



Is it five to twelve or is it five past already?

The digital clock is ticking

Thomas Blömer, Publisher

When people talk about the camera market, they blame the declining demand above all on the omnipresence of smartphones. That, however, is only one side of the coin. Unfortunately, present-day cameras are, with only a few exceptions, simply not innovative enough to motivate large target groups to buy one. That is bad enough, but in the long term, far worse consequences threaten: The photo sector could lose its connection to the present digital trends completely.

This risk was seen at the beginning of the year at the CES in Las Vegas. There, not only did the technology giants of the digital world celebrate their new products, they also looked ahead into a digital future which must appear to the traditional companies of the photo industry just as utopian as the landing on the moon to a blacksmith in the Middle Ages.

The much vaunted Internet of Things is already well passed the stage when a kitchen oven informs its owner's TV set or smartphone that the roast joint is cooked. The ubiquitous connectivity and artificial intelligence power the rapid further development of smart technologies. Complex systems such as road traffic, manufacturing or the household will soon be able to organize themselves more efficiently than they did under human management. The cultural consequences of this development

and the consequences for civilization generally are already subject of intensive discussions. Of course, there are risks but there are also tangible advantages because, in only a few years, people will have to spend far less time on day-to-day matters.

While such systems will function by themselves with powerful processors and software, the interfaces between technology and the people who use it will be completely redefined. Computer-based systems must, for example, no longer be controlled from a keyboard or touchscreen, but respond to the human voice, react to gestures, or will figure out the situation themselves and initiate the right actions – from switching on the light and controlling the heating to bringing the car to a halt in an emergency. As Germany's Photo Industry Association quite correctly pointed out recently in a detailed press release, sophisticated imaging technologies are essential to make this happen. On the other hand, the established camera manufacturers in our industry are playing only a small role in this digital movement. If they are involved, then it is through the provision of hardware such as sensors, but not through the development of software and innovative applications. To put it bluntly: The photo industry is at best responsible for the analog part of the digital world.

That is perhaps not surprising, because the operating logic of cameras has remained virtually unchanged for 150 years. We still rotate dials to

adjust the aperture and shutter speed – parameters that stem from the time of the analog film. We still have to tell our cameras in a rather antiquated fashion which part of the subject is important, which areas should be sharp and what kind of light mood we want to produce. To do this, we need expert knowledge that 90 percent of the population does not have.

Today, even an oven in the kitchen can learn that its owner prefers his meat medium-rare, a car can recognize whether the driver likes to put his foot down or prefers a more leisurely style, and a smart home can alert its owner if someone is moving around in the hallway, and it knows what room temperature, what music and what lighting the residents prefers. The cameras of 2017, on the other hand, know only – without outside assistance – the old German rule of "Sonne lacht, Blende 8", which basically translates as "when the sun is shining, use aperture 8".

Unfortunately, there is no master plan for integrating photography into the connected digital world of the future. The traditional leaders of our photo industry have, so far not given any recognizable signs of which instrument they want to play in the networked digital orchestra. If things remain that way, the photo segment as a whole will miss out on the future. We can then only hope that new providers and start-ups will fill the gap and provide the photo retailers with products and services that can also excite people in the digital society.

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