

Becoming online print producer is easy, cost-effective

Most any owner of a small business can tell you that part of their job is ordering or changing their business gear such as cards, stationary, and even signs.

Running Deans Consulting, advertising for tips to Brenham Washington County Crime Stoppers, and now starting up Brenham Home Rental, I am constantly ordering business cards and company signs.

Years ago I did it the old fashion way by going to a local print shop and having them proof up a sample and then producing what I needed. Unfortunately it took too much time and was expensive. Though I try quite hard to keep our money local, that chore had to be carried out online.

By far the best online source for getting marketing materials designed and produced is VistaPrint.com. I have been using them for almost eight years now and have made dozens of orders buying signs, stamps, business cards, and even electronic business cards.

I found them back then due to my frustration of the long delay of three weeks that I was told it would take to get a simple set of business cards made locally. So after a quick Google search for "Business cards online" I found VistaPrint.com.

In just 15 minutes I was able



John Deans

to select one of their good looking templates for a business card, filled in my information in the boxes, and was able to view and proof the final image online.

After providing VistaPrint.com my Visa information, they asked me if I wanted to buy numerous other related products with my information also on them.

This add-on purchase process took a bit long to get through but it was effective. I ended up buying adhesive mailing labels and a couple of other things.

Since I only purchased the basic card with one of their templates and nothing printed on the back, the price for a 250 count order was free and all I had to do was pay for that extra stuff along with the shipping.

VistaPrint is so cost effective that even if you wanted to use their premium business card line the cost of 250 cards was only \$19.99.

Within a week I had my order delivered and was very pleased with the quality of their free business cards. After those quickly ran out due to my heavy marketing efforts several years ago, I went back to VistaPrint.com and stepped up the content of my business cards.

Since I had already created an account months before, I logged into it and was able to see my

previous card order. I could have just hit the reorder button and had another round of those same free cards shipped to me.

But this time I really wanted to create my own special business card design on some higher grade paper stock.

Weeks before I had created my own logo with Adobe Photoshop of two computers connected with a network and my company name spanning it. After exporting a JPG image of that logo I was able to upload it to the VistaPrint.com site and apply it directly to the blank slate of my second generation business card.

From there I placed text boxes strategically laid out on the card to highlight my services. To make my phone number stand out I made it bright red in color and three times the font size as the rest of the card text.

Then I got really bold and uploaded a color digital picture of me that I took for the *Banner-Press* column.

The card was getting a bit crowded but it sure had content with my picture, logo, contact information, and numerous services that I was providing. After the card was completely designed I then chose the high gloss thicker grade paper to give it a stronger feel and look.

Even after all of that my custom color cards were only \$40 for a set of 500!

This time during the purchase I also went for the electronic

business card option which is an online image of the card I just created that can be linked to as a signature in my Outlook email message. In other words, every time I send out an e-mail now an exact image of my business card is appended to the end of the message.

This service was a one time charge of \$1.99.

A couple of months ago we got an office downtown in the Atrium for me to work on PCs during the day in town rather than take them all the way back home. The second use was for my wife and kids to use it after school and between activities to also cut down on those gasoline consuming home round trips.

The glass door of our first floor office looked bare so I went online to VistaPrint and created

a 19"x12" glass decal with my Deans Consulting logo on it.

It took only 10 minutes to upload that original logo into the signage creation tool of VistaPrint and within a week we had a nice see-through sign for around \$30 on our glass office front door.

One really handy aspect about VistaPrint.com is that they keep all of your creations in a private portfolio enabling you to reorder, edit, or remove previous projects over the years.

I have my Crime Stoppers cards, Deans Consulting signs, and Brenham Home Rental marketing materials all in my VistaPrint portfolio.

VistaPrint.com makes it very tempting to buy other goodies like calendars, rubber stamps, stationary, and promotional

giveaways like pens, hats, and T-Shirts. All of these items can be personalized with your company's name, images and logos.

You just choose what and how many you want then place your message, name, or picture on them. After that it's only a click away from having it shipped to you in under a week.

Bottom line: Next time you need some business cards check out VistaPrint.com and become your own private online print producer.

Next week's column: Carnivore.

John Deans of Deans Consulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.