

BY EUGENE YIGA

The Fine Print

VollherbstDruck, a 98-year-old label printer and fourth-generation family business, is looking to the future of interactive technology.

It's the end of a long day and you're standing in the grocery store, staring at an imposing wall of wine. There are hundreds of options and you have no idea how to make the right choice for dinner tonight. You pick up a bottle at random, look at the label, and put it back. Then you do it again. All the bottles look the same and all the descriptions sound the same, too. This does not bode well for your sanity or your meal.

Now imagine picking up a bottle, scanning a code with your smartphone, and having a different kind of experience. This time, a digital winemaker "jumps out" of the bottle and starts talking to you about the story of this wine. He explains the process of how he made it and assures you that it will be perfect with the roast you're making or even for this weekend's braai. You smile and sigh in relief, happy in the knowledge that you've made the right choice. The bottle goes into your trolley and you're free to finish your shopping.

Welcome to the world of augmented reality labels.

A powerful technique

"We were already working on augmented reality five years ago," says 34-year-old Matthias Vollherbst, CEO of printing company VollherbstDruck. "In those days we were able to visualise whole wine bottles, including the label, and place them into reality."

The inspiration to extend the label design with virtual content was the Living Wine Labels app by Treasury Wine Estates from Australia. Because this app came from a



wine brand, Vollherbst thought that other wine brands would prefer to work with an independent partner and not with another winery that could be considered their competition. So, the company developed its own simple and universal augmented reality app.

"It's specifically for labels but generally for all industries," he says. "We don't want to offer it to wineries exclusively but to everybody who wants to equip a label with this powerful technique – wineries, gin brands, breweries, and more!"

The company won the attention of KWV, one of the world's most admired wine brands, as its first partner to develop an augmented reality experience. This also gave LABELinmotion global attention as the Cathedral Cellar brand it was working on is marketed globally. Since then, the company has also launched two more augmented reality experiences on top of its initial showcase project, one of which involved a lion jumping out of the label and telling jokes.

"LABELinmotion and augmented reality offer us a fantastic new way to tell a story emotionally and excitingly at the point of sales as well as at the point of consumption," he says. "Brands can use multimedia like videos, sounds and interactions on their websites and social media. However, in today's fast world, the way for the consumer to get to these channels is relatively long and there is not necessarily a direct link to the product. By scanning the label with LABELinmotion, and having the brand experience right on the product, there is no way brands lose their customers through distraction or interruption."

Exciting possibilities for brands

There are many positive trends like augmented reality add-ons or digital finishing that are still in their early stages but will offer new exciting possibilities for brands in the future. Also, different kinds of papers and substrates are giving more and more opportunities to differentiate labels from the market.

IMAGE SHUTTERSTOCK

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“For a mid-sized family business – which is what I consider we are – the challenge is to stay up-to-date and invest in the right technology at the right time. It’s not self-evident and not easy to always be at the pulse of time but we believe that this is crucial for us in order to deliver to our clients the best solution for their brands at any time.”

Incidentally, while there’s been a lot of interest in the new augmented reality labels, profit is not the main goal, especially because they’ve only been on the market for around a year. Instead, it’s about understanding the behaviour of a wine or spirits consumer in the digital world and about learning how augmented reality can help brands to better tell their stories.

“Intangible benefits like brand awareness and the positioning as an innovative company or product are exceeding monetary paybacks, both for us as a supplier of augmented reality label solutions and for the brand owners as the

product suppliers,” he says. “That’s why I strongly believe that adjusting to new market needs is more important to us than growth.”

Telling a unique story

The target for LABELInmotion is getting from zero to €100 000 in 2019 and, as Vollherbst says, “so far it doesn’t look too bad”. “I see concepts like that as an opportunity in the label business as well, but also think that to date in our business model it is still crucial to have direct interaction and personal consulting with our clients,” he explains. “That’s why it is so important to not only watch but to take part in developments like augmented reality labels and innovative print techniques.”

Still, the company wants healthy growth in the traditional business and in new technologies like augmented reality, in and out of Germany. The South African market has recorded double-digit growth for the past two years.

“Our growth strategy is to tell our unique story and our comprehensive capabilities transparently and directly,” he says. “Social media and online platforms like our website play a big role in our own marketing mix. Furthermore, we have an ambitious salesforce with three colleagues operating in Europe and me representing the company overseas.”

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“As one of the printing businesses who are deeply involved in the process of creating a brand – together with the marketing departments and design agencies – we are excited to play all these new instruments and invent ourselves as well as product

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packaging again and again,” he says. “Currently we are too excited about the technology and too driven to deliver perfect results to stop working when budgets are finished. But we learn with every project and I’m sure that by the end of 2019 the LABELInmotion investment will have paid off.” **GIBS**



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