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Hero of the Lab – Thom Hekelaar

Every professional print lab has its own hero, this hero ensures the highest possible quality to be delivered to the customer. They are photo enthusiasts and experts in their field. In our opinion these heroes deserve a spotlight, therefore each month we will ask one of these heroes to tell their story.

This time we have interviewed Thom Hekelaar (@thom_hekelaar), Quality and Maintenance Supervisor @profotonet. It is always a pleasure talking to Thom, he talks with much enthusiasm, fun and passion about the photo industry business. He is one of those Originals with extensive knowledge and years of experience.



Who is/are Profotonet?

Profotonet is a professional photo lab located in Capelle a/d IJssel, close to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. We offer high quality prints and wall decoration. The company was originally founded in the early seventies as a wholesale lab and transformed in the nineties to a professional lab. Since 2005 they are doing business online and they are the leading lab in the Netherlands providing prints to prosumer and professional photographers.



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Who is Thom Hekelaar?

I am the Quality & Maintenance Supervisor of Profotonet and have been working here for 8 years now. I am responsible for the quality of our products and the state of all our machines. Being responsible for continuous high quality makes my work fun and challenging every day. Previously I worked as manager of a 1 hour photo lab/shop and portrait photo studio. In my spare time I am a great fan of Formula 1, and I like to listen to music or watch a movie or series. I like to travel with my girlfriend as well, and really enjoy photographing landscapes or cities on our journeys.

Could you please tell us about your professional background?

After my military service I started working straight away. As a manager at a photo studio/photo lab, I learned the tricks of the profession of a photo lab technician. In those years I also worked as a wedding photographer. I was involved with the entire process of photographing, developing, printing and making the album. I am therefore familiar with handprinting according to the wishes of the photographer. When I joined Profotonet, I supplemented my knowledge with colour management, profiling printers and mastering the many different machines.

What has inspired you to enter into the photographic printing business?

I have been a fan of photography since my childhood and started photographing at a young age. At school I joined the photo club and spent many hours in the darkroom. At this age photography dominated my life, so the step to do this professionally was a natural consequence.

Can you tell us about your passion within the imaging business?

I can really enjoy it when I see beautiful photos and it's great to be working in the process that makes sure that these photos come into their own.

How do you think digitalization has influenced photographic printing business?

In my opinion, digitalization has affected the printing business in two ways. On the one hand, the need for a print has diminished. This is because people can easily take their own photos with an acceptable quality. For many people, seeing this photo on their screen is enough and they no longer need a print. On the other hand, the ease with which you can see the results of your photography directly on your screen has resulted in the fact, that more people have started to photograph professionally and also offer their services to others. This in turn results in more prints that the photographers also offer in their packages. Fortunately, there are still more people who see the value of a printed photo, especially in this time of digitalization.



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What do you like most about Fujifilm Original Photo Paper?

I am particularly pleased with the quality of the prints and the fact that this quality remains so constant. Fujifilm continues to develop in the market and regularly comes up with improved and new products. On top of that, the back-up of Fujifilm is also excellent.

Do you have any favourite Fujifilm Original Photo Paper?

I am surprised by the Velvet paper, off which I was a bit sceptical about at first hand, as an old-fashioned photographer. But when you see good images printed on this paper, it is impressive that the experience of the colours can still be so intense, because there is no reflection at all. Also the new Maxima paper with its deep blackness and high colour details surprised me positively.

How do you see the future of professional printing business?

The transition from analogue to digital has initially caused a decline in the printing industry, but we are now at a time when prints and albums are becoming increasingly important. We notice that consumers are appreciating the value of a print again and therefore we also see an increase. Photography and printing are two different disciplines, so I'm looking forward to a bright future. Good photo printing still requires expertise that we can offer as a professional photo lab.

What advice would you give to upcoming photographers?

Make sure you stand out because of your good knowledge of photography, as well as the basic knowledge of your camera. In addition, don't just offer digital images, but also have them printed for your customers to make a better impression. The impression of a print is always bigger than when you see a photo on your screen. And then let yourself be surprised by all the possibilities that prints offer. For example, have a photo pasted on dibond or choose a photo behind plexiglass and be amazed at the quality and appearance that these products bring with them.



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