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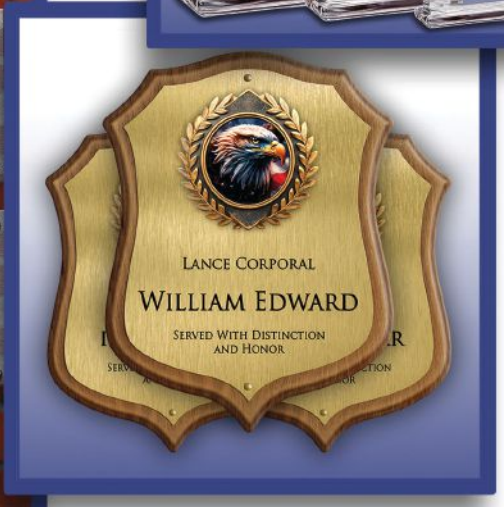
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Childrenswear trends

(Image courtesy of LAT)

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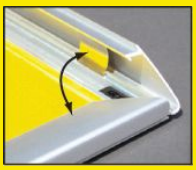
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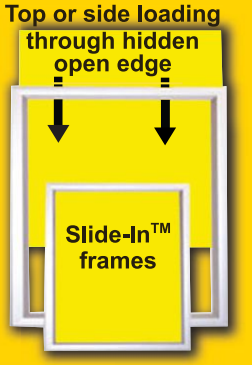
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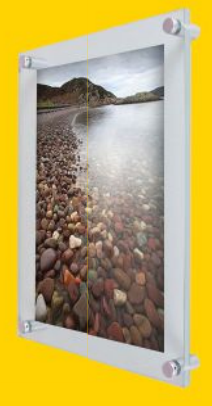




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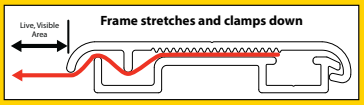
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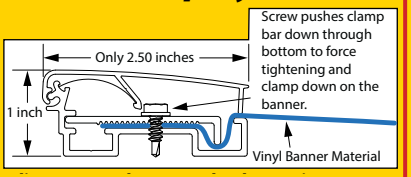






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Marie Fennema is the managing editor of GRAPHICS PRO magazine. She can be reached at mfennema@cahabamedia.com.

A look inside: USA-made

As we head into the middle of 2025, aka July, what better way is there to celebrate the anniversary of the U.S.'s independence than with made-in-the-USA products, patriotic awards, and race cars?

With the current global tariff situation still ongoing, many graphic shops across the country are turning to products produced and manufactured here within the U.S. as a way to avoid the ever-rising prices of goods and materials. In this month's special section, "Made in the USA" (page 30), we offer a collection of industry products that are marketed as being made in the U.S. These products are produced by suppliers and manufacturers across the country and cater to our three main markets: apparel decoration, signage and printing, and awards and customization.

In line with the Fourth of July, Natalie Albers dives into the wide variety of patriotic awards and unique U.S.-themed customization options that you can use to celebrate. From starbursts and eagles to the classic pairings of red, white, and blue, you'll find a plethora of award and gift ideas. Fun fact: The Congressional Gold Medal is the U.S.'s oldest and highest civilian award, and its issuance began during the Revolutionary War. Find out how many recipients this honor has been awarded to on page 22.

Coincidentally, Albers mentions, "Early settlers loved sports, food, beer, and celebrating freedom — just like many of us today." While they didn't have this sport back in 1776, many 21st-century Americans love NASCAR — Roland DGA included. The wide-format printer manufacturer recently hosted a sneak peek of its latest and greatest printer/cutter at the Richard Childress Racing campus, where dealers saw the printer — and race cars — in action. I chatted with Andrew Oransky, CEO of Roland DGA, to learn more about the decade-long partnership between the two companies (page 17).

Finally, we can't forget about the star of this issue's cover: childrenswear. On page 46, Shelley Widhalm shares insight from Monag Apparel, LAT Apparel, and Cotton Heritage on all things childrenswear. They talked about what's trending, including styles, decoration methods, materials, and safety standards.

We hope our readers have a great Independence Day and, as always, thank you for reading!



Marie Fennema
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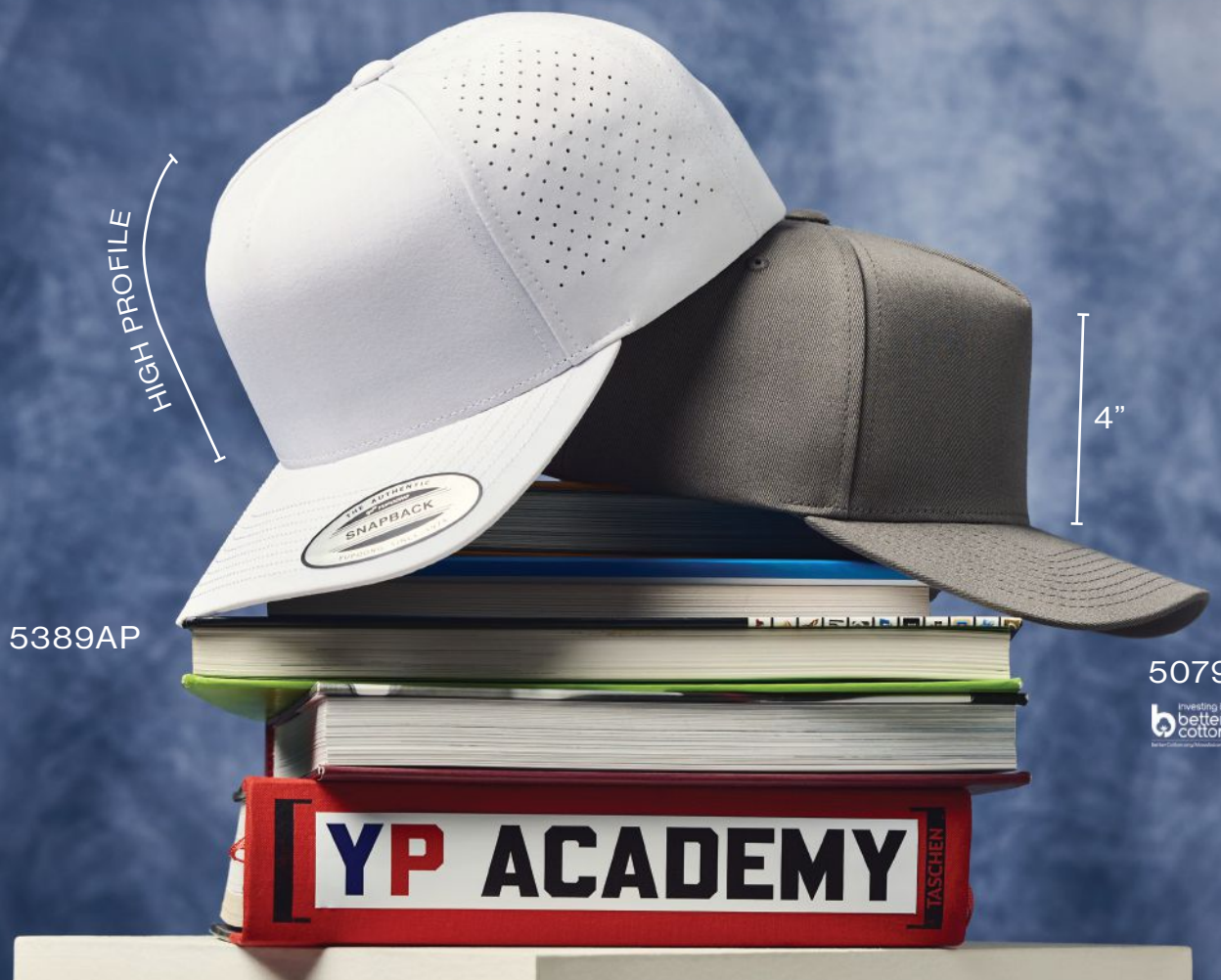
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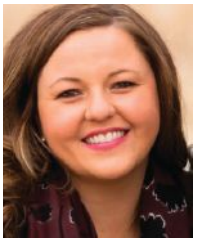
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INDUSTRY UPDATES

NEW HIRES & PROMOTIONS





Katie Ditallo & Jackie Ramsier

Cahaba Media Group

Katie Ditallo and **Jackie Ramsier** have been promoted by **Cahaba Media Group** to associate director roles within **GRAPHICS PRO EXPO** (GPX). Ditallo is now associate director – GPX sales and Ramsier is now associate director – GPX operations. Within these roles, Ditallo and Ramsier will manage the sales and operations of GPX, respectively. Ditallo boasts over a decade in trade show and media sales, most recently serving as senior account executive of GPX. Ramsier previously served as event operations manager for GPX under the ownership of Cahaba Media Group.



Noelle Sieradzki, Janet Page & Chris Barushak

Mactac

Mactac announced several leadership updates: **Noelle Sieradzki** joined as vice president of sales and marketing for the graphics and merchant products (sheets) areas of the business. Sieradzki will oversee a talented team, including sales, product management, and marketing for these business units. **Janet Page** has been promoted to director of the Technical Industrial Tapes business unit. **Chris Barushak** has been promoted to director of business transformation and strategy.



Phil Auerbach, Justin Swietlik & Kane Posner

Custom Ink

Custom Ink named three executives to its senior leadership team: **Phil Auerbach**, **Justin Swietlik**, and **Kane Posner**. **Auerbach** joined the company as chief marketing officer, longtime Custom Ink finance executive Swietlik has been promoted to chief financial officer, and internal leader Posner has been appointed to a newly created role as senior vice president of strategy. All three will report to CEO **David Doctorow**.



Doug Weigman

Vantage Apparel

Vantage Apparel added **Doug Weigman** as the new Upper Midwest regional account executive, serving customers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Weigman brings more than 20 years of experience in the promotional products industry, having worked on both the distributor and supplier sides.

GIVING BACK

Image360 North Houston, a provider of signage and graphics solutions, proudly supported "Rescues on the Runway," a first-of-its-kind fundraising event benefiting **Operation Pets Alive**.

Infinity Her, a headwear brand focused exclusively on women, partnered with **Beautiful Lives Thrift Boutique** to donate six large boxes filled with women's caps, knit beanies, and bags to support its mission of uplifting women through accessible, dignified shopping experiences.

In recognition of May as Skin Cancer Awareness Month, **Avery Dennison** sponsored **The Skin Cancer Foundation's** mobile education and screening program as the in-kind printed graphics and window film sponsor.

Signs Now, launched a "**Signs of Hope**" campaign this May in honor of National Cancer Research Month.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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GPX Long Beach
August 21-23
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GPX Meadowlands
September 12-13
Meadowlands, New Jersey
g-p-x.com/nj

GPX Charlotte
November 6-8
Charlotte, North Carolina
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September 25

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October 2

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November 13

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PARTNERSHIPS

Kornit Digital LTD announced that **Gooten**, a print-on-demand fulfillment and technology company, has integrated with Kornit's Global Fulfillment Network (GFN).

Vantage Apparel is integrating with **Order Desk**, an order management app.

S&S Activewear expanded its portfolio through exclusive agreements with **vineyard vines** and **Marmot**.

Kornit Digital signed a strategic partnership with **MAS Holdings** via subsidiary **MAS ACME USA**, a supply chain orchestration hub, to serve sustainable fashion and apparel brands.

Atlantis Headwear, an Italian provider of blank headwear, collaborated with **Ford Motor Company** to create the Ford Eco Range collection.

The **Baltimore Ravens** have selected **ANC**, a provider of AV technology design and integration, as its partner for digital signage upgrades.

NEW HIRES & PROMOTIONS



Bill Keating
Inkcups

Inkcups appointed **Bill Keating** as its new chief executive officer. Keating succeeds **Rick Hajec**, who served as interim CEO since April 2024 and remains a key member of the Inkcups Advisory Board. Keating brings to Inkcups more than 25 years of experience in manufacturing.



James Stanley
MUTOH America

MUTOH America welcomed **James Stanley** as business development manager for the packaging market. In this role, Stanley will support growth and innovation in packaging applications using the ValueJet 628MP. A second-generation packaging designer and engineer, Stanley brings over 25 years of experience spanning manufacturing, ad agencies, and distribution.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Roland DG Corporation's TrueVIS XP-640 eco-solvent wide-format inkjet printer earned a 2025 BLI Pick Award from Keypoint Intelligence.

Agfa has taken home a trio of European Digital Press Association Product Awards for its new hybrid press, the Jeti Tauro H3300 XUHS.

STAHLS' released the 100th episode of its podcast series, "Heat Press for Profit Live."

Matt Bloom, owner of **Minuteman Press** in Norwich, Connecticut, joined the Minuteman Press International President's Club for achieving over $1 million in gross sales for the year ending 2024.

Imperial has been named the top headwear brand for private and resort golf facilities by the Association of Golf Merchandisers for the eighth year in a row.

SanMar has been selected as a 2025 U.S. Best Managed Company.

Crystal D has been named to the PPAI 100 Suppliers list for 2025.

Monster Digital, a provider of made-to-order garments and accessories, was named "2025 Seller of the Year" by SHEIN Marketplace.

Stevensville High School & **Elite Design Solutions** were awarded the **Stahl Family Scholarship**.

ANNIVERSARIES

Advanced Greig Laminators Inc, a laminator manufacturer, is celebrating its 30th anniversary in business.

DESIGN CHEW:

The network I wanted, the people I needed

The importance of finding community for small business owners

By Lauren Stern

Ever since I started

Studio 618, a boutique signage and wayfinding consultancy, I have loved working independently. There's something rewarding about choosing the projects that I want to work on, working directly with clients without bureaucracy getting in the way, and most importantly, having the freedom to run Studio 618 on my own terms. That said, one thing that I've really missed since leaving the corporate world is the sense of community. I used to enjoy having people around to bounce ideas off of, ask for advice, or just chat about work and life. There's something special about that day-to-day connection with others who get what you do.

As I was closing in on having my business for about a year and a half, I started to feel like something was missing. I often felt a bit disconnected from the larger experiential design community. It was easy to feel isolated without those casual check-ins or creative brainstorms with other designers. Working for myself had a lot of perks, but I was starting to feel really siloed. Every day looked the same: I'd wake up, walk the short distance to my office, work for a while, have some lunch, walk the dog, work a bit more, and repeat. The routine — and the isolation — was getting to me.



I wasn't growing. I felt stuck. And honestly, I was starting to lose some of my social skills from only really talking to my dog and my husband most days. I realized I needed more connection, more interaction, and a way to feel part of something bigger than just my day-to-day tasks. Over time, I realized that I wasn't the only one feeling this way. After chatting with other small business owners around the world, it became clear that a lot of us were craving the same thing — connection, feedback, and a sense of belonging.

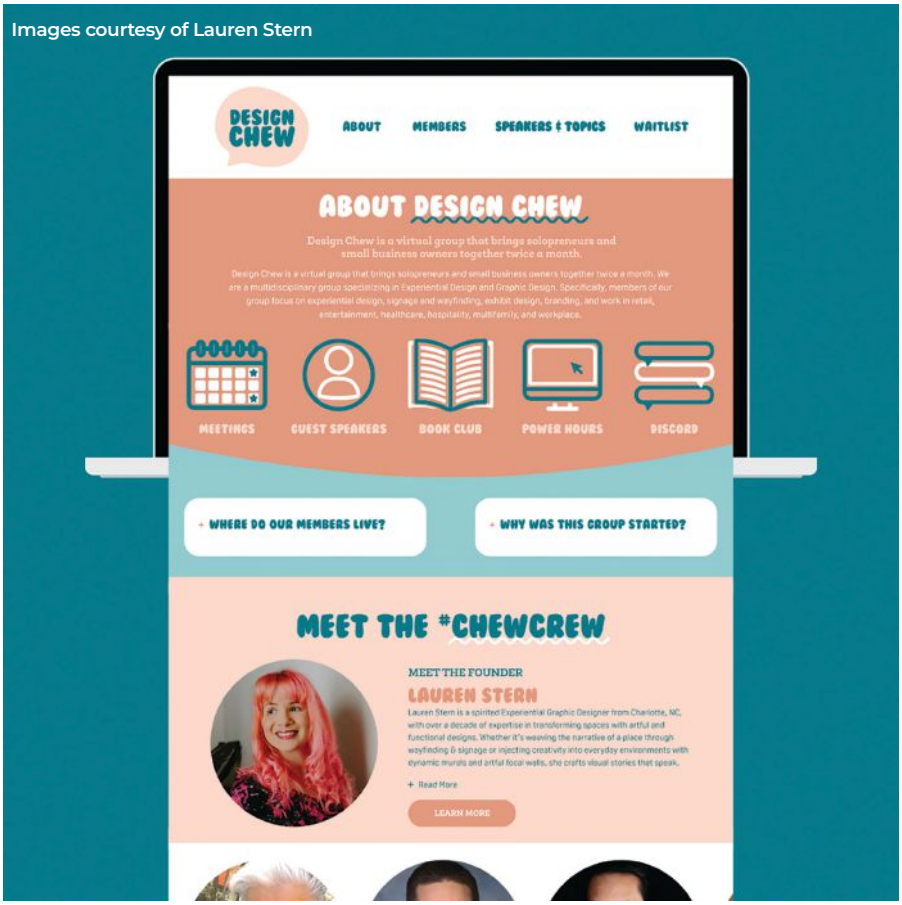
That's how Design Chew came to life. I wanted to create a casual, supportive space where fellow small business owners could come together every other week to share what we're working on, talk about what's going well (and what's not) in our businesses, and just connect with others who understand the ups and downs of creative businesses like ours. I put the idea out there on LinkedIn, and the response was amazing. On Oct. 7, 2022, we had our first meeting — and we've been going strong ever since.

Building what I couldn't find

Over the years, I realized that there was a real gap in the professional world for small business owners, particularly in the creative field and, like I mentioned previously, the isolation working by myself was getting to me. I was overwhelmed with everything that I needed to know as a small business owner and I missed having a support system. The organizations that I was part of often felt too broad or too focused on bigger companies and didn't truly cater to the specific challenges that we face as small business owners. What I was looking for was a space where small business owners could connect with each other — somewhere we could share ideas, talk openly about the ups and downs, and support each other through it all. Something real and relatable.

That's when it hit me: If I couldn't find the right space, maybe I just

Images courtesy of Lauren Stern



needed to create it myself. And so, Design Chew was born. I set out to build a group that was truly dedicated to small business owners in the design world — a space where we could openly talk about the struggles, successes, and the day-to-day realities of running our own businesses. A place where we could ask questions without fear or judgment, share advice, and even be vulnerable about the things we didn't know. Which, trust me, there was a lot (at least for me).

It wasn't easy, but the response I got when I shared the idea almost three years ago on LinkedIn in a post was overwhelming. I realized that other people felt the same way and were craving this kind of support and community. And now, Design Chew is that place. It's a place designed specifically for small businesses — creative, independent, and navigating the unique challenges of building something on our own terms.

One thing that I've learned is that if you're looking for something that doesn't exist, you don't have to wait around for someone else to build it. Sometimes, you just have to make it yourself. And that's exactly what I did.

The power of our community

What I love most about this group is the openness. Even though many of us work in similar spaces — like custom signage and experiential design — it never feels like we're competing. Everyone brings their own unique style, skill set, background, and personality to the table, and that diversity is what makes the conversations so great because they are candid and genuine.

The transparency we've built is rare. We talk openly about pricing and contract terms, tough client situations, and even celebrate each other's wins. We're not afraid to get into the nitty-gritty — like when we've done group exercises where everyone prices out the same project, then shares their numbers. It might sound unorthodox to those who shy away from talking to their colleagues about money, but it's incredibly helpful to us. Where some people avoid talking about money, we lean into those conversations to learn from each other and grow stronger as business owners.

I remember one time I was pricing the biggest project of my career. I brought it to the group and shared my initial estimate. Several people gave feedback, broke down the numbers with me, and helped me see the true value of my work. They encouraged me to raise my price significantly. I didn't end up getting the job — for reasons outside of my control — but that process of working through it with others was invaluable.

That kind of candid, supportive feedback is what makes this group so special. We're not just here to network — we're here to help each other succeed.

A global network of creatives

What makes this group even more exciting is the fact that our members













come from all over the globe! Right now, we have active members in places like Brazil, England, and all across the U.S. — California, Georgia, Indiana, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington, to name a few. We've even had members from Canada, Indonesia, and the Philippines in the past.

Having such a diverse group really adds so much value and depth to our conversations. Whether we're discussing the latest trends in experiential design or the challenges of running a small business, the diverse backgrounds of our members enrich the dialogue in ways that a more localized group simply couldn't. Being part of this international community allows us to learn from a wide range of cultural and business contexts, enriching our growth as designers and small business owners.

It's also inspiring to connect with people who face different challenges in different parts of the world, but still share the same passion for creativity and entrepreneurship. We're all working towards similar goals — building meaningful businesses, creating impactful designs, and supporting each other along the way. There's something truly special about connecting with everyone on our video calls, even though we're spread across multiple time zones and thousands of miles apart.

Topics that we have 'chewed over'

We talk about all kinds of things in our meetings — everything from pricing projects and what to include in your terms and conditions, to website audits, photography tips and tricks, soft skills, and even knowing when it might be time to "fire" a client. There's always something new, but one of my absolute favorite topics is what we call "celebrating our losers." It's where we show off the concepts that didn't get picked by the client. Most of us present two or three options in a project, and the client only chooses one — but that

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TESTIMONIALS

> Before I was asked to join Design Chew, I was struggling to meet other creative business owners in a similar early stage of growing their business that I could relate to, especially with other creatives. There are so many positives to being a long-term member of Design Chew. One of the biggest advantages is putting aside dedicated time to both join our group meetings and discussions, but all the other interactions we have, and Lauren works super hard and organizes for us as well. And one of the best advantages for me has been our book club as well. Being exposed to business and creative books and authors I would never have read on my own. This has been a revelation and also as we read together it keeps us accountable!
>
> Craig Whitehead,
> founder of Fenlands

> I was just starting my business when I joined Design Chew. I think not having coworkers to bounce ideas off of was definitely a struggle. I'm very social, and it was hard to be all by myself. I loved the idea that we are all independent entrepreneurs and share the same experiences, although we are spread around the world. We can offer each other perspectives that others may not have thought of. It's truly a diverse group! I feel like I have truly connected with all of the members of Design Chew in some way — whether it's them helping me with something or me helping them with project-oriented or personal issues. We are kind of like family at this point, and I always look forward to our calls!
>
> Steve Harroun,
> president of Harroun Designs



doesn't mean the others aren't worth sharing. I love getting a peek at the creative process: the early sketches, renderings, and how ideas evolve, and celebrating the "losers." It's such a cool reminder that there's value in the journey, not just the final product.

Another highlight for me is how we end each meeting with "wins of the week." We celebrate everything — from landing a new client to finally taking that overdue day off. The wins just keep getting bigger and better! I've even got a mini air horn I use to cheer everyone on, and people throw up reaction emojis in Google Meet to celebrate each other. It's awesome to be in a group where we're all in similar fields, but it never feels competitive. We genuinely root for each other.

Once a year, we host a virtual retreat. It's a much longer meeting than our typical meetings. This meeting, however, is where everyone gets a chance to share something they've been struggling with — sometimes it's business-related, sometimes it's personal. No matter what, the members of Design Chew always show up with support, advice, and encouragement. It's one of my favorite things that we do. We help each other through the tough stuff, lift each other up, and remind one another that we're not alone. Honestly, I think all of our businesses are better because of it.

Inspiring guest speakers

Just like the diverse group of people in our community, our guest speakers come from all over the world, too. We've had 11 speakers in total, including some who have come back multiple times, like Ken Stern, director of customer experience at Key Lime Interactive, who's graciously presented



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SPEAKER



Paul G. Morales
Product Manager
Professional Imaging
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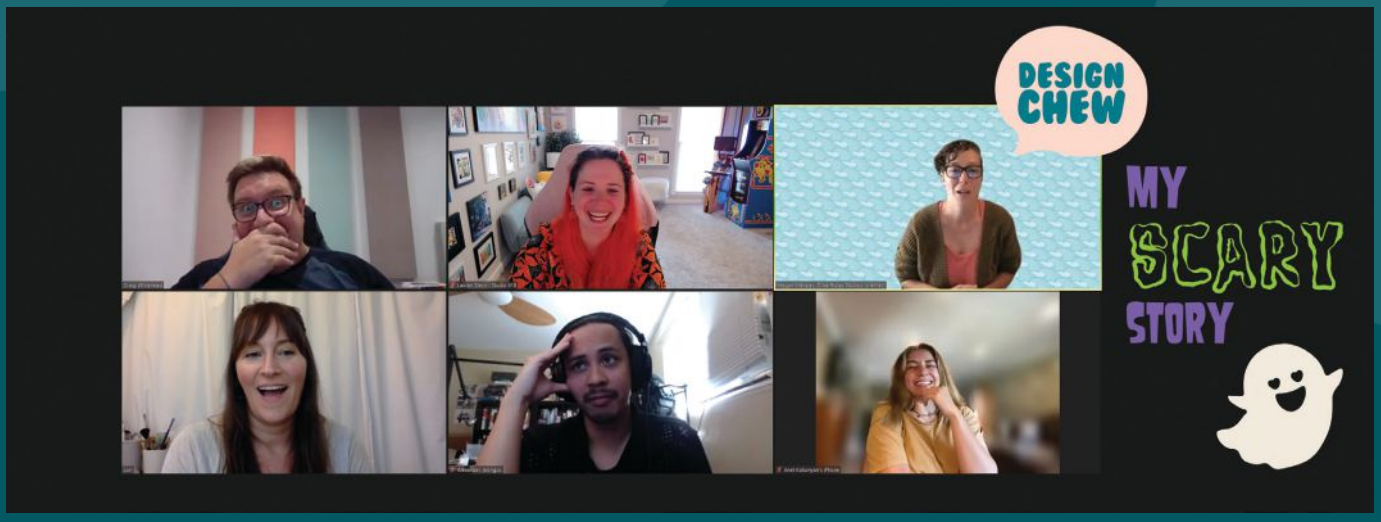
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to our group three times! Each speaker has brought something unique, covering everything from their business journeys and key lessons learned along the way, to gathering client feedback, podcasting, soft skills, maintaining strong client relationships, AI, day-to-day organization tips and tricks, and a client conversations workshop. These speakers have been invaluable and really inspiring for all of us.

Reunited at last: Where bonds were built & friendships grew

One of the things I love most about our group is that it's virtual. It gives us the freedom to meet from anywhere and brings together creatives from across the country — and around the world. But as much as I appreciate that flexibility, nothing compares to connecting in person with people who've become close friends. This past April, more than half of our group met up at the ISA (International Sign Association) conference in Las Vegas. It was amazing to reunite with folks I hadn't seen in years — and to finally meet others face-to-face for the first time!

On the final day of the conference, four of us had the chance to lead a roundtable discussion. We had a fantastic turnout, and co-leading with my fellow Chew Crew felt incredibly rewarding. It was one of those full-circle moments that made me reflect on how far we've all come — not just as a group, but as individual small business owners supporting one another through the highs and lows.

I'm so excited to see what's next for this amazing community — one that all started from a single LinkedIn post. **GP**



Lauren Stern is the owner and experiential designer at Studio 618, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based consultancy specializing in story-driven signage and wayfinding. She transforms ordinary spaces into extraordinary experiences and authored "Signs Have Much to Say," a children's book about the importance of signage, available on Amazon. Learn more at studio618design.com.

INTERVIEW
with Design Chew member Megan Kranzler of Olive Ridley Studios

Learn more here:

What not to miss at WRAPSCON 2025

In 2015, the GRAPHICS PRO EXPO team started WRAPSCON, the annual event hosted by wrappers, for wrappers. The popular event returns to GPX Long Beach on Aug. 21-23 for its 10th anniversary and will bring together top graphics installers, manufacturers, and suppliers for a program focused on all things wraps — from initial design to successful installation.

Get the latest in digital printing, vinyl technology, lamination, vehicle templates, wrap-specific artwork and tools, and immerse yourself in expert education panels, industry networking, and exciting competitions. Here's what you can expect at GPX:

Designer Throwdown

After a short break, the Designer Throwdown is back at WRAPSCON in August, sponsored by the following companies:

- Jody Frego, owner of Full Circle Wrap Training, will lead a wrap design seminar
- The Bad Wrap has supplied a template for designers to download and use for their own designs
- General Formulations is the official media sponsor
- Mutoh is the official print sponsor of both the Designer Throwdown and the Wrap Competition

This contest is 100% focused on you, the designer, to highlight your skills and show the market what you do best. The challenge is simple: Utilize the Mustang Mach E template along with the WRAPSCON logo to design a vehicle wrap that showcases your creative skills.

For the first time, the winner of the Designer Throwdown will receive a cash prize of $1,000 and their design will be the winning design for the top challenge of the competition. The winner will be announced directly following the WRAPSCON Meet the Masters panel on Aug. 21 — make sure to check out the winning designs at the show.

WRAPSCON Wrap Olympics

Back and better than ever, this year's WRAPSCON includes the automotive competition attendees know and love but will also feature a wall wraps challenge and timed bonus rounds at exhibitors' booths. A maximum of 50 teams of two will be allowed to enter the competition.

The first-place team will win a $15,000 cash prize! Second-place winners take home $3,000 and the third-place team will receive $1,000.

The competition brings in teams and sponsors from across the globe. This year's sponsors include: Orafol, JDS Industries, Arlon Graphics, General Formulations, RC Wrap, and Quad Film. Mutoh is the print sponsor for the event and sponsor WrapMerch will supply fatigue mats and gloves.

WRAPSCON University

Wrapix Academy trainer Adam Sumner is back for a second year to lead WRAPSCON University — this year with a fully functional production shop! Adam is a 3M Preferred Installer, 3M Authorized Trainer and Tester, and is 3M Knifeless Accredited.

From a new design training session led by Jody Frego at Full Circle Wrap Training to a production layout sponsored by Image One Impact, attendees will not only have a hands-on experience with vinyl but will also experience everything a print production wrap shop needs to be successful.

Adam will host application and technique installation classes on vinyl, PPF, architectural windows, floors, and doors. Jody will walk attendees through the full production process from design to print on a Mimaki printer.

Meet the Masters & WrapsConnect Networking

Sponsored by The Bad Wrap, the Meet the Masters panel will feature wrap experts from around the industry discussing current trends, common challenges and solutions involved with running a growing wrap shop, and more. Take a deep dive into how the industry's top pros utilize available programs and resources to ensure aggressive shop growth, navigate changes in the market, and evolve into new profit centers by fine-tuning their business plans.

After the panel, join us for the WrapsConnect networking happy hour sponsored by The Bad Wrap. Wrap professionals fly in from all over to attend this networking event — you won't want to miss the chance to connect with your colleagues! GP



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Roland, Race cars & wraps at true velocity

Roland DGA showcased its newest wide-format printer/cutter at the Richard Childress Racing campus & we delved into the partnership between the two companies.

By Marie Fennema





Roland DGA has continued a proud partnership with Richard Childress Racing (RCR) since 2010. Located in Welcome, North Carolina, the RCR Graphics Center is powered by a full lineup of Roland wide-format printers and cutters. Here, RCR Graphics Center staff designs, prints, and wraps RCR's NASCAR race cars before each race — including the backup race cars, transport vehicles, trailers, and pit-support equipment.

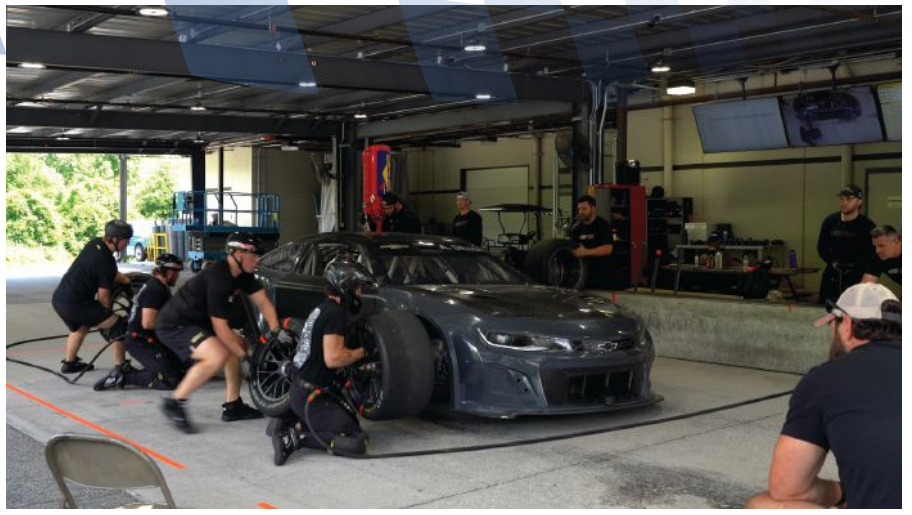
This fast-paced, performance-driven environment is where Roland DGA held its TRUE VELOCITY event, at which Roland DGA resellers were given a sneak peek of the company's newest addition to its large-format eco-solvent printer/cutter family: the TrueVIS XG-640. Stated as being Roland DGA's "fastest, most capable printer/cutter to date," it stands to reason that the RCR campus is where the printer would make its debut — and will find a home at work in the RCR Graphics Center.

During the event, attendees were given an up-close look at the XG-640 while it printed — as well as previews of the newest versions of VersaWorks 7 and Roland DG Connect. In addition, attendees took guided tours of the RCR campus, including the RCR garages and workshops, the RCR Graphics Center, and the RCR Racing Museum. Activities included driving simulators, track pit stop demos, and wrap demos.

To get a better understanding of Roland DGA's history and relationship with RCR, we sat down with Andrew Oransky, CEO of Roland DGA.

Q: How did this partnership come about?

A: Back in around 2010, there were a couple of very large graphic shops in this area, and one in particular that was basically doing all of the graphics for all of the race teams. So, the race teams were outsourcing it. This was also the early days of wrap technology — the equipment in the early 2000s







was more expensive, took up more floor space, was more difficult to use, and required more expertise. And so, you had a couple of these companies that had developed the infrastructure, the equipment, and the expertise to do it.

Nick Woodward, who is a former racer himself, wanted to stay involved in the industry after he quit driving, so he was working at one of those shops. And he had gotten to know Richard [Childress] through his history as a driver. And at some point, [he] went to Richard and said, "You know, I've got this idea to move this in-house because I think that there's more flexibility doing it in-house." There's obviously a bit of a cost advantage. The big thing was the speed and being able to change designs, alter designs, and redo cars. These cars take a beating on the track.

At that point, they went looking around for technology and came to us and said, "Hey, we, we'd love if we could form a partnership where Roland DGA gets a sponsored credit if you can outfit our graphic shop." And so they were the first team to take this internally. For those 15 years, the RCR graphics production department has been co-branded with Roland DGA. It's been a great partnership. Subsequent to that, almost every other major team has brought their graphics production in-house.

Q: What does the partnership entail?

A: We provide hardware and expertise to the shop. In addition to that, Nick and his staff have made themselves available to us for a number of things. First of all, when we're launching new products, we have him take a look, and we want to make sure that they suit the needs of a production wrap environment. Nick and his staff help us out with evaluating equipment. He and his staff are incredibly generous with their time. It's just been a really great collaboration.

We have used this facility, [Richard Childress Racing], for a number of our wrap classes and training. We've also had, at various trade shows, NASCAR race cars in our booth doing live wrap demonstrations.

Q: How has the partnership grown and changed over the years?

A: It started with a lot of uncertainty. For a race team to take this on was a really new idea at that point. Back in 2010, a lot of what we were doing was just validating the idea of even doing this in-house. It's turned out that over time, part of what he's learned — and we've learned as a result — is that there are some actually fairly specific techniques and methods to wrapping in this industry that people who wrap cars on a commercial basis would never get involved in. So there's been a tremendous amount of learning how to perform that function within the sort of constraints and requirements of a race team.

But, it also started very, very small. At the time it started, there was one printer, one laminator, and a worktable.





And it's kept expanding to the point where there are [multiple wide-format] printers in there at this point, [including] a couple of cutters, [and] more than one laminator.* They've just continued to expand the range of applications.

Q: What has been your favorite aspect of the partnership with RCR?

A: The insight that it's offered to our entire business. Our growth over the years has really revolved around creating new applications and new opportunities for customers. Dan Johansen and Dan Burmeister both talked [during the presentation] about the idea that our commitments and our outlook really is to help our customers be successful in making money. And in order to do that, we need reference customers, we need partners, we need people who are going to teach us how different kinds of businesses actually use our equipment day to day, so that we can, frankly, speak intelligently to other people in that industry about why they ought to be using our stuff. So, it's really just expanded our outlook into what these folks need and what they do. It's helped inform some of our decisions on how we position certain features.

Of course, having our name associated with a historic organization like RCR in general has had great marketing benefits for us. The cars draw a crowd when we do those demos at trade shows. When we've done training down here, they always sell out because people want to come here and see the place and be associated with it. And those have all been very specific benefits.

Q: Do you have a favorite race car wrap that's been produced by the RCR Graphics Center?

A: Particularly, in the Xfinity series, when for one reason or another, RCR had not had a hood sponsor, and we had the opportunity [to use that spot]. It was just so cool to turn on the TV, and my kids were like, "Wait, what's that? I know what that is!" Watching it do burnouts in the victory lap was cool.

Q: What else should our readers know about the partnership/RCR/etc.?

A: I would like readers to know that, if they are a wrap shop, if they are thinking of opening a wrap shop, or even getting into this [i.e. wrapping race cars], if they want to talk to someone who's been there, we can make these people [RCR Graphics Center staff] available to them. We have this expertise, and Nick and his crew love to talk about what they do. I think that's maybe, to some extent, the underutilized part of this partnership. I would love for Roland DG users or potential Roland DG users, or people thinking about making an investment for their business, to talk [with them] about how this technology fits into an environment like this. And these folks are absolutely available to do that. If somebody reaches out to us, we can make that connection.

Thank you to Roland DGA & Richard Childress Racing for their hospitality and time during the event — we're looking forward to seeing what graphics shops around the country will create with the TrueVIS XG-640. **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.

***Editor's note:**

According to Nick Woodward, RCR Graphics Center manager, the team primarily uses the following Roland DG printers and cutters to print wraps and other vehicle graphics for their race cars:

- TrueVIS VG2 large-format eco-solvent printers
- TrueVIS VF2 large-format eco-solvent printers
- GR2, GR, and GX series large-format cutters
- And now the new TrueVIS XG-640

They also have additional Roland DG devices in the RCR Graphics Center that they use for creating labels for the Richard Childress Vineyard, promotional signage, banners, etc.



How graphic professionals are quietly transforming the memorial industry

Bringing new life into an industry rooted in honoring lives passed • By Tong Li

The cemetery memorial market, encompassing headstones, grave markers, and monuments, is one of the oldest industries in human civilization. In the U.S., many monument retailers have operated for generations under the same family name and location.

Historically, this has been a slow-moving, largely traditional business, with limited design evolution and minimal outside disruption. However, beneath its conservative exterior, the memorial industry is quietly undergoing a transformation driven by emerging consumer trends and design technologies — trends that create new opportunities for graphics professionals.

A market at the edge of demographic change

The aging of the baby boomer generation is one of the most significant drivers of change. As of 2024, the oldest boomers are reaching 79 years old, lining up with the current U.S. life expectancy. This demographic milestone signals an increasing demand for memorialization services and products. But while the demand is rising, the offerings in many markets remain static — outdated designs, limited personalization options, and very little incorporation of contemporary design aesthetics.

Walk through many cemeteries today, and you'll often find decades-old design templates repeated across headstones, with minimal input from professional graphic designers. Especially in smaller communities, options can feel limited, leaving families with few choices to create truly meaningful and personal tributes.

Changing memorial preferences

Simultaneously, the cultural and practical shift toward cremation is rapidly altering the landscape. According to data from the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), the U.S. cremation rate has surpassed 60% and continues to rise. As fewer families opt for full-body burial, many are seeking alternative forms of remembrance — home garden memorials, community columbaria, cremation urns, memorial benches, and celebration-of-life displays.

This diversification of memorial formats presents significant creative opportunities. Where once design options were limited to carved text and basic motifs, families today are increasingly interested in full-photo etching, intricate layouts, and highly personalized design elements that reflect the individual's life story.



The role of modern laser technology

The technological capabilities available to today's graphics professionals now allow for a level of personalization previously unavailable in the memorial industry. Laser engraving technology — especially the pairing of fiber and CO_2 laser sources — has opened doors to ultra-high-resolution photo etching on granite, metals, and other materials used in memorial products.

For instance, fiber lasers (including master oscillator power amplifier variants) are capable of producing highly detailed images with beam spots significantly smaller than traditional CO_2 systems, allowing for photo-accurate engraving on dense materials such as granite. CO_2 lasers, meanwhile, continue to excel at cutting and engraving organic materials like wood, acrylic, and glass. Together, these technologies enable a wide variety of personalized products, from granite memorial stones to custom wooden plaques, urns, and home decor remembrance items.

Some laser systems today also offer open-architecture or pass-through designs, allowing large-format objects such as benches, windows, or sizable plaques to be engraved with fewer size limitations. For graphics professionals accustomed to working with design software and digital workflows, these systems offer a natural extension of existing skill sets into a new market segment.

Advantages for graphics professionals

For designers, print shop owners, and other creative professionals, several factors make the memorial industry particularly approachable:

1. **Existing design expertise:** The gap in design quality between traditional monument layouts and contemporary



Images courtesy of AP Lazer

design standards is often substantial. Graphics professionals already possess the software skills and creative eye to develop more modern, emotionally resonant designs.

2. **Established infrastructure:** Many graphic businesses already operate out of physical spaces with equipment, staff, and overhead structures that can accommodate memorial product lines with minimal additional investment.
3. **Marketing channels:** Unlike traditional monument retailers who often rely on walk-in business or cemetery partnerships, graphics professionals have experience with targeted marketing and digital outreach. Seasonal marketing around holidays of remembrance — such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Mother's Day — can build awareness and generate steady interest.

Navigating the operational hurdles

While the creative aspects may feel familiar, certain operational considerations require attention:

1. **Material handling:** Working with heavy granite slabs requires equipment like boom-crane trucks, lifting straps, and carts for safe handling.
2. **Cemetery regulations:** Each cemetery enforces its own rules on allowable sizes, materials, and design elements for monuments and markers. Research and compliance are crucial.
3. **Installation:** Monument setting often requires specific skills or partnerships with experienced stone setters.

For those seeking a lighter entry point, home garden memorials offer an accessible starting place. These products serve families looking for non-cemetery remembrance options and often involve smaller, shippable items that avoid regulatory complexities.

Emerging home memorial product opportunities

Here are several memorial product categories well-suited for graphics professionals entering this market:

- **Laser-engraved garden stones:** Granite plaques featuring portraits, names, dates, and personalized messages.
- **Personalized memorial markers:** Durable garden markers blending seamlessly into natural landscapes.
- **Cremation urns for gardens:** Granite urns engraved with meaningful designs for home placement.
- **Memorial benches:** Engraved benches for reflection in home or community spaces.
- **Engraved planters and birdbaths:** Functional garden features that double as memorial tributes.
- **Customized park benches:** Engraved seating for public parks or private gardens.
- **Personalized home products:** Wood plaques, holiday ornaments, tumblers, and other customized remembrance items.





An industry ready for a fresh perspective

While the memorial market may not appeal to every graphics professional, those open to serving grieving families can find both creative fulfillment and profitable diversification. Success requires balancing design innovation with sensitivity to the deeply personal nature of memorialization.

By leading with empathy, offering modern design solutions, and navigating the operational challenges thoughtfully, graphic professionals can bring new life into an industry rooted in honoring lives passed. GP



Tong Li is an industry contributor specializing in laser applications and entrepreneurship in the personalization market. He holds a doctorate in physics and a master's in production engineering, and regularly advises businesses on expanding into new product categories using modern engraving technologies. Reach him at tong@aplazer.com.

Celebrate 250 years of the US with patriotic awards & gifts

America's 2026 semiquincentennial will offer big opportunities for graphics shops

By Natalie Albers



A fleet of stars makes the star-burst award a powerful choice for honoring public service. (Images courtesy of Crystal D)

The world looked a lot different in 1776. Traveling by water — not land — was the main mode of transportation, while newspapers and pamphlets were the primary ways information was disseminated — not social media posts.

That wasn't all bad, though. In fact, the difficult nature of travel and the slow pace at which things could be communicated actually served to be an asset for the 13 colonies inching toward separation from Great Britain. Both aspects played an important role in buying time: Though the colonists formalized the Declaration of Independence on July 4, it is believed the news didn't reach London until over a month later!

Other things haven't changed a whole lot in the last 249 years. Early settlers loved sports, food, beer, and celebrating freedom — just like many of us today. And as we look ahead to our nation's 250th birthday next year, (say it with me, our "semi-quin-centennial"), you can expect a lot of red, white, and blue popping up while the U.S. comes together to honor what it took to give us all life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Now's the time to start thinking about how your customers will commemorate the year through patriotic awards and gifts that honor our country, as well as those who fought (and who carry on the fight) for our freedoms.

Did you know?
The Congressional Gold Medal is the U.S.'s oldest and highest civilian award, and its issuance began during the Revolutionary War. Since then, only 184 people, events, or institutions have been recipients of this honor.

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With gradual bevels that draw your eye upward and a substantial optical crystal body, the blenheim award's perfect for the 3D subsurface and Illumachrome imprints shown here.



The acclaim star's lone star makes this award a singular sensation.



Primed for a variety of imprint options, the 8" achiever award is as versatile as it is elegant. We love the blue and red colorfill that accents the etched eagle.

Classic hues

The colors red, white, and blue are more than just a palette — they're powerful symbols of American identity and values. They will be everywhere! But did you know they actually have meaning? Red has come to stand for courage and bravery, white represents innocence and purity, and blue signifies vigilance, loyalty, and justice.

When combined, these colors evoke our collective sense of pride and unity. Whether used in celebration or remembrance, this trio carries a timeless message of freedom and resilience. Don't forget the use of metallics! Gold, silver, and bronze will accent many pieces, especially when used in designs created for military service and related accolades.



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The future of customization is being revolutionized by UV and UV DTF printing technologies, which are surpassing older methods like vinyl, sublimation, pad printing, and screen printing. This educational session will delve into how these advancements provide professionals with faster production speeds, the ability to print on a wider array of materials, and the achievement of full-color results for applications ranging from hard goods and promotional items to signage. Attendees will gain a comprehensive understanding of why UV and UV DTF are becoming the preferred solutions for modern customization needs.

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This webinar is your all-in-one resource for mastering direct-to-film (DTF) printing. Whether you're just starting to explore DTF or looking to optimize your high-production T-shirt business, we'll cover everything you need to know to make informed decisions and get optimized success.

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The faceted gem paperweight is a popular giftable for sentiments, emblems and seals. Shown with full-color Illumachrome imprints.



Uniquely shaped, the larsmont award creates a sense of motion with the Illumachrome flag imprint shining through from the back.

Iconography

Patriotic symbols are more than just images. They represent the heart and soul of our country. We think of the stars and stripes, of course, but powerful icons also include the bald eagle, the American flag, the U.S. Capitol, the Liberty Bell, silhouettes of servicemembers, and the Statue of Liberty.

These depictions are instantly recognizable and have stood the test of time, each sharing its own perspective of a nation shaped by courage and opportunity. They're uniquely American and — even when displayed without words — they tell our story.

Gift & award ideas

Our forefathers viewed the would-be U.S. as a place rich with possibilities. And with crystal's endless options for customization and personalization, this substrate fits the bill as a worthy way to celebrate our semiquincentennial. Let your imagination set sail, and lean on your suppliers for recommendations along the way!

Whether you choose classic deep etch, add colorfill to make text and art pop, incorporate a 3D laser engraving, or opt for vibrant imprints like Illumachrome full-color graphics, the use of color in harmony with imagery lends crystal to be one of the most versatile choices in awards and gifts. Customers are drawn to it when they want unique pieces that become treasured mementos, like these, for 2026 and beyond.

- **Collectable keepsakes** will be all the rage. As you assort gifts that evoke a sense of nostalgia and national identity, use them to display quotes, sentiments, and graphic artwork. Be cognizant of catering to different budgets and price points. Paperweights and small designs are always popular "giftables," while larger crystal pieces can serve as works of art to be displayed as a reminder of what it took to bring our country to today. On circular pieces, consider representing branches of the military by incorporating images of their seals. Rectangular pieces naturally lend



themselves well to flag artwork, but don't box yourself in — crystal designs in other shapes catch the eye as well.

- **Recognition awards** for public servants will be a meaningful way to honor the dedication and impact of those who serve our communities every day with the desire to make America stronger. Those who do work in the service of the greater good are the backbone from which the U.S. gains its strength, and each role plays a vital part in the fabric of society. Customized awards for these recipients not only acknowledge their exceptional service but also stand as enduring symbols of gratitude and respect. Optical crystal with star features, deep etch, and tasteful splashes of color are an elegant way to convey appreciation and a deep sense of pride.



Featuring blue and optical crystal with deep etch and colorfill, the miltona award is worth double honors as it also gives back 20% to charity.

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As useful as it is beautiful, the chesterfield clock serves as a constant reminder of gratitude.

- **Appreciation gifts** for those who stand behind our nation's heroes by serving military families, servicemembers, and veterans will be beautiful gestures of gratitude. These supporters — family, friends, community members, businesses, or nonprofit organizations — provide strength, sacrifice, and unwavering encouragement. Presenting them with thoughtful gifts that recognize their role is a lasting reminder that their contributions are seen and valued. Consider a design that incorporates color and an interesting feature, such as a clock, as a constant reminder of the vital part they play in the lives of those who sacrifice and serve selflessly.

Spring and summer 2026 will be hot, hot, hot with demand for items that recognize America's 250th, so taking time to prep now is a good idea. Work with your favorite suppliers to plan how you can help your customers commemorate and celebrate freedom! **GP**



Natalie Albers is a Twin Cities-based writer and editor with more than two decades of communications experience for small businesses and large corporations. Natalie serves as communications manager at Crystal D and is passionate about recognition, as well as about helping organizations connect with their people in meaningful ways.

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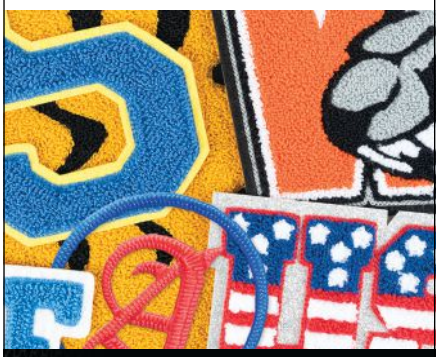


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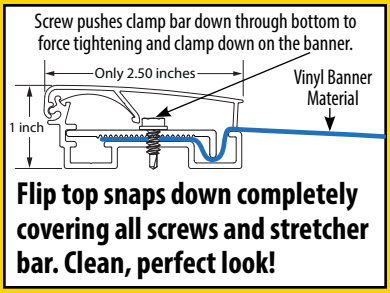
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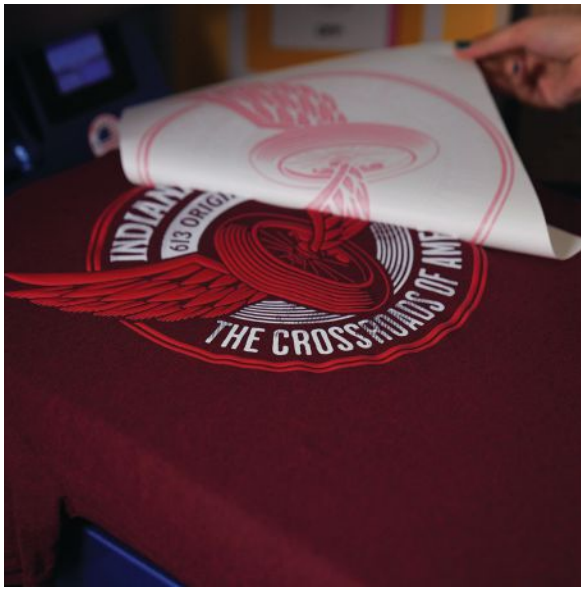
AWT	M&R
American	Svecia
Argon	Theime
Lawson	and more...

GRAPHIC PARTS INTERNATIONAL INC.
www.gpiparts.com



Made in the USA

We're featuring products this month that are marketed as Made in the USA.



Screen-printed transfers

613 Originals offers screen-printed transfers said to deliver vibrant, durable prints with a soft feel for bold designs and high-volume production. The transfers are made for teams, events, and brands that want a professional look with fast, consistent application. Available in one to three color and full color options, these plastisol transfers are engineered to last 100+ washes. Specialty effects like Puff, Neon, and Glow are also available. **613originals.com**

Cast plaques & dimensional letters

A.R.K. Ramos Foundry & Architectural Signage offers bronze, brass, and aluminum cast plaques as well as bronze, brass, and aluminum cast dimensional letters. **arkramos.com**





Accent ADA sign-making supplies

Accent Signage Systems produces solutions for ADA sign-making needs. Operated as a one-stop shop, Accent provides materials, precision tools, and their patented Raster Braille Pen to ensure fully ADA-compliant signage. **accentsignage.com**

AGL SheerKote UV62



The AGL SheerKote UV62 UV LED liquid coater from **Advanced Greig Laminators Inc.** is a roll-to-roll liquid coating utilizing UV LED technology engineered to be a high-quality and efficient. Building on AGL's expertise in graphic lamination, the UV62 is said to deliver superior coating finish and performance while reducing operating costs. **aglinc.com**

Full Cut & Sew All Over Apparel



Full Cut and Sew All Over Apparel from **American Print On Demand** is a vertically integrated apparel solution. From blank garment cutting and sewing to full-color sublimation and fulfillment, everything happens under one roof in Missouri, the company says. Designed for decorators, brands, and creators, the platform has been developed to support short-run and personalized orders with fast turnaround times. **americanprintondemand.com**



Supreme Wrapping Film Yiannimize Colors

Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions presents Supreme Wrapping Film Yiannimize Colors collection, four new color additions to its Supreme Wrapping Film vehicle color change film series. The colors are Gloss Metallic Vibrant Violet, Gloss Pearl Tutu Pink (pictured), Gloss Pure Red, and Satin Metallic Spy Grey. The new films, inspired and selected by celebrity installer Yianni Charalambous, better known as Yiannimize, are designed to enhance the ability of installers to create unique custom looks with a wide range of colors and special effects. The films are engineered to provide outstanding durability and excellent conformability around a vehicle's curves and recesses. **graphics.averydennison.com**



Dimensional Steel products

Dimensional Steel products from **Awards USA** are designed to bold, durable, and make a lasting impression. Each award is crafted from recycled steel, reflecting the company's commitment to sustainability and responsible sourcing. Produced through a lean, eco-friendly manufacturing process, these pieces are engineered to minimize waste while maximizing quality and precision. The result is a striking, dimensional design with industrial strength and a refined finish that stands out in any setting. **awardsusa.com**



Accu-Print High-Tech Micro

Accu-Print High-Tech Micro from **AWT World Trade Inc** is a Micro flatbed screen printer engineered to deliver top-tier performance in a space-saving design. Developed for printers who need high-end features in a smaller format, the High-Tech Micro includes independent drives for carriage stroke and head lift, ensuring smooth, vibration-free operation, even at high production speeds. Its heavy-duty construction includes a tubular steel chassis and belt-driven ball-bearing print carriage designed for lasting durability. **awt-gpi.com**



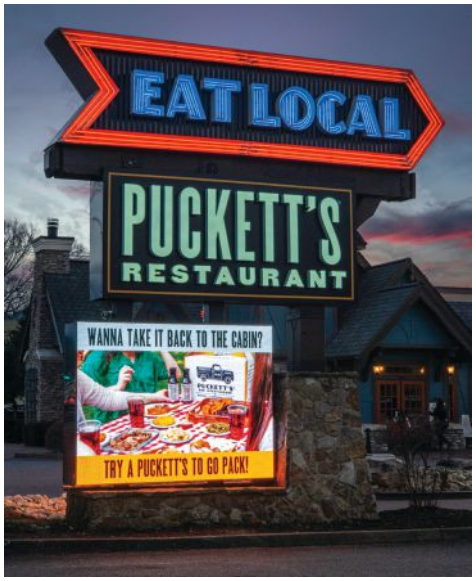
Bandannas for people & pets

Bandanna Warehouse offers a selection of in-stock bandannas in many colors, sizes, and styles with what the company says is the promotional product industry's only in-house imprinting processes. Designed to make a client's brand stand out as a designer wearable accessory masterpiece for people to pets. The company offers quick turn 5-8 days production capabilities. **ledsigncomponents.com**



ADA-compliant stock signs & sign holders

MitUSA offers aluminum and plastic sign holders/frames along with ADA-compliant stock signs in 13 colors. The company offers stock signs for ADA in 12 designs and 13 colors, including wood grain and marbles. The aluminum extrusions and plastic name plate holders/frames are available in many lengths and colors. Products are complemented by 12" X 12" sheets pf 1/16, 1/8, and 1/4" acrylics. **contactusa.net**



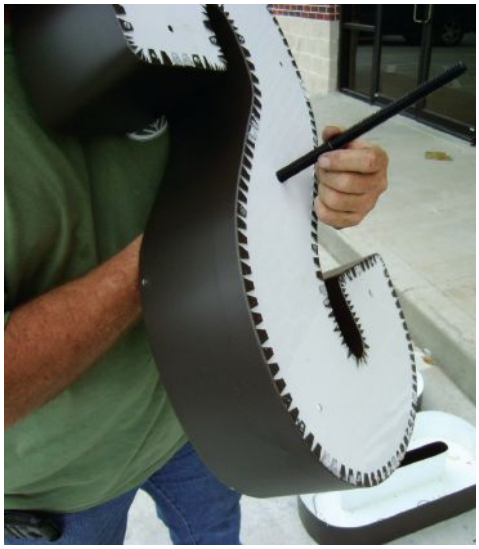
Outdoor digital displays

Cirrus Systems, Inc. builds digital displays designed to give sign companies a serious edge. From streamlined prefab kits to AI-powered support tools, every product is engineered to make installs faster, more profitable, and more reliable. The company's 4' X 8' double-sided 9mm and 6mm displays run on a single 120V 20-amp circuit, cutting install costs dramatically. With a 0.41% failure rate and real-time health dashboards, Cirrus is said to deliver unmatched reliability and proactive support. **cirrusled.com**



NULOC Fasteners

NULOC Fasteners from **Designovations, Inc** secure a variety of materials including fabric, cardboard, plastic, or any other material where there is access to the front and back of the items. According to the manufacturer, they are recognized as the best-selling field sign fastener in North America and millions can be found alongside crop fields in the U.S. & Canada because of their reliability and ease of use. **designovations.com**



Quik-Connects pass throughs

Diversified Components, Inc offers Quik-Connects pass throughs as a simple solution for sign code. The smooth-wall, feed-through insulators accommodate wiring from low-voltage LED to high-voltage GTO cable insulated. Designed to be ideal for LED, neon, or florescent channel letter installations, the small outside diameter requires only a 9/16" hole. **ledsigncomponents.com**



Paint chip repair products

Dr. ColorChip's paint chip and scratch repair products are designed for professional and DIY customers. All of the company's paint kits come with the custom factory matched paint plus the proprietary Sealact blending agent and other accessories needed to level, seal, and professionally repair chips and scratches. **drcolorchip.com**



Easiway Chemicals

Easiway Chemicals from **Easiway Systems** is a line of sustainably focused chemicals developed to work faster, more efficiently, and cost a fraction of the cost per screen. **easiway.com**



Custom acrylic printed boxes

Echod Graphics fabricates custom printed acrylic boxes for orders from from one to 10,000. The company's process is developed to offer fast turnaround time at economical pricing. One color or full color boxes can be fully customized. **echodgraphics.com**

FEDRIGONI SELF-ADHESIVES

3.5 mil White NTC vinyl

Fedrigoni Self-Adhesive offers 3.5 mil White NTC vinyl said to be tough, durable, and exhibiting resistance to oils, chemicals, and some solvents. It is abrasion-resistant and a good choice for outdoor labeling. **selfadhesives.fedrigoni.com**



Men's performance polo

FPS Apparel has introduced a men's performance polo with allover print. The polo features a soft hand feel with plenty of stretch and is wrinkle-resistant. The shirts are athletic fit. Add in a placket label, sleeve hem tag label, or a private label for an additional cost. FPS says orders are available at low minimums with a quick turn. **fpsapparel.com**



Gyford Mounting Hardware

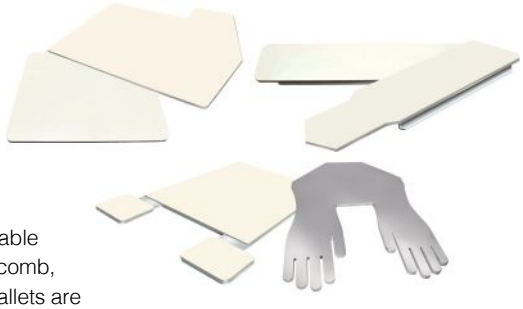
Gyford Standoff Systems offers mounting and display products manufactured domestically to offer delivery service without delays or added costs. **standoffsystems.com**



Puff screen-printed heat transfers

Howard Custom Transfers' puff screen-printed heat transfers are designed to create a raised, textured finish through heat activation. Puff transfers can also be combined with flat ink, such as Howard Multi-Purpose, for a layered, dimensional look. Available in 27 stock ink colors, the product is commonly used by apparel decorators seeking to add a tactile, visual element to their designs. **howardct.com**

Screen printing pallets



Graphic Parts International, Inc's Stay-Flat Textile Pallets are engineered for lasting performance in high-volume screen-printing environments. Available in solid aluminum, aluminum honeycomb, or specially formulated wood, the pallets are designed to stay smooth and flat under intense heat and moisture. With 100s of standard and specialty sizes, and nearly every bracket configuration available, GPI offers pallets for virtually any press or application. **gpiparts.com**



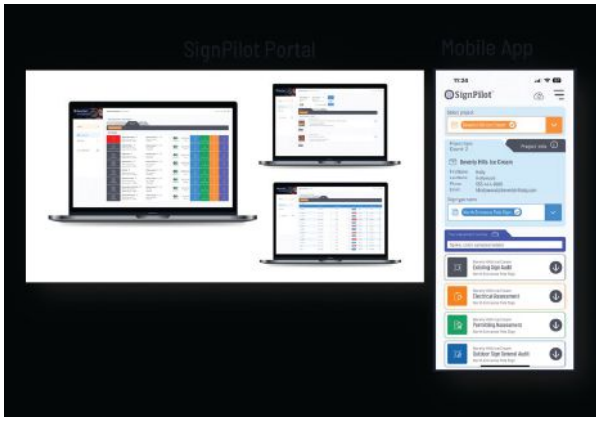
WALAPuff screen print transfers

Heat Transfer Warehouse's WALAPuff screen print transfers are designed to add bold texture and next-level dimension. The ready-to-press transfers are developed to give apparel a soft, raised, eye-catching finish that stands out in a crowd and wears like a dream. The product is said to be perfect for T-shirts, hoodies, crewnecks, and more. WALAPuff applies with just a heat press. **heattransferwarehouse.com**



Viper pretreatment machines

The Viper line of direct-to-garment (DTG) pretreatment machines from **i-Group Technologies** have been designed, developed, and manufactured with the goal of making DTG easier and more profitable by helping users create a pretreatment base for their DTG printed designs. Viper pretreatment machines are available for those just beginning in DTG printing or larger more advanced units for production oriented printing with precise pretreatment applications. **viperxpt.com**



ikeGPS

SignPilot's ikeGPS is a site survey management solution built for sign professionals by sign professionals. It helps gather accurate measurements, photos, and notes all in one place — right on your phone or tablet. SignPilot offers customized checklists for 23 sign types — including channel letters, monument signs, wall signs, pylon signs, window graphics, and more. **sign-pilot.com**



Engraving sheets

Engraving plastics by **Innovative Plastics Inc** (IPI) include laser and rotary engravable sheets in a variety of colors and finishes, suitable for interior and exterior signage, ADA-compliant signs, industrial labels, and more. IPI says its materials are known for their durability, versatility, and compatibility with various engraving methods, ensuring professional results for sign makers and engravers. **inoplas.com**



Fine pewter custom ornaments

Indiana Metal Craft produces ornaments that the company says do more than decorate a tree — they can tell a story, commemorate a legacy, and carry a brand's identity through generations. The custom pewter ornaments are fully designed, cast, and hand-finished using traditional American metalworking techniques honed over five decades. **indianaimc.com**



DTG pretreatments

Image Armor manufactures direct-to-garment (DTG) pretreatments for the garment decorating industry. According to the company, the pretreatments are produced with top-of-the-line industrial mixing and production capabilities. The Image Armor line consists of pretreatment for CMYK only printing, non-UV reacting pretreatments, as well as high performance white ink printing pretreatments. **imagearmorpt.com**



CrystalBlast sandcarvers

IKONICS Imaging features CrystalBlast sandcarvers designed to deliver deeper etching, a smooth frosted finish, and multilevel depth. According to the manufacturer, the sandcarvers are engineered to provide efficient abrasive flow, and advanced dust collection. **ikonicsimaging.com**



Packout products

Packout products from **Neat Tools** are developed to offer high-quality and affordable tool organization solutions to help users organize shops, garages, vans, and workspaces. **neattools.com**



Barhill corporate plaques

Marco Awards Group presents Barhill corporate plaques. With over 400 designs available, Barhill provides options for corporate events, award ceremonies, and recognition programs, catering to various needs and budgets. Most kits include essential components such as a plaque, plate or frame, hardware, and a presentation box. Whether celebrating milestones or recognizing accomplishments, Barhill's extensive collection is developed to offer a meaningful way to honor success. **marcoawardsgroup.com**

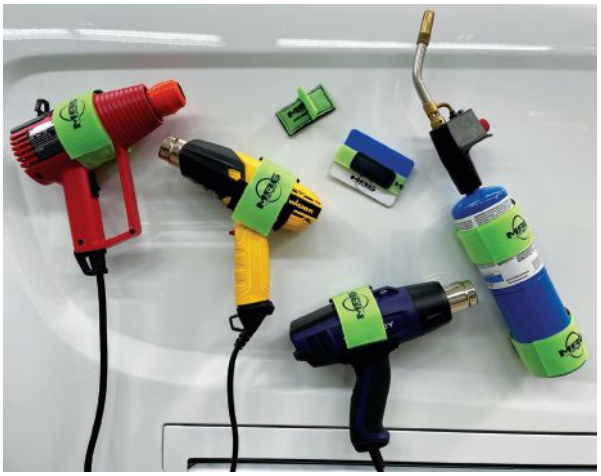


Polar Camel glass drinkware

Polar Camel glassware from **JDS Industries** includes a full line of bar and table glassware can be personalized, such as glass beer mugs and glasses, stemmed and stemless wine glasses, coffee mugs, on the rocks and shot glasses, and more. Purchase one style or mix and match to create unique glassware sets, the promotional items are designed to advertise an eating or drinking establishment or to sell in gift and souvenir shops. Also serve as gifts for housewarmings, weddings, bridal showers, or any occasion. **jdsindustries.com**

Magstrapz

Magstrapz, by the company of the same name, are magnetic straps that wrap around tools for convenience and safety. Originally designed for the wrap and sign industry, they hold torch tanks and heat guns and other item to free hands for climbing a ladder or scaffolding. **magstrapz.com**





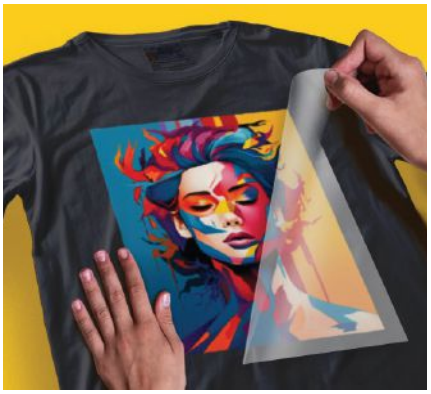
JPPlus sign supplies

Johnson Plastics Plus offers a selection of products including engravable sheets, mounting hardware, essential sign supplies, and more. **jpplus.com**



DTF transfers

Mugsie offers custom, ready-to-press DTF transfers. High-resolution print quality includes 720 X 2400 8-pass print resolution designed for unmatched detail. Featuring bold graphics and crafted with advanced DTF printing technology, each transfer is designed to deliver stunning color vibrancy and durability that lasts wash after wash. The transfers are produced for creators, small businesses, and custom apparel enthusiasts. **mugsie.com**



DTF transfers

DTF transfers from **Ninja Transfers** are said to offer unmatched quality with premium materials and expert craftsmanship. Ninja Transfers offers vivid colors, sharp details with a wide color range, and 100+ wash durability. According to Ninja Transfers, orders are sent quickly with reliable, fast shipping and delivery service. **ninjatransfers.com**



Wood stamp mounts & handles

Jackson Marking Products offers finely crafted Coverdex stamp mounts, wood stamp handles, and art stamp mounts including wood and acrylic mounts, mounting cushion materials, and indexing ink and adhesive sheets. **rubberstampmaterials.com**

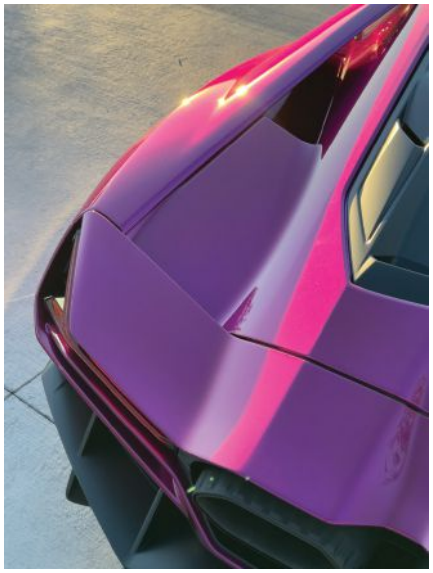


USA-made tops

One Stop offers a selection of USA-made tops, available both in-stock and through mill-direct programs in partnership with the company's trusted brand partners. One Stop tops are suitable for everyday essentials, workwear, or premium apparel. The company boasts quick turnaround times and reliable supply. **onestopinc.com**

BizWizard Order Manager & BizWizard ShopKart

Netsoft Studio's BizWizard Order Manager and BizWizard ShopKart from NetSoft Studio boast the most leading-edge solution designed for the awards and personalization industry. With the integrated bidirectional communication, changes in order manager — such as updating product prices, names, or descriptions — are pushed to your ShopKart website and changes on your ShopKart website can be updated into Order Manager without duplicate data entry. **bizwiziq.com**



ORAGUARD 2815 paint protection film

ORAGUARD, made by **ORAFOL**, is said to offer the ultimate protection for vehicles with 2815+ Advanced Paint Protection Films. This new range is manufactured exclusively at ORAFOL's state-of-the-art facilities from start to finish. 2815+ includes three new products, two in gloss and one matte. ORAGUARD 2815GF+ and 2815MF+ feature a cutting-edge "lotus effect" hydrophobic topcoat designed to provide chemical resistance and dirt-repellent properties. ORAGUARD 2815GF delivers the same level of protection and resistances without the additional hydrophobic properties. **orafol.com**



Orange Peel

Orange Peel from **Pacific Coast Sign Supply** is engineered as an all-natural, non-toxic, multipurpose, citrus-based adhesive remover. The product is said to also be great for removing gum, grease/oil, tar, wax, sap, crayon, ink marker, and glues. **gapusa.com**



Emblems

Penn Emblem Company emblems offer a variety of no tariff, fast shipping emblem options from classic embroidered emblems or dye sublimation to upgrades like DTF Transfers and PennFlex. Penn Emblem services decorating clients in markets such as military, sports, collegiate, safety, and more. **pennemblem.com**



Patriot Series mods & stiks

Marketed as **Principal Sloan's** first, and the sign industry's only, American-made modules and stiks, this 24V system is engineered to offer powerful, energy-efficient LED lighting, ideal for channel letters, sign cabinets, and architectural signage. Patriot Series is designed for durability and consistent performance, delivering 120-240 lumens per foot and featuring smart packaging and qwik-release tabs built for faster installation. **principalsloan.com**



Q3E Controller

Quality One Engravers offers the Q3E Controller as a universal stepper motor engraver or router controller to drive virtually all engraving machines. The product is designed to transform your current engraver to run from high end EngraveLab software. Utilizes Windows 10 or 11. **q1engravers.com**

Bags & totes

Rogue Life Maine offers hand crafted bags and totes. According to the manufacturer, each piece is designed and produced in Maine with quality, integrity, and independence. Roge Life gear is built to represent a lifestyle while supporting American craftmanship. **roguelifemaine.com**





Engravable sheets

Rowmark's premium engravable sheets are engineered for precision, durability, and long-lasting performance, Rowmark sheets ensure clean, crisp engraving results designed to make your signage stand out. The products are said to be perfect for business, office, industrial, or personal projects. **rowmark.com**



Vertical panel saws & combination machines

Safety Speed Manufacturing offers vertical panel saws and combination machines such as the DFC-H5 Panel Saw and Substrate Cutter combination machine, Saw & Router ACM V Grooving Machine. **safetyspeed.com**



Acrylic awards

R.B. Fabrication offers acrylic awards made of what the company calls the finest crystal-clear acrylic. R.B. Fabrication offers an extensive range of sizes, custom cuts, and UV printing. The company says it is known for quick turnarounds. **rbfabrication.com**



C100 laser system

Radian Laser Systems developed the C100, a 100-watt 3D galvo laser system. According to the manufacturer, the C100 system offers speeds four to 10 times that of traditional lasers and can utilize 80% curved surface marketing without tools. **radianlaser.com**

PRODUCT PICKS



1551 Standard Tee

US Standard Apparel offers its 1551 Standard Tee knit, cut, sewn and dyed in the U.S. The company says the conventional jersey fabric is the same weight that was mainly used throughout the 1990s. The drop shoulder and wide body are designed offer a versatile fit that is also great for workwear. This style was garment dyed, an artisanal process that will naturally experience shade variation from garment to garment. The unique differences are intentional, adding to the character of the piece. Made from 100% cotton, the unisex tees are 6.05 oz. **usstandardapparel.com**



USA100 trucker hat

Sportsman Cap & Bag has introduced the the USA100 — Classic Cap's USA-made trucker hat built for comfort, style, and performance. Available in nine color options, this structured, six-panel, mid-profile cap is designed to stand out. Solid colors feature a classic pre-curved bill, while white mesh styles are designed to add flair with a contrast-stitched visor. The red version is made from 100% cotton, while the other eight combine 65% polyester and 35% cotton for a durable, lightweight feel. Every USA100 includes a max-performance sweatband and an adjustable snapback closure. **sportsmancaps.com**



Yard signs & frames

Stouse produces yard signs and frames to promote events, restaurants, service companies, healthcare messages, political candidates, and more. Designed to be affordable, the yard signs are said to be easy to assemble and include frames in the price. Signs are printed on weather-resistant poster board said to handle moisture without breaking down for a short-term outdoor product. Signs are available printed in spot colors or four-color process in two popular sizes. **stouse.com**



Vehicle wrap design templates

The Bad Wrap vehicle templates are made from high-quality vehicle imagery and are built to factory specifications at one-tenth scale. They are layered and masked and engineered so that users can create designs or drag and drop art directly onto the template. A design then looks like it is on a photograph of the vehicle. This process is said to make it a great tool for creating designs with a better understanding of how it looks on the real vehicle, with its body lines and features, and creating a professional proof of design for customers. **thebadwrap.com**



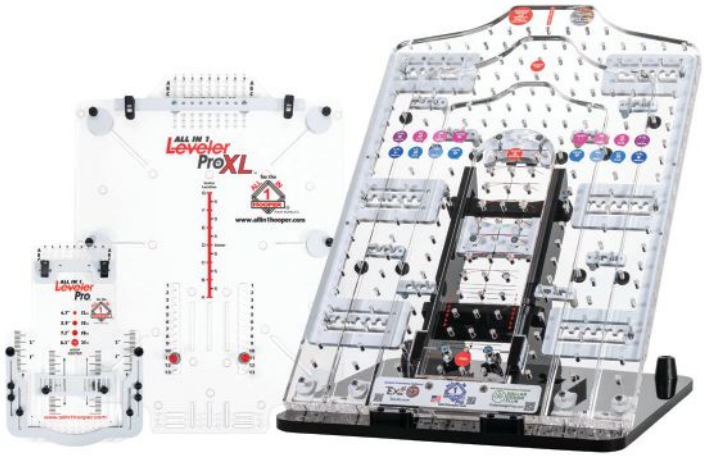
Decorative films

The Griff Network specializes in manufacturing high-quality decorative vinyl for a wide range of industries, including craft, signage, floor graphics, takes, and privacy films. The company says its eco-friendly materials empower creators and businesses to develop innovative, sustainable products that stand out. **thegriffnetwork.com**



2550 CNC router/ engraver

The 2550 CNC router/engraver from **Vision Engraving & Routing Systems** is designed to offer a blend of versatility and quality-precision at best-in-class pricing. Options include a Vacuum Table, DACS Print-To-Cut, Auto Braille Inserter, Oscillating Knife, Drag Knife, Creasing Tool, and more. Work with metal, plastic, wood, acrylic, sign foam, Coroplast, Dibond, cardboard, and other materials. Applications include, but not limited to, ADA Braille signs, print-to-cut, dimensional letters, cut-outs, directional signage, and industrial signs. Contact us today for a free live sign-making demo. **visionengravers.com**



All in 1 Hooper Pro SK

Tex Inc offers the All in 1 Hooper Pro SK, built for precision and efficiency with a patented design that combines five boards into one versatile tool. The product is engineered to be perfect for all garment and hoop sizes. Featuring quick-change leveling devices and color-coded placement stickers, the All in 1 Hooper is said to ensure flawless setups every time. **tex-inc.com**

DTF ink, film & adhesive

The MagicTouch USA offers DTF ink, DTF film, and DTF adhesive. DTF inks are available in black, cayan, magenta, white, and yellow or a ink set including one liter of each. DTF film ranges in size from 18" X 109 yard length to 23.6" X 109 yards. DTF adhesive powders are available in 11-pound bags. **themagictouchusa.com**



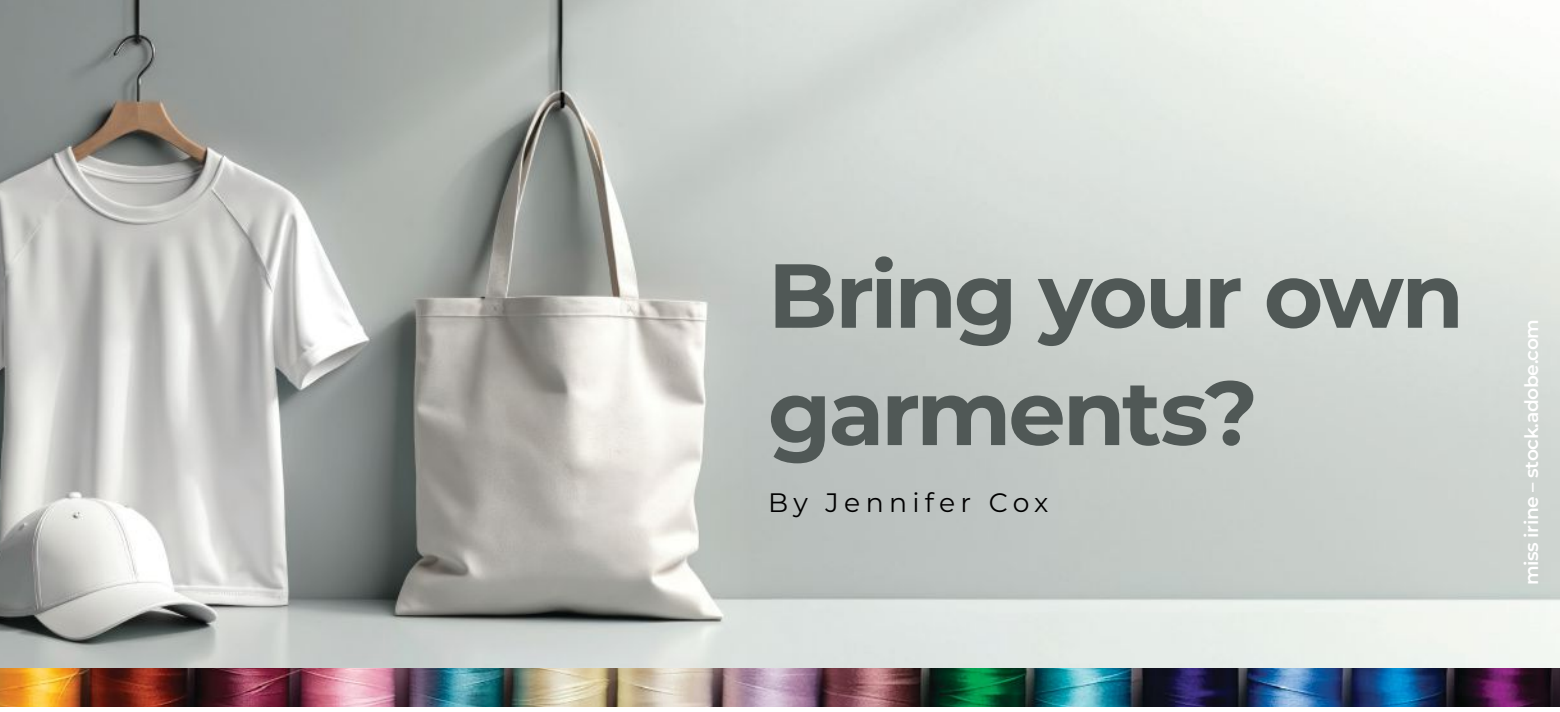
Wilkie cranes & ladders

Wilkie Mfg LLC builds cranes, remote service cranes, and ladders for the sign industry, including Remote Control Service Cranes from 52' to 72' and service ladders up to 60'. A vertically integrated manufacturer, Wilkie is designed to ensure safe, reliable, and quality equipment with an open network of service and repair facilities throughout North America. **wilkiemfg.com**



X-Edge Razor Series router bit

The X-Edge Razor **from X-Edge Products** is engineered as a versatile three-flute chipbreaker capable of handling a wide variety of materials at high speeds. The tool works with acrylic, HDU, phenolic, sign foam, or marine-grade polymer. According to the manufacturer, the X-Edge Razor was born from a desire to achieve results on a CNC router that were previously considered impossible. **xedgetools.com**



Bring your own garments?

By Jennifer Cox

miss irine – stock.adobe.com

One of the strangest things about owning an embroidery business, at least to me, has always been how often our customers bring in something and ask us to add embroidery to the item. Think about it — would you bring raw meat to a restaurant and ask them to prepare the meal with it? Would you take yards of fabric to a clothing store and ask them to sew you a shirt? Of course not. But for whatever reason, in our industry, our customers bring in their own items only to ask, "Can you do that?" after they describe what they want added to the item.

We have handled these requests a few different ways, depending on the situation. The first thing to do is determine if the item in question could even go on the embroidery machine in the first place. A fully assembled golf bag is not exactly compatible with an embroidery machine. A blanket, on the other hand, provides a great deal of potential. The second step is to determine if the item is clean. We do not ever choose to work with apparel or products that are clearly not in new or clean condition. No exceptions. We also decline any items that carry a strong odor from smoke, pets, or unknown sources.

If the product passes those first two hurdles, we continue the conversation with the potential customer, moving to step three. We have what we call a "minimum hooping fee" of $25. This is the bare minimum price for adding embroidery to a product provided by a customer. We also explain that the price usually goes higher than that if we are doing anything more than adding simple text or a small stock design to the product.

At this point, about half of the people would pick up their item or items from the counter and leave. This was perfectly fine with us. We had learned



Photo courtesy of Susanne O'Halloran



Photo courtesy of Martial Arts Embroidery

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the hard way that most of these customer-provided goods orders were not worth the hassle they caused for us. These orders drastically slow down our prep process. Creating the design takes time. Depending on the design, it could require a sewout. We usually need to swap out threads to get the right colors on the machine. Meanwhile, unless we have another job running while we do all this, we are not earning any income.

If the customer is still standing there, we determine what they want embroidered on the product, in what colors, at what size, and in what location. Walking someone through the necessary decision-making process can be time-consuming, particularly if they have never ordered embroidery before. Inevitably, the customer says, "Oh you know, just make it look good." Unfortunately, that is not enough information to effectively create the design and meet your customer's expectations. You need to cover all these essentials or you will end up in the uncomfortable position of hoping that you deliver what they are expecting, what they were envisioning.

Once we have all the specifics, we quote a price for this order and a delivery time frame.

Here are some tips to help streamline the conversation:

- If they want something on the left chest area of a shirt, instead of asking them what size they want the design, show them some examples that are actually sewn out. We use the shirt samples on display in our business, as they have a design sewn on both the left and right chest locations for exactly this purpose. Believe it or not, most chest designs will fit behind a business card, with very little embroidery showing. Yet, if you said to a customer that you will make the design approximately 2" X 3.5", they would say that is much too small. Test this right now. How much of your design (you are wearing a shirt with your logo on it, aren't you?) is visible when you place a business card over it?
- If they are getting a full front or full back design, again, visual samples are your best strategy. Most full front or back designs will fit behind a standard piece of paper, 8.5" X 11". However, that sounds small to most people. They will understand more easily and more quickly with a visual reference.
- When you get to thread color selection, never, I repeat, never take them to where you store your threads and ask them to choose. They will freeze up 99% of the time, unable to make a decision when facing so many possibilities. If they say they want their design in navy and Kelly green, assume they mean colors like the Crayola crayons, and skip the color choices. If they indicate they want colors that are more open for interpretation, instead of handing them the thread chart and asking them what color they want, try this: Ask them if they want a light, medium, or dark [insert name of color]. If they say they want a medium blue, show them no more than three cones or spools of medium blue thread and have them make their choice. Do this will all the colors in the design other than white, black, navy, red, and other easily identified colors.
- Lead the conversation when it comes to where the design will be placed. The default location for chest designs is the left chest, unless the shirt has a pocket. If there is a pocket, you have to ask if they want the design above the pocket, across from the pocket, or on the pocket, which will sew the pocket shut. If you can get into the pocket with a specialty hoop or are willing to remove the pocket and reattach it, then offer that option.
- If they want a full front or back design, and the product has a hood or unique neckline, mark how high the top of the design should be so that you hoop the garment in the correct location.
- If they ask for a unique placement or bring in a unique item, make sure that you can get that part of the product into a hoop and on the



Photo courtesy of Susan Walters, Walters Embroidery





Photo courtesy of Barbara Hayward, Absolutely Specialties

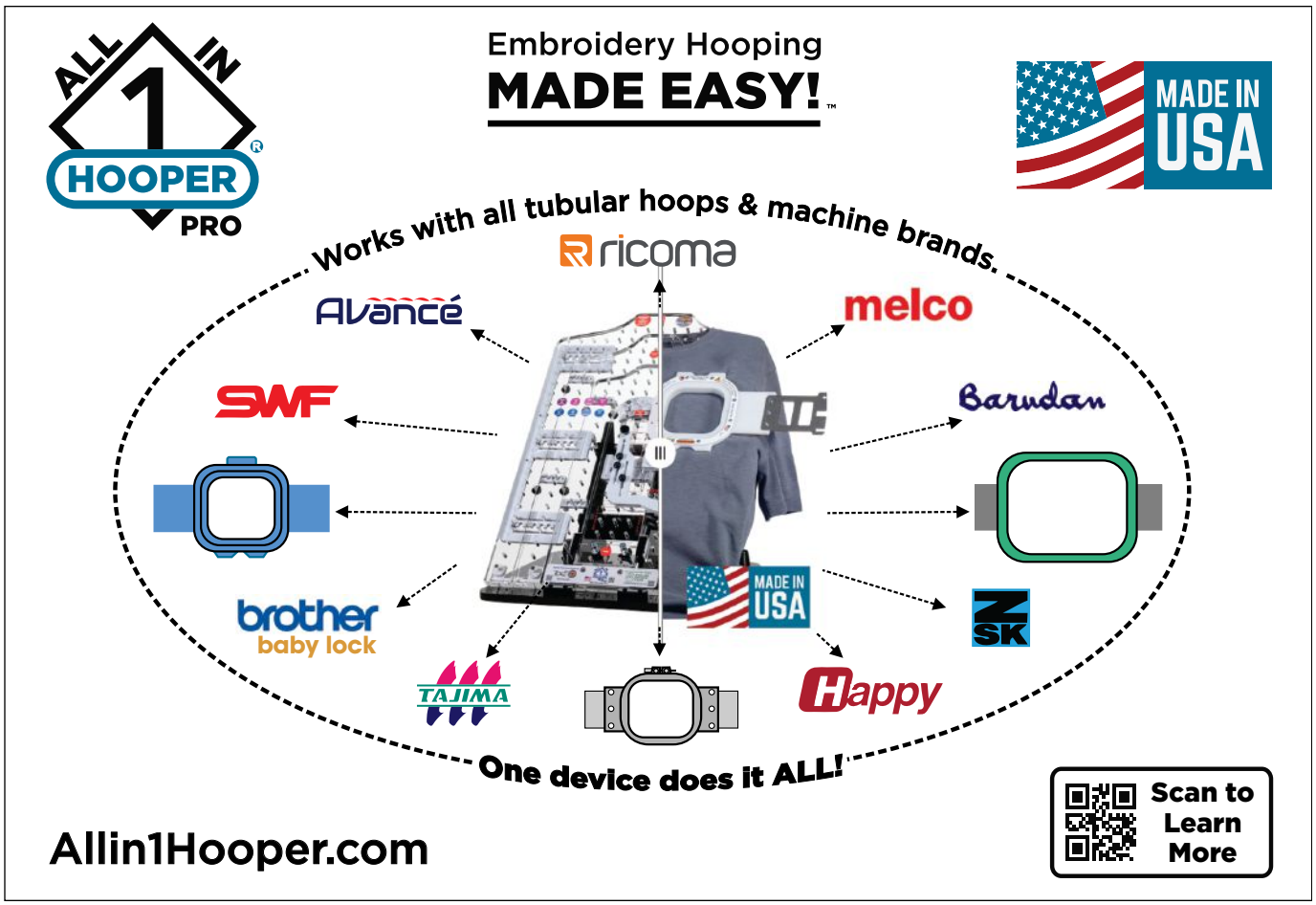
machine. A pocket on a golf bag won't work, but a detachable strap or detachable pocket is an excellent alternative. If the item has a thick seam or zipper in the area they want embroidered, discuss a backup plan if their first choice is a no-go when you try to hoop it or load it on the machine. There are a variety of specialty hoops available to get nontraditional products onto your embroidery machine.

If they approve the price, the next step is to hand them a disclaimer to sign. This disclaimer lets them know that we never want to ruin a product that they provide, but that there is a risk that something could happen. I am sure that your equipment has never eaten a garment before, but mine certainly has!

While we never want to turn customers away, becoming clear about what you will and will not accept, and what you and your equipment can and cannot do will help you make the customers who truly want and need their items customized into loyal and happy customers. It should not be cheap, nor should it be ready today or tomorrow. We design and create unique, quality custom goods. It is 100% reasonable to earn a respectable profit for providing your time, expertise, skills, and service to your community. **GP**



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



Childrenswear

combines trends with functionality, safety & fun

What's trending in kids' fashion — from styles & decoration methods, to materials & safety standards

By Shelley Widhalm



Image courtesy of Cotton Heritage

Kids' fashion trends

in 2025 combine comfort with gender-neutral designs, eco-friendly fabrics, and mix-and-match versatility, so that kids can engage in everything from school to play.

"Children's fashion is evolving fast, merging comfort, style, and purpose," said Amit Gupta, CEO of Monag Apparel, a Rochester, New York-based wholesaler of blank apparel. "The biggest trends right now reflect what today's parents value — practicality, personality, and planet-friendly choices."

Minimal designs and muted color palettes are trending in childrenswear in a move toward unisex silhouettes and colors. Traditional blues and pinks are being replaced with earth tones like terracotta, eucalyptus green, oatmeal, clay, and dusty rose. Often, the materials are sustainable with organic cotton and recycled fabrics in high demand, in line with an increase in awareness about how things are made.

"Some of the top-selling infant and toddler styles include fine jersey, short-sleeve bodysuits, and cozy three-end fleece pieces like hoodies and sweatpants," said Tami Miller, director of creative marketing for LAT Apparel in Ball Ground, Georgia. "Parents love these everyday essentials for their softness, durability, and thoughtful construction. Features like snap closures, tear-away labels, and combed ring-spun fabrics make changes easier and keep kids comfortable all day. These pieces blend function with playful style, making them longtime favorites for growing little ones."

The focus is shifting to comfort with soft fabrics, relaxed fits, and stretchy waists, handy for growing into larger sizes. The choices work for anything from playwear and loungewear to dressier options, allowing function to meet fashion.

"Parents are looking for clothes that are not just cute, but also durable and functional, things their child can wear from playtime to a family gathering without needing a change. The goal: clothes they can move, play, and nap in," Gupta explained. "Comfort is nonnegotiable, especially for toddlers and active kids."


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Image courtesy of LAT Apparel



Image courtesy of Monag

Basics are what's popular in childrenswear, according to Greg Brown, vice-president of business development for Cotton Heritage, a Commerce, California-based wholesaler of apparel blanks.

"Kids are constantly growing, so big brother and big sister can share before the products wear out," Brown said. "For the most part, simple is better when it comes to childrenswear. You really don't have a wide offering [like] you have in other adult items. They outgrow the product so quickly."

Cotton Heritage sells a line of children's products that's similar to what's available for adults but not in as many colors and styles, such as children's and youth T-shirts in basic 4.3-ounce and fleece in 7-ounce, all in combed ring-spun cotton.

"Our fleece crewnecks have made a surge because of the crazy world we live in, and hoods are no longer accepted in many schools in large cities," Brown remarked. "With many schools now, crewnecks have made a bigger impact on some spirit wear and athleticwear that are worn in schools."

Another trend in children's fashion is mini-me and matching sets with kids' clothing mirroring adult fashion, such as "Mommy & Me" and family matching outfits, like jogger sets, jackets, and clean, minimal cuts. The sets are a hit, especially around the holidays and special occasions, because kids love the connection and parents love the photo ops. Also trending is a retro fashion revival with '90s-inspired

Images courtesy of Cotton Heritage



denim, stonewashed or vintage-wash T-shirts, sweatshirts, overalls, and color-blocked jackets.

"Above all, the trend is toward thoughtful fashion, pieces that feel good, last long, and reflect both the child's personality and the parent's values," Gupta said.



Images courtesy of LAT Apparel



Decorating childrenswear

Children's clothes are decorated in several methods that are eco-conscious and durable, balanced with creativity and practicality. The most common decoration methods include screen printing, embroidery, heat transfers, applique and patchwork, and eco-friendly, water-based inks.

Screen printing, for example, is good for bold, vibrant designs and is cost-effective for bulk production. It's durable, able to withstand frequent washings, retaining the vibrancy of graphics and logos. Another option is embroidery, often used for logos and small icons. It can add texture and a premium look and feel, is highly durable, and doesn't fade or peel.

There are also heat transfers, including direct to film (DTF) , direct to garment (DTG), heat transfer vinyl (HTV), and sublimation. Heat transfers are ideal for small-batch, on-demand production and custom designs, such as personalized names and messages. They provide precise, detailed images, able to endure a large number of washes.



Applique and patchwork are ways to add fun, interactive design elements to a garment, especially popular in baby and toddler wear.

"It's visually interesting and often soft to the touch, adding a layer of comfort and style," Gupta explained.

Eco-friendly, water-based inks are another option, ideal for sensitive



Image courtesy of Monag



Images courtesy of Cotton Heritage





skin and environmental consciousness. The result is a softer fabric feel that's also breathable.

"These decoration methods are chosen not just for visual appeal, but for how well they hold up to the active lifestyles of children," Gupta said. "Parents value both the style and the function, and these techniques deliver both."

Materials

The garment materials used in childrenswear vary according to the different decoration methods. For screen printing, the most common include 100% cotton, cotton blends like cotton and polyester, and jersey knits. The items are decorated with plastisol ink for durability, water-based ink for a softer feel, and discharge ink for soft prints on dark fabrics.

"Cotton and blends absorb ink well, and these inks bond to the fibers for a vibrant, lasting print," Gupta said.

Materials typically used with embroidery are thick, such as fleece, cotton, denim, canvas, and twill. Decorating is done with embroidery thread like polyester or rayon, selected for durability, colorfastness, and sheen, and a backing material that serves as a stabilizer to support the stitching and prevent puckering.

Heat transfers are typically done on cotton, polyester, blends, and performance fabrics. HTV is used for cut designs, DTF for full-color images, and transfer paper for sublimation or inkjet transfers.

"These materials adhere best to smooth fabrics. HTV and DTF give flexibility for customization and detail," Gupta said.

The materials for applique and patchwork include fleece, denim, and heavy cotton, and they're decorated with felt, cotton, and fleece fabric patches with a stitching or adhesive backing.

"The garment should be stable enough to hold added fabric pieces," Gupta said. "Applique adds texture, color, and fun, especially in kidswear."

For eco-friendly, water-based inks, the primary materials are 100% cotton and organic cotton, and they're decorated with water-based inks that are pigment or discharge types.

"These inks soak into natural fibers, making the print part of the fabric rather than sitting on top. They're nontoxic, breathable, and safer for sensitive skin," Gupta said.



Image courtesy of Monag

Safety standards

When making decisions about materials and decoration, children's clothing also has to meet strict safety standards to protect against skin irritation, injury, choking, and suffocation. The items can't have any small, detachable parts that infants and toddlers may pull off and swallow, and sleepwear needs to be flame-resistant and snug-fitting to reduce burn risk.

Any hardware on a garment needs to be nickel-free or hypoallergenic to avoid sensitive skin issues and allergic reactions. Cords and drawstrings are restricted to avoid loose materials being caught on playground equipment or doors. And the inks and dyes need to be nontoxic, since kids' skin can be sensitive, and, especially if they are younger, they may chew on their clothing.

"Children's clothing safety isn't just a legal requirement; it builds trust with parents and protects the brand from liability and recalls," Gupta concluded. "Following safety guidelines shows that you prioritize both style and well-being." **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 can be reached via shellsinkservices.com.

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Beyond the gridiron

From robotic champs to PTO heroes — campus culture is bigger than football

By Adam McCauley

Booster club parents, some newly elected and a little wide-eyed, are already setting up their first fundraisers. Teachers are dusting off clipboards. And parents? They're juggling calendars, ordering gear, and bracing themselves for another season as the unpaid Uber driver and sideline cheering section. It's a fresh slate for everyone, full of pride, potential, and plenty of apparel needs.

Let's be honest, when most apparel decorators think of "fall," the default is football. And sure, under those stadium lights on Friday nights, the football teams get the glory. Their season slogan is printed across their chest, and their new identity is highlighted with school colors and mascots. But here's the kicker, football isn't the only game in town. Not even close. There are dozens of other groups hustling just as hard, showing just as much school pride, and yep, looking for an identity.

If you're only selling to the football team, you're leaving a whole lot of money on the table. Let's change that. Spiritwear provides a signal of acceptance and identity for everyone, not just football players. There are hidden gold mines waiting to be discovered if you know where to look. Here's a hint — they're everywhere in the fall.



Images courtesy of Adam McCauley

Underserved programs

One of the first places to look is right on the football field at halftime. There you'll see dozens of students representing the school marching band and color guard. That group is nearly as large as the football team. They perform under the same lights each and every Friday night. Rain or shine, the band comes out to perform the halftime show, followed by the color guard, cheerleaders, and the PomPom teams. All of which have hours of practice time before and after school. They have parents and grandparents who come out to cheer them on. Those teams wear practice tees, embroidered beanies, and hooded sweatshirts to highlight and identify their team. If the kids are buying it, you know the parents and grandparents are too.

The second-largest team on campus during the fall is usually the cross-country team. They often begin their training at the end of the summer while temperatures are still high, then their season sees a steady decline in temps until its end. Boys and girls combine to create the team, and they

travel across the state competing in events beginning early enough for the morning dew, all the way until the sun finally goes down. They may start the season in lightweight running shorts and performance tops, but then they finish the year bundled in long sleeves, hoodies, jackets, joggers, and more.

Here's an extra opportunity: A lot of schools host events and tournaments as fundraisers for their programs, which means teams must stay on location for the duration of the events. This is a great opportunity to provide sublimated 10' X 10' tents to teams and clubs. This will give teams their home base on game day.

Other often overlooked sports teams are tennis, swimming/diving, volleyball, and soccer. These are strong programs that are filled with committed families and loyal boosters. These sports often fly under the radar, but the commitment is anything but casual. Golfers and tennis players love clean, classic gear and polos that feel like country club culture. Swim teams? They live in towels and team hoodies. And their parents? Some of the most loyal fans you'll find. Give these groups understated gear that nods to their discipline, and they'll wear it everywhere.

Next up are the drama and theater programs. Nothing says "I was there" like a commemorative T-shirt with cast and crew on the back. Drama departments thrive on their merch — they have special cast hoodies for bonding, their inside jokes become printed tag lines, and their crew tees remind them of the late nights building elaborate sets. They become living billboards. For them, it is not the garment itself, it's the memories that they represent.

Now, don't forget about the future CEOs training in the student councils, NHS, or DECA. These groups are a part of most of the extracurricular activities that drive the culture of the school. Whether it's managing a blood drive















or state competitions, these students need to look the part. Volunteer efforts, conferences, open houses, and pep rallies all need gear; T-shirts make them look sharp and organized. They are brand ambassadors, and when they wear the brand, they become the brand! That's what leaders do.

Lastly, let's look at the brainy and creative bunch. Robotics, esports, and debate clubs. You may not hear them over the roar of the stadium, but they are competing and quietly winning championships all year long. This group excels at camaraderie culture. Their clever slogans, witty batter, and logos are based on codes and creativity. Give them the right designs to match their passion and smarts, and watch their gear be the viral school "must-have merch." This group has huge school pride but small recognition, their garments need to match their voice.

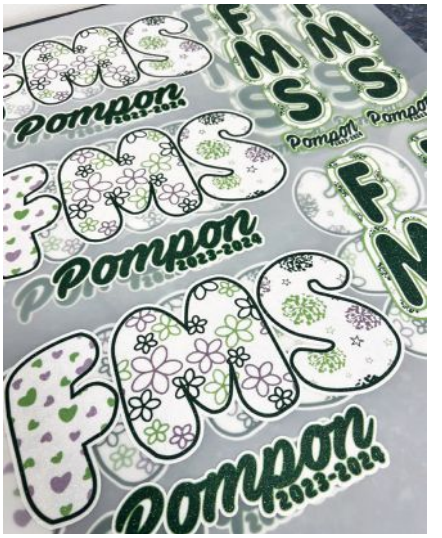
Who's really spending the money

If you are usually living in the sports world and don't know who to contact for the other side of school apparel, all you have to do is follow the money. PTO/PTA groups often have budgets for staff apparel, event shirts, or organized fun runs. They are also huge advocates for teacher appreciation gifts. Booster clubs, particularly the non-sports clubs, are always in full fundraising mode.

They know their programs don't get the same level of enthusiasm from the school community, so they aren't afraid to spend money on gear to help promote their activities and let the school know they are just as much a part of the school as every other team. Overachieving educators and













administrators want their school to have a sense of cohesion. They often spearhead office polos, staff T-shirts, or club tees.

Fall events that drive apparel sales

Each fall, the excitement explodes into the community, and the new school year comes to life. Events fill up the calendar quickly, but they also give lots of opportunities to drive your sales. Spirit week, homecoming, class tees, alumni gear, school stores, and parade volunteers all need special T-shirts or other decorated garments. During pep rallies, students organize "whiteouts" in the student sections or purchase rally towels for the game.

Booster clubs host open houses where apparel is sold. Fall festivals and trunk-or-treats have event volunteers in customizable tees, along with attendees getting keepsakes. Fall is also a great time for fundraising events like walk-a-thons, pumpkin runs, or staff chili cook-offs. Everything needs branding.



How to make it happen

Now that you can recognize the unsung heroes of the fall, what are you going to do with the information? The fall season is chaotic enough as it is. How do you handle more clients without sacrificing the service of your current list? Here are a couple of tactics to help you manage.

This season, create a "fall activities" template catalog or flyer. Bundle options for different groups. Offer preset spirit packs for drama, band, etc. Make sure you're using online stores. Keep it super simple, clean, and easy. Set up a short-term store for each group. Hold quick deadlines and advertise fundraising options. Don't sit and wait for these groups to come to you. Pitch the custom spiritwear ideas to your contact first. Make recommendations for clubs and groups, leverage things you are already using, or offer tiered pricing with scalable options. It's hard to say "no" to a well-laid-out plan.

Final thought: You're not just printing shirts, you're printing identity

When you expand beyond the football field, you start to see schools as living, breathing ecosystems. Every student. Every parent. Every staff member. They all want to belong.

Let's be honest, belonging matters. Whether it's wearing a show shirt backstage or lining up for a group photo after a robotics meet, students are craving something that connects them to a larger story. Custom apparel does more than decorate their wardrobe, it anchors them to a purpose, a place, or a tribe. And in the chaos of growing up, that kind of identity is gold.

It's not just athletes who work tirelessly after school. The cast of the school play spends hours perfecting scenes. The esports team holds strategy sessions like pro coaches. Even the student council pulls off community events that rival professional planners. These students are forming their own kind of teams, teams that often go unseen but deserve just as much celebration.

So, as the leaves turn and the Friday lights flicker on, take a second look at the corners of campus you haven't served yet. There's pride waiting to be printed. And you're the one with the press. **GP**



Adam McCauley is the co-owner of Sandlot Sports, a custom screen printing, embroidery, and promotional company that specializes in spiritwear, team uniforms, corporate workwear, and event T-shirts. There is something electric about the start of a brand-new school year. The smell of freshly waxed hallways, the buzz of locker doors slamming, and the unmistakable chatter of students reuniting after summer break. Before you know it, stadium lights shine throughout communities across the country. On the fields, courts, and stages, teams and clubs are kicking off another season with a blend of nerves and excitement.

Keep screen printing in your toolbox

And be open to other tools

By Stan Banks

Screen printing has been on its death bed once already! When I look at screen printing today, all of the cliche phrases apply. One man's trash is another man's treasure and out with the old in with the new come to mind. The truth is, everyone but the diehard screen-printing fans believe screen printing is dead once again. We could all look at current sales, bow our heads, and write the eulogy for the screen-printing funeral. Hey, maybe they are all right. Or, maybe when everyone is running away headed towards DTF, it takes a rebel to run into the crowd and run straight to the press and stand on it yelling, "Hey, there's still money to be made here!" In fact, I believe screen printing is still better suited for most.

I got on the internet in 2017 and said everyone should start with a heat press and I was crucified by the industry vets. Looking back, myself, alongside Supacolor Heat Transfers, ended the "iron on" stigma that has become the platform for DTF to shine bright. But, let's go back to the original statement I said "Start with a heat press," not "Only use a heat press."

I am in part to blame for what we hear of about screen printing these days. And now I am here with my company, T-Shirt Side Hustle, alongside others like Ranar, Print Grip, GM Graphics, and GPX University to bring new life to screen printing. Making it innovative, relevant, fun, and most importantly easy for people to start, learn, and earn. The truth is, it's not about this method or that method; it's all about what's best for the individual job. Some jobs call for all the great things that DTF has brought to us, and some call for the classic features that screen printing provides. They're all tools and your business needs all the tools to get the job done. Being able to screen print is about having control over your business with a reliable money-making tool that won't fail you.

Fact: Every method has its pros & cons

When you solely rely on your heat press, you are at the mercy of your transfer printing company. As great as they all are, if they are perfect and do everything 100%, we are still at the mercy of the shipping companies who are still riding on the pandemic



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excuse and have yet to put any shipping guarantees back in place.

On the other hand, you may say you're going to print my own transfers, not realizing that means you are now a transfer supplier. Even if you are only printing for yourself, you now are running two totally different businesses. I won't even get into machine downtime. Sure, screen printing comes with a small learning curve and yes, it may also come with a little mess. But that's no different than anything else we can expand into outside of heat pressing and just buying transfers. I'm not here to rip on any one method. We need them all. I am here, however, to tell you that screen printing belongs in any true print shop's toolbox.

When it comes to having something tried-and-true, screen printing is exactly that. If you're just starting out, having even a small single-color setup could boost your revenue and truly give you control over your business.

Screen printing should be a part of your everyday option for printing, depending on job specks. In a worst-case scenario, it should be your reliable backup plan. Leave the setup idle for five or so years and it will still operate like it did day one. Leave some machines idle for a week and spend a month trying to figure out what happened.

Real-life example

One of the last jobs I printed came in as a rush order at the end of the day on a Thursday. The guy needed 200 shirts with front and back print, printed one color for Sunday; meaning he basically needed them Saturday. So now let's break this down.

I've got to get the shirts from SanMar, which is about 50 minutes away. I'll hire a driver, no big deal.

Now, I automatically focused on screen printing — maybe five hours print time on the manual setup — but let's say I didn't have that as an option. I can't do screen-printed transfers because the order won't process until Friday, even if I could call and get it rushed because I know someone that knows someone (not likely). I definitely can't count on a shipping company to overnight anything. That hasn't worked since COVID, so it's off the table.

Cool, I got a local guy that can print my DTF sheets. Two 12" X 12" prints per shirt and that's about $8.64 at the 3 cents going rate today. That, plus the shirt, and my cost is getting up there. I can't rely on outsourcing, either. While it costs less initially, the one-day turn is for sure going to be a 100% mark up.

But you know what, I do have my screen-printing setup. And by having that alone, even if I had to raise my prices to accommodate one of the other print methods, I could do the same price because of the turn time needed (in this case I added $500). My print cost is 30 cents, if I'm generous, for both sides and I still get to put more profit in my pocket.

To sum it up, every print method is a tool. We need them all. It's about using the best tool to get the job done. Good marketing and high profit margin has often made DTF the go to, but we need to make sure our business success is the driving factor determining which what method we use. **GP**





Stan Banks is the owner and entrepreneur behind T-Shirt Side Hustle. He is also a presenter at GPX events. Visit tshirtsidehustle.com to learn more.



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Mind over matter

How discipline turns dreams into full-time success

By Aaron Montgomery

You've got the dream. You're side hustling with a full-time job, late-night orders, early morning social posts, weekend craft shows, or client meetings. You tell yourself, "One day, this will be my real job." And that vision? It's clear. No boss. Creative freedom. Making money doing what you love. But here's what no one tells you when you're laser-focused on the dream: if you skip the daily habits, mindset work, and intentional steps, that "one day" never shows up, and the stories we start to tell ourselves become our new reality.

I've worked with so many small-business owners in this exact spot. Not because they're missing talent or good ideas. They're missing the mental discipline to build something that lasts. Long-term success doesn't come from hoping things will work out or comparing yourself to someone else's highlight reel. It comes from taking consistent actions and choosing to grow on purpose.

The story about your inability, your lack of resources, your bad luck, and how the world is against you is just not true, and hundreds of businesses prove it daily. It's not about never being satisfied. It's about always being open to a better you and a business foundation. In my book, "The FUNdamentals of Business Success," we work from three clear phases, which I titled, "Plant, Prepare, and Pollinate." It's a cycle of mindset, planning, and action. My purpose is to lead people to build a business they love waking up to every day.

That's where mental discipline steps in. It's not flashy, and it won't go viral on social media, but it's the secret weapon behind every business that actually makes it. Mental discipline means showing up with intention when no one's watching. It means doing the work on the days when your energy is low and the sales are slower than you'd like. And it means learning how to build better habits that move you forward.

Plant: Tending to your roots

Every good thing grows from the ground up. And in business, that ground is your mindset. Before you worry about your logo, your pricing, or your next Instagram reel, you've got to get real about what's going on underneath it all. Do you believe in yourself? Do you trust your gut? How will you have a deep enough reason to still show up and do the work if no one clapped, no one liked your post, and no one noticed for a while?

We need to ask ourselves the hard questions and be honest with the answers. Why are you doing this? What does success actually look like for you, not what you think you should want, but what you truly want? One of the most powerful exercises I walk partners through is defining their SVPs — strengths, values, and passions. When you build from that place, your foundation holds, even when things get tough.

So, when someone says, "I want to grow my business," I don't nod and say "Great!" I ask, "By how much? Why? By when? And how will you know when you've arrived?" Without clarity, we default to busy. We chase shiny things.



We overthink everything. But when your mindset is planted in truth and purpose, decisions get simpler, and progress feels more natural. Mental discipline starts with alignment. It starts with a clear reason for what you're doing. Without that, you don't even give yourself a chance to go from part-time business owners to full-time success.

Prepare: Design before you build

Once your roots are planted, it's time to build something on purpose. This is where so many small business owners rush ahead and end up frustrated. You've got the passion, you've got a little momentum, and before you know it, you're jumping from idea to action without ever slowing down to design the thing you're building.

Stephen Covey calls this the "first creation." Every result in your life is created twice. First in your mind, then in the physical world. If you skip that mental creation, you're just guessing, and our businesses are too important for that to be our strategy.

Let's be honest, most people plan like this: Think it, act on it, regret it later. It's easy to get caught in that loop, especially when you're juggling everything else life throws at you. But if you want your business to support your life (and not swallow it whole), you need a different rhythm.

What we teach instead is simple, and it works: Think it. Align it. Plan it. Act on it. Review it. That planning step is where you breathe. It's where you slow down just enough to get intentional. This doesn't mean you need a 42-page business plan or fancy software. It means you take five minutes to sketch out your next steps. You look at your calendar and make space for what matters. You ask, "Is this idea in alignment with my strengths, my values, and the kind of life I want to build?"

Mental discipline in this phase is choosing not to rush. It's giving yourself permission to be strategic, not just reactive. When you plan with purpose, your business stops feeling like chaos and starts feeling like confidence.

Pollinate: Action with feedback

Now it's time to move, and you are no longer hustling blindly. Once your mindset is aligned and your plan is in place, you've got to put it out into the world and see what happens by taking action. Your business can't be super-secret, so how can you share about why you do what you do and how you do it while inviting feedback? It's where many small business owners either get stuck or burned out.

We wait until something feels perfect or we convince ourselves we need more training, more time, or a better logo before we launch. But perfection is a trap, while progress and producing something you are proud of is the real goal. Mental discipline is about persistence and about taking the next best step, even when you're unsure. Think of it this way: Taking action without ever reviewing the results is like printing with your eyes closed. You might hit the mark if you are lucky, but long-term success is more likely when you open your eyes. You won't learn what worked or what needs tweaking.

Pollinate means you show up, you share what you've got, and pay attention to the response. Did that product sell? Did that reel get traction? Did your customer respond to that new offer? Great. Now ask why. Mental discipline helps you hold space for reflection, so your action isn't wasted. You gather what worked, what didn't, and then loop back to the Plant phase with better awareness.

The more you act in alignment with your SVPs, the more your confidence grows. Each cycle adds a layer of clarity, and that creates real momentum. And that, right there, is the shift from hoping your business works to knowing you're building it to.

Why all three are nonnegotiable

This cycle only works when all three parts show up. It's tempting to skip one, especially when life gets busy or the pressure mounts, but skipping a phase just leads to frustration and burnout. If you only focus on your mindset (Plant) without mapping out your actions (Prepare), you end up with false confidence and keep spinning your wheels. If you have a plan (Prepare) without taking any action (Pollinate), you get stuck in perfection paralysis. Without action, you won't see results. And if you hustle all the time (Pollinate) without mapping the steps out (Prepare), or making sure it is aligned with your business values (Plant), you might be working nonstop, but you're growing the wrong thing. That's a fast track to burnout on a path that never actually fits. The complete cycle repeated is how you go from "barely hanging on" to "this feels fun again." You build with intention. You grow with feedback. You get better every time around.

Mind over matter isn't about being tough or powering through. It's about staying aligned, making smart choices, and building the discipline to stick with it long enough for your roots to take hold and your work to bloom. So, here's the question I want to leave you with: Where are you stuck? Which part of the cycle are you skipping? **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.



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Pushing the envelope with HDR

By Stephen Romaniello

BUSINESS STRATEGIES

Pre-digital color images were quite different than what we expect to see today. It's interesting to consider what was acceptable in the days before computer-based color enhancement. Many printed images displayed an overall flatness, a warmish colorcast and marginal contrast that would be unacceptable by today's standards. Image enhancement was an optical process produced with cameras and colored filters. It was dependent on the manipulation of light exposed to negative film through halftone screens called color separations. Color enhancement techniques were limited by the analog technology available at that time **(Fig.1).**

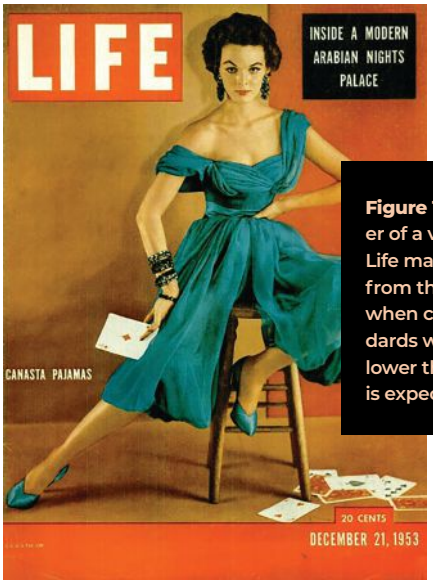


Figure 1. The cover of a vintage Life magazine from the 1950s when color standards were much lower than what is expected today.

Over the past three decades, image editing software has changed the dynamics of printed color images. Color enhancement techniques have evolved to such a degree that high-quality color is easily translated into virtually any printed medium, from short-run large-format printers that use six, eight, or more ink colors, to four color production web presses that produce millions of copies in a single run.

Color editing

Color editing is the standard practice of pre-press image preparation. Software such as Corel PaintShop Pro, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom have features that build superior color relationships. Color adjustment controls such as Levels, Curves, Hue/Saturation and Vibrancy can potentially enhance the color of an image and are frequently employed to produce the super-charged color we see in today's images. These are the basic techniques that are part of the everyday workflow of the design studio or print shop, but the techniques that produce the most dramatic over-the-top color effects are the ones that increase an image's dynamic range.

Moxie

Moxie is an old-time term for attitude, grit, or gumption! Pictures with moxie have enhanced highlights that are incandescent and contain detail in even the lightest areas. The midtones are ultra-clean and smooth and the shadows penetrate their own darkness with detail. The contrast is superb in every region of the image. Photos can look as if, at the split second of the exposure, they saw and recorded the darkest and lightest areas. There are no blown out whites or filled in blacks. Images with this quality are attainable with effort, and, fortunately, there are features in the software that can help conjure the magic.

Dynamic range

Dynamic range describes the ratio between the maximum (white) and minimum (black) intensity of the light-capturing or displaying capabilities of a specific device. The higher the dynamic range of a device, the greater the range of tonality it can capture, display, or print.

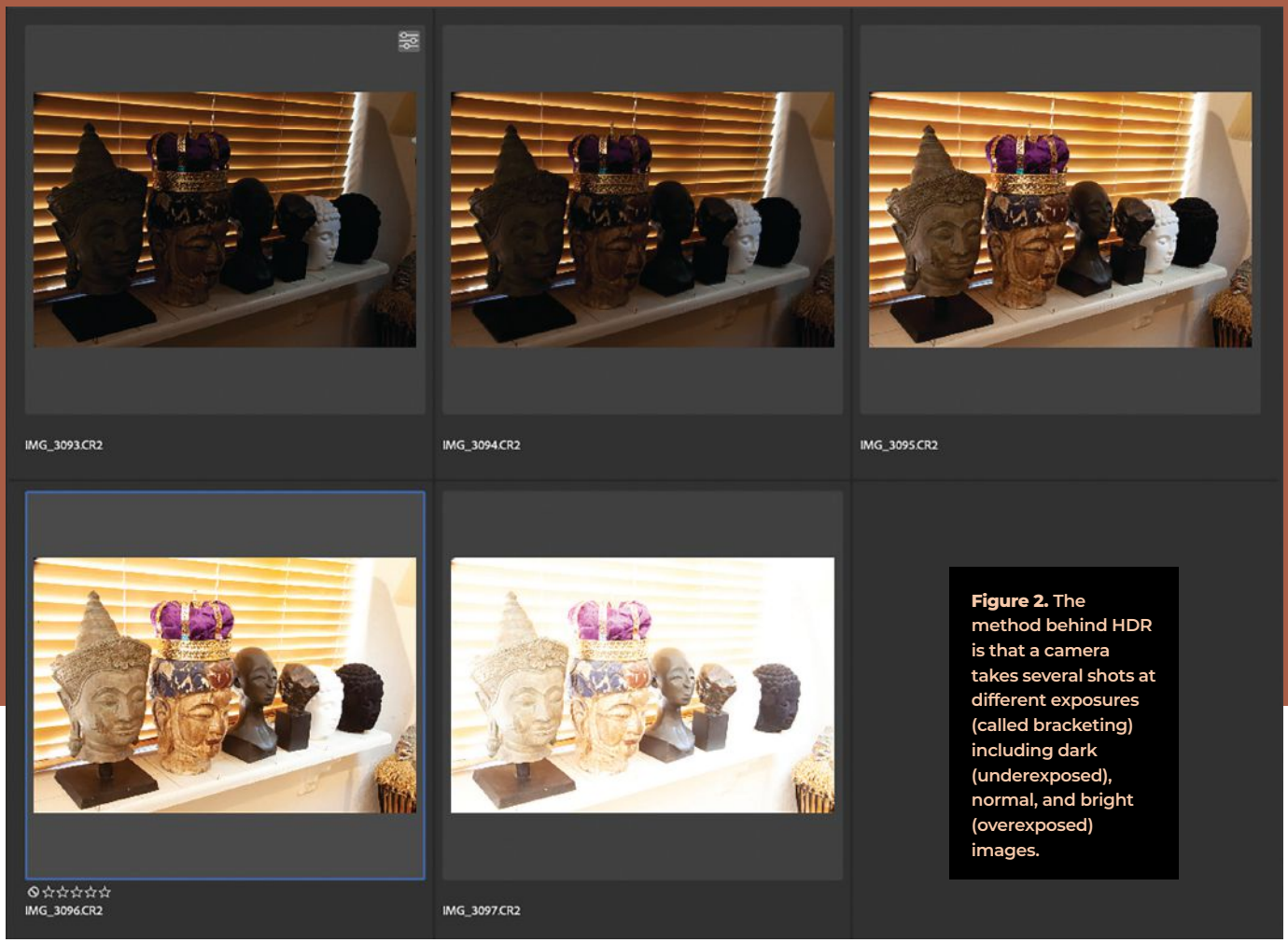


Figure 2. The method behind HDR is that a camera takes several shots at different exposures (called bracketing) including dark (underexposed), normal, and bright (overexposed) images.

High dynamic range images (HDR) are a type of digital image that contain a wider range of light and color information than standard images. They more accurately represent scenes with both very bright and very dark areas, similar to what the human eye can see. HDR software produces a superior range of color and contrast resulting in greater detail in the highlights and shadows and better contrast in the midtones. HDR captures a wider range of color in images that contain super-bright direct sunlight and the darkest shadows, and even faint smoky or foggy areas. Rich blacks, luminous highlights, color balanced mid-tones and grays are hallmarks of HDR technology.

An HDR image that is output to a high-resolution printer and carefully color managed can produce dramatic prints with a wide color gamut and deep color saturation. These effects can be printed to any media including fabric, paper, plastic, or metal.

Multiple exposures

HDR images can be directly captured using cameras with special image sensors, such as an oversampled binary image sensor. Cameras without these special sensors take photos with a limited exposure range, referred to as standard dynamic range (SDR), that may result in the loss of detail in the highlights or shadows. The intention of HDR is to combine exposures to accurately represent the wide range of intensity levels found in real life scenes ranging from direct sunlight to deep shadows.

Method

Simply put, the method behind HDR is that a camera takes several shots at different exposures (called bracketing) including dark (underexposed), normal, and bright (overexposed) images **(Fig. 2)**. The underexposed images capture the most detail in the highlights. The overexposed images capture more detail in the shadows. The midtones maintain a consistent level of overall contrast. HDR software combines the exposures into one image to produce more detail throughout the entire tonal range.

The goal behind HDR is to combine multiple, bracketed exposures to improve the tonal range of pictures. The process of tonal mapping multiple SDR bracketed images of the same subject and perfectly aligning them can result in a high, sometimes even an exaggerated dynamic range.

HDR Pro

HDR Pro is an Adobe Photoshop automation but can also be performed in Adobe Bridge or Adobe Lightroom. HDR images are produced by combining a series of selected, bracketed source exposures by going to File> Automate > Merge to HDR Pro.

Image capture tips

Before looking at the software, let's talk about the best way to capture

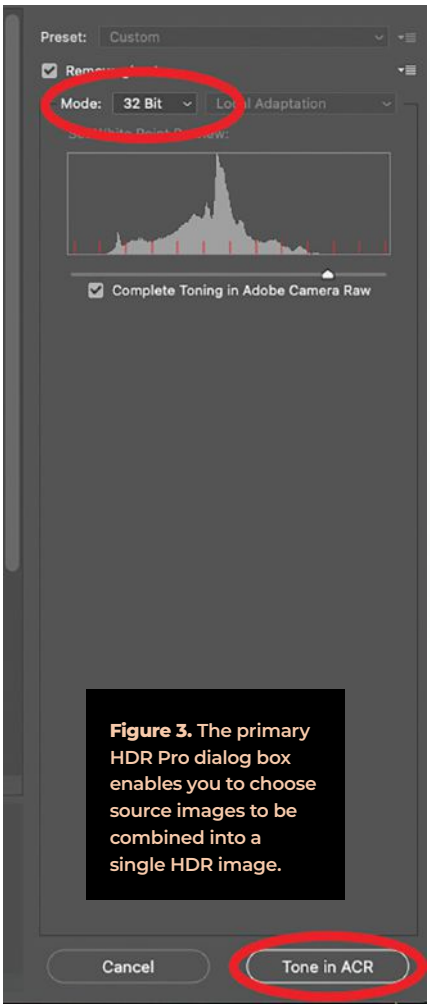


Figure 3. The primary HDR Pro dialog box enables you to choose source images to be combined into a single HDR image.

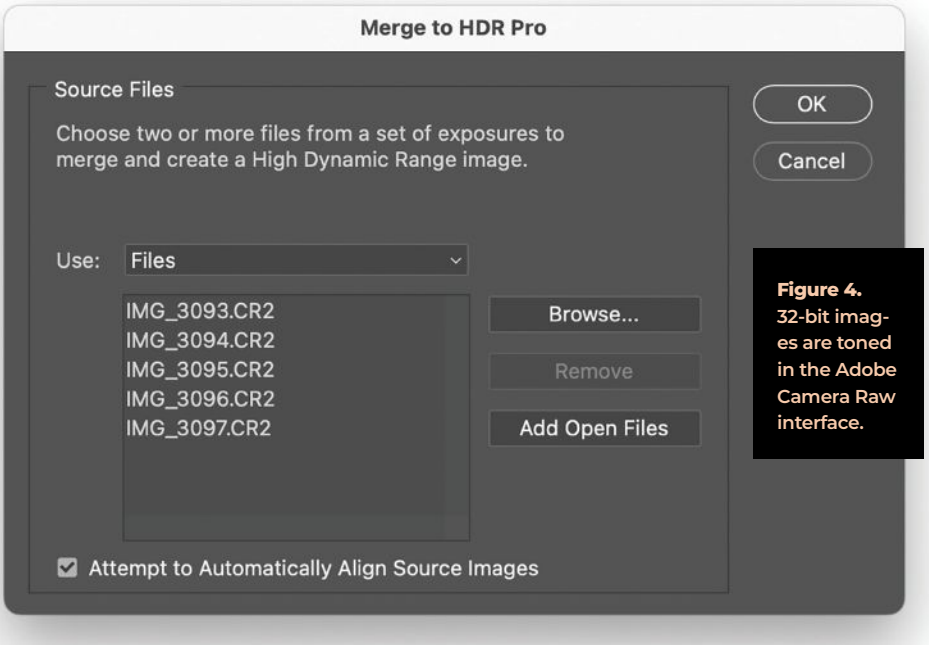


Figure 4. 32-bit images are toned in the Adobe Camera Raw interface.

the images that will be combined to produce HDR. A minimum of two exposures of the same scene is necessary but more will produce better results. When bracketing the exposures, mount the camera on a tripod and connect a cable release to assure stability. Images must be perfectly aligned for the software to combine them. Any number of bracketed images is acceptable but best results are achieved when areas of the highlight, midtones and shadows are emphasized separately on each of three of the bracketed images with additional images to function as in-between tonalities.

Vary the shutter speed when making the bracketed exposures. Do not vary the aperture because the depth of field will be affected and it will be difficult or impossible to align and blend the images. Maintain the same ISO setting for each exposure to reduce variations in shadow noise. Bracket with one or two exposure value step intervals. Smaller steps will produce more images than are necessary.

HDR Pro

The primary HDR Pro dialog box **(Fig. 3)** presents a list of the source images to be combined. Once the list is compiled, click the OK button to display the toning controls.

First, choose a bit depth of eight to produce millions, 16 to produce billions, or 32-bit color to produce trillions of colors. 32-bit images will need to be toned in the Adobe Camera Raw which is accessible at the bottom of the interface **(Fig. 4)**. Eight bit and 16-bit images are toned with the HDR Pro sliders **(Fig. 5)**.

The interface displays the exposures and the composite image. As you adjust the sliders, the combined blended images preview in the image window in real time. When the image is at its best, click the OK button to implement the HDR process, which combines the best tonal ranges of all the images and generates a new image.

The higher the bit depth the more pixel information is combined and thus the larger the file. Collecting as much tonal information as possible may seem like a good idea but there are several adjustments, features, and filters in Photoshop that do not support high bit-depth images. Furthermore, due to the limitations of printing and displays, the extended luminosity range of an HDR image must be compressed to be made visible. The method of rendering an HDR image to a standard monitor or printing device is called tone mapping. This method somewhat reduces the overall contrast of an HDR image to facilitate the display on devices or printers with lower dynamic range capabilities.

What this means is that to print, you'll have reduce the bit depth of the image to eight-bits. The tonality shift will be barely noticeable when you convert to a lower bit-depth because you've maximized the image at the higher bit depth. To change the bit-depth, go to Image> Mode> Eight Bit/Channel. A smaller, more manageable file will be generated.

HDR toning

The HDR Pro feature certainly delivers the goods when you have multiple images to work with. But suppose you only have a single image, and you want to maximize the tonal range. The feature that simulates HDR on single images is called HDR Toning and is found in Photoshop's Adjustments Menu. HDR Toning offers similar controls as the HDR Pro Control panel. It simulates the effect of combining multiple images by manipulating existing pixel data. Its control panel is identical to HDR Pro's, but it's not capable of producing new data. For

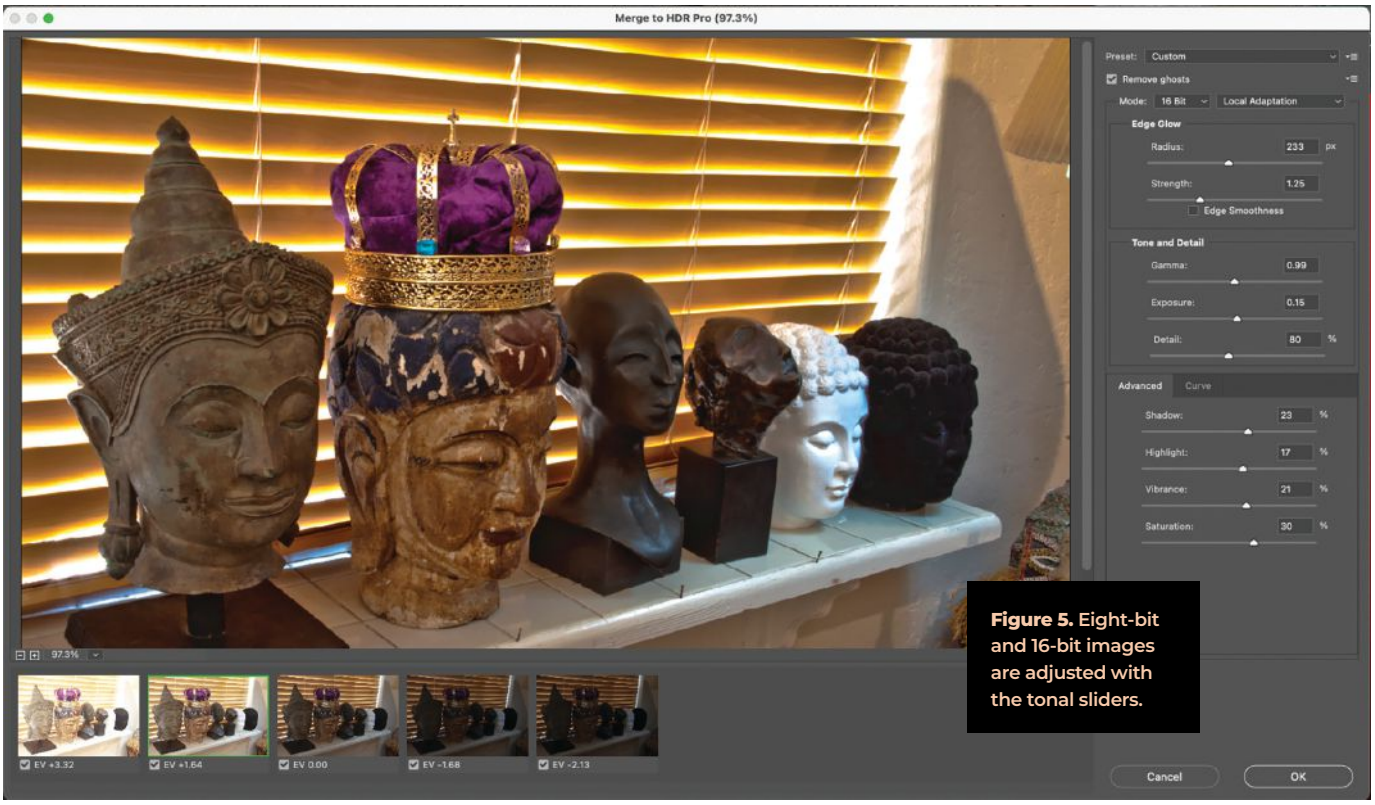


Figure 5. Eight-bit and 16-bit images are adjusted with the tonal sliders.

example, if an area is blown out to white in the highlights, it cannot manufacture new pixels to simulate textures that are not there. It does, however, do a fine job of simulating the appearance of HDR **(Fig. 6)**.

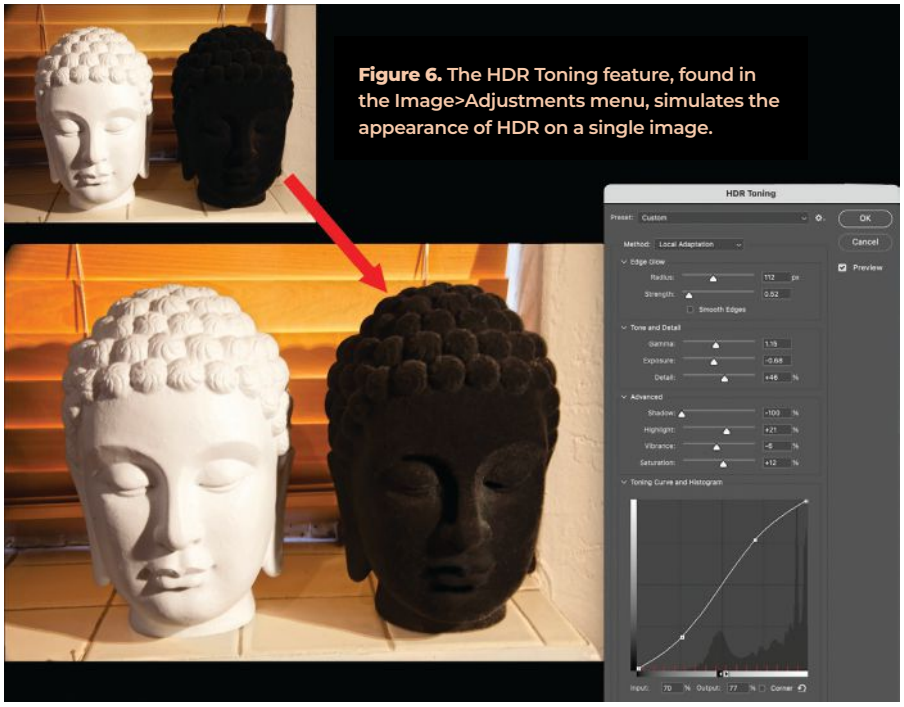


Figure 6. The HDR Toning feature, found in the Image>Adjustments menu, simulates the appearance of HDR on a single image.

Better pictures

In photography, HDR is used to preserve details in both bright skies and dark shadows. In film and TV, HDR provides more vivid, lifelike images with deeper contrast. In gaming, HDR enhances realism by better simulating lighting. Even on your smartphone, HDR technology is used to automatically capture images with a broader range of brightness and detail. The result is a photo that retains details in both the darkest shadows and brightest highlights, closely resembling what the human eye perceives. This feature is particularly beneficial in challenging lighting conditions, such as backlit scenes or high-contrast environments.

Your decision to use these features will depend on the image itself. Does it need enhanced dynamic range to accentuate the contrast in the highlights and shadows? Can you shoot multiple bracketed exposures of the same scene? Do you want to generate hyper-real artistic effects?

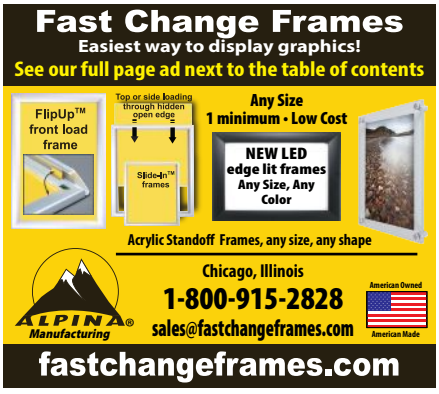
The target printer is also a consideration. Is it capable of printing that extra detail? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then consider incorporating HDR image technology into your workflow. **GP**



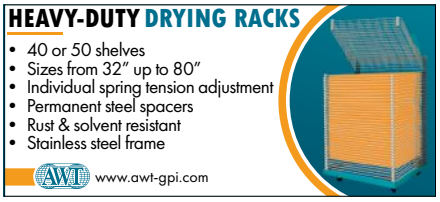
Stephen Romaniello is an artist and educator who has seen the evolution of digital graphics since the beginning of the digital revolution in the 1980s. He is CEO of GlobalEye Systems, a graphics software and creative imaging consultancy, and founder of Gorilla Geeks, a creative consulting firm.

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