

A day at The Picture Spa

By Jennifer Barr Kruger

New kiosk environment invites “Jennifer” to relax and rejuvenate herself and her photos



Jim Morello, general manager of the store (left), with owner Sid Davidowitz, show off The Picture Spa. Prior to its transformation, The Picture Spa space was occupied by a jewelry store.

Jennifer’s busy. She’s stressed out. She’s taking care of the kids, the hubby, the house, the dog, and maybe working full time, too. What could sound better to “Jennifer” – that highly desired 30-40ish memory keeper – than a day at the spa? There *is* something better – a day at a spa that helps her do something with her treasured family images.

The Picture Spa is the brand-new photo kiosk space just launched by Sid Davidowitz, owner of two MotoPhoto stores in New Jersey (www.motonet.com). The Picture Spa, christened by Davidowitz’s wife (a “Jennifer” named

Debby), is connected to Davidowitz’s Paramus, N.J., store.

“I have been in the photo industry since I was a child. My dad owned Leon’s Fotoshop in Bayonne, N.J., and I owned it myself for many years. I opened Expresslab Inc. in this location in 1982, and converted to a MotoPhoto in 1984,” Davidowitz says. “It’s been a good business, but it’s no secret the typical minilab is being pressured from the loss of roll count, and digital printing is not replacing that. One reason I launched The Picture Spa is because I wanted to reverse the trend of my photo business.”

Davidowitz also observed his four photo kiosks were frequently all being used at the same time.

“People were standing at my counter, waiting, sometimes for more than an hour. Maybe they would pull up a stool, but I wasn’t making it a very comfortable environment. I realized I had to do something.”

Inspiration and serendipity

Davidowitz visited The Complete Picture inspiration center at PMA 2006. “That was my jumping off point. I took pictures of every section, and I attended Glenn

Phase 2 of The Picture Spa

Although there is still some work to be done before the official grand opening of the **MotoPhoto** The Picture Spa, **Sid Davidowitz** is already contemplating his next move.

"We have a space in the back I want to convert to a multi-purpose room," he says. "It could be a seasonal photo studio or a classroom, where we could teach everything from using a new digital camera to Photoshop, or even a class on how to use our various terminals."

Another potential use for the room is scrapbooking workshops. The Picture Spa has a Luci scrapbooking kiosk from **Lucidiom**, and Davidowitz plans to approach local scrapbooking businesses with some marketing ideas.

"I'm not really a threat to scrapbooking stores in the area. I'm not going to sell all the punches and dies and things. But I can provide a facility where they can run classes or have parties. All I want is for these people to find my door and know, if they need prints or copies, they can get them done here," he explains. "I didn't want to talk to these people until I had something to show them. Now, I can bring them here and, hopefully, they will say 'Wow.'"

Omura's presentation. The Complete Picture motivated me, and got me thinking," Davidowitz says.

He had planned to create a dedicated kiosk area in his existing space, but a golden opportunity to expand presented itself at the perfect time. Davidowitz is in the fortunate position of being the sublandlord of other space in the strip mall where his Paramus store is located, including the adjacent unit, which had been occupied by a struggling jewelry store.

"I had the feeling the jewelry store owner would go out of business after the holidays. I realized, if ever I wanted to be in that space, I should do it before the holiday season," he explains. "We came to an agreement and he vacated in August. That's when I started cooking this plan."

He consulted with several people, including retail store designer **Mike Crosson**, who is part of the team working on The Complete Picture for **PMA 07**. Using advice and ideas from Crosson, from people at **MotoPhoto** and **Lucidiom**, from **Dan's Camera City** and other retailers, and from his own experience, Davidowitz came up with an idea for his new space. He asked **Diane Boos**, a family friend with a degree in interior design, to help devise the color palette. Boos was excited by the concept and became heavily involved in its development.

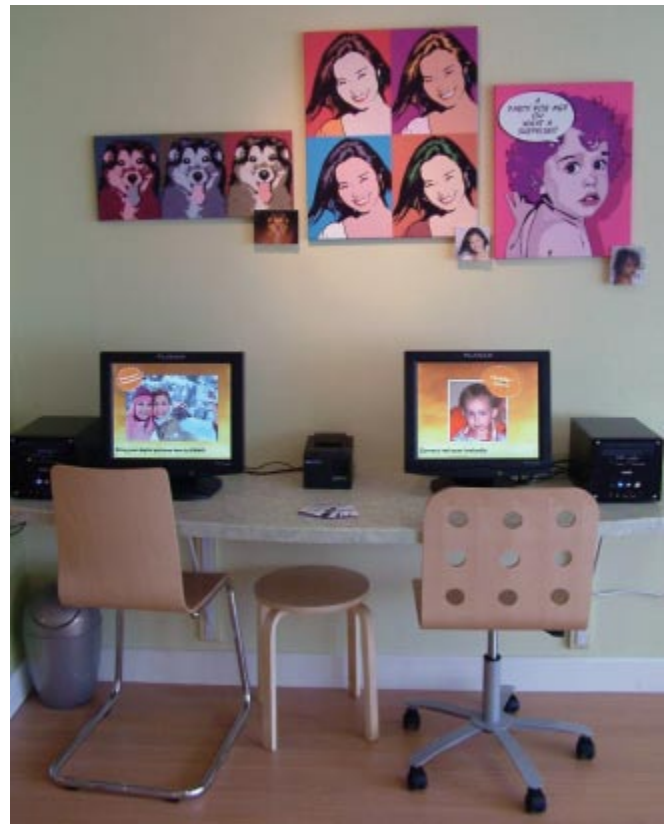
Davidowitz began building in October; and by late November, The Picture Spa was up and running, ready for its soft opening.

Products that can be made in The Picture Spa are displayed on the walls.

A warm welcome

With lovely pale green walls, soothing music, a stylish yet inviting lounge area, and an upscale coffee and tea service (complete with private-labeled water bottles in a glass-front cooler), The Picture Spa earns the "spa" part of its name before you get 20 feet past the front of the space. As for the "picture" part, there are five **Lucidiom** APMs (a sixth APM is located on the **MotoPhoto** side), a **Luci** scrapbooking kiosk, and two **HP Photosmart Studio** terminals on a table Davidowitz designed.

In the back is a spacious play area with a padded floor covering for kids; a table; and colorful, stacking bins filled with



toys. A mounted TV and DVD player will be added soon.

There is also a pretty, and very clean, bathroom – a critical factor for any business wanting to attract mothers and their children. "This is the best bathroom in our whole shopping center. It has a diaper changing station. It's handicap accessible. It has cabinets showcasing pictures, and I'm going to do a ceramic

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border with pictures to show what you can do with photos in your bathroom at home,” Davidowitz says. “I hope everyone who comes to this shopping center, especially every mother, knows it’s here. If they come in to use it, then they are exposed to my business and The Picture Spa.”

The Picture Spa is connected to the MotoPhoto by a 14-foot opening – which is both good and bad, Davidowitz says.

“One design issue I toyed with is completely enclosing The Picture Spa, but it’s a budgetary issue. If I did that, I would have to have a totally separate staff. Since this is experimental and self-funded, I need to keep my overhead reasonable.

And, I want the visibility for my existing customers to see it,” Davidowitz says.

“Unfortunately, it is a little noisier than I want it to be, and I would have played different music on other side; but I can’t do that now.

Down the road, we may enclose it in glass and just have a doorway; but for now, we didn’t have any other choice.”

Products that can be made in The



There are lots of activities to keep kids busy in the highly visible play area.

Picture Spa are on display throughout the space. Anyone walking in sees items like pop art, collages and framed scrapbook pages on the walls; and a photo table, a photo pillow and throw, and a photo tin and coasters in the lounge area. There is also a bar-height counter where a wide range of photo gift products is displayed.

If it is a success, Davidowitz may open a smaller version in his other store. The concept would lend itself well to multiple locations or even a franchise, he says.

Traditional baggage

MotoPhoto has 11 employees, who also now staff The Picture Spa.

“I’ll be honest – it’s a real culture shock,” Davidowitz says. “Although we have always tried to guide our customers in what they need and make suggestive sales, a typical photo lab is really an order-fulfilling business. The Picture Spa is completely different,” he says. “This is theater. This is entertainment. This is the **Build-a-Bear Workshop** of photo labs, and that is an entirely different business model.

“We want people to come in, get excited about what they are creating and walk away saying, ‘Wow.’ Not everyone in a traditional photo lab environment is geared for that, and it’s a tall order to make that shift. If we had opened The Picture Spa as an independent new store, we wouldn’t have the baggage of the traditional way of doing business. It’s a challenge.”

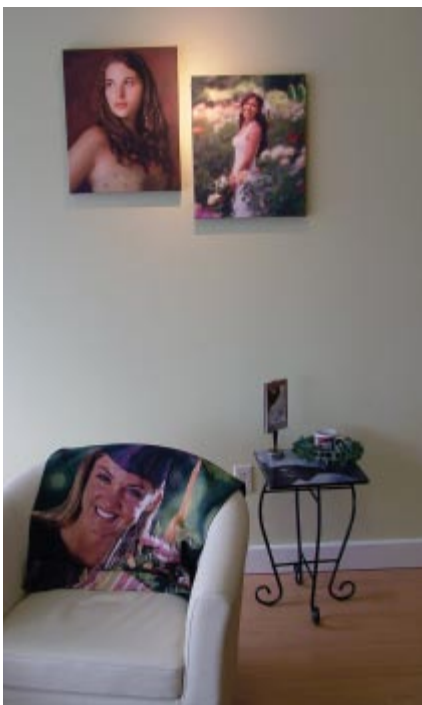
Davidowitz has hired one person (fittingly, a “Jennifer,”) to be based primarily in the spa area. She will be cross-trained to work in the lab as well; but her main focus is to invite customers to use the kiosks, show them what can be made, and answer questions.

“Customers don’t understand all the things they can do with these units, and it’s our job to make them understand,” Davidowitz says. “People who have never used a kiosk before are intimidated. They are not going to just run over and stick in their cards. They need some encouragement to have that first experience.”

Creating comfort from scratch

Davidowitz was a franchise area developer for MotoPhoto, opening more than 20 locations in a 10-year span.

“I could open a new MotoPhoto store in my sleep,” he says. “I know how to design



Product samples in the lounge area help customers envision how these items might look in their own homes.



Before additional space became available, Davidowitz planned to use an area of his Paramus, N.J., MotoPhoto store for The Picture Spa.

a photo lab. But designing The Picture Spa is completely different – these are uncharted waters. There are no rule books in terms of what works and what doesn't."

That fact leads to uncertainty about each and every little decision to be made. Should the counters be desktop height? Kitchen height? Bar height? Should the chairs swivel? Should they be stools? Should they have backs? Padded seats? Wheels?

Davidowitz addressed this lack of certainty by designing tables of different heights and buying inexpensive but attractive matching chairs and stools

with varying features. He plans to watch customers and see what they tend to like best.

"If what we have doesn't work, we can move on to something else," he says.

Although The Picture Spa is in its infancy, so far, it does seem to be working. Customer reaction has been universally positive.

"Everyone tells us it's beautiful, and they are very pleasantly surprised when we offer them coffee or hot chocolate or a bottle of water," Davidowitz says.

Just a few days after the soft opening of The Picture Spa, a customer came in to

make 4-by-6 prints on an APM kiosk. Davidowitz showed her a photo book made on the Photosmart. The following day, she brought in a CD and created a book. When she saw it printed, she immediately ordered four more.

"That is exactly what I wanted to happen," he says.

But even customers who don't make something right away are welcome. "I want this to be a place where people feel comfortable just sitting around," Davidowitz says. "I hope this will become a community location and people will feel comfortable just stopping by here. We're going to have Wi-Fi connection, so our customers will be able to sit here with their laptops like they would at Starbucks. If they are here sipping coffee, they will have the opportunity to realize all the things we can do.

"If the target customer feels comfortable coming here, letting their kids play while they make prints, they will tell people about it," he concludes. "Hopefully, that will turn into many, many more people doing that. My customers are my best advertising, and that's how it should be." ■



Photo gift ideas are on display in The Picture Spa.