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Book's Face

"People matter"

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For many years, Michaela has managed the book production processes in various publishing companies, handling special interest as well as trade titles. Before becoming CTO in May 2018, Michaela had been Head of Production at Ullstein Buchverlage Berlin (Germany), since 2011. In her new role she continues managing both the Production and IT departments. As a Product Owner she develops a production platform for

book content together with a freelance team. Being also a contributor to various specialist periodicals, she has written about the digital evolution and its implementation in the publishing organisation. Together with Alexander Markowetz, she co-founded the "Integrating the Publishing Environment" community in 2018, whose objective is to develop open standard interfaces for the publishing industry.

1. Can you please describe your job in 100 words?

Above all, I like to use the time to listen to colleagues, business partners, and others I meet, and to think about how we can deal not only with the industry's major challenges, but also the smaller ones in everyday professional life. I thus appreciate the freedom I enjoy at Ullstein and Bonnier to be able to support complex human-technology-market interactions in all their diversity. With my six esteemed colleagues and a staff of solid, freelance developers, we design forward-looking processes and technologies to underpin book production and needs of a modern IT organisation.

2. What did you want to be when you were five years-old?

A Singer - no question about it! I used to passionately belt out German pop hits in front of my father's super-8 camera.

3. Can you describe a typical working day?

Every single day has been new and exciting since becoming responsible for our IT and Production departments, and moreover our own production platform pepyrus has been productive since February 2018. Moreover, the initiative "Integrating the Publishing Environment" has gained momentum, so every day is brimming with intensity, amusement, and change. Shortly before eight I read and answer the first e-mails; when I enter the publishing house at about 9, I usually start with the initial in-house discussions. They revolve around individual books and IT projects, processes, and multiple strategic technical issues. Lunch with colleagues from other publishing houses, industries, and related backgrounds are inspiring, as are retrospectives with inter-disciplinary teams on current topics at Ullstein. Meetings alternate with periods of work on my computer, and reading. Ideally,

albeit all too rarely, the day is rounded off with a valued colleague over a glass of wine and stimulating conversation.

4. What would happen to the book if you were not there?

... another clever colleague would master the task brilliantly.

5. What is the most exciting /striking thing that ever happened to you in your job?

What can be more exciting these days than to help to generate something innovative from within an organisation and to introduce it to the world? It takes a lot to analyse the status quo like an archaeologist and to try to prepare the organisation for the future. When a team is able to creatively solve even the smallest challenge, it is at once demanding, imponderable, surprising and refreshing.

I feel very fortunate to have experienced many such special moments: Early in 2018, under the supervision of Constance Stifft, the first production order was sent to our printers digitally, as the project “digital production order” went live. Another magical moment was when René Selpin and Nils Tiemann presented the first manuscript that

was prepared for press using just a few clicks with the help of the cloud solution pepyrus we developed – within three minutes. This included typesetting based on web technology and generating the PDF file. And it is no less fascinating to see what an impact our decision to present the latest book by best-selling author Nele Neuhaus without plastic

wrapping has had. Scarcely a week goes by without interested colleagues getting in touch with questions, as well as positive feedback from authors and retailers as well as on social media. All this consumes a lot of energy, but it is a wonderful gift to be able to implement projects like these.

For the Sake of the Environment - No More Plastic Waste

“Given the threatening levels of plastic pollution in our seas and in our environment, we have to respond as an industry. Much of the plastic is not recycled; it pollutes the oceans terribly and is the cause of death for innumerable animals. The publishing industry is now calling on all publishers to refrain, in as far as is possible, from using shrink wrap in new publications,” according to a statement by the Publishers Committee of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association in November 2018. While the question of whether it might now be time to deliver and sell shrink wrap free hardback books has been debated in Germany for years, it is

already common practice in many other European countries. Ullstein Buchverlage, as a major German publisher, has now taken the first step and will refrain from using shrink wrap on Muttertag, the latest thriller by bestselling author Nele Neuhaus. Instead, a small glue clip is used between the book’s front and back covers, serving as a seal that will reassure customers that the book is new and pristine. Regarding this development, Christian Schumacher-Gebler, CEO of Bonnier Media Germany, stated: “We deliberately chose a top-selling title in order to obtain a comprehensive experience with the first step, and as of next spring we would like, in as far as possible, to avoid using shrink wrap on hardbacks from Bonnier Group. We are hopeful that we can overcome all stumbling blocks so as to get rid of plastic wrapping on as many titles as possible.

With Muttertag’s first edition alone we have avoided using enough shrink wrap to cover four football fields. Numerous other German publishers have already announced that they will follow suit. Booksellers throughout Germany welcome and support this development, a step that they will also advocate for vis-à-vis the reader.

