How Automation and Smarter Workflows Can Help Your Studio Modernize Marketing Campaigns, Achieve Significant Revenue Growth, and Gain Customer Insights

Industry-leading Vertical Studio Artona Sees Hundreds of Thousands of Dollars in Growth Using ImageQuix and PhotoLynx

As a way to adjust to the new normal of Covid-19 while continuing to drive revenue, the entire photography industry has had to make some changes and pivot away from the outdated, homegrown software systems that used to run the industry.

When schools largely moved to in-home learning in the beginning of 2019, studios were faced with many challenges, among them financial burdens and impacts. Despite these physical and economic changes, Artona saw high growth and a customer boom during 2020. Using ImageQuix and PhotoLynx solutions, including a largely automated PLIC workflow integrated with Blueprint eCommerce and ImageQuix's full consumer marketing services, the large studio was able to move away from their costly and maintenance-heavy proprietary software, and gained flexibility and new insights into how to optimize their business.

Dynamic From the Beginning

When searching Google for Artona, the first words displayed are the year it was founded: 1909. This privately held, family run business for over 40 years, has proven time and time again their ability to be leaders in their industry. Artona has become a forward thinking, quick on their feet, studio that has been able to easily pivot in the face of challenges.

Artona operates a state of the art, multi camera room professional studio in the heart of Vancouver, as well as an in-house printing and production facility. With a full studio, they're equipped to produce fast turnaround and have complete control of their output quality.

With almost 24,000 graduates photographed at their main studio in just a typical year, it is no wonder they have earned the status as the most trusted name in local graduation photography in Western Canada and maintains a 100% satisfaction guarantee.

Even with their success and capabilities as an all in one studio and production facility, they still recognized there were opportunities in their workflow to improve the overall efficiencies of their business.

Homegrown Software and an Impending Pandemic

Along the way, many vertical studios of a similar size decided to hire a team of IT professionals and coders to build custom software unique to their needs of taking and fulfilling orders. While this worked for a time, slowly studios found themselves having to focus both on their core photography business, as well as operating IT and technology functions. Software as a Service (SaaS) made its way more and more into everyday lives and businesses across all sectors, including the volume photography industry. Companies like ImageQuix and PhotoLynx were able to bring innovations, efficiencies, and technologies to the market in a rapid fashion that made it hard for most proprietary software systems to stay competitive. In today's high volume photography world, how to integrate, adopt, and dedicate resources to introducing technology has become a consistent component of strategic planning. Most studio owners reading this today can relate to this challenge without ever having worked in technology.

Having a homegrown software that needed regular updates, rarely integrated smoothly with third-party software, and carrying overhead costs for maintaining a fully-stacked IT team became a business challenge that needed to be addressed.

Around the time industry-leading studios were focused on addressing these proprietary software issues, along came an unexpected global pandemic that brought society and commerce to an initial halt. What followed was a dance in what many called the "new normal" and trying to navigate both their personal lives

and wellbeing, as well as that of their businesses. Specifically, studios focused on school photography faced incredible challenges with remote learning and needing a way to produce photos in a safe, contact-less manner. Not only did staff have to take personal safety measures, but their software also needed to be able to keep up.

"The cost to maintain and constantly update our homegrown system just wasn't something we could continuously afford to put the time and effort into." - Michael Rak, General Manager at Artona

Artona is a prime example of these two challenges; dealing with both a legacy, outdated system that was underperforming even in pre-pandemic times, to now having to shift and meet unexpected demands of the global pandemic.

Time for a Shift

ImageQuix and PhotoLynx, two leading photography software providers who joined forces in 2019, create feature rich workflow and eCommerce software for over 1,000 studios in the high volume photography industry. Knowing this, Artona turned to them to replace their homegrown software, while simultaneously supporting their strategic long term goals and quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ImageQuix and PhotoLynx Solutions

Integration Workflows

PLIC Match is a web-based production program that gives studios the capability to upload, prepare, and submit images and subjects to participating labs for processing. With its direct access to PLIC print service items, Artona is able to directly publish to Blueprint. Being able to easily import a school's data and images directly into their database gives them the ability to have previous years projects easily accessible for service items and additional late online orders. This capability helped tremendously during hybrid and remote school options, allowing for the studio to remain contactless and manage all of their interactions digitally. Blueprint Lab is used to create and build all of the Lab products that would be offered on Blueprint's Shopping Cart and also automates incoming online Blueprint orders to DP2.

IQ Ecommerce

Blueprint's Shopping Cart served as an online sales assistant that easily provided Artona's customers with incentives to unlock categories and increase their purchases based on what's in their cart, how much they've spent and more. Artona's customers are guided through their buying experience, making online ordering quick, easy, fun, and more profitable than ever.

Artificial Intelligence

1Touch Retouching, which is directly integrated with Blueprint, is a human-quality retouching software that uses state of the art machine learning to provide scalable and cost-effective portrait editing to studios. In partnership with Skylab, 1Touch gives Artona

the ability to offer their customers high quality retouching without having to lift a finger, saving both time and money.

Marketing Campaigns

Through ImageQuix's Client Success Team, Artona worked with two dedicated IQ team experts, a Client Success Manager and a Marketing Strategist, who shared workflow strategies & insights, increased online sales with advanced custom digital marketing, and served as a go-to source for any questions Artona had along the way. The ImageQuix team built out a marketing plan, consisting of emails and SMS templates, that was completely custom to Artona's vision, ideas, and requirements. Being the first year Artona was provided email addresses, they were able to send more tailored emails to both non buyers and buyers. Emails like free shipping to the school, yearbook selection deadline, abandoned cart, and more, allowed them to continuously stay at the front of their customers' minds and drive more revenue.

"We talked as a team before making any decisions, but the cost savings and convenience of switching over to ImageQuix just made sense from a business standpoint" - TJ Rak, Special Projects Lead at Artona

Results

Revenue Increase

Artona's initial transition of Fall 2020 yielded a 20% increase in revenue. That story continues today where 2021 is on track to perform about 30% above 2019's revenue. Some of the changes Artona implemented in 2021 that drove their revenue included photographing multiple poses, offering new backgrounds, and creating tailored automated marketing campaigns.

Save on Overhead Costs & Reallocate Resources

Not only did Artona see a significant increase in revenue, they were also able to reduce their operating costs by a third when sunsetting their internal processes and software.
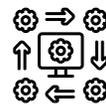
Efficiency Workflow

Switching to the Blueprint and PLIC workflow tools allowed for a total revamp of their workflow, allowing them to setup, capture, and print in a shorter amount of time. Leading to improved efficiency and turnaround time.

Marketing Drives Buy Rate & Average Over Value

With the help of ImageQuix's Client Success Team, Artona saw an increase in their online sales. Taking advantage of digital marketing, including updated email and SMS campaigns, allowed them to continuously remind their customers to purchase their child's images in an appropriate way. In Fall of 2021 alone, their automated abandoned cart campaign, which sends out a reminder 24 hours after a customer leaves an item(s) in their shopping cart, has sent around 4,000 emails and driven an additional $12,000+ in sales. This is money that, in the past, would have been left on the table.