

Case Study

BERLINER VERLAG

How Berliner Verlag transformed their tech stack operations in just six months

Berliner Verlag needed a foundation to support the transformation into a digital-first news publisher. Aptitude answered with a cost-effective, capability-rich, open subscription management platform.

Aptitude 

Introduction

When entrepreneurial new owners acquired Berlin's premiere news publisher, Berliner Verlag (BV), in 2019, they did so with a clear strategy in mind. They wanted a future proof solution with flexibility for the digital age that included their two publications – Berliner Zeitung and Berliner Kurier.

Sofie Siffert, a customer services team leader at BV explained: "Like all news publishers in Germany, we are seeing a gradual erosion of print subscriptions as consumers move over to digital. The new owners' digital-first strategy was a direct response to that. It's about futureproofing the business."



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Sofie Siffert,
Customer Services Team Leader, BV

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Technology Barriers

However, in keeping with most of Germany's news publishing sector, BV was simply not set up to realize that strategy. The technology it relied on to manage subscriptions – whether print or digital – was typical of the legacy systems that hold back so many news publishers.

Cumbersome and expensive to run, BV was reliant on an outdated hard paywall and was unable to innovate at pace in developing, promoting and monetizing new digital products and services.

Siffert said. "Delivering our strategy depended entirely on a wholesale digital transformation of the business, which had never been attempted before."

BV was not alone amongst German news publishers in having been slow to deliver that crucial digital transformation. Cost, time and potential disruption to still-profitable print subscriptions were near universal issues preventing the industry from committing to a digital future.

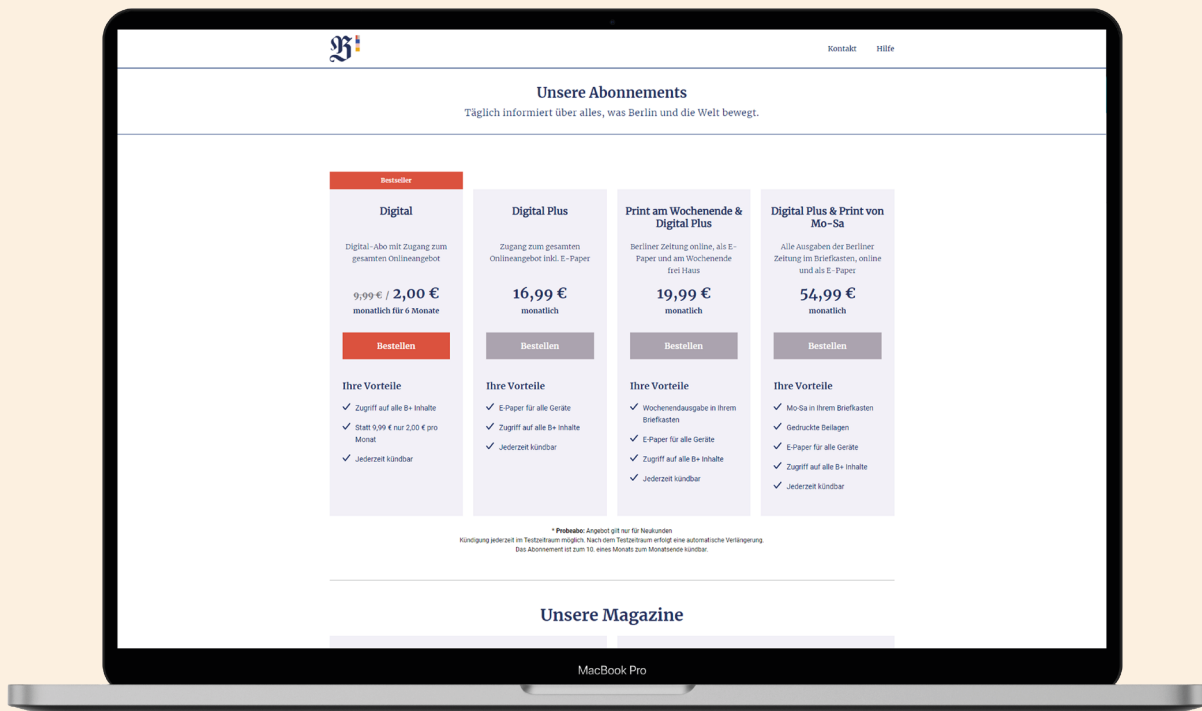


For most news publishers, adapting existing systems is not a realistic option. It would be a complex process, taking years and costing millions. That meant we had to find a different way forward, a way to deliver that same transformation cost-effectively.

Sofie Siffert,
Customer Services Team Leader, BV

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Berliner Zeitung



A race against time

A further complication came in the form of a hard deadline of just six months for BV to either commit to its existing subscriber management system, or migrate to a new solution. “There was a big problem,” Siffert said. “If the previous solution became unavailable before we were ready, we would have had no way to manage and fulfil subscriptions, and potentially even lost all of our subscriber data.”

An ambitious plan

The result was an ambitious strategy. BV needed to deliver a cost effective, low risk migration to a new subscriber management platform within six months. The complexity of that challenge should not be underestimated. Any new subscriber management platform would need to support rapid deployment, easy configuration and simple integration with an array of internal and third-party systems – all while lowering operating costs and providing the foundation for BV’s ongoing transformation into a digital-first news publisher.

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We wanted a cloud-based solution, with no on-premises systems to install and manage, with an open interface, to be a digital foundation for BV.

Sofie Siffert,

Customer Services Team Leader, BV

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But BV didn’t want speed to come at the cost of quality. The publisher also wanted a platform that would support its strategy for the long-term, enabling it to innovate and adapt quickly, from paywall models and digital products, to payment methods and offers – all without neglecting its existing print subscribers.



Six months to go-live: the perfect partnership

To overcome these challenges, BV chose to partner with Aptitude Software and CORE Transform, an IT advisory and consulting firm with a competency around digital transformation in publishing. The plan was to harness the power of eSuite – the world’s smartest subscriber management and billing platform.

“eSuite was an easy choice” continued Siffert. “It was the only subscriber management product offering all the capabilities we needed in a flexible cloud solution. Together CORE and Aptitude were the ideal partners and were able to deliver the project on such a short timescale.”

That partnership, along with eSuite’s support for API-based integrations and easy customization, ensured the project was completed on time – from selecting eSuite to go-live took just six months.

“The set up was really fast,” Siffert confirmed. “Now we are in an optimization phase, adjusting and tweaking settings to best deliver our strategy, supported by a dedicated team from Aptitude, which is very responsive when we need help or advice.”

BV’s digital foundation

eSuite centralizes a range of business systems – from customer services, fulfilment and delivery to billing and accounting – into a single, seamless solution. More importantly, a digital transformation with eSuite at its core is just the start. BV now has all the tools it needs to win the battle for digital subscribers according to Marvin Ebker, Head of Customer Service, BV, “Right now, compared to other news publishers in Germany, we have a real advantage. We are more flexible, more able to adapt and innovate, more able to create and launch new products and passes. The other publishers have the problems that come with big, legacy technology. As we know, it is expensive, slow and inflexible.”





Costs down by more than 50%

Some of those benefits have already started to emerge. For instance, moving to eSuite has slashed BV's subscriber management operating costs. Meanwhile, eSuite's support for subscriber self-care has enabled Ebker's team to work more efficiently day to day.

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By implementing eSuite we cut our operating costs by more than 50% almost overnight. At the same time, we are much more efficient as a team because daily tasks are so much easier to complete. This gives us more time to focus on delivering our strategy more quickly.

Marvin Ebker,
Head of Customer Service, BV

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The final word

Print and digital integration

Finally, BV's decision to migrate to eSuite means digital innovation does not come at the expense of its existing print subscription business. It is the only cloud subscriber management platform that integrates both print and digital, to generate further efficiencies, improve the print customer experience and enable cross-format bundling.



eSuite gives greater ability to experiment with mixed bundles, and to be flexible in offering things like subscription holidays. Now we have a range of mixed, print and digital bundles and, if a customer wants to pause print delivery while away from home, they can do it online in seconds. eSuite ensures that our distributor is aware any changes, and delivery schedules are correct.

Marvin Ebker,
Head of Customer Service, BV

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