

What Can Digital Do? (It's More Than Just Pages)



You see it lurking in the shadows in the corner. It's been quietly growing the past couple of years, stealthily moving from a mere distraction to something that must be dealt with. Its luminescent eyes glow steadily, tracking your every move. You wonder how to approach it. You take a deep breath, and hold out a shaky hand, inviting it into your classroom. You close your eyes and hope for the best - what *have* you done?

No worries - you've just taken the first step toward befriending the Digital Demon.

But some scrapbook retailers *are* worried. They wonder how the increasing popularity of digital scrapbooking will affect their papercrafting businesses. They wonder if their customers will "convert" and stop buying traditional supplies. They wonder if they should try to revamp their existing stock and services to appeal to digital scrapbookers. And if so, how?

The good news is that you *can* combine your existing business with all the fun digital gadgets and techniques, and even better news - many scrapbooking manufacturers want to help you do it.

The first point to keep in mind is that even "traditional" scrapbookers (those who use paper, 3D embellishments, adhesives, and the like) are probably also "digital scrapbookers", to some extent. They're already using digital cameras, printing photos and journaling at home, and scanning memorabilia. The question isn't whether traditional scrappers will "convert" to digital - the question is how can you, the retailer, help them make better use of their digital tools?

It's about balance

Traditional scrapbooking products can peacefully co-exist with new digital elements. Susan White, Director of Marketing for Triscape Software, recommends retailers provide resources that both traditional and digital scrapbookers can use. That could mean adding appropriate stock and class offerings, as well as educating yourself on using a digital camera and some basic photo editing techniques.

Terese White, Senior Product Manager for Avery Dennison, agrees. "The idea is not to replace traditional paper crafting but rather to complement" your existing stock. Show customers how to personalize products to best suit their needs. Avery's sticker papers and printable tags allow scrapbookers to create custom embellishments on the computer. By providing printable products in your store, you can capitalize on the desire to have exactly the right embellishment, no matter the event or situation. You can essentially offer your customers anything they can dream up. "We know that being able to say what exactly on their minds is important to scrapbookers," says Terese White.

Here is a sample "digital shopping list" of items that would complement your current stock:

- Photo and sticker printer papers, like Avery's line of acid-free sticker papers
- Unfinished alterable items, like photo frames, tins, MyBook Planners, and Creative Imaginations' Bare Elements Collection
- Printer cartridges
- Digital albums and album binding systems, like Epson's StoryTeller Kits and Unibind's PhotoBook Creator
- Digital equipment - wireless mice, graphics tablets, and flash drives
- Storage items like laptop bags and CD/DVD organizing containers
- Digital scrapbooking magazines
- Software CDs featuring digital kits, fonts, and photo editing software like Triscape's FxFoto Creative
- Scanning and digital printing services for photos, memorabilia, and layouts

Have some class

As a retailer, you know the merchandising power of in-store classes. Classes allow you to demonstrate how to use a tool, try a technique, or work with a specific line of product. The same is true for digital scrapbooking. "Once a scrapbooker sees what the product does and how easy it is to use, they understand intuitively how it will benefit them," comments Randy Redecker, Marketing Director for Unibind. By offering classes that incorporate digital scrapbooking techniques, you provide valuable content for your customers. They will see you as a resource for all their needs, not just traditional paper scrapbooking. And digital scrapbookers will come to you for ongoing education, as well as support for their consumable needs. Education doesn't turn customers away from your store. It helps give them a place where they can continue to keep pace with technology.

"Show-and-Tell" demonstration-style classes work well for teaching digital scrapbooking techniques. Show customers how to use what they already have. Terese White points out that many customers enjoy learning how to use existing Avery computer templates and techniques in Microsoft Word to create scrapbooking elements and designs. From there, you can move to classes that demonstrate how to use software CDs you stock.

Consider offering basic classes that incorporate digital techniques, such as photo organizing, digital photo fixes, and incorporating fonts into layout design. More advanced classes could include creating digital pages from scratch, adding drop shadows, using digital brushes and filter effects, and designing your own digital accents and complete digital projects. Students can bring their own laptops to work on, or you can connect a store computer to a projector for classroom demonstrations.

One idea for a project-based class features the MyBook Planner by Per Annum. Production Coordinator Lisa Flanagan suggests offering a year-long, once-a-month class/crop that would add to the MyBook Planner throughout the year. Students could use the planner to record daily memories and collect bits of monthly ephemera. At the end of the month they use those resources to create a month-in-review layout or mini book. Classes can also feature a different technique each month. By offering new content each month, customers can join the class at anytime during the year, and shoppers come back to the store at least once a month. At the end of the year they would have a personal "Year in Review" album.

A digital scrapbooker herself, Susan White teaches classes featuring digital scrapbooking techniques at Wholly Scrap! in North Hampton, New Hampshire. "Recipe albums are the perfect digital project. You can make a layout once and print as many times as you want, which is great for family members. Resize the layout and print any size you want so you could have the same album as an 8x8 or 12x12 or 6x6. You can make recipe cards too." Host classes around these fun recipe album themes: holiday cookies, favorite drinks, Mom's Best, and summer salads. To make things even easier, Triscap recently released an FxFoto Recipes Project CD that comes complete with easy-to-use software, cooking themed digital kits and drag and drop templates. "So with one package your customer goes home with everything she needs to make recipe layouts and she returns to you for albums," says Susan White.

Looking beyond a typical two-hour class, Susan White also recommends that retailers offer "digi-friendly crops". "Many digital scrappers would love to meet other digital folks but are intimidated by going to crops at stores", she comments, "but we really want to come hang out with you...all we need is power." Set up your crop room so at least one table has electrical access – "power strips are good," says Susan White.

Branching Out

One interesting thing about offering digital products, services, and classes is that it could lead to an entirely new population of customers. Market the fact that you offer photo papers, combined with photo preservation and display expertise, and you've got yourself a niche. Tweak your marketing and advertising to attract people who may be interested in photography, but haven't tried scrapbooking (yet). Susan White suggests that you "look outside the scrapping world - maybe mommy groups, church groups, women's clubs, cooking stores, genealogy or history groups - any place you can think of where people might want to know about [your digital products and services]... Digital is perfect for new moms - no mess, you can start and stop easily, and most have computers already. You could offer a digital photography class or use FxFoto Creative to fix photos. They might like a night out and you might introduce them to the world of scrapbooking."

Barbara Kotsos, Senior Marketing Manager for Epson America, suggests that retailers advertise that consumers can bring in their own photos on a flash drive, and leave with an image printed on archival photo paper, such as a page from Epson's StoryTeller kit. "Product demonstrations work really well," says Kotsos, "particularly with someone's own photos." It provides prospective customers with a glimpse of the ease-of-use and variety of options available through digital technology.

Let the public know you have the resources to help them do what they want and need to do, and they will start to seek you out. By the time they arrive at your doorstep, that Digital Demon and you will be the best of friends.

Angie Pedersen is a freelance writer, specializing in crafts, B2B, technical writing, and social media topics. Her areas of expertise include website content, blog marketing, and media communications. Find more samples of her writing at <http://angiewrites.com> .