APRIL 2025

GRAPHICS PRO

APPAREL DECORATION • AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION • SIGNAGE • WIDE-FORMAT PRINTING • WRAPS

GRAPHICS-PRO.COM



+

Moms, dads & grads gift ideas

Grow your business with an online store

Transform restaurant interiors with wall wraps

Here's how to fix hiring

Illuminated signs

An electrifying history

To the Artists of Ye

AROUND 40,000 YEARS AGO, EARLY HUMANS IN PLACES LIKE
HUMAN FIGURES, AND ABSTRACT SYMBOLS, USING NATURAL
HAVE SERVED AS STORYTELLING, RITUAL, OR COMMUNICATION
THEY OFFER A GLIMPSE INTO EARLY HUMAN CREATIVITY. IT'S
TO OUR ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES. HOW WOULD THA


sterday and Today!
THE SIGN SHOP
ABCDE
FGHIJK
LMNOP
QRSTU
VWXYZ
FRANCE AND SPAIN CREATED CAVE ART, DEPICTING ANIMALS,
PIGMENTS LIKE CHARCOAL AND OCHRE. THESE DRAWINGS MAY
TOOLS, FOUND IN SITES SUCH AS LASCAUX AND ALTAMIRA.
FASCINATING TO IMAGINE HOW THEY WOULD HAVE REACTED
T HAVE TRANSFORMED THEIR ARTISTIC EXPRESSION?
SIGNS365

DIRECT TO FILM TRANSFERS

ULTRACOLOR® MAX™ with NEW INKS

SEE THE DIFFERENCE

Cleaner. Brighter. Better.







WHY CHOOSE ULTRACOLOR MAX™?

- ✓ **The Brightest DTF Transfers:** New UltraColor MAX™ inks expand your color range by 23%, making your designs pop like never before.
- ✓ **Certified Safer for You and Your Customers:** Free from harsh chemicals like ethylene glycol and formaldehyde, these inks meet Oeko-Tex®, Prop 65, and CPSIA safety standards.
- ✓ **Consistent, Quality DTF Transfers:** Expect precise, professional quality every time—perfect for nailing customer orders and reorders.
- ✓ **Made for Peace of Mind:** Safe for children's apparel and compliant for California shipments.
- ✓ **Proprietary Ink Technology—Only from STAHLS'**



Certified Safe

OEKO TEX®

PROP 65 COMPLIANT

CPSIA

CLEANER INKS, BETTER PRINTS

Shop UltraColor MAX™ Transfers Now!

STAHLS' TRANSFER EXPRESS®

TransferExpress.com | 800.622.2280

NEW 24" ECO-SOLVENT ALL-IN-ONE PRINTER/CUTTER









XpertJet C641SR Pro

MUTOH's NEW XpertJet C641SR Pro 24" Eco-Solvent Printer/Cutter Combo is perfect for a wide range of applications such as posters, stickers, HTV transfers, vehicle stickers, banners, window and floor decals, labels, and more. Print and cut a 24" roll of media and operate at speeds up to twice as fast as its closest competitors. The All-In-One XPJ-C641SR Pro benefits from MUTOH's renowned reliability and Made in Japan quality, making it the perfect choice for anyone looking to get into the print game.



The XPJ-C641SR Pro is paired with MUTOH's Award-Winning Genuine VerteLith™ RIP Software, paired with FlexiDESIGNER MUTOH Edition 21 (valued at $2,199.00).

ONLY $6,995 MSRP

Optional Stand & Take-Up Available

www.MUTOH.com
1.800.99.MUTOH

MUTOH

REQUEST FREE PRINT SAMPLE

GRAPHICS|PRO

CONTENTS

VOLUME 38 | April 2025 | NUMBER 12



17

AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION

17
Gift ideas for moms, dads & grads
Personalization makes gifts unique & special
By Shelley Widhalm

22
Want more impact? Add branded products to your sign shop's offerings
Here's how to impress your clients & their customers
By Allen Landis

24
Top 10 common issues in UV printing & how to solve them
By Steve Weist

26
Selling sentimental items
Delicate orders provide lasting memories
By John Morman

APPAREL DECORATION

29
Resurrecting an old T-shirt design
Updating decade-old art for rerelease
By Lon Winters

34
The art of the perfect event T-shirt
Prioritizing quality, thoughtful design & effective project management
By Christy Shellenberger

36
How to open an online store & grow your business
By Matthew Rhome

38
Back to basics: Mastering the fundamentals of screen printing
Set yourself up for long-term success
By Keith Stevens



On the Cover:
Illuminated signs
An electrifying history.

(f11photo - stock.adobe.com)

EDITOR'S NOTE

6
Always learning
By James Anderson



34

WE HAVE A SOLUTION TO ALL OF YOUR FRAMING NEEDS

GAS PUMP FRAMES
Sell more in your store!™






Eye level mini ads at pump to entice gas pumpers and passengers in the cars to buy in your stores. Easily changeable 5 x 7 and $8^1/_2$ x 11 size ads.

gaspumpframes.com

Pivoting Pole Banner System



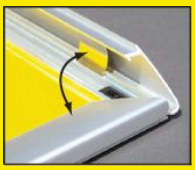
Ban"45" means it pivots 45 degrees to either side to deflect and re-direct the force of high winds off the banner.

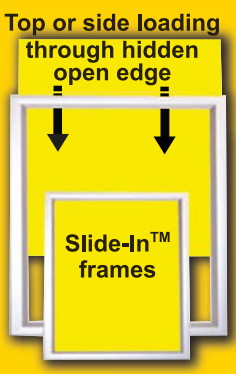
Patents Pending. All Rights Reserved.

ban45.com

FAST CHANGE FRAMES
Easiest way to display graphics!

FlipUp™ front load frame

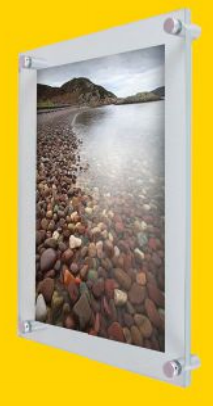




Any Size
1 minimum
Low Cost

NEW LED edge lit frames
Any Size, Any Color
1 Minimum

Acrylic Standoff Frames, any size, any shape.



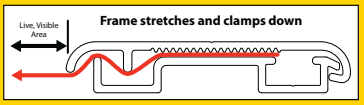
fastchangeframes.com

2 NEW Banner Stretching Frames

Beautiful Banner Display, Wrinkle free, Drum Tight



Only our frame offers perfect linear alignment with our included "Joiner Straps." Longer sections join easily and perfectly for the best results!

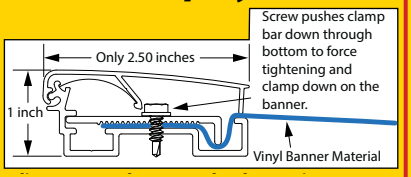






Create large and beautiful, drum-tight stretched vinyl banner displays!

SLIM PROFILE



Flip top snaps down completely covering all screws and stretcher bar. Clean, perfect look!

bannergrip.com **sales@bannergrip.com**



Beautifully display any size banner ! Patented

bannergrip.com

1-800-915-2828 **sales@bannergrip.com**

Easy online ordering 24/7 • Our Intelligent, informed Sales pros answer our phones and respond to your emails. Fast responses!

ALPINA®

Alpina Manufacturing
6460 W. Cortland St. Chicago, IL 60707
ban45.com • gaspumpframes.com • fastchangeframes.com • bannergrip.com

sales@fastchangeframes.com
1-800-915-2828

American Owned
American Made

GRAPHICS|PRO

CONTENTS



41

SIGNAGE & PRINTING

41
Transform restaurant interiors with wall wraps
A new look for an Early Toast location
By Kristin Lanzarone

48
Modern campus signage
Q&A with Phil Jennings of Creative Sign Company
By Marie Fennema

44
Illuminated signs
An electrifying history
By Paul Ingle

BUSINESS STRATEGIES

52
Hiring is harder than ever
Here's how to fix it
By Marshall Atkinson

60
Solutions for scaling images
The art & science behind image size
By Stephen Romaniello

58
Personalized gifts that create meaningful moments
By Aaron Montgomery

EXTRAS

8
Industry updates

15
5 questions

16
Product picks

16A
GPX news

FROM OUR PARTNERS

50
Product highlights

64
Marketplace

64
Ad index



58

©2025 Cahaba Media Group Inc., all rights reserved. GRAPHICS PRO (ISSN 2766-953X) is published monthly by Cahaba Media Group Inc., PO Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35223. Periodicals Postage Paid at Birmingham, AL 35223 and additional mailing offices. USPS/Cahaba Media Group Inc. Automatable Poly. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GRAPHICS PRO, PO Box 460794, Escondido, CA 92046-0794. All items submitted to GRAPHICS PRO become the sole property of GRAPHICS PRO and Cahaba Media Group Inc. and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Advertisers and/or their agencies, jointly and severally, assume all liabilities for printed advertisements in GRAPHICS PRO. Opinions expressed in GRAPHICS PRO not necessarily reflect the opinion of the magazine, its management or its advertisers.
Letters, pictures and manuscripts welcome.

CERTIFIED AUDIENCE
PRINTED WITH SOY INK

6Sign

Trade only

We ship from Los Angeles, CA and Boston, MA

Quality, Time, Lowest Price Guarantee

SCAN ME



Adhesive Products

Start from $0.99/sqft



13oz Vinyl Banner

$0.79/sqft



Standard Retractable Banner

Start from $39



DTF Gang Sheet

$1.49/sqft

Sublimation - Rigid signs - Tradeshow displays



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

Always learning

Years ago, when I worked as a small-town newspaper editor, I was invited to speak with a high school journalism class. When it came to the question of what I enjoyed about my job, my first thought was to quote an editor I once worked for, who said in the interview process, "The pay isn't great, but it won't feel so bad because the hours are worse."

Instead, I told these hungry young minds waiting for me to stop talking so they could go to lunch that what I liked most about my job was that it constantly pushed me to learn new things. The kids probably didn't believe me, but I did mean it. Rarely a day would go by without some historical moment that needed to be remembered, or new concern that popped up that would have a meaningful impact on a small group of people.

About a decade ago, my career took a turn from community journalism to trade journal editing and thankfully, the learning part still applies. Take for instance this month's issue of GRAPHICS PRO. Maybe some of you in the sign industry were aware of the history of illuminated signs presented in Paul Ingle's article on page 44. I wasn't. Sure, technically I read that article numerous times because I was paid to, but I'd also have read the whole thing in a magazine waiting at my dentist's office.

Of course, this issue isn't just about signage. As your shop preps for moms, dads, and grads season, Shelly Widhalm points how to personalize gifts to make them truly unique (page 17). With personalized gifts in mind, John Mormon, on page 26, shares best practices for selling personalized items for very meaningful moments in people's lives.

In the apparel decoration category, on page 29, Lon Winters demonstrates how his company brought a decade-old T-shirt design back to life. Specific to event T-shirts, Christy Shellenberger shares on page 34 the art of creating a perfect event tee.

Some topics are universal, regardless of what your shop carries. Hiring, for instance, is an important topic in any industry. If you're having a hard time hiring and retaining talent for your shop, Marshall Atkinson has some great advice for you on page 52.

Circling back to signage, be sure to check out Kristin Lanzarone's project that transformed the look of a Sacramento, California, restaurant. Managing Editor Marie Fennema also talked to Phil Jennings of Creative Sign Company on his company's take on modern signage for a Wisconsin high school campus.

If you're looking for hands-on learning, check out what Bill Mattes has to share about GPX University on page 16. As always, if you have suggestions for future topics we can cover, feel free to send an email to janderson@cahabamedia.com. Thanks for reading!



James Anderson
Editor-in-Chief

GRAPHICS|PRO
GRAPHICS|PRO|EXPO
GRAPHICS-PRO.COM

Editor-in-Chief
James Anderson
janderson@cahabamedia.com

Managing Editor
Marie Fennema
mfennema@cahabamedia.com

Senior Account Executive
Ryan Applebaum
rapplebaum@cahabamedia.com

Account Executive
Seth Messer
smesser@cahabamedia.com

Account Executive – GPX
Katie Ditallo
kditallo@cahabamedia.com

Account Executive – GPX
Leigh Ann Messer
lmesser@cahabamedia.com

Art Director
Iveth Gomez
igomez@cahabamedia.com

Web Designer
Charlie Fox
cfox@cahabamedia.com

Client Services Coordinator (Advertising)
Sonya Crocker
scrocker@cahabamedia.com

Contributing Writers
Shelley Widhalm, Allen Landis, Steve Weist, John Morman, Lon Winters, Christy Shellenberger, Matthew Rhome, Keith Stevens, Kristin Lanzarone, Paul Ingle, Marshall Atkinson, Aaron Montgomery, Stephen Romaniello

Event Operations Manager
Jackie Ramsier
jramsier@cahabamedia.com

Event Services Coordinator
Joie Martin
jmartin@cahabamedia.com

Subscription Changes & Inquiries:
graphicspro@omeda.com

CAHABA MEDIA GROUP
PO Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253

Publisher
Matthew G. Conroy

VP of Sales
Greg Meineke

VP of Finance
Brandon Whittemore

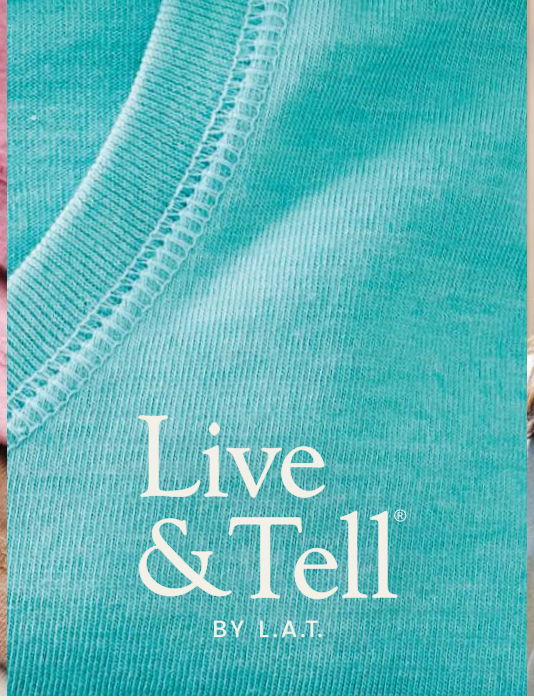
Director of Content
Elizabeth Manning

Director of Operations
Laurie Tisdale

Director of Sales
Stacy Marshall

Director of Events
Bill Mattes







VINTAGE WASH

THE SOFTEST TEE EVER.

5.7 oz. 55% ringspun cotton/45% polyester vintage wash jersey

www.latapparel.com







The Live & Tell Vintage Wash assortment achieves its authentic look and feel through a special wash process, which creates unique and natural variances in texture, distress, and shade. These are intentional and are NOT considered defective.

INDUSTRY UPDATES

EXECUTIVES



Marc Held
L2 Brands

Marc Held has been named president of **L2 Brands**. He officially began in the role in mid-January, reporting to L2 Brands CEO **Connor Knutson**. Held will oversee all customer-facing aspects of L2 Brands, including sales, customer service, merchandising, and marketing. Previously, Held served as senior vice president of sales and customer service at alphabroder.



Dan Burmeister
Roland DGA

Dan Burmeister has been appointed as **Roland DGA's** new president. Burmeister, a print industry veteran with more than 20 years of experience, replaces **Amado Lara**, who will serve as vice president of Latin American sales and business development. Burmeister has held senior sales, marketing, and operations executive positions with several well-known companies within the commercial and wide-format print sectors, including Canon, Eastman Kodak, Océ, Encad, and Xerox.



Steve Bratspies
HanesBrands

Steve Bratspies will depart as chief executive officer of **HanesBrands** at the end of 2025, or upon the appointment of his successor. As part of the company's leadership succession planning process, the board has begun a comprehensive search to identify the company's next CEO and has retained Spencer Stuart, an executive search firm, to support its work. Bratspies will step down from the board of directors concurrent with the end of his tenure as CEO.



Eric Kahle
Visual Marking Systems

Visual Marking Systems (VMS), a third-generation, family-owned provider of custom-printed product identification decals and fleet graphics, announced **Eric Kahle** as the company's new president. This leadership transition is part of a strategic 10-year succession plan developed by Eric and his father, Dolf Kahle, CEO of VMS. As president, Eric will focus on continuing VMS's growth, innovation, and operational excellence. Dolf will remain in his role as CEO, providing leadership and guidance during this transition.

GIVING BACK

Osawatomie High School and **The Uniform Post** were awarded the Q4 **Stahl Family Scholarship** and materials.

Crystal D celebrated its late founder, Chuck Dahlgren's, birthday by making charitable contributions in his honor, giving **20%** of the product total from Legacy Gallery award purchases to four nonprofit organizations.

JDS Industries transitioned to 100% employee-owned through an employee stock ownership plan.

Koozie Group announced the graduation of the second service dog, Daphne, from its sponsored litter with **4 Paws for Ability**.

UPCOMING EVENTS

GPX Indianapolis
June 19-21
Indianapolis Convention Center
g-p-x.com/in

Colorways
August 14-15
Chicago, IL
mscprinthouse.com/colorways

GPX Long Beach
August 21-23
Long Beach Convention Center
g-p-x.com/ca

GPX Meadowlands
September 12-13
Meadowlands Convention Center
g-p-x.com/nj

GPX Charlotte
November 6-8
Charlotte Convention Center
g-p-x.com/nc

Sponsored by

GRAPHICS|PRO webinar

From Printing to Promos: How to Expand Without Extra Overhead

Ready to expand your printing business into the promotional products industry? This webinar will show you how to grow your offerings without extra overhead by leveraging the power of promotional products. You'll discover:

- How to diversify your revenue by adding promotional products to your current services, catering to the growing demand for branded merchandise and providing your customers with more options.
- Cost-effective ways to enter the promo products market, focusing on high-margin, low-inventory items that require minimal upfront investment.
- How to partner with suppliers in the promotional products industry, allowing you access to a wide variety of products without the need for stocking inventory.
- Affordable marketing strategies to introduce promo products to your clients, including social media campaigns, email marketing, and word-of-mouth tactics.
- How to scale without extra overhead, using online platforms to manage orders and fulfill client needs efficiently.

SPEAKER



Doug Charles
Account Executive
Advertising Specialty Institute
dcharles@asicentral.com

Watch on demand at

GRAPHICS-PRO.COM/WEBINARS

SCAN ME



INDUSTRY UPDATES

EXECUTIVES



Chuck Ward
Gildan Activewear

Gildan Activewear announced the following executive leadership nominations and a CFO transition as part of a multi-year succession planning process: **Chuck Ward**, currently president of sales, marketing, and distribution, has been appointed to the newly created role of executive vice president, chief operating officer, and will continue to report to **Glenn J. Chamandy**, president and CEO. Ward joined Gildan in 2011 through the acquisition of GoldToe Moretz, where he served as executive vice president and chief financial officer and initially led the integration of GoldToe into Gildan.

NEW HIRES, PROMOTIONS & RECOGNITIONS







Amanda Stevens, Steve Serini & Tanner Serini
Cap America

Cap America promoted **Amanda Stevens** to training and development specialist, **Steve Serini** to director of facility operations, and **Tanner Serini** to the position of maintenance supervisor. Stevens has been with Cap America since June 2022, starting as a quality control inspector and later advancing to quality control trainer in May 2024. Steve Serini's promotion comes after five years of exceptional leadership as facility maintenance manager. Tanner Serini, who joined Cap America in May 2023 as a senior mechanic, brings with him over 13 years of experience in industrial maintenance.







Mike Renna, Kenny Ginn & Sean Profera
Roland DGA

Roland DGA announced several personnel changes within its sales department. **Mike Renna**, who previously served as a Roland DGA regional sales manager, has been promoted to the newly created position of strategic sales manager. **Kenny Ginn**, a top field salesperson within the sign and graphics industry for the last 12 years, has been appointed to the newly created Roland DGA position of sales manager – digital fabrication. **Sean Profera**, formerly a sales and marketing expert within the channel, will now serve as product experience sales manager.

WEBINARS

Xante
May 8 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

ColDesi
May 28 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

Gravotech
July 10 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

Xante
July 24 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

ASI
August 7 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

ColDesi
August 21 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

Equipment Zone
September 25 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

Xante
October 2 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

ColDesi
November 13 • 12 p.m.
gpro.link/webinars

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Lawson Screen & Digital and **Workhorse Products** have announced a strategic merger. The companies will continue to operate as usual, with no changes to staff, contact information, or day-to-day operations.

EXPANSIONS

Kern Laser Systems, a provider of laser cutting and engraving solutions, launched a wholly-owned division, **Beam Laser Systems**.

Vanguard Digital Printing Systems, a Durst Group company, opened an experience center located in Franklin, Tennessee.

Is UV Printing Right for You?

FREE | MAY 8 | 12 P.M. CENTRAL

GRAPHICS PRO webinar



Thinking about adding UV printing to your business? This webinar will break down what makes UV printing different, how it increases efficiency, and the surprising range of products you can create. From cost analysis to real-world applications, we'll guide you through the decision-making process to see if UV printing is the right move for your business.

SPONSORED BY XANTÉ

REGISTER AT
GRAPHICS-PRO.COM/WEBINARS

SPEAKER:



Mark Priede
Vice President of Sales
Xanté

Mark Priede brings over 20 years of extensive experience in the print industry, combining deep technical expertise in sales leadership. He began his career at Xanté in 2005 as territory manager for Latin America and has since advanced to vice president of sales. Over the years, Mark has developed a comprehensive understanding of digital print technology, including laser and inkjet systems. Mark has also been a key educator at industry events, sharing actionable strategies and insights to help businesses thrive in today's competitive printing landscape.

NEW HIRES, PROMOTIONS & RECOGNITIONS



Craig Ryan & Steven Clune
S&S Activewear

S&S Activewear announced key leadership appointments to its Canadian division: **Craig Ryan** has been appointed vice president of commercial Canada and **Steven Clune** has been named national director of sales for Canada, reporting directly to Ryan. Ryan will lead the Canadian market's strategic direction, overseeing all sales operations and working closely with dedicated functional leaders. Clune will strengthen sales efforts nationwide.



Stefan Hackl
Luxinar

Stefan Hackl has been appointed the new managing director of **Luxinar**. In his new role, Hackl will lead the 200-plus workforce at the Hull, UK manufacturing site and headquarters, and the employees at Luxinar's sales and service offices in China, Germany, Italy, Korea, and the U.S.





Rhodri Harries & Luca Barile
Gildan Activewear

Rhodri (Rhod) J. Harries, has informed the **Gildan** board of his intention to retire on Jan. 1. The company announced that **Luca Barile**, currently CFO, sales, marketing, and distribution, will succeed Harries, as EVP and CFO.



Eric Zimmerman
Roland DG

Eric Zimmerman, a sign and graphics veteran with more than 25 years of related experience, has been appointed as **Roland DG's** new director of global market research. Prior to assuming his new role with Roland DG, Zimmerman served for six years as director of wide-format print for the global research and analysis firm Keypoint Intelligence.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Fully Promoted, originally established as EmbroidMe, marks its 25th year of business this year.

Atlantis Headwear, a provider of blank headwear, has become a **bluesign** system partner by meeting its sustainability criteria.

Minuteman Press International, a printing and marketing services franchise, announced several new milestones: Entering its 50th year of franchising, the company has broken the 1,000-center mark and has been awarded the No. 1 ranking in the printing/marketing services category by **Entrepreneur Magazine**.

Vantage Apparel debuted its new anniversary wall at its corporate headquarters in New Jersey. The wall celebrates the dedication and achievements of more than 120 team members who have each marked 15 or more years with the company.

FDC Graphic Films recognized seven employees named as "Core Values Ambassadors" for the third quarter of 2024: **Jorge Barajas**, **Fernando Cocoletzi-Gomez**, **Justin Cooper-Mohr**, **Carter Cox**, **Linda Carter**, **Joseph Labadie**, and **Eric Norby**.

Jon Wolf of **Wolf Designs** in Arizona has been awarded the 2024 Signelements Award for Outstanding Vehicle Graphic Design.

Rowmark's Safe-T-Mark sheet products with black core color combinations have received Underwriters Laboratories safety certification UL94-V0 Flame Retardant Yellow Card E354751 in the U.S. and Canada.

FASTSIGNS presented the U.S. Vendor of the Year Award to **Grimco** and the Canadian Vendor of the Year Award to **Spicers** at the 2025 FASTSIGNS International Convention.

SUBSCRIBE TO GRAPHICS PRO



APPAREL DECORATION • AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION • SIGNAGE • WIDE-FORMAT PRINTING • WRAPS

- Full market coverage
- Best business practices
- Knowledge-building features
- GRAPHICS PRO Today e-Newsletter, monthly magazine, Q&As, new products, videos, and more!

SCAN ME

Subscribe for **FREE! graphics-pro.com/subscribe** • **800-256-2785** or use QR code

NEW HIRES, PROMOTIONS & RECOGNITIONS



Cristi Meyer
Prime Line

Cristi Meyer has been hired as the new director of national/strategic accounts for **Prime Line**, a division of **S&S Activewear** and provider of promotional products. Meyer spent 15 years at Staples Promotional Products, 13 years at Sweda (now SnugZ), and two years at AAA Innovations. In her new role, she will be traveling across the country to represent the company with several elite strategic accounts

---





Ray Rodriguez & Tawauna Garner
Crystal D

Crystal D has added industry veteran **Ray Rodriguez** to its sales leadership team and promoted **Tawauna Garner** to solutions manager. After consulting with Crystal D over the last six months, Rodriguez joins the company as its vice president of sales. It's the latest in a series of progressions Garner has made as a leader on Crystal D's inside sales team, known as the "Solutions Team."







Brett Long, Jaimee Benson & Tracy Royster
Charles River Apparel

Charles River Apparel added of three professionals to its crew: **Brett Long**, **Jaimee Benson**, and **Tracy Royster**, who will bring their extensive expertise and passion to key sales roles. Long joins Charles River Apparel as the national account manager, bringing 19 years of industry experience, including roles at Hirsch, Goldstar, and The Magnet Group. Benson joins Charles River Apparel in a newly created role as the business development representative for New England, with a focus on growing the resort and destination markets. Royster joins as the outside sales territory manager for North Carolina and South Carolina, bringing extensive apparel industry experience.



Have news to share?
Email gpeditorial@cahabamedia.com.

PARTNERSHIPS

AS Colour is the official merchandise partner for **South by Southwest** (SXSW) 2025.

ColDesi announced a strategic partnership with **Texmac/ HappyJapan** and will be the exclusive distributor of HappyJapan embroidery machines in Florida.

STAHLS' Hotronix, a heat press manufacturer, entered into an exclusive worldwide manufacturing, distribution, and service agreement with **Stampinator**, integrating Hotronix IQ heat press technology into the Stampinator concept.

Koozie Group announced a new promotional products supplier partnership with **SproutWorld**, the maker and global patent holder of the world's first plantable pencil.

Nazdar Ink Technologies has collaborated with the **Georgia Institute of Technology's Digital Design and Manufacturing Lab** to explore advancements in 3D printing through a novel process known as radio frequency additive manufacturing.

Color-Logic, a Hybrid Software brand and color management solutions provider, announced a strategic partnership with **Hinterkopf**, a manufacturer of machinery for printing cylinders and tubes.

Broadsign & **Scope3** partner to advance carbon measurement in DOOH advertising.

NEW BUSINESSES

Big Frog Custom T-Shirts & More, announced the latest independently owned and operated store in Fayetteville, Georgia, owned by **Domonique Downing**, a former scientist at Coca-Cola with a doctorate in chemistry.

5 questions *with...* Lon Riley



Lon Riley is a recognized leader in UV printing, engineering, and workflow optimization, with over 30 years of experience driving innovation in high-volume production environments. As the founder and principal collaborator at DPI Laboratory, he has pioneered advancements in digital printing technology, enhancing efficiency and scalability for manufacturers worldwide. His expertise bridges the gap between technical precision and financial strategy, helping businesses streamline operations while maximizing profitability. A sought-after industry speaker and consultant, Riley continues to push the boundaries of what's possible in digital print solutions, shaping the future of the industry through strategic innovation and hands-on problem-solving.

Know someone who should be featured on this page?

Email gpeditorial@cahabamedia.com.

1 DPI Laboratory is a fairly new company. Can you share a bit about how it started?

When I left my last company, I took a two-year hiatus but ultimately decided that I just could not get enough — this industry is simply too much fun. Where else can you conflate engineering, chemistry, software, enterprise workflow, and graphic design? I started the company with a line of specialty UV inks and coatings and, at the urging of a number of former clients and colleagues, set out to design an improved line of UV printers. It has been difficult, but I have a fantastic team and I love it.

2 Your company introduced Catalyst printers. What sets these printers apart from others in the UV category?

We simply set out to provide a high-quality product at a good price point. I saw an opportunity in the UV-printing space to push the technology farther, while keeping costs in check and making many features accessible, which were previously reserved for much more expensive and complicated equipment. Our printer packages are simple, but powerful, and designed to help businesses offer more products, while controlling fixed and variable operating costs. We will continue to push those boundaries and improve both the core product line and our value-add services.

3 What other products does your company provide?

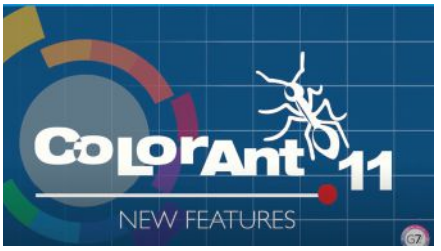
Catalyst printers are our flagship product, but the combination of the printers with our software and inks are what really sets the package apart. We started the company with specialty inks and coatings and will continue to provide U.S.-made UV inks and UV-cured coatings and offer custom chemistry. We also offer systems integrations solutions and workflow software that help streamline the order-to-cash process in print and customization operations.

4 What would you say are the biggest challenges facing the printing industry today?

Rising material and supply chain costs are going to become increasingly painful in the near term. We have built a diverse supply chain and are working hard to insulate our customers from the effects of changes in the global economy, but these are difficult waters to navigate right now. Finding and retaining skilled workers to fill positions has also been a struggle for some of our clients. We're working to move digital-printing technology deeper into the educational realm to help introduce more students to this highly-marketable skill set, which will hopefully help to bring more talent back to the industry and close this skilled trades gap.

5 The flip side of that question: What do you think are the biggest opportunities?

This may sound like an unusual answer, but there is a big opportunity in data related to the print operations. While we are quite proud of Catalyst printers, there are plenty of machines that can make great prints on any number of items or substrates. We believe the future is in providing better visibility to and control over entire production operations. The more data we can make available to our clients, the better they can manage their printer fleet, get ahead of demand, reduce costs, and drive more revenue. **GP**



ColorLogic ColorAnt 11

ColorLogic, a hybrid software brand, has released ColorAnt 11, the newest version of its color measurement and correction software. Designed to optimize workflow efficiency and color accuracy, ColorAnt 11 introduces advanced features tailored for professionals in color management. With a revamped user interface, ColorAnt 11 is developed to streamline test chart creation, offering a faster, more intuitive experience. The complementary Mini Charts mode is designed to enhance flexibility, allowing users to generate custom charts for diverse printing applications. Key improvements include expanded functionality in the Edit Primaries tool, enabling fine-tuned adjustments to primary color density. The enhanced Adopt Secondaries feature ensures greater accuracy when managing secondary colors. Additionally, ColorAnt 11 now supports the Barbieri Spectro Swing qb measurement device, offering fully automated color chart measurement through USB and Ethernet connections. **colorlogic.de/en/colorant**



Computerized Cutters

Computerized Cutters has introduced its most advanced router in over 30 years: the XLR8 router. According to the manufacturer, the router is designed to fit any budget, and features upgraded software, helical gears, enhanced motors, and a variety of cutting tool options engineered to tackle some of the most demanding materials in the sign industry. **computerizedcutters.com**



GCC Cutter compatible with 3M

GCC Cutter now is engineered to work seamlessly with 3M Pattern and Solutions Center Software. The RXII and Jaguar V are now optimized for car detailing, including PPF and tint applications. This integration is designed to enhance precision by leveraging 3M's pattern library for over 4,500 vehicles. The RXII series is said to offer high-speed accuracy, while the Jaguar V series delivers robust cutting capabilities. Professionals can use GCC vinyl cutters to achieve vehicle wraps with enhanced efficiency, protecting surfaces from scratches, UV rays, and environmental damage. **gccworld.com**

Hanes Moves



Hanes has introduced its first-ever cross-category athleisure collection developed to bring bold design, smart performance features, and unbeatable value. Whether consumers are staying comfy on the couch, running errands, or hitting the gym, Hanes Moves is engineered to ensures that the wearer is comfortable and ready for anything. The line includes colorful matching sports bras and leggings, streamlined moisture-wicking tees, and supportive running shorts. Items include: chafing and cooling solutions for men's and boy's underwear; breathable stretch technology for women's underwear; moisture-wicking, odor control, and anti-chafe properties across apparel; functional storage solutions in legging and shorts for phones and keys; leak protection integrated into select women's styles. The collection boasts a variety of men's, women's and kids' innerwear and apparel, retailing from $8 - $45. **hanes.com**



Donaldson BOFA extendable arms mobile extraction system

Donaldson BOFA has launched a new mobile fume extraction system with articulated arms capable of filtering emissions associated with heavy-duty laser processes, soldering, and organic solvents. The AD 1500 iQ Dual Arms offers a functional reach of over 6', to ensure precision and operational flexibility in removing potentially harmful airborne contaminants on larger scale projects. The system also includes an integrated spark arrestor developed to reduce the risk of thermal events by capturing hot embers before they can enter the extraction system. The extraction system features Donaldson BOFA's Intelligent Operating System (iQ), providing access to real-time airflow readings, filter condition monitoring and remote diagnostics. A multi-stage filtration architecture includes a pre-filter, HEPA filter and carbon layer, with an extended exhaust box developed to reduce noise and air dispersion. **donaldsonbofa.com**

The GPX University experience

By Bill Mattes

Scan here to register!

As we get older, continuing education and training are great ways to continue broadening our horizons, especially on the business side of our lives. The trick to this as we age is making sure we find that what we are reading, participating in, or watching is compelling.

As children, when we were learning, we had a curiosity for many things. As we matured, our interests became more refined and narrowed. As we narrow the interests down, they tend to center around what we do for a living so we can stay aware of trends and industry changes.

With GRAPHICS PRO EXPO, this is no different. Our show serves an industry where trends, technology, supplies, and — most importantly — company acquisitions are changing almost daily. The only way to keep up with most of these is by participating in webinars, hosted seminars, etc. GPX brought to market the GPX University product for attendees to experience hands-on training so they can learn best practices, see new products, and chat with influencers so they stay at the forefront of industry changes.





Our experience to-date shows this has been exceedingly well received and people walk away with greater knowledge of processes, best practices, and materials. We have also found attendees are reviewing new revenue streams more closely once they experience the different stations in the GPX University area of our shows.

We will continue to invest in education and bring our in-classroom programs along with a refresh such as new subjects and presenters. If there are subjects you'd like GPX to include, please send us an email at gpxinfo@cahabamedia.com so we can include those in future shows.

Enjoy the spring and we hope to see you at GPX Indy in June. **GP**



Bill Mattes is Cahaba Media Group's director of events, overseeing GRAPHICS PRO EXPO. Reach him at bmattes@cahabamedia.com.



Experience GPX

in **Indianapolis, IN**
June 19-21, 2025
Classes start June 18

Get hands-on experience and learn from the best at GPX University and WRAPSCON University.

WRAPSCON UNIVERSITY

GPX UNIVERSITY

Register now!

For more information and to view all 2025 show dates and locations, visit **g-p-x.com**

After you register, be sure to check out our new app for all the latest show info!

Gift ideas for moms, dads & grads

Personalization makes gifts unique & special By Shelley Widhalm

Personalization takes an ordinary gift for a mom, dad, or grad, and with a few words or a photo, makes it something they'll want to keep forever.

"When you think of drinkware, an ornament, a tumbler, a mug, or those items that are seemingly ubiquitous, if it has a photo on it or a drawing, those are things you're likely to cherish and keep," said Jackie Faeth, marketing coordinator for Johnson Plastics Plus. "People are willing to pay for items that are unique and special to them."

The personalization of gifts, a market that has seen growth in the past 10 to 15 years, is popular for all kinds of items, with drinkware and home decor dominating sales, Faeth said.

"The cool thing about what our customers do is they can take those items and make the coolest gifts ever," remarked Faeth. "The possibilities are just endless with the combination of materials and technologies."

Moms & dads

"Ornaments are always huge," Faeth said. "We tend to think of them as Christmas gifts, but they can be given any time of the year."

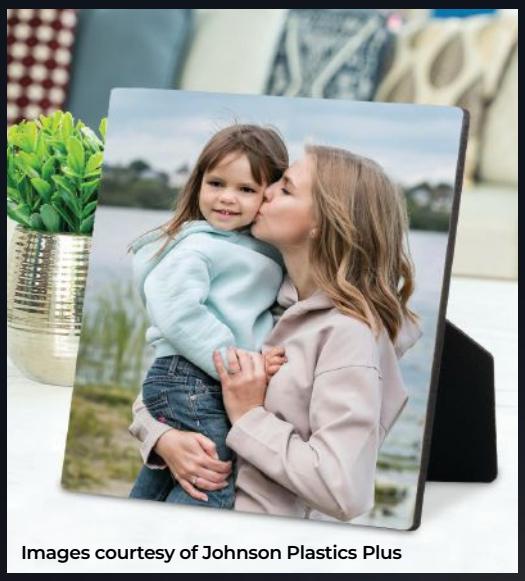
Ornaments can be gifted for first-time parents or a first Mother's or Father's Day and can be hung, made into a car charm, or displayed on a shelf as decoration.

Popular for dads is a custom basement or man cave sign, such as an engraved sign stating "Dad's Bar," a hammer with his name engraved on the handle, or a sublimated insert for a tool chest saying something like "Don't touch!" If the sign or insert is metal, a diode laser can be used, while a laser engraver is preferable for materials like wood or acrylic.

Another popular item is photos made into gifts, such as photo panels or photo jewelry. Photo panels are a collection of photos sublimated onto different



Images courtesy of Johnson Plastics Plus







Images courtesy of Johnson Plastics Plus

panels and hung or placed in a shadow box, commemorating special moments or showing off favorite images of family and friends. Alternatively, photo jewelry can be diode or laser engraved, depending on the material, with words or images engraved onto a charm or a metal pendant. For instance, a metal charm could have initials with flowers of the birth months of their children engraved onto the piece. Or a metal bracelet with a charm with a heart-, square-, or circular-shaped insert can be sublimated with a photo. Also popular is laser-cutting a favorite child's drawing or their handwritten words onto a sign or something that can be placed on a desk.

"There's so much you can do beyond a Happy Mother's Day or Father's Day mug," Faeth said. "You can take acrylic and make a charm bracelet for a parent, and every year make a new charm."

Beyond metal and wood, soft materials, like ties or socks, can be sublimated with photos, patterns, or words, using a sublimation printer and a transfer to adhere the image onto a blank using a special sublimation ink to make the image.

Tumblers and other stainless steel drinkware items continue to be a popular gift item, not just for moms and dads, but for everyone in the family, said Chris Smith, COO of Marco Awards Group.

Drinkware can come in styles from wineglasses to 20-ounce and handled 40-ounce mugs. The items can be laser engraved or directly printed, though laser engraving is the most popular for the durability and pop of color it can offer.

"It's something many already have, which makes them fun to swap out or even [make into] an accessory with their outfits," said Sara Thompson, laser/UV coordinator for JDS Industries. "The color combinations, mixed with personalization of











Images courtesy of JDS Industries

the drinkware, can make it as unique as your parent is to you."

Knives are "part of a huge industry that covers such a large demographic of people and their professions and hobbies," Thompson said.

"The knives can be sold without any personalization and be a great standalone gift. Adding the extra touch of personalization makes them more than a utility item but one to be treasured," Thompson said, adding that personalization is done through direct laser engraving or incorporating Cermark to mark the items with things like logos, names, and initials.

Condé Systems' top sellers for moms are UV-printed or laser-engraved gift boxes, sublimatable linens sold by the yard, and blank items like totes, zippered cosmetic bags, pillowcases, and kitchen accessories like aprons, oven mitts, and potholders.

"If you buy the fabric, you can

JOHNSONPLASTICS PLUS

Custom gifts for grads, moms, & dads!



Learn more at jpplus.com!
Scan this code to see our Spring Product Guide

JPPLUS.COM | 1-800-869-7800 | ORDERS SHIP SAME DAY WHEN PLACED BY 4 PM EST







Images courtesy of Johnson Plastics Plus

sublimate it all the way, then cut and sew it," said David McLean, president of Condé Systems Inc. "Also popular for a cook are glass cutting boards and stainless steel serving bowls that are vacuum insulated and have an attached lid that can stand upright, both of which can be sublimated. The bowls can be engraved on the sides, plus the lid has a round disc for sublimating.

"Personalized gifts have so much more value than something off the shelf," McLean said. "Personalized gifts are rising in popularity because it doesn't cost much more than a plain item from a big box store."

"We also carry a line of office essentials, awards, and gifts made with vegan leather that can be personalized with a name or message," Smith said. "Another great gift idea for dads and moms is our bamboo kitchen items and barbecue gift sets. These useful accessories can be easily laser engraved or UV printed with messages and family names directly onto the product with all types of personalized messages."

The items can be personalized with full-color UV printing as well as traditional laser engraving.

"Our customers are looking for items that have meaning but also are useful items the recipient can use throughout the year," Smith said. "A sublimated mug or an engraved tumbler will always remind the recipient of a friend or loved one."

Grads

A trendy home decor item for high school graduates is a set of linen storage cubes with a monogram or design they love for organization and saving space. Other high-selling grad items include custom pillow covers, caddies for shared restrooms, and sublimated or engraved notebooks to take to class.

Also popular are personalized puzzles by taking a special photo, such as of a graduate, and sublimating the image onto a blank or custom shape like the state where the graduate will be attending school.

Leatherette cord cases are popular for graduates to keep all their chargers in one place when going to class or traveling. JDS Industries makes cases that are wrapped with a leatherette and have inside pockets and straps to accommodate several cords, charger blocks, and other technological devices. The cases can be personalized through laser engraving, UV printing, or heat transfer vinyl (HTV) or direct-to-film (DTF) treatments with things like logos and names.

"The younger generation has multiple devices needing to be charged, so it's practical and stylish," Thompson said. "In this tech-heavy world, there is a charger for everything."

Additional popular items for graduates include sublimated stoles, decorated with the graduate's school name, and things for their vehicle, such as personalized air fresheners and sublimated frames for license plates.

"Anything auto-related they would appreciate if they're getting their first car," said McLean.

Wrapping up

Personalized gifts are unique,

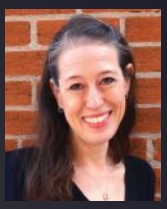


Images courtesy of Condé Systems



one-of-a-kind items that can last forever, and gifts that are tailored for moms, dads, and grads carry extra meaning and will be something to treasure.

These kinds of gifts not only mark a special occasion like Mother's or Father's Day or a milestone like graduation, but they also show that the gift giver put thought, effort, and love into choosing and personalizing the gift. The gift ultimately creates a deeper connection between the giver and receiver, and because the gift carries sentimental value, it is cherished as a keepsake and can even become an heirloom passed down the generations. **GP**



Shelley Widhalm is a freelance writer and editor and founder of Shell's Ink Services, a writing and editing service based in Loveland, Colorado. She has more than 15 years of experience in communications and holds a master's degree in English from Colorado State University. She can be reached at shellsinkservices.com or shellsinkservices@gmail.com.



Images courtesy of Marco Awards Group

Want more impact?

Add branded products to your sign shop's offerings

By Allen Landis



Images courtesy of Fully Promoted Lancaster & Signarama Lancaster

We all know how important it is for a business to have an eye-catching, well-placed sign if they want to attract customers. But that's just the start of an effective awareness campaign for your clients, who get a secondary sales force when you create mugs, T-shirts, bags, and other branded items their customers can showcase in your community. Adding promotional products to your sign shop's offerings can also benefit you by solidifying your client relationships and creating more opportunities for repeat business.

The demand for promo products is here and rising. According to Grandview Research, American businesses spend $20 billion a year on promotional products; the global market was valued at $90.5 billion in 2023. The research firm also forecasts 3.75% annual growth in the worldwide market through 2030. Grandview calls promo products "a low-budget customer acquisition technique (that) enables startups and small enterprises to reduce their marketing expenses while still capturing consumers' attention."

The success of this market stems from companies' desire to make the physical workspace more inviting, with a recognizable look and feel for employees and customers alike. Customers are looking for more meaningful products that are useful and durable. Businesses aren't just buying promotional products to increase brand awareness but for employee retention, rewards, and recruitment. When given as prizes for team-building activities, for instance, they can help create a sense of pride and camaraderie among co-workers.

A business needs branded apparel and promotional products for the same reason they need a sign. It isn't just important; it is essential for customers to be able to identify you wherever you are. Promotional products are one more opportunity to stand out and demonstrate what kind of organization the business is.

The most significant benefit of adding promo products to your sign shop's



offerings is that you become a more trusted source of what your customers need, further entrenching yourself in your client base. If a customer can now get two products from you instead of just signage, they have one less point of contact that they need to manage, which they appreciate. Additionally, offering more products allows you to nurture the relationship with your customer and better understand their business and needs, which opens the opportunity for you to give them new products and services.

We've grown our expertise and knowledge with a new set of vendors and products, making us more competitive as a business in our area. The more we diversify our products, services, and expertise, the more value we offer our customers — enhancing our brand and driving growth.



Getting started with branded products

If you haven't extended your services into this area, you can start with trade show items like table throws, retractable banners, and tabletop displays. Then, you can expand to individual items like drinkware and office supplies.

When looking for clients, consider industries with big promotional product budgets, such as the automotive or insurance sector, or categories like landscaping and construction, whose employees wear branded apparel.

Ask about their business, their employees and customers, and other challenges they are facing. You can then identify opportunities to offer them promotional products that make sense. This approach helps them understand that you want to help solve their challenges instead of just selling them additional products and services.

When suggesting any new product or service, you may not get to "yes" right away. You may have to propose a branded product several times before your message registers, so it's critical to communicate everything you can offer on a consistent basis. Using your email campaigns, social media, and in-store branding and displays to remind your existing customer base what else they can get for you is essential to become that one-stop shop.

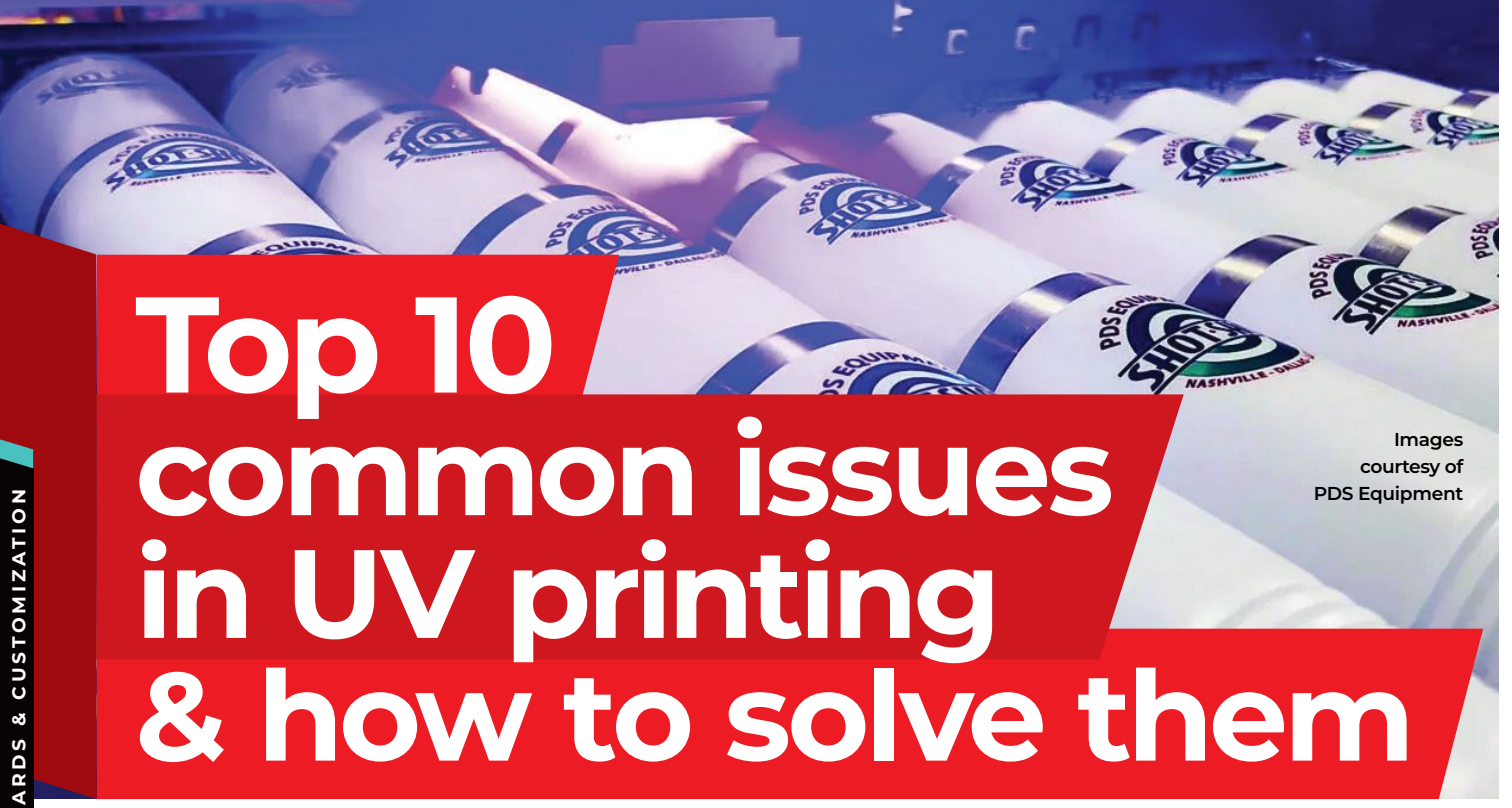
Once you and your team are comfortable executing promotional product orders, bring samples and displays in-store. As the team's experience grows, incorporate it into your email and social media marketing.

The industry has many vendors that operate in different ways, so it is essential to understand each one you work with; you'll avoid surprises and won't underdeliver to your customers. The beauty of having a sign shop, however, is that you may not need an outside vendor for all products. If you have a UV printer and a laser engraver, you may be able to offer in-house promotional products such as golf balls and drinkware at a competitive price with quicker turnaround times.

Start slow and work with customers you already have an excellent relationship with; they'll be more forgiving of mishaps with new products and vendors that are likely to arise. But don't let the challenge of a new product category cause you to miss this tremendous opportunity for your sign business. **GP**



Allen Landis is the owner of Fully Promoted Lancaster and Signarama Lancaster in Pennsylvania. With a background in both state government and the military sector, Allen brings expertise to the forefront of creative branding solutions for businesses in his community.



Images courtesy of PDS Equipment

Top 10 common issues in UV printing & how to solve them

By Steve Weist

UV printing has revolutionized the printing industry with its ability to print on virtually any substrate, with quick curing times and vibrant color capabilities. However, like any advanced printing method, it comes with its own set of challenges. If you're using a flatbed or any other UV printer, here are 10 common issues you may face and how to overcome them.

1. Adhesion issues on different substrates

Problem: Ink not adhering properly to glass, acrylic, metal, or other challenging surfaces.

Solution: Use a suitable primer or adhesion promoter. Surface preparation, such as wiping with isopropyl alcohol or flame treating, can improve adhesion. Also, choosing the right ink formulation (e.g., LUS-120 for flexibility or LH-100 for rigidity) is critical. If your printer has them, use onboard jettable primers for precise placement.



2. Ink cracking or peeling

Problem: Ink cracks or peels off over time, especially on flexible materials.

Solution: Ensure you are using the right ink for the material. Flexible inks like LUS-120 work well on materials that bend, while rigid inks like LH-100 are better suited for hard surfaces. Proper curing and pre-treatment also help.

3. Banding or uneven print quality

Problem: Visible horizontal lines or inconsistencies in color.

Solution: Always do a test draw to ensure all nozzles are firing before going into production. This will allow for a flawless print. If nozzles are missing, perform head cleanings and do machine maintenance until you get a perfect test draw.

4. Overspray & ink buildup

Problem: Ink misting causes unwanted deposits on the printer components.

Solution: Adjust the print height to the correct level. Regularly clean the print heads and surrounding areas to prevent overspray buildup, which can cause long-term issues. The use of proper file size, proper head gap, and precise jigs to catch overspray and absorb light will help eliminate overspray and buildup. If you are running LD print modes with a high head gap, you will need to perform more frequent head cleanings and keep a close eye on your mist absorption filters.

5. Color matching difficulties

Problem: Printed colors don't match the design or expectations.

Solution: Choose proper high-quality print files that are CMYK and let the machine put down the white layer. This ensures your colors are very close every time. You can also have custom ICC color profiles built to further enhance color accuracy.

6. Curing issues

Problem: Ink not curing properly, leading to tacky prints.

Solution: Ensure the UV lamps are functioning correctly and that curing intensity is adequate for the ink and material. Slowing down the print speed may allow more curing time if

necessary. Also, inspect the LED lamps to ensure there is no overspray on the lens that blocks the UV light from curing the inks.

7. Material warping due to heat

Problem: Thin or heat-sensitive materials warp under UV lamp exposure.

Solution: Use lower-powered UV settings or LED curing to minimize heat exposure. Consider using substrates that can better withstand UV curing. The use of an adhesive engraving mat will help hold down thin materials such as thin plastics and leatherette for hat patches.

8. Printhead clogging

Problem: Ink cures in the nozzles, causing blockages and inconsistent printing. This is always caused by reflected light.

Solution: Perform daily nozzle checks and clean the heads as needed. Keeping the printer in a stable environment with controlled humidity prevents ink from curing in the nozzles. Check the condition of the wiper system and take measures to eliminate overspray and light reflection.

9. Scalability challenges

Problem: As business grows, production can't keep up with demand.



Solution: UV printing is highly scalable. Multiple machines can be run from a single workstation, allowing businesses to expand easily. Most of our customers add their second printer nine to 12 months in, if not sooner; so when you place printer No. 1, plan for growth with printer No. 2 very soon.

10. Operator skill & training issues

Problem: Operators struggle with optimizing machine performance.

Solution: Investing in proper training and incentives for operators improves performance and reduces errors. A comfortable, well-compensated team ensures machines are used to their fullest potential. Think about operator compensation.

This operator now has three extra jobs: UV machine operator, UV machine maintenance technician, and content creator for all of your socials. If you compensate your UV print team properly, you will get complete buy-in from your staff and will benefit from your entire team pushing your UV print dreams forward.

Final thoughts

While UV printing offers incredible versatility and efficiency, understanding these common challenges and their solutions ensures smooth operation and high-quality output. If you're looking for hands-on learning and networking with experts, join us at UV Energize in Nashville, from Sept. 2-4. This three-day event will provide in-depth training, live demos, and industry insights to help you maximize your UV printing success! GP





Steve Weist is the CEO at PDS Equipment. Steve started as a service technician installing Heidelberg and Komori offset presses. He has brought that level of precision into the UV inkjet world. Steve now focuses his efforts in the flatbed UV market because he feels it is unlimited and is the future of print and decoration.

Images courtesy of John Morman

Selling sentimental items

Delicate orders provide lasting memories

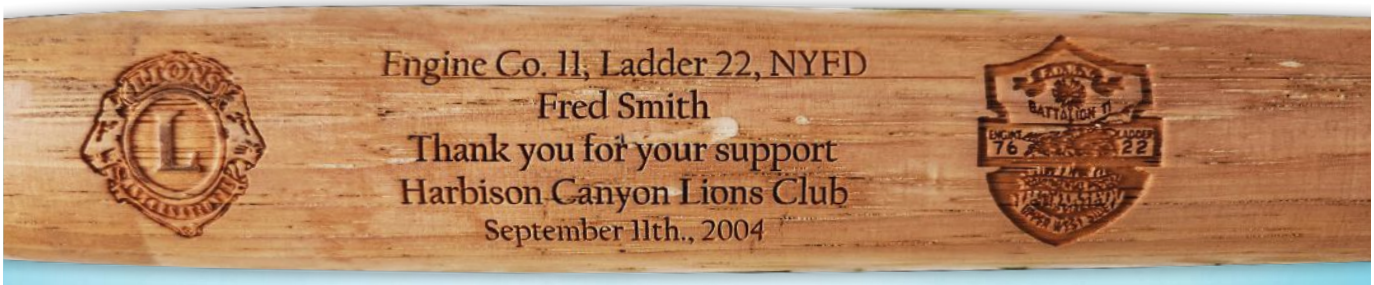
BY John Morman

I will be as delicate as I can because this month's article is centered around items of a sentimental nature. We can be talking about literally everything from births or funerals and every life event in between. Delicacy is vitally important, particularly when presented with something that maybe isn't typical, but is very important to the customer. I have worked with anything from fiber-cast moldings of a family pet to what I saw as a hodge-podge of various pieces and materials assembled as an "in memoriam" piece. All the various parts were items that had meant a great deal to the deceased and, therefore, to my customer.

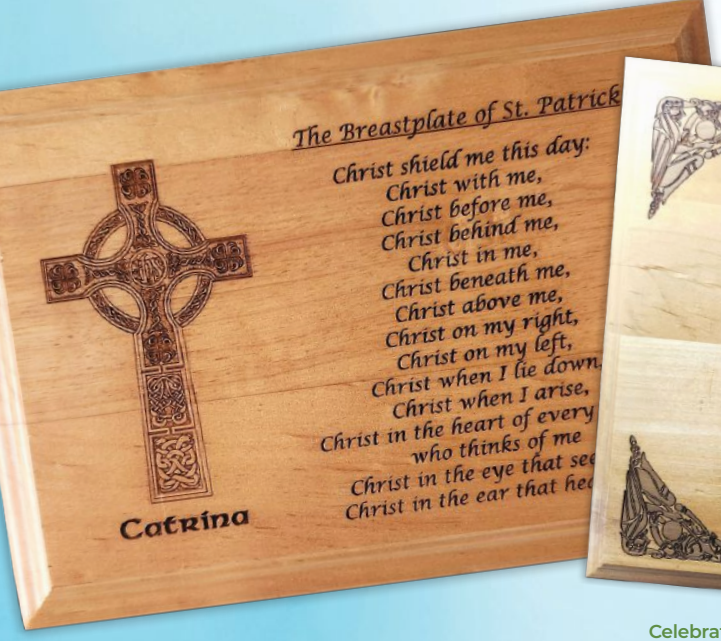
Definitions of sentiment include sentimental, excessive tenderness, sadness, and nostalgic. As with beauty, sentimentality is in the eye of the beholder, so it's important to treat customer requests very seriously.

Of course, being able to use a more conventional piece makes life much simpler, so I'll start there. I will say right off that I have not personally produced every item I'm discussing — which doesn't mean I haven't presented the ideas to customers. The only limit to what we can offer is our own imaginations and the materials we work with. Occasionally, a customer will bring in something that may not be workable because of machine restrictions, so always ask to see a piece before committing.

We can work with wooden or crystal ornaments, wooden plaques or shields, bamboo cutting boards, mirrors, pewter tooth cups or christening cups, photo frames, stainless steel flasks, and so on. As I said, the list of items we can work with is very long. The pieces I'll show celebrate marriages, births, retirements, graduations, romantic gifts, reunions, and dedications — and I'm sure you can think of many more. I've also done funerary boxes and urns for cremains and accents to headstones. These last two items demand the most sympathetic and respectful treatment. The gratitude of the bereaved families is one the greatest rewards you will ever receive despite the sorrow involved. One of the greatest compliments after finishing a piece I've had in the 20-odd years I've been doing this was an invitation to join



After Hurricane Isabel hit New City, the members of the Lions Club in San Diego and Imperial Counties donated a large sum of money and a wide list of other dry goods through a contact with the New York Fire Department (FDNY). A month or so later, the Cedar Fire ravaged huge areas of San Diego County. When word reached the FDNY, and after the city was in better shape after the hurricane, a team of FDNY firefighters arrived in San Diego to help with repairs in a small community heavily affected by the fire. I was asked to engrave framing hammers for each of the firefighters with the Lions Club logo and the particular FDNY company logo, as both a working tool and an expression of thanks. The firefighters said, "Thank you very much, but now we need some hammers to work with because we're not using these!"



I was asked to complete these plaques for several children in a class of first-time communicants.



Celebrating a couple entering into a civil partnership.

One thing to note is that when you engrave a wine bottle, the wine remains perfectly drinkable.



This shows a combination of two redrawn graphics combined and then coupled with text to create a unique graduation gift.

the family party at Arlington National Cemetery for the interment of a three-star general under full military honors.

The other end of the emotional spectrum is weddings and births. The customer will often bring in their own ideas for graphics and text. It can make things a little easier if the engraving involves simple text. You can also gently suggest the inclusion of a simple graphic, vice versa, or both. Ironically, perhaps the hardest thing to do is a job where the customer leaves the entire text and graphic construction up to you. In these cases, it's best to have workpieces at hand where you can prepare demo pieces to run by your customer.

Depending on the capabilities of your machinery and software, you can perhaps include photographs. Otherwise (again, depending on capabilities) you can use your imagination to create appropriate combinations of text and graphics. One note to remember: if you include text, please remember to include any appropriate attribution. In most single-piece quantities you'll produce, it's highly unlikely (though not impossible) that you'll be pursued for copyright or licensing infractions as long as



A young marine had this made for his mom prior to his first deployment to Iraq. It was even more poignant when the young man came home with life-changing injuries caused by an improvised explosive device.



Specially commissioned as a gift to the wife of a police chief on his retirement to recognize the sacrifices and worries a police officer's spouse must go through.

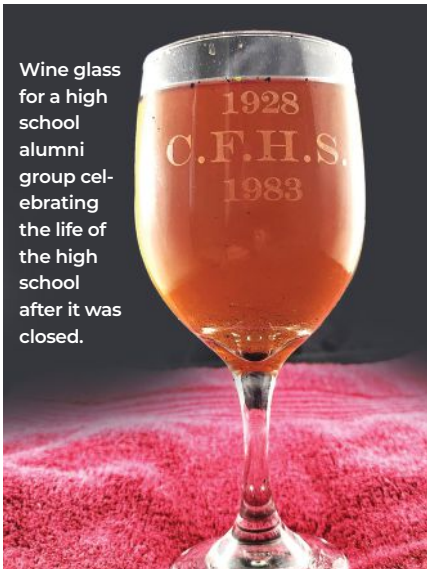


Granite plate for an accent to a headstone. The stone was engraved and then gold color filled.

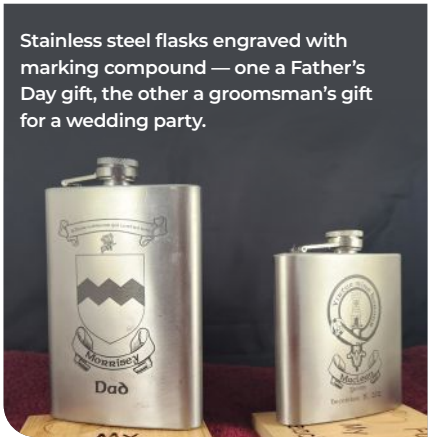
A graphic done as a watermark with the text engraved over.

Convention box that contains the gavel used for a fraternity national convention.

Class ring on folio cover. Done as a fundraiser for a local university. Graphic supplied in a non-editable, non-copiable format. The graphic is hand drawn.



Wine glass for a high school alumni group celebrating the life of the high school after it was closed.



Stainless steel flasks engraved with marking compound — one a Father's Day gift, the other a groomsman's gift for a wedding party.

attribution is included. Failing to include the appropriate attribution makes this more likely, even if only by a little. Never mind the legality of using someone else's work, it's dishonest to let it seem like such usage stems from your own work.

Can awards and presentations come under an umbrella of sentimentality? They may seem separate categories to you, me, and perhaps to the presenter. However, there is sentimentality involved as far as the recipients are concerned. We're perhaps fortunate in that we are likely to be presented with prepared text and editable graphics that we can use on our workpieces.

With prepared graphics, always ask if an editable graphic is available. Some artwork (including text) becomes the property of the customer after payment to the designer. Some remain the property of the designer. In those cases, the designer will occasionally be willing to release artwork to you if the customer asks the designer to do so. If not, ask if you can redraw the graphic. You might not be able to achieve 100% duplication, so again, it's best to advise the customer in advance and have a demonstration piece to show prior to production. You may be fortunate and be able to copy a simpler, or very clean, graphic in a non-editable format and use it directly without the need for redrawing. There are literally thousands of font styles available either for purchase or free of charge from online libraries. Just be warned that certain fonts may request attribution, but this is generally not the case for more standard font styles.

With things like corporate logos, sometimes it's necessary to trace lettering. Obviously, you're not going to really want to trace a swath of lettering, so try to find a representation of similar text from other sources if necessary. As always, check with your customer.

Lastly, since these sentimental pieces are almost always one-offs, you have the option of raising your price as a custom job. **GP**



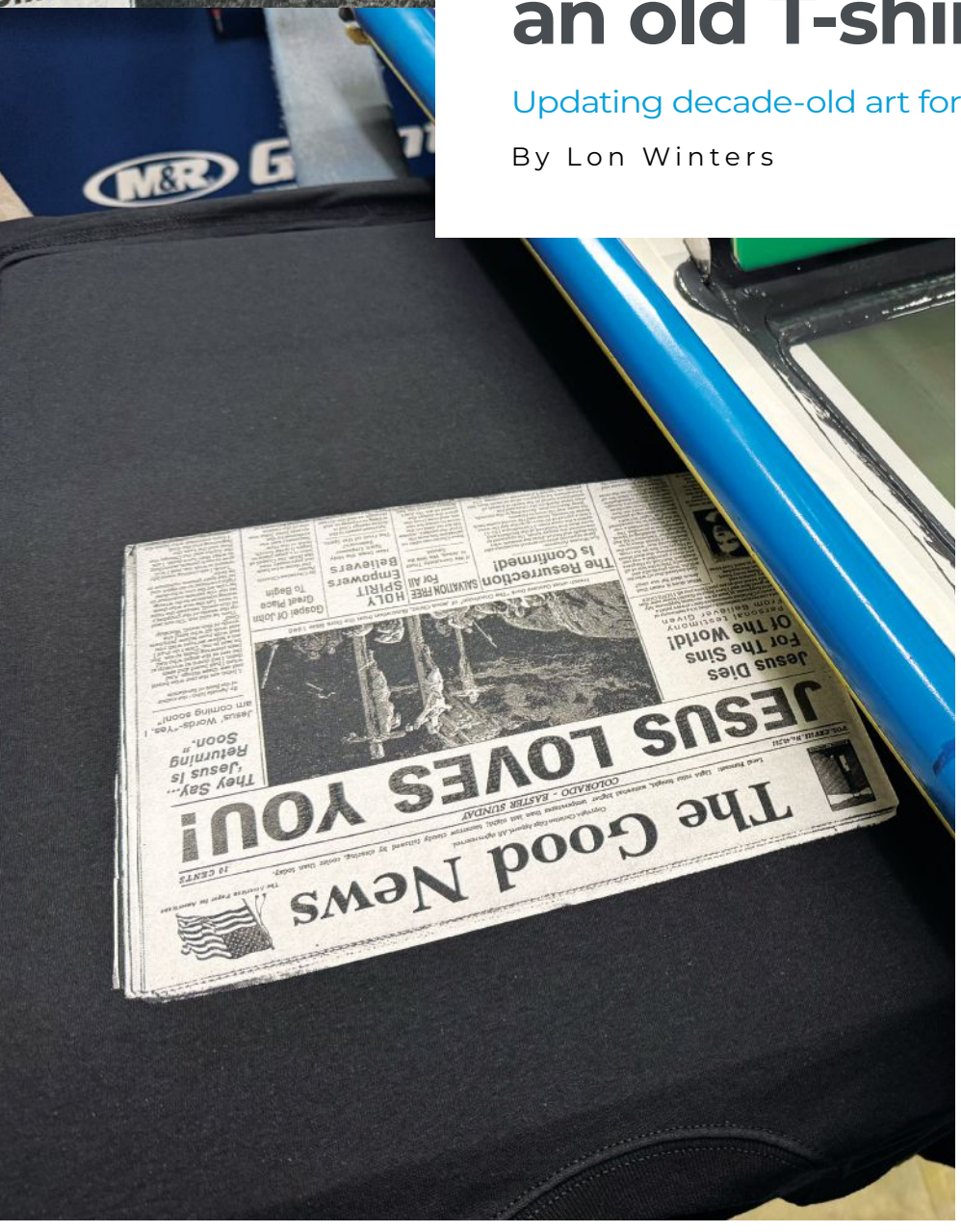
John Morman is the owner of Celtic Tides in Lexington, Virginia. He and his wife, Mary Jo, have been running the shop since 2005. John started laser engraving in 2003.



RESURRECTING
an old T-shirt design

Updating decade-old art for re-release

By Lon Winters



Here in Colorado, spring is right around the corner, even though March and April are the snowiest months of the year. Before we begin telling lies about the warm wind in our hair again on whatever summer toy we may be riding, we thought we should give a little back, because we have been blessed with so much.

We get a little sensitive from time to time, but then again, we are spiritual folks for the most part. As you may or may not know, we have a Christian clothing line we call Christian Edge Apparel. A number of examples used here in our monthly column over the years have been of outreach programs for churches, schools, missions, youth activities, and other organizations. That is all part of the Christian Edge brand and directive. Over the years, many of our outreach customers and wholesalers have purchased a good number of our "The Good News" T-shirts. The design is a play on a newspaper graphic on ice-gray and black garments. This graphic is No. 3 on our top sales list. Because of the success of that image, and some prodding by our "fans," we decided to roll out a new play on an old favorite. We wanted to mix it up a

> “The design is a play on a newspaper graphic on ice-gray and black garments. This graphic is No. 3 on our top sales list.”

bit with some careful thought. We sure didn’t want to undermine our own sales and just trade for a new design, but instead create something similar but far enough away from the old standby that potential customers would want or need both garments.

Early in the 2000s, one of Christian Edge Apparel’s founders was volunteering at a church bookstore on Sundays. Yes, they have a bookstore for obvious products like the Bible and, you guessed it, wearables and decorated apparel. At that time, the church was also recording the weekly sermons and making them available on CDs for purchase. A four-part CD study titled “The Good News” was released on one of those Sundays way back then. The associate pastor quickly put together art for the CD covers. After the first weekend, people fell in love with this newspaper design declaring “the good news that Jesus loves you.” Believe it or not, physical newspapers were still a thing at that time. We were chatting with the pastor





when the conversation of the cover came up. It was determined that this would make a great shirt. We burned a CD at church with the original Photoshop doc to work our magic back at the shop. This was never meant to be anything more than a limited run for a few churchgoing folks.

The original file was nothing more than a photo of a newspaper that had been blurred in the background and a few pieces of type placed appropriately.



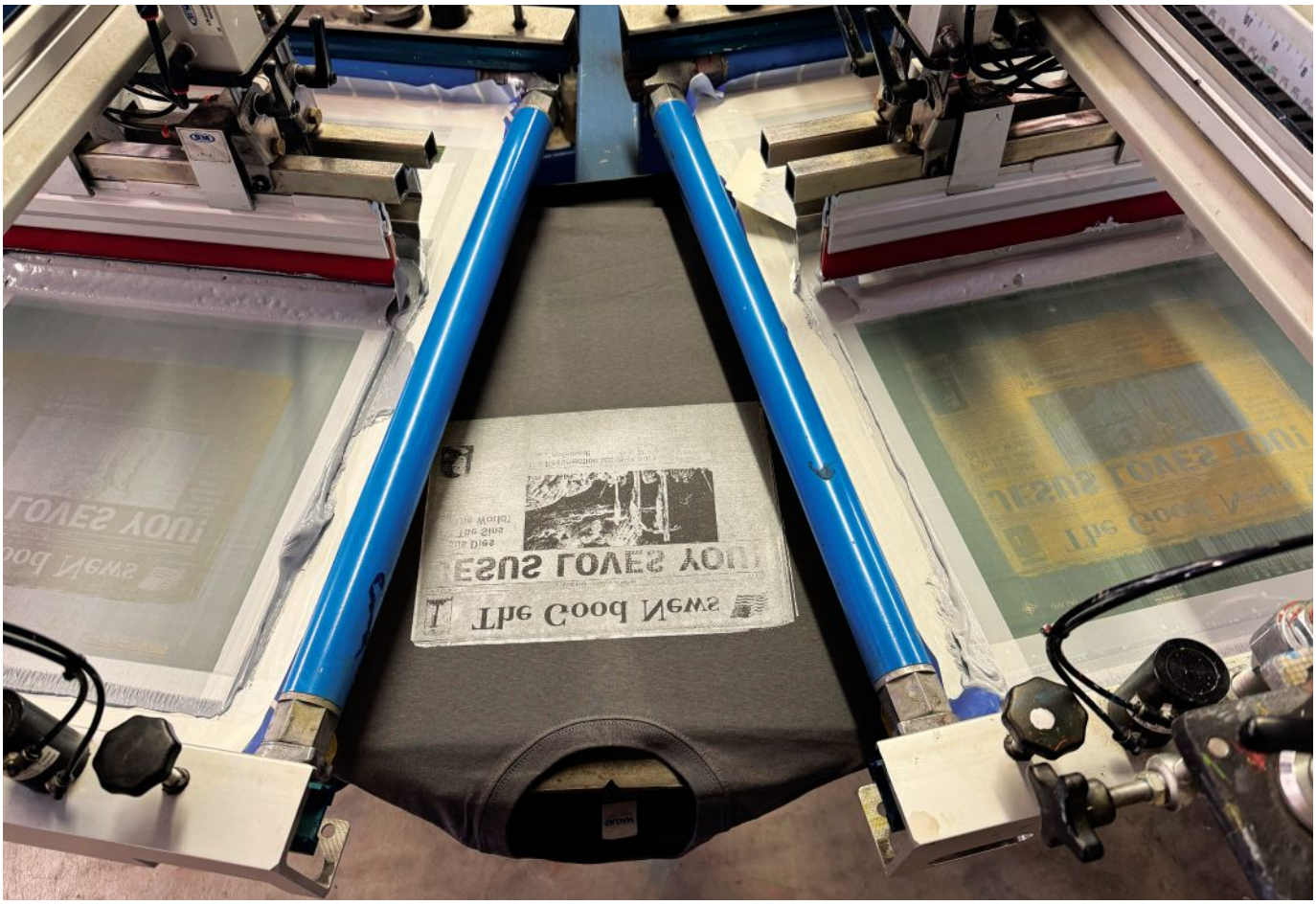


> "... This time, we decided, if we were going to do it, we were going to do it all the way."

This obviously served the purpose for the tiny CD cover. For the first go around for the shirts, we opened the file in Photoshop and tried to give it a little bit more clarity and defined edges. A composite of the light and a composite of the dark became our separations. We printed a neutral newspaper gray and a vintage news print black. Custom colors, of course. It was a hit and the church loved them. They sold pretty quickly, and we did a second run. With the pastor's permission, we released it as Christian Edge design. They sold for several years before we retired the design some time ago. We did get comments in which people wished they could read the verbiage on the rest of the newspaper. A premonition, perhaps?

The Good News design had been out of circlation for over 10 years. People would now and again email us asking if we had any available. Recently, we decided to bring the design out of retirement. But this time, we decided, if we were going to do it, we were going to do it all the way. So, we went to the original file, broke it down and re-created it one step at a time. We used the foundation of the original file and newspaper, but we finished out the edges giving a little texture to look even more like a traditional newspaper. We reset every image, text, and detail. We made some adjustments to our type and vector components in Illustrator by using the warp options under the effect menu. More importantly, we were able to get testimonies from friends, family and coworkers to add as the articles.

After the art was complete, we went on to separations. After seps, output on CTS (computer to screen) 55 LPI (lines per inch) at 22.5 degrees. We went with a white printer or base first to control some of the levels of the background grays for highs and lows. Then we flashed and smoothed with a heated iron through a Teflon screen for a beautiful surface to print on. We printed a dark charcoal, a light gray, and, finally, the newsprint black all wet-on-wet allowed them to dither and blend. All meshes were high tension N-272 tpi (threads per inch) at 45 N/cm^2 with 12-14% EOM (emulsion over mesh). We used harder 75/90/75 triple-ply dual durometer squeegees. All this for an ultra-smooth clean finish



to the inks. We even rounded up an old newspaper to match the colors. This was harder than it sounds.

We released the new version of The Good News tees for Easter. How apropos. It is, once again, part of the Christian Edge line. If you're going to wear a T-shirt that proclaims The Good News, you're going to want to talk about it. What an interesting conversation piece. When you look at it closely, you can actually read the articles and all of the type under the headlines this time. **GP**





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.



Images courtesy of Rock Hill Screen Printing

THE ART OF the perfect event T-shirt

Prioritizing quality, thoughtful design & effective project management

By Christy Shellenberger

Event T-shirts are some of my favorite projects to work on because they do more than just showcase a cool design — they capture a cherished moment in time. Whether for a charity run, corporate event, or music festival, we, as screen printers, play a vital role in bringing a vision to life. Crafting the perfect event tee isn't just about putting ink on fabric; it's about making thoughtful choices regarding quality, style, messaging, and timelines to create a keepsake that clients and attendees will love.

Know your client & their audience

The foundation of a successful event tee starts with truly understanding the client and their audience. At Rock Hill Screen Printing, we recently had the unique opportunity to create event tees for our regional shirt distributor, Carolina Made, for an event held on Valentine's Day.

In the initial design meeting, I made sure to ask key questions:

- What is the in-hand deadline?
- What is the event date?
- Who will be attending?
- Does the client have any design concepts?
- What is the budget?

Gathering these details up front ensures alignment between all parties and sets the project up for success. From that first meeting, we were able to develop a plan, starting with selecting the right blank tee.

Choosing the perfect shirt

The right blank can make or break an event shirt's success. Budget is a great starting point, as different price points determine the options available. However, I always encourage clients to invest in a higher-quality tee that their audience will actually want to wear long after the event. Reminding clients that their goal is extended brand visibility can go a long way in justifying the investment.



Sourcing is another crucial factor. Event tees often operate on tight timelines, so ensuring product availability before finalizing counts is essential. For the Carolina Made event, our client sourced their own tees and had them shipped to our shop. Coordinating arrival dates with production schedules was critical to keeping everything on track.

Design: The heart of the tee

A great blank is the foundation, but the design is what truly makes an event tee memorable. For the Carolina Made project, I started brainstorming based on the event date — Valentine's Day. A quick Pinterest search for heart imagery led me to the idea of an old-school tattoo aesthetic, which felt like a perfect blend of trendiness and event-specific branding.

From there, I worked with our graphic designer, BJ Walters, to refine the concept. He took the idea to the next level, delivering a bold and unique design that the Carolina Made team loved. Once we finalized the design and locked in the blank tee selection, the next step was managing production — a step that is often overlooked but is vital to keeping the process smooth and stress-free.

Project management: Keeping everything on track

One of the biggest challenges with event tees is planning for production when many clients — especially first-time event hosts — struggle to predict their exact order quantities. That's where strong project management skills come in.

At our shop, we reserve a production date based on the client's initial estimate. We also set a firm design deadline at least a week before final counts are due. This structure helps prevent last-minute sponsor additions and avoids the chaos of chasing approvals right before press time. Setting clear expectations from the start and sending weekly deadline reminders keeps everything running smoothly and ensures a seamless experience for the client.

Final thoughts

Event tees are more than just merchandise — they're lasting reminders of special moments. By prioritizing quality, thoughtful design, and effective project management, you can create event shirts that people will actually want to wear long after the event has passed. And when clients see their attendees proudly sporting their event tees, they'll know exactly where to go the next time they need custom apparel. **GP**



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.

How to open an online store & grow your business PART 2

By Matthew Rhome



How to open your online store in 5 simple steps

Starting your online store may sound overwhelming, but it's simpler than you think. Whether you have years of internet experience or are completely new to the digital world, there are plenty of tools and resources available to help you get started. From user-friendly website builders to step-by-step guides on setting up payment systems to no-cost web stores and fulfillment packages, launching your own online store is more accessible than ever. With a bit of effort and a clear plan, you'll be well on your way to running a successful online business.

1 Choose the right platform

Before going online, you'll need a platform to host your store. Some platforms provide intuitive frameworks for designing your store, uploading products, and taking payments all without requiring technical expertise.

If you're new to e-commerce and not ready to invest in paid options or production equipment, start with a platform that offers free web stores and fulfillment services. This allows you to focus on building your business without the hassle of manufacturing products or handling shipping logistics.

2 Select & showcase your products

Not all products need to go online at once, start with your best sellers or niche items that get customers excited. Each product listing should have high-quality photos and detailed descriptions. Don't forget to include specifics that build trust, such as material types, dimensions, and shipping options. Carefully crafted product pages create more informed and satisfied customers.

3 Set up payment & shipping

Choosing a secure payment gateway is vital. Many platforms

include built-in gateways, which allow users to process payments seamlessly without needing third-party integrations. These gateways simplify transactions and enhance the overall user experience.

When it comes to shipping, focus on offering affordable rates and clear, reliable delivery timelines. Many small business owners succeed by providing options like free shipping or tiered delivery services to meet customer needs.



4 Brand your online store

Your online store should reflect your business's personality and speak directly to your target customers. Select a color scheme, logo, and consistent font style that match your physical brand identity. A strong brand identity will help customers remember you even after they leave your website.

5 Get the word out

What's the point of an online store if no one knows about it? To ensure your business thrives, you need to actively promote it through digital marketing, social media, and email campaigns. Digital marketing helps increase your visibility on search engines, while social media platforms allow you to engage directly with your audience and build a loyal following. Email campaigns, on the other hand, are a great way to nurture relationships with potential and existing customers by keeping them updated on new products, sales, and exclusive offers. Together, these strategies can drive traffic to your store and boost your sales.

Don't forget to ask your customers for online reviews; they play an important role in building your business's credibility and showcasing your proven track record to potential clients. Positive reviews not only help attract new customers but also boost your online presence and trustworthiness. A simple rating request after a successful transaction can go a long way in growing your reputation and building loyalty.



Online stores are here to stay

Online stores aren't the future; they're the present. The real question is, when will you take the leap and launch your own? Building an online store isn't just about following trends; it's about positioning your business to thrive in a rapidly evolving market. The sooner you begin, the sooner you can reap the benefits of the booming digital economy. **GP**



Matthew Rhome, a DTG industry pioneer, launched the first commercially available DTG Printer, "Revolution," obtaining the first U.S. Patent for DTG printer technology. With over 45 years in garment decoration, his contributions greatly influenced DTG's success at Brother International and Epson America. Matthew has excelled in printer technology, business ownership, invention, and equipment design.

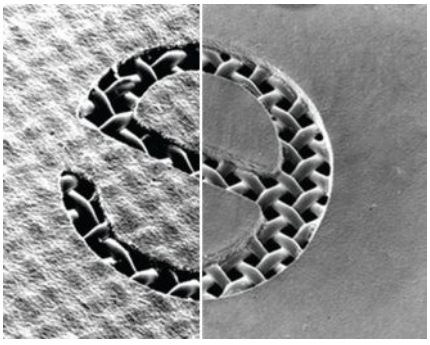
Back to basics: Mastering the fundamentals of screen printing

Set yourself up for long-term success

By Keith Stevens

I first got involved in screen printing after learning lithography in high school. Lithography felt too rigid and mechanical for my taste, but screen printing — whether on paper or T-shirts — immediately resonated with me. The process itself felt like an art form, not just a means to an end.

I never set out to get rich from printing. I did it because I loved it. Over time, I printed millions of tees — sometimes, over 3,000 per day — before transitioning from running automatic presses to sampling and sales. As my experience grew, so did my ability to refine techniques and increase efficiency, turning my knowledge into profits.



The value of experience often lies in knowing what not to do. Just like a mechanic's worth isn't just in labor but in diagnosing the problem, a skilled printer understands what mistakes to avoid. Many of the troubles I encountered early on stemmed from cutting corners. If I had planned better, I could have spared myself a lot of wasted time and money.

So, let me pay it forward and highlight some key fundamentals that can keep your operation running smoothly and profitably.

Your shop is a money machine

Imagine you had a printing machine in your garage generating $500 per hour. Would you let it run out of ink or use subpar materials? Of course not! You would do everything in your power to keep it running optimally.

Yet, in screen printing, many shops try to cut costs by using lower-quality supplies, thinking it will save money in the long run. But it doesn't work that way. Just like using cheap oil in your car can lead to costly breakdowns, using inferior inks, screens, or emulsions can slow production and increase waste.

High-quality ink, for example, is more opaque, flashes quickly, minimizes buildup, and cures at the correct temperature. In contrast, low-quality ink often leads to frequent screen cleaning, multiple print strokes, longer flash times, and curing problems. The small cost difference per print is easily outweighed by the time and efficiency gained with better materials.

Mesh tension: The foundation of a good print

Every year, when we print detailed images for our trade show displays, we hear the same question from visitors: "How do you get your prints so sharp?" The answer, more often than not, comes down to mesh tension. A properly tensioned screen ensures that fine details stay crisp, halftones remain consistent, and ink is deposited cleanly. Without the right tension, even the best artwork and screens can fall short.

It's a simple but often overlooked factor that separates an average print from an exceptional one. If your screens don't sound like a drum when you flick them, they may be too loose.

Consistent screen tension is also crucial for proper registration. Before



Images courtesy of International Coatings

coating screens, test them by flicking them with your finger; they should all produce the same high-pitched sound. Loose screens require more off-contact, slowing down production and reducing print quality.

Clean screens are more profitable

Before coating screens with emulsion, ensure they are properly cleaned and degreased. Dust, debris, and grease can cause pinholes and emulsion breakdown. Store freshly-coated screens in a clean, horizontal drying area with the ink side facing up. Avoid using fans or outdoor drying to prevent dust contamination.

Darkroom: Protect your screens from the silent killer — light

A properly controlled darkroom is critical for consistent, high-quality screen exposure. Position it close to your washout area to minimize light exposure and ensure no stray light leaks in — tiny gaps around doors or vents can degrade your emulsions. Blackout curtains or plastic sheeting can help eliminate contamination.

Use your existing in-house air conditioning to help condition your screen room's environment. This air is filtered and dry and, in most cases, readily accessible. In case your darkroom cannot access the building's air conditioning, a dehumidifier is essential, as controlled moisture levels speed up drying and improve stencil integrity.

Be mindful of your light sources — Rubylith film works best for covering bulbs, as some amber filters may still allow UV light to expose your coated screens. Even stored emulsions can slowly degrade if exposed to improper lighting over time. Just like unwanted heat can ruin your ink/prints, unwanted light will ruin your coated screens.

Emulsion: More than just a blocker

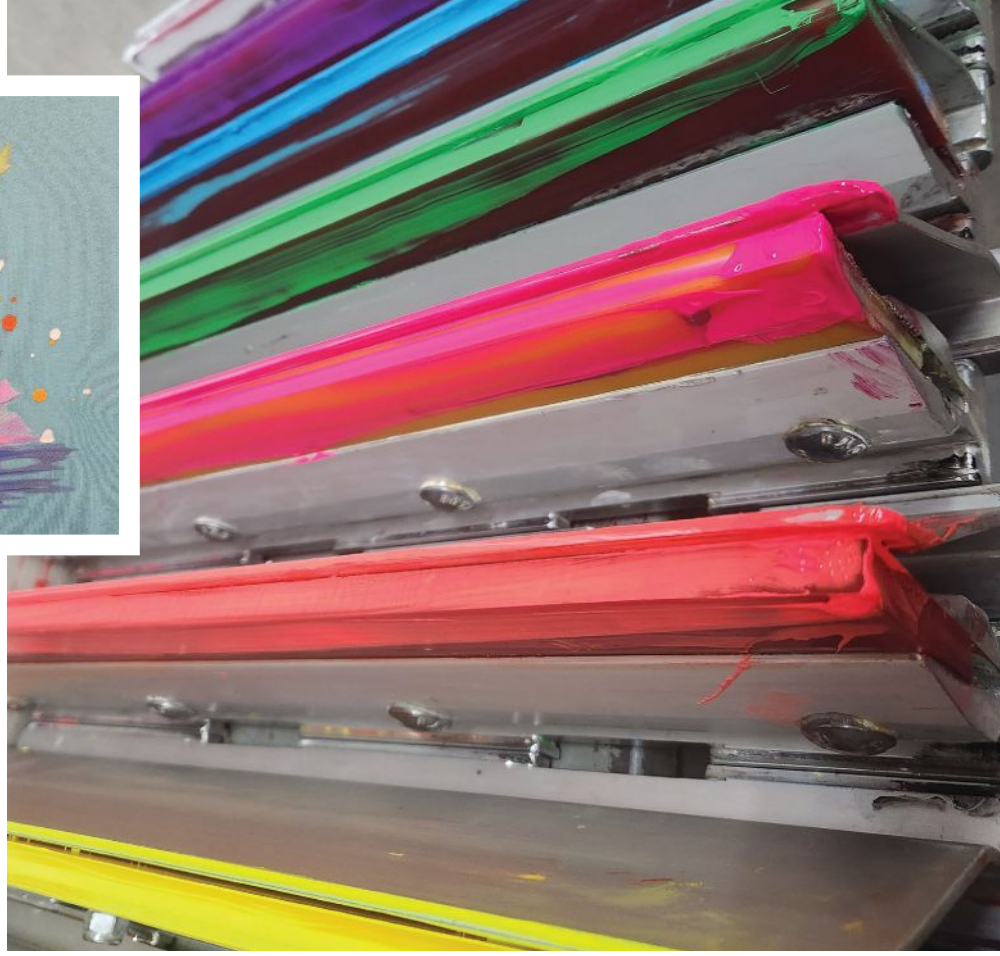
I sometimes scroll through social media and come across so-called screen printing "influencers" coating screens with emulsion on camera. More often than not, the videos are cringe-worthy — not because of their technique, but because they're doing it in a space contaminated with light, sometimes even under regular neon lights.

Emulsion needs to be applied in the darkroom in order to function at its best. Exposure to stray light — even for brief moments — can start the curing process prematurely, weakening the stencil before it even reaches the exposure unit. Over time, constant light contamination can degrade emulsion in storage, leading to unpredictable results on press.

Emulsion doesn't just block areas of the mesh — it creates a gasket that controls ink flow. A properly applied emulsion layer provides clean edges and improved ink opacity. To maintain quality, store emulsion in a







cool, dark place and keep it free from dust, moisture, and contaminants — any impurities can lead to pinholes, weak stencil edges, or premature breakdown during printing.

Different mesh counts require different exposure times. Shops should dial in exposure settings for each type of mesh they use. Since each person coats screens slightly differently, exposure times should be tested and adjusted accordingly.

Film positive: The blueprint for a perfect print

A sharp, high-quality print starts with a dense, opaque film positive. The darker and more impenetrable the image, the more precise the stencil on your screen. Any light that sneaks through the dark areas can compromise detail and extend washout times, leading to subpar results. Even with newer technologies like direct-to-screen exposure units and laser systems, the fundamentals remain the same.

Many printers struggling with fine details don't realize that poor film density is often the culprit. Simply put: bad film equals bad prints, which means lower quality and lost profits.

Pallets: The unsung hero of ink opacity

Printing on rubber-coated pallets can improve ink opacity and consistency. Unlike metal pallets, which absorb and release heat quickly — causing ink to gel on the screen — rubber-coated pallets provide better insulation and ink performance. If using metal pallets, consider adding rubber mats or adjusting ink placement to prevent premature gelling.

Proper curing: The key to durability

Every ink has a recommended curing temperature, typically between 275 F and 320 F. The entire ink film — not just the surface — must reach this temperature to ensure durability.

Excessive heat can cause dye migration, ghosting, shrinkage, and scorching. Instead of increasing heat, extend dwell time in the dryer. A longer cure time at a controlled temperature results in better prints and fewer issues. Time is your friend, and excessive heat can be bad.

Squeegees: Your quickest adjustment tool

Having a variety of squeegee durometers on hand allows for quick print adjustments. Need more ink deposited? Switch to a softer squeegee. Need less? Use a harder durometer.

Instead of double-stroking — slowing production and increasing costs — opt for the right squeegee. The small investment in extra squeegees saves time and money in the long run.

Don't forget — the sharp edge your squeegee had when you first bought it will dull over time and needs to be either sharpened or replaced. Unless you just unboxed a brand-new press, the squeegee that came with it likely needs to be updated.

Invest in quality, reap the rewards

Screen printing is both a craft and a business. Cutting corners might seem like a way to save money, but, in reality, it often leads to wasted time, lower quality, and reduced profitability. By focusing on the fundamentals — quality materials, proper technique, and consistent processes — you set yourself up for long-term success. Remember, every shirt you print is a reflection of your art. Take pride in it and never stop refining your craft. **GP**



Keith Stevens is the Western regional sales manager for International Coatings. He has been screen printing for more than 47 years and teaching the craft for over 22 years. A regular contributor to International Coatings' blog, he was awarded SGIA's 2014 Golden Image Award. He can be reached at kstevens@iccink.com.

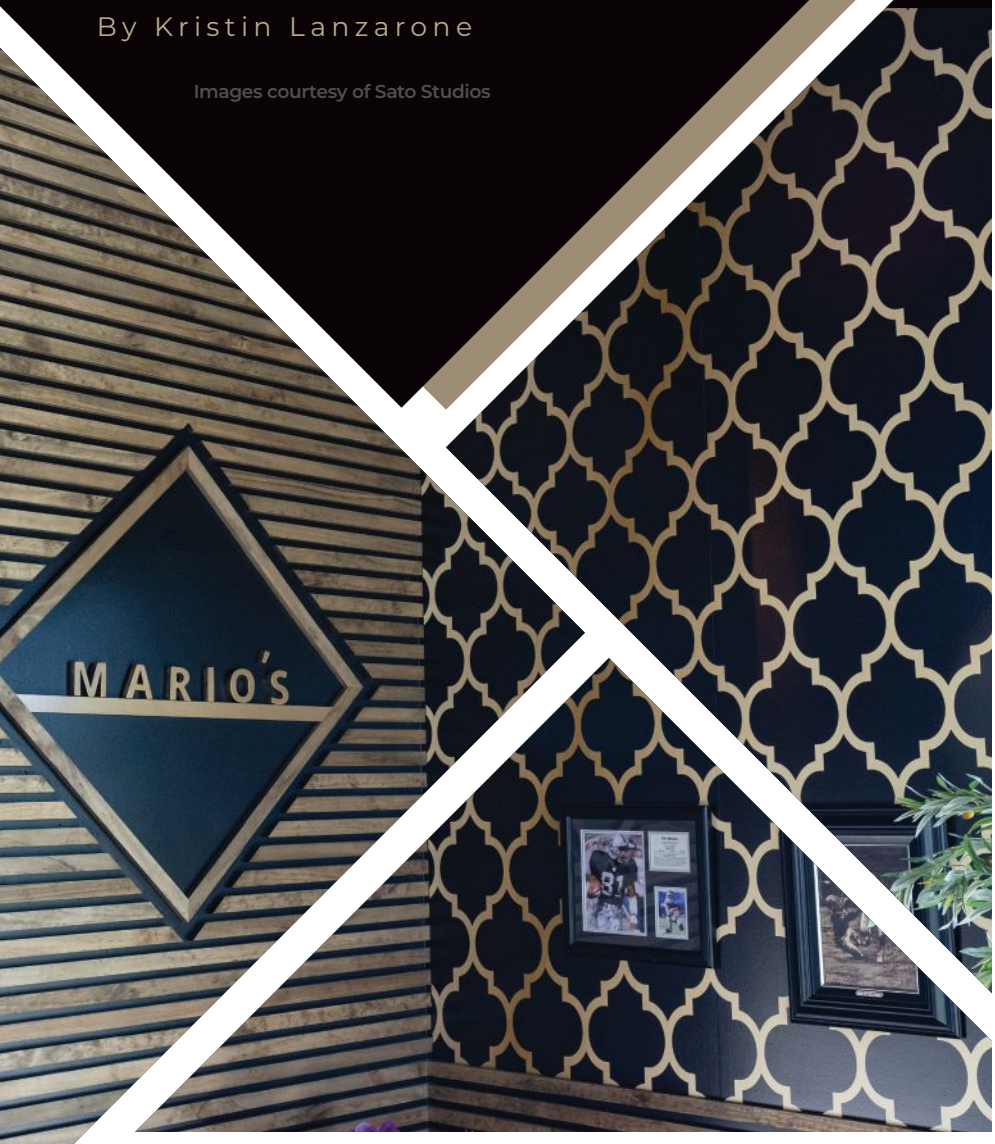
Transform restaurant interiors with *wall wraps*

A new look for an Early Toast location

By Kristin Lanzarone

Images courtesy of Sato Studios





Mario's Early Toast set out to open its fifth location in the Sacramento, California, region, with a clear goal. Create a space that not only carried over the restaurant's well-established brand but also resonated with the upscale community it was now serving. Having worked with our company, WrapStar Pro, on the restaurant's rebranding back in 2020, Mario Astorga knew that wall wraps would play a key role in the transformation.

Originally, Early Toast featured a classic country-diner look, with a ketchup-and-mustard-colored logo and brand elements. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, WrapStar Pro helped shift the brand's identity to a more sophisticated mimosa lounge vibe, a look that blended black and white with earthy textures and gold accents. The transformation was a success, and as the business grew, it was time to take things up a notch for this new location. Instead of sticking with the standard black and white wall wraps, we opted for a bold gold-and-black design to bring a sense of luxury that would appeal to the high-end clientele of the neighborhood.

At the heart of this transformation was Arlon's newest wall wrap film, DPF V9500 and Series V3370 satin overlam, a non-PVC solution. This project served as a real-world application of the film's capabilities, showcasing why wall wraps can serve as an innovative, cost-effective, and efficient alternative to traditional renovations.





The vision behind the design

The space itself required a full renovation, as it had previously housed a Mexican restaurant with a completely different atmosphere. The challenge wasn't just installing wall wraps, it was creating a seamless blend of branding and interior design that felt intentional and upscale.

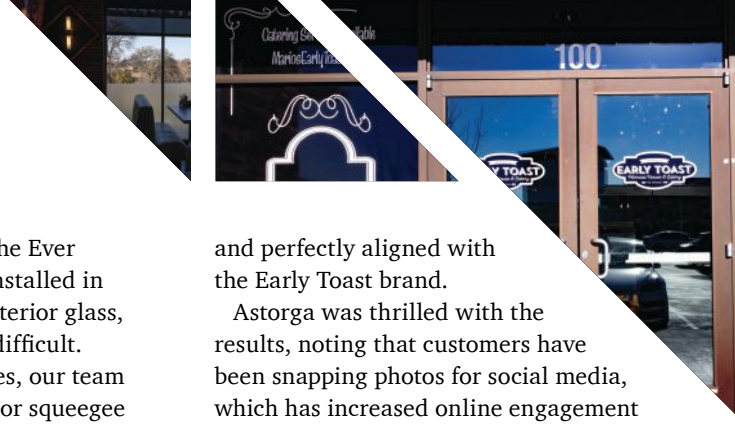
Initially, Astorga had requested more gold features, which we were skeptical about. Our team wanted to maintain the brand's established identity, ensuring the space still felt like an Early Toast location. However, after seeing how gold accents had successfully been incorporated in a previous location to distinguish a lounge space, we decided to integrate them into the entire restaurant design. With the combination of wall wraps, a faux living wall, wood slat accents, statement chandeliers, and cream-and-gold touches throughout the space, we believe the transformation is stunning.

The power of wall wraps

Many businesses still overlook wall wraps, not realizing how much they can enhance a space compared to traditional paint or wallpaper. The benefits are clear: lower renovation costs, faster turnaround times, and a high-end aesthetic without the hassle of construction delays.

For this project, WrapStar Pro installed 750 square feet of wall wraps in DPF V9500 and series V3370 satin overlam and 440 square feet of Ever Etched frost vinyl, along with various window signage applications using DPF 4600GLX and series 3420 overlam, plus BriteLine cut vinyl gloss white for additional signage. Instead of weeks of work, the installation was completed in just one and a half days, with minimal disruption to the restaurant's opening schedule. One of the biggest advantages of the wrap we used is the medium initial tack, which enabled us to pull the full liner without worrying about paint damage when repositioning.

Another standout feature is its



built-in static, which allows the film to "hug" the wall in place. This meant we didn't have to constantly reposition panels or go up and down ladders to check alignments. The time saved per panel added up significantly, making this large project much more efficient.

The film's heat-balancing technology was also beneficial. Traditionally, if a panel stretches slightly during repositioning, it can cause misalignment and uneven installation. With DPF V9500, applying heat with a heat gun allows the material to relax, stabilize, and shrink back into place, making precise alignment effortless.

Challenges & problem-solving

No installation comes without its challenges, and this project had its fair share. Working around permanent objects like the host desk, built-in furniture, and the narrow mimosa bar required precision and patience. Additionally, the Ever Etched frost vinyl was installed in cold temperatures on exterior glass, making adhesion more difficult.

To navigate these issues, our team relied on the Bill Collector squeegee for the walls and the Yellotools TimberMaxx squeegee for the frost vinyl, which allowed us to apply the frost vinyl efficiently and scratch-free. The repositionable adhesive of Arlon's film also made it easier to work around obstacles without compromising the final design.

Despite these challenges, the project was completed on time and exceeded expectations.

Client reaction

The final transformation was nothing short of stunning. The gold-and-black wall wraps, combined with other interior elements, created a space that felt modern, sophisticated, and perfectly aligned with the Early Toast brand.

Astorga was thrilled with the results, noting that customers have been snapping photos for social media, which has increased online engagement and brought in new visitors. The aesthetic not only complements the restaurant's branding but also aligns perfectly with the luxury experience the location aims to offer. **GP**



Kristin Lanzarone is the founder of WrapStar Pro and a sought-after industry trainer. Recognized as one of the Top 40 Under 40 by the Sacramento Business Journal, she has also received a Women in Wide Format Award in 2021 and the Best of Wide Format Award in 2024.



Illuminated signs

An electrifying history

By Paul Ingle

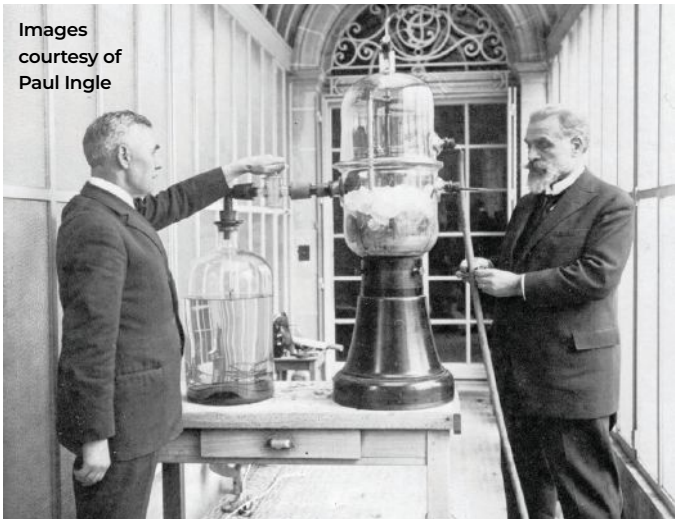
Future technologies are always a focus in the signage industry. But, have you ever wondered what the first illuminated sign looked like? How and when electrical signage got its rocky start? Or who we should thank that we can spot a convenience store brand on the dark interstate at 1:30 a.m. to get fuel, stale Twinkies, or an energy drink plus a clean restroom?

While illuminated glass tubes were used in the mid-19th century, some crafty entrepreneurs began using oil lanterns to light the surface of signs outside their establishments during this period. They burned whale oil, kerosene, camphene, and a mixture of turpentine and alcohol called "burning fluid" until gas, and finally electric lighting, replaced them.

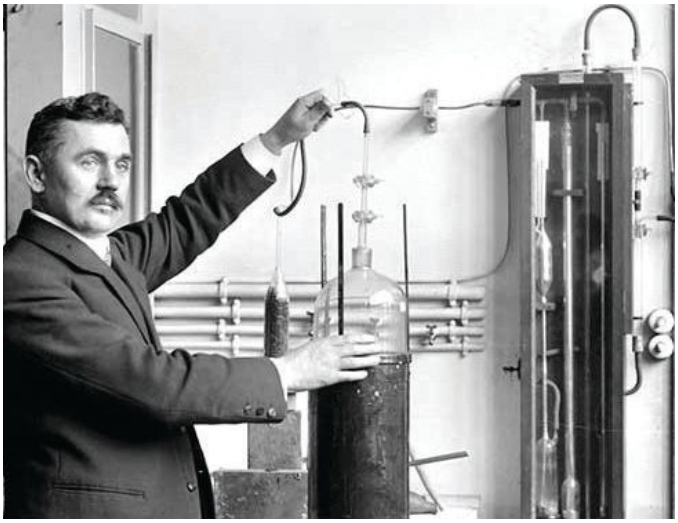
It is believed that the first lighted sign was fabricated in London in 1881. Reading "EDISON" in large block letters, this marvel was introduced at the International Electrical Exposition in January of 1882. Predating the first modern automobile by three years, this sign gained notoriety around the world, though slowly, but it ushered in other creative inventions that would forever alter our industry.

French chemist Georges Claude followed up with the first neon light in 1902. He showed it to the public for the first time at the Paris Motor Show in 1910 and acquired a U.S. patent

Images courtesy of Paul Ingle



Georges Claude in 1926 purifying inert gases, which led to neon.



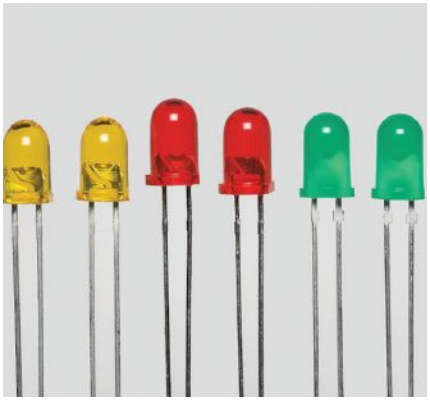
Georges Claude, French engineer developing neon.



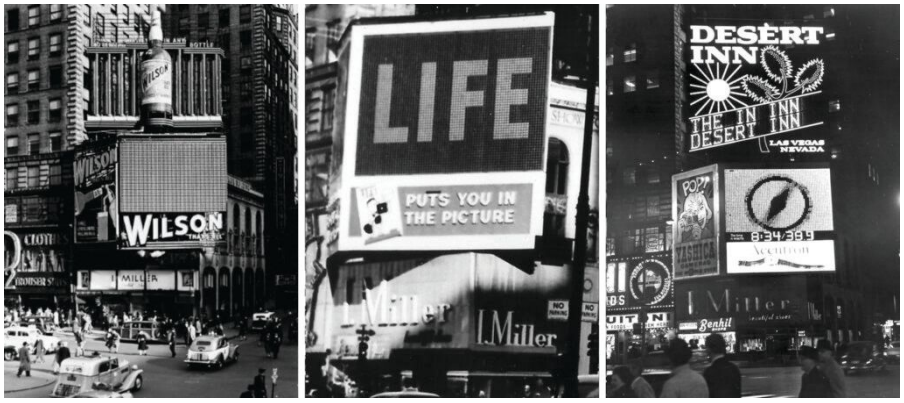
Early neon and illuminated signs in Paris.



Earle C. Anthony, founder of Packard Motors, commissioned this neon sign for his Los Angeles showroom in the early 1920s.



The light-emitting diode (LED) was created in 1927.



Early digital programmable signs.

five years later. A forward-thinking Parisian hairdresser is credited with the first use of a neon sign in 1912. The words "Palais Coiffeur" became a prominent feature above the storefront and soon business owners across Paris ordered their own neon signs.

Earle C. Anthony, the owner of Packard car dealerships in California, purchased two neon "Packard" signs in 1923. In 1924, a neon sign was installed in New York's Times Square advertising automaker Willys-Overland. The race was on.

Chicago saw the first neon sign at a Chinese restaurant called Orange Garden in 1926. Las Vegas, which later would become the benchmark of all things neon, saw its first signs between 1928 and 1930. And by the mid-1930s, neon signs could be found in every major city in the world and was the most popular form of advertising. This boom would continue into the 1950s.

Technological innovations in neon lighting during this time saw improvements that continued to propel its popularity. The use of argon instead of neon and new fluorescent tube coatings (and later leaded glass) helped to generate a wide range of neon sign color options. Iconic neon signs, like the Flamingo hotel sign in 1953 and the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign in 1959, enhanced the character and popularity of Las Vegas. Las Vegas has been a haven for thousands of illuminated signs, and some neon pylon signs were so large, they had neon equipment for glass blowers to fabricate repairs and replacements inside them!

In the 1960s, neon started to decline, partly because they were no longer a novelty, and less expensive illuminated signs became more widely used. The transition from neon to LED lighting not only revolutionized commercial lighting but it also created a pathway to environmentally sustainable and cost-effective illuminated signage.

During the 1980s, neon found a revival with television series like "Miami Vice" promoting nightclubs, hotels, bars, and a luxurious lifestyle. But like all things with a shelf life, neon fell out of favor in the 1990s, until recent years in special applications. Some specialty brands still insist their signs are neon. However, improvements in LED tubing and light output have created a faux-neon transition that simulates traditional neon and argon signs. The low voltage



Early argon filled tubing signs.



The Neon Boneyard of The Neon Museum of Las Vegas.

aspects of LED and its power supplies have become safer and more energy efficient than the higher voltage transformers that powered neon.

The light emitting diode, or LED, had a later start, but many people think it is a 21st century invention. In 1961, Robert Biard and Gary Pittman at Texas Instruments patented the first infrared LED. But a Russian inventor, Oleg Lesev, created the first LED in 1927. The first green LED was born in 1958, but not until 1962 did a red LED see light.

IBM implemented LEDs for the first time on a circuit board in an early computer in 1964. Hewlett Packard incorporated them into its calculators in 1968. A blue LED was created by Edward Miller and Jacques Pankove in 1971, and the following year the first yellow LED was invented. 1986 is a ground-breaking year for LED with two scientists creating a working blue LED that set all future standards.

White LEDs became commercially available in 2002 with widespread use in schools, offices, and hospitals by 2008. By 2019, LED lights were the predominant source of lighting as halogen and fluorescent bulbs were phased out.

Compared to neon, LED offers superior energy efficiency, longer lifespan, lower maintenance costs, and the ability to create dynamic displays with changing colors, animations, and other advertising flexibility. LEDs have transformed the signage marketplace, whether storefront signs, billboards, digital message boards, and artistic or architectural installations.



The iconic Las Vegas sign was fabricated and installed in 1959.



Organic light-emitting diodes are made in sheets and are carbon-based.



Excerpt from 1984 an American television commercial which introduced the Apple Macintosh computer was directed by Ridley Scott.

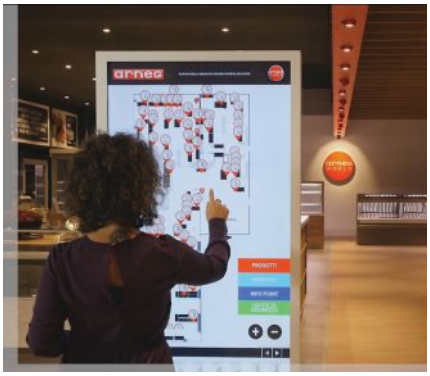


Augmented reality is coming to a sign near you.

What is the next evolution of illuminated signs? With further advancements in LED research, expect higher resolution visuals, integration with smart technology, and organic light emitting diode, or OLED. These panels will be slimmer, flexible, and even more energy efficient with extreme customization capabilities.

These changes will allow signs that can change based on environmental conditions, user interaction, real-time data, touch screens, and/or motion sensors. LED panels will have improved pixel density for sharper visuals and complex animations and streaming that will approach movie theater quality. Tailored messaging based on individual demographics or preferences will be enhanced by smart technology integration. Think "Blade Runner" on steroids.

The ability to have 3D visual effects and other advanced lighting and color transitions or patterns are possible. Flexible LED strips or panels or sheets will create curved or nontraditional shapes. Connecting signs to the internet for remote monitoring, content updates, data analysis, and viewer integration will become common.

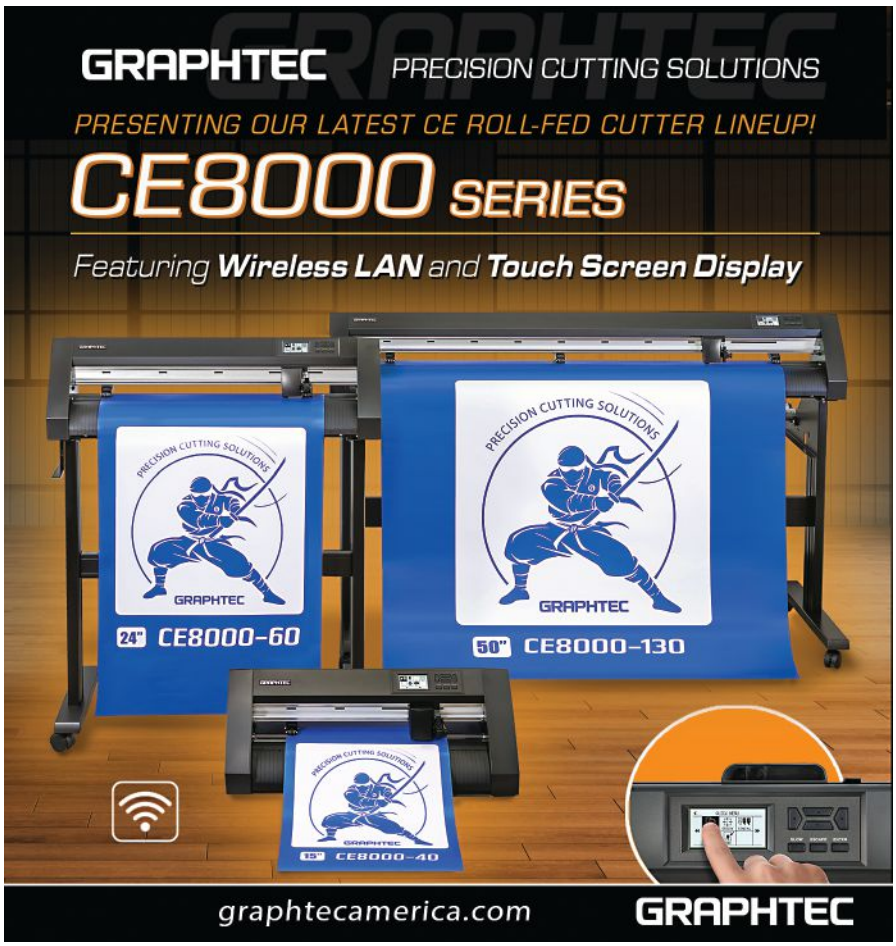


Remember the Super Bowl XVIII television commercial introduction of the Apple MacIntosh personal computer in 1984? Big Brother indeed.

Advertising is all about evolution. Electric signs allow you to customize your sign to fit the look and feel of any business. If visibility is important and you want to grab attention, a lighted sign is a great option. Whether front-lit, backlit, halo-lit, neon, or LED, you still have only one chance for a great first impression. Make it count! **GP**



Paul Ingle's career has spanned sales, sales management, marketing and business ownership since 1973. He is currently vice president of national sales for Stratus, the nation's largest branding implementation firm. Ingle is a past president of the Texas Sign Association and its regional chapter the Greater DFW Sign Association. Contact him at paul.ingle@onestratus.com.





FEATURED PROJECT:

MODERN CAMPUS SIGNAGE

Q&A with Phil Jennings of Creative Sign Company

By Marie Fennema

Neenah High School celebrated the opening of its new campus in Neenah, Wisconsin, last year. During construction, the school's leadership team envisioned modern signage that could also serve as a dynamic communication tool to keep students, parents, and the community informed. They turned to Creative Sign Company, a local full-service signage and wrap shop, to find the ideal solution.

In close partnership with Watchfire, an LED display manufacturer, Creative Sign Company designed and installed two LED signs: a full-color display for the high school and a smaller display for the middle school.


Phil Jennings

We spoke with Creative Sign Company Account Manager Phil Jennings to learn more about what went into the project:

Q: How did the project with Neenah High School come about?

A: "This project highlights the significance of long-standing relationships in the industry. The facilities manager at Neenah High School had previously collaborated with us while at another local public school. When he moved to Neenah, he reached out to us again. Having worked with us before, he trusted our expertise to realize the school's vision. Although he invited proposals from other sign companies, our design best matched their vision of complementing the modern architecture of the new campus and serving as an effective communication tool for students, parents, and the wider community."

Q: Walk us through the design process.

A: "Our lead designer, Nicole Mattson, had a personal connection to the project — her husband attended Neenah High School, which made it even more meaningful. Her team worked to incorporate the school's logo into the sign while also ensuring it blended seamlessly with the new campus.

"Early in the process, we received architectural renderings of the school, which featured prominent red elements. The design team used that as inspiration, tying the same red into the signage to create a cohesive look. We also incorporated a faux brick base, carefully painted to match the building's exterior. The final design wasn't just functional — it became an award-winning display that enhances the school's entrance."

Q: What about the fabrication process?

A: "Once the design was finalized and approved by Neenah High School and the board, the fabrication process was straightforward. We handled all fabrication in-house, using aluminum and a faux brick base to ensure durability while maintaining an aesthetic that matched the school's modern design. The sign also features an advanced 10 mm, 4'5" X 7'3" LED message center from Watchfire. This advanced display allows the school to update messaging in real-time."

Q: Walk us through the installation process.

A: "The installation process went very smoothly, although we



Images courtesy of Creative Sign Company

encountered some challenges with the ground conditions. Initially, the ground was too soft for us to proceed, so we had to wait for it to dry before pouring the foundation.

"Two signs were installed: a smaller display at the secondary entrance and a larger, more prominent display serving as the main entry sign to the new campus. Once the concrete was set, the installation was completed without any issues."

Q: How was collaboration between Creative Sign Company, Watchfire, and Neenah High School executed?

A: "The collaboration among all three parties was smooth and efficient. We have worked with Watchfire for years, and our primary contact, Chad Deffenbaugh, has been exceptional. Having a trusted vendor made the process easy and stress-free. Neenah High School was also a pleasure to work with. Their team was highly engaged throughout the project, making sure that the signage aligned with their vision for the new campus and keeping us up to speed on the construction details and timeline. Overall, it was a great project from start to finish."

Q: What was the timetable and what did it take to complete a project?

A: "The project kicked off in late 2022, while the high school was still under construction. Installation took place in late 2023 and the signs were ready in time for the start of the school year and the school's grand opening celebrations. The timing worked well, allowing students and families to experience the new signage as they arrived on campus."

Q: What were some of the major challenges of this project?

A: "Overall, the process was smooth, but working around ongoing school construction added an extra layer of coordination. We had to ensure that our timeline aligned with the larger campus construction schedule. That meant waiting for certain elements of the site to be completed before moving forward."

Q: Were there any aspects of the project you found particularly unique?

A: "Absolutely. School projects are always rewarding because they support education and strengthen the local community. This one was especially meaningful since our design lead had a personal connection to Neenah High School. Beyond its functionality, the signage became a defining feature of the new campus. The high school display is a bold, eye-catching structure designed to maximize visibility while adhering to local zoning requirements. Its striking design was so well-executed that it earned a 2024 Watchfire LED Sign Award for design excellence."

Neenah Joint School District's Network Operations Manager Andy Dubey added, "Working with Creative Sign Company and Watchfire has been fantastic. From the initial design phase to the final installation, everything was incredibly smooth. Whenever we needed help, they were right there."

Using Watchfire's software, the district manages content for the displays. Updates like school closures, virtual learning days, upcoming events, and student achievements can all be made in real time, ensuring that key information reaches the school community quickly when it's needed most.

Since installation, the digital displays have transformed how Neenah schools communicate, enabling quick, visible updates for students and parents alike. From celebrating student achievements to notifying families of schedule changes, the signs ensure that anyone passing by is always informed, strengthening connections across the Neenah school community. **GP**



Marie Fennema is the managing editor of GRAPHICS PRO, including GRAPHICS PRO Today, covering news and guidance in apparel decoration, awards and engraving, and sign and digital printing.

Welcome to the

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

section, where each month we offer you **resources to enrich and expand your business** with great services and products from our advertisers.

BIG News, LOW Minimums

STAHLS' Emblems & Patches



***ALL NEW* 12 piece minimum!**

ORDER NOW
▶ stahls.com/patch-12

STAHLS'

GP0425



NYLON TRICOT SHINY MINI SHORTS

This shiny mini short offers flexibility and comfort perfect for yoga, tumbling, and light active wear.

We made these shorts with a seamless front, making them the ideal option for layering under skirts and dresses when you need extra security or layering over tights for a night out.

Features a low rise and short inseam with just enough coverage in the back.

WHOLESALE-IMPRINTABLE DIVISION
WWW.LOSANGELESAPPAREL-IMPRINTABLE.NET
INFO@LOSANGELESAPPAREL.NET
(213)275-3120



NEW!
TREND ALERT: *selling fast!*

JOHNSONPLASTICS PLUS

EPSON SURECOLOR®
F1070 PRINTER
DTF & DTG Printing



scan me TO SHOP

JPPLUS.COM
1.800.869.7800

OTTO®

Slightly Faded, Worn-In Look!

VINTAGE LOOK



Style No. 16-200

Style No. 121-1297

Style No. 31-3

Order Blank or Custom Hats on
WWW.OTTOCAP.COM

Phase II
DIGITAL RIBBON PRINTER



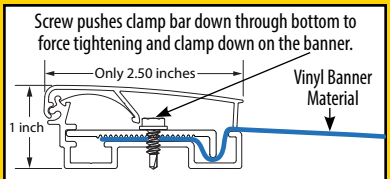
Print custom ribbon with the click of a mouse! Satin ribbon from 3/8" wide to 4" wide. Repeat the image up to 999 times. Print from 1 to 5 ribbons at once, many color choices. Offer custom sashes!
www.DigitalRibbonPrinter.com

JMP
Jackson Marking Products
800-782-6722
www.RubberStampMaterials.com
info@rubber-stamp.com

Banner GripFlip™

Amazing new flip up frame that stretches any size vinyl banner within the frame, and the tops snap down to cover the banner edges. There are no visible external screws, and the profile is only 2.5 inches wide!

Create large and beautifully, drum-tight stretched vinyl banner displays!



Flip top snaps down completely covering all screws and stretcher bar. Clean, perfect look!

To see more:
bannergrip.com

HOTRONIX®
360 IQ® HAT PRESS



The MVP when it comes to applying Emblems & Patches.

GET YOURS TODAY
stahls.com/hat-mvp

STAHLS'
GP0425





Hiring is harder than ever

Here's how to fix it

By Marshall Atkinson

Hiring used to be a lot simpler. You put out a job ad, got a decent batch of applicants, picked the best one, and boom — you had a new employee. Those were the good old days. Now? It's a different story.

If you've tried to hire recently, you know the struggle. Candidates don't show up for interviews. The ones that do often expect a management salary for an entry-level job. Finding good employees feels like trying to win the lottery, and in some areas, especially rural towns, the talent pool is more like a talent puddle. Business owners everywhere ask the same question:

Where did all the good workers go?

The truth is that the workforce has changed. People want different things from jobs now — more flexibility, better pay, and less stress. Some don't want to work at all. Employers are left scratching their heads, wondering how to attract reliable, hardworking employees who won't disappear after a week.

But here's the thing: Hiring isn't hopeless. You just have to change your approach to it. You'll struggle if you're still doing things as you did 10 years ago. But suppose you're willing



Rising Monk – stock.adobe.com

to rethink your hiring strategy, get creative, and make a few adjustments. In that case, you can find great employees, even in this job market.

This article isn't a list of boring HR theories or corporate jargon. It's about real, actionable strategies that work. Sound good? Great. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.



The vanishing interviewee phenomenon

You schedule an interview, block off time, and then — nada. No call, no email, just a disappearing act. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Ghosting has become a standard move for job seekers who apply for dozens of jobs at once, take the first offer, and ignore the rest.

So, how do you stop wasting time on no-shows? Text reminders work better than emails, as a simple "Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow at 10 a.m." increases attendance.

Pre-screening with a short video call or recorded response also helps weed out the tire-kickers. Instead of immediately booking an in-person interview, ask candidates to hop on a quick five-minute video chat first. This casual check-in makes it easier to gauge interest, and candidates who aren't serious won't bother.

Another option? If you don't want to book a five-minute call, ask applicants to submit a short, recorded video answering two or three questions (like "What interests you about this job?"). If they can't put in that effort, they're unlikely to show up for an interview anyway.

The 'I want to start as a manager' dilemma

Many job seekers today aren't looking for a job; they're looking for a shortcut. They apply for entry-level positions but expect management titles, top-tier salaries, and a corner office by next Tuesday. Some assume a college degree should automatically land them a leadership role, while others entirely skip over the "working your way up" part.

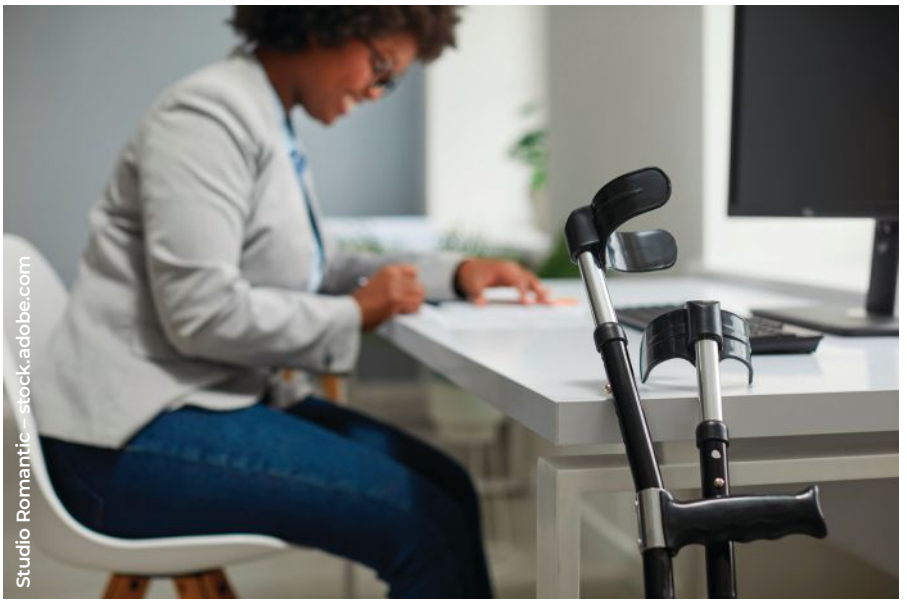
So, why has entry-level lost its appeal? Remote jobs, side hustles, and gig work have changed people's thoughts about traditional career paths. The idea of "starting at the bottom" isn't as popular anymore.

The fix? Set clear expectations from day one. In job postings, outline the career growth path, including timelines for raises and promotions. During interviews, be upfront: "We promote from within, but we need to see solid performance first." If a candidate expects to be a manager immediately, ask them, "How would you train someone on a job you've never done?" This will reset expectations quickly.

Another tactic? Reframe job titles. "Production assistant" sounds like a dead-end job; "production apprentice" suggests growth. A minor tweak in language can make an entry-level role feel like the start of something bigger with a future.

The goal isn't to suppress ambition; it's to redirect it into action. Show new hires the path forward, but clarify that getting to the top still requires work.





The small hiring pool problem

Hiring is tough everywhere, but it can feel impossible if you're in a small town or working in a niche industry like decorated apparel. When the local talent pool is already limited, your hiring choices can feel like picking between "bad" and "worse." If you're lucky, you might find someone who's worked in manufacturing or production before — but good luck finding a candidate who already knows how to separate T-shirt artwork or run an automatic screen-printing press.

The reality is nobody is born knowing how to do this stuff. Screen printing, embroidery, and heat pressing are all specialized work requiring hands-on training. That means expecting to find a fully skilled applicant in the first few resumes isn't realistic.

The best strategy? Hire for attitude, train for skill. You've heard that before, right? It's still true.

Look for people with transferable skills. Restaurant workers who can handle fast-paced environments, mechanics who understand machinery, and artists who can be taught prepress work. If someone is reliable, teachable, and has a good work ethic, you can train them on the rest.

If your usual hiring methods aren't working, expand your search. Partner with local high schools, trade programs, veteran training centers, and workforce development offices. Consider hiring part-time workers who need flexibility, like parents looking for a job during school hours or college students who want hands-on experience.

Another often overlooked resource is disability employment programs. Many organizations offer job coaching and financial incentives for hiring neurodiverse or disabled workers. They can also connect you with highly motivated candidates eager for stable employment. These candidates don't want a handout or charity; they only want an opportunity. More on that later in the article.

At the end of the day, the goal isn't to find the "perfect" candidate. It's to find the right person and give them the tools to succeed. When you focus on training and long-term growth, you build a team of skilled employees who stay, learn, and add real value to your business.

Fear factor: Employers' biggest concerns

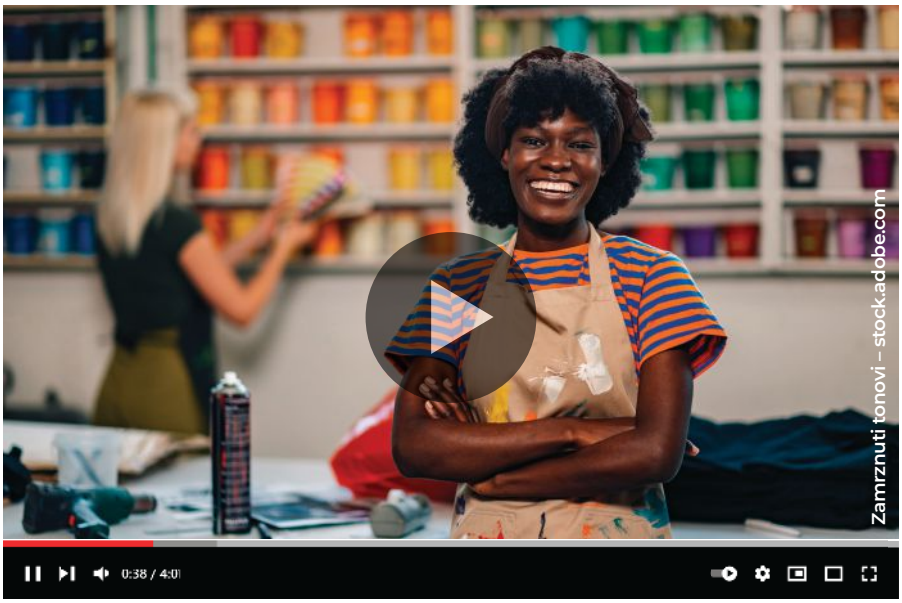
Hiring can feel like a gamble. What if you train someone, and they quit a week later? What if they're not as good as they seemed? These fears are real. But remember, F.E.A.R. is an acronym for false evidence appearing real.

Yes, some hires won't work out. But what if you find a great one? The best way to overcome hiring anxiety is to control what you can. Refine your hiring process, set clear expectations, and focus on retention.

Are you worried about turnover? Give people a reason to stay. A solid onboarding process, clear growth paths, and a positive work environment go a long way. If you're concerned about pay competition, focus on what makes your workplace better. A supportive team, flexibility, and low stress can be just as valuable as a bigger paycheck.

And here's something to consider: Every day, your employees go home, and someone asks, "Hey honey, how was your day?" You are in control of





their response. If they're frustrated and dreading tomorrow, they won't stay. But if they feel valued and enjoy their work, they will. And maybe they'll bring others with them.

Instead of fearing the hiring process, use it as a chance to build a high-performing team. Employees who see that effort leads to opportunities such as raises, promotions, and new skills stay engaged. A workplace where results matter, hard work is rewarded, and people take pride in their work isn't just a job. It's a culture.

And when you build that kind of culture, hiring stops being a headache and becomes your biggest advantage.

Rethink the hiring process

Hiring in the decorated apparel industry should not feel like a corporate HR exercise. We are not hiring brain surgeons. We print T-shirts, and let's be real; it is pretty fun. If your hiring process is as dry as a job at the DMV, you are doing it wrong.

Speed matters. First, ditch the lifeless job ad. No one wants to apply if your posting sounds like a robot wrote it. Instead of "Looking for a detail-oriented individual to perform garment decoration duties in a fast-paced environment," try something like, "Tired of boring jobs? Work with a team that actually likes each other. We print T-shirts, crack jokes, and help awesome customers bring their ideas to life. If you enjoy making cool stuff and working with people who don't suck, apply today!"

Even better, record a quick video showing your shop in action. Have your best employee say, "I started here three years ago and still love it. Plus, my closet is 80% free T-shirts." That will do more to attract good candidates than listing "competitive pay" for the thousandth time.

And here's an easy win: Get your current employees to recruit for you. Ask them to share job openings on social media or tag friends who might be a good fit. Offer a referral bonus if their hire sticks around, payable at the new employee's 90-day mark. People trust their friends, and if your team brags about how much they like working there, it is way more convincing than a job ad that looks like every other one out there.

The goal is simple. Make applying easy. Show that your shop is a great place to work. Move fast when you find the right person. We are in the T-shirt business, not an accounting firm. Make hiring as fun as the work itself, and you will attract those who want to be part of it.

Turn social media into a hiring tool

Most people spend more time on social media than looking for jobs. That is why platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook can be great recruiting tools.

Use LinkedIn for professional roles like sales reps, managerial staff, or designers. If you need someone hands-on, Instagram




Svitlana – stock.adobe.com

and Facebook are better.

Also, get into local Facebook groups. A quick post like, "Know someone who loves T-shirts and working with their hands? We are hiring!" and ask people to share the post. People trust recommendations from people they know; the best hires often come through word of mouth.

Host hiring events & trial days

Do you want to find out if someone is the right fit before hiring them? Give them a chance to experience the job first. Home Depot has weekend events where parents bring their kids to build a birdhouse or a toolbox. Although this is a free community event, it is actually a clever recruiting tool. Suppose a parent appears handy and comfortable with tools. In that case, an employee will pull them aside and ask if they have ever considered working there. You can do the same thing.

Host a "Print Your Own Shirt Day" where people can come in, learn the basics of screen printing, and take home a custom T-shirt they made themselves. It is a fun event for the community and a great way to spot potential employees. If someone picks up the process quickly, asks thoughtful questions, and seems genuinely interested, they might just be your next great hire.

Partner with schools & local programs

Some of the best employees you will ever hire do not even know this industry exists. Many schools focus on pushing students toward college or trade careers like plumbing and welding. Very few mention that making T-shirts, running embroidery machines, or designing graphics can be a full-time job.

Partner with high schools, trade schools, and community colleges to offer apprenticeships or internships. Give students a chance to get hands-on experience and see if they like the work. If they do, you now have a trained future employee.

Do not overlook vocational programs and workforce development centers. These organizations train people eager to work but need a starting point. Many also help cover training costs, making it a win-win for both you and the employee.

Hiring neurodiverse & disabled workers

Many businesses are missing out on a workforce of skilled, motivated people simply because they are not looking in the right places.

Neurodiverse and disabled individuals are among the most underemployed in the country, not because they lack ability but because traditional hiring practices create unnecessary barriers.

These people thrive on structure, focus


goodluz – stock.adobe.com

on details, and bring problem-solving skills that can elevate your business. They can perform every job you have in the building. This is not just a hiring strategy. It is an opportunity to bring in people who will show up, work hard, and stay.

If you struggle to find reliable employees, this is your solution, usually right under your nose. Reach out to job coaching programs, vocational rehab centers, and disability employment services. These organizations do more than connect you with great candidates. They also provide training, support, and even financial incentives to help make hiring easier. The best part? These employees want to work. They are not just looking for a paycheck; they are looking for a place where their skills matter.

Hiring is just the beginning. Success happens when employees feel supported. Many neurodiverse workers thrive with structured workflows, written instructions, and step-by-step training guides. If your current training plan is "watch and figure it out," it is time for an upgrade. Accommodations do not have to be expensive or complicated. Sometimes, it is as simple as offering noise-canceling headphones, adjusting a workspace, or providing a clear checklist.


Cultura Creative – stock.adobe.com

When you create an environment where everyone feels valued for what they bring to the table, you are not just filling jobs. You are building a team that is stronger, more engaged, and invested in the company's success.

The future of hiring (& why it's not hopeless)

If you want different results, you have to try something new. The right employees are out there, but finding them means looking beyond job boards, moving fast, and creating a workplace that people want to work in. The best hiring strategy is finding the right people and creating a place where they want to stay. The question is simple: What are you willing to do differently to solve your problem? **GP**



Marshall Atkinson lives and works in Mesa, Arizona. He is a frequent contributor to industry magazines and a popular trade show educator. Recognized for his industry education contributions, he was elected to the Academy of Screen and Digital Printing Technologies in 2020.



andranik123 – stock.adobe.com



Personalized gifts
that create meaningful moments

By Aaron Montgomery

Arugula Pica – stock.adobe.com

Some gifts fade into the background, others end up in the landfill, while others become part of a story people tell for years. Personalized gifts belong to the last group, and people rarely part with something personal to them, which brings more value to that product. A name on a keychain is one thing, but something that taps into shared memories or inside jokes carries a deeper meaning and larger price.

A product decorator once told me about a gift they had made for their father which was a simple wooden sign laser-engraved with a phrase he used to say when tucking them into bed. The moment he opened it, there were tears. Not just because it was customized, but because it held a piece of their relationship in it. That's the power of a well-thought-out gift. Tapping into that is the difference between a "thing" and a story that is worth having regardless of the economic climate.

The magic of shared memories

Personalization isn't just about adding a name to an item. While that can certainly be a good start, it is still about telling the story. The most meaningful gifts bring back a specific moment, a connection, or a shared experience. It's the difference between printing a generic message on a mug versus engraving a favorite saying that only makes sense to the people involved. For example, a couple celebrating 50 years together might not need another wine glass set, but if those glasses are etched with lyrics from their wedding song, the value changes completely. Parents receiving a cutting board with a handwritten recipe from a grandparent see it as more than kitchenware and instead more of a piece of family history.

The point is, to put yourself in your customer's or potential customer's shoes and think about how much you are willing to pay for the latter part of



Jariya – stock.adobe.com

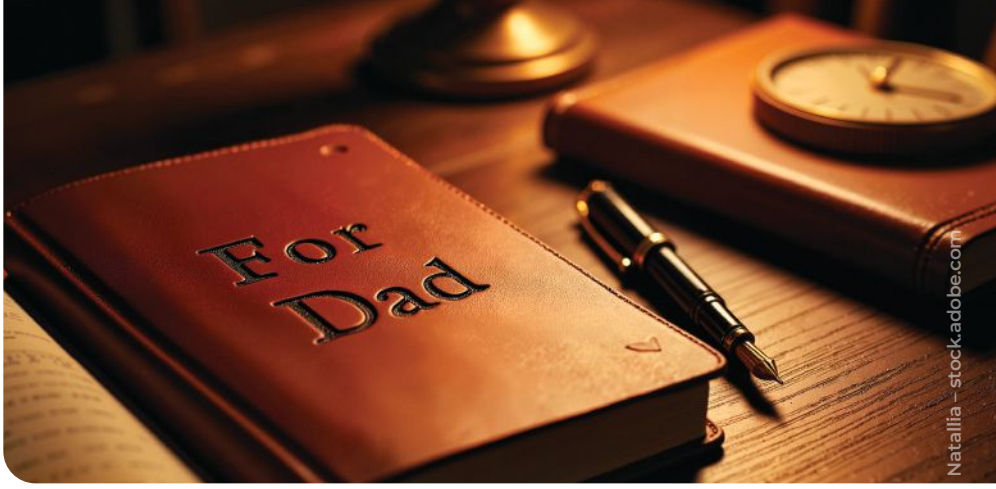
the examples. After spending 50 years together, most couples have plenty of stuff, including wine glass sets. They probably would not pay more than they would for a decent set at a local retail outlet. But my wife and I have been together for 12 years, and an opportunity to remind her of why we fell in love and to bring a spark back from our wedding day is hard to put a value on. If I were in the market for that and you as the decorator made it easy for me to buy the gift and gave me some assurances that the quality would be top-notch, I'm sure I would be willing to pay double what I might pay for blank ones. Once we get to 50 years, those reminders will be so much more valuable.



Farknot Architect – stock.adobe.com

Thoughtful gifts bring customers back

Businesses that offer personalized products have an edge: they help customers give gifts that mean something. And when a gift lands the right way, the person giving it feels just as good as the one receiving it. That feeling is what makes them return. The best way to encourage this isn't through discounts or promotions but by ensuring that every purchase feels like a personal experience. A small business that



Natallia – stock.adobe.com

includes a handwritten note to the gift recipient from the gift giver or carefully wraps each order creates an extra layer of appreciation. People remember those details and share them with others.

A big part of customer loyalty and gaining repeat business is reducing friction. That friction could be remembering where they got that gift. Our brains operate on stories and if the gift has created a new story for them, they will rarely forget your part in the story. You're not giving them a reason to go elsewhere. And that is why the next part is crucial.

Smart customization without overload

Part of reducing friction is making the original process easy, fun, and seamless by clearly defining expectations, meeting those expectations, and making the buying process as simple as possible. Giving customers too many choices can backfire. If someone has to pick from 30 fonts, 50 colors, and endless design options, they're more likely to abandon the process altogether. If it feels difficult or too time-consuming, they might buy it once because they must have it or they need that gift, but their brain will be on the lookout for alternatives. A well-curated selection helps them make decisions quickly without feeling overwhelmed.

Showcasing real examples is one of the easiest ways to guide customers. A display with previous projects sparks ideas, making the process smoother. When people see how others have customized an item, they start picturing their own version instead of feeling lost in too many possibilities. Also, the buying process doesn't need to be complicated or highly technical. Yes, there are tools, software, and e-commerce platforms that could make it simple, but if that overcomplicates it for you, you won't sell it. Just think, how can you make it easy? Can you be the expert and help them with the design, layout, or even ideas? Let go of the thought that you are offering a "thing" and focus on the service you are offering. In this case that service could very well be curating and participating in creating their perfect personalized gift. There is value that people are willing to pay for, so charge accordingly.

The best way to market personalization

Customers need to see the emotional impact of personalized gifts before they even make a purchase. Social media is one of the best ways to show this. A video of someone unwrapping a gift with a heartfelt reaction is worth more than any ad. Behind-the-scenes footage of the production process builds anticipation and trust.

Live demonstrations at events or pop-up shops also help. Watching something being engraved or a design pressed onto fabric in real-time makes the experience feel special. Customers who see it happen are more likely to buy because they feel a part of the process. Again, this all goes back to removing the focus from your part of the business and the product and focusing on the service. Why will your customers care and what is in it for them? We all want to be a thoughtful gift giver and paying for that is worth it to many people.

Pricing personalization correctly

One mistake small businesses make is underpricing their customization services. Personalization takes extra time, skill, and customer care to really hit this market. I have tried to point out throughout this article how much value people see that we as business owners don't always see due to our proximity to the service. For many of you, that level of customer service is just what you do. If a business doesn't charge appropriately, it ends up working harder for less profit. Remove the idea of cost from your pricing strategy and focus simply on value. I'm not saying to forget about your cost, but covering your costs and time should be the minimum, not the pricing strategy. When you start telling the story instead of focusing on the product, you will find your customer values the service way more than the "thing."

The best part of working with personalized gifts is hearing the stories that come back. Price is the last part of the conversation and value is all the customers care about and they can't wait to share their new story. The mother who gave her daughter a bracelet engraved with a note from her late father. The coach who received a plaque with handwritten messages from every player. The friend who surprised a loved one with a keepsake that brought back a long-forgotten inside joke.

Personalized gifts aren't about selling products — they're about creating moments people hold on to. When a business understands that, customers don't just buy once. They come back because they know they'll find something meaningful again. **GP**



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.

Solutions for scaling images

The art and science behind image size

By Stephen Romaniello

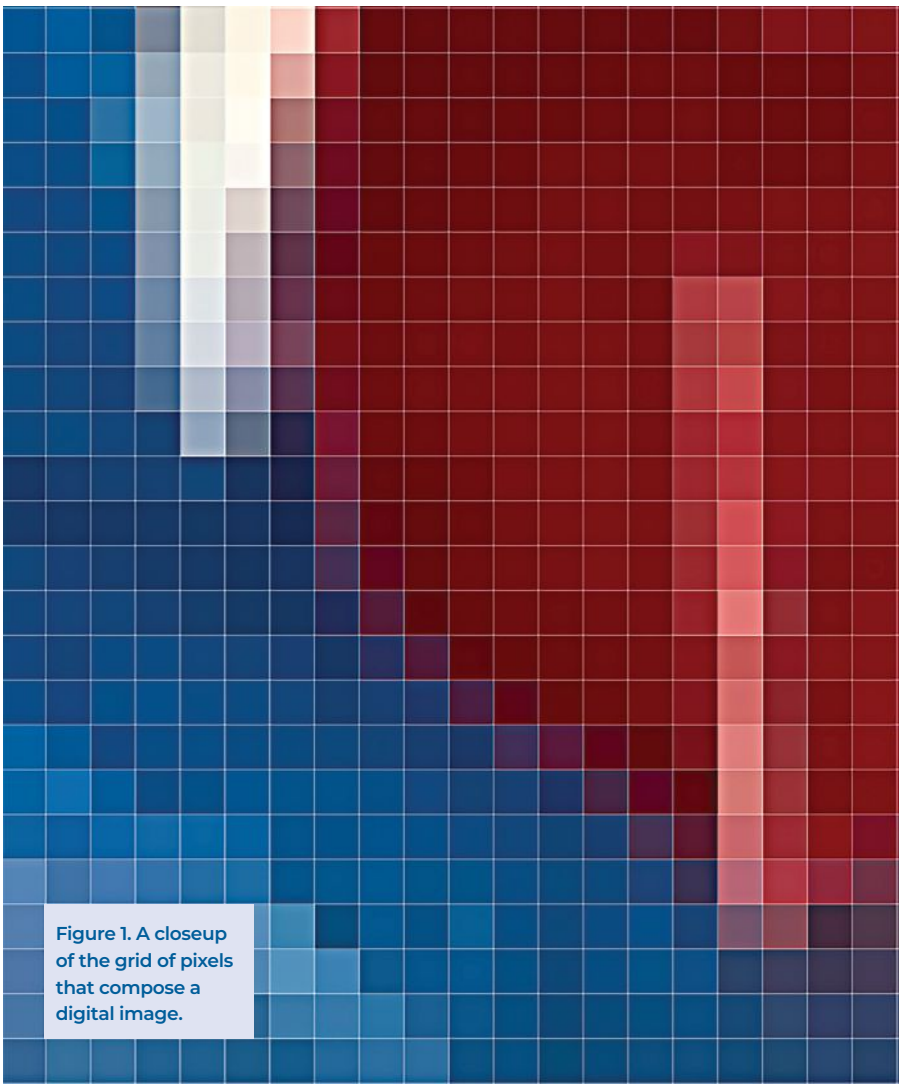


Figure 1. A closeup of the grid of pixels that compose a digital image.

You no doubt have experienced problems associated with scaling digital images. All too frequently a lack of understanding of the sizing process produces dubious results at the printer. There are several resizing methods, and the one you choose will depend on the intended output. An understanding of the properties and terminology associated with these methods will assure that the best quality reproductions will be achieved, and that time and materials are not wasted.

Pixels

As I'm sure you know, a digital image is composed of a grid of tiny squares called pixels. Each pixel is a building block of a specific color **(Fig. 1)**. The combination of all the pixels composes the image that you see on screen. The *image resolution*, the number of pixels in a linear inch, determines the quality of an image and how much detail can be displayed or printed. The file size is directly related to the number of pixels in an image. Simply stated, the more pixels there are, the bigger the file size.

Smaller is not necessarily better

Decreasing the height, width, or resolution of an image does not usually cause problems. Image quality remains consistent within certain limits. If the image is downsized too much, however, and the image resolution is too low, the image will appear pixelated with stair-stepped edges **(Fig. 2)**. The importance of knowing the purpose and destination of your image before fiddling with its dimensions is crucial.

Bigger isn't always better either

A matrix of 72 pixels per inch (PPI) at 100% of the height and width is required for images that are viewed online. A larger or smaller matrix appears enlarged or diminished on screen. Images destined for a high-quality printer require a resolution

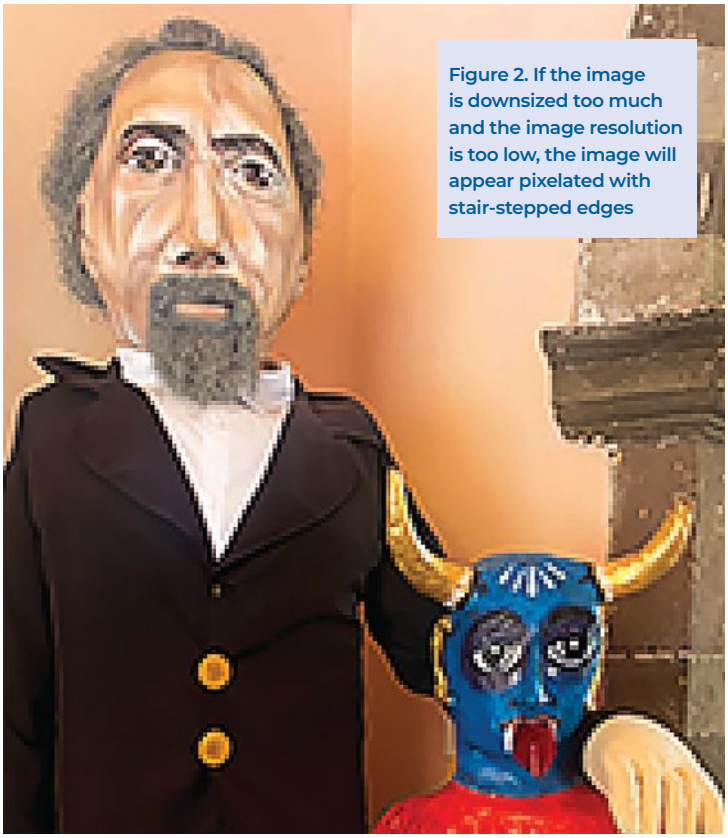


Figure 2. If the image is downsized too much and the image resolution is too low, the image will appear pixelated with stair-stepped edges

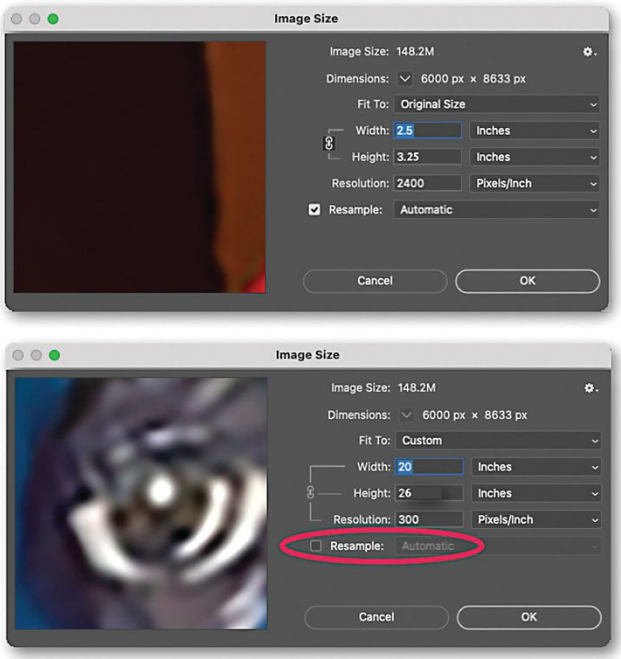


Figure 3. Choose the *Image Size* dialog box found in the Image menu. Uncheck the *Resample* button and type a value for the width.

of 300 PPI at 100% of the print size. Resolutions significantly smaller than 300 PPI will appear pixelated or soft when printed. Resolutions higher than 300 PPI don't improve the look of the printed image and have unnecessary large file sizes and slower printing times.

Nondestructive enlarging

The best method for enlarging an image's total width and height begins at image capture, either at the scanner or digital camera. If taking a photograph, choose the highest resolution your camera can produce. If scanning an image, choose the appropriate optical resolution. For example, if you have a 2.5" X 3.25" photograph and you want to increase its width and height proportionally to 20" X 26", scan it at eight times the resolution of the final output requirement. Ultimately you will want to end up with a 300 PPI image to produce a quality print. Scan the image at 2400 PPI which is the maximum optical resolution of most flatbed scanners.

Once scanned, you can enlarge the image while reducing its resolution by a factor of eight. Choose the *Image Size* dialog box found in the Image menu. Uncheck the *Resample* button and type 20" for the width. The height changes to 26" and the resolution changes to 300 DPI **(Fig. 3)**. The physical size of the image increases by eight times while resolution is reduced by a factor of eight. (8x2.5=20, 8x3.25=26, 2400/8=300). The file size remains the same with no addition of pixels.

Adding pixels

If you don't have the choice to rescan or reshoot the image, you'll need to apply the enlarging method that is least likely to compromise image quality. *Resampling* increases or decreases the height, width, or resolution and, ultimately, the file size, by adding or subtracting pixels. *Interpolation algorithms* are used to best determine what colors the new pixels will be assigned. There are eight methods to choose from in the Image Size dialog box.

The algorithms menu is displayed when the *Resample* box is checked **(Fig. 4)**. Each algorithm determines the color of added pixels using a specific mathematical formula designed to produce the best overall results depending on the color characteristics of the image.

- ***Automatic:*** Photoshop automatically selects the resampling method based on the document type and whether it is being upsampled (enlarged) or downsampled (reduced).
- ***Preserve Details and Preserve Details 2.0*** are both used for enlarging images. When either of the Preserve Details is selected, a noise reduction slider is displayed that eliminates noise as you drag the slider to the right. Preserve Details 2.0 is a later upgrade of the original algorithm.
- ***Bicubic Smoother*** is also recommended for enlarging images. The core algorithm is bicubic interpolation, but it smooths edge pixels and reduces softening by adding pixels of higher contrast to the inner areas.
- ***Bicubic Sharper*** is a good method for reducing the size of an image based on Bicubic interpolation with enhanced sharpening. This method maintains detail in a resampled image. If Bicubic Sharper over-sharpens some areas of an image, try using Bicubic.

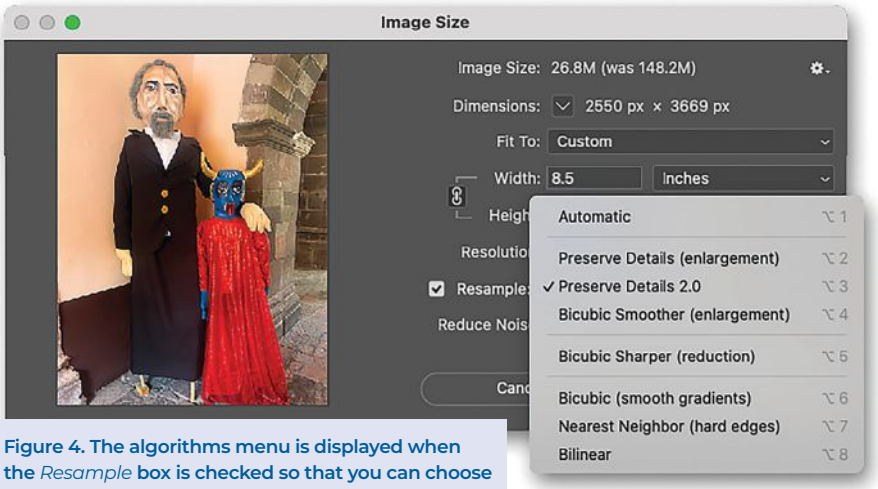


Figure 4. The algorithms menu is displayed when the *Resample* box is checked so that you can choose a specific interpolation method.

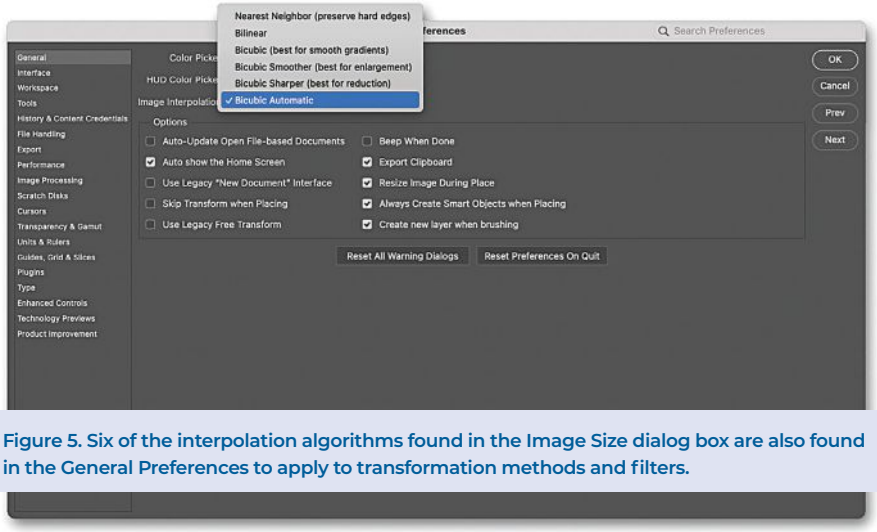


Figure 5. Six of the interpolation algorithms found in the Image Size dialog box are also found in the General Preferences to apply to transformation methods and filters.

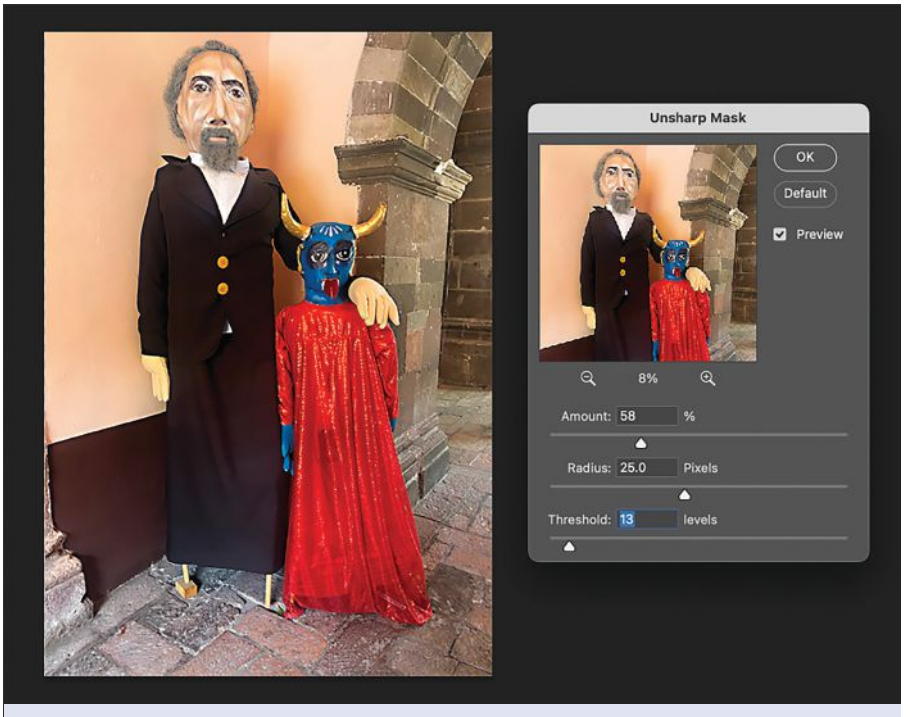


Figure 7. Apply the *Unsharp Mask* or *Smart Sharpen* filter in moderation to improve the image quality.



Figure 6. Enlarging a by significant measures can degrade the image and produce soft edges, blurring and dull regions of color.



- ***Bicubic* (smoother gradients)** is a slower but more-precise method based on an examination of the values of surrounding pixels. Using more complex calculations, bicubic produces smooth tonal gradations.
- ***Nearest Neighbor (hard edges)*** is a faster but less-precise method that replicates the pixels in an image. It is generally used for line art containing only black and white pixels. This method preserves hard edges and produces a smaller file size in illustrations containing edges that are not anti-aliased. Nearest Neighbor can potentially produce stair-stepped edges, which become apparent when you increase the size of an image.
- ***Bilinear*** adds pixels by averaging the color values of surrounding pixels. It's fast but produces medium-quality results.

Six of the interpolation algorithms found in the Image Size dialog box are also found in the General Preferences **(Fig. 5)** to control interpolation when sizing or distorting image content with the transformation features and filters.

Best strategy

The best strategy to enlarge an image is to opt for the most control possible and observe the results as you work. Enter the size, width, and resolution; check the Resample box and scroll through the various resampling methods one at a time as you observe

the results in the preview window. If you choose the *Preserve Details* methods, observe the result as you drag the *Noise Reduction* slider.

Image quality

When increasing the image size by moderate amounts (1-5%), a decrease in image quality will hardly be noticeable. Enlarging a by significant measures, however, can degrade the image and produce soft edges and flaccid regions of color **(Fig. 6)**. Just how much you can get away with enlarging often depends on image content. In an image with content that is already soft, like big fluffy clouds for example, the damage won't be as severe as an image where focus and contrast are more critical — like portraits or fashion shots.

The acceptable amount of degradation is also dependent on the image's ultimate purpose. If it's going to be seen at a distance in changing light, like a billboard for example, there is not too much to worry about. If it's a fine art print that is going to scrutinized close up, then upsampling by too much can produce unsatisfactory results.

Sharpen

Resample up to the desired size using the *Preserve Details* feature to eliminate as much noise as you can with the *Reduce Noise* slider, but don't compromise any important textures. Convert the layer to a *Smart Object* to assure that the filters you are about to apply are nondestructive. Apply the *Unsharp Mask* or *Smart Sharpen* filter in moderation to improve image quality **(Fig. 7)**. Don't over sharpen and avoid halos that are a result of an imbalance of Amount and Radius.

The sharpening filters are not cure-alls, but they will help in reducing the ravages of upsampling. Don't expect to add detail where there is none in the original image.

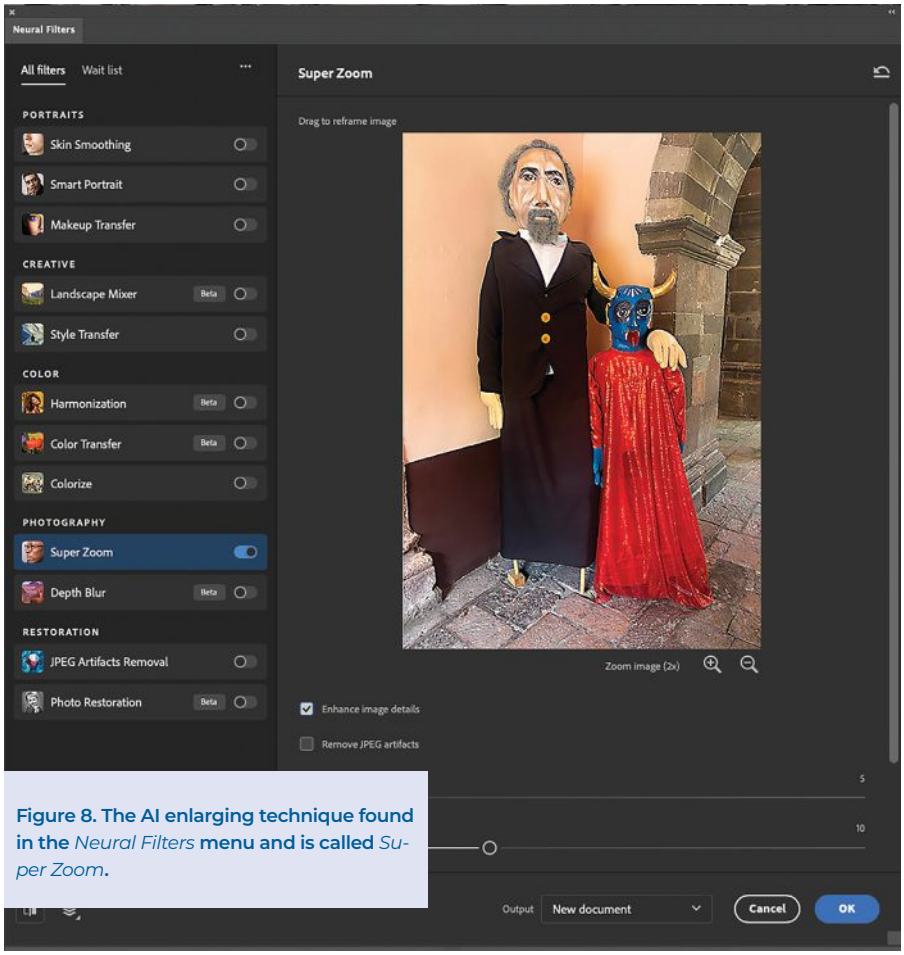


Figure 8. The AI enlarging technique found in the *Neural Filters* menu and is called *Super Zoom*.

Images destined for large-format printers should be sharpened to some degree.

AI enlargement

In the latest versions of Photoshop, you can employ artificial intelligence (AI) to the enlargement process. I hate to admit it, but this method produces really great results. The technique is found in the *Neural Filters* menu and is called *Super Zoom* **(Fig. 8)**. First, drag the Super Zoom button to the right to activate the filter. Click the magnifying glass icon up to four times to increase magnification from 200-500%. From the menu, choose *New Layer* or *New Document*. Click the *Enhance Details* box to apply a general sharpening effect to the image's details. Drag the manual sliders for noise reduction and additional sharpening.

Science & art

Resizing images is both a science and an art. The tools and techniques that perform the work are quite good but require your judgment. You're not going to get perfect results every time because some images are just plain stubborn. Experimentation is always the key to produce the best results, and, fortunately, there are several methods to choose from. Bear in mind that there are a multitude of transformation tools, techniques, and filters that can rescale specific areas within the image. They rely on the interpolation algorithms selected in the General Preferences window. I'll have a look at those in a future article. Remember, above all, the higher the quality of image that you start with, the better the results will be. **GP**



Stephen Romaniello is an artist and educator who has seen the evolution of digital graphics since the beginning of the digital revolution in the 1980s. He is CEO of GlobalEye Systems, a graphics software and creative imaging consultancy, and founder of Gorilla Geeks, a creative consulting firm.

AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION

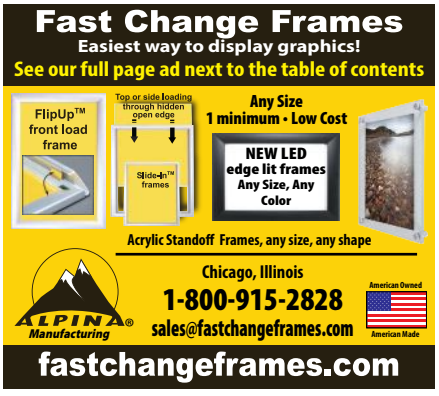


SIGNAGE & PRINTING



SIGNAGE & PRINTING





To advertise, visit:
graphics-pro.com/advertise



ADVERTISER INDEX

Advertiser	Page
6Sign	5
ADA Central Signs	64
Advertising Specialty Inst/ASI	9
Alpina Mfg LLC	3, 51, 64
AWT World Trade Inc	50, 64
Gildan Activewear SRL	CVTP
Graphic Parts Intl	64
Graphtec America Inc	47
Great Computer Corp	43
Hartlauer Bits	64
Hirsch Solutions LLC	31, 51
GRAPHICS PRO	**13, 64**
GRAPHICS PRO EXPO	**16B**
Jackson Marking Products Co Inc	51, 64
Johnson Plastics Plus	19, 50
LAT Apparel	7, 51
Los Angeles Apparel	50, IBC
Mutoh America Inc	1
Otto Intl Inc	51
Signs365.com	FCG
STAHLS'	IFC, 50, 51, BC
XANTE Corp	11

The Advertiser Index is intended solely as a convenience for our readers and is not a written or implied part of any advertising commitment. As such, GRAPHICS PRO assumes no liabilities for unintentional errors or omissions.

8.5 oz Wide T-Shirt

Introducing one of the heaviest tees available on the market. So thick, it could almost be called a sweater. This textile is durable, comfortable, and virtually shrink-free thanks to the garment dye process.

Garment-dyed means it's been washed in dye after it was sewn, so the color will stay true even after repeated washings. It also gives a broken-in feel, just like your favorite T-shirt that's been worn for a decade.

1201WGD
- Unisex
  S | M | L | XL | 2XL
- Made in Los Angeles
- 8.5 oz/yd^2
- 12/1 Open-End Jersey
- 100% Cotton

- Black Edge
- Light Grey
- Creme
- White



8.5 OZ
12 SINGLES
GARMENT DYED
SHRINK-FREE

LOS ANGELES APPAREL
Wholesale-Imprintable Division
www.losangelesapparel-imprintable.net
info@losangelesapparel.net
(213) 275-3120

BIG News, LOW Minimums!

STAHLS' EMBLEMS & PATCHES



NEW 12 PIECE MINIMUM!

Tap into more markets,
say YES to more customers.

- Lowest Minimums
- Fastest Shipping
- Heat Press – No Sewing!
- Quality You Can Trust





ORDER NOW

STAHLS'®

STAHLS.COM • 800.4.STAHLS

GP0425