

Nordwest Zeitung

29.08.2009

Photo book newly opened up Series CeWe Color benefits from the knowledge of Oldenburg software institute Offis in its reorganisation

They have been in contact since 1999. The computer scientists developed "just the right know-how".

Oldenburg – You could almost call it a miracle, and yet it was nothing but business foresight coupled with a great deal of perseverance and intuition that this was the right partner at the right time: the rapid execution of a technological transition from analogue to digital photography over the past few years has seen Oldenburg photo services company CeWe Color slipping into this new era without much ado at all. One positions oneself at the forefront on a market which has experienced an enormous technical revolution, resulting in a brutal shakeout on the market. CeWe Color has emerged stronger from this process, which numerous rivals have not survived.

How did the company, which had previously specialised itself solely in providing the market with high quality photo prints which fewer and fewer customers now want, manage to cope with this challenge? Dr. Reiner Fageth, member of the CeWe Color management, is quite straightforward in replying to this question: "Because some leading lights in our company recognised this at an early stage and set the course accordingly. And because we had contact with the Offis Institute as early as in 1999. They had exactly the know-how that we needed."

Offis (Oldenburg Research and Development Institute for Information Technology), an institute of Oldenburg University, has dedicated itself to the rapid transfer of knowledge gained in research in regional business and was thus "a natural partner" for the major Oldenburg photo services company.

Declared a matter of core competence

At that time CeWe Color was facing enormous problems in handling digital data. The big issue was how to best get the photos through current network technology. CeWe Color had not yet developed any applications; instead the company had engaged external companies to do this – with mixed success.

However, the top management soon sensed that this was not a step in the right direction. On the one hand it was not particularly effective, and on the other hand technology that had actually been developed for CeWe Color also found its way to competitors. The management thus declared that this was a matter of core competence and instructed its own technicians to develop programs, considerably increasing the number of staff here in order to do so. Yet the company could hardly cope with this task on its own. Dr. Fageth: "We couldn't just expand a department with 15 employees to 100 employees from one day to the next without knowing exactly what each person was actually supposed to be doing."

In this situation Offis came at just the right time, as their fundamental research was far more advanced. The instruments and tools were there, they just had to be adapted to the special needs of CeWe Color, explains Project Manager Professor Dr. Susanne Boll.

Worthwhile friendship

Dr. Fageth describes the situation at that time: "This was the beginning of a huge friendship." A worthwhile friendship for both parties. Offis eventually developed the basics for what is probably the most modern photo book on the market for CeWe Color (1.3 million books were sold in the first six-month period of this year). And CeWe Color has taken on a large number of qualified employees from the Institute to work in its own development department.

Just how closely linked CeWe Color and Offis have become in the meantime is shown by the fact that Offis Managing Board Chairman Professor Dr. Dr. h.c. hans-Jürgen Appelrath is a member of the CeWe Color Holding AG Supervisory Board.