

Digital Transformation School Photography With Vancols

School photos have been a fixture of British society for generations, with the earliest examples seen during the Victorian era when photography was still in its infancy. Until relatively recently, children and their families took part in a very familiar process, with image packs or image proofs sent home in school bags and the final photo choices paid for in cash, often on a sale or return basis.

Vancols, a familiar name in school photography

Established over 60 years ago, Vancols has become one of the most successful and familiar names in school photography today working with over

1,000

schools and more than

500,000

children

The company has also been at the forefront of efforts to modernise the entire photography experience, from organising photo shoots and image processing to online proofs and purchases.



Delivering a digital-first solution

For the last seven years, IJYI's David Brunning, Head of Technology, has worked closely with the Vancols leadership team to guide the business through the entire technology design and development process.

Implemented as a long-term plan, the importance of delivering a digital-first solution for schools and parents alike became much more urgent, however, as a result of COVID-19 and the need to protect school staff, children and photography professionals.

"As early adopters of technology in the school photography industry, we've always had a close eye on innovation in a relatively staid market. When the pandemic took hold, our objective was to find an effective way of maintaining our services to schools

and families, this meant making the process as safe and simple as possible," explained Janus van Helfteren, Managing Director of Vancols.

“ We had to design a solution that met the safety and security needs of schools and where possible, utilise processes and technology systems that we already had in place. We also worked really hard on PPE-compliant shooting systems and on the ordering system because everything needed to be 'touchless'. ”

A digitally enhanced experience

Today, the Vancols school photography service is a digitally enhanced experience that begins with organising each photo shoot. Schools operate an efficient process where each student is assigned a unique barcode that links them to their images from start to finish.

As each student arrives to have their photos taken, they present their barcode for scanning by the photographer, who is positioned behind a perspex screen throughout the shoot. The whole process is designed to maintain social distancing and ensure schools can continue the photography tradition with complete confidence – measures which will remain in place until official COVID guidance allows them to be relaxed.

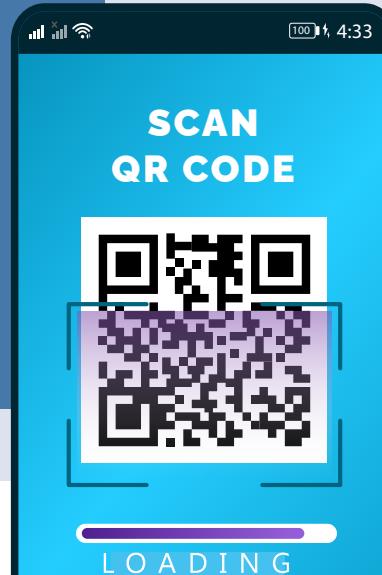
“ Traditionally, the school photography customer experience was based around a 'take it or leave it' approach. Our investment in the process and technology means parents have a great choice of options via our purpose-built online shop. We are enabling them to buy what they want rather than what was most easy for the industry to do. ”

Janus van Helfteren, Managing Director

Immediately following the shoot, images are colour corrected and cropped using purpose-built image software in the bespoke Vancols lab. A test print – using traditional wet process printers – ensures that image quality meets their required output standards.

A full selection of images is then made available to parents online straight after the shoot, who register using a QR code, linking their Vancols account to the images of their children. Offered via laptop, tablet or phone, the secure online ordering process then allows parents to review a wide choice of images, not just a selection pre-determined by the lab, as has traditionally been the case.

Each image can be reviewed across all of the available size options, including the ability to see them in a virtual setting, such as within a picture frame. With 80% of orders coming via tablet or mobile, Vancols also offers parents a wide range of creative and interesting school photo presentation options, from the traditional image style set in a frame to everything from key fobs, bookmarks and even snowglobes. Payments are made securely online, with purchases delivered to the school or to parents directly.



Cloud data storage

A key part of the Vancols digital transformation strategy has been its use of on-premises and cloud data storage technologies, all supported and developed by IJYI through a new 3 year contracted relationship. Using an onsite Storage Area Network (SAN), keeping raw images close to the printing lab equipment, and an offsite archive that resides in the cloud, Vancols has the capacity to deliver on one of its main technology objectives – to securely store Terabytes of image data.

“ Our focus on technology innovation has always been important, but never more so than in the past 18 months. It's very rare that you find a technology partner who really understands your needs and is willing to go beyond the core technical priorities to really focus on your business. ”

“ This kind of long-term relationship has always been highly valued by Vancols and will continue to play a key role as we look to the future with full confidence in our technology strategy. ”

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 **Vancols**
School Photographers