



A Global Benchmark

As the first company to print banknotes on polymer, Note Printing Australia is a global pioneer in the banknote industry. The organisation is continually raising the standard of quality for banknote printers everywhere.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography

CEO of Note Printing Australia (NPA) Bernhard Imbach got his introduction to the printing industry in the 1970s when he undertook his apprenticeship as a letterpress and offset printer. He then worked in a number of commercial print works, followed by Orell Füssli, a Swiss commercial, privately owned printer, working mainly in security and banknote printing. Prior to leaving Orell Füssli, Bernhard had worked for 10 years as a consultant to NPA with regard to quality management, technical, and pre-press solutions. In November 2007, he commenced work with NPA as operations manager before taking up the CEO role in February 2008.

NPA has gained international recognition for its invention of polymer banknote printing, which set the benchmark globally.

Bernhard says, "This was such a new thing that people really didn't think about what the quality was like. However, over the past 20 years, I think NPA lost a bit of focus on the core business, which is banknote printing, as a result of concentrating resources on marketing to gain successful penetration into the paper banknote market. They didn't do a lot of development in the quality of printing, which we've done significantly over the past six years, not only in educating people but also in getting in the latest equipment from a development point. We've made sure we train

our people with the skills they need so we can produce a quality product that meets our customers' expectations. Having a good partnership with your key equipment suppliers is an important factor, in my view. These suppliers are able to train our people very well in using their equipment and products to the best of their ability."

Suppliers play a vital role in ensuring NPA can meet its desired quality standards. The organisation works closely with key suppliers to create a mutual understanding and to continually innovate. "For example, I have been working for many years as a kind of consultant from a user's perspective when they develop new machines. They always ask >



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PEOPLE & TECHNOLOGY



WHEN THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER BEAUTIFUL THINGS CAN HAPPEN. KBA-NOTASYS IS PROUD TO WORK WITH BERNHARD IMBACH AND HIS TEAM AT NPA. THEY ARE AN EXAMPLE THAT PEOPLE DO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE. OUR PARTNERSHIP GOES FURTHER THAN JUST SUPPLYING MACHINERY AND THEN LEAVING IT UP TO THE CUSTOMER. THE PEOPLE INVOLVED AT NPA AND KBA-NOTASYS ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER TO CREATE NEW DEVELOPMENTS, LOOK DIFFERENTLY AT PROCESSES AND FIND NEW SOLUTIONS. WHEN PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY GO HAND IN HAND, THE FUTURE TAKES SHAPE.



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me and a couple of others, "What do you think this machine should do? What annoys you most about the previous machine?" There are often little things with the machines that annoy printers, so if you can avoid these things, printers will be a lot happier with your machine and will use them differently; they will use them much better than before.

"People may get annoyed because they might hit their fingers somewhere because the machine design is not user friendly, so we work very closely with our suppliers to avoid all of these things. I have been in a few meetings where they ask what I think about their developments, which definitely helps bring the machines to a level where they match the expectations of a print works. Don't get me wrong, there will always be print works people that complain about machines, but I'm pretty sure that the partnership has helped bring the machine design to a new level."

While the surging popularity of online shopping has meant fewer cash transactions, Bernhard believes cash will remain due to its anonymity. "You can always trace credit cards, so I believe that in the future cash will still be used."

According to Bernhard, security doesn't start with how many security features there are on a banknote. "I think security starts with the fact that it must be a combination of design and security features, which then creates security. That's my view. I think each country or central bank needs to develop their own secure banknote in a way that at first analyses the trends of counterfeiting in that country. They have to look at how to counterfeit that banknote. If you know that, then you know what kind of features you may need to put in place. That's an important job that central banks do so as to understand how to prevent counterfeiting."

Another important aspect of NPA's production line is the Australian



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passport. "Because we belong to the Reserve Bank, it allows us to do that. We also have a very good, long-term relationship with DFAT [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade]. I strongly believe that the passport business is a good business for us. We are not actively going out into the market, because we are too small for that, but we serve DFAT 100 per cent. If DFAT requests that we should do some work for small countries or a specific region, then we will do it, but we don't go out to market to sell passports. It's not our intention to do that because there are bigger players out there.

"In the past six years, I think NPA has been able to raise the bar in passport production quality and productivity. We are very proud of this. I personally believe that our Australian passport is very secure and is definitely a benchmark in printing and quality. It's an important business for us, even though it's just a small percentage compared to banknotes. People forget that passports have to be very secure; if a criminal is able to get a non-personalised passport, they can do a lot more harm with a passport than with a bag of cash."



Quality is a vital element of NPA's operations as the organisation continually works to improve its production. "Whenever we say we're at a very high level of quality banknote printing, there are always companies that invent and develop new features and new products. For us as an independent company, it's important to keep in touch with the industry, know what's going on, and be able to produce the highest-level quality.

"For instance, with the new upgraded equipment we have introduced, we will be able to apply new security features. We have spent a lot of time in the past 12 to 15 months sending people to Europe to train them, making sure we're prepared when we start the next generation of banknotes in Australia. On this >



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new equipment, we can produce to the highest level of quality that we expect.”

Bernhard strives to ensure everyone at NPA is happy, investing heavily in their training, and involving staff in the company’s decision-making. “My philosophy on people is that the biggest asset a company has is always its people. You can have \$200 million worth of equipment and assets, but the biggest asset is your people because they’re the ones who operate that equipment.

“The second philosophy I have is that you treat people the way you would like to be treated—with respect and by listening to them. It doesn’t mean you have to agree with everybody, but respect a different view, listen to them, and make sure they understand that if you have to make a decision they don’t agree with, then explain why you have to. Involve them, engage them.

“You can go to our website and look at our core values which I established with the company: truth telling, inclusiveness, consistency, and discipline. If you follow that, you can create trust. I think that’s an important thing—if you can create trust with your employees, they’ll trust the management team. This is important, as I believe this is fundamental in creating trust with your customers.”

Having spent his career in printing and getting his start from the ground floor, Bernhard understands the operational side of the business and the invaluable staff that make it run. “My management style—I’m a very approachable person. I have an open door where anyone can walk in and complain, or whatever they want, and I will discuss it with them. I’m very open to ideas. I try to go about once a week to the print hall to see how it’s going and to talk to people. Time doesn’t always allow that; I would like to

go more often because I still like the smell of printing. Once a printer, always a printer.

“I’m a very passionate banknote printer; I really do it with passion. I think the staff really appreciate the style that I have. I think they have the feeling that I am one of them. Coming from where they are, I strongly believe that I do understand them—I know how they feel and I know what worries them. I think I have an advantage, having once been one of them.”

Bernhard’s experiences instilled a great deal of confidence from NPA’s board, particularly since he had acted as a consultant to the organisation for many years previously. “Whenever they had a printing problem, they could call me for my expertise and together we created a better result. I could probably still print on most machines, even though they are much more modern than when I was a printer.



“I personally felt sorry about it, but it didn’t cause me any sleepless nights as I wasn’t involved. Every time we were mentioned in the newspaper, it was annoying for our people. We didn’t have any of the people involved working in management at that point in time; they had all since left the organisation. Still, it’s not a good feeling if every second day you make the headlines of the newspapers in such a negative form.”

According to Bernhard, the most important thing for NPA now is to focus on the company’s future rather than dwell on the past. This notion was furthered during the organisation’s centenary last year, which gave NPA the opportunity to celebrate its triumphs and cast its eyes towards the future. “Our centenary was a good year. We held a few events for our staff. It started in March with an NPA Centennial Picnic at Rupertswood Mansion in Sunbury. That was really good. The first Australian banknote was printed on 1 May 1913, so we celebrated the centenary with a quick afternoon tea and big cake with staff. And then in June, we had an incredible gala dinner at the Regent Theatre in Melbourne. Mike Munro presented it, and it was a fantastic event; very well organised.

“We have a centenary activities organisational committee that has no senior management. I established that committee with employees and they organised everything. Traditionally, we always do a lot for our retired officers; in July, we had a retired officers high tea. It was great, at the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne, a very traditional hotel. And in early December, we had our staff Christmas party at Melbourne Town Hall. In March this year we issued a centenary book with the history of NPA. The book is really about the 100-year history of Note Printing Australia, and what I especially like is that there are a lot of entries in the book from present and past employees.”

Foil-based security systems for banknotes and government documents.



For banknotes: LEONHARD KURZ Stiftung & Co.KG
Schwabacher Straße 482 | D-90763 Fuerth | www.kurz.de | michelle.carter@kurz.de

For government documents: OVD Kinegram AG | Member of the KURZ Group
Zaehlerweg 12 | CH-6301 Zug | Switzerland | www.kinegram.com | mail@kinegram.com



“However, I can’t actually get in there these days and get my hands dirty, but I can go to the printer and ask them if they’ve tried this or that. It helps them, and I think they appreciate having someone from the top who understands what they do. I have the feeling it was relatively easy to convince them to do things differently, and now we can concentrate on our core values. They were happy that I’d convinced the board that we needed to invest our money into new equipment; some of the equipment has been with us 30-plus years. You can’t have

the highest-quality equipment if you’re hanging onto it for that long.”

In 2011, the company and a number of former executives were charged with bribing foreign officials to obtain banknote business in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nepal. It was a difficult period for NPA because the organisation’s integrity came under scrutiny. “It had a very negative impact on NPA because we were always in the newspaper. I think the advantage for me was that I didn’t know a lot about it because it happened before my time.

