

Business Case

Symeta selects Buhrs to take customized mailing to the next level

Symeta is a Belgian provider of solutions in effective business communication. One of its most prestigious projects is the bi-weekly production of over 1.6 million fully customized booklets for budget supermarket Colruyt. Switching from static 32-page coupon booklets for everybody to a targeted 4-page booklet for each individual customer has not only brought Colruyt considerable cost savings and reduced environmental impact, but also a steady growth in sales and a higher market share by providing consumers a shopping list based on their shopping behaviour via their loyalty card.

In order to keep up with the success of the Colruyt mailings and at the same time increase efficiency in the production, Symeta turned to long time partner Buhrs to find the right solution. After carefully exploring all technical demands and possibilities together in a multidisciplinary team, Buhrs installed three Buhrs 3000 paperwrapping lines, equipped with 10 selective feeders each and controlled by the Buhrs Data Controller (BDC).

“Together, we create sustainable added value through value-driven craftsmanship”

Optimizing communication

Symeta was formed on 1 January 2011 by the merger of the in-house printing company Druco, one-to-one specialist Mitto and Colruyt Group Services. As part of the Colruyt Group, the largest retail organisation in Belgium, Symeta focuses on the optimisation of all document and information flows in organisations. As Philip D’hooge, general manager at

Symeta, puts it: “We are always looking to optimise the way in which communications are managed, sent and received by customers.” This fits exactly in with the Colruyt Group mission statement, that says: “Together, we create sustainable added value through value-driven craftsmanship in retail.”



One of the biggest challenges for Symeta, being Colruyt’s in-house printer, is the production of Colruyt’s so-called ‘Selection for you’ mailing. Up until 2010, budget supermarket Colruyt had been sending out a 32-page coupon booklet to over two million customers. In an effort to raise efficiency as well as effectiveness, Colruyt decided it wanted to dramatically change the way it offered its coupons to its loyal customers. Mr. D’hooge explains: “Colruyt asked us to find a way to produce customized booklets, containing targeted information and coupons for each individual customer.”

‘Selected for you’

The focus on a highly personal approach of customers had already started in 2008, when Colruyt successfully introduced its

'Extra' loyalty card. Customers using this smartcard did no longer have to cut out any coupons and bring them to the supermarket to make use of any special offers. The 'Extra' card became very popular in a very short period of time: within two years after its launch, more than 2.8 million smartcards were distributed – reaching half of all households in Belgium.

At the same time, the 'Extra' card allowed Colruyt to study customer behaviour and thus further adapts its services and communication to suit them best. Mr. D'hooge: "Efficiency is key – not only for Symeta and Colruyt, but also for our Colruyt customers. We want to make their shopping experience as easy and comfortable as possible, by getting the right information to the right person at the right time."



In February 2010, Colruyt launched its 'Selected for you' campaign. Starting off with a solid base of some 50,000 loyal customers, Symeta produced a fully variable full colour 4-page folder containing a selection of the best offers and discounts available plus some 30 special offers aimed at each individual customer, based on previous buying behaviour. "It is important to emphasize here that we do not analyse specific persons or names. We assign profiles to anonymous card numbers, and match these card profiles with our pool of offerings and discounts. Each number receives the 30 offers that best fit a profile. Only after the 4-page folder is already paper wrapped, a name and

address that matches the profile of the folder is added to the mailpiece."

By the end of 2010, Colruyt was sending out 1.6 million 4-page folders – each one different from the other - every two weeks. The campaign proved very successful: although customers received up to six times less coupon offerings, the supermarkets reported a rising number of coupons being used. While ROI improved by 2 per cent, Colruyt was saving more than 665 million pages of paper at the same time, seriously reducing its environmental impact. Even better: by improving turn over each quarter by 5 to 6 per cent, Colruyt is now in a market leader position with a 30 per cent market share.

Continued partnership

As the success of the customized Colruyt folders started to take off, plans were being developed to concentrate several production facilities at one location under the Symeta brand. This move would also allow for the replacement of the two Buhrs MTR paper wrapping lines that had already been in use to great satisfaction for over 10 years. Mr. D'hooge assigned a team to take charge of the project and come up with the best way forward. Business Process Engineer Arnaud Barroo (later succeeded by Jan Decuypere) and Technical Support Manager Rudy Muylaert set out to screen the market for opportunities: "It did not take long before we knew that Buhrs would continue to be our partner. They offer us not only the right technology, but also the knowledge and experience we need."



Dick Verheij, Managing Director at Buhrs, remembers doing some product presentations for the Symeta team already in 2009: “By the end of 2010, our contact further intensified and we had meetings with the team almost once a month, discussing various machines and different solutions. As the project leader was also heavily involved with the project concerning the move to the new location, I knew it was important to keep him and the rest of the team well-informed at all times. By analysing and understanding the needs we were able to provide very specific information and clear answers to any questions. By working closely with this multidisciplinary and very professional team, we managed to come up with exactly the right solution.”

“We need to be 100 percent certain that every customer receives exactly the right information”

Mr. Muylaert adds: “What we were really looking for was the reliability of the existing Buhrs MTR systems, preferably at a higher speed and equipped with additional possibilities. After exploring many options, we asked Buhrs to adapt their Buhrs 3000 system to our specific needs for the Colruyt mailing and decided for the installation of three such systems with 10 selective feeders each.” Mr. Verheij: “One of the improvements we implemented on request of Symeta is a new gluing unit. By applying a different type of glue in a different way, Symeta not only improved the quality of the final product, but it also allows them to save on glue and paper.”



Buhrs also added its Buhrs Data Controller (BDC) to the three systems to enable Symeta full control during production and making sure every mail pack – consisting of one customized folder plus up to nine different inserts - is complete before it is paper wrapped and sent out to the customer. Mr. Muylaert: “We need to be 100 per cent certain that every customer receives exactly the right information. As Buhrs was able to integrate the Buhrs BDC with our existing Hunkeler controller system, we now have a perfect system in place.”



Pushing the limits

The new Buhrs 3000 systems were installed in early 2012 at the new premises of Symeta in Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, after a Factory Acceptance Test of the system at Buhrs in The Netherlands. Mr. Verheij: “During this test, one Symeta staff member assisted our people to fine-tune the system and get it to run the application perfectly. We could not have done a better job ourselves in proving the importance of partnership and shared experience.” By replacing the existing two Buhrs MTR systems one by one with new equipment, production of the Colruyt-mailing – being printed on a high-volume HP T400 Colour Inkjet Web Press – continued without interruption. Producing more than 2 million mail pieces every two weeks (1,6 million customized packs for loyal Colruyt customers, plus another 500.000 general versions) leaves

the Buhrs systems with only eight days to send out every piece exactly right. Mr. Verheij: “These volumes are really extraordinary. Pushing our machines to the very limits in this way is also providing us with valuable data for future developments.”



Having three instead of two systems now handling the Colruyt-mailing provides Symeta with many benefits, explains Mr. Muylaert: “Having an extra system in place increases our capacity and efficiency, so we no longer need to have three shifts working 24/24, but instead we can run two shifts during the day. This also gives us the control and flexibility we need. And it provides us with room for new developments and further growth.”

“We prove that paper communication really works, and that you can do more with less”

Grow business

The flawless implementation of the complete Buhrs solution has convinced Mr. D’hooge that Symeta has made the right decision: “A project like this is not just about installing a machine. What I look for in a partnership is much more about commitment and about sharing ideas and knowledge.

Coming up with the best solution needs to be a team effort. Buhrs understands how to be a true partner.” Having everything in place now, Mr. D’hooge is ready to take his business to the next level: “Actually, the production phase is now the ‘easy’ part of what we do. It is the way that we handle data that makes us unique and therefore very difficult to copy by our competitors. The ‘secret’ is in the application: we prove that paper communication really works, and that you can do more with less. That enables us to expand our possibilities to other parts of the Colruyt organisation and offer our services to other clients as well - to grow their business, and ours.”

Watch the video

<https://www.buhrs.com/index.php/en/print-and-mail>

More information

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