

A Mom and Pop QuarkXPress Shop

Cammie Donaldson, owner of Just Cause Media, runs a 2½-person boutique design shop in Melbourne, Florida. Today, the company produces a quarterly magazine, a quarterly newsletter, one big catalog, and an annual 16-page insert for various clients. It also produces black-and-white and color work for non-profit organizations. Donaldson generates all the content and husband Spence Guerin lays everything out; then they deliver their files to their printers without any unusual output requirements.

In 2000, Just Cause Media was still small potatoes until the company won a project to produce newspaper inserts. Donaldson was thrilled and furious at the same time.

“Lo, and behold! Every stinking newspaper wanted QuarkXPress format,” said Donaldson, a veteran PageMaker user. “I felt pushed into QuarkXPress and was furious — sure that the whole project would go down the tubes because of the learning curve. Wow! Was I wrong!”

But PageMaker was paid for...

Donaldson and her artist husband started their business 10 years ago. Their first product was a magazine that Guerin laid out and designed in Aldus (now Adobe®) PageMaker — a design tool Donaldson said Guerin complained about all the time.

“I really didn’t understand his complaints because I come from a programming background, and I’m so used to non-user-friendly that I don’t expect anything else,” Donaldson said. “He was always whining that Adobe made products for engineers and not artists. I thought he was just lazy.”

Just Cause Media took on more business designing newsletters, brochures, forms, and catalogs for local institutions and organizations. As the firm’s work became more sophisticated, Guerin kept telling Donaldson that they should switch to QuarkXPress® software. He told her that he’d heard about QuarkXPress from a friend in the graphic design business and that their existing PageMaker setup was limiting Just Cause Media’s ability to keep up with the changing publishing market.

“Since I pay the bills and also learn all the new software, I had no interest in switching,” Donaldson said. “I figured PageMaker was paid for, and we were trained on it. End of discussion.”

Immediately sold on QuarkXPress

After Just Cause Media won its first really big contract, Donaldson was very frustrated with the publishing industry’s almost-universal support of QuarkXPress as the design product of choice. She didn’t feel that she and Guerin had the time or ability to learn a whole new product at this point in their business’s development.

In her experience, she found most of the layout and design tools she’d worked with presented enormous learning curves, and she felt that because she didn’t use the products every day, she would never be able to get

the hang of this new tool. After all, she figured that if QuarkXPress proved to be anything like Adobe’s products, which Donaldson said were particularly difficult to remember from one session to the next, Just Cause Media’s new newspaper insert project was going to go down the tubes. “It took us five years to get beyond basic cropping in Photoshop,” she said.

Hopes were not high on Donaldson’s part as the company made the switch to QuarkXPress, but Guerin was ready to champion their new design tool the minute he installed it.

“My husband was instantly in love with this program and wanted to spend all his time showing me how great it was,” she said. “I was frantic, just wanting him to learn the darn program and lay out my inserts.”

Not only did Guerin learn the program at warp speed, but he also produced three “big, beautiful inserts” within a couple of weeks, and Donaldson was totally sold.

“I was ready to buy him anything he wanted after that,” Donaldson said. “We’re very sold on how easy it is to use QuarkXPress. I know that the same project in PageMaker would have taken twice as long. And just the word “InDesign” causes major marital squabbles in our house!”

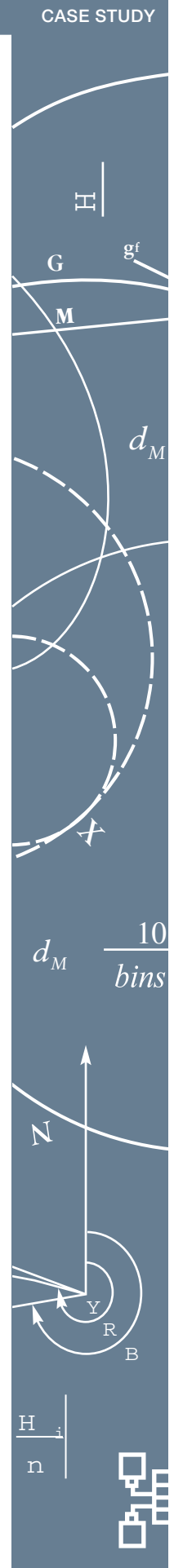
Transforming the business

Since switching to QuarkXPress, Just Cause Media has been able to increase significantly the number of jobs it handles so that it produces about double the output it did before making the switch in 2000. The company’s quarterly magazine, which previously required about 2½ weeks to produce, is now complete in less than a week and a half.

But it’s not just the quantity of work that has increased. Donaldson said that Guerin started producing more elegant layouts, which she thinks stems from a combination of QuarkXPress software’s ease of use and fast performance and the surge of energy Guerin got from using a user interface he liked and didn’t have to fight.

Guerin is the primary QuarkXPress user, but Donaldson is lucky enough to tackle what she and her husband call the “grunge” tasks. Her latest task involved dumping 5,000 database records into a QuarkXPress document and formatting it with style sheets.

“This involves the use of XPress Tags, something my husband is not interested in learning,” Donaldson said. “He’s strictly a visual person. He uses QuarkXPress for everything — including letters, which seems extreme to me.”





Significant ROI continues today

Just Cause Media migrated to Mac OS® X and upgraded to QuarkXPress 6.1 in March 2004, and Donaldson said that the performance they've seen has continued to improve with upgrades and faster hardware.

"We should have [upgraded] much sooner," Donaldson said, but she described herself as upgrade-shy and once again nervous about making the switch. "The upgrade went extremely smoothly, which surprised but pleased us. No longer will I fear upgrades."

Donaldson said that she especially likes the upgraded collect-for-output feature, the PDF generation function, and the improved search capabilities.

"I use the search-and-replace [tools] in a very special way for one of my annual projects," she said. "It used to be very slow, but I noticed this year that it was super fast and never stopped working. I love it!"

She also said that she's impressed with Quark's technical support, which recently was restructured to be based out of India. "Frankly, since Quark shifted their tech support to India, I think it's a lot better." Donaldson said.

When two hurricanes hit the Florida coast, Just Cause Media lost power for a total of three weeks, but the company was otherwise unscathed. Still, the hurricanes did get Donaldson and Guerin thinking about the possibility of relocating their headquarters. The two say they are confident that they could pick up and move anywhere and know that their QuarkXPress design skills would keep them in business.

"Printers everywhere are delighted to get QuarkXPress files," Donaldson said. "They will take (Adobe) InDesign files, but they love QuarkXPress files, so we'd be good wherever we moved."

CONTACTING QUARK

In North America

Quark, Inc.
1800 Grant St.
Suite 800
Denver, CO 80203

www.quark.com
solutions@quark.com

800.676.4575
303.894.8888

In Europe

Quark Media House Sàrl
Rue de Saint Nicolas 7
2000 Neuchâtel
Switzerland

euro.quark.com
solutions@quark.ch

00800 1787 8275

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