

Kodak Alaris 'committed to photo speciality'

August 27, 2015

Kodak Alaris has **declined to provide any responses** to questions from retailers following the article it contributed in early July – 'Kodak's support for supporting retailers'.

PhotoCounter invited Fujifilm and Kodak Alaris to outline their support initiatives for the photo speciality channel, which we then ran unedited and in full in the same issue.



Observations from long-term Kodak customers were that the Kodak Alaris article was light on detail and that some of the claims made – for instance that Kodak Alaris had a 'commitment to keep silver-halide at the forefront of photographic printing' – seemed to contradict what the company was doing in the marketplace.

One reader wrote: 'I'm pretty disgusted with what Kodak and Fuji put in the *PhotoCounter* article – it was nothing more than corporate claptrap.'

And from retailer Garrett Rooney in Tamworth: 'That generic tish-tosh that Kodak gave as a reply to Keith was like someone with their feet on the desk pulling various vacuous attributable paragraphs together in a press release, they may yet have a career in Australian politics as it said nothing and claimed, irony of ironies, to be the defender of the last bastion of quality images (silver- halide).'

Stephen Feldon, convener of the PSS group of (mostly) Kodak-supporting stores in New Zealand wrote: 'If only Kodak walk the walk as well as they talk the talk. I'm willing to be proven wrong here but in my not too distant past as a KEX store owner I saw the same. Lots of talk not a lot of walk. Yes I realise that resources are tight across the industry, but if you're going to announce a product or strategy to industry, make sure you can back it up.'

Another reader sent in a Powerpoint presentation to underscore how much was promised to the photo speciality channel by Kodak Alaris – and how little delivered.

Perhaps most indicative that there is something missing in the Kodak Alaris approach in Australia and New Zealand were comments from ex-Kodak employee and previously one of the biggest Kodak fans in the industry, the unservingly positive Alan Logue, who wrote in a separate article:

– Our store still trades as a Kodak Express member (the only one now in Adelaide), but it is Kodak in name only. We get little or no support from Kodak Alaris in Australia other than an occasional email with a promotional poster attached... I also look at what Kodak Alaris is doing in the UK, and its support for its members is chalk and cheese compared to the Australian effort...

However, retailers critical of Kodak Alaris were at pains to emphasise that the relationship with Kodak distributor into the specialist and probab channels, IPS, was as good as the perceived lack of effort and engagement from Kodak Alaris was bad: 'My comments were aimed at Kodak Alaris themselves, not our trusty distributor IPS,' wrote Stephen Feldon. 'My apologies if that was how it was perceived. IPS here in NZ have in the past been nothing but supportive to me in my retail store, and I'm aware that the trio Brain, Sam & Graham continue to support stores very well, often in an "over and above" nature. The photo industry here in NZ is in good hands with the team at IPS.'

Following the article we invited Kodak Alaris Australia marketing manager, Michel Palm to address some of the specific questions put by Kodak-supporting photo specialist customers, and he undertook to do so, indicating a formal response would probably come from someone within Kodak Alaris with more seniority.

The questions, directly contained in the comments from the Kodak-supporting photo specialists and put to Kodak Alaris on their behalf, were:

– How does a "Commitment to keep silver- halide at the forefront of photographic printing" fit in with the push on KEX stores to adopt the APEX print system and the favourable terms given to low margin churn been provided by the mass merchants?

– I wonder who is dictating the prices and who is providing the hardware in the K-Mart arrangement?

– Kodak has numerous great products but how are they supported at retail level?

– Who does one contact here in NZ if you wish to become a KEX store?

And then operating on the 'may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb' ethos, we threw in our own question, based on discussions with concerned retailers:

– Kodak Alaris is effectively account director for KMart and Officeworks, both of whom a fierce price competitors to the specialist channel. Does this lessen Kodak Alaris' enthusiasm for providing marketing support to photo specialists?

These questions were also copied to the business director of Kodak Alaris in Australia and New Zealand, Stephen Nichols. After several weeks we followed up with Michael Palm, but he did not respond to numerous phone calls, emails or text messages.

After six weeks we emailed Stephen Nichols direct (with a copy to the head of corporate affairs in the US) asking for a response – even if it was to be a formal 'no comment'.

His reply ignored the specific questions troubling Kodak-supporting photo specialists and basically confirmed that Kodak Express dealers shouldn't expect a whole lot more than they are currently receiving from Kodak Alaris – namely the occasional digital file to create Kodak-promoting artwork. And equipment maintenance for those with an equipment maintenance contract:

'Thanks for the follow up and I'm not absolutely sure of the specific issues you wish to follow up, but our intention in making the statement we did was to present our position as clearly as we are able. In particular, Kodak Alaris remains committed to the photo speciality channel and will continue to support with ongoing marketing materials for in store and digital use. Direct access to our service and support team is available to stores who have a service contract with Kodak Alaris and all day-to-day management will continue to be handled by our distributors.

If you believe that there are significant unanswered questions then we'll do our best to respond but we won't be making commitments that we aren't able to deliver on.'

– So that's it. We were unsuccessful in attempts to have Kodak Alaris respond to its customers – but not for lack of trying! Those significant unanswered questions will, it seems, remain unanswered.

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4 THOUGHTS ON 'KODAK ALARIS' 'COMMITTED TO PHOTO SPECIALTY'

Stuart Holmes on August 27, 2015 at 5:05 pm said:

Hi Keith, many thanks for acknowledging that "the relationship with Kodak distributor into the specialist and probab channels, IPS, was as good as the perceived lack of effort and engagement from Kodak Alaris was bad: 'My comments were aimed at Kodak Alaris themselves, not our trusty distributor IPS,' wrote Stephen Feldon."

As we at Independent Photo (IPS) passionately believe in the Photo Industry in Australia & New Zealand and have always strived to give 110% support to our loyal customers. As ever any questions/ queries can be directed at any of the good guys at IPS Aust. & NZ for prompt and efficient supportive action. Yours in Photography, Stuart

Reply 1

Alan Logue on August 27, 2015 at 5:52 pm said:

I think I just wasted 5 minutes of my life reading nothing! Keith, thanks for your support, and thanks for trying to get something. I'm (pleased) to say Kodak Alaris have kept their commitment to us – we did get an email with a fathers day poster attached! I guess the next one will be a Santa poster.

I've got to the point with Kodak Alaris in Australia where I am no longer disappointed with their lack of action. Why is that? It's because I no longer expect anything, so I'm no longer disappointed.

They have some superb new products for the wet channel with new papers and our customers have loved the samples we have done for them on the new silk paper. BUT and its a big BUT, Kodak will do nothing to promote the paper (just like Metallic) – it will be up to us to do it.

For the younger market, the Kodak names means NOTHING! Sure they have (somewhat flakey) apps available for the youngies to use who don't print photos!

We have downloaded countless copies of the app in our store for "oldies" to help them print their 6 or 10 photos.

The Kodak name still means HEAPS to those over 40, and fortunately, they are my prime target demographic group. We still get calls asking if we are "the Kodak store" and we say yes, what did you need.

I don't give a rats arse about K Mart or Officeworks – they are a great source of new customers to us after the disappointments customers get there. I've also gone and visited all the local Officeworks and K Marts and told them about us – that we process film, we do film reprints, that we do posters, that we do card recoveries (and more) and we now have these stores referring customers to us. I urge everyone else to go and do this as well. Work WITH the big guys, not AGAINST them – you WILL NOT WIN!

AS has been previously said, the Kodak Distributors IPS and APS, as well as C Direct are all great companies to work with, and they will support us all. I'd also suggest that our membership in the IPI group has given us huge additional promotional and emotional support over the years.

In short, my plans are to keep growing our business. If Kodak Alaris is there at the time, they might help, but I'm not expecting it.

My business growth will be up to ME!

Reply 1

Keith Shipton on August 27, 2015 at 6:07 pm said:

– Hey – I wasted a lot more of my life trying to get a response than you did not reading it! But I think that ultimately a lack of response is a response in itself. Just as Stuart jumping in and making a comment shows how much IPS cares about the specialist channel.

Great comments Alan – thanks once again for taking the time to share your thoughts.

Reply 1

PG on September 1, 2015 at 12:51 pm said:

Through periods of my working life I have had a love hate relationship with Kodak.

Hate, they were bully boys in the 80's and 90's, "if you don't go with us we will put in a store nearby and run you out of business" They tried that with my customers in the early to mid part of the 80's and with me in 1990. All I wanted then was KEX pricing (we would have been in the top 10% of customers spend wise at that time), with four Smiths KEX stores nearby we could not be a KEX store even if I wanted to.

Thank you Kodak, it enabled me to buy consumables and film way cheaper and make more profit for over 23 years. We grew, they closed all stores! It also forced us to do my own personalised marketing to suit our store and our customers. KEX was fantastic for those who wanted to be spoon feed, most (apart from Alan L and a few others) withered as Kodak lost interest in the market. We started looking at digital applications as early as 1992 and went digital before most. Not relying on Kodak for assistance with new products and services was a big plus.

We went Kodak 2 years ago, "sorry you will have to swap to Kodak paper" we did it thankful that there was an alternative than go to Fujifilm! Kodak/IPI have been fantastic with supply and the product is fine. What impresses me is the range of film they still have especially in the pro prices which the new breed of photographers just love.

As far as the current bunch of Kodak people are, apart from their pro guy, they are not visible to us. Mr Palm is obviously too busy keeping his job to make any sort of comment!!

Reply 1

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