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## How Photobooks Are Made - Backgrounder

Source: HP, 2009-May-06

Ordering photo-specialty products, especially photobooks, is the most advanced example of web-to-print technology, involving consumers, retailers and enterprises in a smooth, end-to-end production workflow and financial transaction.

The photobook is a groundbreaking product in that it complements digital photography as a streamlined, superior alternative to mounting snapshots in albums. Photo-specialty represents the fastest-growing segment of the HP Indigo business(1), and HP remains fully dedicated to creating profitable growth for photofinishers in this segment by meeting and exceeding consumers' quality expectations and offering solutions that maximise productivity.

The last quarter of the year is traditionally the photo-specialty market's busiest time of the year, as people begin thinking about holiday gifts. In the last three months of 2008, HP Indigo photo customers worldwide collectively produced 87 percent more pages than were printed during the same time period in 2007 (2). High uptime and reliability for the HP presses was a key requirement for success in peak production season and many photo specialty customers reported operating their presses 24 hours a day in this time period.



The transfer process

The process has been developed for customer convenience, and the variations possible are supported by a well-structured procedure. From start to finish, the process has an hourglass shape with multiple means of input, a single system to handle workflow and printing, and multiple finishing options.



The beginning of the process for the customer is the transfer of digital pictures to a retailer, which in turn forwards them for printing. They can transfer their images via a CD, memory card or other device at a high street retailer or kiosk, or from a home computer to an online photo service company.

HP works with several partners who offer these services including DigiLabs, via its My Photo Book service, or Pixami. Pixami's "Photo Site" is a turnkey, highly customisable, brandable solution that allows customers to build a successful business from the sale of custom photobooks and other digitally printed products.

Snapfish by HP is another direct route via the web for consumers to access a full photo-specialty production service.

Using the interfaces provided by these suppliers, consumers select the products they want, and design their photobooks, choosing paper stock, bindings and the number of copies. They also have full control over picture size and shape, captions and other text, and a variety of backgrounds and embellishments to make each page of their product unique.



The data management

Once the photobook or other photo-specialty product has been designed, the data is sent via the internet to the print service providers (PSP) or specialty photo-finisher.

At the PSP, the images are processed by a prepress and data management system like the new HP SmartStream Photo Enhancement Server (formerly HP Indigo Photo Enhancement Server), which performs or manages imposition, colour management and RIPping.

For the PSP, the HP SmartStream Photo Enhancement Server and the HP Scalable RIP Solution offer a powerful system for driving multiple RIPs feeding multiple HP Indigo presses in a seamless workflow.

For customers, the HP SmartStream Photo Enhancement Server provides automatic image enhancement, sharpening images, removing red-eye, adjusting contrast and brightness, enhancing shadow detail and reducing JPEG artifacts, to deliver high-quality printed images.

When the imposed, corrected and RIPped data is fed into an HP Indigo press (an HP Indigo press 5500 for up to 1.5 million pages per month, or an HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press for monthly volumes above 1 million pages), the printing can be carried out on a variety of

substrates. HP ElectroInk provides sharp images and life-like colour. HP Indigo presses have multiple paper feeders that enable different stocks to be fed into the press without stopping. This means that covers and contents can be printed and collated at the same time, ensuring that all the elements are kept together, contributing to both accuracy and workflow speed. Photobooks can be of a variety of sizes from mini-photobooks (pocket- or purse-size) up to large (A3) containing 100 pages or more.

While standard CMYK process colours are commonly used, photofinishers have the option to offer photo printing with two additional colours, HP Indigo Light Cyan and Light Magenta. Use of these additional colours provides improved images with smoother tone transition and saturated colours, achieving truly photographic quality, far beyond the usual benchmark of offset.

#### The finishing process

Another option for photofinishers is the HP Indigo UV Coater. Designed for cost-effective production in short-run production environments, the coater protects printed materials against damage from finishing or mailing systems, as well as providing a degree of resistance to water and solvents.

Gloss, matte and satin finishes are possible with the coater.

Once printed and coated, photobook pages are ready for finishing. This is the second part of the hourglass analogy where the options open up again. Depending on the selections made by customers, the printed photobook pages are prepared for binding. If added protection is required, notably for soft covers, these pages may be laminated with equipment from HP Photo-finishing Partner GBC. For photobooks and mini-photobooks using soft covers, pages will be creased, folded, stitched and trimmed. HP Photo-finishing Partners Morgana and Duplo supply equipment for this process. Photobooks and calendars with wire bindings may be processed on systems from Renz (punches and double-wire bindings).

For hard-covered (case books) photobooks, Schmedt, Kolbus and Horizon offer HP Indigo PSPs a choice of solutions. Casebooks may have personalised dust jackets, or cut-out windows showing an image on the first page.

Pages are placed into the casebook covers where a strip of hot-melt glue is in the spine. The spines are heated and the pages adhere to the cover when the glue melts. When cool, pages are securely fixed; properties of the adhesive ensure many years of use with product integrity. Manual finishing is also possible through Unibind solutions, either for entry-level (and low volume) offerings, or for high end, tailor-made professional photobooks.

The permutations of possible photobook formats mean that consumers can exercise a high level of design control over their publications. When they use a retailer offering an HP solution, they can also be assured of end-to-end quality.

(1) Of the 165 HP Indigo 7000 Digital Presses installed since its launch in 2008, 85 have been installed for use with photo-specialty applications. (2) HP Internal data.

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