

How the War Affected Printing Business in Ukraine

ENGLISH TRANSLATION · ORIGINAL PUBLICATION IN GERMAN · VALERIIA GRANKINA

I have a pretty clear sense, that now my life is divided into “before” and “after”. And, if I know what was before, then it is simply impossible to say what will happen after. Only a week after we left the burning Kharkov, I realized what kind of race our people were constantly in. It was really difficult for me to get any memories from my memory simply because several weeks of war merged into one endless terrible day. I understand, give in to feelings and that’s all – you are crushed, which means there is no further way. And you need to choose: your feelings or life. Now it is impossible to complain, stop, cry, give up, show weakness. It remains only to fight with all possible forces and to believe. To believe that the war will stop, that we will continue our usual free happy life, that our enterprise will continue its beautiful development.

The end of 2021 marked two significant events for my company. The first of them: our family-owned company Slavena celebrated its 23rd anniversary. Slavena is a large printing company in Ukraine that produces cardboard packaging for pharmaceutical, cosmetic and food processing factories. The second important event: we were able to obtain quotas for the supply of cardboard from Europe to provide our customers with packaging in full. And, given the fact that since 2021, printing enterprises in Ukraine have experienced a crisis in the availability of cardboard in the country, for us this was really a victory. Also, given the fact that for 23 years we have been consistently providing large pharmaceutical plants with packaging, instructions and inserts, and now we have received the ISO 22000 Certificate, which opened up the opportunity for us to work with the largest food companies in Europe, the issue of obtaining cardboard in large volumes was for us not only extremely important, but also decisive in terms of the development and existence of the company as a whole. Moreover, one of the most important tasks that we set ourselves was to enter the European market of cardboard packaging. Therefore, we entered 2022 full of hope and strength to conquer new heights. It definitely opened up new opportunities for us to grow and develop.

Even before the crisis began with the supply of cardboard to Ukraine, we thought about expanding and updating our production facilities. Therefore, we received loans, selected, purchased and installed new equipment. At the beginning of 2022, our employees carried out test work on the new equipment, and the whole team was preparing for the big and grand opening of a completely new production site. I must say that some of our customers have already received an invitation to the opening and we discussed the issue of the number of people from the customer company who would like to take part in our event.

We included a lot of risks in the opening of a new factory. For example, an insufficient number of customers for those capacities that were already ready for launch, an insufficient number or qualifications of employees of the enterprise, an insufficient

amount of cardboard for the production of packaging, and so on. We knew a lot about the world of VUCU, but none of us could even think that in the modern world it is necessary to lay down such a type of risk as the start of a full-scale war in the country. Nobody believed in it. And here I would like to note that already today many enterprises are thinking that when restoring their buildings, it will be necessary to build a bomb shelter near or inside the enterprise. Is this not a proof of how the vision, values, very life of people and the course of business in our country are changing as a result of a terrible war?

I forgot to say that both factories of our printing house, as well as the office of Slavena enterprise, are located in the city of Kharkov. In a city that, despite daily shelling, explosions, death, and destruction, still has the strength to breathe and believe in recovery.

On February 24, 2022, I, like every resident of the cities of Kharkov and Kyiv, woke up at about 5 am from the sounds of the most powerful tank salvos towards our peacefully sleeping city. Now, having survived three weeks of the war in the basement and already easily distinguishing the sounds of shooting, hail, rockets, planes, the most terrible are the memories of precisely that first series of volleys and the still incomprehensible gray haze in the sky that they left behind. And I know for sure that in fact this day is our common always yesterday. The yesterday that forever changed the lives of Ukrainians.

On that day, I, like many other Ukrainians, thought that this horror would last only one or two days, and then our ordinary peaceful life would continue. Therefore, that morning I received a message from the school where my daughter studied that the school would work today, and then we would be informed of everything as events unfolded. Some employees of our company went to work because they did not want to believe in terrible sounds in the sky, but we nevertheless asked them to return to their homes and take care of themselves. On the same day, my father and me personally phoned all our customers to ascertain their relative well-being. The directors and managers responded that the operation of the enterprises was stopped for several days, and all applications to produce packaging should be temporarily suspended. That important word is temporary. No one believed that tomorrow and next week and even in a month we would not go to work either. And only starting from the fourth day of the war, our e-mail began to actively receive letters, which contained information about the termination of the work of our partner factories in Ukraine until the end of hostilities.

So, from the first days of the war in Ukraine, most of the country's enterprises suspended their work since an attack was expected on any city and at any moment. Later it became clear that the occupier had chosen several points, which for some reason he decided to destroy. These are: Kharkov, Mariupol, Kyiv, Irpen, Izum, Sumi, Bucha, Chernihiv. These are the cities where the largest number of adults and children perish, and there is practically nothing left of the cities themselves.

Being in Kharkov and hiding from shelling, my family spent every day and every night in a basement. Getting out of the shelter for a short while, we turned on the phones in order to find out if our friends and colleagues were alive, which part of the city was affected at the moment, and if there was any information that the war had been stopped. And one day terrible news came up to us: the repair base of military equipment, which was

located a few meters from our new enterprise, was completely destroyed by Russian missiles. It was scary to even think about the state of our new site. It seemed that time had stopped, but that day we were very lucky. The outer part of the building was slightly damaged, the outer pipes were blown off, but the printing, die-cutting, folder-gluing and all other machines remained undamaged.

As I said earlier, severe destruction and shelling today continue to be felt mainly by several cities. Among them is my city Kharkov, where most of the infrastructure and residential areas of the city have been destroyed. We, entrepreneurs, have no opportunity to establish production. Going to work today is a huge risk to our lives and the lives of each of our employees. And here I would like to cite as an example the story of our customer, a large pharmaceutical company from Kharkov. On one of the days of the war, shelling was carried out at the plant, as a result of which some animals were killed. They also fired a rocket that didn't explode, but remained on the territory of the plant itself, which now blocks any possibility of movement of people at the pharmaceutical plant for an indefinite amount of time. Therefore, every enterprise in Kharkov and other cities that were attacked has its own story, why you want to work now, but you can't. Now we understand that Russian troops are destroying everything that makes our people a great people, culture – a high culture, and business – a strong business that brings the country to the international level.

Fortunately, not in all regions of the country the same situation is observed, as, for example, in Kyiv, Mariupol and Kharkov. Therefore, more and more actively enterprises of those cities and regions, which the military actions of the Russian army touched the least, began to resume their work. Therefore, in western Ukraine, many printing companies continue to operate in a safe mode, although production volumes have slightly decreased due to the suspension of many customer enterprises. So, one of the companies, which has always been considered our competitor, offered to place on its own a batch of cardboard, which managed to enter the territory of Ukraine before the start of the war, but did not manage to reach our city Kharkov.

During the month of heroic resistance of the Ukrainian state to the Russian invasions and its desire to destroy the Ukrainian people, our country was able to show its strength and unity in the desire to live freely, independently and for the sake of our own dreams, and not other people's fantasies. I sincerely believe in a quick victory of our country over the Russian invaders. Of course, we will need a lot of strength to restore the infrastructure of our cities. We asked for help and support for our country in the war, I know that we will need Europe's help in rebuilding.

And for its part, Ukraine has already shown its strength and its standards to Europe. In the same way, our company is ready to show its knowledge, skills, standards, strengths, and capabilities in the printing industry to Europe. I know for sure that our company will need new customers from Europe, and especially from Germany, because we have worked with German customers, we know Germany's requirements for printing and delivery times, and therefore, as the head of Slavenna's company, I relate to this country most hope.

Ukraine used to be a wonderful country, but now it will also become great, because our people are like that. Great people. Great Ukraine. This means that the restorations, and

after in the future will also become great!

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