

SPECIAL REPORT

Buying Used Printing Machines

What you must know

Democracy and press freedom, increasing literacy and school enrolment in Africa mean increasing demand for books, newspapers, magazines and other printed materials. Growing commercial publishing activities are fuelling demands for printing machines across the continent. Our reporter looks at the trade in used printing machines in Germany.

Germany is the birthplace of the modern printing machine and the largest producer of printing press in the world. No wonder, it is the choice destination for buyers of printing machines the world over.

The importance of printing has never been greater in Africa due to increasing literacy and school enrolment which translate to an ever-increasing demand for books, newspapers, magazines and other printed materials. On top of that, democracy, which demands that elections are conducted regularly, means that campaign posters, flyers and ballot papers have to be printed.

Because of the astronomical prices of new printing systems, the machinery of choice in African printing are used equipment that are still in good working conditions.

Setting up a printing shop in Africa like any other business venture demands that extreme care be taken at every stage of realising the venture. Experts advise that whoever is going into commercial printing must first of all determine what the market is demanding and hence, the products he or she would be offering. The products and the quantity he or she would be producing determine the machines an entrepreneur will be buying. Such machines must be capable of producing the desired products on the required scale.

Hans-Joachim Bertram, a Berlin-based dealer in used printing machinery, emphasises the role of well-trained workers who will run the machines. "Please don't be miserly with workers, hire the highly-qualified ones even if they're expensive," he advised.

The German businessman also warns



A machine being thoroughly checked before shipment to Africa

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against buying machines that are not tested prior to their shipment to Africa. "The machines must be in working order. In my company, we test-run the machines for the customers before loading them into containers for shipment," he explained. "In fact, now I have customers in Africa who order machines from us on phone without bothering to come and inspect them here in Germany because of the confidence they have in our company," he added.

Mr Bertram, who has been selling machines to Africa for more than 20 years, cautioned people wanting to establish printing shops, to be well-advised before buying equipment. "We always ask our customers what they want to print and we will recommend machines to them - from the cheapest to the expensive," he said.

Because his company recognises the need of customers to buy the right machines, it would soon introduce the sales of complete printing shops – all the equipment a printing shop will need to operate will be sold in a package, he reveals.

Bertram recommends that machines be bought from good companies because of after-sales technical support. "If our customers have problems, we order original spare parts for them from the manufacturers," he revealed.

What advice does the vendor of printing machines have for Africans wanting to buy equipment? "Buy good machines that will produce good quality work and hire well-trained workers to run the machines – these are very, very important," Bertram said. He said that the role of qualified workers in a printing press cannot be over-emphasised. "In fact, we already offer training opportunities to those who buy machines from us," he added.

On maintenance, Bertram, who visits his customers regularly in African countries, said that although there are good installation technicians in the continent, some use cheap replacement parts made in Asia. This, he said, is dangerous because they end up damaging the whole machine. He therefore strongly recommends that only parts made by the manufacturers of the machines should be used to ensure that the machines operate for a very long time, to make the investment in them worthwhile.

Bertram also advises against shipping printing machines in trucks or buses to Africa to save on transport costs. He recommends containers so that they can be professionally packaged for sea shipment. "If not properly packed, the machines may sustain damage during shipment," he warns.

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