

ValueDialog: Didier Gombert on the power of print innovation and connectivity for a better communication

drupa ante portas – automation, flexibilization, and digitization make print a top growth market! Beyond printing technology Multichannel newly defined is focussing communication effectiveness at its best. (See my expert comment: <http://bit.ly/1TeTNZa>) – A good reason to talk to an extraordinary entrepreneur, Didier Gombert, the Co-Founder and CEO of Objectif Lune (abbreviated to: OL), before drupa 2016 will start to catch his vision and POV of future market developments. –Interview by Andreas Weber

Some insights: OL's offering will touch the areas of pre-media, print, multichannel and future technologies. **OL's performance promise is quite different from other drupa exhibitors:** OL is dedicated to simple and effective software that is fun and helps companies around the globe communicate more efficiently with their customers. At **drupa 2016** OL will be present in two halls: Hall 7a /E23 close to the drupa innovation parc (dip), plus Hall 8a /D21 close to the digital printing technology world.

Key messages by Didier Gombert

- I like finding solutions for customer pains and getting rewarded for it
- Innovation is the cornerstone of our company to make life better for others; we always try to look at it from multiple perspectives
- Success isn't something you dream up out of the blue. It is created out of your personal experience.
- At the end of the day, it's simply offering proper communication from every aspect by providing the ability to have all of these connections and seamless connectivity.
- Creating and optimizing these processes is the foundation of what we bring to the market. All of that inside one single system; that is the key element.
- I consider the print community to be an industry perfectly capable of competing with many other industries claiming to perform impeccable or better communications.
- Consequently, at drupa 2016, we need to emphasize to the world that we understand communications, that we are capable of undertaking web technologies such as email, web pages and portals. That is what Print 4.0 is; it is multi-faceted.
- drupa 2016 is important because it is way of informing customers by human representation, unlike an email or a web page.

—PART 1:

Insights about entrepreneurship, innovation, connectivity and global business success

Could you please explain what guides you as a visionary entrepreneur?

Didier Gombert: I like to think about how I can make life better for others. It's what wakes me up in the morning. **I like finding solutions for customer pains and getting rewarded for it.** In other words, finding solutions for customers and trying to monetize it!

Starting OL more than 20 years ago, did you expect to reach the point where you are today?

Didier Gombert: Definitely not! The bar has been rising higher and higher with time. When we started out the goal was certainly more modest than it is today. But I feel very happy and very lucky for what we have managed to achieve. **We expected to do well, but certainly not to the current size and especially the current recognition!**

If you were able to re-start, what would be different (or equal)?

Didier Gombert: Interesting question, worth to put quite a bit of thought into it. When you reach a certain stage, you want to go to the next one and see what you can do next. — **Naturally, knowledge of the future would put anyone in an advantageous position!** I would certainly do a lot of things differently if I had to restart. We were dealt quite a few challenges, but we learned from our mistakes. I like to think that we gain experience the same way I try to solve issues — by finding solutions to problems. I believe that constant need, or drive, to improve things — either for oneself or for others — is what helps in being very innovative. Since innovation is the cornerstone of our company, it's very difficult to say "lets restart!". **As such, if I had the same set of knowledge, I'd probably do it the same way. It's the only way I know how to do things.**

If innovation is OL's cornerstone how do you deal with it?

Didier Gombert: **Innovation is created by being challenged with sets of problems.** We try to find ways to do things more efficiently, or more practically, with more benefit and so on and so forth. This is the way we've always done things. **We look at an issue and think about how we can improve it! We always try to look at it from multiple perspectives.**

And in relation to your customers and projects, was it possible to run experimental efforts, or are customers very conservative in that sense?

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Didier Gombert: Initially, people were much more willing and open to experiment. However, when you reach a certain size, experimentation carries quite a bit of risk. If you believe in yourself and you have a bunch of people uploading that new version of software — I don't believe that they would appreciate the word 'experimental'.

Nowadays, our mode of operation is much more structured, as we need to grab expected results. **In the early days, we experimented quite a bit more.** Through our experiences of talking to customers and being asked certain questions or having certain requests made of us, we have created our structured approach. **Naturally, this approach leads to innovation — of course you come up with certain things that haven't been thought of before!** The catalyst of an idea is undoubtedly something that was shown to you, asked of you, or something from your environment. **Success isn't something you dream up out of the blue. It is created out of your personal experience.**

But the whole thing with innovation means for me all the time to have more or less trustable partners, so if I can trust somebody, I'm ready for a journey, even if I don't know the way. Do you agree?

Didier Gombert: I'm very people-oriented. I absolutely agree with you on that topic — for me it's important to trust the people around me. **Business is driven by relationships.** A lot of companies claim that their assets are their people — but they don't really mean it. **I am convinced that people are the real assets.** Most companies attach great importance to intellectual property. **Yet intellectual property isn't like wine — it doesn't age well.** Technology, fashion, language all change and develop with time. What is really important is the people who create and maintain intellectual property, not the intellectual property itself. **At the end of the day, you need to trust your partners, your employees, and the customer. The trust relationship you have with them is a vital basis.**

I checked a lot of OL's blog posts and Twitter posts and also you shot a personal video on your website. If I got it right, one of your key words is "connect". From your personal point of view, what is the secret of connectivity?

Didier Gombert: **Connectivity, or connecting, is synonymous with communication.** People connect through some form of communication. **Nowadays, the pace of change is accelerating at an alarming pace!** As such, the companies of the future will need to adapt to new requirements, new ways of doing business, new ways of talking to their customers. **Hence connecting to their customers, their employees or even connection between systems is crucial.** There are an ever-increasing amount of systems, more ways of talking to a person rather than a system or a machine. **That is what connectivity is for me.**

We need to have something which is flexible and thus future-proof. There is no company out there who could claim that their communication is perfect.

Accordingly, better communication is a universal goal. The words connect and communication are the same to me, and they describe perfectly what we are trying to do with our new products.

Interjection (by Andreas Weber)

I love that term connectivity as well because when I was rethinking what I'm doing as a communications analyst, dealing with all those suppliers for more than twenty five years and then I started publishing a lot because everything was about innovation, nobody knew what we were thinking and talking about. Then I have those three terms which work for me, advise, knowledge and connectivity. I think they are strongly related to each other, and when I screened what OL is also doing with blog posts other things it's exactly that! Giving good advice, being good advisors share your knowledge and always struggle to give the best connectivity you can.

That means connectivity also has importance beyond technology?

Didier Gombert: Most certainly! **What are we if we don't connect to others?** Think of social networks! I'm not saying that we're involved in social networks, at least not yet. Social networks provide a way of connecting to a larger, wider audience and a way for that audience to connect to you. **Communication is one of the key processes in life** — whether it's business or personal, we all like to be communicated with in a proper way, in a timely manner among many other sorts of criteria on communicating, or connecting.

Words such as 'disconnect' have very negative connotations, and correspondingly, 'connect' is an extremely positive word! Right?

Didier Gombert: I'm an engineer. **As such, the word connectivity initially meant machine talking to machine in my days at university.** Entering the world, I believed connectivity was more about machines talking to humans, especially considering things like page composition and languages like PostScript. This is evident in the fact that we have interactive software rather than just a piece of paper — you have web forms, inputs and buttons you can click, even in an email! **This form of connectivity is human connecting to a machine, which is the reverse of what we traditionally did when we started out.** At the same time, however, we also offer options for electronic communication. That means machine to machine communication and connectivity, so going back to my old definition of connectivity! **At the end of the day, it's simply offering proper communication from every aspect by providing the ability to have all of these connections and seamless connectivity. Creating and optimizing these processes is the foundation of what we bring to the market.** All of that inside one single system; that is the key element.

—PART 2: drupa ante portas: how to touch the future?

According to my personal view Drupa 2016 will be very different compared to the past. The expectation is already extremely high to celebrate "Print 4.0". Beyond relevant digital technologies what will be key to augment the customer experience and to 'orchestrate' the (new) customer journey?

Didier Gombert: There is a lot to be said to this question. In my view, things are evolving tremendously, and digital is certainly one of those things. Nevertheless, print is also evolving. People going to a print show expect to see a lot of paper. Since the evolution of the PDF, not necessarily the early days, but the actual evolution as in the content, the management system etc. and things such as the option to attach files to email. Print has evolved a lot. **People still print today...**

... and attaching a PDF file to an email is effectively a doing digital print?

Didier Gombert: I think it is going even further than that. We will be showing some web technology and some tablet technology. This demonstrates that we can print directly from a tablet or an email. **The important thing about drupa 2016 is the fact that the print community has an opportunity here that is completely misunderstood.** There are many people out there who are capable of creating websites or doing web developments. It is a widespread skill among university students nowadays — many of them are competent in html, java script or other web technologies and understand platforms such as Wordpress amongst others. These kinds of skills are very easy to find.

However, there are very few people who understand print and the value of print. People need to realize that print is still relevant! It isn't a growing thing, but it is certainly still relevant and necessary in the digital age. **There is still a need to compose a proper page on which information is easy to find, which is appealing to the eye, which is attractive and efficient.** Then if you add all the other technical aspects, you begin to see how print is still relevant.

You mean print and the print industry are not out of time?

Didier Gombert: The print industry is an industry which is capable of doing print properly, but it has trouble understanding web technologies, multi-channel distribution of information, and new connectivities. **I consider the print community to be an industry perfectly capable of competing with many other industries** claiming to perform impeccable or better communications. **Consequently, at drupa 2016, we need to emphasize to the world that we understand communications, that we are capable of undertaking web technologies such as email, web pages and portals. That is what Print 4.0 is; it is multi-faceted.**

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So in the past the print industry focus was on efficiency, especially to make their own workflows and processes efficient. If I got your message right, in the meantime it's all about effectiveness but the technology has to be efficient, but communication needs effectiveness. Is that what you mean?

Didier Gombert: Absolutely, in every aspect! What I mean, though, is that people are looking for printables. Printable avoidance does not mean they don't want to print — it just means they are avoiding the cost of paper, envelopes and so on.

drupa 2016 is important because it is way of informing customers by human representation, unlike an email or a web page. Anyone can create an email or a webpage, but not everyone is able to print. So the print industry could profit greatly from adding to their skill set, as in the web or email representation of information.

What kind of visitors do you expect to come to OL's drupa 2016 booth? What will be their benefit?

Didier Gombert: This is an industry, so **naturally the who's who of the industry is going to be there.** I recently had a chat with our Australian people and they said they are expecting a lot of their customers from Australia to be there! — In all honesty, our main customers are usually the people who have their own booths at the show. **We sell our software to the seller community, and since they are all present at drupa 2016, we are expecting to, and hoping to, talk to them more than anyone else.** The people that are walking in aisle are generally end-users — that means they obtain our software through our first-hand customers. **From that perspective, I'm expecting mail service providers, creators of big print rooms, medium to large, migrant customers.** This is great, because we have the opportunity to demonstrate what we can do and we are definitely excited to show our newest and latest, and our capacity.

So everything you do at drupa 2016 is more or less on a strategic level but even if operators come they could learn about your solutions?

Didier Gombert: Absolutely! We believe that we have a good brand and good brand recognition as well as a good reputation. As such, we definitely think that our customers will look for us at drupa 2016. There are also likely to be many people in other booths who will talk about us, so we're expecting to see that traffic, and of course we will support our partners in their own booths.

You are experienced in running a global business successfully. What is your key success factor to 'harmonize' all those different cultures different levels with different needs?

Didier Gombert: I have a personal definition of success. The first ingredient of success is luck. I don't think you can be successful without being lucky. Mind you,

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the ability to recognize that luck and acting on it is what drives success. **The best way to do this is to find the right talented people, and keep them around you.**

You have to think local and act global. You need good people that work for you on a local basis to be your eyes and ears. They tell you what's important. Once you have a basis of this, you can start to see what is important on a global level. Obviously, there are different ways of doing certain things in different countries. At the end of the day though, you need to pick and choose what is best on a global level. **It's best to try to take the thing that is most widespread, most rewarding from a global perspective, and then you have a chance to see what you can do for the most benefit in a specific region.** That is the approach to being successful on an international level.

Quite impressive: OL is able to handle a customer base of 20,000+ organizations while having around 240 employees. What is your secret to keep this successful? And; what kind of talents characterize your staff?

Didier Gombert: In the first place, we look for people with the right kind of attitude. Aptitude comes second. *Why?* Because aptitude can always be learned, but attitude can rarely be changed. If you have people with the right kind of attitude, it allows you to forge better relationships with your partners.

As to the 20,000+ customers, we did not do them one by one. **The fact is that we are good with our resellers and partners.** The kind of people we look for are people who care, who work very hard, which is not always easy considering the work multiplies corresponding to the number of customers you reach.

What also sets us apart is that we offer products that cater to a wide range of company types. **We are capable of providing for small to medium size companies as well as very large corporations.** There are companies out there that only serve the Fortune 500. The fact is, this limits you to 500 customers!

Do you monitor the happiness of your customer base dealing with your products, do you have the possibility to monitor that?

Didier Gombert: We do inquire and do our surveys, but we try to limit this, as we don't want to annoy the customers with survey after survey. **We certainly welcome feedback, especially good feedback!** I must admit that I am very pleased with customer satisfaction. I get a lot of emails from customers saying they were well served, and we are very sensitive to this sort of thing. We could always do better, though. **We are always working on improving our method of feedback.** Ultimately, though I think that the fact that we have so many customers for such a long time, that they keep coming back for more, shows that we have happy customers.

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What is your advice for the drupa 2016 audience to transform the drupa motto 'touch the future' into sustainable business success?

Didier Gombert: First and foremost, my advice would be to **show up with an open mind**. The future is very hard to predict. Our industry has been very conservative. When I came out of university, the goal was the paper technology and what you could do with that. People are still talking about it. **The development in the past years has been astounding** — in the last decade the phone has become a radio, a walkman, a TV, a movie theater, a concierge and so on and so forth. I don't think the industry was ready for that!

I think that people out there are looking to make more money out of communication, or to make it cost-efficient. Thus, the audience coming to drupa 2016 needs to **look at print with a new mindset, and with an open mind**. I think that productivity is a prominent factor in all of this; in challenging times, we all want to perform better. **The audience needs to open their minds and then they might be touched by seeing what the future has in store for them!**

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About

Didier Gombert is the Co-Founder and CEO of Objective Lune (abbreviated to: OL). His mission (on a worldwide level) is to create and market efficient solutions for interactive business communication, which open up innovative paths in customer communication, giving immediate access to all the advantages of the digital age.

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