

Q&A: Shutterfly personalizes gift-giving and empowers the creator economy

Article

Jim Hilt

President, Shutterfly



Insider Intelligence spoke with Jim Hilt, president of Shutterfly, which when combined with recent acquisitions Snapfish and Spoonflower, reaches more than 21 million customers. Shutterfly allows customers to personalize a variety of products, ranging from mugs to cards to home decor.

Insider Intelligence: How has Shutterfly evolved over the years?

Jim Hilt: Twenty years ago, we were the pioneers in digital photos and then photo personalization.

Now, we're moving toward a model that champions for everybody to be a creator. We can turn any person's creative idea into a product.

If you think about the next decade—with web 3.0 technologies, the paradigm around NFTs, and the way unique technology is going to drive the creative economy—we consider our work to be in the epicenter of that and where we are headed in the future.

II: Why is your highest growth rate with younger buyers?

JH: We are living in a more digital world, making the physical product even more important. Customers ages 34 and younger may not be buying lots of physical things, but what they are buying needs to have value.

Younger buyers are used to brands tailoring their offerings to them. If you think about the evolution of direct-to-consumer brands like Glossier and Harry's, they feel much more individual and personalized. The ability to make and create is powerful for the consumer.

Everyone to a certain degree can be a creator, which is taking hold in the younger generation. We're the platform that enables consumers to personalize their creative products, and avoid the hassle of manufacturing and supply chain issues when starting a business.

II: Was it challenging to convince creators and entrepreneurs to use your products to launch their businesses?

JH: The individual has always turned to Shutterfly and trusted us with one of their most important assets—personal photos.

So it's not a super far leap to have a conversation with our consumers about how to enable their creative business. Not just what you do to furnish your house or to send a gift to grandma, but how you can use your design and creativity to create your own economic outcome with our products.

II: What is the future of personalized products?

JH: Any good brand is driving to create a more personalized experience.

What goes beyond that is the personalization of the product itself. It will no longer be sufficient to have a personal experience with the brand. It will actually be, "I want the product that I'm buying from you to be unique to me," and we've been doing that for 20 years.

II: With the gift-giving season coming up, what is your favorite product that you have worked on?

JH: The one I'm most excited about is our ornaments. I'm a Christmas ornament guy. I've got people who love them, so I buy dozens of them, and they all get different pictures and layouts.

I always think about holiday diversity with our products. We've made card designs for Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and other things. I'm trying to find something like a Christmas ornament for every other holiday in terms of the quick hit, so there's a lot of options for our customers.