

SPECIAL REPORT: THE PRINTING INDUSTRY IN WEST AFRICA

Nigeria, a big market for printing machines

With a population of over 140 million people, Nigeria is not only the most populous African country, but also a huge market for printing machines. Our Contributing Editor Isaac Umunna reports from Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital and the base of the country's printing business.

In Shomolu, mainland Lagos, the humming of printing machines is a part of daily life. In this part of Nigeria's former capital city, it is difficult to see a street without a printing press. As a matter of fact, in some streets it is common to find a press in almost every other house.

"It is like that is all we do here," says Eme Collins, a printer with 10 years experience. "Shomolu is synonymous with printing in Nigeria." On a typical day, Shomolu is a beehive of printing activities. Men and women of different ages can be seen moving printing materials (paper, plates, and ink) to the presses, taking already printed matters

"The Chinese have started bringing in machines, but the ones from Germany remain the favourite of Nigerian printers"

to the cutting machines or leaving with finished ones. While many of the lithographic shops are manned by ladies, it is a man's affair at the presses, which comprise mainly Kord 64 with a small number of Sord Z and Gestetner 201 printing



Newspaper printers at work in Lagos, Nigeria. There are about 100 newspapers in the country

machines.

Elsewhere in Lagos, the printing business is also booming – places such as Mushin, Bariga, Ikeja and Surulere. Outside Lagos, printing is equally big business in towns and cities such as Ibadan, Oshogbo, Ife and Ilorin in the south-west; Aba, Enugu, Onitsha and Owerri in the south-east; Port Harcourt in the Niger Delta; and Abuja, Kaduna, Zaria and Kano in the north.

GREAT POTENTIAL

Nigeria's huge population of over 140 million people (2006) translates into a huge demand for printed materials. Take newspapers, for example. According to an article in the 4 April 2010 edition of Nigeria's mass-circulating *Sunday Punch* newspaper, "As at today, the total number of newspapers, be it national, regional, state or local in the country, is in the region of one hundred."

While some of the major weekly news-

papers are printed with web offset machines imported primarily from India, most of the dailies are, however, printed on bond paper by Kord 64 machines imported from Germany. The glossy magazines are mainly printed using full-colour Speedmaster, four-colour Kord or digital (Direct Imaging) presses usually procured from Germany, the home of printing machines.

In addition to newspapers and magazines, there is also a huge demand for the printing of books and periodicals, annual reports, brochures, wedding cards, event programmes, calendars, posters and greeting cards, among others.

THE INDUSTRY HAS COME A LONG WAY

The history of printing in Nigeria dates back to 1848, about the time when European missionaries, in what later became Nigeria, established community newspapers to propagate their message. The business was expectedly dominated by

the British colonialists, but the trend began to change five years after independence, when an American and a Briton teamed up with two Nigerians to set up Academy Press in Lagos in 1965.

"The initial desire of the founding fathers," says Academy Press, in its corporate profile, "was to set up a printing company that would break the monopoly of European printers, which hitherto was responsible for corporate and educational printing in Nigeria." This has since been achieved, with the printing industry now fully in the hands of Nigerians and Academy Press as the flagship.

The industry has witnessed steady growth, especially since the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–70. The country moved from letterpress to offset printing in 1971, when printers started importing lithographic equipment and Gestetner 201 printing machines. Thereafter, things happened quickly, with the introduction of the one-colour Kord 64 printing ma-



Visitors from Cameroon negotiating the purchase of a printing machine at the annual RESALE - international trade fair for used machines - in Karlsruhe, Germany

ucated printers and press owners in Nigeria. Rather than compound issues by forcing people to register, the institute, according to its president, Mr Wahab Muhammed Lawal, has opted for persuasion and dialogue in the meantime. "We appeal to print buyers to ask for licences before they give out jobs. Our licensed printing outfits should also inform their clients that they have been licensed and gradually, quacks will be taken out of the industry," he says.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The CIPPON president does not see the reluctance by printers to register with the institute as one of the main problems of the industry. "Electricity is the main problem," he says, bemoaning the "unfriendly and uncompetitive production environment with increasing cost of infrastructure, power, energy, funds and foreign exchange." Highlighting another problem, he says: "Our paper mills are not functioning well. All the papers we are using are imported (from Europe and Asia) and all this is telling on our profit."

While hoping that the Nigerian government will be able to find a solution to the country's erratic power supply problem soon, CIPPON is exploring ways to see that printing consumables such as paper and chemicals for printing plates can be produced locally. "We can even invite the foreigners to come and establish their industries and produce here in our country," says Lawal.

Another battle currently being fought by the institute is the printing of electoral materials, which is usually contracted to foreign printers by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). As the country's next general election scheduled for next year approaches, CIPPON is intensifying its lobby to convince the INEC to print electoral materials locally.

"In this coming election, they should not go out of the country to print any electoral material," says Lawal, who recently led a delegation from CIPPON to meet Professor Dora Akunyili, Nigeria's Minister of Information and Communication, to solicit her support in this regard. According to the CIPPON leader, "When we talk of the latest technology in printing, our people are there. Visit the top presses in Nigeria and see what they are doing. We have the technology and experiences that can enable us to handle the job."

If the campaign bears the expected fruit, it would be yet another boon to Nigeria's vast printing industry. ■

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"We had other machines like AB Dick, but they couldn't stand the test of time," says Peters Ogheghe, a veteran printer who has operated in the industry for more than 40 years. "Kord 64 by MAN and Heidelberg proved to be the favourite and has remained so ever since because of its durability. The Chinese have started bringing in machines, but the ones from Germany remain the favourite of Nigerian printers," he adds.

The same is true across West Africa and even beyond, with printing presses in other countries such as Ghana, Burkina Faso and Cameroon (in Central Africa) preferring printing machines from Germany. As Afrifa Darko, General Manager of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Printing Press, Kumasi, Ghana, puts it, "It is always advisable to choose Heidelberg machines or German-made printing machines."

That was just what KNUST Printing Press did when it decided to modernise its business; the contract was given to Bertram Grafische Maschinen, the well-known German suppliers of printing equipment, which has since installed a modern press for KNUST. (See the next story)

In Nigeria, the vogue was to import brand new machines, but the trend changed after the country's economy took a tumble in the mid '80s following the introduction of the Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market by the military

government of General Ibrahim Babangida. Since then, most Nigerian printers have resorted to buying used machines (mainly Kord 64 from Germany), which are far cheaper.

GOVERNMENT SHOWS INTEREST

After decades of indifference, the Nigerian government seems to have come to terms with the huge potential of the industry and the need to reposition it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Along these lines, in 2007 the government finally bowed to pressure from printing industry stakeholders and established the Chartered Institute of Professional Printers (CIPPON) by an act of parliament to regulate, manage and control the practice of printing and other related matters in the country. The Act requires that all printers in Nigeria should be registered members of CIPPON and all printing presses in the country licensed by the institute.

To become a member of CIPPON, one is required to be a trained printer and must have been in practice for five years before the CIPPON Act was enacted. So far, about 1,000 persons have registered as members of the institute and have been presented with certificates (in the case of individuals) and licences (in the case of printing houses).

This represents a very small fraction of those operating in the industry and no one expects a phenomenal growth in CIPPON membership in the near future in view of the preponderance of barely ed-