



AutoPrice® & Index Builder Case Study

Revving Up Catalog Production at J&P Cycles



Who they are

As recently as 30 years ago, the mention of a motorcycle conjured up images of the Hell's Angels, James Dean, Peter Fonda and a rebellious and hardened attitude. Hollywood's characterization of a "Rebel Without a Cause," Marlon Brando's "The Wild One" or another leather-enhanced street-thug, glorified the independence and power of two wheels, a bandanna, and a banana seat. If you couldn't afford the luxury of a hot rod, you could still make a social statement by being one of the few low-riders.

Today, the romance and open-air freedom of motorcycles lives on. Bikers are more in the mainstream than ever. Since 1998, there has been a 34% increase in the number of motorcycles in use in the U.S. (estimated to be about 8.8 million). According to webBikeWorld.com, 24 million people in the United States rode a motorcycle at least once in 2003.

But yesteryear's "greaser" is now in the minority. According to a recent survey by MotorCycle.com, 64.5% of today's bikers have an annual income of more than \$50,000, and while it's true that 98.5% are men (56.3% married), only 11.6% are under the age of 25. Even more atypical of the traditional image is that 52.6% of today's cycle owners are college graduates and another 34.5% are working towards a degree.

One could then argue that the true and tried cyclist rides a Harley-Davidson. According to Harley-Davidson's own annual report, the average income of its "HOG" (Harley Owners Group) owners has now risen to more than \$80,000 and the median age is north of 45 years old. This explains how the company can charge more than \$15,000 for a new bike.

Today's cyclist is far more sophisticated and demanding. So while finding a savvy and more plugged-in audience is easier, motorcycle vendors now have to deliver the goods, in terms of quality and dependability, in order to capture that audience's attention. MotorCycle.com tells us that the number one attribute cycle owners seek when buying accessories is quality (47.1%). This is why J&P Cycles works so hard to produce a top-notch catalog.

J&P Cycles... riding is our passion... not just our business!

Ten years after Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper co-starred in the 1969 cult classic "Easy Rider," J&P Cycles was founded to meet the growing enthusiasts' quest to hit the road. Today, J&P Cycles is a retail mail-order business of more than 55,000 unique aftermarket parts and accessories. The company reaches customers worldwide from its headquarters in Anamosa, Iowa.

Though privately-owned, many now consider J&P to be the largest catalog retailer for aftermarket parts and accessories for Harley-Davidson customers.

Recently the company was honored for the eighth consecutive year as a "Dealernews Top 100 Powersports Retailers in North America (2006)." Dealernews Magazine's Top 100 Awards recognize dealerships for retail design and merchandising approaches, promotional innovations and dedication to customer service.

Reaching with catalogs

J&P's main link to the marketplace is its catalogs. Each year, the company produces catalogs for two distinct markets. The "Harley-Davidson Parts and Accessories Catalog" (1,192 pages) showcases J&P's after-market offerings for Harley customers. Produced and updated twice per year, the catalog reaches more than two million subscribers.



The "Metric Cruiser Parts and Accessories Catalog," on the other hand, is geared towards foreign (Honda, Suzuki, Yamaha, Kawasaki) bike owners. This catalog (664 pages) is distributed to over one million biker buffs each year.

A third catalog, the "Vintage and Restoration Catalog," is a bi-annual publication for owners of Harley-Davidson bikes dating back to 1929. The 336-page catalog is distributed to a select audience of 100,000 subscribers about every 24 months.

Catalog production Making the catalogs happen is the work of J&P's Catalog Production Manager, Mark Keedy, and his seven-person staff. Tasked at squeezing 55,000 parts and accessories into just over 4,000 pages each year, one of Keedy's monumental responsibilities is organizing page elements and ensuring accuracy for each and every item.

"Our success depends upon customers being able to find the parts they want in a hurry," noted Keedy. "It really comes down to making sure parts are where they are supposed to be, described accurately and priced correctly. Though it sounds easy enough, in my 25 years of production, it's been a major bottleneck. It's time-consuming, tedious and labor-intensive."

About six years ago, Keedy discovered a solution to finding and pricing parts accurately. Text for each cataloged part is created and tagged using Meadows Publishing Solutions' AutoPrice software (www.meadowsp.com). Product information is passed from merchandisers to the catalog group in spreadsheets and then ported into a FileMaker database. As text files are exported from FileMaker, for use by page designers in QuarkXPress, AutoPrice data tags and Quark style tags are embedded in the files. Thus, the job of making sure items are priced accurately is removed from the designers and is automated through the database. This process eliminates traditional concerns of tagging errors and/or typing errors.

"AutoPrice allows us to tell what parts are on what pages and at what price," added Keedy. "Price edits are entered directly into the database and automatically updated in the catalogs. Price versioning has always been a major headache. With AutoPrice, what used to take 10 days, now takes 30 minutes for a complete catalog."

Though the company bought AutoPrice for its pricing functions, Keedy and his staff have become equally reliant on its reporting features. In addition to automating pricing edits, the software also reports where those changes have been made (document origin and page numbers), and provides a historical listing of the price changes made over time. Using this feature, J&P generate reports that indicate the location of products in various catalogs, their part numbers, and how many times and where they appear in the catalogs. This reporting feature has become critical to the company's operation.

"AutoPrice saves us about 10 hours a week per person, easily," added Keedy. "It's like a Swiss-army knife. There's no way to use all of its features, but you keep trying and each time you're happy you did."

What goes in, must come out
(Meadows Index Builder) What AutoPrice has done for the front-end of J&P's workflow, Meadows' Index Builder has done in the back-end. "AutoPrice made it possible for us to get prices into the catalog properly," said Keedy. "Index Builder allows us to quickly generate both product index and brand name indexes without hassle."

Released earlier this year, Index Builder is a software module for QuarkXPress users that automates the creation of catalog indexes. Using the new software, publishers can drastically reduce the production time of creating a catalog index from hours to just minutes.



"Good indexing is just good business. Building an index for our 1,200-page catalog used to take a full 8-hour shift. Using Index Builder, it now takes less than 30 minutes. And it used to take nearly a week to review over 1,000 pages of QuarkXPress index tags in our big catalog. Now the index terms can be assigned as the product groups are built (even without knowing what section or page the products will appear on). We have the confidence of knowing that Index Builder will keep track of our parts and create an index our customers can rely on," said Keedy.

Once the catalog pages are assembled and approved, they must be readied for printing. At J&P, this requires that each page be converted into a PDF. To accomplish this task, Keedy employs a third Meadows' software tool.

"We use an XTensions package called MPS Page Printer. Basically, it converts our pages into PostScript files, but it also does one very special task. It creates filenames that correspond to the catalog page numbers. Afterwards, we use Adobe Distiller to create the individual PDFs and MassTransit to ship our files up to Perry-Judds [in Baraboo, Wisconsin] for plating and printing.

With Perry-Judd receiving as many as 1,200 individual PDFs for just one catalog, a relatively simple task of assigning page numbers within the required naming convention becomes critical. It saves as much as two days late in the production cycle. Even with last minute changes, the process is simplified and accelerated."

In publishing, you're tasked to do a job until it's done. If they're at all interested in having an outside life, managers are inspired to seek out tools that eliminate bottlenecks, shrink man-hours, and/or accelerate throughput. Keedy's constant search for improved productivity is both a function of personal and business needs.

"Our customers don't see the impact that tools such as AutoPrice, Index Builder or even Page Printer have on our catalog. They just notice when the item they're interested in is priced right and properly explained. For the millions we reach annually, our catalogs are our calling card. Our image and the value it represents to our customers is reflected in each and every catalog. When it's all done right, I get to go home."

Note: Shortly after the writing of this article, Mark Keedy left J&P Cycles and joined Carlisle Publishing Services (Dubuque, Iowa) as their Creative Service Manager. Carlisle Publishing already own a 5-seat license of Meadows' BatchPrint XTension and Mark is hopeful that many of the efficiencies gained at J&P Cycles will be applied to projects in his new production workflow.



**Time saved is personal
time gained**