

SOLD! CONSULTANT SELLS WORLD'S LARGEST AUCTION HOUSE ON D-PRINT SOLUTION FOR CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

Personalised customer subscription form printed on Xerox DocuColor 70 garners whopping 49% response rate from Sotheby's customers.

She wasn't raising her hand for a painting or some antique silver, but **Letina Russell** did some serious bidding with **Sotheby's** a few months ago.

The Melbourne branch of the world's largest and oldest auction house wanted more customers to subscribe to its art and collectible catalogues. Down under, Sotheby's publishes seven glossy catalogues annually that list a

consider mailing an elegant subscription form targeting specific customers on their database. The mailing would go one step further – it would be personalised using digital printing technology, so customers would feel they were being singled out for special attention.

Since Russell does a lot of consulting work for Xerox's Melbourne office, including managing the Melbourne arm of the annual D-Print Challenge competition for creatives, Russell was very familiar with the technology and also had the machine in mind to do the printing job – the **Xerox DocuColor 70**. A digital colour printer which allows every document to be



diverse range of fine art and antiques coming up for auction including international, Australian and Aboriginal paintings and sculpture, and decorative items such as antique furniture, jewellery, glassware, china, clocks and silver. The catalogues are priced between \$35 and \$42 per issue. *"They serve as essential, serious references for those interested in collecting but they are also beautifully illustrated and lasting reading materials,"* explained Russell.

Russell, a graphic communications consultant who runs a thriving business on Melbourne's St. Kilda's Road with her partner Malcolm, had an idea about how the subscription form project should proceed: her bid urged the company to

personalised and customised for maximum effectiveness, the DocuColor 70 uses standard desk top publishing applications, allowing documents to be prepared with variable information including text and photos.

Mass market approach didn't work for prestigious 200-year-old firm

A few years before, Sotheby's had undertaken a similar campaign to increase their catalogue subscriptions. *"They did a large mail-out, took the mass market approach and didn't personalise their communications. They sent out 22,000 newsletters and it cost them in the vicinity of \$25,000. And the response wasn't that great,"* recalled Russell.

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"To do well today, companies have to be able to target and market to their customers on a one-to-one basis because each customer is different and has different needs," she added. "D-Print allows you to do this."

Russell realised it was time to move the 256-year-old company (which had started off as a London book dealer in 1744) to 21st century communications. Having successfully undertaken several projects for Sotheby's in the past, including catalogue design and newspaper advertising, it didn't take much to convince Sotheby's to try the personalised route. Seeing nothing to lose, the managing director agreed and for the first time, the auction house released its database to an outside consultant.

"We did our homework. We studied the database, cleaned it up and found the names of people who had subscribed to the catalogues before. It was obvious that these were the people who placed more value in subscription and who actually enjoyed reading the catalogues. We saw that these were the people with whom Sotheby's already had a relationship and were ultimately the people we wanted to target," she said.

After getting the names sorted on a disk, Russell then designed a stunning, fold-out subscription form featuring four pieces of art and decorative items slated to appear in upcoming catalogues. These were juxtaposed with some comments from Sotheby's experts about what readers could expect to find in the catalogues and at upcoming auctions. Spaces were left blank for the names and addresses of recipients. The artwork was designed on a Macintosh Apple and the finished art completed in Quark Express.

In all, 714 names were selected from the Sotheby's database. Since Russell knew this would be a small print run, she felt the Xerox DocuColor 70 would be a cost-effective choice for Sotheby's. *"Digital printing is good for short print runs whereas with traditional printing the cost would have been prohibitive."*

Another bonus: The DocuColor 70 also offered excellent colour quality at 600 dots per inch. Radiant fusing and gloss enhancement module

features would enable the finished job to have a true offset look and feel – important for making an impact on Sotheby's affluent, often conservative, clientele where the end product simply had to look subtle and elegant.

The finished art was put on disk and taken to Cherry Print, a Melbourne printing company with a DocuColor 70 in house. The technical process worked like a sophisticated mail merge, explained Russell. Using Fiery Freeform software and a Fiery ZX RIP, the correct names and addresses were retrieved from the database and merged with the artwork. The subscription forms were then printed on the DocuColor 70, with a three hour turnaround time, and distributed to Sotheby's clientele in January.

The result? To date, 350 customers have mailed back their subscription forms for catalogues – a 49 per cent response rate. *"It's the first time Sotheby's has ventured into direct mail and personalised printing and the company was pleased with the reaction from their clientele as well as the quality of the personalised work,"* said Russell.

And the best part? To clean up and prepare the database, design the form, print 714 copies and mail out, the project only cost the auction house \$5,500.

Interestingly enough, Sotheby's has just distributed an additional 5,000 of Russell's subscription forms – but these ones weren't personalised. The generic forms, which cost \$7,000, were sent to other people on the Sotheby's database – particularly targeting auction attendees. The response rate: only 84 replies to date (a 1.6 per cent response rate). *"It just goes to show you how much more powerful the personal approach can be in terms of getting a response,"* said Russell.

Happy with the outcome from the first direct mail project, Letina Russell is now making a new bid with Sotheby's: to create another digitally personalised subscription form. *"I'm pushing for it. I want to go back to the people on our list who didn't subscribe the first time, find out why they didn't and offer a premium, like a free catalogue, or something, to get them interested."*

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