

# Hotspots!: A Printing Company, Not Just Publishers

By Gregg Lasky

Walking through the labyrinth-like offices and hallways of Hotspots Inc.'s Oakland Park facility is a far cry from those early days when a skeleton crew running a printing business launched a gay magazine in hopes it would help pay for new equipment.

"We had put in one phone line over in the corner and it rang once or twice a week," Publisher Jason Bell remembers. "Most of the calls were about how bad the book was and we should go out of business. Some messages on the machine during the night threatened us."

Today, those passageways invariably lead past busy employees and complicated sounding machinery, which spits out magazines, brochures, advertisements and numerous other materials for Fort Lauderdale area businesses.

Hotspots runs a high-speed Novell Network with multiple file servers; a Cybernetics Automated Robotic Tape Back-Up that can store three terabytes per magazine; high-speed RIPS; a four-color 40-inch Heidelberg Speed master Printing Press; and full-color proofing, among others. In addition, a laser-printing capability allows the company to make complicated, multi-colored plates in less than five minutes instead of the four to six hours the process would ordinarily take.

"Hotspots was the first printing company in all of Florida to use this technology," he says. "Now, five years later,

most of the real big companies have multiple machines also."

And the cost was substantial: \$375,000 for each of the two machines.

First Impressions Printing opened in 1984. Hotspots Magazine started two years later.

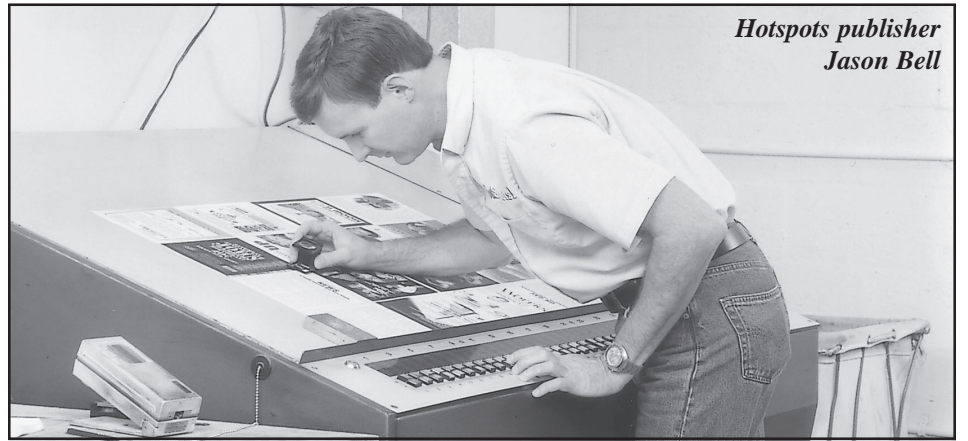
"Unlike every other gay publication in Florida and, I suspect, most of the country, Hotspots was not started because I had a message to get out or that I had a big ego to feed," Bell says. "It was started because my printing company had purchased a new printing press for a customer we had, and before the press was installed, the customer went out of business. What could a bunch of gay guys working in my straight printing company do to generate more income to make the payment on the press?"

What they did was start a new publication to challenge the only other one in the market, David Magazine.

"We had no idea what we were doing and had no experience whatsoever, except in the printing department," Bell says. "The rest was learning as you go."

Luckily for Hotspots, Bell was ahead of the curve in his knowledge of technology, and that propelled the magazine forward. At a time when gay publications were not accepted by the world, it was a gamble. But Bell and his staff hit a few bumps along the way.

"After the first book came out, every business on our street around us received a copy of the new queer fag book



Hotspots publisher Jason Bell

that was being produced in our neighborhood and (told) it needed to be stopped," Bell recalls.

Two days later, someone filled the locks on the company's doors with Super Glue. The front door had to be removed by the hinges and all the locks were changed. But just when a battle seemed to be brewing, a funny thing happened. Neighboring business owners stopped by to offer support and insist they had nothing to do with the glue incident.

"They told us we should look to our competitors and not our neighbors," Bell says. "Since then we have learned that even gay businesses fight other gay businesses to make a dollar. This will never change."

"The gay community has seen some very positive steps forward in equality during these years," Bell says. "Businesses have become 'big business' equal to straight business and are something the world has to deal with, like it or not."

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