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Electronic marketplaces for printed matters in Germany

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Abstract

To bring together supplier and consumer of printed matters, different marketplaces exist on the Internet. In the following survey the different kinds of marketplaces are highlighted as well as their way of conducting their role as intermediators. In this connection, a central result is the finding that only few marketplace operators provide a process to secure the suppliers' reputation.

Keywords: **Electronic marketplaces, print matters, print shops, printed matters**

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INTRODUCTION

Many printing shops offer their customers the possibility of placing orders via the Internet (Klose 2010, p. 12; Zunke 2009, p. 32.). This is supported by so-called web-to-print-solutions, with which printing templates can be created online (Klose 2010, p. 12). Besides the fact that through this the order process can be completed faster and safer (N.A. 2002, p. 31), price advantages can be generated, as the orders of several customers are merged into one printing process.

Hereby, the effort of setting up, starting and cleaning the required machines is reduced. Hence, this process, also known as system print, makes it possible to provide an adequate cost/performance ratio despite low piece numbers (Zunke 2009, p. 33).

There is a wide range of printing shops with internet-based processing (Klein / Kanschur 2010, p. 12). So, on the portal www.druckdeal.de for instance, 762 suppliers of letter paper and 914 suppliers of business cards can be found (Zietlow 2010, no page reference). Thus, the customer has to face the challenge of finding the most appropriate service provider out of the multiplicity of suppliers. Here, such electronic marketplaces – as the one mentioned above – can help. Those marketplaces make a comparison of providers possible and bring together supply and demand.

As a corresponding literature review has shown, it seems as if there has not been any profound examination of this service yet. For this reason, an investigation was carried out with the aim of identifying suppliers and their business models. To begin with, the results of this investigation are documented in the following paragraph to be able to analyze and discuss them afterwards.

SURVEY

The survey of relevant portals took place in December 2010 and was carried out via the search engine service Google plus using the internet forums on www.linkedin.de, www.xing.de, www.mediengestalter.info and www.werbetechnik-forum.de. While the research via the forums remained unsuccessful as none of the participants responded to the request, nine German portals could be identified within the search engine query. The

used key words are indicated in table 1. In each case the first five pages and according to this the first fifty entries were reviewed.

Table 1: Outline of the used key words

key word	additional variation 1	additional variation 2	additional variation 3	additional variation 4
market place	printing shop	print	printed matter	print product
electronic market place	printing shop	print	printed matter	print product
market place online	printing shop	print	printed matter	print product
printing portal				

The examination of the portals documented below was carried out in terms of functionality, supply and quality assurance. The significance of the last-mentioned aspect is due to the fact that print products are experience goods, which means that customers can only judge the quality after the purchase. Therefore, the supplier's reputation plays an important role in the purchase decision (Peters 2010, p. 163; Ahrholdt 2010, p. 43). Hence, it is recommended that the portal operator provides mechanisms which are able to indicate the suppliers' reputations. Due to the fact that solely nine portals could be identified, an examination based on statistics was abandoned and a qualitative evaluation was carried out instead.

Since it became evident that several portals offer further products such as promotional items besides printing matters, an important criterion for the incorporation into the range was defined: Printing matters clearly have to play the most significant role. Therefore, portals with merely personal ads covering a multiplicity of products (such as www.heise-marktplatz.de) were excluded.

WWW.DRUCKANFRAGE-ONLINE.DE

Hubert Baumann offers the service www.druckanfrage-online.de, which focuses on the German market. The users can make printing inquiries, which are transmitted to a network of printing shop partners. Here, a multitude of products such as letter paper, labels or calendars can be chosen.

This is financed through a membership fee on the part of the printing shops. Details on different admission criteria or on the number of associated printing shops are not given. Besides, no further mechanisms boosting reputation become apparent.

WWW.DRUCKDEAL.DE

druckbesser.de GmbH & Co. KG runs the service www.druckdeal.de. The website claims to provide "over 40,000 products" supplemented by "more than 4,000 printing shops and suppliers of means of advertising" (Zeitlow 2010, no page reference). A detailed subdivision of the products into the categories "Printing Matters Standard", "Printing Matters Office" and "Printing Matters Industrial" is given. Here, one can find subcategories such as "Stickers & Labels" or "Posters", which are again subdivided into further sections.

The user has the possibility of starting a quote request by creating an order description, which can then be answered by printing shops filing bids. Beyond that, the suppliers can also publish sale offers. The two processes are free of charge as the portal is exclusively financed through advertisement. The printing shops' reputations are guaranteed by a rating function via which the users can rate the printing shops.

WWW.DRUCKEREI-FINDEN.DE

The marketplace www.druckerei-finden.de is run by MSI Media. Users can place requests, which can be answered by printing shops afterwards. Furthermore, there is a general outline of suppliers of different printing products. The service is financed through membership fees and advertisements. Concerning the printing shops' reputation there are no references to be found.

Although the "Top Printing Shops in Focus" are displayed on the homepage, it is not obvious how the selection was compiled. The membership application for printing shops does not imply the possibility to register a country. Hence, it is left to the supplier's discretion whether foreign suppliers can be admitted as well.

For some products the number of printing shops is given. Here, it can occur that a printing shop offers several of those products. Flyers for instance are offered by 220 printing shops, whereas flags are offered by only 58 and banners on the other hand by 132 printing shops. Those three categories represent largely different printing processes, which is why the number of suppliers can be estimated at about 300.

WWW.EUROPADRUCK.COM

The portal www.europadruck.com is an international marketplace for printing shops and is run by Klaus Wenderoth. Although printing shops from several European countries are represented on the supplier's website, deliveries are exclusively made to Germany. The user has the possibility to place a request, which can then be answered by printing shops. There is no information given on the number of associated printing shops.

It is financed through the printing shops' membership fees, thus being free of charge for the user. The reputation is guaranteed by means of different criteria, that the printing shops have to fulfill. For instance, the portal operator takes into account the printing shops' location, plant, printing processes, printing formats and its efficiency during prepress and post-production printing service before deciding on their admission.

Beyond that, the printing shops have to confirm that they are neither bankrupt nor involved in insolvency proceedings, that at least 50 per cent of the printing products come from their own production and that the preparation of offers are carried out free of charge.

WWW.MEDIAEXPERT.DE

RadischCommunication runs www.mediaexpert.de, a portal which specialized in the arrangement of printing, web design and photography orders. The category responsible for the printing matters is called "DruckXpert". Again, users can place requests and the

suppliers can reply and the service is financed through membership fees on the part of the suppliers. Details on the number of printing shops and the way of securing their reputation are not given.

WWW.MITDRUCK.DE

On www.mitdruck.de the service of the Lürssen Brüggmann Werbeagentur GmbH can be found. On this portal orders are grouped together to be able to offer cheaper printing matters. The search for suppliers is carried out via a supplier database. There is no reputation mechanism, though. Basically, it is financed through membership fees of the participating printing shops. Furthermore, advertisements are published.

It is not obvious how many printing shops are listed. However, it is an international range of members from different countries such as France, Italy, Poland, Slovakia et cetera.

WWW.PRINTPROFIT.DE

The service www.printprofit.de is an international marketplace for printing shops. The user can place requests, which can then be answered by printing shops filing bids. Printprofit GmbH is the operator. For suppliers the service is connected with a membership fee. For the user on the other hand the offer is free of charge. A printing shop's reputation is not specified via the platform. However, depending on whether a printing shop's data are given, the user can see which printing techniques and machines are used by each particular printing shop.

Altogether, 653 printing shops are registered, almost half of which (321) are located in Hungary and merely 30 printing shops are situated in Germany.

WWW.VDMNRW.DE/MARKTPLATZ/

Verband Druck + Medien (VDM) NRW e.V. is an association of enterprises of the printing and media industry. It considers itself to be an employers' and trading association as well as a representative and service provider of the printing and media entrepreneurs (Laumanns 2010). At www.vdmnrw.de/marktplatz/ a marketplace with the categories „Classified Directory”, “Buying and Selling” as well as “Job Offers” is run. The field “Classified Directory”, which is relevant for the survey, is subdivided into 36 sections such as “Sheet-fed Offset” with 94 company entries or “Digital Printing” with 63 company entries. Altogether, there are 735 entries, which are redundant though, as one company is able to operate in several fields. One company entry consists of the particular contact details as well as a service description in headwords.

For the use of the marketplace and thus an entry into the classified directory, no separate charge is made. As only member companies of the VDM are listed, the marketplace is financed by membership fees. Here, the costs of a membership are based on the size of the enterprise. A company's admission into the association is preceded by a technical interview. This was the only aspect which could be identified in terms of reputation.

WWW.WERBEFAIRGLEICH.DE

The operator of www.werbefairgleich.de is "MINAX Innovations- and Beteiligungsgesellschaft mbH". By means of branch search or product search the user has the possibility of looking for a suitable printing shop. When using the branch search a branch like "Retail Trade" or "Real Estate" can be chosen, whereupon the system suggests corresponding products such as "Image Kits". On the other hand, when using the product search the user can directly choose the favored product. During the research period the portal was still in "beta mode". There were neither advertisements nor offers liable to costs.

There is a comparison system which can calculate a price index on the basis of test calculations and compare it to the listed suppliers. The quality is determined via the customers' feedback. So far, there are hardly any ratings though. The registration allows registrations within and outside Germany. The number of the listed printing shops could not be found out.

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The portals and the number of the listed printing shops as well as their geography, the financing model and the reputation measures are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Outline of the portals

address	number of printing shops	geography	financing	reputation
www.druckanfrage-online.de	not specified	national	membership fee	not specified
www.druckdeal.de	approx. 4,000 (incl. other suppliers)	national	advertisement	rating function
www.druckerei-finden.de	approx. 300	national	membership fee and advertisement	not specified
www.europadruck.com	not specified	international	membership fee	admission criteria
www.mediaexpert.de	not specified	national	membership fee	not specified
www.mitdruck.de	not specified	international	membership fee and advertisement	not specified
www.printprofit.de	633	international	membership fee	not specified
www.vdmnrw.de/marktplatz/	less than 735	regional	membership fee	admission criteria
www.werbefairgleich.de	not specified	national	free of charge	rating system

It shows that with the exception of www.druckdeal.de there are generally several hundreds of printing shops per portal. This might represent a complete market within the microcosm of each portal, however, in proportion to the printing industry with 10,000 enterprises altogether (Mayer 2010, no page reference) it is just a small selection out of the complete market.

Only three of the nine examined portals bring together supply and demand in a cross-border way. At this point, most of the suppliers neglect to expand the competition and consequently the customers' benefit. In terms of financing a more consistent image is outlined: Here, seven of the nine portals venture on membership fees, two of them complementary to advertisement. Just one single portal is financed exclusively through

banner ads (www.druckdeal.de). The portal www.werbefairgleich.de – as described above – is run completely without a financing model. The reputation issue is still neglected. Two portals rely on rating functions, two on admission criteria. The remaining five portals set aside corresponding mechanisms.

Altogether, it is shown that the portals mainly give the user the possibility of comparing prices (with the exception of www.vdmnrw.de/marktplatz/). Hence, the business model of electronic marketplaces for printing shops corresponds to the field “Commerce” of the “Internet-Basis Business Model Classification” by Wirtz and Kleineicken (Wirtz / Kleineicken 2000, p. 629) and among this to “Price Seeking” (Wirtz 2009, p. 647).

CONCLUSION

It is shown that there is only a limited number of electronic marketplaces for printing matters so far. Those ones still have weaknesses especially in the field of reputation guarantee. Moreover, they have not yet grasped the chance of “unlimited trading”. Thus, there is potential for further development on both the quantitative and the qualitative side.

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