

A different picture on publishing, marketing

 By [bryan berkman](#)

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When a former magazine publisher turns his hand to creating bespoke customer-orientated media, you can expect it will be rich in visual content.

You may also be surprised, as I was, when I met with Marc Blachowitz, now of Photodeli. He seems to have found the Holy Grail of customer relationship management for the hospitality industry - a user-generated brag book, and other photo products, that are also user funded and meet a target list of marketing objectives, all under the banner of the recently launched Guest Signature Photo Product offering, powered by Photodeli.



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I worked with Marc when he was publisher of Men's Health Magazine and I remember him then talking about defining and attracting the gatekeeper. In luxury tourism terms, Rovos Rail is the key holder to the gate that opens access to the industry. So, paging through the 40-page book, a combination of Rovos Rail's own iconic images and 19 guest supplied-images, I can see why this concept is a winner with them and companies such as Londolozi, Shamwari, Sanbona, and 13 Southern African Sanctuary Retreats' five-star lodges. Ultimately, guests get the best of both worlds in that they can place their own 'happy snaps' alongside iconic, hero professional

images and receive the ideal premium keepsake of a truly memorable experience.

All the touchpoints

"Guests are to be exposed to the Guest Signature offering via all available touch points", he explains, "booking, website, gift shops, all customer correspondence and at hotels and lodges. The client takes their pictures during their stay and, once at home, and from any country, they simply upload their images to the customised website that provides access to the online software. We offer an end-to-end, comprehensive solution (from creative, design, website, online software, payment gateway, production and fulfilment) to clients located in all corners of the globe.

"While Photodeli provides the backend, the customer experience is entirely branded Rovos Rail, or for the particular participating partner.

"From the website, users select the desired product (photobooks in varying sizes, Digital Book, Block Mounted canvas prints) and embed their images into the demarcated spaces in the cloud-based template - that appear opposite professionally produced imagery. Once satisfied with the book, they save, pay online and the rest is left to us," he says. "We produce the book, bind and finish and then books are wrapped 'deli' style, placed in the distinctive client-branded packaging and our courier of choice delivers to the address provided anywhere globally," he says.

High in production values, quality

"What's exciting is the new, cloud-based software (another SA first, he says) where the uploading of images is fast and the user experience is simple and friendly. We have also now added the large format A1 and A2 block-mounted canvas prints to the offering, that can be delivered speedily and cost effectively to any global destination," he says.

What impressed me most is the feel and quality of the products. He uses 180g lay-flat paper stock that perfectly displays a double-page spread without any bleed or issues around the binding. Certainly, for the top-end market, this is a product that is high in production values and supports all the positive associations that having a coffee-table-style book has for a brand. Prices are also reasonable for people staying in luxury properties, but Blachowitz has also created cost-efficient digital

solutions that are as great to look at, albeit on a screen, but far, far cheaper.

"The only element that Photodeli has no control or influence over is the client sales and marketing component. This is the responsibility of the destination partner to ensure that this service is actively and aggressively promoted to their clients via all available marketing and communication touch points and channels.

The 'Facebook Factor'

"From a marketing perspective, Blachowitz says that 52% of Facebook users say their friends' photos inspired their holiday choices while 92% of people trust word-of-mouth advertising above all forms of advertising. He says his Digibooks (that also provide video links and interactive links to websites and email addresses, Facebook, Twitter etc) support the statistic that 76% of travellers post their vacation photos to a social network and his solution takes all of this to a new level. Social media sharing buttons come standard with the Digibook.

(Image extracted from the Photodeli website)



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"With the above in mind and to assist and support the partners, Photodeli now sends all customers that purchase hardcover photo books, a complimentary Free Digibook, a great value-add to guests and a marketing bonanza for the partners. In addition, they have also put a monthly cash-back incentive in place, where partners are rewarded for driving and growing sales volumes. This monthly reimbursement can be ploughed back into marketing/advertising budgets turning this investment into a revenue-generating initiative, or could be used to bolster needy conservation or community-based outreach programmes", he says.

Never-ending journey

According to Blachowitz, feedback and reaction from partners has been overwhelmingly positive and Brenda Vos, Head of Marketing and PR for Rovos Rail, had the following to say, "I am thrilled with the guest photo products - they're elegant and lovely, which for us is an extension of the train journeys. Our passengers also like the idea of creating the albums themselves as it takes them on a happy trip down memory lane that they find fun. For us to have confirmed a booking because of a sold photo album is obviously wonderful so the marketing reach has proved to be excellent. The software is so simple to use and Photodeli's execution once an order has been placed is flawless".

Following our stay at Royal Malewane Lodge, our ranger gave us a DVD of images that he had taken of us on game drives intermixed with images he'd taken of the hotel and game sightings. This impressed us so much that now, having visited most of the top luxury game lodges, we still regard that lodge and that DVD with the most affection.

[Find more about Photodeli here.](#)

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