



Inspiring Creativity

Case Study The Valley Courier

Industry: Publishing

Application: Serif PagePlus

Organization Profile: The Valley Courier is the weekly local newspaper of Hamilton County, Ohio. Covering community news ranging from birth and wedding announcements to local sports activities and upcoming events, the paper is distributed to 8,000 subscribers. Mike Koewler, the owner and publisher of the paper since 1996, relies on Serif software for all of his design needs.

Summary: With no newspaper design background prior to becoming owner and publisher of The Valley Courier, Mike Koewler quickly mastered PagePlus and has since used it to publish the 16-page community paper. The program's easy-to-use and professional tools have enabled Koewler to publish and grow the paper over the past 12 years, despite a small staff and limited resources.

It all started with an idea

It all started with an idea to document a 90th birthday. In celebration of his grandfather's milestone birthday, Mike Koewler designed, wrote and published a simple four-page newspaper highlighting the life and times of his granddad. Pleased with the results and encouraged by his enjoyment of the design process, Koewler was inspired to pursue a career in newspaper publishing.

Today, Koewler is the owner and publisher of The Valley Courier, the local newspaper of Hamilton County, Ohio. Every week, Koewler and his team of two part-time office workers, 12 volunteer writers and 15 paper carriers produce and deliver the 16-page newspaper, which is distributed to 8,000 readers. The Valley Courier, unlike some of the larger newspapers serving the Cincinnati area, emphasizes the local happenings and topics that are relevant to the citizens of Hamilton County.

"I would like to think it is very, very important," Koewler said of The Valley Courier's relevance in the community. "All the other newspapers cover only the major stories in this community. We do birth, engagement and wedding announcements, cover city council news and report on Little League baseball, basketball, volleyball, soccer and football. The community writers get the opportunity to talk about what the seniors did at their meeting or on a road trip. Non-profit groups announce their events for free, so people know about them. The paper is really a community service."

Producing a weekly paper with a large readership and a small staff does not come easy. Since 1994, Koewler has turned to Serif's PagePlus for all of his professional design and publishing needs.

After experimenting with a few desktop publishing programs early on in his career and never being satisfied with their results, Koewler came across a small advertisement for an early version of PagePlus. Struck by the fact that it was printer independent and inexpensive, he immediately ordered the software. After quickly learning the ins and outs of the program and realizing its professional potential, Koewler became a loyal Serif user and now deploys PagePlus X3 to create The Valley Courier.

"It's so simple to use, I can lay out all 16 pages without a lot of frustration. It greatly speeds up our production time, so we can meet our deadlines with plenty of time to spare," explained Koewler.

As his authors send him articles in various file formats, Koewler appreciates that he can import most text files without encountering any problems and then easily adjust the text frames to a specified width and height to fit the column requirements. He also emphasizes the text wrap tool, which enables him to quickly and easily place images either within or near the text, as a time-saving application.

After 14 years of use, Koewler has learned the features and benefits of the myriad of tools that PagePlus offers and continues to find them invaluable in the production of The Valley Courier. In addition to the layout and text capabilities of the program, Koewler cites the importance of the program's ability to import databases, the option to output to PDF and the built-in photo adjustment tools, including the Image Cutout Studio, which enables him to extract images from their background, without having to use a separate image-editing program.

Serif's PagePlus has played a large role in enabling Koewler to survive as an independent newspaper publisher, despite the buyout of many small papers nationwide. Koewler is proud that The Valley Courier is the only community newspaper remaining in the Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana tri-state area that is not owned by Gannett, the largest newspaper publisher in the United States.

Koewler acknowledged that using Serif software, the publishing possibilities are endless. After mastering PagePlus, he taught himself how to use WebPlus, Serif's Web design program. Since then, he has developed both print publications and Websites for other community organizations, including the Reading Historical Society and the Hamilton County Fair.

"Serif has made both paper and Web publishing not only easier, but more professional," he said. "I also appreciate that through the various versions of the programs, the company listens to its users and tries to add features that make tasks easier and save me hours each week."

For more information on Serif and its range of design and creative software products, visit:

www.serif.com