

# iPHOTO invests in quality time

We chat to Rob Voysey about aims and directions for Independent Photo Supplies.

Toting years of experience as a photographer, salesperson, technician and lab manager in the photo industry, Rob Voysey believes passionately in the people and technical services he feels have been undervalued by the multinational suppliers.

Along with business partner Stuart Holmes, he represents Independent Photographic Supplies Pty Ltd (IPS), trading as iPHOTO, which has recently expanded on its consumables focus - including CPAC chemicals, Tura Premium RA-4 Colour paper, Ilford products and photolab supplies - to offer a Q.C. service which helps minilab and professional lab owners monitor the quality of their digital and optical output.

When Holmes and Voysey formed iPHOTO they wanted to offer a point of difference and felt there needed to be a truly independent and non-aligned consumables supplier in Australia. "Every country we researched had about two to three independent players offering points of difference," explains Voysey. "We also found that from the point of view of independent photo labs, that they were not getting the same quality of technical support and service they used to know, five to ten years ago."

iPHOTO was thus established to help independent labs to better handle the emerging threat from mass merchants, kiosks and the non-traditional competitor

market segments with better products; service and significant cost reductions.

The company supplies digital and optical labs of all sizes and offers support to prolabs as well.

Voysey's experience in the industry ranges from technical sales and export management in Europe to lab technician work locally. He has represented Camera House as their business development manager and spent three years as the national sales manager for online service provider OnPix.

Holmes has been on both sides of the retail counter, working for prolabs, and three multinational consumables suppliers. He was senior category manager for the then-Hanimex's Frontier system.

Both involved in the industry's issues on a number of levels, they can see that now is the time for digital labs to maximise their opportunities.

"The market dynamic has changed in that the independent photo lab's current supplier is probably now its greatest competitor," Voysey says. "Online photo services mean the big brands are now marketing directly to the independent labs' own customers. 'Print@...' websites are emailing tens of thousands of consumers special direct offers to buy photos online without going through the photo specialty retailer.

They're undermining the relationship the independent retailer has built up with

the customer, based on quality, friendly service and technical advice - all the things which have built and maintained their success over the years. The retailer needs to be able to offer their customers a direct online service without a third party involved."

He believes the next level of competition will be with remote kiosks. "The independent lab will need to maintain a degree of control as they are being placed in pharmacies, video stores, wherever, so the consumer still knows they can pick up their prints over the counter at their favourite minilab. These are some of the industry's major issues and we feel we can support the independent lab because of our knowledge of the industry, combined experience and by aligning ourselves with the independent suppliers of these services."

Voysey says iPHOTO's aim is to provide free, fair and open advice on business ideas, and ways labs can progress in this changing market environment.

Voysey can see there is currently a lot of haphazard and inaccurate advice issued by some suppliers regarding process control, for example.

"Some lab owners have shown us monitoring reports from other suppliers that are blatantly wrong - processor evaluations that report as underactive when in fact they are grossly overactive. This underlines the current lack of focus on technical support by the multinationals."

He believes the launch of the photo processing quality monitoring service - QM iPHOTO - will help counter these problems.

Retailers' relationship with suppliers has changed dramatically since mass merchants such as Harvey Norman have entered their territory, says Voysey. "In the pre-digital era, the major conflicts with the consumables suppliers and independent labs was with company-owned chains e.g. Kodak-owned versus independent Kodak Express stores, and Hanimex/ Fuji having owned Rabbit chain of stores since 1989 - with the point of conflict between Rabbit/ Hanimex and the independently owned Fuji Image Plazas.

With the emergence of digital imaging, conflicts of interests are taken to a new level. The major suppliers are now competing with the independent outlets directly online and through all the other online fulfilment brands they support.

The 'Print@... Coles, Harvey Norman, Domayne, Big W, Kmart, Powerhouse etc are attacking the core business of the independent lab."

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Rob Voysey: pushing iPhoto to the next level by giving retailer advice.