The Rafiki Foundation Powers Up with Fiery Print Servers to Help Orphans and Widows in Africa

"Rafiki" means friend in Swahili and depicts the purpose of the Foundation — to befriend orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). The mission of the Rafiki Foundation is to help Africans know God by caring for and educating orphans, providing materials and training in education and Bible study, and giving economic opportunities to widows.

To accomplish this mission, Rafiki established ten Rafiki Training Villages within the African countries of Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. These Villages provide living, educational, and medical facilities through Rafiki's four programs: Childcare, Education, Training, and Widows. For more information, visit http://www.rafiki-foundation.org

CHALLENGE:

Using outsourced printers for their communications and educational materials gave the Rafiki Foundation little flexibility and few creative options. They learned that a Fiery print server on a Canon digital press could solve these challenges as well as help them lower printing costs, increase the speed of their workflow, and open the door to new opportunities.

On any given day at the Rafiki Foundation ("Rafiki") headquarters, a rhythmic hum can be heard as two Canon digital presses, powered by Fiery® digital print servers from EFI™, steadily churn out a multitude of educational curriculum and colorful communications pieces that are forever changing the lives of orphans in Africa. In fact, in just over a year, Rafiki has printed more than 4.5 million pages of Bible study and school curriculum, and they are thrilled with the results.

Africa's orphans are at the heart of Rafiki's services. The Eustis, Florida-based non-profit has established ten Rafiki Training Villages – in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Malawi, and Zambia – that provide orphaned and impoverished children with a loving home, medical care, Bible studies, and education. Each Training Village is operated by overseas Rafiki staff, with help from local caretakers, national workers and short-term missionaries, and each provides up to 180 orphans with 24/7 care.

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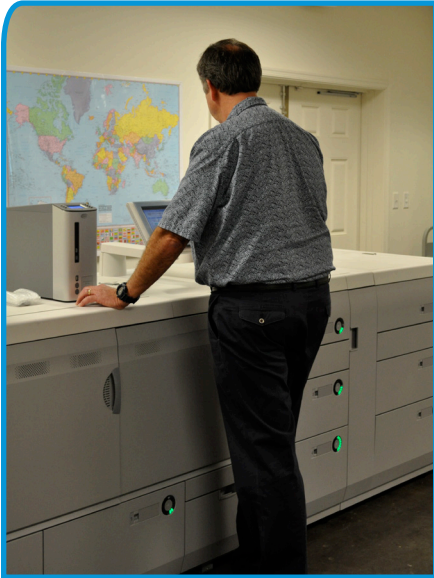
SOLUTION:

Rafiki chose a Fiery A1100 on a Canon imagePRESS C6000 and a Fiery J100 on a Canon imagePRESS 1125 to print high quality communications pieces, Bible study and school curriculum.

"It's a very user-friendly system."

—Steve Kranz, Director of Facilities and Services

Also at the heart of Rafiki is their Widows Program, which gives many African widows the opportunity to make crafts, such as jewelry, baskets, and handbags, which Rafiki then purchases and sells through the Rafiki Exchange and on its website. Without this program, many of these widows would not have a way to support their families.

The mailings Rafiki sends to their database of donors, volunteers, supporters and church members are an essential component of their communications efforts. The updates, reports and pictures of the children and widows show donors how their funds are being allocated and spread the word about Rafiki to further help their missions. Providing Rafiki School Curriculum is also critical, not only for the educational component, but because printed school materials are a rare commodity in African schools.

Kiboko is in the House

Rafiki hasn't always had two digital presses to print these materials. Until the summer of 2009, the Foundation, which was founded by Rosemary McEachern-Jensen in 1987, printed from small desktop printers or out-sourced to local shops.

Steve Kranz, Rafiki's director of facilities and services, led the charter to purchase the new equipment after learning from Canon that by doing their own printing Rafiki could reduce their print costs 10-20% each year, have more print options and flexibility, and ultimately be able to increase their services to Africa.

Encouraged by the proposal, Kranz approached McEachern-Jensen, Rafiki's president, who agreed that bringing a digital press in house would provide many advantages. Specifically, in addition to the positive economic

aspects, they liked the idea of printing on demand and having more flexibility with workflow and creativity.

In August 2009, Rafiki purchased a color digital press – a Canon image-PRESS C6000, which they nicknamed Kiboko ('hippo' in Swahili), with an EFI Fiery A1100 print server. Bringing digital printing into the picture was exciting, but also a little daunting. The staff liked the idea of having different features and capabilities to use, but with no previous digital printing experience, they were a little wary about making the change.

According to Kranz, however, knowing computer basics and "given what the EFI Fiery software can do," they were able to learn how to operate the system and print successfully from the start.

What put them at ease fairly quickly was the intuitive nature of the Fiery print server, which, the staff and its volunteers discovered, was user-friendly and fast.

"I find it amazing," said Kranz. "It's a gift to people in our situation – we can do something that we otherwise wouldn't be able to do because the software was created in an environment we can work in. It's a very user-friendly system. "

Successful Printing from the Start

Rafiki's first job with the color press was their 2010 calendar. According to Kranz, it was quite an undertaking, but ultimately a big success. With help from Canon, they printed 180,000 impressions, using variable data to take their mail lists and run them at the same time they were printing the calendars.

"We learned fast about the [printing] field and what it took to produce

15,000 calendars right out of the gate. It was a great learning experience" said Kranz. "We dove into it. By all accounts, it was very successful."

Their second big project was a two-sided newsletter with variable data printed on the back. After completing the print job, the team folded the 11x17 pages to an 8 ½ x 5½ size, stuffed them into envelopes and sent them to the database of 43,000. "We were extremely pleased with the quality that we got out of everything," said Kranz.

Compassion and Curriculum for the Children

At about this time the Rafiki team decided to make their Rafiki School Curriculum a top priority. Their charter is to provide children in the Training Villages with progressive schooling that meets educational standards, incorporates African culture and represents a Christian world view. The timing for having the in-house digital press was perfect. They would be able to develop and print out larger amounts of the curriculum at a faster rate and then ship the packets to each Training Village.

It didn't take long for word to spread about Rafiki's special curriculum; soon the African churches Rafiki worked with began inquiring about using it in their schools – they relished the curriculum's Biblical and cultural focus and would not otherwise be able to provide school materials for their students.

Rafiki added the churches to their distribution list, knowing it would be a big undertaking but ready to make it work. Calculating the amount of curriculum they'd need to produce for the churches was the first task: Rafiki works with eight churches, all with large denominations. Each church's request was for about 300-400 sets of curriculum, and one set of curriculum, which covers six years of schooling, runs 9,000 pages.

Knowing they'd need more than one machine to handle such a high volume, the team brought in a black and white digital press – a Canon imagePRESS 1125 with an EFI Fiery J100 print server. They installed the machine, nicknaming it Punda Milia ('zebra' in Swahili), in May 2010 and have since used it primarily for Bible study and school curriculum.

Fiery Print Servers Produce Powerful Results

Today, the Rafiki team enjoys using the two digital presses, especially the many features on the Fiery print servers. They regularly use Fiery Command WorkStation® as well as Fiery SeeQuence Impose for their calendars and other communications pieces when they print on both sides.

According to Kranz, the Canon and EFI combination gives them a lot of flexibility, which was limited when they outsourced their projects. For example, they can now customize the curriculum for different segments of schools, and they especially enjoy being able to stop a print job, make a change, and then continue printing. Additionally, they have much faster workflow and can turn jobs around quickly and without a long lead time. Ease of use and high quality end products have also been steady throughout.

"The quality of our products that are turned out – we find it to be very high," said Kranz. "We did calendars this year on different paper. The paper dealer asked for a copy of the calendar, impressed with what came

RESULTS:

The Rafiki Foundation has printed beautiful calendars and newsletters and more than 4.5 million pages of Bible study and school curriculum in just over a year. They continue to explore new ways to help orphans and widows in Africa.

off a digital press. It's a great vote of confidence – a product that's being turned out that's not merely acceptable but that people are actually impressed with."

Kranz says Rafiki donors have been very encouraging about the printed materials and have commented positively that the two digital press purchases made good use of their donor funds. The Rafiki team is more than grateful for the support of their donors, who have continued to donate throughout tough economical times.

"The message we're communicating hits people well and, to their credit, we have a committed donor base that feels strongly about the children they're supporting," said Kranz.

Economically, Kranz estimates they're spending a minimum of 10% less than they'd spend using a color digital press at a local print shop. He doesn't think they'd be able to find outside print shops to manage the high volume of Bible study or school curriculum; they're customized to Rafiki's needs so tricky to print.

"It allows us to do something we literally could not do otherwise. We could not take what we do to an off-site printer and there's no way it could be done on a traditional copy machine. There's too much that goes into these things," said Kranz.

Plans for Future Printing

2011 is lining up to be another busy year for Rafiki. Their fourth, fifth and sixth grade curriculum will add another three to four million pages to the black and white digital press's work load, and the staff is now lining up writers to develop curriculum for middle school and high school years. With so many additional printing capabilities to explore on the Fiery print servers, the team also looks forward to delving into projects they hadn't thought about doing before.

"I have no doubt there are going to be new ways we're going to use the press. I think the equipment we have gives us a lot of flexibility to do a lot of different things," said Kranz.

As a whole, the Rafiki team looks forward to expanding their communications and reaching out more to missions and schools, all in the spirit of compassion for the orphans and widows of Africa.

"The fact that we're from a non-technical background and can turn out decent work, and do the volume we need to do and do it part-time is an amazing thing," said Kranz. "I think it's a real direction in the future for a lot of organizations. They can consider doing this kind of work that they never would have considered doing before. It really has changed the way we think about things dramatically."