



Fast track to catwalk

The fashion industry largely depends on talented designers to keep us interested in new ideas and trends. Technology is not often considered to be the driving force behind a design company's success, but Rodney Appleyard reveals how one application is doing just that by helping to turn a small Sydney company into a global player.

Longina Phillips, the owner of Longina Phillips Designs, has a healthy problem on her hands—she has too much business coming in and the only way for her to cope with the constant influx of work is to keep on expanding the company.

Phillips dealt with her latest problem, which involved having too many designs to manage physically, by introducing Canto's Cumulus digital asset management solution to store all of her most marketable images. But this system has created a new problem. By helping her to manage her business so much more efficiently, it means that she can take on more work from other markets around the world, and as such is growing much faster than anticipated.

Now that she can gain access to every design ever made in her company with a few clicks of a mouse, this makes it easier for her to sell designs and show more clients than ever before.

Phillips says of her dilemma: "It's a monster that keeps getting bigger and bigger the more I try to control it. I already have agents working for the company in Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Sydney, New York and Los Angeles, but with this technology, and the use of the Internet, I am capable of getting designs to even more agents in Europe and America too."

Phillips credits the Cumulus software for making a massive impact on the company in terms of improving efficiency and accessibility to key designs. The design

house currently has 7,284 designs stored inside the Canto software package which have either been scanned in or saved through PhotoShop.

“In the old days, we’d have to save each design onto a CD and then send it out by a courier to the client. Nowadays, we can save on time and money by just FTP-ing each design directly to the agent in the respective country, who can then download it and show it to the client right away.”

Phillips says that the major advantage of sending images via the Internet instead of through a courier is that the design gets to its destination much more quickly, which of course means it gets sold sooner too.

Each design has meta data carefully attached to it, so that it can be categorised in a logical folder. This makes it easier for every member of staff to find every design intuitively at the click of a button.

Items can be labelled in a variety of ways, with the name of the designer who made the image, the type of fabric the design is available in, and outfit types such as boys wear, girls wear, swimwear, street wear, sports wear, underwear and general wear (that's a lot of wear!).

This level of organisation makes it easy for Phillips to discuss ideas with a client over the phone who is based in a different country, whilst searching for designs that meet the client's needs in the Cumulus system.

“A client might be interested in a design for swimwear that includes flowers, but I might not know exactly what kind of flowers would be suitable. If I were to go looking through the designs physically, it would take me a very long time to find the exact design. But with this software, all I have to do is enter in all of the search requirements and wait for the system to return a collection of designs back to me that might suit the client's taste.

“After the phone discussion, we usually agree on a number of possibilities, which I can immediately email over as jpegs individually, or as a whole selection, so the client can receive design ideas immediately after the phone

call. This saves on the time and money we would waste having to put the designs on a CD and posting them.”

While Phillips would never consider parting with it now, she did look at a number of other applications before finally choosing to go for Cumulus. The main reason why Phillips arrived at that decision was because it is one of the few apps of its kind that can be used across multiple platforms.

It even allows designs to be protected from copyright infringements, so individual artwork can be safeguarded and clients can be guaranteed exclusive rights to a design.

“If, for example, Bonds makes new clothes with designs bought exclusively from us, but some way down the line, Bonds finds out that another company has made clothes with the same designs, Bonds can then come back to us and ask for documentation that proves its exclusivity. It then has the evidence to carry out any action needed for compensation purposes.”

One of the key advantages of this software is its ability to eliminate administrative tasks from Phillips' operations so that the time saved can be spent being creative instead. This also means that her designers can keep the imagery fresh and competitive. Once a design is sold, it is automatically dragged into a folder, which means it can not be used again.

In the past, designers could only work on one master copy of the design. This used to cause problems if, for example, somebody else in the office wanted to work on a design when it was off site. That person would have to wait until the original design was returned to the office. The risk of a courier, client or somebody losing that one off design also used to cause difficulties for the company.

Phillips continues to look at ways she can use the software to expand her service to the rest of the world.

“This is why the project has been divided into three stages. The first stage involved putting all of our designs into the Cumulus 5.5.10 version, which we have done. The second stage involves upgrading to the next level of

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Cumulus 6.0.3, which we are doing now, and making sure that the browser works for us and the agents. In the future, we aim to not only have agents in New York and LA, but also in London, Paris and wherever else possible.

“This third stage means that we will be able to provide a service to our customers that allows access to designs via password protection functionality. We hope this technology can help us to expand globally too. Just because we are based in Sydney, it doesn’t mean we can’t sell anywhere else. After all, 40 percent of our designs are sold in New York. This software gives us a chance to build on this.”

Phillips admits that the system has revolutionised the way her company works. “In reality, people are creatures of habit. Workers usually don’t really like change. It took two years to fully implement this system because we wanted to do it in a gradual and friendly manner, rather than with a ‘here it is, now wrap your brain around it!’ approach. So we started slowly at getting people familiar with the categories, and this is why we only have seven steps, for example: gender, description, target market, etc. These are definitions that we deal with everyday, so it is not strange at all.

“As a company, we always enjoy changing things, and we are not scared of new ideas. The industry has this perception that we, as a company, are always ahead and coming up with new ideas, computers and software. As long as you keep an open mind as you are growing, you need solutions to help you cope and grow, otherwise you stand still and other people catch up with you. I think it’s a catch which makes you take on more work, so by Cumulus making us more efficient and clever, this means we can deal with more work.”

With the combination of Phillips’ hunger to satisfy the interest of clients in her designs and the ability of Cumulus to provide her company with the resources to meet the needs of new clients around the world, there does not seem to be an end in sight to the growth of Longina Phillips Designs. Phillips is determined to push Cumulus to its limits, so her company in time will reveal just how far Cumulus can allow a business to grow when its ambitions are as lofty as hers. **IDM**



Longina Phillips, Longina Phillips Designs