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UNIVERSAL SUCCESS



Cheri Baker, Director of
Communications, The
Crowley Company

A lot has happened in ten months. This past November, two industry icons joined together when The Crowley Company (Crowley) made a friendly acquisition of chief competitor Wicks and Wilson, Limited (Wicks).

In March, Crowley introduced the Wicks-manufactured UScan microform scanner at CeBit in Hannover, Germany.

In June, the production release UScan was exhibited at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Anaheim, California.

By July, the firm had completed its third large production run. By September, more than 300 UScan or OEM units are expected to have shipped.

To say a lot has happened is – perhaps – an understatement.

THE TRANSITION

The Crowley-Wicks association likely made some ripples in the capture hardware pond, but to Crowley owners Chris and Pat Crowley and Wicks and Wilson owners Ian McMinn and Bob Randall, the acquisition made sense. “Ian and Bob were considering their personal

futures,” notes Chris, “and we were looking for a stronger foothold in the international market. We’ve respected each other’s work for years and it seemed natural that we would work together.”

Crowley continues, “Our Mekel Technology brand scanners were selling well worldwide either as Mekel units or under their Zeutschel OEM name – the OM-series – but we knew that we were just scratching the surface. The opportunity to have physical locations in both the U.S. and Europe, to marry our deep histories and expertise in analog and digital technologies and to work with the very-qualified reseller base that Wicks had developed was an ideal match with our strategic plan.”

If the immediate success of the UScan is any indication, it’s been a very good marriage.

CREATING A UNIVERSAL SCANNER

Kevin Keeler, research and development manager, believes that brainstorming for the UScan (so named because it is a universal scanner) took place in February 2011. “Although it was a new market area for us, the market was well understood by our reseller base, who

felt that the need for a microform scanner – a single unit that could scan multiple types of media – was growing. The development skills required were similar to those used in our existing production scanners, so we thought we could give it a go.”

Crowley adds, “In the traditional reader/printer marketplace, Canon, Alos and others were exiting – leaving a void. We had been planning a Mekel unit, but saw that Wicks was farther along in R&D. We implemented a full dedication of resources and personnel to this new collaboration and, consequently, were able to bring a high-end, low-cost microform scanner to market in just six months.”

The added business benefit, he notes, is that by bringing a new product to market in such a short time, the two teams were forced to work together quickly for a single purpose, eliminating the lengthy corporate transition standard to most acquisitions. “The Wicks division development team worked closely with our U.S. team. The biggest challenge may have been the time difference.”

Keeler notes that while the five-hour difference did pose a test, the true

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design and technological challenges included designing a quality desktop-size product that could be manufactured at a competitive cost.

Paul Negus, Managing Director of Genus and one of the first resellers to sign on with the UScan, believes Keeler and team have succeeded. "Clients are looking for a small desktop and digital solution to their occasional microfilm scanning needs. The UScan satisfies that need by replacing bulkier, analogue microfilm scanning equipment with a device that is actually very compact and stylish."

THE USCAN: TECHNICAL SPECS

"Crowley and Wicks have a combined 50-plus year experience in the micrographics and digital imaging industries," says Crowley. "We've both lived through the analog-to-digital revolution and became players in its evolution. We manufacture and sell high-end, production-volume film, fiche and aperture card scanners. We understand the old and the new and how the two can work together. The UScan is the physical manifestation of this technical and end-user knowledge. This is not a camera on a carrier, but a fully-integrated scan system designed from the ground up."

To that end, the UScan can read/scan/print/ email:

- Roll microfilm (16/35mm; M and C clips)
- Microfiche (jackets, jumbo, etc.)
- Aperture cards

- Photographic materials (slides, negatives, etc.)

Just a few of the main features include:

- Easy touchscreen all-in-one PC interface
- Whisper-quiet operation (ideal for library settings)
- Interlibrary Loan (ILL) compatibility
- Direct output to searchable text (OCR) in 126 languages
- High-resolution full color LED area array sensor with real-time onscreen view
- Color, grayscale or bitonal capture in 1/3 second per image
- Output resolution up to 400 dpi
- Saves to USB; prints to hardcopy; outputs to the cloud or email
- Lightweight (7.2kg/16 lbs.)

Matthew McCabe, Crowley vice president of business development, has worked closely with Keeler and team to bring the UScan to market. "My job was, and is, to represent the end-user," says McCabe. "At each step of the way, the UScan casing and software goes through extensive testing - always with the question of 'what will work best for the customer.' This is where our experience – and that of our resellers – can really make a difference. We understand the

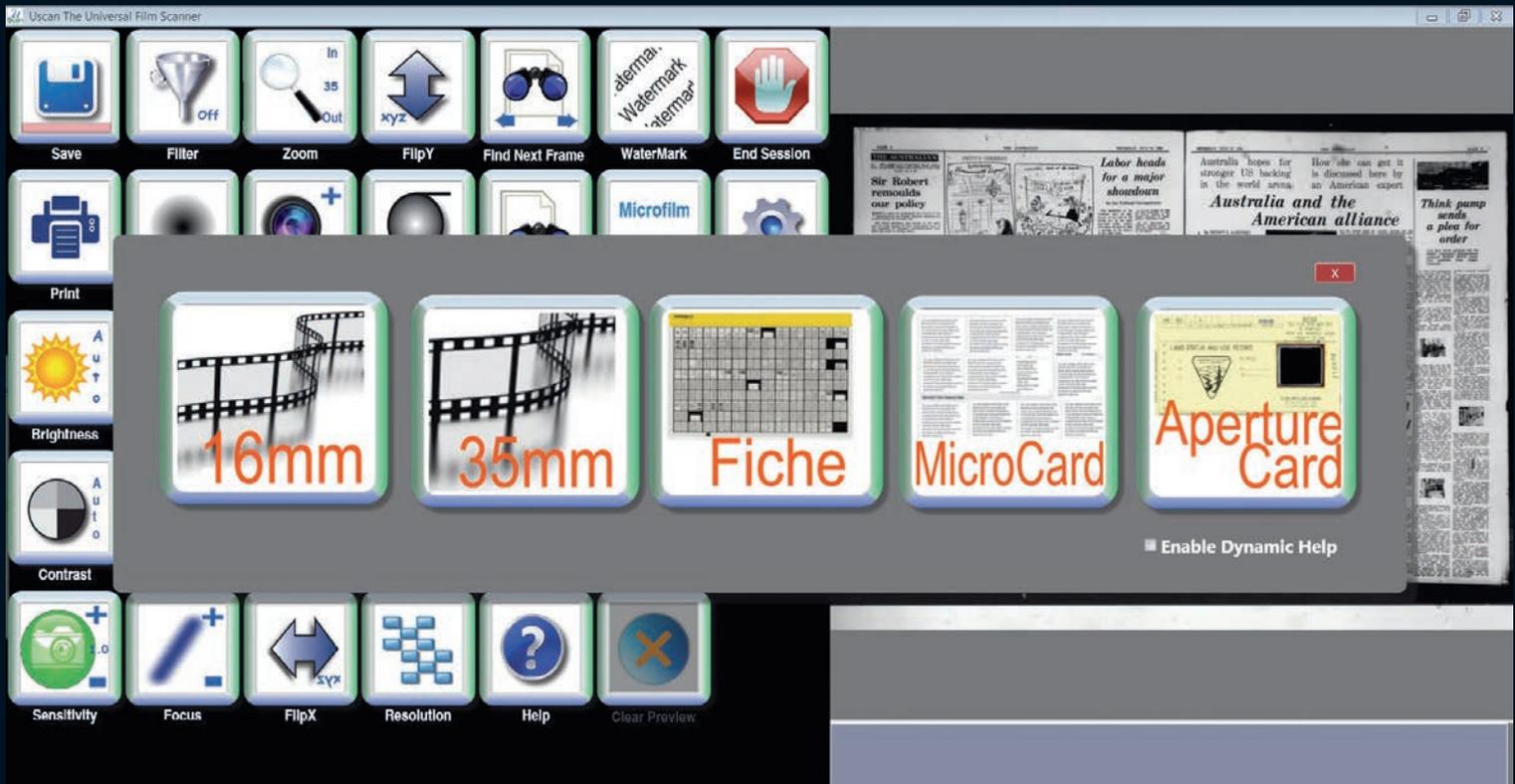
The UScan universal scanner fits on a desktop and scans microfilm, microfiche, aperture cards and photographic materials in a single unit.



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technology. We understand the needs. We just have to put the two together."

Negus agrees, "The UScan is one of an increasing number of products that are new to the microfilm industry in recent years. It shows that investment in new microfilm products, such as scanners and writers, is what clients are demanding. It gives clients the confidence to know that sticking with microfilm is the correct document archiving path. They are buying into a well-proven archiving technology that is moving forward with new products, whilst able to enjoy all the benefits of modern technology and access." ▶



The touchscreen interface makes UScan operation easy for walk-up patrons, using system presets for different media. For advanced preservation scanning, the settings can be directed manually.

◀ A full list of specifications can be found on either the Crowley or Wicks websites.

THE END-USERS

Just who needs a universal scanner? "Anyone in a research setting," states McCabe. "Primary locations are libraries and academic, government and medical institutions of all types – basically any institution, corporation or individual that has reference archives or a microfilm or microform repository."

He expands, "The beauty of this scanner is absolutely in its simplicity. Almost anyone can step up, take a quick look at the touchscreen and begin operation. This is critically important in settings where the end-user is a walk-up patron, such as research student or an everyday citizen."

Along those lines, the UScan also incorporates features such as a Kensington lock system and the ability to host a pay-per-use interface that make it an ideal solution for public settings. "The return on investment is pretty quick with or without a pay-per-use system," notes McCabe.

Keeler adds that "the software user interface is flexible and configurable so that a walk-up patron and an archivist can

uniquely utilize the system. Although the UScan comes with presets for each media type, a more discerning user can override these automatic levels and manually adjust for their own preservation needs."

"...It shows that investment in new microfilm products, such as scanners and writers, is what clients are demanding."

Crowley jumps in to note that there is yet another market in which the UScan has already figured prominently: replacement units. "There are tens of thousands of reader/printers in the world that are on their last leg. Parts are no longer available and the technology has far surpassed that on the original unit. The UScan offers a replacement unit that is both affordable and light years ahead of the technology being replaced. In many instances, folks are using scanners that were developed before the internet and the cloud were even thoughts in someone's head."

A USCAN BY ANY OTHER NAME

In just a few short months, the UScan has not only made a splash in the market, it's ringing true with resellers and distributors. Already it is OEM'd under several monikers – the MACH2 Universal (Mekel); the Ozaphan UScan (Genus); and the delta Universal (Zeutschel).

"We have many reseller opportunities available," says Crowley. "Many in the market know Stuart Winsborough, who was the international sales manager for Wicks. He is now tasked with enhancing our stable of distributors and has been doing an excellent job. He'll be the first one to tell you that the UScan is making it easy."

Crowley sums it all up in a single sentence, "No matter the name, it is the technology that makes the UScan a truly universal unit for both patrons and archivists." ■

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