

StewMac Strikes a Chord with Guitar Aficionados

StewMac, the leading tool, parts and electronics supplier to guitar techs and players, relies on Walsworth's expertise and advanced equipment to transform its catalog into pure 4-color music.

A Case Study Published by Walsworth



New 4-Color Catalog Brings Higher Definition to Products

We love lots of businesses, but some are just more fun than others. And what could be cooler than supplying everything needed to set up, repair or build guitars? That's exactly what StewMac has been doing very successfully since 1968. Based in Athens, Ohio, they supply tools, parts and electronics to both guitar techs and players worldwide. The tools are used by major guitar companies and repair shops everywhere. In fact, many were invented at StewMac. No doubt they've come a long way from the early days of selling banjo parts at music fairs, and the company continues to evolve.

Challenge

StewMac has successfully used a catalog as part of its marketing program from the company's inception. They complement the catalog with email campaigns, an active Facebook page, printed postcard enclosures and, of course, their website, www.stewmac.com. What might be surprising is that until recently, the catalog interior was always printed in two colors on 30 lb. newsprint.

According to Evan Oliver, who heads catalog production, the change to 4-color process throughout and coated paper didn't occur because the old version wasn't working. There were no complaints and business was strong. "But there was a desire among management for something fresh," he says, "and we weren't always happy with the reproduction accuracy of some items like woods in two-color printing."

Solution

Evan and the StewMac team turned to Walsworth, their long-term catalog printer, for help. "Walsworth is always great to work with and totally helpful," Evan offers. "And our prepress systems are so well calibrated to one another that we always know what to expect from proof to press." Walsworth responded with a riff on its Manroland Rotoman N heatset press that produced a showstopping, 96-page (plus cover), 4-color catalog on 36lb., #5 gloss paper. Trim size is 8.375 inches x 10.75 inches with perfect binding. Distribution occurs mainly through direct mail and order enclosures.

Results

When the company did a research study in July 2017, it revealed StewMac has one of the highest net promoter scores of any business the research firm has ever seen. "While there are many things driving it, one item that stood out was customers reporting how much they love the catalog," says StewMac Vice President of Marketing Brock Poling. "They look forward to getting new ones, they keep them for years (sometimes decades), and it's not just a resource they use for purchasing. They also read it for enjoyment," Polling adds. So, future

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production will continue in four color, though the StewMac team is not finished experimenting. They're considering smaller, more subjectspecific versions to see if that further heightens appeal to certain customer groups, as well as other strategies that are in the making. Bottom line: StewMac will continue to evolve the catalog's role in the path-to-purchase as consumer behavior changes.

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But whatever the future holds in the guitar set up, repair and building business, you can bet StewMac will play the lead. And Walsworth will be right behind strumming the rhythm.



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