

Tabitha Geary Company - Preserving Generations of History, One Family at a Time

- Casey Quinlan, Mighty Casey Media

Tabitha Geary founded the first professional memory archiving business in the U.S. in 2005. Her biggest start-up challenge? Finding the right words to communicate what her company does. "It's not scrap-booking," says Ms. Geary, founder and CEO of Tabitha Geary Company (formerly OK Picture This, Inc.), "we preserve and archive memories." Geary discovered that calling her products coffee table books, or memory books, gave her customers a clearer picture of what her company offered.

An additional challenge was differentiating her company from online utilities like Shutterfly and Kodak Gallery, who produce photo-books from digital images uploaded by their customers. The difference there? None of the online photo-book utilities can handle non-digital images like 19th century photogravures, old platinum prints, newspaper clippings, letters, invitations, or any of the host of memory items that a family collects over several generations.

"We're not in the photo printing business," says Geary. "Our competition doesn't digitize images, they handle the digital images sent to them by customers."

As an example, Geary spoke of a pair of memory books created for a family to memorialize their parents. Their father was an officer in the US Navy during WWII, and their mother was a pro golfer in the 1920s. Newspaper clippings collected as she traveled throughout the world during her golf career were glued together, one on top of another, and stored in boxes. The Tabitha Geary crew painstakingly separated each piece of newsprint, putting them in chronological order, and then preserved them digitally. That's not a level of service available from photo processors or online photo utilities.

"Archiving memories is really the best description of what we do," says Geary. To produce the top-notch archiving results her company has become renowned for, Tabitha Geary needed an array of technology tools and a showroom that would inspire trust and confidence in her customers. In May of 2006, angel investors provided just under \$1M of financing that allowed the company to invest in infrastructure: scanning equipment, servers, hardware for handling large digital files, and an inviting, comfortable showroom and offices. Tabitha Geary Company also has off-site back-up storage of its projects, ensuring disaster-proof customer service.

"Our investors have been invaluable in developing products and services that can become national brands."

The press has also helped with the growth of the company. Every article or broadcast has created a stream of new business, with customers saying that they had been looking for something like Tabitha Geary Company without success, until seeing the company's media coverage.

“They say that they’re so glad that we’re here, and that they can hand their memories over to us.”

One Tabitha Geary customer came to the company when her father died, asking them to put together a memory book for the family. She then ordered a memory book for her mother, which was completed before her mother’s death so that her mother could see it. She also did a memory book for each of her children, and started sending her friends to the company for help with preserving their family archives.

Developing the relationships that drive repeat and referral business has been a big part of the growth of Tabitha Geary Company. “Baby boomers are our biggest market right now,” says Geary. “They’re preserving the memories of three generations - their parents, their own, and their children.”

Younger parents are another growth market, with younger moms less interested in photo books than wall art - large format pieces that celebrate and commemorate a child’s sports and school activities or a family event. As Geary herself says, “moms get it.” She also noted that the volume of digital photos being created by today’s families can often mean that photos sit on hard drives, flash drives, and CDs, sometimes for years, without being viewed or shared. Tabitha Geary Company organizes and archives those digital memories, saving their customers hundreds of hours - and creating family heirlooms in the process.

“What has struck me is that people are very confident when they send their stuff to us. They don’t hesitate to trust us with their family’s entire history.”

One of the key factors in developing that trust is the physical space - the showroom - that gives the company credibility, and its customers’ confidence in the company’s products and services. Tabitha Geary Company was located in an office park on Parham Road in Richmond’s western suburbs before re-locating in 2007 to its current offices in a home-like building on Libbie Avenue. Having a comfortable showroom for clients that can also serve as a showcase for the company’s products and services puts customers at ease, and makes it easy for them to decide how they’d like the company to help them archive their family history.

Ms. Geary’s background in physics and mathematics, as well as her experience working for the US Navy and in her own database marketing company, is an indication of how much market research has gone into creating Tabitha Geary Company and its products. Her goal of making her company a national brand will draw on her strategic planning and relationship-building skills.

“Understanding customers, profiling customers, building relationships with customers - these things are a huge part of our business. If people are going to trust us with their memories, we’d better have a long-standing relationship with those customers.”

That approach sets Tabitha Geary Company apart, along with its determination to help its customers preserve precious and fragile family history. The digital revolution has provided tools that allow Ms. Geary's company to literally create a multi-volume family encyclopedia. A popular tag-line has long been "suitable for framing". Family history is "suitable for archiving" - and Tabitha Geary Company is working to make that a 21st century reality for every family.

- Casey Quinlan, the Mighty Mouth of Mighty Casey Media, helps companies and their customers get to "happily ever after" by helping them discover and tell the authentic stories that drive the growth and profit of their brand. Story consulting, storytelling workshops, presentation coaching - what's YOUR story? www.mightycasey.com