

Cypher serves the world from Cumbria

Website trading allows Cypher Digital to sell to just about anywhere from its rural location. Now new finishing kit has seen it add fast turnaround photo services.

One of the beauties of Internet trading is that it doesn't really matter where you are any more. It's allowed Cypher Digital Imaging to build up a successful on-line business from Milnthorpe, on the outskirts of the Lake District in Cumbria. It's selling digital print, exhibition graphics and website creation services to clients as far afield as the Falkland Islands, as well as the Scottish Isles, the Isle of Man and other parts of the UK and Europe. Now new finishing equipment has allowed the introduction of a fast turnaround photo-book printing and binding service.

The company was set up 14 years ago by Paul Calland and his wife Sue, and today they employ 18 staff including five designers and two web programmers. "One of the reasons that we have gone down this route is because of our rural location," says Mr Calland. "Another is because as a company we understand technology and the third is because we don't have a sales team. Locally we rely on word of mouth and recommendation, but a significant part of our revenue comes from the Internet."

The Falklands business is a case in point, he says. "It's now one of our bigger clients. It started with a photographer asking us to print postcards of penguins and flat landscapes for the tourist trade. They get a lot of cruise ships calling in on the way to Antarctica. Now we're getting work from the Falkland Islands tourist agency, including signage for a nature trail."

You can check out the range of services and prices at www.cypherstore.co.uk. "A lot of printers don't like to give their prices, but all ours are on the internet," Mr Calland explains. "Our website provides instant quotes for digital print, large format and giclée prints, as well as our ranges of display and exhibition systems and accessories. We offer a quick turnaround, high quality and versatility."

The company's all-digital printing equipment includes a Xerox DocuColor 5000 plus one of the latest 700 sheet-fed colour printers, which was installed last autumn. Wide format print is handled by combination of HP Designjet and Epson Stylus Pro inkjets. A nearby partner company is used if longer-run offset work is needed.

Recently Cypher extended its finishing kit with a Fastbind Elite perfect binder, a Casematic casemaker and a Surepro laminator supplied by Ashgate Automation (www.ashgate-automation.co.uk).

"We actually initially only required the ability to perfect bind our digital prints as we produce a lot of paperback books," Mr Calland explains. "However we saw a niche market here because although a growing number of companies are producing hard back photobooks, consumers have to use fixed

website templates and then wait up to two weeks for delivery. We have taken a different strategy in that customers can send their files in PDF format over the web with no restrictions on design or layout. We will print the books and bind them using the Fastbind equipment in one to three days, so customers get flexibility, speed and professional quality.

"We aren't chasing the high volume publisher market. 200 books is probably our maximum number digitally, above which we would outsource the job. Typically the runs are up to 20 digitally printed books with a minimum of 52 pages."

Besides school year books, self-published books, photobooks, commemorative books, financial reports and accounts, Cypher is now introducing the case making service to photographers and baby shops. "A wedding photo album can cost up to £800, but now photographers can also provide extra hard back copies for the rest of the family at a fraction of the cost, because we can give them the contract rates," he explained. "Baby shops can also offer this as an added-value service. It's something that has never been viable before we had the Fastbind equipment."

"We've been very pleased with the service that Ashgate has provided. One of the difficulties with laminating digital print is to ensure that it adheres 100%. Ashgate has helped us to source the right substrates so that we don't have any problems."

He says that Cypher also does a lot of trade printing: "When we told other printers that we were going to install the Fastbind equipment, they were sceptical about its quality. I was determined to prove them wrong and now they have seen all the different books that we have produced, they have been very pleasantly surprised. Customers who previously had their books wire bound with soft covers have now upgraded to a much more professional looking hard cover. It's an ideal added value service to put on our website." ■



Cypher's print site in Milnthorpe.