

CASE STUDY

SPECIALTY PRINTING HELPS A BOOKSELLER CUSTOMIZE ITS SMALL-BATCH PRODUCTS

BY CYNTHIA DRAKE

In a rapidly changing world with lightening-fast technological advancements, it's important to build flexibility into your business model. Listening to the needs of your customers often leads to new avenues for product development. As one company learned, being able to say "yes" to the customer—along with staying true to your core principles—can pay off in a big way.

THE BACKGROUND

Starting with founder Barbara Morina's personal quest for a vacation journal in 1997, Journals Unlimited, Inc. has since grown into a booming business with more than 65 50-to-the-black-theme journal titles in print for sale in retail stores across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Based in Hay City, Mich., the company produces a "Write it Down" series of journals that feature writing prompts for a wide array of life experiences and hobbies, including wine tasting, gardening, road trips, cooking, reading, and pregnancy. Journals are offered in three sizes: mini, mid-sized, and full-sized. The company is proud to remain "made in the USA," despite growing competition from cost-rate printers abroad.

THE PROBLEM

As her company grew, Morina and her staff began hearing feedback from potential corporate partners who hoped for journals that could be customized to their specific needs. They wanted to incorporate corporate logos and other artwork, premium papers, and unique binding options. It was an expensive proposition to be able to offer customized titles in small batches.

"At the time, [our restaurant was] whether our printer was able to do small quantities," says Shelly Walczak, custom sales manager for Journals Unlimited. "It was a big thing for us, since we offer die-cut covers."

Rather than getting discouraged, Morina and her staff set to work finding a printer that could accommodate these print-on-demand requests for a reasonable price. And they weren't willing to stray from their American-made roots in order to do it.

THE SOLUTION

Journals Unlimited eventually partnered with The F.P. Horak Company, a Michigan-based company like Morina's. Now the full product line can be customized as much as Morina's customers prefer, ranging from a customized title page to a completely personalized journal for a "press run" of just a single book.

The company's "Personalize It" line allows customers to feature their own photos or artwork along with a line of text on the first printed page of a full-sized journal. The die-cut handcover reveals this artwork. Customers may order a single customized journal for \$29.95 on the company's website.

Journals Unlimited is also now able to do some of this printing in-house. And for larger orders, the turnaround is four print runs of 50,000 journals and more can be printed much faster than if produced by overseas printers. "If you print overseas, you can be waiting for months" and end up with a product you might not be happy with, says Walczak.

THE RESULTS

Since Journals Unlimited started offering customized products, the company has created branded journals for *G. Ziv Great Migrations*, Disney, Ralph Lauren, and other major customers, who in turn sell the journals to their customers.

These companies are able to offer a customized product with their corporate logos and artwork in a professionally bound handcover journal. The products are often used as gifts or incentives for employees or customers, charitable donations, or sold as products.



"It certainly expands things in that we offer over 65 different titles, and if somebody's looking for something completely different than what we offer, we can do that," says Walczak. "We've never had anybody who's been unhappy. We offer full color on the first page, so it really can liven the journals up."

And Journals Unlimited continues to print in the USA on recycled paper, which helps attract growing numbers of conscientious retailers and their customers.

"So many people are going overseas, so that's huge for our business. More people are purposely seeking out USA-made items. It's becoming a bigger deal for customers, which means it's a bigger deal for retailers," says Walczak.



Tim Dor is the president of The F.P. Horak Company. He helps clients enhance their brand on an array of specialty print projects by recommending custom die-cutting, full stamping, embossing, folding, and binding.

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