

## Photo kiosk software firm caters to DIY customers

With shift to digital cameras, kiosks challenge giants

LESLIE MCNAB  
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If you haven't heard of software developer Beaufort Solutions, that's just fine with Todd Hiscock.

"We like to keep it under the radar," the company's CEO says.

Located in St. John's — several hours' flight and a time-zone-and-a-half from any mainland business centre — the company is taking on technology giants and aims to be a major player in the burgeoning print-at-retail digital photo market.

Beaufort Solutions makes digital photo kiosk software. Its technology drives the Olympus TruePrint, a royal-blue booth that Mr. Hiscock says offers customers a fast, simple way to read images stored on any type of digital medium, from digital cameras to discs to memory cards.



Todd Hiscock, CEO of Beaufort Solutions, with one of the blue Olympus do-it-yourself photo printing kiosks powered by his company's software. *(Paul Daly)*



With digital cameras now outselling traditional film models, Mr. Hiscock says the practice of buying prints is changing. The old model — dropping off rolls of film at the drugstore counter — is shifting to a print-it-yourself concept, but not everyone wants to purchase a special printer, ink and paper to make prints at home. Kiosk users can edit, crop and improve image quality on the kiosk screen before printing their pictures as standard photographs.

"We want to help make people's crappy images look better — if you can give them those experiences, people will keep coming back to the kiosks for more prints," Mr. Hiscock says.

Kiosk customers can also choose to have the images put onto items such as posters, calendars, greeting cards, t-shirts and mugs. Joe Leo, director of new business development for Olympus America, says this is part of the company's strategy to offer consumers and retailers something beyond the standard 4-by-6-inch photograph.

"Our kiosks let retailers sell more than just prints — they bring in people looking for that special photo-related gift or novelty item," he says.

More than 250,000 kiosks of one sort or another will be installed in North American stores by 2005, according to Summit Research Associates Inc., and self-serve photofinishing is named by Kiosk magazine as the No. 1 kiosk application for 2004. The benefit of the photo kiosk to retailers — few of which can compete with giant operations such as Wal-Mart on the price of basic prints alone — is the opportunity to earn margins from the value-added services without taking up much floor space.

Mr. Hiscock, who spent nine years working for IBM in Toronto after graduating from Memorial University's business school, describes his one-year-old company as a start-up, albeit one with a shorter-than-usual R&D cycle thanks to its ownership of certain intellectual property. Beaufort Solutions' software and programming talent are what's left of another St. John's company, dotcom flameout Telepix Imaging which got its start in the nascent on-line photofinishing business in 1996.

Telepix was bought in 1999 by Zurich-based Gretag Imaging, at the time a world leader in photofinishing systems, and Gretag invested more than \$25-million developing its products for use over the Internet. When Gretag's holding company went bankrupt in December 2002, Telepix CEO Mr. Hiscock and another manager, Charlie Hutchings, recognized an opportunity for the product in the self-service kiosk market. They hopped an overnight flight to Zurich and struck a deal for Telepix's intellectual property, then went into business as Beaufort Solutions. The pair hired Telepix's top programming talent and now employ a development group of six, all with a financial stake in the company.

"We're a collection of talent who all have experience outside Newfoundland," Mr. Hiscock says. "And we've tapped into an industry with a small number of players that isn't geographically centred — it's truly a global business."

Being located in St. John's is an advantage, he adds, because the time-zone is halfway between Europe and eastern North America. And with Atlantic Canada's largest university on the company's doorstep, Mr. Hiscock says he has a wealth of talent to choose from — "people who are really trained in the process and discipline of developing code in a structured way." Many of Memorial's graduates are Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans, who, like Mr. Hiscock, are typically thrilled to find work in their home province.

Olympus — a gigantic camera brand, but a relative newcomer in the photo kiosk market — is betting that Beaufort Solutions' technology will help it win market share from Kodak and Fuji, the segment leaders.

Olympus' Mr. Leo said the company is focusing on getting the TruePrint out to specialty retailers, such as Hallmark and consumer electronics stores. Olympus has also singled out cruise ships, amusement parks, airports, hotels and hospitals as likely markets — anywhere a person might be inclined to pop in their digital camera's memory card and print a few special photos.

In Canada, Olympus has installed TruePrint machines in 12 of the 13 Henry's Camera stores in Ontario, and in Dumoulin/Audiotronic electronics stores across the country. Mr. Hiscock says there are deals in the works to deploy more kiosks in the Americas and Australia in the coming months.

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