The U.K.'s leading online and home shopping company embraces e-commerce with Adobe® Creative Suite® and Adobe InDesign® Server software

Shop Direct Group is a retail giant that owns 60% of the catalogue business in the United Kingdom. Formed through the merger of Littlewoods, an 80-year-old retail veteran, and Great Universal Stores, the U.K.'s largest mail order business founded in 1900, Shop Direct Group has reinvented its business several times over—from mail order via postal service to telephone ordering and now primarily through e-commerce sales over the web.

To maximize internal design and production efficiencies and boost sales across channels, the company embraces the latest technologies. Shop Direct Group was among the first in the U.K. to automate print production using an all-Adobe workflow powered by Adobe Creative Suite and Adobe InDesign Server software. Today, Adobe solutions enable the Shop Direct creative team to more efficiently deliver print materials and interactive, personalized e-commerce websites that support 70% of sales.

"We are known in the retail industry for using technology to drive down costs and enhance the way we engage with consumers," says Carl Dawson, chief information officer at Shop Direct Group. "We pay close attention to the fundamentals by offering the right products and providing customers with financing so they can afford the items they want most. When it comes to efficiently creating the materials we use to interact with customers—print catalogs or personalized, intuitive websites—we rely on Adobe Creative Suite software as part of our technology solution."
Shop Direct Group makes savvy use of Adobe technology to advance its business into the digital age while continuing to cater to print catalog customers. With deep roots in catalog marketing, Shop Direct continues to produce a high volume of print materials.

**Nine brands, high-volume production**
Shop Direct’s nine brands include Littlewoods, Very, Woolworths, Isme, k&co, Choice, Additions Direct, Littlewoods Ireland, and Littlewoods Europe—each requiring a high volume of materials to support marketing and sales efforts. The company’s team of 170 print and interactive designers is responsible for marketing materials delivered across an array of media. An additional 15 product designers use Adobe Illustrator® software to design the company’s own Love Label line of women’s fashion and associated packaging, a brand so successful that its sales rank third among home shopping sites in the U.K.

**18 "big books"**
Across these initiatives, Shop Direct Group makes savvy use of technology to advance its business into the digital age while continuing to cater to print catalog customers. With deep roots in catalog marketing, Shop Direct continues to produce a high volume of print materials. In 2007, the company created approximately 17,000 unique pages per year. By 2010, that number had more than doubled to nearly 50,000 unique pages.

“We stock a huge range of ‘High Street’ products. We create two, 1,500 page, customized ‘big books’ annually for each of our nine brands, mid-season books with 800 pages, specialty catalogs for the holidays, and other items such as sales brochures,” says Dawson. “That equates to many tens of thousands of custom pages a year.”

**Automation increases ROI**
Shop Direct Group uses Adobe Creative Suite and Adobe InDesign Server software, integrated with a Pindar Agility product information management (PIM) system, to produce catalogs and other print materials that are up to date and targeted to specific customers and opportunities. Designers start by using Adobe InDesign software to create a sophisticated yet flexible master template. They then make up pages using the template, InDesign Server, and the Pindar PIM system, which contains product images, prices, and other information. The system is fully integrated through AppleScript calls and Java™ programming.
Designers can customize templates by automatically populating the master template with different styles, images, brand identities, telephone numbers, URLs, prices, and product offerings. They also use Adobe Photoshop<sup>®</sup> Extended software—fully integrated with the entire publishing system—to retouch photos as needed for each piece. The retouched imagery is automatically updated within the Pindar database. Shop Direct’s designers can make up pages while the high resolution images are finessed in parallel.

Once pages are complete, InDesign Server swaps out low-resolution images with their corresponding high-resolution versions and generates a print-ready PDF file for output. This eliminates the need to purchase a separate OPI server for prepress.

The automated print publishing processes increase business agility while dramatically decreasing the time needed to produce professionally designed catalogs—all while conserving creative resources.

Dawson notes that the number of unique pages created per year roughly doubled from 2007 to 2010, yet the company only needed a 13% increase in design staff. He also says the ability to make last-minute changes is a boon to the business.

Nine e-commerce websites constitute 70% of sales
Efficiently producing print materials is a competitive mandate that is only eclipsed by the need to support a massive and growing e-commerce empire. The company enables customers to shop 24 hours a day, seven days a week online—and this means supporting nine different e-commerce websites. The company has also moved into the mobile shopping space with the Very fashion app, the first iPhone/iPad application to use full screen video while offering a full transactional service for Very shoppers.

"Four years ago, just 20% of sales were online," says Dawson. "This has increased in the last financial year, to around 70% of all units sold. Customers want to buy over the Internet, and they respond best to interactive, personalized exchanges that show them that we recognize their unique needs and can cater to them."

"When it comes to efficiently creating the materials we use to interact with customers—print catalogs or personalized, intuitive websites—we rely on Adobe Creative Suite software as part of our technology solution."

Carl Dawson
Chief information officer,
Shop Direct Group
Supporting growing e-commerce success

To create and maintain websites, designers use Photoshop Extended to design user interfaces and JavaScript, HTML, and Adobe Dreamweaver® to bring interactive, customer-centric sites together. The same content, layouts, and catalog spreads used for print materials are leveraged for the company’s many e-commerce websites.

Pages are repurposed for use on the company’s websites using InDesign and all images are rendered on the websites by using templates from within the Adobe Scene7® environment.

Enhanced customer engagement

For Shop Direct Group, Adobe’s tools have also helped the company move into the e-commerce realm with greater ease.

“We designed a number of websites and catalog spreads. With Adobe Scene7, we can now repurpose and serve this content online,” says Dawson. “With Adobe Creative Suite and InDesign Server, we now have a higher level of control, because we manage more processes in house. At the same time, we’ve made the process more efficient by enabling consumers to shop with us how and when they prefer.”

For more information
www.adobe.com/products/creativesuite

Adobe tools are built from the ground up for the future, and they offer open APIs that have helped us link with other systems to automate a large number of our processes.”

Carl Dawson
Chief information officer,
Shop Direct Group

Toolkit
Adobe InDesign Server
Adobe Creative Suite Design Premium and Standard. Components used include:
• Adobe Illustrator
• Adobe Photoshop
• Adobe InDesign
• Adobe Dreamweaver
Adobe Scene7®