



Minilab 2002

By Jerry Lansky

GRAPHX, INC.: Putting the Minilab Into the Online Print Business

You say you're a minilabber and you want to compete with the Ofoto's and Shutterfly's of the world? You've spent \$150,000 on the digital minilab expecting to grab the market of digital shooters who want prints, and you find that these customers are ordering prints online from a variety of websites—not from you. Back to the days of mail order, it seems, when it took a week to get prints returned. What to do?

Joe Kowalik, president of Graphx, Inc., Woburn, MA, was offering a solution with a demonstration inside the Noritsu booth as well as off-site demos at a Times Square hotel. (I learned that Graphx is a 17-year old software firm that offers, among other things, RasterPlus color printer software products sold on an OEM basis to minilab manufacturers and others.)

Joe is offering to retail minilabs a new product, Photogize, that will allow a digital lab to receive digital images from a customer's PC through the dealer's own website. According to Joe, a lab needs: a digital minilab, a Pentium PC, a website (though Graphx can provide one at a cost), a high speed Internet connection, and someone in the lab that has some PC literacy. Graphx supplies the software and all the web services.

The business model is no different than Shutterfly. The customer goes to the lab's website and uploads

images from a home PC and indicates how many prints of each and what sizes. The Photogize software captures this information and sends it to the dealer's digital lab for completion. The customer can drop by the store and pick up the order in less than

an hour—instead of the time it could take via other online services that have to process the order and return it by mail. (Sounds like the early days of one-hour processing when customers had to wait days or a week with a drug store film processing order.)

How much? According to Joe, the total cost is \$4,985, which includes an annual fee of \$995 for web services. One element of the price is the firm's RasterPlus software at \$2,495. If a minilab is already equipped with RasterPlus, the Photogize system prices at \$2,490.



photogize

There are no click fees or royalty payments. The setup provides for multiple websites for a dealer that has separate sites for commercial customers or professional photographers, as well, with the capability of different pricing and services for each type of customer.

At my request, Joe provided me with a list of dealers who are already using Photogize so I could see what the experience was in the real world of minilabs. I called Brian Noble, owner of Noble's Camera, Hingham, MA., a true bell-cow of the industry. Brian has six locations, two of which have on-site equipment though the digital work is done on an Agfa d-lab at the Hingham store. He installed the Photogize system in April.

Does the product deliver, Brian? He told me it was "like finding money on the street." He wouldn't tell me specifically what his volume was but to give some hint he said that **he does as much business**

with Photogize in a week as one of his stores averages in a day. I'm impressed.

He said he went into the program expecting people to upload their images at night from their home PC and that he would see the orders in the morning. It turns out that most of the volume comes in at lunchtime. Reason? People are transmitting the images from their offices which almost always have high-speed connections rather than from their home's slower dial-up modems.

Typically, orders are picked up after 5pm, according to Brian. All orders are processed at the Noble's main lab and delivered to any of the other five stores by its own delivery vehicle which circuits the stores three times a day. "99% of the orders are picked up, not mailed," he said. Price? Noble's charges 50-cents per 4R print from a digital image vs. 49-cents from a negative printed at time of development. C'mon, Brian.

Curious? Open up www.noblescamera.com and click on "Photogize" and then "Help." For the whole experience, upload an image and you'll see an entire order form.

Digital shooters are trying to find the 'right' way to get prints done. Home printing is costly and time consuming. Sending images off to an online service is easy but it takes a number of days to get the prints returned by mail. Customers are most comfortable with the old model of dealing with their own local lab and getting prints in an hour. The Graphx system, as well as a few others out there, **gives the minilab operator a unique edge that could serve to secure his connection to his film/digital shooter.**



Contact Graphx at 781-932-0430 x566 Or visit www.photogize.com

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