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Supplier Spotlight
An inside look at the manufacturers, distributors, and service providers that move the industry forward.

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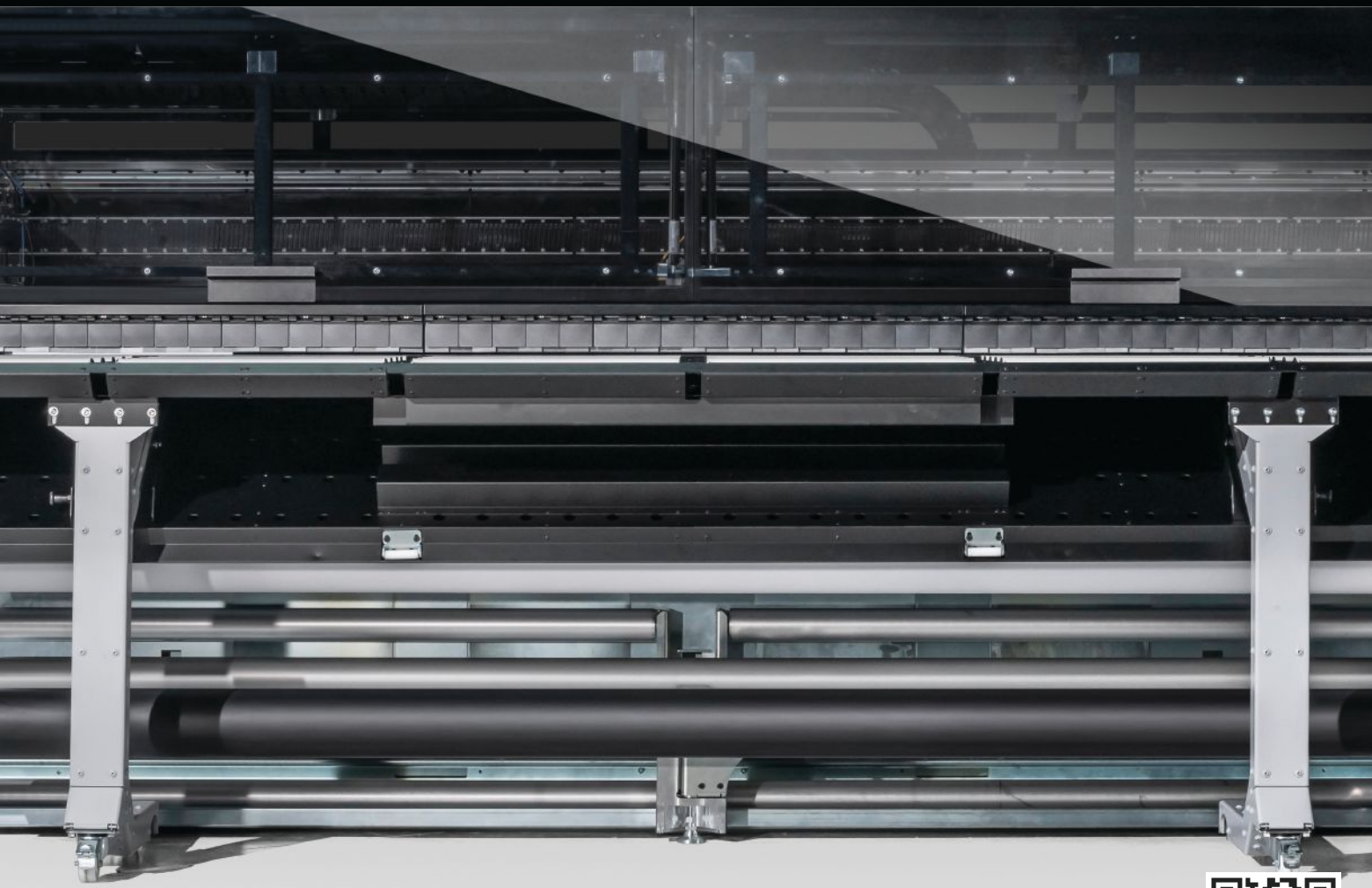
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Plenty to be Thankful for



James Anderson is the lead editor of GRAPHICS PRO magazine. He can be reached at janderson@cahabamedia.com.

We're wrapping up 2024 with our inaugural Supplier Spotlight issue. Inside, you'll find profiles from 30 different advertising partners who took the opportunity to showcase their companies, products, team cultures, values, and more to offer a closer look at the manufacturers, distributors, and service providers that keep our industry moving forward.

As we send this issue to the printer, the Thanksgiving holiday is fast approaching, and I can't help but reflect on the past 12 issues of GRAPHICS PRO that also happen to coincide with my first year with the company.

I'm most thankful for our small-but-mighty production team of Managing Editor Marie Fennema, Art Director Iveth Gomez, and Digital Projects Manager Charlie Fox, who, in the past 12 months, have brought our readers a staggering amount of industry content, including, as of this writing:

- 880 pages of print magazine content
- 426 articles posted to our website, graphics-pro.com
- 298 email news updates
- 23 online sponsored content posts
- Roughly 832 social media posts

Thanks to the many monthly and periodic contributors to our magazine and website who provide the content we're able to share.

There are other very important groups involved in GRAPHICS PRO that I am also thankful for as I look back on the year. First, our sales team of Ryan Applebaum, Seth Messer, and Stacy Marshall, who continually build relationships in our industry that allow us to bring you the news you look for to keep your business competitive. This past year, they've expanded into webinars that have provided a vehicle for advertising partners to connect with our audience in a hands-on, educational manner. Thank you, as well, to the operations team that brings these ideas to reality and the advertisers who make it all possible.

Speaking of hands-on, I'm also thankful for our GRAPHICS PRO EXPO team of Bill Mattes, Jackie Ramsier, Joie Martin, Jessi Tygielski, Katie Ditallo, Leigh Ann Messer, and Kaylor Hagerla. This year, GPX added GPX University, featuring hands-on educational opportunities offered by industry influencers. Be sure to check out g-p-x.com for more information on 2025 shows.

Last, but absolutely not least, I'm thankful for you, our readers. We really do strive to do our best to serve our audience, and nothing makes me or the rest of the team happier than seeing a reader connect with a piece of information that helps improve their craft and their business. That's why we do it, and that's what we look forward to in 2025. Happy holidays, everyone. See you next year.



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SPEAKER

Tong Li, Ph.D.
Founder and Inventor
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Driven by a passion for problem-solving, Tong Li's work is rooted in meeting the emotional and functional needs of diverse markets, from businesses to educators and creatives. His leadership and dedication to customer relationships have positioned AP Lazer at the forefront of the industry, helping businesses tap into new opportunities while delivering unmatched support.

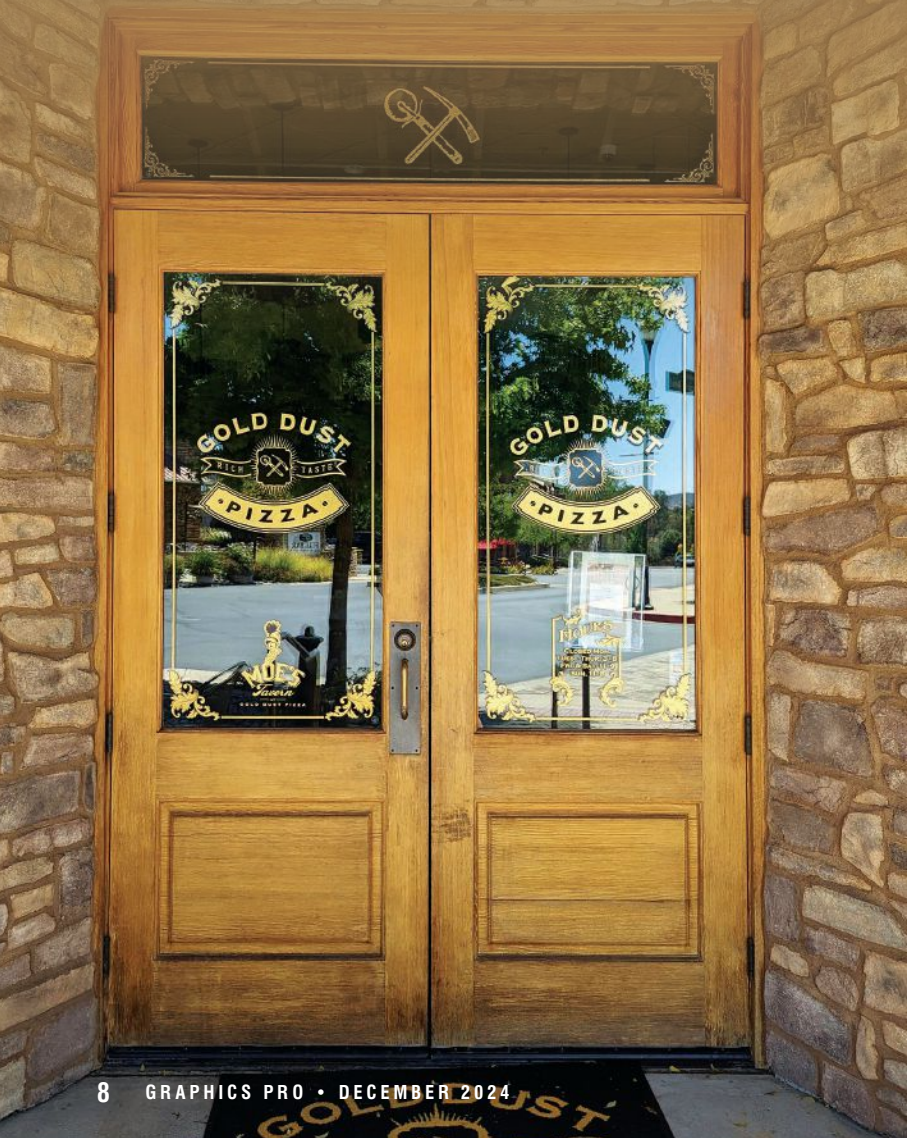
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Window Graphics

Choosing the best option for your customer's needs





Charity Jackson is co-owner of Visual Horizons Custom Signs based in Modesto, CA. She has been in business since 1995, and has worked in the sign industry for over 30 years. You can visit her website at vhsigns.com.

When we started our business nearly three decades ago, if someone asked for window graphics, the choice was cut vinyl lettering. Maybe layers of vinyl if we were really jazzing it up. I remember doing a lot of bullet lists of services and stripes of vinyl across multiple windows.

Now, when we get requests for window graphics, whether on storefront windows or vehicles, there are so many more options. Now we're asking if they need to see out of the windows, if they're wanting to block out the light completely, or if they want solid film, do they still want light to come through?

Cut vinyl lettering is still, of course, an option. And, we still do the occasional bullet list of services, or stripes of graphics, but now we have



This specialty printable gold leaf-look material allows us to create an old-fashioned look with new technology. (Images courtesy of Charity Jackson)



Visibility through vehicle windows, especially on transit vehicles, is easily achieved with perforated vinyl while still allowing for full coverage of the wrap.

full-color printed graphics as a choice, as well as the different adhesives and visibility options.

Narrow choices

With so many options now available, I find we ask a lot of questions to narrow down what the customer is really needing. Like I mentioned, it's a matter of asking what they need from their graphics.

- Do you want full coverage?
- If so, do you want to still see out from the inside?
- Do you want to block the light completely, or do you still want light to come in?
- Are you looking for partial coverage? This could be a partial wrap that's decorative across the windows or contour-cut vinyl.

When cut vinyl lettering is what the customer is looking for, then often it's informational text on the door(s) and a list of services on additional windows. But there are additional choices here as well, like full-color or solid color cut vinyl lettering.

Old school

Before we get into all the printed options, I will say that sometimes keeping it old school is still the way to achieve effective window graphics. If the company needs informational text, that's easy to read, especially if they're on a budget, then cut vinyl is a great option.

That said, when combined with contour cutting, there are printed options that still give an old-school look. The window



These windows received complete coverage, cutting inside visibility, while still allowing some light to come through.





Many of our contractors want to block visibility into their vehicles for security, so we wrap the windows with a solid printable media.



lettering we did at multiple locations for a local pizzeria is printed on a specialty gold leaf-look film.

Since we're able to print the black outline of the graphics directly to the gold vinyl, it eliminates a second layer of vinyl and keeps the cost down. Together, they achieve the look of cut, layered vinyl that matches the customer's brand.

Since we've had such an issue getting SignGold 24KT vinyl over the last few years, we started looking for other options. We came across Encore Gold Leaf from MPC Supply as a great solution. The cost is much less expensive than true gold leaf, something that often matters more to the customer than having real gold leaf.

Perforated vinyl

Many of our large storefront window graphics are full coverage with perforated view-through vinyl. We always laminate our graphics, including perforated graphics, to help with abrasion and UV protection. On perforated vinyl, lamination keeps the small holes from filling with dirt and water, making the graphics look rather dingy.

Most of our vehicle graphics consist of perforated vinyl as well. Many of our customers want to see out the back and/or side windows for safety when driving.

We always explain to our customer that the visibility with perforated vinyl works opposite at night. When it's dark outside and light inside, then the visibility happens in reverse.

This isn't usually a concern with vehicles because we don't drive with our interior lights on, but on building graphics, this should be a consideration. For example, if it's a gym with people working out after it's dark outside, they may not want to feel like they're in a fishbowl being watched from the outside.

In instances like this, we might recommend a combination of graphics. Perhaps perforated graphics by the front desk area



or up higher, where people aren't working out right next to the window, and then a solid vinyl across the lower section.

Solid vinyl

As I mentioned above, some of our storefront windows include solid graphics for privacy, but often they still want light to come through. In this case, there are a few vinyl options that pertain to longevity, adhesive, and light flow.

We've wrapped the windows of a local Skechers store a couple of times as their designs have changed. This project involved another company hiring us to survey the site, measure all the windows, and send them the information. They then sent us the completed graphics for installation.

They sent us vinyl that is designed for flat surfaces like windows and costs less than wrap media. The graphics allowed some amount of light to come through, which prevents the interior from being too dark, but they block visibility to the parking lot from inside the store.

When the graphics are on a vehicle and they need to blend with the rest of the wrap, we print to the same premium wrap media and extend it over the window. The white point of different media affects the color of the print, so it's important to use the same media across the wrap.

The graphics provide solid coverage while still allowing light to come through and the graphics to be visible on both sides. For our contractors with equipment stored in the vehicle, the solid vinyl also helps with security. If someone can't peer in the windows and see what's inside, they may be less likely to break in.

Another common option for window graphics is full-color printed graphics that are also contour-cut to shape. They are not see-through like perforated vinyl, but since the graphics don't cover the entire window, there is plenty of visibility and light around them. For the windows of a children's dentistry office, we did a band of graphics on the outside with printed and contour-cut cartoon images aligned on the outside and inside.

Temporary

We recently wrapped the front windows of a health club that is opening soon. While the interior space is under construction, they wanted to cover the windows with solid vinyl, while still advertising that they'll be opening.

Since the graphics will be up for short-term, we chose a transit media with a temporary adhesive. It's the same media we use for our temporary bus graphics. It prints fantastic and peels off easily.

Decorative

Another type of wrap media we use for interior and exterior windows is more decorative than for advertising. There are a lot of finish options with decorative window films, but one we use often is a frosted film.

It's a wet-application film that provides privacy and blocks visibility, while still allowing filtered light through. At a local college, there is a row of windows. On one side are offices, while on the other side are benches and tables for students gather to study. The school needed to block visibility, but wanted the windows to be subtle and still allow light into the office spaces. The frosted look was a perfect solution.

The film can also be contour-cut for an even more decorative look. The cut areas offer clear visibility, while the rest of the film has a solid frosted look. This was a good option on the large glass windows of the wash tunnel at a local car wash. We cut the decorative stars from their logo, along with some decorative stripes, out of the graphics to create a bit more interest. GP





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Wraps Training & Certifications

Find the courses you need in 2025

Keeping up in a constantly evolving industry like wraps installation can be a tough task, especially if you don't have a lot of time to fit extended training into your schedule. It can be difficult to track down the educational resources you need for certifications and extended training. The best way to find what you're looking for is to contact resources directly to determine when and where classes might be taking place.

"Installers are still looking for manufacturers and industry leaders to continue to be a source of information and training in a post COVID-19 business environment," says Destiny Rotuno, project manager for Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions. "We recommend installers take advantage of

Images courtesy of Avery Dennison



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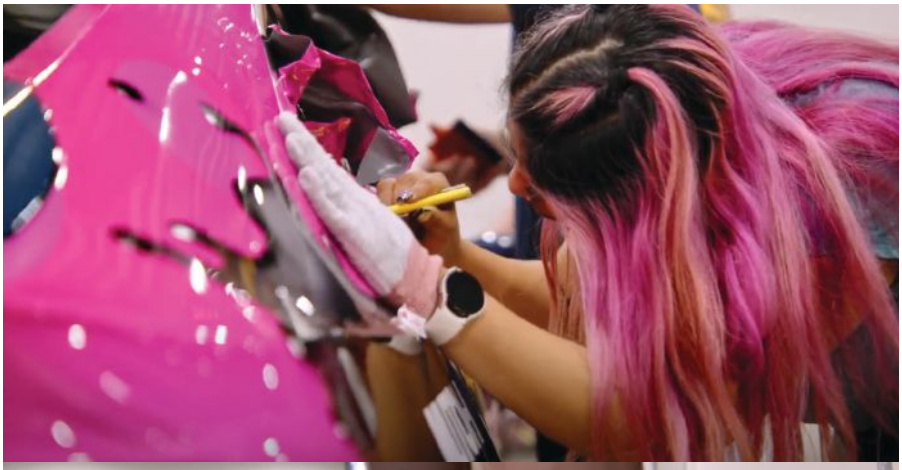
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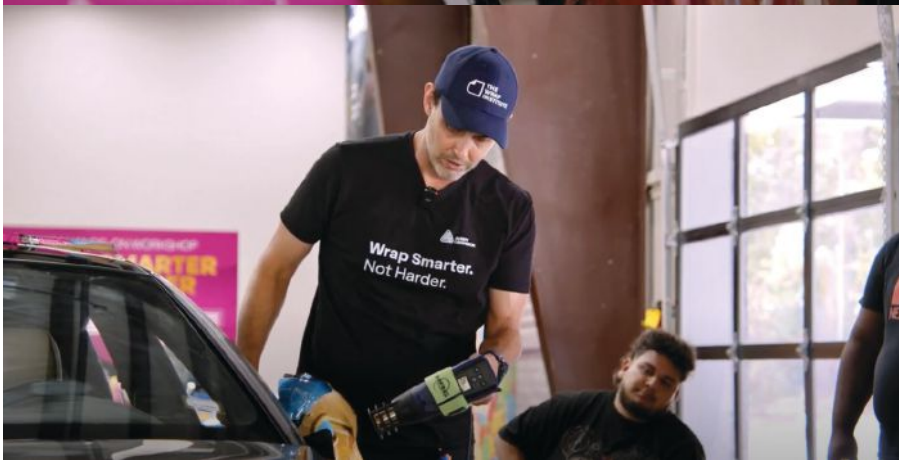


every learning opportunity possible. Look for product and installation training that also includes adapting business practices, leading a team, keeping skills sharp, and staying vigilant with federal and state guidelines."

Scan the codes to the right for more information. Most vinyl wrap manufacturers also list available training sessons on their websites.

GRAPHICS PRO EXPO is expanding wraps training for its 2025 programming, including adding Wrapscon University locations. Visit g-p-x.com for more. GP





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Investing in You in 2025

GPX team gears up for next year's shows

BY BILL MATTES



Bill Mattes is Cahaba Media Group's director of events. Reach him at bmattes@cahabamedia.com.

As we look forward to the 2025 show season, we are investing in many different areas:

- New registration platform
- Mobile app and show directory, plus networking capabilities
- Lead retrieval that uses the same networking capabilities as the mobile app
- Education options during the show

Three of the four areas are about improving the user experience, plus having people network before and after the show. The fourth component — education — is a high priority for GPX in 2025.

Why expand educational opportunities?

As my grandmother used to drill into me as a kid, education is the key to getting ahead. As you learn and gain experience, having that knowledge provides a solid foundation to grow as an adult and provides additional resources you can call upon in your respective industry.

For 2025, besides the sponsored content sessions, we will have expanded non-sponsored sessions, plus our continuation of the hands-on education on the show floor.

- **In Irving**: GPX University, WRAPSCON University, and classroom sessions
- **In Indianapolis**: GPX University, WRAPSCON University, and classroom sessions
- **In Long Beach**: GPX University, the full WRAPSCON experience, and classroom sessions
- **In Meadowlands**: GPX University and classroom sessions
- **In Charlotte**: GPX University and classroom sessions

By adding all of the different educational components to GPX, an attendee can gain additional insights through hands-on and traditional classroom environments. Providing multiple ways to gain this knowledge guarantees attendees can learn in a way that works best for them.

We will be offering classroom sessions for all the areas of the graphics industry — awards/personalization, signage/wide-format printing, apparel decoration, etc. Plus, we will be adding courses on business development, management, and basic legal concepts for small businesses. Our goal is to create an extremely well-rounded educational experience.

Overall, we want GPX to be the place where you view great products and see old friends and make new ones, but to also gain the knowledge necessary to grow and maintain your business. Thank you in advance for coming on this journey with us. We expect 2025 to be a great year and we're sure it will provide a strong foundation for years to come. GP



How B2B Print Service Providers Are Growing Revenue With

E-Commerce Personalization

Drive sales & improve customer experience

BY ABHISHEK AGARWAL



Abhishek Agarwal is the CEO of Design'N'Buy. He has extensive experience in web-to-print solutions and IT.

Personalization has become a game changer for B2B companies, especially in industries like signage and printing, where one-size-fits-all solutions are no longer enough. Buyers today want to feel valued and recognized, expecting suppliers to cater to their unique needs and preferences.

Consider this: 77% of B2B buyers say they'd be more likely to purchase from a business that offers personalized experiences, while businesses using personalization strategies have seen revenue growth of up to 25%. The shift toward personalization is not just about delivering the right product, it's about creating meaningful interactions at every stage of the buyer's journey.

If you're a print service provider (PSP), think about your clients — whether they're ordering customized commercial printing items, promotional items, or personalized packaging. Wouldn't it make a difference if you could tailor your offerings based on their industry, preferred printing techniques, and even order volume? This is where personalization can transform your business.

8 ways to drive sales & improve customer experience

Let's explore how PSPs are leveraging e-commerce personalization to grow revenue, improve customer satisfaction, and build lasting relationships.

1 Uplifting customers' shopping experience through personalization

Personalization begins with understanding the needs and behaviors of each customer. By tailoring the online store's interface, product recommendations, and content based on past purchases, browsing history, or industry, you can create a more engaging and relevant shopping experience. For example, if a client frequently orders promotional banners, showcasing related products like banner stands or large-format printing options can make the buying process smoother and more personalized.

2 Streamline the ordering process

Repeat customers often need to reorder the same products, configure custom items, or place bulk orders. By using personalization to simplify this process — such as offering a "reorder" button, saving previous configurations, or setting up custom order templates — PSPs can significantly reduce friction and improve convenience. This leads to a faster checkout process and encourages repeat purchases.

3 Empower customers with self-service features

B2B buyers appreciate independence and efficiency in their shopping journeys. Offering self-service options like account management, subscription services, or the ability to configure products themselves can enhance the customer experience. This not only reduces the need for constant sales interactions but also gives customers the freedom to explore different product variations, ultimately leading to higher engagement and satisfaction.

4 Help shoppers discover new products: Upsell in the shopping cart

The shopping cart is a prime place for personalization. By analyzing the customer's past purchases and preferences, you can offer personalized upsell and cross-sell suggestions that are relevant to their business needs. For instance, if a customer is buying custom packaging materials, suggest complementary items like personalized labels or inserts to increase the average order value.

5 Offer flexible payment options

B2B customers often have different payment needs compared to individual consumers. Providing flexible payment options, such as credit terms, installment plans, or subscription-based models, can make transactions easier and more appealing. For example, offering net 30 terms for high-volume clients or subscription plans for recurring orders can streamline the payment process and cater to diverse financial preferences.

6 Showcase real-time inventory & pricing data

In the fast-paced B2B environment, providing accurate, real-time data on inventory and pricing is essential. Personalizing this information based on a customer's location, order history, or contract terms can improve transparency and help customers make informed decisions quickly. For instance, a print shop can show real-time availability of certain substrate types or ink colors, ensuring customers have the most up-to-date information before placing an order.



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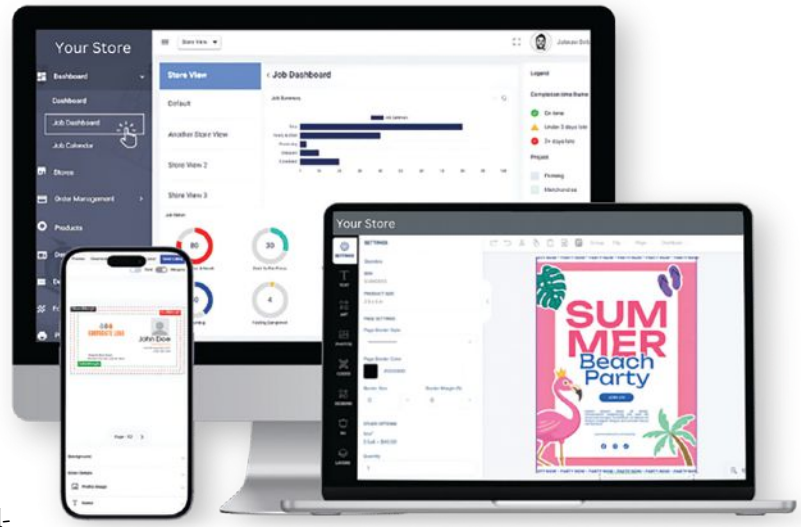
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7 Use e-commerce intelligence to deliver personalized content

Customer data is a goldmine for delivering personalized content. By using e-commerce intelligence tools, businesses can serve tailored promotions, educational resources, or product suggestions that align with each customer's interests. This approach not only boosts engagement but also positions your brand as a helpful resource, making it more likely for customers to return.

8 Welcome new visitors & keep them coming back with personalized messages

The first interaction with a potential customer can set the tone for the entire relationship. Use AI and CRM tools to send personalized welcome messages, follow-up emails, and relevant offers based on the visitor's browsing behavior. This strategy can help convert first time visitors into loyal customers by showing that you understand their needs and are eager to provide solutions.

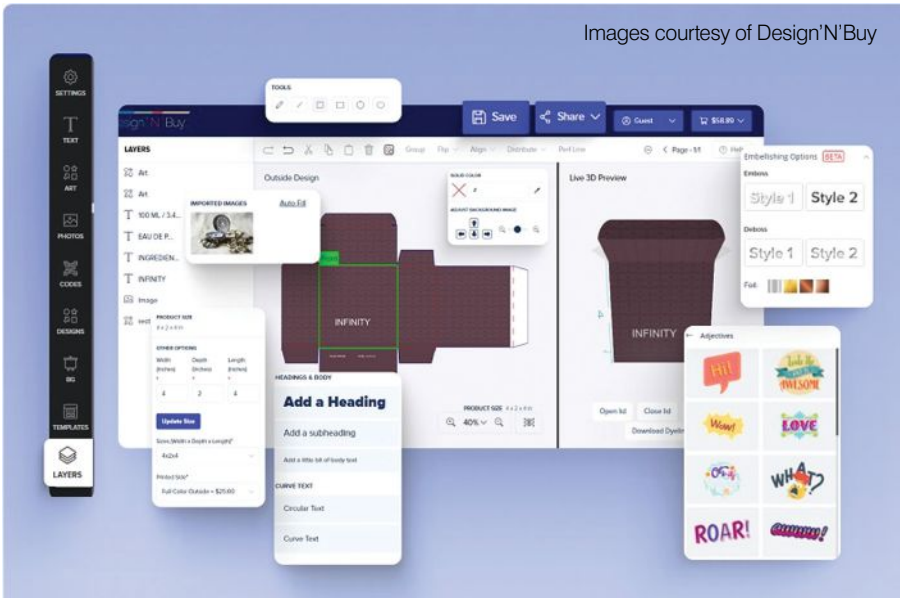
How product personalization software is fueling growth

Beyond the standard personalization tactics, product personalization software is becoming a key differentiator for B2B business, particularly in the print industry. The ability to offer tailored product experiences — such as customizable designs, sizes, and features, allows companies to stand out in a competitive market. By giving customers the power to personalize products to their exact specifications, PSPs not only engage customers more deeply but also build brand loyalty.

One of the most impactful ways B2B print shops can offer personalization is by integrating design tools and form-based quick editors into their online stores. Product personalization software allows customers to create and customize products with their own artwork, text, or company branding, providing an interactive and creative experience. This feature is especially popular for items like business cards, promotional materials, and signage, where customers need specific brand elements to be perfectly represented.

Meanwhile, a form-based quick editor is ideal for simplifying personalization when customers need to make quick updates or choose from predefined options. For instance, if a company wants to reorder business cards but only needs to update the employee's name and title, a form-based editor can make the process quick and error-free. This type of personalization tool ensures customers can tailor products to their needs without requiring advanced design skills.

By offering these tools, B2B PSPs can differentiate themselves from competitors and provide customers with the flexibility and convenience they're seeking.



Images courtesy of Design'N'Buy

Wrapping up

Personalization is no longer just a trend — it's a business imperative for B2B PSPs looking to grow revenue and strengthen customer relationships. From improving the shopping experience and simplifying the ordering process to leveraging real-time data and offering interactive design tools, there are countless ways to implement an effective personalization strategy.

As customer expectations continue to evolve, PSPs that invest in personalization will be better positioned to meet those demands, differentiate themselves in the market, and achieve long-term success. If you're in the print industry and haven't explored personalization yet, now is the time to start. Adopting these strategies and watching your revenue and customer satisfaction rise. GP

Wood Products 101

Why wood is an ideal substrate for customization

BY BARRY STEWART



Images courtesy of Colorado Heirloom.



Barry Stewart is the owner/president of Colorado Heirloom Inc. Colorado Heirloom is a custom wood products manufacturing company that has been producing products for the gifts and awards industry since 1986.

Wood products are a highly popular medium in the awards, recognition, and gifting industries. Wood is recognized as a high quality, stand-alone product and an enhancement for other mediums, such as glass and acrylic. Wood is easy to personalize with many different techniques. Laser engraving, routing, direct-color printing, sublimation, and metal plates are all possibilities for decorating or personalizing wood products. Understanding the desires of your customers will help you choose the best wood medium to achieve the best results.

Uniqueness

The graining in most of the woods is what makes each piece unique. Due to the uniqueness and natural beauty of wood, it carries a higher perceived value. Wood is associated with high-end products that are used for heirloom-type gifts and awards. Many corporate gifts, achievement awards, educational awards, personal gifts, and memorial products are made from wood due to their monetary and perceived value. Even smaller products such as nametags, bag tags, Christmas ornaments, and coasters are great products that can be produced from wood that carry higher perceived value. Wood boxes, urns (human or pet), picture frames, achievement plaques, etc. are all products that can be customized and personalized to become family keepsakes and heirlooms.



Sustainability

Sustainable wood is a very good ecological selection when thinking about the environment. When wood is selected from a sustainable forest, it is one of the most environmentally friendly mediums used in the industry. The sustainable certification assures that the forest has proper management and logging techniques. Strip harvesting is not allowed. That ensures erosion does not occur and nature (wildlife) is not thrown out of balance. Forest management includes planting five trees for every tree harvested and the dead trees and undergrowth that feed





large uncontrolled fires are removed. Uncontrolled fires normally occur in forests that forest management is not allowed in. It is critical for the environment to use good forest management techniques and to keep using and harvesting lumber. In a climate-conscious world, educated buyers realize the benefits of using wood rather than metal, glass, or plastic. It can be a win for all.

Wood byproducts are also a good material source for less expensive products. These products are plywood and MDF. Care needs to be taken when choosing these woods, as when buying solid woods, that they follow certain environmental guidelines. Care should be taken that the material is labeled to be formaldehyde-free. Also, laser engravers need to make sure glitter is not used in the manufacturing of the plywood and MDF boards. The glitter is metal and will affect the cutting of the plywood and MDF.

Most domestically manufactured nonstructural plywood and MDF boards are glitter-free and all are made with formaldehyde-free glues and binders.

Decorating

Many times, more than one technique of decorating and personalizing is used on the same piece. Solid woods are the nicest for laser engraving to get the most consistent natural results without the use of color fills. To get the best contrast when laser engraving without the use of added color fill, it is important to choose the best wood species. Alder, cherry, and maple are all high-quality wood species that work very well with lasers. For best results using direct-color print or laser engraving, it is important to have a good finish on the woods.

A durable lacquer finish is a good choice. Having a good finish on the surface of the wood ensures that the laser residue can be cleaned easily after the piece is lasered. For direct-color printing, using UV-cured inks, having a good finish that pairs well with the inks is important. Printing with unfinished wood can tend to allow the













ink to bleed or soak into the grain of the wood. This can still be a desirable look — more rustic if you will. It is important to know how your personalization techniques behave and act with various wood species and grains as well as using a finish or leaving unfinished.



Staining

A newer trend is going toward colored woods. There are a few ways to achieve a colored wood piece. Transparent stains and opaque stains, colored lacquers, or paint work the best to bring out the richness and uniqueness of the graining. Each stain looks unique on different species of wood. For example, a transparent blue stain looks totally different on maple (the blue stain stays truest to its color because of the light color of maple) versus alder (the blue stain will be slightly darker on the medium tone of alder) versus walnut (the blue stain will appear closer to a navy-blue color as walnut is already naturally dark in color). This coloring gives products a very new look without losing the beauty and uniqueness of wood.

This technique can be used on solid wood or on plywood, MDF, and veneers. Whether your customer needs high-end boxes or nametags, the color can give each product a unique look. Many times, the color can be incorporated into company logos or school mascots/logos and colors. When using stains, it can also be important to adjust the speeds and powers of the lasers. When laser engraving on a light wood with a darker stain, a very nice contrast can be attained with a light engraving (less power) just to remove the stain. Conversely, with a light stain on a darker wood, a higher power will give great contrast and results. Direct-color printing is also a very viable decorating option for stained woods and works exactly as it does on any lacquered surface. Sometimes, for direct-color printing opaque colors, choosing a white finish (stain or lacquer) is the way to go so that when vibrant color is applied, the white base ink is not needed. This technique is normally used on MDF material when grain is not important. GP





Roman – stock.adobe.com

Managing Engraving Substrates

What to watch for, common mistakes & how to fix them

BY JOHN MORMAN



John Morman is the owner of Celtic Tides in Lexington, Virginia. He and his wife, Mary Jo, have been running the shop since 2005. John started laser engraving in 2003.

Let's start with the obvious. Engraving is a fairly unforgiving process, and if we make a mistake, we've pretty much just lost a piece. There are some workarounds that can save you, but I think that, for the most part, it's time to look for a new workpiece when we realize we have made a mistake.

First, the most important thing is to remember there is a difference between using your own inventory and using a special piece supplied by the customer. A mistake with your inventory is bad enough, but a mistake with a customer-supplied piece can be very expensive and can damage your reputation. Most of the more expensive machines will come with an index of suggested settings. In some cases, the suggested settings will be fine. In others, they won't be close. Only experience will get you to the point where you can enter the settings for your machine without a thought. If you have a graphic that includes text, it's always worthwhile having someone proofread the graphic before starting the job.

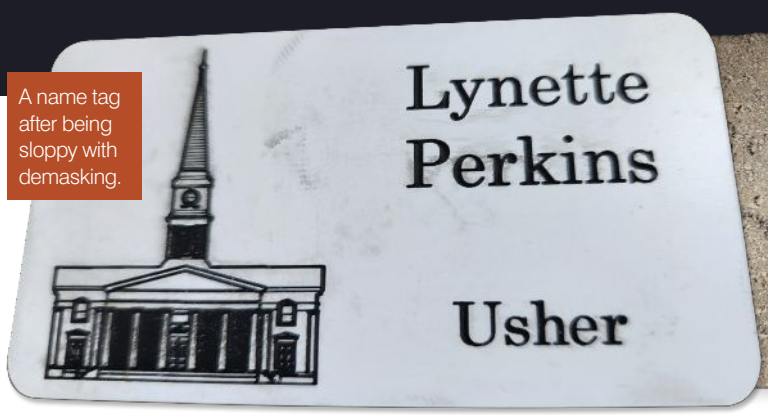
Remember the adage: bad results come from a lack of experience. Sufficient experience comes from making mistakes! Don't worry about making mistakes — as long as you don't keep making them. Have enough material to practice on if you're uncertain.

Wood

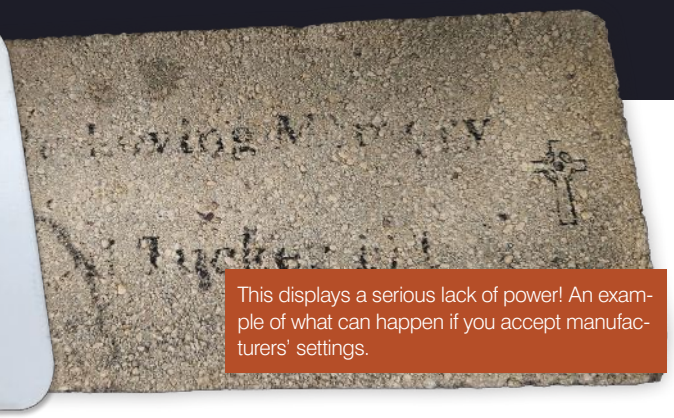
Different woods are going to behave differently, but the potential setbacks are going to be similar. Excessive power settings will cause burning, and insufficient settings will result in poor engraving and



Poor color fill caused by bad masking.



A name tag after being sloppy with demasking.

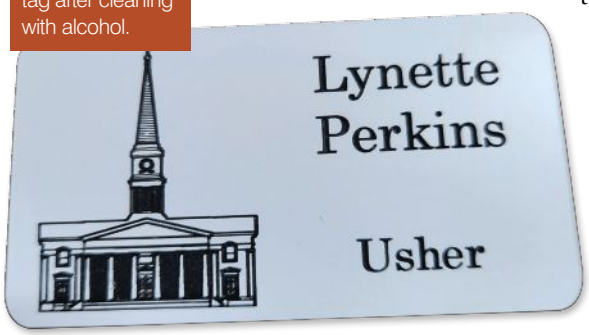


This displays a serious lack of power! An example of what can happen if you accept manufacturers' settings.

an incomplete cut. If a piece burns, there's nothing you can do. If the setting is too high for a cut and the edge burns, it may be possible to clean up some of the charring with the judicious use of some fine sandpaper. With a finished surface, however, it may not be possible to clean it enough. When cutting, be very careful and hold the substrate to avoid changing position. Gently try to remove the piece (or one of the pieces if making multiples) to check if the piece will separate. If the cut didn't go all the way through, adjust the power and repeat the cut.

Another issue that can arise with cutting is a result of the natural variations in wood. Sometimes, the piece will separate almost completely but tear the last little bit on the obverse side. If the tear leaves a scar on the finished piece, use your own discretion and see if you can clean it up with fine sandpaper. If the tear extends from the finished piece into the substrate, gently remove the jagged piece with a razor and finish the edge by hand.

If you have created the graphic yourself, the only adjustments you will probably have to make will be adjusting the grayscale to maximize the contrast between segments. If you create a bitmap, you can adjust the tone curve to alter the contrast or brightness (if that feature or something similar is provided with your software). Another way to improve the appearance of the graphic is to adjust the lens height on your machine — different people have different ideas about how to do this. I am generally pretty happy with changing the height by about .05" closer to the lens.



This is the same tag after cleaning with alcohol.

Now, having said that, a mistake will generally ruin a piece, but there is one workaround if you do make a mistake. Sometimes this will work with a graphic, but sometimes it won't. Draw a dark-shaded rectangle around the portion of the job where the mistake lies and run two passes (one pass may be enough). Then, run a piece using microsurface plastic or foil and create an inlay. I'd check with the customer first and make sure that is acceptable.

A point to remember is that the engraving and cutting process releases oils from the wood onto the surface. That can be cleaned with a mild cleanser or even soapy water. I usually give the piece a gentle application of furniture oil to brighten up the finished piece.

Bamboo

Although bamboo is treated like a hardwood (as far as settings are concerned), the substrate is made by cementing shredded bamboo strands. The combination of the inconsistencies of the bamboo and the cement creates variations in the material which affect the graphic. One tip for improving the result is to raise the bed about .01" out of focus and run the piece. I usually add a second pass by raising the bed by another .005".

Glass

Some material indexes offer two settings: one for glass and one for crystal. I have found that, as far as my jobs are concerned, using the crystal setting works better for all glass. In almost every instance of a mistake happening with glass, you're stuck. A second pass with different settings is not generally going to help, although you might be able to run a second pass if you used insufficient power. Otherwise, the only hope you might have is if you are working with a flat piece, in which case you might be able to make an overlay to conceal the problem.

Most of my glass work involves rotary work. There are several things that can go wrong with using a rotary adaptor for glasses, tankards, or mugs. Unfortunately, they're all "terminal." Too much pressure from the rotary adaptor can cause the piece to crack or even shatter. An incorrect focal length setting will spoil the engraving. I always recommend using wet masking with wet paper when working with glass. If the mask dries out too quickly, the paper may lift and interfere with the beam, causing a defect in the engraving. On a rotary job, if you're using a wet mask and the glass isn't secure, it may slip and spoil the image. If the glass is crooked on the adaptor, the same thing can occur.

Microsurface plastic/acrylics

Mistakes with plastics almost exclusively arise from too much power. Too much power will burn the plastic. Insufficient power generally doesn't ruin a job because a careful second pass will recover the graphic. You may need to repeat engraving passes, particularly if you're working with bicolored substrates for jobs such as name tags. I have found that two passes at a lower power pass get me a better finish than one high-power pass.

Cutting creates smoke, which will



(Images courtesy of John Morman)



Two issues on this one. A: Incorrect focus on a curved surface. B: The bottom right corner shows what can happen if you try to correct.

stain the plastic — which you can usually remove with a gentle rub of an alcohol-soaked soft cloth. The single best way to avoid smoke damage is to use a good adhesive masking paper. I'll run the cloth around the cut edges before removing the mask to try and avoid smudging. Be careful and try to keep your hands clean and avoid smudging the finished piece.

Leather/paper

In a general sense, you use the same philosophy with these materials as you do with wood. Careful testing at various powers and speeds will get you to the point where you can cut and engrave these more delicate materials with confidence. I recommend using an adhesive masking paper on leather, but you need to be more careful when cleaning off the residue because leather is more fibrous and more liable to staining.

Metals

We can pretty much expect to be able to mark pewter, stainless steel, and anodized metals. Hard anodized material can present some challenges and may be beyond the capabilities of some lower-power machines. It is possible to work with some other metals, but consult with your machine's manufacturer first. You will probably not be able to work with metals that have been finished with a clear coat, but again, consult with your machine manufacturer. There are two primary methods of working with metal: engraving compound and direct engraving.

Engraving compound: Used on ceramics, stone, or selected metals is definitely a one-or-done process. This is one application where I have found the factory index for settings to work fine. Focus height, power, and speed settings are critical, particularly with stone or ceramics. If you're going to err with power, err on the high side, and I always use a commercial water sealer with ceramics and stone to help preserve the marking.

Direct engraving: Some manufacturers have offered lenses that allow some degree of "mechanical" engraving on metals with lower-power machines. I have not personally tried these, so again, you should discuss this with your manufacturer.

When working with metals, there are a couple of things to remember — again, focus and power are very important. If you don't get that right, you'll definitely get a poor image, and you might even remove the marking along with the excess when you clean off the compound. If you reapply the compound to try and fix a problem, you are likely to take away the good part of the graphic. When applying the compound, which can come in an aerosol spray, tape, or a powder that can be reconstituted into a light paste, don't use too much. I personally have never had much luck with the paste or the tape, but I have spoken with engravers who prefer them. Lastly, make sure you don't overspray and be sure to put your piece where the coating will dry uniformly so you don't have "thick" or "thin" spots. Either will affect the finished graphic.

Other than getting settings right, the two biggest issues will arise from not first cleaning the metal thoroughly. Some pieces come with adhesive labels which leave residue when removed, and some cast, turned, or spun metals have release agents or lubricating material left on the surfaces. A thorough cleaning — I prefer rubbing alcohol — is essential, or the compound will not adhere properly.

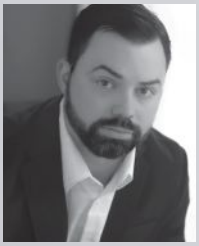
Color fill

Color fill on wood, some plastics, and leather is a great way to add value to a piece. Always mask carefully and be very careful with clean up.

Whatever you work with, learn as you go and try not to waste material. After all, it's not just a substrate — it's money! GP

Get Ready for Next Year

Investing now will set you up for a successful 2025



Howard Potter is the co-owner and CEO of A&P Master Images, along with his wife, Amanda Potter. Their company offers graphic design, screen printing, embroidery, sublimation, vinyl graphics, and promotional items. Learn more at masteryourimage.com.

This is just another year ... or is it? Many people in our line of work are reporting that buying is down by 20%, which means sales are drastically down for many distributors, yet this doesn't hold true for all companies. Often during a major election year, several companies slow down their buying to see how the results may help or hurt their company going into the new year.

So, what has happened in the past year? Several national companies have closed locations or gone out of business altogether and, on top of that, several smaller distributors have retired.

Another major shift we are seeing is larger companies in our industry buying each other out to acquire market share. When I look at all of this, I see the potential for massive holes in the market, and the possibility of many companies making major moves, and even several to fail if they do not pivot to the needs of the market.

Since our company opened in 2003, we have gone through the Great Recession when free trade opened up, the COVID-19 pandemic, and several major presidential elections. Still, we continue to adapt and overcome at each turn. Over the past two years, our company grew 42% in sales, which is above normal for companies in our line of




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work. This year, however, we are focused on maintaining our sales and not necessarily growing them.

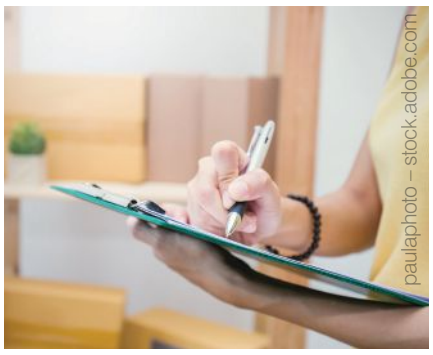
Why? Because when you grow by that much you will hit growing pains along the way. You need to take time to evaluate and reset where any fixes or adjustments need to be. It does not matter how much you grow if you are throwing money and energy out the back door. You then create your own hamster wheel. It takes a lot of self-control to hit the pause button. You are better off taking one step back to make three moves forward.

Many in our industry are frozen right now and not sure what to do or when to do it. So what is everyone doing? The majority have stopped all spending and investing. Why? If you are good at what you do and you take care of your customers, then you keep moving.

What are you doing to prepare?

We are looking at all our supplies, determining what we buy the most of and working with our suppliers to create bulk-buying deals. Why do this now? Have you received email offers that some suppliers are dropping their pricing by 10% or more? This is the perfect time for you to buy stock on items you know you will need.

Now look at equipment purchases. When everyone slows down buying is when we, on the other hand, are investing. Many major equipment deals out there can save you $3,000 to $5,000 on average. On top of that, if you buy it this year you


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are again lowering your taxable income and helping yourself to expand. In the past two years, I have written several articles on direct-to-film (DTF) and UV printing and why every small or large company should be investing in it. It is basic math. Why would you want to invest in making changes when everything is at its peak pricing?

If you know you have a great customer base, and these lower prices will help you cover the cost and you can keep more work in house to control the turnaround time and quality, then this is a huge gain. So, which is easier? To promote to sell to a new customer or investing into a new process and sell to an existing customer? In my 21 years of experience, it has always been easier to build up a process



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by outsourcing it and then to later invest in bringing it in house and promoting it directly to existing clients. I would rather own the equipment and only run it three days a week than trust someone else to care about our customers as much as we do. Remember, a piece of an equipment is an asset and not a liability. It is only a liability if you are not making money with it.

Analyze customers

Look at your customer base and pay attention to buying habits. Over the years, companies that are financially sound and growing tend to spend the most when the markets are down. Why? Look at COVID-19. A lot of companies thrived during those times, and the companies that did not pivot either failed or went financially backwards and have still yet to recover. So, start researching new sources of customers now rather than later.

Remember, everything in business comes down to basic math, data analytics, logic, and drive. If you have all of this going for you, why would you worry as much as the next person when your company is running like a well-oiled machine? Make your investments and focus on your goals. If you are great at what you do, this is your time to shine! GP



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STRATOJET HAWK CLEANPRINT

A roll-to-roll printer using synthetic water-based inks, the **Hawk CleanPrint** from StratoJet is rated at three years for outdoor durability unlaminated and suited for printing on all types of roll media such as solvent, eco-solvent, or latex printers up to 66". A cooler drying level serves as an evaporation process, meaning no volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Ink is said to dry instantly for handling, laminating, or cutting. The new synthetic water-based ink system from StratoJet has been in use for years internationally and now available in the United States. ***stratojetusa.com***

GCC LASERPRO PIOLAS 400



GCC LaserPro has introduces the **Piolas 400** laser engraver, featuring an engraving speed of 175 IPS. The tool's 40" X 24" work area is designed to handle projects of all sizes. Equipped with SmartEYES CCD technology, positioning is said to be seamless, and the live-view camera is ideal for educational use. The brushless DC motor with closed-loop servo control is designed to ensure fast, precise laser movement. The company also offers special financing options. ***gccworld.com***



STAHLS' 120V DUAL AIR FUSION IQ

STAHLS' Hotronix has introduced the 120v model of the industry-leading **Dual Air Fusion IQ** heat press, now available in addition to the existing 240v model. This new voltage offering is a developed to make maximized heat printing more accessible to a wider range of apparel decorators, small businesses, and print shops of all sizes. The introduction of the 120v model means more decorators will benefit from the Dual Air Fusion IQ without having to modify their electrical infrastructure. ***stahls.com***

BLAZE LOW BLEED WHITE 7042

International Coatings Company has reintroduced its **Blaze Low Bleed White 7042.** It has been reformulated to offer enhanced print characteristics and is designed to be easier to print and delivering fast-flash, low tack, high performance, and a superior hand. Blaze Low Bleed White 7042 is developed to print more easily than other opaque whites, using a finer screen mesh to achieve the same opacity as a more open mesh. Blaze Low Bleed White 7042 is now part of the FlexCure line, which means it can be cured at temperatures ranging from 290 F to 320 F. It's low-cure, low-bleed properties are developed to help stem dye migration on cotton/poly blends as well as on most polyester substrates. ***iccink.com***



EASY PEEL TECHNOLOGY FROM NINJA TRANSFERS

Ninja Transfers has announced the launch of **Easy Peel Technology**. This new offering is said to mark the next evolution of DTF transfers, replacing traditional cold-peel methods and enhancing-hot peel applications. Easy Peel Technology is designed so that users can peel film immediately while hot or wait until cool with the ability to pull slowly at first and then fast to ensure it is properly adhered to the product. The transfers feature a new double matte film that also allows for better color and print alignment for transfers. ***ninjatransfers.com***



ATLANTIS HEADWEAR RECYCLED VISORS

Atlantis Headwear is collaborating with ReTraze to reduce plastic waste and promote sustainable solutions in the promotional products industry. Known as **Atlantis x ReTraze**, the new recycled visors are created by upcycling discarded fishing nets and plastic bottles. The recycled visors offer consumers a sustainable headwear option, while also keeping discarded materials out of landfills and oceans. ReTraze has developed a vertical supply chain that transforms abandoned fishing nets and other plastics into 100% recycled PE panels. ReTraze visors are said to generate 37% fewer CO_2eq emissions compared to conventional visors. ***atlantisheadwear.us***



Supplier **Spotlight**

A SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

An inside look at industry manufacturers, suppliers & wholesale distributors.



In this Supplier Spotlight special section, GRAPHICS PRO invited advertising partners to submit profiles offering an inside look at their operations. Manufacturers, suppliers, and wholesale distributors were encouraged to showcase their company culture, values, history, manufacturing processes, commitment to service, quality assurance, employees, and other factors that make them unique.

It's a first step toward getting to know your industry partners, which can lead to building trust and camaraderie and, ultimately, enjoying shared success. After all, even the most independent shops can't do it alone. **GP**

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American Apparel



American Apparel is redefining the boundaries of blank apparel with an exhilarating foray into streetwear focused styles, a natural evolution for a brand rooted in crafting culture. With a brand point of view that champions individuality and creativity, American Apparel invites you to "Craft the Culture," offering a fresh spin on style that resonates with today's trendsetters.

At the heart of this streetwear revolution lies the iconic 2001 style, a T-shirt that has become synonymous with American Apparel's commitment to quality and style. This staple piece, known for its fit and premium fabric, serves as a blank canvas for self-expression, embodying the brand's ethos of timeless style. Complementing this classic is the heavyweight garment-dyed collection, which has quickly become a favorite among customers. These pieces offer a unique blend of style and durability, ideal for making a bold statement.

Over the past year, our music activations and pop-ups were more than just marketing events; they were cultural touchstones that highlighted American Apparel's role in shaping our new narrative. Attendees were treated to exclusive previews of new collections, live customization sessions, and interactive installations that brought the brand's "Craft the Culture" mantra to life.

Looking ahead to 2025, we're introducing the 9410 and 9001 styles — where super heavyweight meets super trendsetting. Riding on the wave of our beloved heavyweight collection, these pieces take it up a notch with their bold, oversized silhouettes. Crafted for nightlife, concerts, and entertainment settings, they offer a cool, confident vibe that stands out in any crowd. Whether you're hitting a gig or just owning the urban landscape, the 9410 and 9001 styles are your ultimate go-to for making a statement.

But we're not done for 2025: we're also leading a charge into the youth category. Taking the iconic well-loved 2001 style, the O.G. classic, we're tapping into the youthful spirit that values innovation and individuality with our 2001 Fine Jersey Youth T-Shirt.

American Apparel's journey into streetwear is not just about clothing; it's about creating a community where style is a shared language. The brand's approach is bold and unapologetic, much like its audience, who value authenticity and creativity over fleeting trends. By embracing streetwear, American Apparel continues to push the boundaries of fashion, offering pieces that are both iconic and innovative.

In a world where fashion is often seen as disposable, American Apparel stands firm in its belief that style is eternal. The brand's latest collection for 2025 and innovative activations are a testament to its enduring commitment to quality, diversity, and cultural influence. As American Apparel invites you to "Craft the Culture," it reaffirms its place as — always iconic, always ahead of the curve.

Our designs are inspired by you. How you live, how you create, and how you express yourself boldly. GP

americanapparel.com/us/en/craft-the-culture
customerserviceactivewear@gildan.com

B2Sign

At B2Sign, our mission is to empower print resellers by providing seamless, high-quality, large-format digital printing solutions that allow our partners to focus on what matters most: growing their businesses. As a behind-the-scenes partner, we take pride in offering reliable, trade-only printing services, empowering our clients as if they do it all in-house, effortlessly managing complex projects and tight deadlines.

Our national footprint is a key advantage for our partners. With three strategically located print facilities in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Dallas, and an additional Los Angeles sign fabrication center, B2Sign provides unmatched capacity in the trade-only sector. Spanning over half a million square feet of production floor, our facilities are equipped to handle high-volume orders with speed and precision. This extensive network ensures that 90% of U.S. customers are within a two-day ground shipping range of a B2Sign location, providing our resellers with fast, cost-effective delivery options that meet their tight deadlines.

B2Sign boasts a diverse product lineup, offering the hottest items in digital print. From grand-format vinyl banners, rigid signs, dye-sublimated flags, soft signage displays, table throws, direct-to-film transfers, and an array of adhesive vinyl for every application, we are proud to provide a full array of cutting-edge solutions. We offer various print technologies, including UV printing, dye sublimation, and eco-solvent printing, ensuring the right fit for every job.



In addition to our comprehensive large-format offerings, B2Sign provides illuminated signage fabrication through our popular channel letter division. Whether your customers need traditional front-lit or backlit letters or modern stainless steel faced halo-lit letters, we offer thousands of combinations to meet every signage requirement and local code. Our commitment to innovation and versatility ensures that we have the right solution for any application.

We understand the dynamic and fast-paced nature of the printing industry. Whether you're bidding on a large-scale order, handling overflow, or looking for a hassle-free way to fulfill a specialty one-off print, B2Sign has your back. We are dedicated to supporting our resellers with consistent, high-quality products, fast turnaround times, and a user-friendly online platform. Our Next-Day Production Guarantee means that even under tight timelines, you can count on B2Sign to deliver.

At the core of B2Sign is our commitment to making the print production process as simple and efficient as possible for our customers. Our state-of-the-art online quoting and ordering system is available 24/7/365, providing instant access to pricing and order placement. No more waiting for quotes or chasing down details — you have the power to get your projects started anytime, anywhere.

We're proud to partner with over 40,000 resellers across the country, providing the infrastructure and expertise that enable businesses to thrive. Apply for a trade-only account today. GP

b2sign.com
info@b2sign.com
888-739-8501



ComfortWash by Hanes

Enjoy the journey. Taking a weekend road trip, singing along at a concert or vacationing with family, these are the moments we live for. ComfortWash is ready to help make those memories last with our 100% American-grown cotton styles. These garment-dyed, vintage washed silhouettes are up to the challenge of capturing the best moments with their durable construction, exceptional printability, and cozy softness.

With details like shoulder-to-shoulder taping and double-needle sleeves and bottom hems, ComfortWash makes the ideal canvas to preserve the experiences you don't want to forget. Plus, you can feel good knowing that we source most of our cotton in the rain-rich states of the Southeast, utilizing advanced farming methods and water optimization strategies to create less impact on the environment. And, because ComfortWash garment dyed apparel is crafted with U.S. grown, ring-spun cotton, it's a great choice for all types of decorating techniques including direct to garment, plastisol, screen printing, embroidery, and more.

Focused on comfort and innovation, it's easy to see why our entire collection is a decorator's best friend. Designed with embellishers in mind, the ComfortWash advantage gives creators the ability to easily navigate common decorating issues, like correcting simple mistakes and eliminating dye migration. When most garment dye products fall short and can't handle shoot out, ComfortWash can, which means less waste and faster order fulfillment. In addition, the dye used to create these vintage washed tees removes the need for using poly-based inks to offset bleeding or dye sublimation.

Embrace the fun with our bestselling Short Sleeve Tee and Short Sleeve Pocket Tee. These popular styles offer the comfort and softness that your customers are looking for in a unisex relaxed fit. Available in plenty of trending tones, our classic garment dyed silhouettes provide the printability you need.

For the cooler months, our relaxed fit Fleece Pullover Hoodies and Crew Sweatshirts make it easy to take time and unwind. Perfect for hanging out at the beach or stargazing around the firepit, our super soft cotton and polyester blend sweats have a relaxed fit and come with an easy-to-embellish 100% ring-spun cotton face.

Keeping your customers in comfort, our Pullover Quarter Zip and Polo Collar Sweatshirt are ideal for camping in the mountains or grabbing coffee with friends. These fleece styles are made with a smooth blend of U.S. grown cotton and polyester. They also come with a 100% ring-spun cotton face that provides optimal printing results.

For the adventure takers and memory makers, the ComfortWash collection of tees and sweats provides a cozy and long-lasting way to hang on to life's most important memories. Always fun and casual, all of our styles are available in crowd-pleasing colors and are just the right canvas for preserving those unforgettable moments. Wherever the road leads — make it memorable. GP

brandwearunited.com/pages/comfortwash
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800-685-7557





Epilog Laser

In business since 1988, Epilog Laser is the leading designer and manufacturer of small-format, mid-size, and larger-format CO_2 and fiber laser engraving, cutting, and marking systems.

Our USA-made laser machines range in speed from 65" per second to 165" per second and come in a variety of sizes and wattage configurations. Used in a variety of industries, Epilog's laser systems can work with an extensive list of materials including wood, acrylic, glass, marble, textiles, plastics, and much more. Our powerful systems are incredibly easy to use, designed for production, and manufactured to last.

All the lasers in our product line feature the IRIS Camera Positioning System, which has revolutionized the way our customers work with our laser machines. With our sophisticated technology, you can place your artwork for engraving and cutting more quickly and accurately than ever before. The included overhead cameras provide an accurate live view of any material you place on the laser's work surface. This allows you to drag and drop your artwork directly onto your sheet material, part, or product, giving you greater control and faster turnaround times. In other words, it makes bringing your laser projects, products, and creations to life quick, easy, and more fun!

We also provide extensive support, including training resources, tutorials, and a community forum, helping users get the most out of their equipment. For the past three decades we have remained committed to innovation and customer satisfaction within the laser technology space. GP

epiloglaser.com
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Hanes

Since 1901, Hanes has been making everyday apparel known around the world for quality, comfort, and value. Today, the brand you know and trust keeps bringing you the styles your customers love to live in. Because we're dedicated to bringing the best to the printwear space, we're continuing to offer new styles and print technologies that make it even easier for decorators to do what they love.

In 1975, we saw that the T-shirts being used in the branded printwear world weren't getting the job done. We knew what we had to do — create the Hanes Beefy-T, the first ever T-shirt designed for screen printers. For the past 50 years, this iconic heavyweight tee has been a go-to, decorator-friendly blank.

Inspired by printers, creators, and embellishers, our Beefy-T is all about the details that matter. We crafted the Beefy-T to be bold, with 6 ounce of 100% U.S. grown, ring-spun cotton. It's designed with double-needle stitching and shoulder-to-shoulder taping for extra strong seams. Plus, we added Clean Canvas print technology to solve some of the most common decorating issues. By removing oils and waxes from the fabric, it creates a smoother printing surface while reducing variations and inconsistencies.

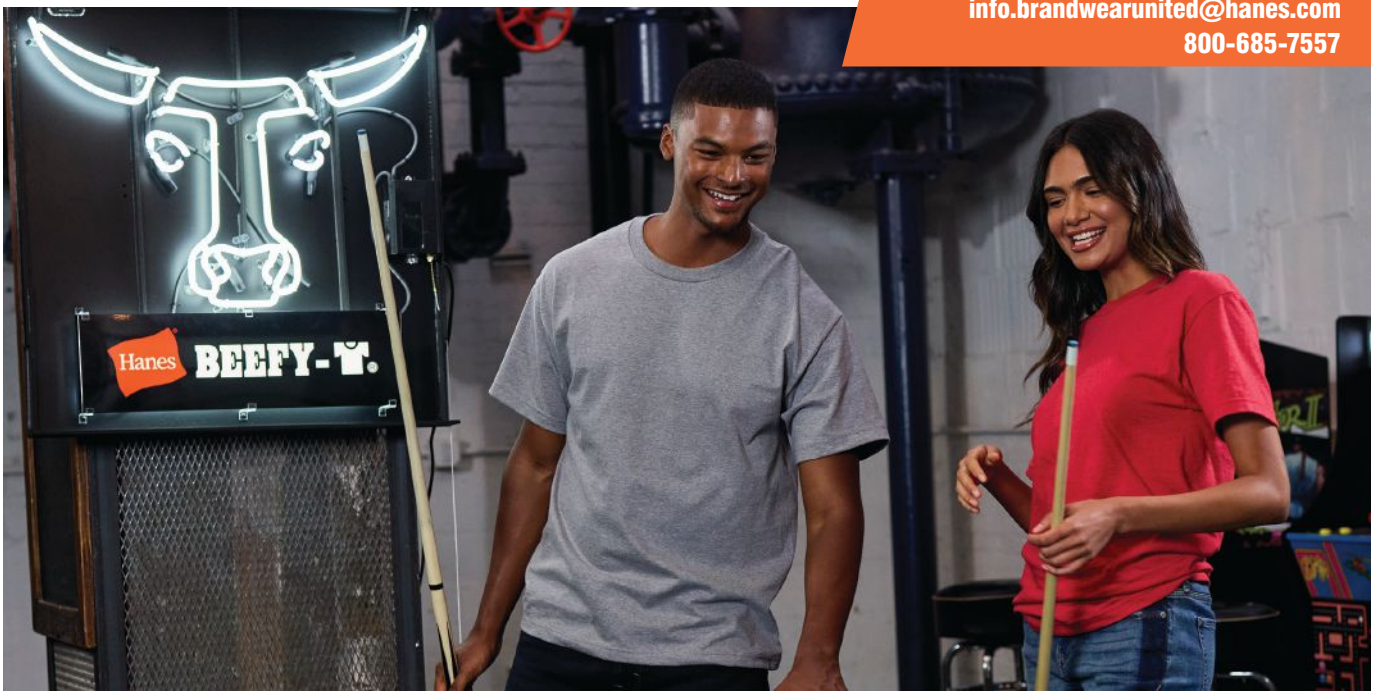
As we celebrate 50 years of this legendary tee, we've created the new Beefy-T Retro Street Tee. This vintage vibe T-shirt has an even heavier weight, at 7 ounce, and is oversized for the perfect level of comfort. Made with the same great 100% American-grown, ring-spun cotton as the original Beefy-T, this new style also has Clean Canvas technology, making it the optimal platform for your next inspired design.

Like the creativity that developed the Beefy-T, we've always been committed to innovation and sustainability. We believe it is important to continuously seek to improve the raw materials that we use and find better options for our environment. That's why we've created EcoSmart polyester, a technology that allows synthetic plastic-based fibers to behave more like natural fibers once they are in a landfill as compared to untreated polyester. And because this innovative solution significantly accelerates the breakdown of plastic fibers in soil and the sea, ultimately it is reducing microplastic waste in the environment.

It's this same passion driving us to develop inventive T-shirts, like our Perfect-T Pretreat Tee. This tee arrives with every surface ready to print DTG, eliminating those extra steps and added expenses it typically takes to pretreat a standard T-shirt. PrintNOW technology takes the chemicals, additional machines, and downtime out of the printing process — making it faster and easier to get orders out.

It's clear to see that these are no ordinary blanks! From our crowd-pleasing Perfect-T and Perfect Sweats to the legendary Beefy-T, we bring you the styles and comfort your customers really want. With original print technologies like Clean Canvas and PrintNOW, we're making decorating even faster and easier. And you can always be proud that American-grown cotton is being utilized in our products. You've got a choice — don't take any blank! GP

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JDS Industries

Founded in 1973 by Darwin and Jane Sletten, now owned by their son Scott, CEO, and Mike May, president, JDS Industries is the world's leading supplier of component parts for awards, promotional products, gifts, and sign supplies, distributing world-wide from 13 warehouses coast-to-coast. The centralized call center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, open from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. CST is staffed with an award-winning customer service team that handles all orders and service-related matters. Our website offers shopping convenience and many resources to help you enhance your business. JDS has received many national and international industry awards for product innovation and outstanding service to customers. At JDS, each customer is valued and seen as a true business partner, and every effort is focused on helping you succeed. To learn more about JDS Industries, "Your Recognition, Personalization & Sign Supply Partner."

You can find us on social media.

YouTube: youtube.com/@JDSINDUSTRIES
Facebook: facebook.com/JDSINDUSTRIESWHOLESALE
Instagram: instagram.com/jds_industries
TikTok: tiktok.com/@jds_industries

Products & services description

Our over 30,000 products include trophy and award components, gifts and engravables, promotional products, and sign supplies. We provide technical assistance for sublimation and lasering, and our fabrication department can help with your outsource orders. GP

jdsindustries.com
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Los Angeles Apparel

Los Angeles Apparel stands as one of the largest apparel manufacturers in the United States and the G7, yet we're more than just a name in fashion. Founded by industry visionary Dov Charney with a commitment to redefine industry standards, we operate with a clear mission: to create high-quality, ethically produced garments while championing sustainability, fair wages, and community investment. At the heart of this mission is our unique, vertically integrated model that ensures every step of the production process happens under one roof in South Central Los Angeles, allowing us to maintain precise control over quality and minimize our environmental footprint.

With roots in the cultural mosaic of Los Angeles, we draw energy and inspiration from a community that's as diverse as it is dynamic. Our operations are based in the heart of South Central, where we're committed not only to producing garments but to creating stable, well-paying jobs for local residents. Here, our skilled garment workers earn a starting wage of $20 an hour, with opportunities to make up to $35 an hour with productivity bonuses, all in an environment that respects and values the hands behind every piece.

Our contrarian philosophy extends to sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Nearly 100% of our production and shipping byproducts — scrap fabric, paper, boxes, and plastic — are recycled. We lead the charge in ethical production by using environmentally friendly cotton, upcycled materials, and organic or reclaimed fabrics, and we finish our textiles in California, where the industry's strictest environmental standards are enforced. This dedication to sustainability is not just about reducing waste; it's our commitment to eliminating the harmful practices of fast fashion by creating timeless basics designed to last. These quality essentials are not only versatile and functional but built with durability in mind, serving as wardrobe staples for years to come.

Our focus on advanced manufacturing and innovation allows us to stay competitive on a global scale without sacrificing ethics. Our fully domestic supply chain, which sources over half of its yarn from U.S. producers, strengthens the local economy and reduces carbon emissions. By supporting U.S. farmers and the domestic yarn industry, we bolster the health of the national manufacturing base while contributing to environmental sustainability. This approach aligns perfectly with the needs of apparel decorators, engravers, and signage experts, providing them with consistent, high-quality garments ready for customization in graphics and digital printing markets.

For businesses seeking a partner dedicated to quality, ethics, and sustainable practices, Los Angeles Apparel offers unparalleled value. Our commitment radiates vision, passion, and innovation, driving us to challenge industry norms, prioritize local jobs over offshore production, and build a future where sustainability and efficiency drive profitability. That's Los Angeles Apparel: a company that's not just about apparel, but about ideas, values, and a bold new standard in American manufacturing. GP

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MUTOH



For print service providers, large signage is more than a service, it's a staple that demands reliability, efficiency, and exceptional quality. Yet, these projects often present real challenges. Shops frequently contend with maintaining color consistency, handling large files, and meeting tight deadlines without sacrificing speed. Fortunately, today's advanced printing technology makes achieving these goals possible, allowing high-quality results with optimized productivity.

Consistent quality across large-format signage is essential to satisfy client expectations and retain their business. Color inconsistencies, banding, and alignment problems often lead to wasted materials and costly reprints. The XpertJet 1462UF tackles these common issues with its precision engineering, delivering vibrant, sharp images from edge to edge using its award winning UH-21 ink. With reliable, consistent output, shops can meet high standards while avoiding the rework and downtime that cut into profits. MUTOH has also created a Start Right Kit (a $999 value) to go with every XpertJet 1462UF that teaches print service providers various print techniques, to ensure high-quality prints from day one.

In addition to high-quality output, print shops need versatile equipment to handle the diverse media demands of today's clients. Ranging from classic yard signs to larger outdoor displays and custom substrates for unique signage, the XpertJet 1462UF accommodates a broad array of applications. With a convenient print area of 55" X 27" and the capability to handle objects up to 5.9" thick and 10 pounds per square foot in weight, this printer makes it easy to expand service offerings. Its UV-LED ink technology ensures durability on various surfaces, making it ideal for both indoor and outdoor use. Whether producing durable signage, specialty displays, or ADA-compliant Braille, the XpertJet 1462UF delivers quality and versatility that lets shops confidently meet a wide range of client needs.

In the fast-paced printing industry, the ability to deliver on tight timelines is crucial. Print shops often must choose between speed and precision, especially with high-volume orders. The XpertJet 1462UF comes equipped with MUTOH's RIP software bundled with Flexi MUTOH edition (a $2,100 value) and offers high-speed printing without compromising on quality. Its UV-LED curing system ensures prints are dry immediately, eliminating finishing delays and accelerating workflow. This productivity means shops can take on last-minute orders or large projects with ease, enhancing customer satisfaction and fostering business growth.



Large-format projects can be waste-intensive, from extra materials to reprints due to quality control issues. By using precise ink control, the XpertJet 1462UF minimizes waste, which not only reduces material costs but also supports sustainability. This efficiency allows shops to boost profitability and meet the growing client demand for eco-conscious practices.

Downtime can disrupt production and delay schedules, but with the XpertJet 1462UF, maintenance is straightforward. Its self-maintenance features help operators keep production running smoothly, reducing the time spent troubleshooting. This feature lets shops meet tight deadlines consistently without compromising workflow.

Large-format signage remains a powerful tool for visual communication, and having the right equipment is essential for staying competitive. The XpertJet 1462UF doesn't just solve common production challenges; it empowers print shops to expand their capabilities, exceed client expectations, and boost profitability. For shops ready to elevate their large signage offerings, the XpertJet 1462UF is the reliable partner they need to drive success and deliver outstanding print quality. GP

mutoh.com
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Ninja Transfers







Ninja Transfers leverages over a decade of experience in custom apparel. With that, we realized that there was a place in the market for a consistent, high quality, high service company. We solved questions which were abundant in the DTF transfer space, such as… How does it feel? How shiny or matte will it be? How durable is it through washing and use? With Ninja Transfers, you will get the softest, matte, most durable transfer because we've researched, customized, and tested every component part of it. From the powder, ink, film, heat, cure times, press times, washing instructions, all the way to saying, "Hiyaah!" when you complete the pressing process.

DTF (direct to film) and UV-DTF is not just our business, our Ninja eats, sleeps, and nunchucks DTF every day. We are crazed about speed, quality, and service with no minimums. We've even made it possible to order by 3 p.m. ET with next day delivery for about $25 or get free shipping on any order over $75.00 with standard delivery.

We made the decision early on that DTF would be the ONLY transfer we specialize in because the process of printing DTF consistently and reliably requires intense focus and dedication. With 85+ DTF printers producing tens of thousands of transfers daily in both our East and West Coast facilities, it enables print shops and PPDs (promotional product distributors) to grow their business with a supplier they can trust.

Ninja Transfers not only prints DTF transfers, but we actively test them over 10,000 times per day on real orders to make sure they are consistent in color, quality, and pressability. Most transfer companies are just that. Transfer companies. Ninja, however, has a white-label customization brand called NinjaPrinthouse.com, where hundreds of orders are customized using our own DTF transfers daily. Ninja also sells heat-pressable patches through our NinjaPatches.com brand, with nine-plus patch types which elevates a customized product for not much more than the cost of a transfer. Ninja Patches also offers a selection of custom patches with five-day rush production. Now, you can expedite your custom patch order and receive your custom patches even faster.



NinjaTransfers.com is your one-stop shop for all your custom apparel needs. From our DTF transfers, to UV-DTF transfers, to custom patches and even premium blank apparel, Ninja Transfers can help you take your business to the next level. GP

ninjatransfers.com
service@ninjatransfers.com
888-356-3665

Signs365

Signs365 is a grand format, trade only, wholesale print company. We have 30-plus products to fit your needs, including banner, rigid signage, and adhesive materials. We are committed to providing excellent image quality, quick turnaround, and dedicated customer service.

24-hour print production and $10 Overnight Anywhere shipping are standard. When you place your order by midnight, it prints and ships tomorrow, for delivery the next day! GP





signs365.com
800-265-8830

EMP Corp



Founded in 2008, EMP Corp. began as a supplier of engraving equipment, providing businesses not only with top-tier machines but also with the installation and training needed to maximize their value. Through years of successful partnerships and satisfied clients, EMP evolved from its beginnings in rotary engraving technology, finding its niche in the laser industry. Focusing on laser engravers and cutters, EMP quickly built a reputation for delivering high-quality equipment, exceptional customer support, and a dedication to innovation that has driven its success.

After partnering with several laser manufacturers, EMP solidified a strategic alliance with Aeon Laser, eventually becoming its exclusive U.S. distributor. This relationship marked a turning point for EMP, helping Aeon become a major name in the laser industry. More than just a distributor, EMP invested heavily in research and development, driving new technologies to make laser systems more user-friendly, reliable, and efficient.

Among its notable innovations, EMP launched the Multiroller, an industry-first tool that enables users to engrave multiple stainless steel tumblers simultaneously — a significant boost in efficiency and productivity for engravers of all types. The drive to enhance fume extraction led to the development of the Iris System, a pioneering technology that automatically switches between upper and lower extraction zones, providing precise and effective fume management.

Most recently, EMP introduced the EMP Touch, an intelligent rotary device designed to eliminate cumbersome setups by streamlining the fixturing of cylindrical items, while also enhancing repeatability and batch processing. EMP has also released a line of proprietary consumable products, including acrylic, wood, faux leather, and tumblers. A collection of supplementary products like a material storage cabinet, plug-and-play air compressor, hat press, water chiller guard, wireless networking device, and a laser fire suppression system scheduled to launch in 2025, further confirms that EMP is a company focused on enhancing the complete customer journey.



Perhaps the most prestigious of EMP's most groundbreaking achievements is the release of the EMP Signature Series, the fastest and most reliable CO_2 laser system available on the market today. Built on the chassis of the new Aeon Redline Series, EMP takes it to a whole new level with an ensemble of American made components designed to meet the needs of professionals who demand faster cycle times and unwavering results. The assembly process is carried out by a single EMP technician who then proudly signs it upon completion.

Expanding beyond CO_2 lasers, EMP has ventured into fiber laser technology, introducing fiber marking machines, welders, grinders, and sheet metal cutters. By bringing affordable sheet metal cutting technology to the sign industry, EMP is opening new revenue streams for smaller shops, making metal fabrication accessible to businesses that once found it out of reach.

With an impressive track record of innovation, quality, and affordability, EMP Corp is setting new standards in the laser industry. By focusing on making advanced laser technology accessible to businesses of all sizes, EMP continues to shape the future of laser engraving, cutting, welding, and marking. GP

aeonlaser.us/emp-signature-series
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EMP LASER
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STABLILITY AT ITS CORE

USA MADE HERMETICALLY SEALED CERAMICORE® RF LASER TUBES BY IRADION WILL NEVER REQUIRE A GAS REFILL OR LOSE POWER OVER TIME.

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INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

EXPERIENCE SHORTER CYCLE TIMES WITH NEAR ZERO CHARRING TO HELP GREATLY REDUCE OR EVEN ELIMINATE PAINSTAKING SCRUBBING AND POST PROCESSING.

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900+ 5 Star Reviews

ASSEMBLED IN USA

Graphtec

Established in 1949, Graphtec's corporate philosophy emphasizes the pride every member takes in the company's products. The pride comes through at all stages, from preliminary planning and design to final delivery. This commitment does not stop at the factory door. It extends to services and customer-support personnel around the world because Graphtec never forgets what is at stake every time you choose one of its products.

Graphtec cutting plotters are designed to meet the demanding requirements of design professionals in packaging, vinyl signage, apparel, monument building, and the manufacturing design industries, with a diverse line of roll-feed and flatbed plotters. GP

graphtecamerica.com
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800-854-8385



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GRAPHTEC

PRECISION CUTTING SOLUTIONS

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Johnson Plastics Plus



For over half a century, Johnson Plastics Plus has been a trusted leader in distributing high-quality engravable sheet materials, sublimation products, sign frames, standoffs, equipment, and a wide variety of related accessories for the sign and display industry. Originally established as Johnson Plastics, the company has evolved significantly over the decades, adapting to market demands and technological advances. In 2017, the company rebranded as Johnson Plastics Plus, following the successful integration of two other prominent players in the industry: Bur-Lane Inc., and LaserBits. This strategic move not only broadened the company's product offerings but also strengthened its position as a comprehensive source for sign-making supplies and equipment.

Johnson Plastics Plus prides itself on being a single source for all things related to sign and display creation. Whether you're a small business owner looking to expand your product range or a large-scale manufacturer, the company's diverse inventory has you covered. The company offers innovative, cutting-edge materials that meet the highest industry standards. A standout in their product line is Rowmark's EcoMark, an environmentally conscious choice that is the first laser and rotary engravable sheet material made from post-consumer recycled plastic. EcoMark is a prime example of how Johnson Plastics Plus continues to lead by offering unique options without compromising quality.

Another pioneering product is Rowmark's LaserGlow, which is engineered to exceed stringent photoluminescent signage standards. LaserGlow is ideal for creating safety signage and other display products that must remain visible in low-light conditions. By offering advanced materials like these, Johnson Plastics Plus demonstrates its commitment to providing high-performance products that are both functional and innovative.

Beyond materials, Johnson Plastics Plus excels in offering a complete line of equipment from some of the most trusted and reputable brands in the sign-making and personalizing industry. From Epson and Roland to Flux, STAHLS', and Geo Knight, the company's inventory spans everything from lasers and printers to cutters and heat presses. These machines are suitable for businesses of all sizes, allowing them to enhance their capabilities and expand their customer base. Whether you're just starting out or looking to upgrade your existing setup, Johnson Plastics Plus has the right tools to help you succeed.

When it comes to mounting solutions, Johnson Plastics Plus offers an impressive range of options. They provide a variety of metal and injection-molded sign frames and desk holders that are readily available in stock sizes, ensuring quick and efficient delivery for standard projects. For more unique needs, the company can also assist in creating custom frames and configurations to meet specific requirements. For clients seeking contemporary, high-quality mounting solutions, the company offers Gyford stand-offs, clamps, and rod and cable systems, which are known for their durability and design excellence. Manufactured in the USA, Gyford products are trusted in the art and museum industries and are an ideal choice for professional installations.

Headquartered in Findlay, Ohio, Johnson Plastics Plus operates a user-friendly and comprehensive website, jpplus.com, which boasts over 15,000 products available for online purchase. The company's extensive distribution includes locations in Carrollton, Texas, Reno, Nevada, and Findlay, Ohio, with fabrication facilities located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This widespread reach and dedicated customer service team available across multiple time zones ensures that Johnson Plastics Plus can effectively meet the needs of customers throughout North America.

By continuing to offer top-tier products, industry-leading brands, exceptional service, and expert advice and support, Johnson Plastics Plus remains at the forefront of the sign-making and display industry. GP

jpplus.com
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800-869-7800



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LAT Apparel



Since 1982, LAT Apparel has dedicated itself to providing high-quality blank products that not only meet, but exceed our diverse clientele's expectations. We concentrate on exceptional printability, vast selection, and superior fit, offering product lines that cater to men, women, teens, kids, babies, and even dogs. Our commitment is to use combed ring-spun cotton and expertly developed fabrics, ensuring that each garment not only looks appealing but also feels comfortable, providing a smooth surface ideal for customization. Ethical production is crucial to us, with our socially compliant, WRAP-certified factories demonstrating our commitment to manufacturing free of sweatshops and child labor. Through our brands — LAT Apparel, Rabbit Skins, Code Five, SubliVie, and Doggie Skins — we present a variety of innovative products. Whether it's the exceptional features of LAT Apparel, the classic styles of Rabbit Skins, the unique camo designs of Code Five supporting great causes, the premium sublimation shirts of SubliVie, or the comfy canine wear from Doggie Skins, LAT Apparel is at the forefront of quality and ethics in the textile industry.

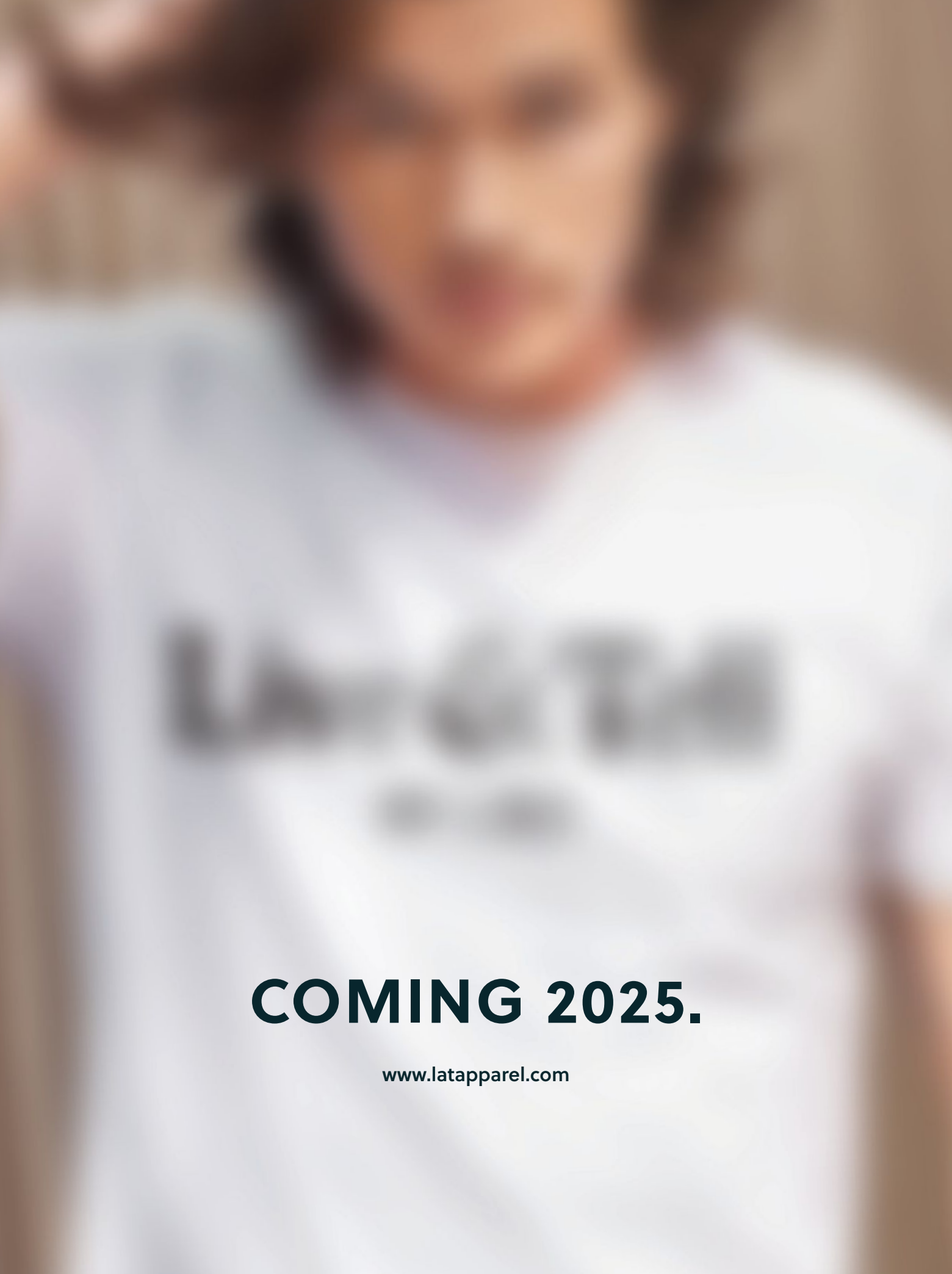
As we move forward, LAT Apparel is thrilled to announce the unveiling of something new and exciting at the upcoming January 2025 trade shows. This launch marks another milestone in our journey to blend innovation with tradition, ensuring our products continue to exemplify our values of quality and responsibility. This forthcoming announcement will not only enrich our existing offerings but will also redefine the standards of excellence that our clients have come to anticipate from us.

Our unwavering pursuit of excellence, dedication to ethical manufacturing, and commitment to building strong, respectful, and trustworthy relationships with our partners are at the core of LAT Apparel's identity. As we continue to grow and innovate, our focus remains on enhancing our fabric quality while expanding our product lines to meet the diverse needs of our global clientele. By consistently integrating cutting-edge technology and sustainable practices, LAT Apparel is poised to transform the textile industry. The January 2025 trade shows will serve as the perfect platform to showcase our groundbreaking developments, offering attendees an exclusive glimpse into the future of apparel at LAT.



Stay tuned for more details about this exciting launch, and join us in January 2025 to witness firsthand the extraordinary innovations that will elevate our brand to new heights. As always, our commitment to you — our valued partners and clients — remains steadfast: to deliver exceptional products that truly embody quality, comfort, and ethical production. Together, we look forward to celebrating another chapter of success and innovation at LAT Apparel. GP

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800-414-5650



COMING 2025.

www.latapparel.com

Mimaki USA





Mimaki is an innovator and pioneer in the development of digital printing and cutting products worldwide. Our portfolio includes a wide range of products that provide a total workflow solution for the sign and graphics, textile and apparel, industrial printing, and 3D markets. We are dedicated to engineering smarter machines that help our customers improve their workflow and grow their businesses.

Mimaki Engineering — the parent company of Mimaki USA — was founded in 1975 in Nagano, Japan. At Mimaki USA, we close out 2024 by celebrating 25 years of service to print service providers in the Americas. Today, we operate seven regional offices and technology centers across the U.S. and Canada. Visitors can take part in live product demonstrations, application training, open houses, dealer technician certification courses, color management boot camps, software training, and more. We offer the Mimaki UV Academy, a one-day event to share the benefits of UV technology and demonstrate unique applications that enable you to expand your product offerings and seek higher profits per print.

Two new products were introduced recently: a compact UV-LED flatbed printer and a wide-format, direct-to-film (DTF) printer for transfer applications.

JFX200-1213 EX

The Mimaki JFX200-1213 EX medium format UV-LED flatbed printer is designed for low- to medium-volume production and small-sign print service providers. Its compact footprint is suitable for in-house print shops, such as those in hospitals and universities, that lack space for a full-size flatbed printer. With a 4' X 4' bed size, it can print up to four 18" X 24" signs simultaneously and be fitted with a jig for volume object decoration.

This model is ideal for print service providers specializing in medium-volume printing applications such as textured surfaces and ADA-compliant-capable signage. Print service providers can produce Braille with a plug-in app to easily add tactile textures, and seamlessly integrate the JFX200-1213 EX printer into their production for ADA applications. The JFX200-1213 EX UV-LED printer is based on the proven JFX Series platform that offers large-format production capabilities in a smaller footprint. It includes all the Mimaki Core Technologies found on the larger model for consistent, high-quality output and efficient operation.

TxF300-1600

The Mimaki TxF300-1600 printer is a production, wide-format DTF model for transfer applications. It offers increased productivity through a wider media width of 63" and print speeds of up to 108 square feet per hour. Its excellent white ink adhesion capability through ink circulation technology prevents sedimentation. The TxF300-1600 printer delivers consistent quality with a three-way intelligent heater to accelerate ink drying.

This DTF printing system enables the creation of intricate designs on an expansive range of fabrics, including cotton, mixed textiles, polyester, and even darker shades. It can print skin-friendly textiles with OEKO-TEX ECO PASSPORT Certification of Mimaki PHT50 inks. The TxF300-1600 joins the product family that includes the TxF150-75 and TxF300-75 models, all of which include Mimaki Core Technologies for high-quality printing, reliability, and efficiency. GP

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usa.info@mimaki.com
888-530-3988

JFX200-1213 EX

scan me



Big impact, small footprint

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The Mimaki JFX200-1213 EX medium format UV-LED flatbed printer is designed for low- to medium-volume production offering wide-format printing capabilities in a space-saving 4’x4’ footprint. It excels in versatile applications, including specialty printing such as textured surfaces and ADA signage, making it ideal for businesses and organizations with limited space.

Mimaki®

Xanté

In an era where customization, speed, and quality are king, Xanté has positioned itself as a leader in digital printing solutions. Known for its pioneering approach to printing technology, Xanté offers businesses — ranging from small shops to large industrial operations — innovative tools to increase productivity, reduce costs, and unlock new creative opportunities. By providing cutting-edge technology without sacrificing affordability, Xanté's robust portfolio includes UV flatbed printers, envelope presses, and direct-to-film (DTF) solutions. These products are powered by the company's proprietary iQueue software, which integrates seamlessly into printing workflows, giving users the precision, control, and speed necessary to stay ahead in a competitive marketplace.

What sets Xanté apart from other providers is its focus on delivering a complete, user-friendly solution rather than simply selling equipment. The powerful iQueue workflow software is a cornerstone of this approach. By simplifying complex printing tasks and streamlining production processes, iQueue enables businesses to achieve high-quality outputs with ease. Even novice operators can quickly adapt, meaning less time managing technical difficulties and more time focusing on creativity and productivity. This commitment to ease-of-use helps print shops and other businesses operate more efficiently and take on more projects without sacrificing quality.

Xanté's relentless focus on innovation has made it an essential partner for businesses looking to expand. Whether printing on unconventional substrates like wood, metal, and glass with their UV flatbed printers or producing customized apparel with their F-24 DTF printer, Xanté provides the tools to open new revenue streams. Their versatile machines allow businesses to differentiate themselves by offering unique, high-margin products such as personalized signs, promotional items, home decor, and custom apparel.

The UV flatbed printers, for example, offer a wide range of possibilities, helping print shops tap into diverse markets and offer customers one-of-a-kind products. Meanwhile, Xanté's DTF printers deliver vibrant, durable prints on fabric that can withstand hundreds of washes, making them ideal for the booming custom apparel market.

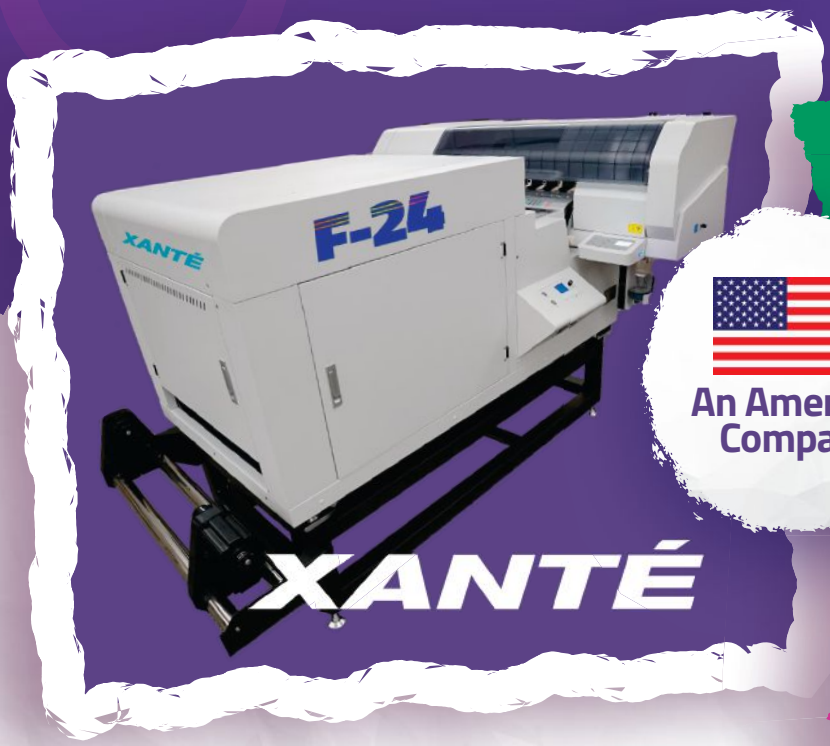
At the core of Xanté's offerings is their commitment to customer success. When you invest in a Xanté product, you're not just buying a machine — you're partnering with a team dedicated to helping your business grow. CEO Robert C. Ross Jr. sums it up best: "We believe in building relationships, not just selling machines. We want our customers to succeed, and we're committed to being there every step of the way."

For businesses looking to grow, Xanté offers not only the tools but also the inspiration to push creative boundaries and thrive in an ever-evolving industry. GP

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You can press vibrant designs on shirts, hats, towels, practically any fabric.

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AP Lazer

Founded in 2009 by Dr. Tong Li, AP Lazer has revolutionized the laser engraving industry with its innovative machines designed for versatility. With over a decade of experience in the monument sector, Dr. Li aimed to create a laser system capable of engraving, etching, and cutting materials of a wide range of sizes and weights. This innovation not only enabled him to personalize large monuments with ease but also added significant value to his business. After patenting his design, Dr. Li launched AP Lazer, introducing a groundbreaking, more versatile laser machine to the market.

AP Lazer's unique two-part design quickly gained traction in monument shops across the United States, leading to adoption in various industries, including







signage, home decor, and furniture. AP Lazer machines have also become valuable educational tools in schools nationwide.

What sets AP Lazer apart in the industry is its commitment to 24/7 tech support and onsite training with every machine purchase. The buying experience extends well beyond the initial sale, offering numerous resources to ensure customers' success. AP Lazer remains dedicated to providing innovative solutions for businesses aiming to grow, diversify, and stay ahead of the competition, all while delivering an exceptional purchasing experience. GP

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AP LAZER
LEADING THE WAY

Canon Solutions America

Canon Inc., a world leader in imaging and optical products, has extended its expertise into the large-format printing industry. This segment delivers high-quality, efficient solutions for a wide array of printing needs, from commercial and fine art to signage and industrial graphics. Combining precision, speed, and vibrant color reproduction, Canon's large-format printers empower businesses to achieve superior print quality, streamlining workflows while supporting creative and high-demand applications.

In 2007, Canon launched the Arizona to critical acclaim. The original Arizona 250 GT was honored with the DPI Vision Award. Since then, the series has earned significant acclaim, collecting more than 50 industry awards for its exceptional image quality, versatility, and productivity.

The current Arizona series now includes:

The Arizona 135 GT: A versatile, entry-level UV flatbed printer designed for small to medium-sized print service providers.

The Arizona 1300 Series: Mid-level flatbed printers that emphasize productivity and efficiency, available in both GT (standard) and XT (extra-large) versions and with FLXflow technology.

The Arizona 2300 Series: Advanced UV flatbed printers with new FLXflow technology, providing efficient airflow management for quicker setups and handling of heavy or irregular substrates.



Arizona 2300

The Arizona 6100 XTS and XTHF MK II Series: High-capacity printers designed for higher-volume, rigid media production. For all your printing needs. GP

csa.canon.us/arizona1300flow
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Gravotech



Gravotech designs, manufactures, and distributes innovative solutions for engraving, marking, and cutting. Since 1938, Gravotech has been the world's leading manufacturer of marking solutions, offering a full range of equipment: rotary engraving machines, CO_2, fiber, green, and YAG/fiber hybrid lasers, micro-percussion (dot peen), and scribing, engraving materials, consumables, and services.

With cutting-edge technologies, Gravotech masters permanent marking and engraving to give power to objects. Gravotech is the result of the integration of pioneering technologies, and constantly explores new solutions to innovate and shape the future of engraving and marking. Gravotech is the only company to pioneer and master all types of marking, including laser, rotary engraving, scribing, and dot peen. Gravotech manufacturers machines, CAD software, and consumables with support all over the world. Gravotech manages the entire chain, from creation, production, and service, to provide you with the best products and options. Gravotech was born in 2008 from the merger of Gravograph, Technifor, and Type3, and was unified under one brand, as Gravotech in 2020. Designed in France and made near you, our equipment is manufactured and supplied from three production sites, including in Duluth, Georgia. GP

gravotech.us
web.us@gravotech.com
800-843-7637



Radian Laser Systems

Radian Laser Systems designs and manufactures high-end 2D and 3D (3-axis) fiber, CO_2, and UV galvanometer-based laser marking and engraving solutions. Radian's products are used in various industries such as manufacturing, aerospace, and promotional products. The laser systems cut and mark exceptionally on applications such as custom drinkware, awards, apparel manufacturing, medical manufacturing, firearms, jewelry, and many others.

Increased productivity is possible using our unique 3D (3-axis) marking technology, customized indexing tools, automation, and exceptional internal engineering capabilities. The unique 3D (3-axis) technology allows for marking on curved or irregular surfaces without rotation of the workpiece. True 3D relief engraving is also available. Industrial automation and advanced software allow for unlimited configuration and precise control to meet the most exacting demands.



In addition to laser engraving machines, Radian offers a variety of unique accessories — custom-built to fit small and high-volume productions. These accessories can be ordered at initial purchase or later as business demand grows.

Radian Laser Systems is here to help, from the initial quote request to machine delivery and beyond — we want to make sure our customers feel confident and knowledgeable when using our lasers. With so many options to choose from, we take pride in providing laser engraving machines for precise laser engraving, marking, and cutting in order to get the best high-quality results. GP

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SanMar



Truth be told, anyone can sell you a T-shirt.

But a shirt that's available when you need it, prints well, and stands the test of time? One that's also ethically made to fit and feel great?

You only get all that with SanMar.

That's because our business is focused on the details and features that will help your business grow.

Like partnering with the best retail brands. Developing exclusive labels that offer quality, comfort, performance, and value. Innovating and investing in industry-leading technologies and logistics. Taking care of one customer at a time. And staying committed to two simple values: Be nice and tell the truth.

Anyone can sell you a T-shirt. But we're not just another T-shirt company.

We're here to be your partner. The one you rely on. The one that helps take you from where you are today to where you dream of being.

That's SanMar — still here after more than 50 years to help you do business better. **GP**

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ShopBot Tools



ShopBot Tools' full-size CNC routers offer signmakers a high-precision, versatile solution for crafting attention-grabbing, three-dimensional signs that make a statement. Built with robust, industry-grade construction, these machines excel at carving intricate details, deep contours, and custom shapes with speed and efficiency — perfect for signmaking professionals who need to meet demanding timelines without sacrificing quality.

Equipped with user-friendly software, ShopBot's CNC routers make it easy to turn digital designs into stunning, multidimensional creations in wood, plastic, foam, or composites. The generous work area accommodates large-format signage, allowing signmakers to produce full-size pieces with intricate 3D effects that captivate audiences and enhance brand visibility.

Beyond exceptional performance, ShopBot's CNC machines support scalability and customization, empowering users to adapt the technology to their unique production needs. With dedicated customer support and online resources, ShopBot ensures each signmaker has the tools and guidance for success.

Designed for efficiency and precision, ShopBot Tools' full-size CNC routers are the choice for signmakers who want to elevate their craft, streamline production, and deliver professional, eye-catching results that leave a lasting impression and boost business. GP

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ShopBot CNC. Your path to productivity.



John Murray Productions, Inc.
Oakland, CA
Tool: ShopBot PRSalpha 4' x 8'

The California Academy of Sciences' exhibit, "Skin: Living Armor, Evolving Identity"

ShopBot manufactures CNC machines that inspire people to turn their ideas into something tangible. When we see our machines put to work in constructive and creative ways, it reaffirms our commitment to the mission of making digital fabrication technology readily accessible and usable for everyone.



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SHOPBOTS ARE ENGINEERED, MANUFACTURED, AND SUPPORTED IN THE USA

Condé Systems

Condé Systems was founded in Mobile, Alabama, in 1992 as a sublimation supplies distributor. Condé began featuring industry standards such as printers, substrates, and heat press machines. As Condé continued to grow, there was an increasing interest in products in the graphic arts, photography, prepress, craft, and desktop publishing markets. Condé Systems grew to become the leader in all things sublimation.

In mid 2024, the Condé Systems trademarks and brand names were purchased by David McLean, founder of TrophyKits.com in Jacksonville, Florida. Condé Systems in Mobile, Alabama, closed and the company was restarted in Jacksonville.

Today, Condé Systems is coming back strong. A new website was launched in early August. Condé staff is working to restock the products Condé customers have come to know and love.

Condé Systems customers have access to all of our exclusive products, stocked in our massive warehouse.

This isn't the old Condé, and we're not stopping with sublimation. We're adding laser engraving, heat transfer vinyl, direct to garment, direct to film, and more.

Condé Systems brings you exclusive brands such as DyeTrans, Pro Spray, Colorlyte, IronClad, SPP Paper, and more.

Condé Systems offers everything needed to get into the personalized photo gift business including transfer systems, blank imprintable products, production software and supplies, technical support, and instructional videos.

Condé Systems — not just sublimation! **GP**



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A.R.K. Ramos

A.R.K. Ramos Foundry is a legacy building wholesale manufacturer serving primarily:

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You're likely to see our signage across the country on government buildings, K-12 schools, universities, industrial companies, and a variety of businesses big and small.

We put our all into every project to ensure you receive architectural signage that stands the test of time. GP

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AWT World Trade Inc.

AWT World Trade Inc. has been your complete manufacturing source for over 45 years. Products include a wide variety of both manual/automatic textile and graphics presses; gas, electric, and UV dryers; T-shirt printers; wood and aluminum frames, as well as our exclusive Fab-Lok frames; drying and storage racks to fit every budget and application; squeegee holders, handles, blades, and sharpeners; cleaning and reclaiming systems; exposing units; color mixers; vacuum hold-down tables; replacement blankets, and much more! GP



Gemini

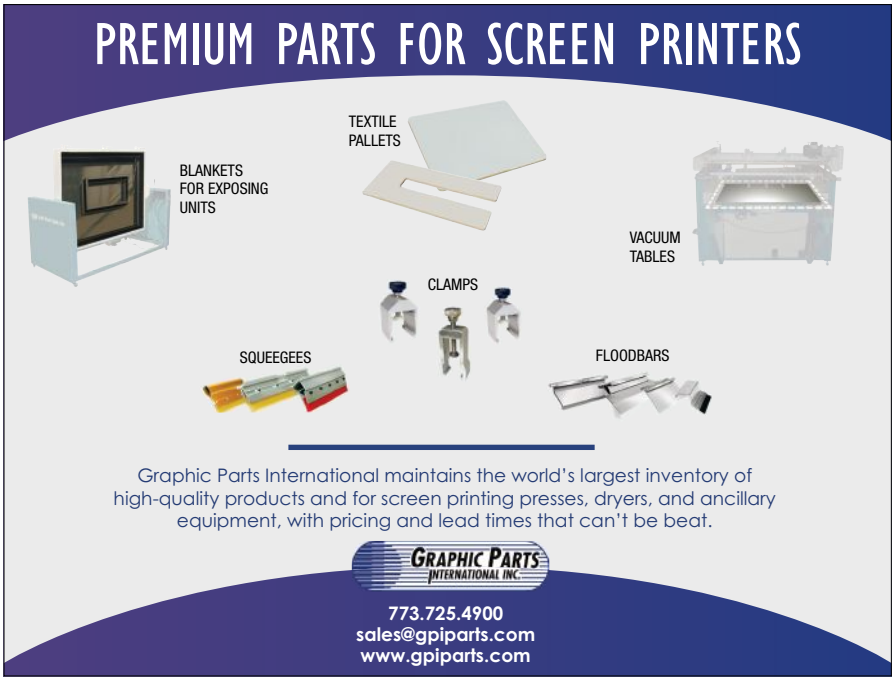


Gemini is a second-generation, family-owned wholesale manufacturer of dimensional signage. For over 60 years, Gemini has partnered exclusively with sign professionals and stands behind its craftmanship with its unparalleled lifetime guarantee. Headquartered in Cannon Falls, Minnesota, Gemini has production facilities throughout North America. GP

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Graphic Parts International



Graphic Parts International, is the premier manufacturer of parts and services for the screen-printing industry. Products offer include squeegees, vacuum beds, vacuum motors, floodbars, exposing units, replacement rubber blankets, timers, infrared panels, vacuum tables, vacuum motors, vacuum tables, UV dryer components, speed controllers, scoop coaters, and thousands of other replacement parts. GPI also remanufactures screen-printing equipment. GP

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IKONICS Imaging

Sandcarving is unmatched among engraving technologies for achieving the highest quality results on hard surfaces like glass, crystal, and stone. As the global leader in sandcarving solutions, IKONICS Imaging serves a wide range of industries, including awards and personalization, monument engraving, architectural signage, and decorative glassware.

Our product lineup features top-tier photoresist stencil films, advanced equipment, user-friendly software, and extensive training — all proudly made in the USA. Our Media Blast Sandcarvers offer a cleaner, more efficient sandcarving experience, setting a new standard in the industry.

Let IKONICS Imaging help you build a successful engraving business. GP

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OTTO CAP has been a leading global headwear manufacturer for over 70 years, offering top-tier quality and service. With an easy-to-use B2B platform, customers can place blank or custom orders 24/7. OTTO CAP stocks millions of caps in over 6,000 styles across warehouses in California, Texas, and Georgia. Their custom headwear program supports distributors, decorators, sports teams, and retailers, with world-class factories equipped with cutting-edge technology and equipment. GP

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STAHLS' has INKTRA screen-printed transfers, brand-building emblems and patches, vibrant full-color UltraColor MAX DTF transfers, and legendary Hotronix heat presses.

But that's not all! With STAHLS' Fulfill Engine software, you can manage every job, every press, and every detail of your custom apparel business from a single platform.

It's more than heat printing; experience the ultimate decorating transformation. No cape required! GP

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Ski Train Tournament Tees

Using historic images for current events merch



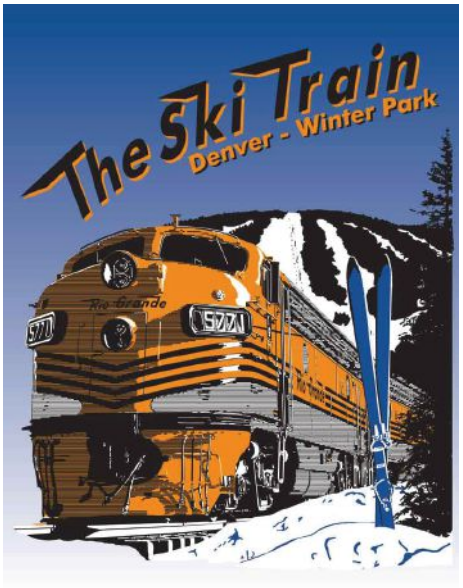
Lon Winters is founder and president of Colorado-based Graphic Elephants, an apparel decorating studio and international consulting firm. He was inducted into the Academy of Screen and Digital Printing Technologies in 2013 and is widely recognized for his contribution to the graphic printing industry. Learn more at graphicelephants.com.

Fraser is a town in beautiful Grand County, Colorado, in the Rocky Mountains. The population is 1,500 and is in the valley of the Fraser River just northwest of Winter Park, Colorado. Fraser was incorporated in 1953. The post office has been there since 1876. With a subarctic climate, Fraser has an annual temperature of 35 degrees and is one of the coldest towns in the lower 48. Snowfall is heavy and it freezes year-round, so Fraser has been called the "icebox of the nation." A freeze has been recorded for every date of the year. The Fraser Valley has stunning views, endless outdoor activities, wide open spaces, and people who are very friendly and down to earth.

A Colorado tradition for generations, the Ski Train was America's largest scheduled passenger train running into the hills, carrying riders from Denver to Winter Park to go mountain biking, hiking, skiing, snowboarding, and sightseeing. The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad (or simply known as the Rio Grande) started the Ski Train in 1940. Then, there was one trip in each direction per day.



Images courtesy of Lon Winters



The Ski Train was sold and its last run to the Winter Park Ski Resort was in 2009. In 2016, Amtrak partnered with the resort to run a ski train on select weekends and holidays. The Winter Park Express, or the Ski Train as the locals still call it, originates at Denver's Union Station, takes passengers directly to the resort, and waits in Fraser until the end of the day when it returns to the resort to take its passengers back to Denver. Recently, the state of Colorado has researched expanding the service on the popular Winter Park Ski Train. Which brings us to this month's story. We just love telling stories.

Among other outdoor activities, Colorado has become known for the Summer Mountain Volleyball Tournaments, and in 2017 (coincidently coinciding with the reemergence of the Ski Train) our client added the Fraser Valley Doubles Volleyball Tournament. The event is located just 90 minutes from Denver with all grass fields grouped together. The









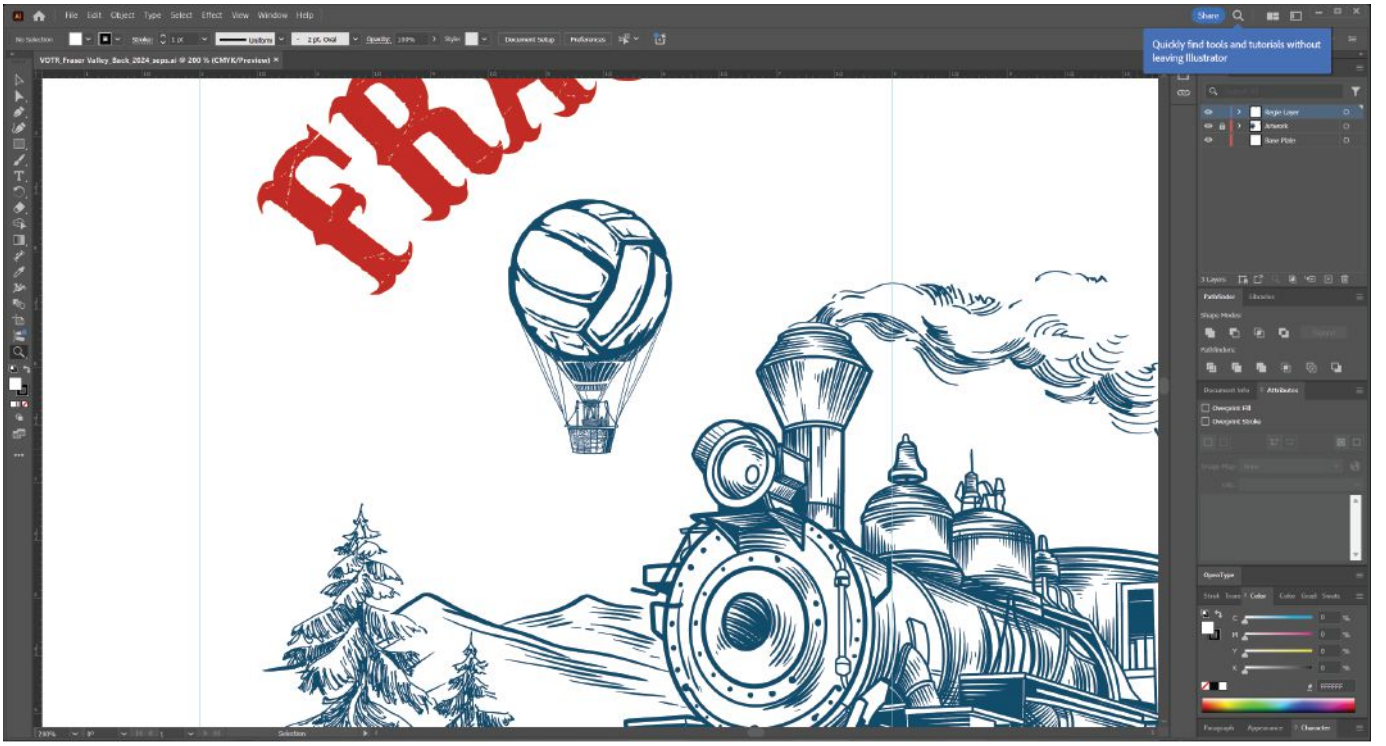




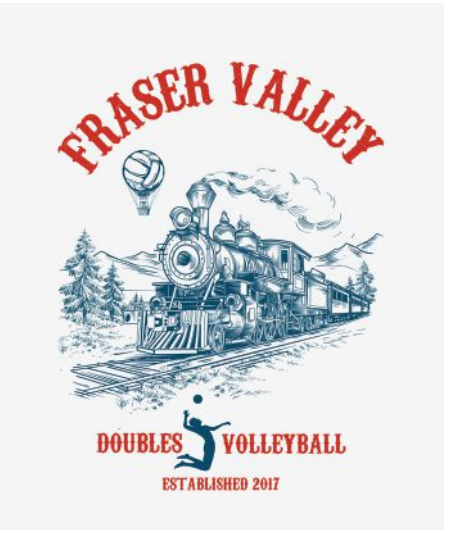


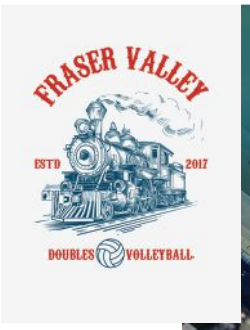
Fraser and Winter Park area hosts these volleyball enthusiasts in the valley annually in late summer. Each year we are asked to develop the merch for the tournament. When we say merch, we mean decorated apparel. Sometimes we get just a little bit of direction and this year we did. "Let's do a ski train kinda thing, since the train comes right in next to the courts and the timing of dates and all."

We love trains. One of our fathers was a model railroad enthusiast (God rest his soul). The only caveat though, is we wanted to do a steam engine or locomotive rather than the traditional ski train you may have seen in photos. The first











successful steam locomotive in the U.S. was built in 1827 and were used for railroad power until World War II. They are far more interesting in detail than today's diesel engines — in our opinion, anyway.

First, we would need some reference. We took to Google and simply did a search turning up way too many photos. We chose a few we liked and went to work old school like. We printed several of our photos to a similar size and laid them on a light table and placed some paper over the top where we used a pencil to sketch in some details of multiple train photos. This was kind of a morph of several engines. The customer wanted something fairly simple, and this was a great way to get a clean look. After several sketches with some trees and mountain backgrounds added, it was time to get out the pen and ink to clean it all up. We scanned our final drawing into Photoshop and worked it a bit more. We opened up some areas and filled in others.

We imported our vectorized version of the locomotive into Illustrator and set our type on an additional layer since it would be a different color. We chose a western-style font for this type solution. "Fraser Valley" set largest on the top and "Doubles Volleyball" on the bottom



with the established date in the middle. We popped in a generic volleyball as well. Done? Nope. "Not volleyball enough." So, we laid it out a bit differently with a hot air ballon in the background using Tom's (the owner) volleyball as the balloon. Not our idea, but hey, it worked for them.

Once our seps were complete on layers and in spot colors, we placed the file on our Illustrator art board where our registration marks, grayscale, and job information live and outputted on CTS (computer to screen) with a frequency of 45 lpi halftone at a 22.5 degree angle and a round shape. For a very thin ink deposit, both screens were work hardened N-272 tpi (threads per inch) at a tension of 45 N/cm^2. We nailed the set up — because there was no registration. We used 75/90/75 triple ply, dual durometer squeegees with flood and print speeds moderate with minimal pressures. Inks were primary blue and red cut 50/50. Easy, breezy run!

Back in the 1980s there was tournament in Fraser called the Never Summer Doubles Tournament. It disappeared in the '90s and the grass didn't see much play the next couple decades. Today, Fraser Valley is filled with nets and volleyballers again each Labor Day weekend. The grass is still green and there are over 100 courts, all in one location. Fraser Valley Doubles sees over 600 teams annually and finishes each years' summer off in style. Too bad we couldn't take the Ski Train to the tournament. Well, not yet anyway. GP





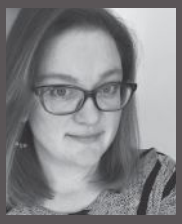


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How to Add Embroidery to Your Business

What you'll need to get started

BY JENNIFER COX



Jennifer Cox is a co-founder and president of the National Network of Embroidery Professionals (NNEP), an organization that supports embroidery and apparel decoration professionals with programs and services designed to increase profitability and production.

Adding embroidery to your screen printing business can be a great way to expand your apparel decoration services, increase your sales, and attract new customers. As you interact with your current customers, gauge their interest in embroidery services. Ask what specific products they might want, such as embroidered hats, golf shirts, dress shirts, outerwear, or bags. Use these insights to help you tailor your offers and focus on high-demand products as you develop your embroidery services.

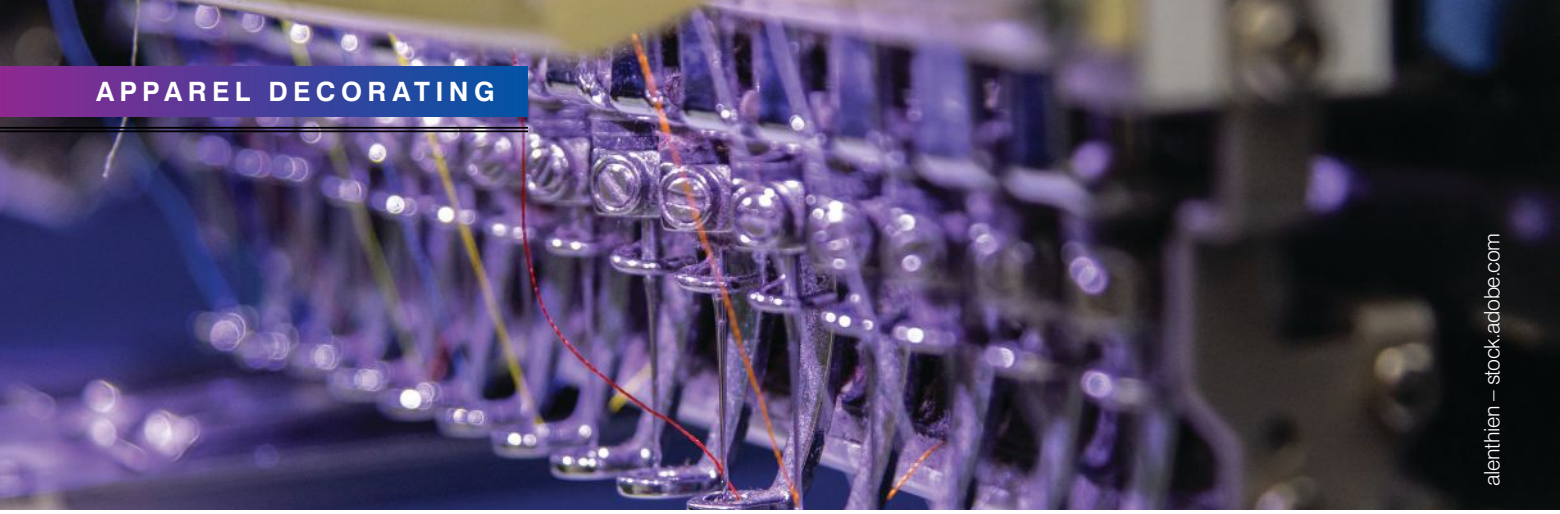
There are several key points to consider as you evaluate the possibility of adding embroidery to your current operation:

Equipment requirements

Machine: Choose the right commercial embroidery machine. Start with a single-head, multi-needle machine. These are more affordable than multi-head machines, yet versatile enough to handle a wide range of designs and products. Every shop will benefit from a multi-needle, single-head embroidery machine. As you may be unclear about the kinds of orders and quantities of goods to which you will be adding embroidery, this is a safe bet as you develop your embroidery skills. You can add more machines or upgrade to multi-head equipment as your demand grows. You can always contract out a job if you land an order that is larger than you want to run yourself. Commercial embroidery machines and digitizing software can be expensive, ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars depending on the machine's capabilities. Starting with a single head lets you asses the need for embroidery and develop the skills necessary while controlling your initial investment and risk.

Software: Digitizing software is needed to create and view the files that operate your embroidery machine. Some machines are sold with specific software programs, or you can choose a standalone software. With the software, you can create basic design files such as names or use stock designs for some orders. Consider outsourcing all the custom designs so that you can focus on the production side and develop the necessary skills to become an excellent embroiderer. Learning to digitize is a challenge and not a skill that is developed quickly.

Supplies: Threads, bobbins, needles, stabilizers (aka backings), hoops, and nippers are all necessary. You will want to track this inventory so that you do not



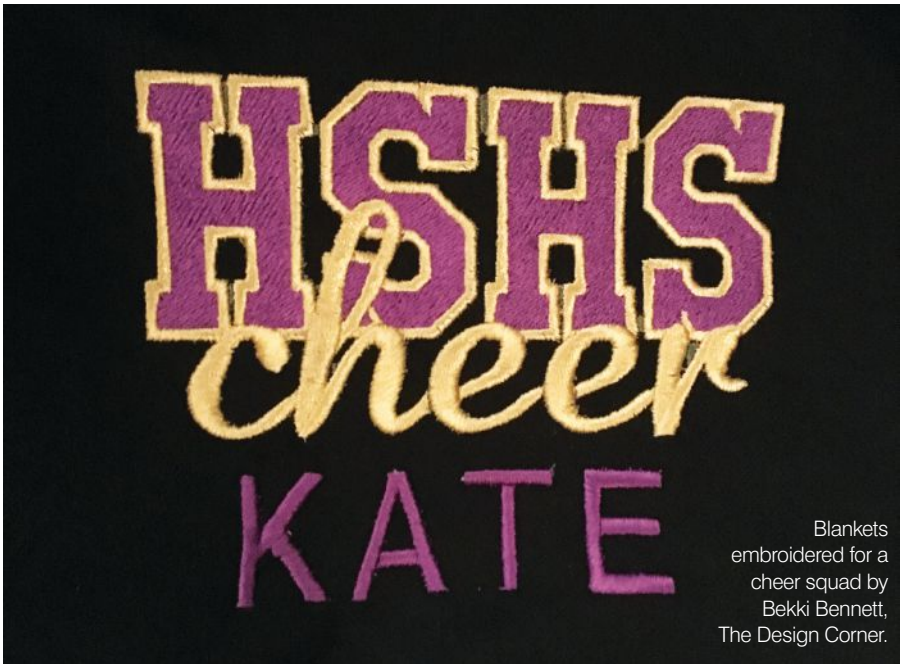
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come up short of the correct thread color or backing just as a job is scheduled on the machine.

Space requirements

Workspace: Make sure the space for your embroidery area is clean and away from your inks, screens, washouts, and other messy spaces. You will need a clean and cleared off flat surface at table or counter height for hooping garments. Embroidery threads, hoops, and even rolls of stabilizers can be stored vertically on pegboard so they do not take up precious floorspace.

Noise: Embroidery machines can be noisy. Keep that in mind as you carve out space for your embroidery services so that it is not disruptive to other aspects of your business.



Blankets embroidered for a cheer squad by Bekki Bennett, The Design Corner.

Training & skill development

Machine operation: Learning how to create top-quality embroidery takes practice. While the basics of how to run the machine can be taught in a fairly short period, learning how to use this knowledge properly comes with experience. You have to learn how to "feel" when the thread tension is set correctly, as there is not a universal setting on the machine for it. Learning about the different kinds of fabrics and how to stabilize and hoop them correctly is also a hands-on and experience-based process. Learning how to operate the machine efficiently is the key to making it profitable, ultimately.

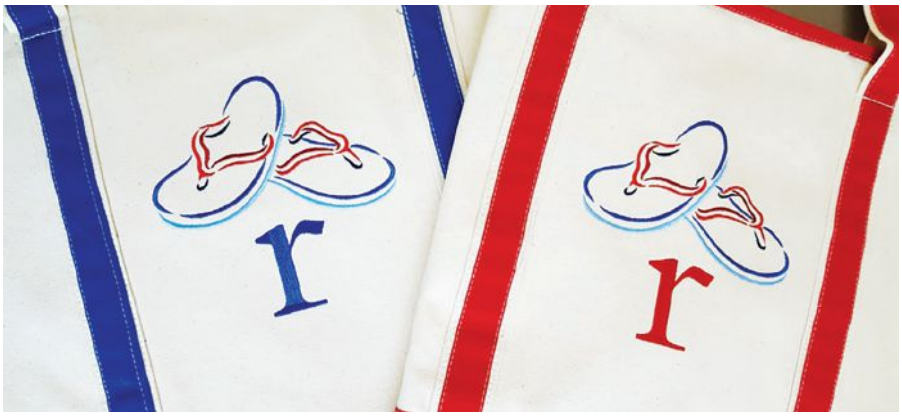


Image courtesy of Adriane Cropley, Rocking My SewJo, LLC.

Digitizing: Watching good designs sew out is one of the best ways to learn the basics of good digitizing. The order in which the layers are stitched, the underlay that is built in to the design to stabilize it, and the way details are added are all crucial to an excellent finished product. Sending out designs to a professional digitizer will allow you to watch and learn while you develop your embroidery skills, and begin to develop an understanding of how good embroidery files are digitized. Many successful businesses never bring digitizing in-house, preferring to spend their time and effort running the equipment instead of creating designs on the computer.

Design considerations: Understanding the constraints of embroidery compared to screen printing is essential. Thread is a consistent thickness and a consistent color. It cannot be changed into something that

it is not, unlike ink. Being able to look at a customer's design and see how you will need to adapt it for ink and for thread yet still look like the same design is a skill that is developed with practice. Some designs might work for both screen printing and embroidery, while others won't. Managing client expectations for what works well as an embroidered design is important, and mistakes in this area could result in returns or redo's, eating into your profits.

Focus on quality

Standardize production: Develop a procedure for taking embroidery orders and for setting up embroidery jobs on the equipment. Keep track of the design files, design placement, thread colors, backings used, and any other relevant details. This will help reduce mistakes and ensure consistent quality as well as allow you to easily replicate an order at a future time.

Market & customer opportunities

Current customers: It is likely that a decent percentage of your existing customers are either interested in buying embroidered goods, or they are already buying embroidered goods from somewhere else.

Target markets: Certain markets are more inclined to order embroidered apparel and products, just as there are certain markets that prefer screen printing. "White collar" industries, such as banks, investment firms, insurance companies, car dealers, pharmaceutical companies, and "service industries," such as restaurants, entertainment businesses, and medical institutions, including hospitals and research facilities, tend to prefer embroidered goods over screen printed goods.

Pricing

Pricing strategy: Pricing embroidery is different than pricing screen printing. The number of colors in a design usually does not affect the cost of embroidery. The metric for pricing embroidery is the number of stitches in the design, as the more stitches in the design, the longer it takes to sew out on the equipment.



Image courtesy of Ann Polen, Tom-Mar Farms & Ann's Shop.

Promotion

Existing customers: Present embroidery as an additional service every time existing customers place an order. If they order shirts, suggest some embroidered hats. If they order sweatshirts, maybe they would like to hear about embroidered golf shirts. If they order printed hats, maybe some embroidered beanies would be good in the colder months. The good news is that the majority of embroidered goods tend to be at a higher price point than goods that get screen printed. This provides a higher profit potential for every order to which embroidered goods are added.

Create package deals: Offer a special discount for the first time that a customer adds embroidered goods to a screen print order. It will help you to introduce this new service to your existing customers by email, on your website, on your social media, and in person.

Create & wear samples: Produce embroidered apparel for you and your staff to wear at work. It is a great way to get practice running the machine as you create things for yourself, your family, and your team. Having samples allows people to see the quality of the embroidery you produce.

Showcase your equipment: Watching a design appear in the hoop is fascinating, no matter if you have been running machines for years, or have never seen it before. Shoot short 30-second videos of the machine running, focusing on the hooped surface and the emerging design. Post these to your website and promote them on social media. Add a short clip to your email signature, or a QR code that leads to the video on your website.

Offering both screen printing and embroidery services makes your business a more attractive option for customers who want a variety of services under one roof. For example, a customer may want screen-printed T-shirts and embroidered hats or jackets for a unified look. When customers can rely on you for a wider range of services, they are less likely to seek out competitors. This helps build long-term relationships and increase customer loyalty, as they appreciate the convenience of working with a single trusted provider. By adding embroidery to your existing screen printing business, you can diversify your product offerings, attract new types of customers, and create more growth opportunities for your business. The key is to integrate this new apparel decoration service in a way that aligns with your existing strengths and your customers' needs. GP



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The Essential Guide to

Hiring Your First Inside Sales Representative

for Your Screen-Printing Shop

BY CHRISTY SHELLENBERGER



Christy Shellenberger is co-owner and VP of sales for Rock Hill Screen Printing in South Carolina. She also hosts the podcast Last Call for Plastisol, which is available on all major platforms.

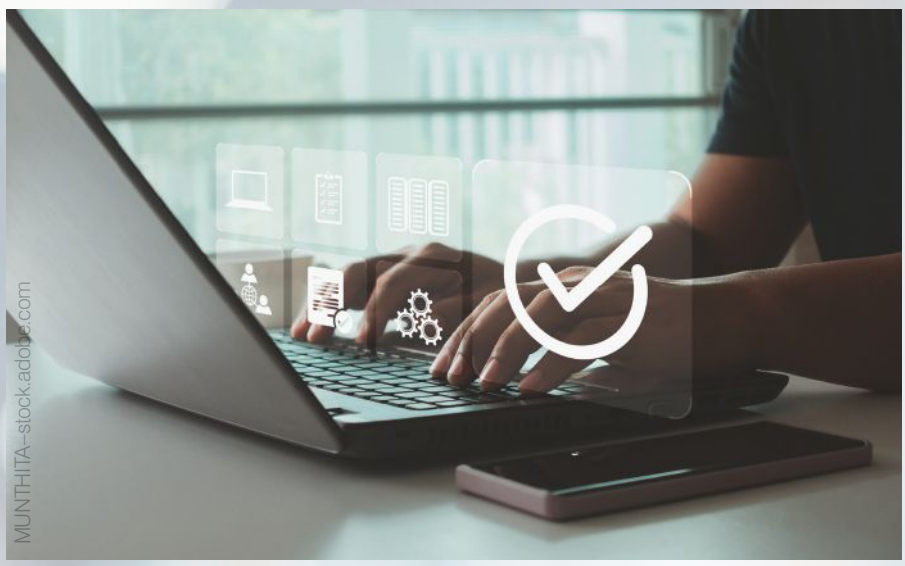
Ten years ago, I began my journey in screen printing with just a Speedball kit and an Instagram handle. Reflecting on my growth, the most transformative moment came when I successfully onboarded and trained my first inside sales representative. Through my own experience and discussions on our podcast, "Last Call For Plastisol," I've learned that bringing on the right salesperson can truly make or break your shop's success. Here's how you can make this process smoother and set both your new sales rep and your business up for success.

Setting up for success

To start, it's essential to have strong systems in place. If you're still jotting down orders on sticky notes, it's time for an upgrade. Shop management software like Printavo, YoPrint, Monday.com, etc., can help you keep everything organized in one place. For instance, Printavo offers features like payment processing, quote tracking, artwork approvals, and job scheduling, with useful tools like pricing matrices and mock-up creators that can really boost your sales efforts.

Creating a comprehensive sales binder is another key step. This binder should include your procedures, pricing matrices, and answers to frequently asked questions. On your new sales rep's first day, walk them through the binder and the processes so they can start pricing quotes on their own. Over time, this will allow you to focus on higher-level tasks while your new team member handles day-to-day queries.

Additionally, maintaining clear business hours and a clean, organized showroom



is crucial. Many shops operate irregular hours, which can deter potential walk-in customers. As your team grows, it's even more important to have consistent business hours. A tidy showroom not only attracts better customers but also creates a positive work environment for your staff.

Prepare for managing increased sales volume by avoiding a drop in momentum. Consider extending production hours, adding shifts, or partnering with an outsourcing provider to handle overflow until things stabilize. Instead of turning away work, find ways to get it done and keep the momentum going.

Setting achievable goals

When you're ready to bring on your first salesperson, start by setting small, achievable goals to help them find early success. Encourage them to reach out to customers who haven't ordered recently, write thank-you cards, and ask for referrals. For example, during order pick-ups, a small gift like stickers can be a nice touch and an opportunity to ask for referrals. Happy customers are more likely to spread the word about your services.

Engaging with customers on social media is also a great way to build relationships and keep your business top-of-mind. Have your sales rep like and comment on clients' Instagram posts. This ongoing interaction helps maintain visibility and opens doors for upselling and cross-selling within your existing customer base. By focusing on current clients, your sales rep can make a significant impact and get to know your products before diving into new prospects.





Moving to higher-level sales activities

As your new sales rep becomes more comfortable with quoting, they should start tackling more advanced sales tasks. They should follow up on quotes that have been pending for more than a week. It often takes several touchpoints to close a deal, so encourage them to reach out through text, email, and Instagram messages. Many shops send quotes and then wait passively for a response, but proactive follow-up can make a big difference.

Another effective strategy is to reengage clients after 90 days. As seasons change, suggest new products or services to keep their offerings fresh. For instance, as fall approaches, recommending beanies and outerwear can be a helpful suggestion without directly pushing for business.

Providing support & feedback

Your sales rep's success depends significantly on your support and engagement. Provide them with tracking sheets to monitor their activities and review these regularly to ensure they're meeting their goals. Offer timely feedback and ask how you can better support them.

Many shop owners are hesitant to hire a sales rep and worry about how it might impact their business. However, with the right support, training, and planning, an inside sales rep can become a key player in your shop's growth.

In conclusion, hiring your first inside sales representative is a major step that can significantly impact your screen-printing shop's success. By setting up solid systems, establishing clear goals, and providing ongoing support, you'll help ensure that this new role contributes positively to your business. Embrace the opportunity to grow with the right sales team member and watch your shop thrive! GP

Craft promps that get results



Aaron Montgomery's company, Our Success Group, assists with business plans and pricing strategies, as well as customer service and marketing. He is the author of "The FUNdamentals of Business Success" and the co-founder of a facilitated six-month mastermind collective called Radical Goal-Getters. Aaron also co-hosts the 2 Regular Guys podcast.

In the fast evolving world of technology, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a game changer, particularly for small business owners and those with limited time and resources. This article is not about image generation, however. Instead, this is about text and idea generation with AI, specifically ChatGPT. I use ChatGPT daily, and it even helped me with ideas and structure for this article. It can make running your business faster and easier, but here's the catch — AI is a tool, not a replacement for the human touch that makes your business unique. The challenge is finding the balance between leveraging AI to save time and ensuring you remain personal and authentic.

To help you strike this balance, we're going to focus on how you can use AI effectively through precise prompts, without losing the heart and soul of your business. We'll dive into the CARE model (context, action, role, execute), a practical framework for crafting AI prompts that get the best results while keeping your voice intact.

Understanding the role of AI

Before we get into the specifics of creating prompts, let's talk about AI's evolving role in your business. AI has come a long way since its early days. Now, tools like ChatGPT have the power to help with content creation, social media management, customer service, and much more. However, it's not a "set it and forget it" type of tool. As small business owners, you still need to guide AI to make sure it



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delivers results that align with your brand and customer expectations.

I don't claim to fully understand the deep workings of AI, but to help us best use it, let me explain how it works on the surface. Tools like ChatGPT are built on top of large language models, or LLMs. They are taking massive amounts of text (like the internet's worth) and converting it to math. The math becomes an algorithm that makes educated guesses about the results you want based on the words you use and the training it has. If you think about language, it has a pattern, and that pattern forms the context and the words around it. Going back to 1957, linguist John Rupert Firth said, "You shall know a word by the company it keeps." This understanding tells us the more context we give AI the better the answer. The more relevant words you use, the better the results you will get.

AI's strength lies in its ability to handle repetitive tasks quickly and efficiently. For instance, it can draft emails, generate marketing ideas, or even create content based on your input. Yet, as powerful as it is, AI also has its limits. It can't replace the personal connection you have with your customers or the human intuition that drives creative decisions. That's why it's crucial to understand how to direct AI effectively — this is where prompt crafting becomes vital.

The CARE model

This is something I created to help Our Success Group Mastermind members better interact with AI. The CARE model — context, action, role, and execute — offers a straightforward way to create AI prompts that deliver the best results. Here's how it works:

1 Context: Setting the stage

ChatGPT works best when it has relevant information to work from. The more details you provide, the better the result. This could include information about your business, your target audience, or the specific scenario you're working with.

For example, if you're crafting a social media post, you would want to include details about your target market. Are you aiming to engage solopreneurs or larger business owners? Are your customers focused on eco-friendly products, or are they looking for high-end customization options? The more you clarify, the better.

2 Action: Defining the task

Once you've set the context, it's time to define the action you want the AI to take. Be specific with your instructions. Are you asking it to write a product description? Draft a social media post? The action should be clear and direct. By specifying the task, you prevent ChatGPT from generating something too generic or off-target. Think of it as giving instructions to an employee — you wouldn't just say, "Create something," you'd explain exactly what you need.

3 Role: Establishing perspective

When creating your AI prompt, the next step is to define the role the AI should take on while completing the task. Should it act as a knowledgeable marketing expert? A customer support agent? A content writer? You can even go so far as to ask it to act as a specific person, so tell it to use your favorite marketing guru. I often ask ChatGPT to speak as if it is Seth Godin and Jack Canfield, and by specifying the role it helps the AI match the tone and voice you want.

4 Execute: Finalizing the details

The final part of the CARE model is execution. This is where you specify any additional instructions, such as the format or the call-to-action. It's also where you can add any specific preferences for the tone or structure of the content. For example, if you are asking for keywords to use as tags on your latest YouTube video, it will certainly give you a list. But to make your job easier, you should ask it to provide the tags on a single line as a comma-separated list. If you like the list, you can just copy and paste. Or, if you're crafting a social media post, you might specify the character limit or include a relevant hashtag. The more details about exactly what you are expecting the more likely you will get the details and format you need.

Best practices for using AI in your marketing

Now that we've covered the basics of the CARE model, let's talk about a few best practices for using ChatGPT.

1 Don't lose your voice

One of the biggest risks when using AI is sounding too generic or that it is obvious they are no longer creating their own content. While AI is great at generating content quickly, it's up to you to ensure that the content reflects your brand's unique voice. Even though I interact with ChatGPT all the time, and it has learned my voice and tone, I never copy and paste content without making edits. I still see to this day those companies that clearly do not create their own content any longer. The emails or social media posts went from regular writing that was very short, to long flowing "salesy"



emails and social media posts, with bold letters, bullet points, and even some emojis thrown in for good measure. Yes, my emoji game has gotten better since using AI too, but I was using emojis before AI was a thing.

2 AI as a tool, not a decision maker

Even as AI and tools like ChatGPT get better and better, it is still like having the smartest but most forgetful intern. You are never going to get the same thing twice. It often misses key points, and just goes off on a tangent. It can help you brainstorm, create drafts, and handle repetitive tasks, but it shouldn't be making key decisions for your business. Use AI to assist with your business but rely on your own expertise to make the final call.

3 Stay updated with AI trends

AI is constantly evolving, with new features and capabilities being introduced regularly. Whether it's through updates to ChatGPT or other AI platforms like Gemini or Bard, keeping up with the latest advancements will give you a competitive edge.

ChatGPT and other AI LLMs can be a powerful ally in your small business, especially when you use them strategically. The CARE model offers a simple yet effective way to craft prompts that yield high-quality results without losing the human touch that makes your business special. By providing context, defining actions, specifying roles, and guiding execution, you can harness the power of AI while ensuring that your marketing remains authentic, engaging, and aligned with your brand. I'd love to hear about some of the creative uses you are finding for AI and ChatGPT in your business.

And a quick bonus for those who read to the end, ChatGPT Plus can even help answer that age-old question, "What's for dinner?" Again, with the additional Plus version, you can snap a picture of the inside of your refrigerator and share it with ChatGPT using the CARE model and ask what you should make for dinner with the ingredients it sees. You will get some awesome ideas. GP





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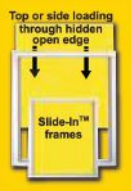
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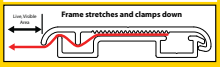
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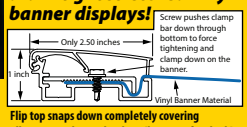




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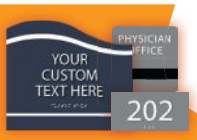
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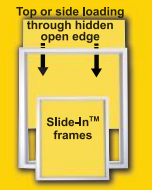
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XANTE Corp	77	xante.com

LOS ANGELES APPAREL

Made in South Central. That's Los Angeles.


Dark Red


Tomato


Bright Orange


Neon Orange


Gold


Spectra Yellow


Seafoam


Matcha


Army


Ivy


Atlantic Green


Sage


Light Blue


Clear Blue


Blue Moon


Indigo


Cobalt Blue


Neon Purple


Purple


Ruby


Mauve


Fuschia


Lotus


Pink


Coral


Rose Quartz


Light Pink


Cream


Off White


White


Cement


Light Grey


Ash


Ice Grey


Dark Silver


Charcoal


Dolphin Blue


Clove


Vintage Black

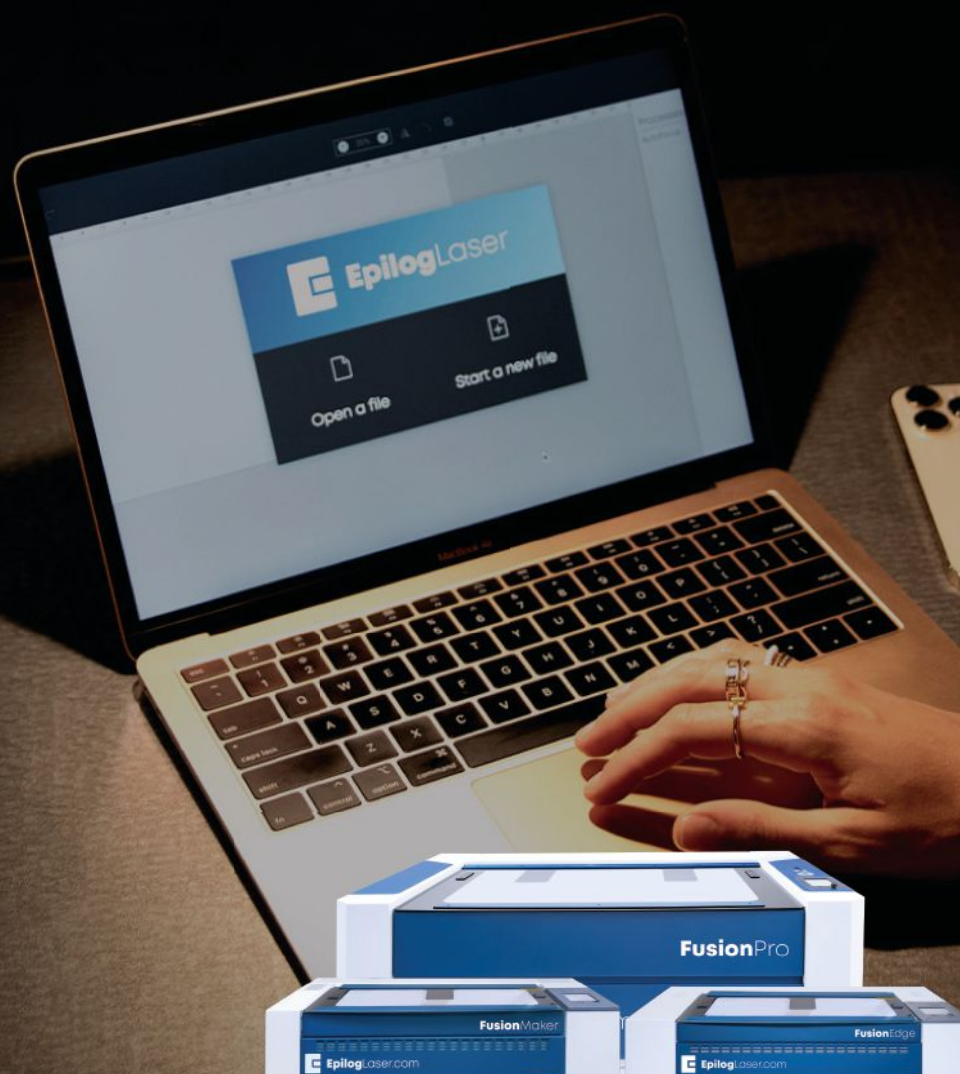

Chocolate

Black Edge

Black

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