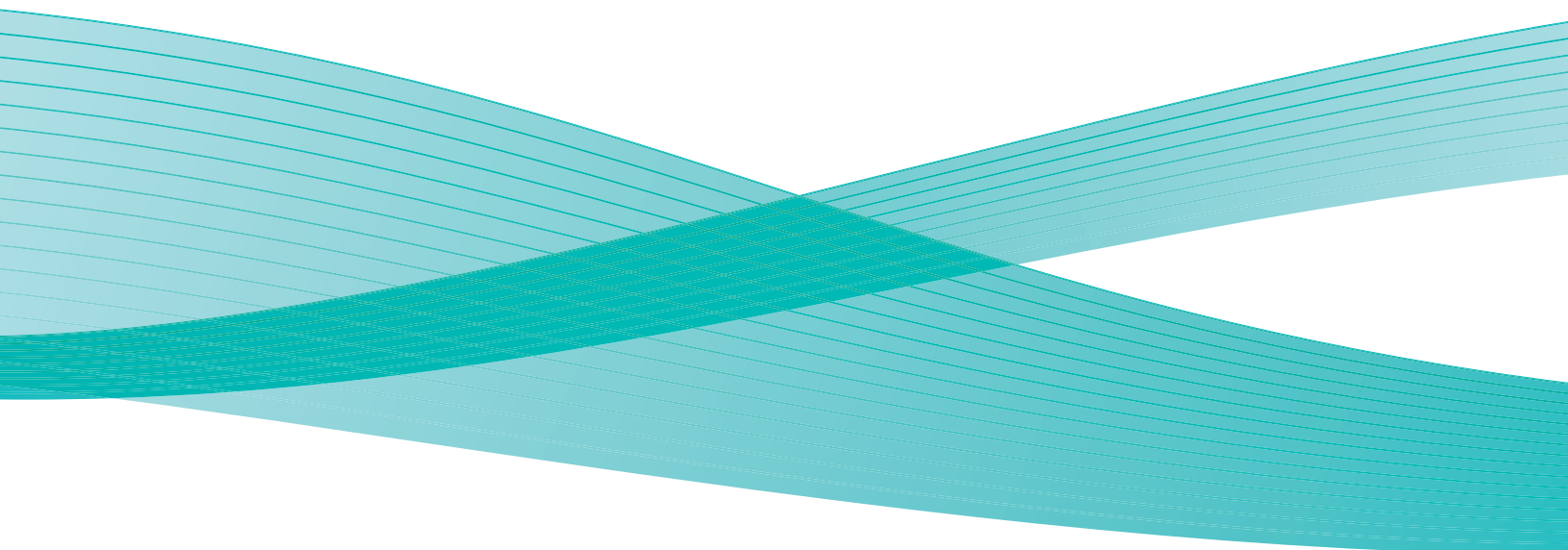


Bowens Bureau Case Study.

Creating partnerships
to tap into the potential
of photo books.



An innovative selling approach, consumer-friendly software, and a dependable Xerox® digital press add up to photo book success for this service bureau and print provider.

Bowens Bureau

For the past 20 years, Bowens Bureau—based in Johannesburg, South Africa—has provided its customers with a number of service bureau and printing production capabilities. While a portion of its jobs still use film-based products, the company has heartily embraced the digital realm and photo publishing.

By selling photo publishing “affiliations” with annual licensing fees, Bowens Bureau has created a nationwide sales network—which includes many of its historical customers. These affiliates drive pages to Bowens Bureau. In turn, it helps drive demand.

“Photo books are relatively new in South Africa,” says Shaun Bowen, “so we’ve had to educate people as to what they are.” As a result, Bowens Bureau has developed creative tactics that include radio advertising and online videos.

“When we decided to pursue this business model, Xerox came to the party in a big way, helping us with a combined hardware and software solution that gives us the infrastructure we need to succeed. If I had to do it all over again, I would!”

Shaun Bowen
Managing Director
Bowens Bureau

Challenge

When Bowens Bureau decided to tap into the potential for printing photo books for South African consumers, there were the usual challenges of ramping up a new line of business—and some unique ones.

Historically a business-to-business service bureau and print provider, it needed to devise a way to sell directly to consumers—and without alienating its established base of business customers.

The Internet seemed to be a natural fit for consumer-generated photo books. “We thought it would be simple—put a server in, print, and finish,” says Shaun Bowen, managing director at Bowens Bureau.

But in South Africa, online speed and access is limited. For those consumers who are online, there are issues with paying by credit card—not only in terms of security, but also in getting people to use what to them is not yet an accepted practice.

Solution

To overcome these multiple challenges, Bowens Bureau created a new business model: promoting photo books through a nationwide network of affiliates that could accept jobs online or off. The model appeals to entrepreneurial individuals and organizations, providing them with a turnkey business in kit form that then feeds pages to Bowens. In essence, it turns the company’s customer base into its sales force.

Another crucial key to success? The Xerox® iGen3® Digital Press.

Bowens Bureau had originally purchased an iGen3 for short-run digital jobs, including business cards, brochures, and books. The company knew it could also depend on it for its new photo publishing business because the iGen3 provides the exceptional image quality that consumers expect in photo applications.

“We get consistent quality, great speed, and service that has been second to none,” says Bowen. “I’m very happy with my iGen.”

To produce photo books, Bowens Bureau teams up its iGen3 with RapidStudio software from M-Photo. Consumers download this template-based photo application software for free, request it on a CD, or use it at an affiliate location. They then submit their orders via the Internet, or drop off an electronic file at one of a number of collection points. Once produced, the photo books are delivered to these same collection points for pickup, or couriered directly to the consumer for an extra fee.

Benefits

Currently, Bowens Bureau has 40 to 50 affiliates feeding its photo book business and helping to drive page volumes. These affiliates range from entrepreneurs working out of their homes to small photo shops, and even include a large retailer.

The company's e-commerce photo business represents close to 20% of its overall business. "I'm hoping in a year it'll be more like 50 to 60%," says Bowen. "Going totally e-commerce will be an uphill battle, but I like a challenge."

Partnering for success.

The M-Photo software allows Bowens Bureau to track where an order comes from, so commissions can be paid to the appropriate affiliates. To help generate interest in and demand for photo books, Bowens has initiated a number of marketing efforts that benefit all parties involved.

Bundling opportunities.

Always looking for innovative ways to promote its photo book services, Bowens Bureau also bundles RapidStudio software with products from other companies. Examples include a major digital camera manufacturer and a telecommunications company.

Additional applications.

The iGen3 beautifully handles other photo applications as well, including personalized calendars and magazines marketed and produced by Bowens Bureau. Its ability to support variable data jobs and photo-rich content opens the door to adding new photo publishing applications as well. "Every day, we think about what else we can do," says Bowen.

Looking to the future.

For the short-term, Bowens Bureau wants to work on "bullet proofing" its e-commerce channel, and enhancing related CRM systems to continually enhance customer satisfaction while driving repeat business. "Giving our competition a run for their money is great fun," says Bowen.



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