

# In touch with schools

## Member of the hep Verlag management team talks about the importance of the merger with Orell Füssli

hep Verlag has grown steadily since it was established back in 2000. Today, it is one of Switzerland's leading providers of teaching and learning media. The range of digital products has become more extensive and sophisticated over time. In order to continue to keep pace with the rapid technological changes, the publisher's owners and management team were looking for a strong, reliable partner. "We also wanted to maintain our agility in order to exploit market opportunities in the best possible way and secure our competitive edge," explains Manuel Schär, who worked in operational roles at hep Verlag for many years and took over as chairman of the Board of Directors in summer 2022.

### Orell Füssli: the right partner

The search for a suitable ally came to an end in summer 2022 with the announcement of the merger with Orell Füssli. The company's financial security and its long-term focus, with a history as a publisher and printer spanning more than 500 years, and its Swiss roots, argued in favour of Orell Füssli. In addition, hep Verlag would retain its independence. The acquisition was a very good fit for the Orell Füssli Group's strategy, which has defined education as a central growth area.

The Orell Füssli teaching materials team will move to hep at the beginning of 2023. This means that the joint activities for teaching and learning media will be bundled at hep's headquarters in Bern under the auspices of hep's management team.

Geraldine Blatter, Stephan Schori and Manuel Schär



hep is confident that its founding spirit and innovative strength will not change after the takeover. Although the formative figure of Peter Egger is retiring, the company has not been a one-man show in recent years, explains Schär. "The team is the pillar that holds the company together", emphasises Geraldine Blatter, who is in charge of the publishing house programme and previously spent seven years as an editor at hep Verlag. Continuity is also guaranteed by the fact that five current members of the Board of Directors will remain in their roles.

### Valuable network in education

One of the strengths of hep Verlag lies in its careful selection of authors, including high-profile figures from the business and political arenas. The key pillars of the programme, however, are the numerous experts who write teaching materials driven by a passion for their subject and for education. "What really makes me proud is the fact that authors approach us on their own initiative," says Stephan Schori, who has been a member of the management team since 2021 and also teaches business and law at upper secondary level school.

One of hep Verlag's specialities is its close links to educational theory, didactics and learning research; hep not only offers educational media, but also reflections on them. The fact that representatives of teacher training universities sit on the Board of Directors is the result of the publishing house's consistent positioning and profiling.

Thanks to its ties with the education sector, hep keeps in touch with schools and has access to the latest information on the reforms that are currently keeping publishers of teaching and learning media on their toes. Players who want to be successful have to be able to develop the right teaching tools at the right time.

#### **Multiplying recipes for success**

In Switzerland, numerous educational reforms have been recently adopted and launched, and hep wants to support and facilitate their implementation. For example, commercial vocational training will be revamped at the start of the apprenticeship period in 2023. Commercial apprenticeships attract the highest number of students of all occupations. In view of the reform, hep has developed the digital teaching and learning platform "myKV". The platform reflects the goals of fostering methodological, social and personal skills, such as self-organisation and self-reflection. Geraldine Blatter: "Work on new teaching materials helps us develop close ties with schools and teaching staff. This helps us to understand their needs."

University of Teacher Education (PH Zurich), for example, teaching materials for Lehrplan 21 have been developed that use pictures and comics to promote children's understanding of media and information technology.

#### **Conquering the realm of digital education**

Pursuit of new avenues is a matter of course at hep and is an approach that is put into practice time and again; for example, in subjects such as art, Italian and history. This coming year will also see the publication of a large collection of teaching material for nursing professions.

The publishing house aims to use its products to cover a wide range, to be open to many different types of teaching concepts and to give teachers freedom in how they structure their lessons.

What is good digital teaching material? More than 20 years of experience have shown that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution. Work materials for primary school have to have different qualities than those for upper secondary level school. The key is to exploit the potential and added value of digital media. Learning can be supported by multimedia and interactive elements, facilitating collaborative work between students and teachers in a network. It makes little sense to simply replicate printed matter in digital form. "Printed books are still a good format, especially for younger pupils," says Schär.

*"Orell Füssli is the right partner for us in terms of allowing us to keep pace with technological changes."*

hep laid the technical foundation for "myKV" in recent years with the teaching and learning environment "mySkillbox", a service launched in cooperation with the Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET). The same recipe is also used for vocational training in the retail trade.

Other areas that hep Verlag has discovered and is cultivating include products that help users to better find their way in media and virtual spaces. In cooperation with Zurich

But schools have a real need for digital learning media, says Geraldine Blatter. The real art lies in developing digital media that provide ideal support for learning and teaching at the appropriate level. And whether artificial intelligence, for example, to give students automated feedback, or book enhancements to include audio-visual media thanks to augmented reality, really have potential is still unclear. One thing is certain: hep Verlag aims to remain a leading provider of state-of-the-art teaching and learning media.