

From floor waxes to high-performance inks

By Eugen Keller on the event of our 80th anniversary celebration

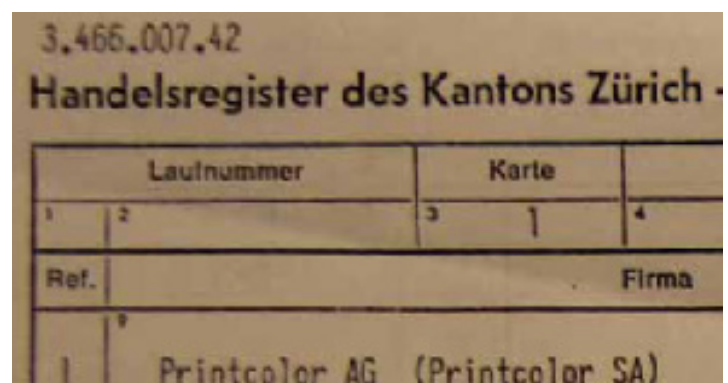
An anniversary is always associated with a look back at the past. It all started in Leipzig, when Springer & Möller decided to open a subsidiary in Switzerland. That subsidiary opened its doors in Bern on December 31, 1932. After a short time, they came to the realization that Switzerland's business capital was not Bern, but Zurich, and so, without further ado, they moved to Neugasse 55-61 in Zurich. With a great deal of foresight, they purchased a factory property, which they converted from a foundry into a paint factory. For a long time, the old rail track in the basement remained witness to a bygone era.



On February 1, 1936, my father was headhunted to become manager at Labitzke, and small-scale production began of artists' paints, floor waxes and printing inks. The Second World War and the uncertainties of the post-war period led to the sale of a share of Springer & Möller to my father. Unfortunately, the newly established company of Springer & Möller, which had in the meantime moved from Leipzig to Hamburg, was never able to build on its prewar successes. There was a complete lack of any new developments or technical support, and no further investments were made.

However, the parent company benefited from its successes in Switzerland. The Swiss subsidiary was regarded as a "cash cow".

On May 25, 1961, in the midst of negotiations, my father died of a heart attack. Four days after his death, the German shareholders gave up their stakes, clearing the way for the founding of Printcolor. It is unfortunately a tragic and bitter fact that my father lost his life because of his worries about the future. With 100% of the shares in Springer & Möller now in our possession, the time was right for a name change. Since we have very good relations with the USA, both with printing ink factories and suppliers, we chose a name with English roots – PRINTCOLOR. A very good choice, as it turned out. This marked a brand-new start, in partnership with Messrs. Branger and Hunziker. We immediately started highly successful imports of offset and web offset inks from the USA. Quantities increased rapidly, and the factory on Neugasse became too small. In 1967, we purchased the property on Mutschellen. New, high-performance machines were purchased, and we began to build up our own production capacity with



US raw materials. The new building provided sufficient space to also develop and produce screen and flexographic printing inks.

This diversification was a success, and further markets opened up, primarily in the Far East. The company was a frequent participant at trade fairs, and growth continued. Its increasing size required ongoing adjustments to its organizational structure and led to the creation of profit centers, which were shortly thereafter converted into independent public companies. Encouraged by this success, the company established PC Indonesia and PC Nigeria.

In 1989, pricing issues forced us to abandon the production of web offset inks. This gap was closed in 1991, with the takeover of Landolt in Zofingen.



Instead of offset inks, we would now produce gravure inks. The same year, Printcolor achieved a market share of 20% in Switzerland. Other market research companies published the following assessment: "With coverage of 28%, Printcolor is in first place in the Swiss market." (original text)

Unfortunately, we would not be able to maintain these pleasing results over the following years, as we generally steered clear of price wars and accepted a corresponding drop in sales.

On May 2, 1994, our son-in-law, Marc Bär, joined the company. As today's Group CEO, he represents a new generation. This marked the beginning of a new era for the PC Group, with qualified specialists and a new generation of young people.

The graphics area had begun to stagnate, and later on, would even shrink sharply. New ideas and new thinking were required. Industrial applications required new raw materials, and the newly developed inks allowed better prices.

In Zofingen, orders by the kilogram suddenly gave way to orders by the tanker load. Printing inks gave way to oils and aromatics. Magazines no longer smelled of oil but, very pleasantly, of toluene. Thanks to continuous investment in machinery and technology, today Printcolor is in a competitive position and looks to the future with confidence.

Yours sincerely,
Eugen Keller

