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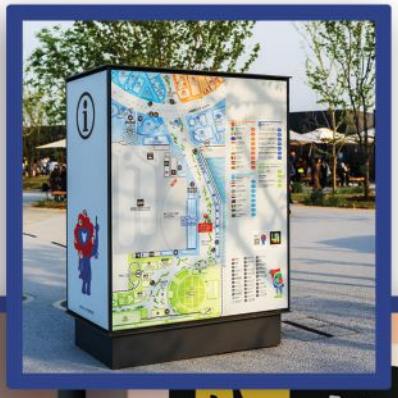


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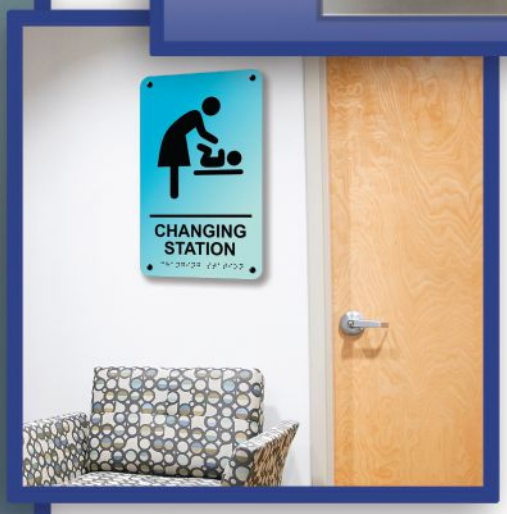
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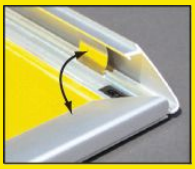
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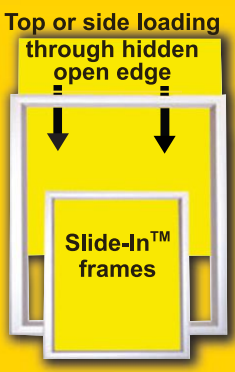
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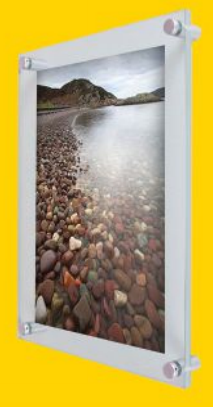




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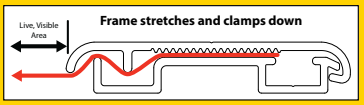
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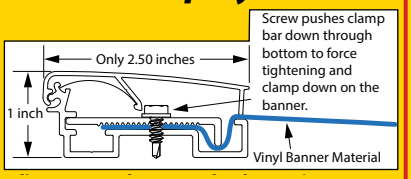






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Marie Fennema is the managing editor of GRAPHICS PRO magazine. She can be reached at mfennema@cahabamedia.com.

Wrapping up 2025

As we head into the holiday season and finalize preparations for the coming year, I'd like to take a minute to reflect on all we've experienced and accomplished throughout 2025.

The past 12 issues of GRAPHICS PRO have been chock-full of information, ranging from deep dives, tips and tricks, featured projects, industry updates, products, and guidance from our network of trusted professionals. A special thank you to our monthly and periodic contributors who provided their time, knowledge, and expertise.

All of our print, digital, and email content has been brought to you by our small-but-mighty team, including Editor-in-Chief James Anderson, Art Director Iveth Gomez, Digital Projects Manager Charlie Fox, and me (Managing Editor Marie Fennema). As of this writing, we've produced the following over the past year:

- Over 800 pages of print magazine content
- 530 articles posted to our website, graphics-pro.com
- 127 newsletters deployed
- 15 online sponsored content posts
- Roughly 460 social media posts

In addition, 2025 was GRAPHICS PRO'S first full year of hosting webinars. Thanks to Project Manager Jessi Tygielski, we successfully ran a total of 16 webinars in conjunction with our industry partners.

We can't forget our dedicated sales team of Seth Messer, Kaityln Everts, Sonya Crocker, John Balagot, and Stacy Marshall, who continually build and facilitate industry relationships that allow us to bring you the information you look for to keep your business competitive.

In this issue

We're wrapping up 2025 with our annual Supplier Spotlight issue. Inside, you'll find profiles from 27 different advertisers and partners who took the opportunity to showcase their companies, products, team cultures, values, and more to offer a closer look at the manufacturers, distributors, and service providers that keep our industry moving forward.

In addition, our contributors cover a variety of informational topics. From investing in an embroidery machine (page 12) and business exit strategies (page 20) to deal markers (page 26) and vibe coding (page 74). And the impressive projects our writers showcase: Lon Winters' iconic western merch for Stetson (page 16) and Lauren Stern's unit and wayfinding signage for the historic Spinning Mill Lofts (page 64).

Happy holidays & cheers to the new year

As the year draws to a close and we gather together to celebrate the holidays, we thank you, our readers, for your continued support of GRAPHICS PRO. We strive to help each reader hone their craft and improve their business — and nothing makes us happier than accomplishing just that.

Wishing everyone a happy holiday season and a prosperous new year.

Cheers,



Marie Fennema
Managing Editor

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PPAI Expo
Jan. 12-15
Las Vegas, NV
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Impressions Expo
Jan. 22-24
Long Beach, CA
impressionsexpo.com

FEB

Decorated Apparel Expo
Feb. 20-21
Kansas City, MO
daxshow.com

APA Expo
Feb. 24-27
Las Vegas, NV
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MAR

ASI Show
March 9-11
Fort Worth, TX
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GRAPHICS PRO EXPO
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Tong Li, PhD is the founder and CEO of AP Lazer, a Michigan-based company redefining laser engraving with its patented open-architecture design. With a background in physics, technology and innovation, Li empowers creators and small businesses to expand into new markets by transforming ordinary products into meaningful, emotionally resonant works through laser technology.

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INDUSTRY UPDATES

NEW HIRES, PROMOS



Pat Daley
General Formulations

General Formulations (GF) has welcomed Pat Daley as the new regional sales manager overseeing the Pacific Northwest, Western Canada, and Alaska territories. With more than 14 years of industry experience, Daley will play a key role in driving growth and supporting GF's customers across the region. Daley began his career at Fellers, where he served five years as an Oregon sales representative before moving into national franchise accounts for nine years.



Rachel Newman
LAT Apparel

LAT Apparel has announced the promotion of Rachel Newman to president. Newman joined the company in 2024 as chief commercial officer. With more than 25 years of experience in the apparel industry, Newman brings a proven track record of leadership, innovation, and results, the company announced in a press release. Prior to joining LAT, she held several senior roles at Hanesbrands, including VP/GM of the printwear and Hanes apparel divisions and VP of sales for Champion retail.



Ankur Mour
FUJIFILM Integrated Inkjet Solutions

FUJIFILM Integrated Inkjet Solutions announced that Ankur Mour will serve as vice president and general manager. Mour is a Fujifilm veteran, serving in progressively senior roles for numerous functions, including engineering, manufacturing operations, commercial presales, customer support, ink development, and project management. During his tenure at Fujifilm, Mour directed and managed the group's long-term strategic vision, operational plans, and processes.

RETIREMENTS



Timothy Andrews
Advertising Specialty Institute

Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) announced that President and CEO Timothy Andrews will retire from the company at the end of March 2026 after 23 years of leadership. The Cohn family, owners of ASI, and Andrews have agreed on the transition timing and are working closely together to ensure a seamless process. The family has engaged Russell Reynolds Associates, a CEO search firm, to lead the process of finding the next CEO.

ANNIVERSARIES

Minuteman Press franchise Owners Karen Fraielli & Valerie Chanoux are celebrating 25-plus years in business. They were awarded the Minuteman Press International Crystal Pinnacle Award in commemoration.

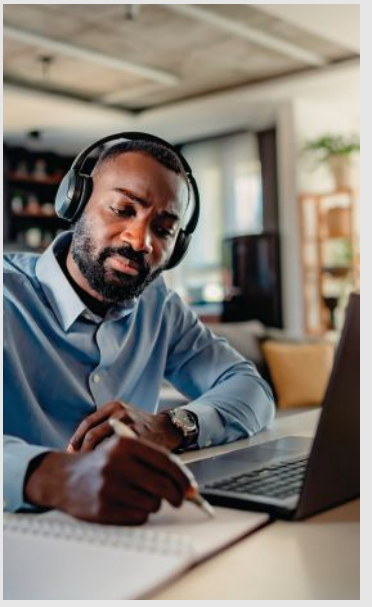
Comfort Colors celebrated 50 years by teaming up with the University of Georgia for an immersive game day experience.

MERGERS

Inktavo, parent company of InkSoft, Printavo, GraphicsFlow, SignTracker, and Clarity Software, and **OrderMyGear (OMG)**, an online platform for group ordering and e-commerce in the team, promotional products, and decorated apparel markets, have merged.

WEBINARS

Don't miss 2025 webinars from AP Lazer, ColDesi, OMTech, IT Supplies, Xante, Radian Laser, ASI, and more at **graphics-pro.com/webinars**





Alliance Franchise Brands, a franchisor of several visual communications brands, recently honored Stuart Wilson and Chelsea Wilson, owners of Allegra Marketing Print Mail in North Houston, with the Peak Performance award.

SAGE recognized over 1,000 outstanding promotional products suppliers and decorators with the 2026 A+ and A SAGE Rating Awards.

Rowmark LLC, manufacturer of engravable sheet plastic for the awards, engraving, and signage markets, was presented with the Performance Plastics Association Environmental Excellence Silver Award.

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

UPDATES

SanMar Corporation, a supplier of wholesale accessories and apparel, recently opened a 1.1-million-square-foot distribution center, located north of Richmond, Virginia, in Hanover County.

SpeedPro, a provider of large-format printing and graphics, announced the opening of SpeedPro Southlake in Southlake, Texas.

Royal Apparel, a manufacturer of knitwear, announced the upcoming opening of its new West Coast Distribution Center in San Bernardino, California.

Ninja Transfers, a provider of direct-to-film (DTF) transfers, upgraded its logistics network: customers located within a 100-mile radius of its Philadelphia fulfillment center can now receive same-day delivery on eligible orders.

PARTNERSHIPS

Atlantis Headwear, a provider of sustainable headwear, partnered with **La Direttissima**, a mountain race held annually in Trento, Italy, to create the official hat for contestants.

Infinity Product Group, the parent company of **Infinity Her**, entered into a new licensing agreement with **Ford Motor Co.** to offer, design, and produce Ford-branded headwear for retailers.

Gemline, a supplier of promotional products and gifts, added two new retail partners, **RIGWA** and **Native Union**, to its portfolio of lifestyle and technology brands.

SanMar Corporation, a wholesale accessories and apparel supplier, will carry headwear and bring exclusive performance apparel from **Richardson** to the industry.

Pukka Inc., a manufacturer of custom headwear, has teamed up with **Sportsman Cap & Bag** as it enters the wholesale market.

Brand Management Group, a global brand licensing company and subsidiary of **S-One Holdings Corporation**, announced its new partnership with **Berger Textiles**, a provider of textile solutions since 1849.

Fluid Color, a supplier of industrial UV/LED wide-format printing systems, entered into a new authorized dealership agreement with **Glantz**, a distributor in the sign, graphics, and display industry.



Images courtesy of Hirsch Solutions

What to know before

investing in an embroidery machine

Embroiderers have a few key things to consider for industry success

By Shelley Widhalm



Starting an embroidery business can be a low-cost way to enter the textile and apparel industry, but according to those already in the business, there are a few key things to know before investing in equipment.

"My first tip is to do your research, and even look at other countries," said Rene Rosales, marketing and education manager for TEXMAC Inc., a machining manufacturer in Charlotte, North Carolina. "You're going to see a wide range of prices, but the cheapest isn't always best."

TEXMAC represents a single brand of industrial embroidery machines, HappyJapan, and is the sole distributor in the U.S. and Canada of the company's single-head and multi-head embroidery machines, providing related support, training, and maintenance services.

"As objectively speaking as I can be, it seems like the German and Japanese brands take development, reliability, and consistency more seriously," Rosales said. "In our experience in the market, we've seen competitors in the U.S., Germany, Japan, and China, and the more reliable brands tend to be made in Germany and Japan."

Rosales recommends seeking referrals and checking online forums free of manufacturer bias, even places like Facebook or Reddit, for customer complaints and recommendations.

"Educate yourself as much as you can, and check out multiple sources,



Images courtesy of Hirsch Solutions

especially competing distributors and brands, and get their stories," Rosales said. "Talk to actual customers, embroiderers, as opportunities arise."

Those conversations are important, since there are many factors to consider, said Josh Welch, applications team manager for Melco in Westminster, Colorado.

"Before buying an embroidery machine, consider factors like reliability, sew field size, ease of use, and ongoing maintenance needs," Welch said. "Ensure the machine can handle your expected production volume without compromising quality or efficiency."

Ed Levy, vice president of technology for Hirsh Solutions in Huntersville, North Carolina, suggests choosing that quality over price.

"There are a lot of machines entering the marketplace that focus solely on price and lack in quality components, training, and after-sales support. Investing in an embroidery machine is an investment in your future," Levy said. "One of the most important things to know is whether or not the embroidery machine is capable of performing the work that you need to perform. For example, if headwear will be an important portion of your business, ensure that the machine is capable of embroidering on caps."

Another tip is to compare the monthly payments for purchasing an embroidery machine to the amount of income that can be generated from the machine's use, for anything from polo shirts, jackets, caps, blankets, and T-shirts to patches and applique, Rosales said. An entry-level machine will cost less, but opting for that higher quality often does not make a big difference in the monthly payment, he said.

"Look at the fee structure for larger designs — your embroidery fee — and how that breaks down profitability," Rosales said, adding that the main cost is the embroidery blanks bought wholesale, not the cost of the machine. "The more sales you do in a month, the smaller the difference in monthly payments for your machine versus a higher-end machine — that difference is small."

A larger equipment investment also means a more reliable, durable machine with a longer warranty and additional support. The machine typically will have more powerful motors, giving it the ability to sew on a wider range of materials and thicker





Images courtesy of Melco

and tougher substrates, such as one-fourth-inch leather and bulky hoodies, without any problems or degradation of quality.

Machine size

Another decision to consider is the size of the machine, such as single- or multi-head (two, four, six, eight, or 12), based on the anticipated order volume, Rosales said. He recommends starting out with a single-head machine to run samples or small orders.

A multi-head machine, alternatively, can handle large orders but of the same design for each order — a six-head machine would be able to handle six garments at a time, for example. One brand does different designs on the same machine, as Rosales pointed out, but it's no more convenient than having two separate machines, since it requires accommodating different drive systems and additional power and operational space.

"A retail shop or personalization-based items might warrant a single-head, while high-volume contract orders might require a six-, eight-, or 12-head machine," Levy said. "A single-head will always be one of a shop's most valuable machines as they are extremely versatile for small orders, repair work, or personalization. Regardless of growth, many embroidery companies rely on one or more single-head embroidery machines in their daily workflow."

A single-head machine typically can operate on household power of 110 to 120 volts, while a multi-head machine requires 220 volts in a commercial setup, but it's best to first consult with an electrician, Rosales said.

"If you're serious about a full-time embroidery business, starting with a full-size industrial machine is key," Welch said. "Smaller machines may be more affordable upfront, but they often can't keep up with growing demand. For established shops, a multi-head or module system is a great option that can scale with your business, supporting future growth. Entry-level, single-head machines are fine for learning and sampling, but they rarely generate enough production or profit long-term. Starting with the right equipment sets you up for scalability and success from day one."

As far as space, a single-garment machine can be operated in a home, since the footprint is small (about four square feet per head), plus there needs to be room for a table to fit the substrate into the hoops and to box up the final products, Rosales said, adding that the machinery also is quiet.

"One thing unique about the embroidery business is it scales up — one operator can run several machines at a time without penalty labor-wise. It scales up pretty well as long as you have the budget and space for it," Rosales said. "There are no dryers or chemical drains that other decorated apparel methods would require."

Supplies

Embroidery doesn't require a lot of supplies either, though a good quality thread is important, Rosales said. Other supplies include bobbins, backing, topping, scissors, nippers, oil, and a seam ripper or stitch remover.

"The commercial threads are able to withstand a higher tension and maintain a consistent tension," Rosales said. "Most established brands out there all work."

Also important is the stabilizer, which is the piece of material placed behind the shirt or other substrate to counteract shifting and distorting as the machine moves over the substrate. The result is stitching that's reliable and consistent and that has clarity.

"Most embroidery machines include a basic starter kit with hoops and essential accessories, but you'll need additional supplies to get started," Welch said. "Try to find a reputable supplier that stocks all these items to cut down on shipping costs. Choose quality materials from a reputable supplier to ensure professional results."

Hoops are an attachment that holds the garment securely in place, stretching it taut to prevent puckering during the stitching of the design. Specialty clamps and frames are also used for materials that are bulky or

unusually shaped to hold them in place, such as bags, gloves, shoes, and belts.

"Hooping garments flat on a table can be slow and inconsistent, while a hooping station ensures faster, more accurate results, especially as production increases," Welch said.



Images courtesy of Melco

Maintenance

In addition to getting the right supplies, embroidery machines need routine maintenance, primarily oiling and cleaning, typically on a six-month or annual cycle.

"Most manufacturers provide a preventative maintenance schedule," Levy said. "Ongoing preventative maintenance will help prevent costly repairs."

That includes regularly oiling the hook, as well as the other oiling points as recommended by the manufacturer, and keeping the machine clean from dirt, dust, and any type of spray adhesive, Levy said.

"Having a technician visit and perform an annual tune-up is always a great idea," Levy said. "This will help protect your investment and increase your profitability by having a machine that performs at optimal levels."

Any worn consumable parts should be replaced, and critical measurements should be checked to keep the machine running at peak performance, Welch said.

"Proper adjustments not only extend the machine's lifespan but also ensure consistently high-quality embroidery," Welch said. "Additionally, try to keep the machines themselves as clean as possible. Dirt and debris can stain garments and compromise your work."

Rosales recommends maintaining contact with the support department for any questions and being aware of parts that may no longer be available.

"Check to make sure things are good and tight, and if any parts need to be replaced," Rosales said. "Things may get knocked out of adjustment, but it's not hard to do yourself. A good, properly cared for machine can last 20 years."



Digitizing

Embroiderers can hire out or learn how to digitize the image or logo that's to be embroidered on the substrate. A digitizer has the skills and knowledge to translate the image into designs and draw the lines and shapes so that they are compatible with stitching. Different types of substrates may require different setups based on thickness and other features, such as a hat or hoodie — they also may need alternative needle types, hooping devices, or stabilizers to perform the stitching.

Rosales recommends outsourcing the digitizing step, at least initially, since there isn't an ROI of doing it in-house, given the amount of time it takes and the fact that the job can be hired for less overseas, he said. Plus, trained digitizers understand how to achieve consistent quality on different types of materials, such as a shirt versus a hoodie, and can provide a quicker turnaround time.

"Digitizing is an acquired skill. You don't take a training class and then all of a sudden produce world-class designs," Levy said. "However, you need to provide your customer with a high-quality design from day one."

Levy recommends that embroidery software purchases include digitizing capabilities in case it's brought in-house. They can include features like scaling, recoloring, merging designs, and adding text.

"You can still outsource most designs but do simple designs, or as your skill progresses, do a small portion of the digitizing, especially if it means that you can provide better service to your customers," Levy said. "Having digitizing capabilities helps provide a faster ROI than only having a lettering or editing system."

Continuing education

Finally, Rosales recommends that embroiderers be open to education and learning about new technology. This includes learning about aspects of the embroidery machines, as well as how embroidery is created, even using digital education as a primary source. High-quality and more established brands include a training program with the purchase of the machine, he said.

"At the beginning, take in as much education as possible," Rosales said, recommending beginner, then maintenance classes. "Be aware of what you need to know, even if you can't learn it all at once."

He concluded, "User interfaces are getting better. Prices have fallen, and the quality and user-friendliness of the machines and software have gone up." **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.

Printing the West

Stetson at Stagecoach

By Lon Winters



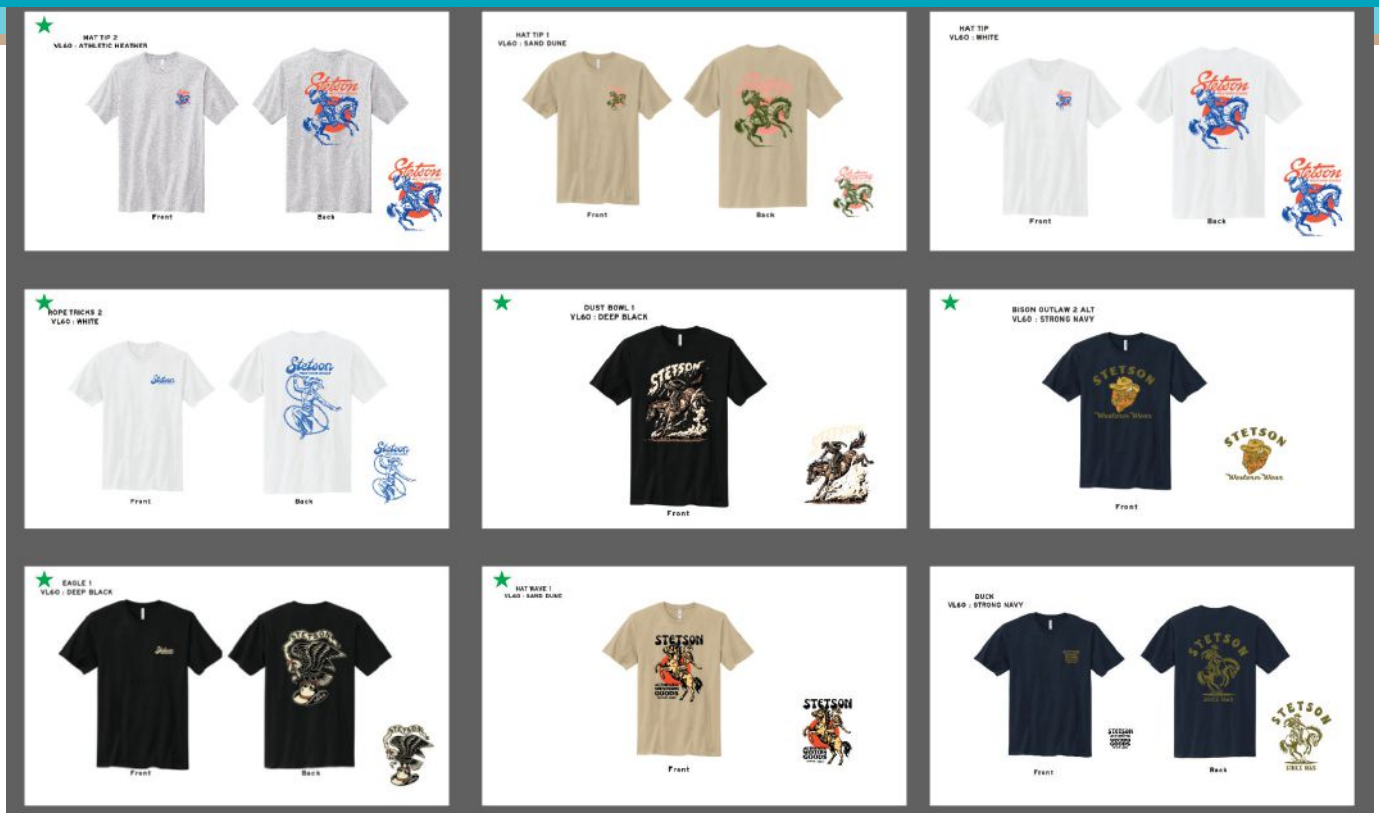


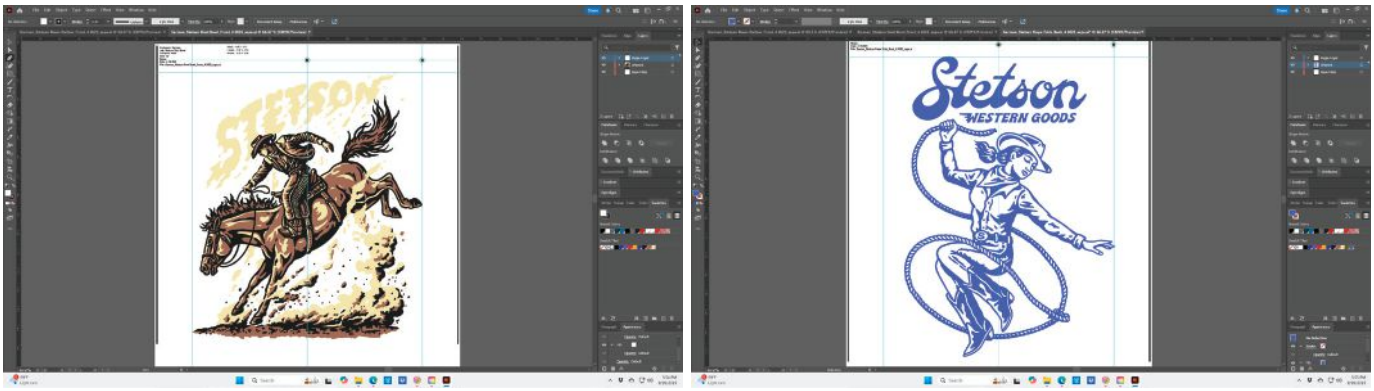
Images courtesy of Lon Winters

Out West, where the horizon seems endless, we like to say there are two kinds of music: country and western. Twice a year, thousands of boots walk the grounds in Indio, California, for the Stagecoach Festival. Stagecoach is all country: fiddles, guitars, and honky-tonk attitude. Launched in 2007, it is one of the largest country music festivals in the nation. Stagecoach isn't just a festival — it's a cultural experience where western brands are part of the whole scene. What we wear matters as much as what we hear.

That's where Stetson comes in. A brand with over a century and a half of history, Stetson is woven into the fabric of the American West. Founded in 1865, their cowboy hat has become synonymous with the West. Cowpokes, officers, ranchers, country boys and girls, politicians, and ordinary Joes have worn the Stetson crown. Stetson has become a cultural icon worn by actors, at rodeos, and by country music stars for decades. Being from Colorado and the West, we've been working with Stetson for over 30 years now, and when they approached us with a project tied to Stagecoach, we were in. We would need to create shirts tough enough, stylish enough, and authentic enough to stand alongside official festival merchandise, but distinctly Stetson. Quantities weren't huge at about 288 shirts per style, but this wasn't about big production numbers. It was more about representing the brand and the West.

The first requirement was nonnegotiable. A heavyweight, 100% cotton, American-made T-shirt. Makes perfect sense. No thin, fashion forward,

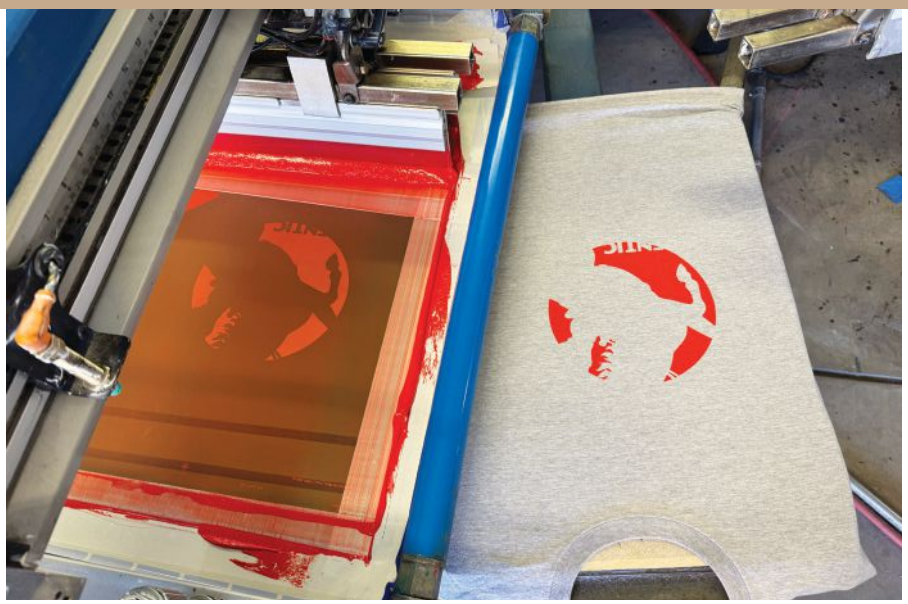


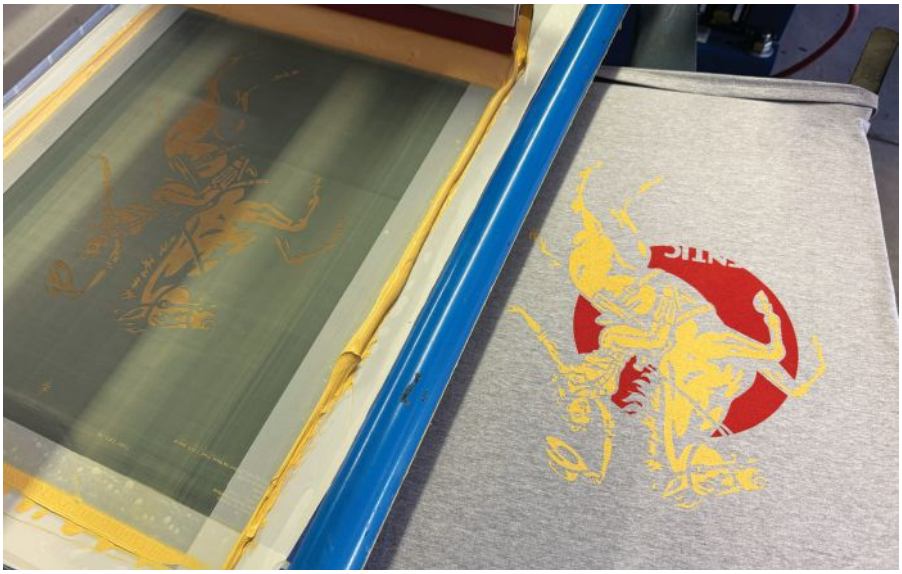


tapered, or fitted cuts would do. Stetson wanted a classic heavyweight that felt sturdy and would hold up to the country way of life. Their vision centered on these heavy tees with oversized prints. While nothing extended beyond our standard pallet size, the designs required longer print strokes with edge-to-edge squeegee and flood widths. Once the garment selection was finalized, we arranged overnight delivery to get blanks as quickly as possible. From there, the team went to work on the art.

When the files landed in our inbox, we knew we had work to do. The concepts were straightforward and solid as always — Western motifs and characters on bucking broncs — but the files were low resolution JPEGs. At best, they looked like mockups for a PowerPoint presentation — because that's what they were. We loaded the images into Adobe Illustrator for redraws. Each file was placed on a locked layer. After reducing the









transparency to about 20%, these served as rough sketches or templates. From there, we began the painstaking work of reconstruction. The Pen tool was the go-to. Click, drag, adjust the points and handles, repeat. Every curve, every arch, and every outline was redrawn point by point. We tried some auto trace, but with so many rough edges, it just didn't work. Every design was built in spot colors and individual layers and pretty much separated into colors. There would be no white printers or base plates on this project as we wanted the inks to print transparent and allow the shirt color to influence the final colors. Perhaps this was a mistake — I'll explain later.

A key request was for a soft, smooth feel and drape across all the designs. For the lighter garments, higher mesh counts ranging from 228 to 272 tpi to minimize ink deposit were chosen. Most inks were cut 50% with curable reducer to improve feel. On the dark garments, to prevent fibrillation, we chose 205 to 228 screens and we relied on our Teflon smoothing screens. This ensured a clean, smooth surface even with a little heavier ink deposit. The combination of mesh selection, ink modification, and smoothing techniques allowed us to deliver consistent, quality results across all nine styles.

After exposure and development, we checked the screens under a









loupe for pinholes and resolution. Here's where one design threw us a curveball: even though we'd traced the bulk of the artwork, some of the background had been auto-traced to save time. The result? Noise. When we looked closely at the screen, dozens, hundreds, thousands of tiny pin holes sat outside the image area. We hadn't noticed this on the computer screen. The fix was an old-school one using a brush and blockout.

Color choice was important as well. Stagecoach isn't neon lights — it's more dusty and faded earth tones. The goal was a set of inks that felt as though they'd been around as long as the brand itself, rugged but not tired. See what we did there?

The shirts were certainly heavier than lightweight blanks, so off contact was increased slightly to accommodate the thicker fabric. Print sequence began on most following the print order rules, so to speak, each beginning with the least amount of coverage and darkest to the most coverage and lightest colors. Strategic flashing was used to keep the colors bright enough on darker fabrics. Triple-ply dual durometer 65/90/65 squeegees were used almost exclusively for a clean ink deposit at a deliberate speed with minimal pressure.

The inks sank into the cotton and gave the prints a soft hand and a weathered authenticity. We did, however, have to run a couple of designs around twice, as some of the inks were just not opaque enough on the dark fabrics. If you recall, no white printers — poor choice.

Stagecoach is more than a festival. It's a statement that country music and western style are alive and well. Stetson, with its roots stretching back to the mid-1800s, fits that stage perfectly. Their hats have been worn by legions of famous folks. Now, their shirts walked the festival as part of that authenticity — wearable pieces of Stetson's history and Stagecoach's present. **GP**



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









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7 exit strategies

for embroidery & apparel decoration business owners

The exit you don't want to think about

By Jennifer Cox

As business owners, we spend so much of our energy thinking about how to grow our companies. We think about new equipment, finding more customers, and better ways to manage production. We'll spend unbelievable amounts of time agonizing over thread choices, but when I ask about an exit strategy, all I get is a blank stare. Very few pause to think about how to eventually step away from the business for even a vacation, much less in a more permanent fashion such as retirement.

The truth is that your business exit plan is as important as your startup plan. Whether you're five years from retirement or 25 years from it, the earlier you prepare, the more options you'll have. I can tell you with 100% certainty that without a plan, it is unreasonable to expect that exiting your business will fund your retirement.

In my 29-plus years working with embroidery and apparel decoration business owners, I've watched far too many talented entrepreneurs build incredible shops, only to stumble when it comes time to retire or begin a new chapter of life. I've seen every type of exit. Some were highly profitable and smooth. Others were stressful, messy, and left money on the table. Some protected employees, some did not. Some were clean and immediate; others stayed on as consultants or employees to smooth the transition to new owners.

Here's what I know: Every single one of us will exit our business eventually. Whether it's retirement, health issues, family changes, or simply wanting to try something new, that day will come. The question isn't IF you will exit the business, it is how, when, and most importantly, whether you will be well-prepared so that you can be well compensated.

After helping dozens of National Network of Embroidery Professionals (NNEP) members navigate their exits, I've seen what works and what doesn't. Some owners walked away with enough money to fund their next chapter comfortably. Others barely broke even or, worse, they went in the hole (or further in the hole) because they had to pay to get out of leases and contracts.



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The difference? Planning, and understanding your options. Here are seven exit strategies. Each has its place, and each comes with trade-offs.



Keep it in the family

This is the ideal dream scenario for many owners, passing the business to a son, daughter, or other family member. It feels like your legacy. Your name stays on the door, and all your years of hard work continue paying off for the people you love.

But here's what I've learned from watching family transitions: wanting to keep it in the family isn't enough. The family member must want the business, understand it, and be capable of running it so that it remains profitable.

I worked with a shop owner in Tennessee who was absolutely convinced that his daughter would take over. She worked summers in the shop during college, knew the basics of embroidery, and seemed interested. When it came time for the handoff, though, she admitted that she'd been going along with the plan to make him happy. What she really wanted to do was to use her marketing degree in an entirely different industry and not even stay in the area.

If you are considering this option, ask yourself: Does your family member genuinely want to run this business? Do they understand the sometimes long hours, the pressure of rush orders, the equipment headaches, and the importance of customer and information management? Can they handle the financial responsibility for themselves, much less for the staff?

Can they afford to buy you out, or will you need to finance the deal? If you carry the loan, your retirement depends on their ability to succeed. When family transitions work, they are a thing of beauty. When they don't work, they can damage relationships that matter more than any business.



Sell to your team

Your key employees already know your customers, understand your processes, and have relationships with your vendors. In many ways, they are ideal buyers for your business. I've seen this work particularly well in shops in which the owner has created a strong management layer. The customers barely notice the change because they continue working with their same account managers and the production staff they've always known.

The challenge is that being an excellent embroiderer or a great customer service rep doesn't automatically translate to being a qualified business owner. Running the books, managing cash flow, making production schedules, and handling insurance and staffing issues requires different skill sets entirely.

I worked with one shop owner who sold the business to her production manager. The woman was an incredibly talented machine operator and had great relationships with many of their customers. But she'd never handled business finances or dealt with the stress of making payroll during slow months. The original owner ended up staying involved in the day-to-day operations much longer than she'd planned, essentially mentoring her replacement through the first two years of ownership.

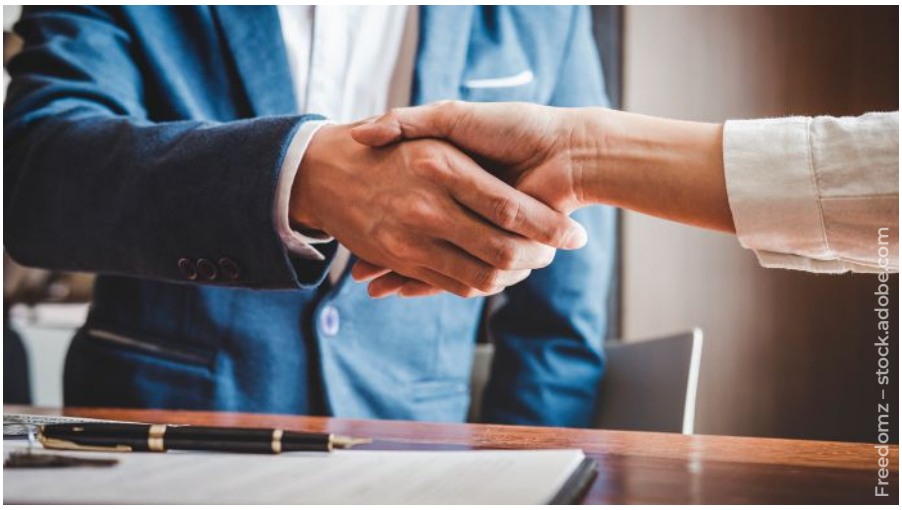
If you're considering this route, start preparing your team early. Get them involved in business decisions. Let them see the financial side. Give them leadership responsibilities. You'll quickly identify who has an interest in and aptitude for ownership. These sales often work best when the business is already profitable, and the staff has proven themselves. It is typical for employee buyouts to involve seller financing, which means you'll be receiving payments over time rather than a lump sum. Make sure that you are comfortable with that arrangement and that the terms of the sale protect you if things go sideways.



Sell to a competitor

This can be one of the most lucrative exit strategies, but it requires careful navigation. Competitors often pay premium prices because they value your customer relationships, contracts, and standing in the community. They might also want your equipment, your location or your online assets, such as your business website, phone number, and email address.

Before you share sensitive business information, protect yourself with a solid nondisclosure agreement. And be very clear about what they're buying and what they plan to do with it. Are they buying your business to expand their capacity? To eliminate competition? To acquire your customer



list? Their answer affects everything, from the valuation of your business to what happens to your employees.

I've seen competitor sales where the entire staff was retained, and the shop continued operating under new ownership with minimal disruption. I've also seen deals where the buyer immediately consolidated operations, closed the acquired location, and laid off most or all the staff. If protecting your employees matters to you, and it usually does, negotiate those protections into the sale agreement. It is not smart to assume that good intentions and verbal promises will carry the day. Those promises will not buy you or your staff a single cup of coffee unless they are backed up in the paperwork.

One advantage of competitor sales is speed. They understand the industry, know what your equipment is worth, and can move quickly through due diligence. If you need to exit fast, this might be your best option.



Find a private buyer or investor

Sometimes the best buyer is someone completely outside the industry who sees your business as an investment opportunity. These buyers are typically looking for steady cash flow and businesses that can operate without heavy owner involvement.

This is where those systems and processes I'm always preaching about become crucial. If your business can't run without you making every decision, outside investors won't be interested. But if you've built documented procedures, trained reliable staff, and established recurring revenue streams, your business becomes much more attractive.

Private buyers often expect seller financing arrangements. They'll want you to stay involved during the transition period, sometimes for as little as six months or for as long as up to two years. Make sure you are comfortable with these expectations before you start down this path.

I worked with a promotional products distributor who sold to a small investment group. The new owners kept all the staff, maintained all the customer relationships, and the original owner stayed on as a paid consultant for 18 months. It was a smooth transition that worked well for everyone involved.

The downside is that private buyers may not understand the nuances of our industry. They might make changes that hurt customer relationships or try to cut costs in ways that damage quality. Again, if you care about what happens after you leave, build protections into your agreement.



Consider private equity or industry consolidators

This is where things get interesting, and potentially very profitable. Private equity groups and industry consolidators have been actively buying embroidery shops, screen printing businesses, and promotional products distributors.

These buyers typically target larger operations ($2 million-plus in annual revenue.) Smaller shops can sometimes fit into their consolidation strategies, especially if you are in a desirable market or have unique capabilities.

What they care about most is EBITDA — earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization. If your financial records aren't clean and your numbers aren't solid, you won't even get a meeting. If you do not know what all those terms mean in your business, this is probably not a viable option for you.

However, if your financials are strong, these deals can be very lucrative. I know a handful of business owners who received multiples of what they thought their business was worth because they filled a very specific gap for the buyers.

The trade-off is typically a long-term commitment. Many private equity deals require you to stay involved for three to five years under an employment agreement. Part of your payout may be tied to future profits. If you want to walk away immediately with the full purchase price in hand, this may not be the right option for you. If you are willing to stay involved and you're confident in your business's growth potential, private equity can deliver returns that make the commitment worthwhile.



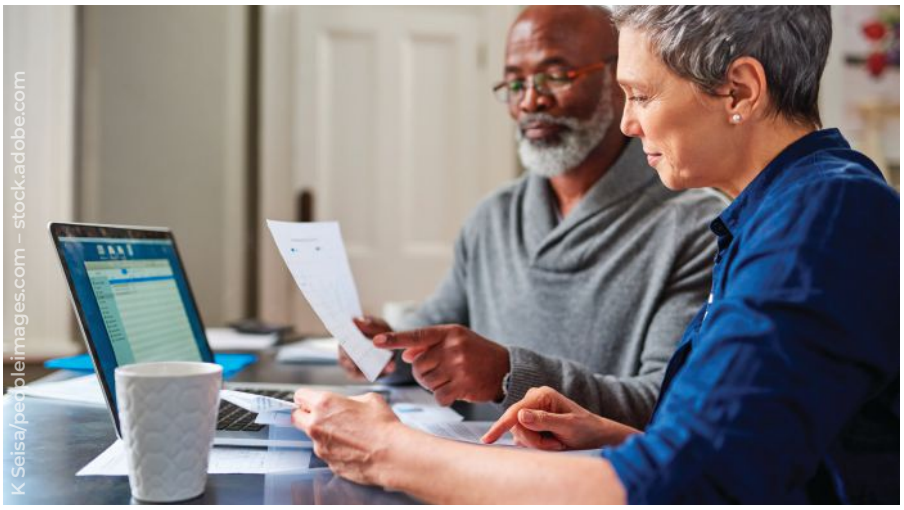
Join forces with another business

Merging isn't exactly an exit strategy; it is more of a pre-exit strategy. Instead of selling outright, you combine your business with another business to create something stronger and more valuable. I've seen successful mergers between embroidery specialists and screen printers, between promotional products distributors and decoration shops, and between businesses in complementary geographic markets.

Once merged, your combined operations often have lower costs, better buying power, and can offer customers more solutions. The merged business might be more attractive to eventual buyers and bring a better sale price. Mergers are complex, however. You're not just combining assets — you're combining cultures, management styles, and customer relationships. Both ownership teams need to agree on leadership roles, operational decisions, and long-term strategy. You will need to share control, and that often is the biggest challenge after being the only one in charge for so long.

I worked with two shop owners who merged their operations three years before they planned to retire. The combined business was much stronger financially and operationally. When they eventually sold to a private equity group, they received significantly more than they would have selling individually.

If you're considering a merger, start with someone you trust and respect. Get legal help to structure the arrangement properly. And be prepared for a learning curve as you figure out how to work together effectively. It is not for the faint of heart, and may test you and your partners, and the new dynamics that you have added to your business. This option doesn't give you a clean exit right away, but it can be a smart step if you want to increase value before selling down the road.



7 Shut down & liquidate

Sometimes, the cleanest exit is simply to close the business and sell off your assets. This typically brings in less money than selling the business as an ongoing operation. It is clean, straightforward, and final. Closing the business makes sense when your business is heavily dependent on your personal relationships and skills, when your equipment is outdated, or when market conditions make finding a buyer challenging.

You will still need to handle any outstanding loan or lease obligations, complete pending orders, and manage the tax implications of the sale of the assets. Once it's done, it's done. You are not carrying notes, you are not worried about whether the new owner will succeed, and you are not tied to the business in any way.

For some owners, liquidation is disappointing. I've also worked with owners who felt relieved after shutting down. They were ready to close that chapter of their lives and move on to something completely different.

Start planning now

Here's my bottom-line advice: Start thinking about your exit strategy today, even if retirement feels light-years away. The stronger and more systemized your business is, the more options you will have when that time comes. There's no single best way to exit a business. The right choice depends on what matters most to you.

Clean up your financial records. Document your systems, processes, and procedures. Train your team so that they can run the shop without you. Build recurring revenue relationships with your repeat customers. The work you do now to improve your business will pay returns now in a more well-run organization, and then again when you are ready to leave. I've seen too many talented shop owners scramble, accepting less than they deserved because they waited too long to plan. Don't let that be your story.

At NNEP, we regularly discuss exit planning strategies and connect members with resources to help them prepare. Ultimately, a successful exit is just as important as a successful business, it is how you secure the future you have worked so hard to build. Email me at jennifer@nnep.com and I will send you an exit strategies checklist to help you evaluate the options.

Whatever path you choose, make sure it aligns with your values, your financial needs, and your vision for your next chapter. Your business has been a lot of hard work. Your exit should honor that investment and ideally set you up for whatever adventure comes next. If you have not done anything to prepare your business so that you can turn it into some other sort of value, like retirement money, it is not reasonable to think that is how you will fund the next phase of your life, whatever that may be. **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.



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How to engrave a framed mirror

Setting up an unusual gift

By John Morman

Unusual or unique gifts can be a good way to encourage retail sales, particularly during the holidays. I'm going to be describing how to produce a framed, engraved mirror. As always, this description follows how I do it on my machines.

Frame prep & engraving

This is obviously a two-step process, and I'll start with the frame. There are several good suppliers who provide consistently high-quality frames and mirrors, and you might find different frames in local stores. As a small business owner myself, I'm a great believer in supporting other local small businesses, so please don't forget to check out your neighbors to see if they can help. Remember, though, the mirror must fit the frame.

When you have the frame, remove the easel backing and the glass. The glass can be reused for different projects if you wish. Remember, the mirror is going to be thicker than the photograph or picture the frame was designed to hold. The easel backs on the frames I use have rotating tabs that fit into a slot in the frame. The slot will have to be modified to allow the easel to be secured over the mirror. A hobbyist's rotating tool can be used, or a narrow hobby knife will also work. Whichever you use, be very careful when widening the slot because taking off too much will cause the frame to crack when you secure the tab. Try the mirror in the easel back, being careful not to force the tabs into place. If necessary, gently take out a little more from the slot.

When that is done, you can work on the engraving. The work I do almost always requires a graphic in two of the corners, if not all four corners. Create your template and measure the frame to get both the outside and inside dimensions. Create a rectangle or square at the corners. This will give you the area to place the graphic. You can also insert text into the graphic, usually centered on the top or bottom side of the frame.

Note: I've also seen graphics that cover the entire frame. I've never been asked to do this, but it does produce an interesting effect. Maybe I should try it!

When the graphics are situated, place the frame on the machine bed, focus



Images courtesy of John Morman.

the machine, and run the graphic. After one pass, I lower the bed by between .125" and .25". The second pass provides a virtual 3D image, which I think enhances the appearance. When done, clean the frame and set it aside.

Mirror engraving

Now to the mirror. Take the measurements of the mirror, remembering to take the chamfered edge — if the mirror has one — into account. Then prepare the graphic. You'll be engraving through the silvering on the back side of the mirror. You will be able to produce some shading using grayscale if the graphic is editable. If you're working with a photograph, producing the image is a little more complicated. There are several products on the market that allow you to work with photographs. Personally, I have enjoyed more success by converting the photograph to a bitmap and then making adjustments to the shading using the tone curve tool in my software.

I'm not, in any way, suggesting you shouldn't look into photograph engraving software — I'm simply saying that I am happy with the results obtained using the process I have described. If your software does not provide a means of editing bitmaps, you may be able to adjust shading, or you may have to obtain the appropriate software if working with photographs is going to be a regular occurrence or something you want to offer as a service to customers.

Once the graphic is ready, remember to reverse the graphic to create a mirror image. (Sorry for the pun, but it works in this instance.)

Place the mirror with the silvered image facing up. If the mirror has a chamfered edge, it may be difficult to align the mirror properly. To assist with these cases, I have made up "bumpers" or materials that are square and perpendicular to the bed. Using double-sided tape, I secure the bumpers to the rulers on the bed, making sure they are even. Then you can place the mirror up against the bumpers. To avoid scratching the face of the mirror, I use a piece of paper to lay the mirror on. If you've tried to create shading, remember not to set the power too high. Start with the usual setting for glass and reduce the power. If you have a spare mirror, you can try a test run. If not, then experience will tell you which settings work best.

With the mirror on the bed, dampen a piece of paper sized to cover the area to be engraved. I don't usually advocate using too much water, but you don't want the paper to dry out too quickly and have the paper fly off and interfere with the laser beam. Again, experience will tell you whether to run a second pass, at reduced power, to improve the image. It is possible to make a second pass, but don't move the mirror. The slightest misalignment will ruin your work.

When you've run the piece, wash off the back of the mirror. Depending on what kind of paper you've used, some residue can stain the engraved pieces. Newspaper can be especially dirty, but don't worry. A careful washing, using some dish soap, can clean the mirror. When done, remember to dry the mirror completely before placing it inside the frame and securing it.

Now your piece is done, and you've created a unique gift. Good luck! GP



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



Images courtesy of Polaris Custom Awards

An introduction to deal toys & markers

These items can be a big win for your clients & your shop

By John Hathaway

When you hear "deal toy," your mind might go to something whimsical or playful. But in the world of finance, a "deal toy" is anything but a toy — it's a custom, commemorative piece that marks a significant business transaction, like an M&A closing, a real estate deal, or a fund launch. Within the industry, many prefer the term "deal marker," because it better reflects the seriousness behind these high-stakes achievements.



So what exactly is a deal marker? And why should graphics professionals care? Let's take a look at this fascinating niche where creativity, craftsmanship, and recognition converge.

What is a deal toy/marker?

A deal marker is a physical, often custom-designed piece that celebrates a financial transaction. Think of it as part award, part keepsake, part branding tool. They're typically handed out by investment banks, private equity firms, law firms, and commercial real estate companies to commemorate a successful deal — similar to how a championship ring might celebrate a sports win.

Materials range widely: Lucite (acrylic) remains the most popular thanks to its versatility and clarity. But you'll also find pieces made from crystal, resin, wood, metal, stone, or even combinations of all the above. Some include embedded objects (like stock certificates or miniature models), while others lean minimalist and sleek. No two are exactly alike.

Why do companies commission these? The short answer? Legacy. In an increasingly digital world, closing a deal still happens face-to-face (or via a very real stack of signed documents), and firms want to mark the occasion with something tangible. A deal marker says: "This mattered. We did something big here."

For internal teams, it's a recognition tool. For clients, it's a gesture of appreciation. For the firm, it's part of brand identity — a physical reminder of their role in a high-profile transaction.

And make no mistake — these pieces often live in the lobbies, conference rooms, and executive offices of major firms. They're conversation starters. Reputation builders. Memory keepers.

Where graphics pros fit in

If your shop offers laser engraving, UV printing, or works with acrylic, crystal, or other award-grade materials, you may already have the skills and equipment to enter this market. In fact, many deal marker providers rely on the same techniques and tools you use to produce awards, signage, and promotional products.

The difference? A higher level of design customization and a deeper sensitivity to what's being celebrated.

For example, a crystal rectangle might be elevated with a custom 3D-etched skyline for a commercial



real estate closing. A Lucite block might include an embedded printed circuit board to represent a tech acquisition. The challenge — and the appeal — is in capturing the story of the deal.

Keys to success in this space

If you're thinking about exploring deal markers as an offering, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Storytelling matters:** Clients want the piece to reflect the transaction's identity — location, industry, deal value, or other symbolic elements.
- **Precision counts:** Many recipients are senior-level professionals, so quality standards are extremely high.
- **Timelines can be tight:** Closings don't always come with a lot of lead time. Streamlining your design and production workflow is essential.
- **Reorders are common:** A single deal may require five or 50 markers, depending on the size of the client base. Repeat business is part of the appeal.
- **Confidentiality is a must:** NDAs and discretion are standard. Your ability to protect client data becomes part of your value.
- **Experience adds up:** Many graphics professionals already have a solid foundation — whether it's laser engraving, 3D modeling, or working with complex materials. But there's no real substitute for hands-on experience managing these projects from concept to completion. You learn what works (and what doesn't) when you've gone through the entire process: capturing the essence of the deal, navigating production variables, and delivering a finished piece that exceeds expectations.





A market with meaning

The best part of working in this niche? You get to be part of moments that truly matter. A founder sells their company. A team closes its first billion-dollar deal. A firm celebrates the launch of a new fund. In a fast-paced world of numbers and negotiations, you're creating the object that makes the memory tangible. And that's the magic of a deal marker. It's not about the Lucite or the logo. It's about the moment.

Final thoughts

Deal markers occupy a small but meaningful corner of the recognition world. They sit at the crossroads of art, storytelling, and business achievement. And for graphics pros with the tools, creativity, and attention to detail, they represent an opportunity to serve a high-end clientele in a deeply rewarding way.

As the demand for personalization and physical storytelling continues to grow across industries, deal markers might just be the next great addition to your offering list. GP



John Hathaway is the Deal Toy Expert at Polaris Custom Awards, where he helps firms in finance, real estate, and beyond commemorate major transactions with custom deal markers. With over 25 years of experience in design and production, he's worked hands-on in Lucite, crystal, and resin manufacturing facilities across North America, Europe, and Asia.

What to read while you wait for GPX 2026

Happy holidays

from the GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (GPX) crew! We are thankful for your continued interest and involvement in the GPX show, and our team is even more excited for what we have in store in the coming year. As you plan out your 2026 travel schedule, keep GPX in mind. We're coming to a city near you and can't wait to see you there!

2026 GPX Schedule

Irving, Texas
March 12-14, 2026
Registration opens Dec. 12, 2025
Classes start March 11, 2026

Long Beach, California
Aug. 13-15, 2026
Registration opens May 15, 2026
Classes start Aug. 12, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio
Sept. 10-11, 2026
Registration opens June 12, 2026
Classes start Sept. 9, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina
Nov. 13-14, 2026
Registration opens Aug. 14, 2026
Classes start Nov. 12, 2026



While you're waiting for next year's shows, catch up on must-read content from some of our GPX partners and exhibitors on graphics-pro.com:

A guide to machine embroidery stitches
From GPX University's Jennifer Cox

Sell the holidays while it's hot
From GPX speaker Marshall Atkinson

5 questions with Wrapix Imaging & Wrapix Academy's Adam Sumner
By GRAPHICS PRO staff

From graphics to growth: Drive new revenue with promotional products
Webinar on-demand sponsored by ASI

Keep screen printing in your toolbox
From GPX University's Stan Banks

GRAPHICS|PRO EXPO

Returns next year...

Save the date in 2026!

- **Irving, TX**
  March 12-14, 2026
  Education starts March 11

- **Long Beach, CA**
  August 13-15, 2026
  with WRAPSCON
  Education starts August 12

- **Cleveland, OH**
  September 10-11, 2026
  Education starts September 9

- **Charlotte, NC**
  November 13-14, 2026
  Education starts November 12

For more information visit
g-p-x.com

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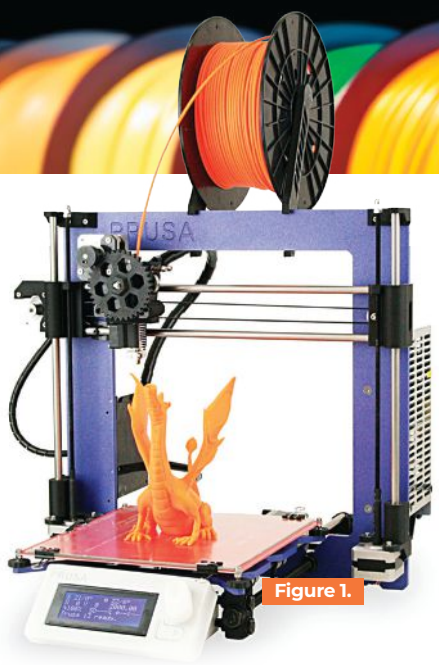


Figure 1.

The future in layers

Understanding 3D printing technology

By Stephen Romaniello

Conceived decades

ago, 3D printing has emerged in recent years as a production tool for industrial designers, medical technicians, and hobbyists. Nowadays, 3D printers range from inexpensive desktop home printers to multimillion-dollar giant industrial robots **(Fig. 1).**

Additive process

Another term for 3D printing is additive manufacturing. It is a process of making three-dimensional, solid objects from a digital file. The creation of a 3D printed object is achieved by depositing successive layers of material until the entire object is realized. Each layer is a thinly sliced horizontal cross-section of the whole object. As it is deposited, each layer is fused to the previous layer to build a solid structure. In this article, I'll describe four of the most common 3D printing technologies in use today. Since 3D printing is a kinetic process and can be a bit challenging to understand, I've included a basic schematic illustration of each system and links to videos that show the processes in action.

3D modeling

The basic principle of 3D modeling is structuring the surface of an object into polygons called vertices. Images of objects can be captured using a 3D scanner or generated in 3D software. The contour of the object, consisting of polygons is "mapped," and a virtual model is generated that can be reshaped and surfaced. The more polygons a model has, the more detail can be created. **(Fig. 2)**

3D printing begins by creating a virtual design in a 3D modeling program and saved as in a 3D specific format. An existing object can be scanned with a 3D scanner.

Modeling software includes tools that implement the design of three-dimensional models of objects or characters and often include supplemental features to flesh out models with realistic details. 3D modeling software and hardware can generate objects using tools and techniques that often include painting features to add textures and color.

Software that is used for 3D animation can also export to 3D printing compatible formats.

Several companies offer premade 3D models such as cars, furniture, human figures, and animals that can be downloaded and manipulated in a modeling program. **(Fig. 3)**

3D printer formats

The data of the completed model is exported to a printer compatible format that is configured so that 3D printer software can interpret the model into consecutive layers. The two most common file formats for 3D printing are STL and VRML. STL, or stereolithography, formats 3D rendered objects containing a single color. STL is typically used with desktop 3D printers. VRML (pronounced vermal) with a file extension of WRL stands for virtual reality modeling language. This 3D format enables color printing on desktop 3D printers with more than one nozzle that emit different colors.

Additive manufacturing file format (AMF) is an XML-based open standard for 3D printing. AMF supports multiple colors. AMF files use a compression scheme that reduces the file size of the document. GCode format contains detailed instructions for a 3D printer to follow for each slice, like the starting point for each layer and the path that the nozzle or print head will follow in laying down the material. Some 3D printers have proprietary formats that contain instructions for a specific make and model of printer and the printer's software. Fortunately, proprietary file formats are generated from STL or WRL files so that any software that can export to these common formats can be used to create the model.

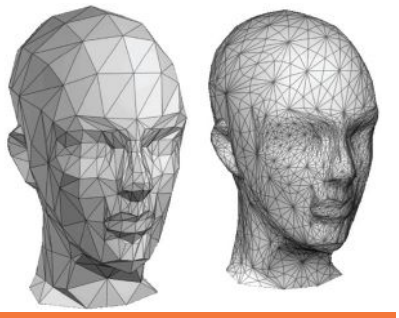


Figure 2. The basic principle of 3D modeling is structuring the surface of an object into polygons called vertices.

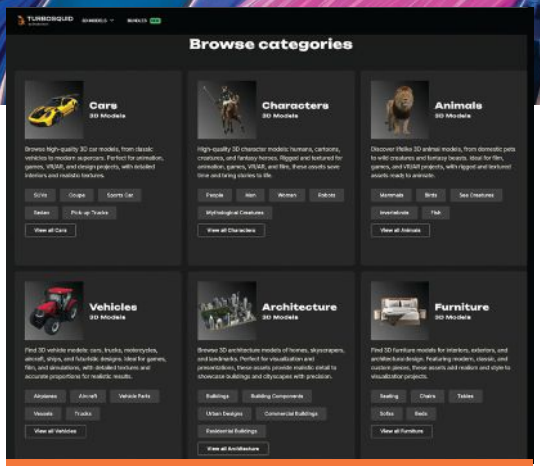


Figure 3. Several companies offer premade 3D models such as cars, furniture, human figures, and animals.

Slicing

After the 3D model is rendered, and to prepare a file for printing, the 3D modeling software "slices" the model into hundreds or thousands of horizontal layers. When the sliced file is uploaded, the printer software uses the sliced data to print each layer. It reads each slice and its path along the cross section and gradually builds the object, fusing each layer to the previous one. These layers are deposited in a material such as plastic or metal, by the printer's emitter heads and fused by a heating method or ultraviolet light.

Printing technologies

There are several 3D printing technologies, but they have one thing in common; they are all additive. That means that the material is built and not carved. They differ primarily in the way the material is deposited and how layers are fused together. What follows are descriptions of four of the most common 3D printing processes.

Vat photopolymerization stereolithography (SLA)

SLA uses a vat of liquid ultraviolet curable photopolymer resin to sequentially deposit material one layer at a time. **(Fig. 4)** It fuses the layers with an ultraviolet laser. The laser exposes a cross section of the object in the liquid resin to UV light, which cures and solidifies the pattern and fuses it to the layer below. After a layer has been traced by the laser, an elevator platform to which the object is attached, descends by the distance of the thickness of a single layer (0.05-mm to 0.15-mm). A resin-filled blade sweeps across the top-most layer and re-coats it with fresh material. On this new liquid surface, the subsequent layer pattern is traced, joining it to the previous layer until the complete three-dimensional object is formed. The object is then cleaned, to remove uncured resin, and may undergo post-curing under UV light for full strength.

Material jetting

In this additive process, two nozzles supply the material in tiny droplets just like a desktop inkjet printer. **(Fig. 5)** One of the nozzles builds the 3D object and the other builds a support structure that stabilizes the object. The material is deposited layer-by-layer and leveled with a leveling blade. The material is hardened by an ultraviolet curing lamp that follows the print head. Poly-jet technology (multiple jets) is used to print objects with multiple parts and colors.

Binder jetting

This technology uses two components; a gypsum-based powder which is a form of plaster, and a superglue-like binder. **(Fig. 6)** In the build chamber, a roller spreads a layer of powder over the build platform. A nozzle jets binder into the powder in the shape of the cross section of the object. It uses inkjet printer heads that are similar to an inkjet paper printer to jet the binder into the powder. Once a layer is printed, the build platform descends the thickness of a single layer, and the roller distributes a new layer of powder. The process is repeated until the entire object is built. When completed, the object is removed from the build chamber, and the excess powder is recycled. By coloring the binder, multiple colored 3D prints can be created. Binder jetting machines make good solid objects. Because they are essentially composed of plaster and glue, its use is limited to the creation of rigid parts.

Powder bed fusion selective laser sintering (SLS)

SLS uses a high-powered laser to fuse small particles of plastic, metal, ceramic, or glass powders into a 3D object. **(Fig.7)** The laser selectively fuses the powdered material by scanning the cross sections generated by the 3D modeling program on the

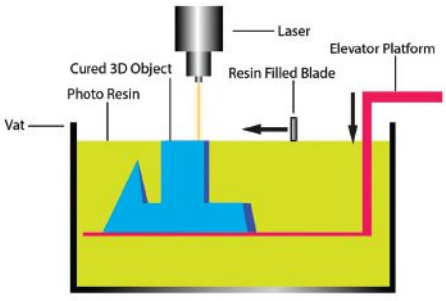


Figure 4. Vat photopolymerization uses a vat of liquid ultraviolet curable photopolymer resin to sequentially deposit material one layer at a time and an ultraviolet laser to fuse the layers together.

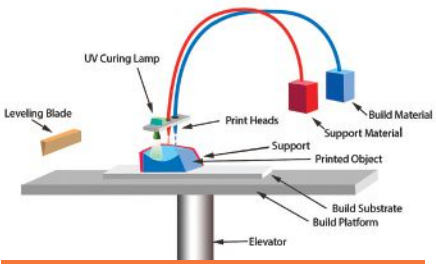


Figure 5. This material jetting schematic shows two nozzles on the print head — one for the 3D object and one for the support structure and a UV curing lamp that fuses the material.

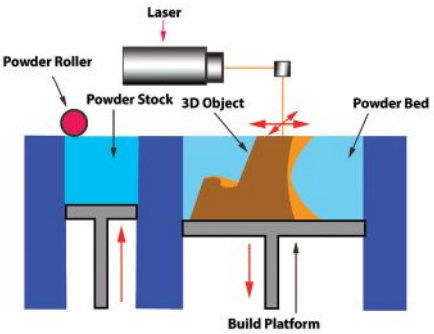


Figure 6. Binder jetting employs two components — a gypsum-based powder, which is a form of plaster, and a superglue-like binder.

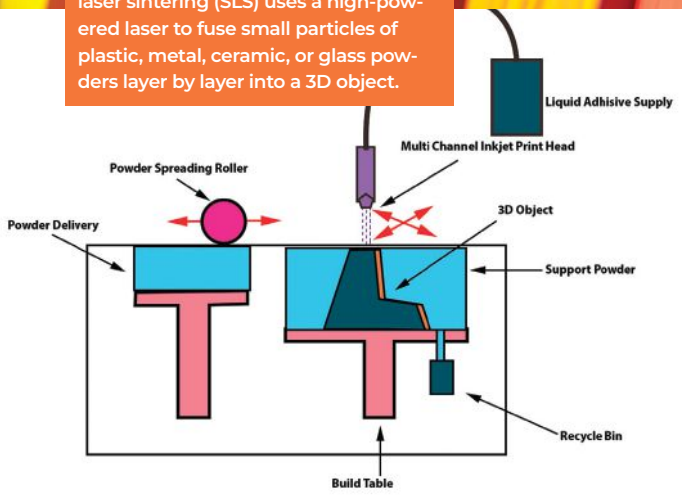


Figure 7. Powder bed fusion selective laser sintering (SLS) uses a high-powered laser to fuse small particles of plastic, metal, ceramic, or glass powders layer by layer into a 3D object.

surface of a powder bed, similar to binder jetting. After each pass, the powder bed is lowered by the thickness of one layer, then a new layer of powder is deposited on top with a blade. The process is repeated until the object is completed.

The surrounding untouched powder serves as a support structure for the object, eliminating the need for an auxiliary structure, which is an advantage over technologies like material jetting that build support structures as the object is being printed. Unused powder is recycled for the next print.

The 3D printing industry

3D printing technology is used across a wide range of industries because it allows for rapid prototyping, customization, and complex design fabrication that traditional methods cannot easily achieve. Here are a few examples of industries where additive manufacturing has become mainstream technology:

- **Manufacturing and engineering** for prototyping, to quickly produce and test design concepts prior to full production. Also, for tooling and jigs to create custom tools, molds, fixtures for assembly lines, and end-use parts for low-volume production of specialized components.
- **Aerospace and defense** to manufacture lightweight parts to reduce fuel costs and to easily produce objects with complex geometries such as turbine blades and ducts. It is also used for the rapid replacement of obsolete or mission-critical parts.
- **Automotive** for the rapid prototyping of design components, for custom tooling and fixtures, and for limited production runs
- **Healthcare and medical** to create custom prosthetics and implants specifically tailored to patient's requirements. It is utilized for printing surgical guides and anatomical models for planning complex surgeries and for bioprinting tissues and organs.
- **Architecture and construction** to produce detailed scale models of buildings and landscapes, for building 3D-printed houses and construction components with concrete printing, and to manufacture decorative and functional elements like facades or fixtures.
- **Consumer products** for the rapid iteration of design ideas and for creating customized items such as eyewear, footwear, jewelry, personalized gadgets, and home decor.
- **Art, design, and fashion** for sculptures, wearable art, stage props, complex geometric jewelry, and fashion accessories.
- **Dental** to precisely create crowns, bridges, dentures, and aligners.
- **Food** for culinary design of custom shapes, textures, and nutrition.

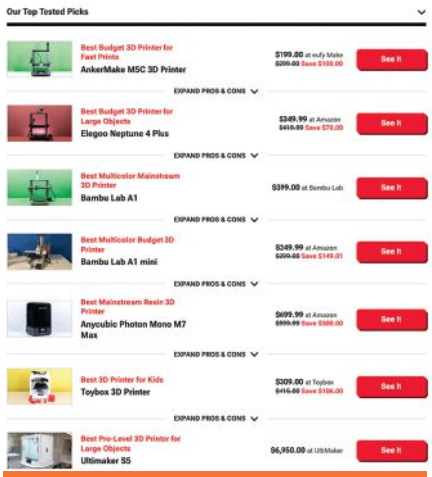


Figure 8. Because of the demand, the cost of a home-based 3D printer has dramatically decreased.

Personal printing

Domestic 3D printing for artists and hobbyists has seen a surge in growth over the past ten years. Because of the demand, the cost of a home-based 3D printer has dramatically decreased. Currently, prices range from $200 - $7,000. **(Fig. 8)** Printing 3D objects at home or in a studio on a small 3D printer that an artist scans with a hand-held scanner or designs in a 3D modeling program is very rewarding form of sculpture. Work of this kind can be seen in art galleries and museums.

3D printing technology has changed the nature of manufacturing, quite like 2D digital printing did in the 1990s. End users can manufacture parts for home repairs and the generate new objects at will. 3D printers are versatile with the ability to print objects with multiple colors, materials, and sizes. The effect of 3D printing on energy utilization, waste reduction, customization, product availability, medicine, art, industrial design, construction, and science is dramatic as this technology has been absorbed into the everyday workflow of industry. GP



Stephen Romaniello is an artist and educator who has taught graphics software for over thirty years. He is a certified instructor in several graphics and video software applications and the author of numerous books and articles on the creative use of graphics software. Stephen is the founder and CEO of GlobalEye Systems, a company that offers training and consulting in graphics software and creative imaging. He is also the founder of Fire Boy Productions, an art book publishing company.

Supplier Spotlight

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



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6Sign is a trade-only, large-format printer designed to help print resellers, sign shops, and marketing agencies grow their businesses efficiently. We focus on the priorities that matter most to trade professionals — affordable pricing, reliable quality control, fast turnaround, wholesale material supply, and exceptional customer service.

Trade pricing & strict quality

In the printing industry, both price and speed are critical. 6Sign optimizes production workflows and sources materials in bulk to provide the lowest trade pricing without sacrificing quality. Whether your orders include banners, yard signs, retractable displays, rigid boards, or posters, we ensure wholesale rates that protect your margins and keep your business competitive.

Quality is nonnegotiable. Every print undergoes strict quality control to guarantee sharp details, precise finishing, and durable products suitable for both indoor and outdoor use. Our premium materials — from vinyl and fabric to aluminum and PVC — are carefully selected to meet the high standards expected by trade professionals and their clients.

Fast turnaround time

Speed and efficiency are equally important. With fast turnaround times, most standard orders are ready to ship within 24 to 48 hours. Our streamlined online platform allows for easy artwork uploads, instant quotes, and smooth order management, enabling partners to meet tight deadlines with confidence.

6Sign also supplies high-quality printing materials at trade-only prices. Partners can purchase roll media, rigid boards, and adhesive vinyl directly from us, reducing costs while ensuring consistent results across every project. This makes it easy for print shops to handle both small custom jobs and large-scale campaigns without delays or quality concerns.

A standout feature of 6Sign is our dedicated customer service. Our knowledgeable team assists trade partners with everything from selecting the right materials and configuring custom sizes to troubleshooting orders and providing production guidance. Clear communication, prompt responses, and personalized support ensure that our clients always feel confident in their printing partner.

By combining low prices, strong quality control, fast turnaround, reliable materials, and excellent customer service, 6Sign has become a trusted partner for trade professionals looking to deliver outstanding results consistently. GP

6sign.com
sales@6sign.com
888-717-1666

Alpina Manufacturing, LLC



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

Alpina is creating jobs and keeping dollars in America. We work hard to provide outstanding quality, customer service, and affordable pricing. We are in our 100,000-square-foot building on 4 acres in Chicago with a dedicated production staff to serve your needs.

We use all American-made frame components and lenses. Our aluminum frames are made with an over 30% recycled content, and are produced under environmentally responsible manufacturing processes in the U.S.

We design, test, and build all our products in Chicago. We run a super-efficient operation to give you the best quality at low costs. Our employees are hard-working Americans, and our goal is to provide a great product at the lowest price.

We want your business. Help keep America strong and your dollars here!

Alpina makes an array of high-quality frame products:

- Flip-Up (snap) Frames with various rails sizes and colors.
- Slide-in Frames are designed to change graphics in 10 seconds.
- Banner Grip Frames sized from 4" X 4" to over 100' X 100'! (bannergrip.com)
- Banner Grip JR for trucks and buildings
- Banner GripFlip
- Acrylic Frames
- CloudLight LED Frames
- Ban45, a modern engineered, tested, patents pending, pivoting, pole or flat surface mounted banner system. Ban45 means it pivots 45 degrees to either side to deflect and redirect the force of high winds off the banner. (ban45.com)
- Gas Pump Frames (gaspumpframes.com)
- Hospital Patient Boards (hospitalpatientboards.com)
- Edge Grip Sign Holders
- SEG Fabric Frames and Fabric Snap Frames
- We also make Storms Snaps (window insulation for exterior or interior windows) at stormsnaps.com.

Alpina's president and owner, Darius Augustine, credits Alpina's 33 successful years to our exceptional customer service and that every order is custom made and inspected. "Alpina is a full capability manufacturer, we can make what you need!" GP

American Apparel



American Apparel is once again redefining the boundaries of blank apparel, evolving beyond timeless styles into a new era of elevated street-inspired pieces and lifestyle staples. With a legacy rooted in culture and creativity, the brand continues to invite makers, dreamers, and innovators to "Craft the Culture," offering a modern backdrop for bold self-expression.

For 2026, American Apparel introduces a new chapter of premium fabrics and forward silhouettes that reflect how people live, move, and create today. The latest French Terry Collection reimagines comfort with a luxe, contemporary edge — smooth on the outside, soft within, designed for statement-making versatility. Meanwhile, the return of Baby Rib revives one of the brand's most iconic textures, merging form and flexibility in sculpted fits that feel as expressive as they look. Completing the lineup, our Heavyweight Collection expands with new, boxier proportions and garment-dyed finishes, celebrating the raw authenticity that has defined American Apparel for decades.

Beyond product, American Apparel's world continues to collide with music, art, and street culture. Through our creative collaboration with Live Nation, we're going bigger in 2026 with the Ones to Watch program. We're taking over more stages, elevating more emerging artists, and offering exclusive capsule drops. It's more than apparel; it's a shared experience.

Each piece is crafted with intention: premium fabrications, timeless silhouettes, and a design language that honors individuality over imitation. Certified under OEKO-TEX Standard 100 and marked "Made with Respect," every style reflects a continued commitment to quality, sustainability, and craftsmanship.

In a landscape crowded with the temporary, American Apparel stands firm in what's timeless. Our 2026 collection reaffirms what has always set us apart: uncompromising quality, creative integrity, and a fearless approach to design.

Always iconic. Always evolving. Always American Apparel. **GP**

americanapparel.com
communications@gildan.com

Flexfit



At Flexfit LLC, we study comfort. We study performance. And through technology, we create better solutions for comfort perfection. As the U.S. distributor of Yupoong Inc. and a leading manufacturer of private-label headwear for industries worldwide, Flexfit has been at the forefront of innovation and craftsmanship for nearly five decades.

Since 1974, Yupoong has stood as a pioneer in the headwear industry — beginning with traditional roll-up hats and evolving into creators of advanced performance wear. This evolution reflects a continuous pursuit of excellence that defines the Flexfit brand today. For over 30 years, Flexfit has set the standard in comfort technology, revolutionizing the way hats fit, feel, and perform.

From timeless classics like adjustable trucker hats to the groundbreaking Flexfit stretch-fit cap, and now to our latest innovation, FLEXFIT NU, each milestone represents our dedication to performance-driven design and our promise to our clients and their customers. As trends, technologies, and lifestyles evolve, Yupoong and Flexfit remain committed to staying one step ahead — pushing boundaries in comfort and performance to create the perfect fit for every wearer.

With 50 years of expertise, Flexfit continues to learn, adapt, and innovate every single day. We never stop listening, improving, and striving to elevate experiences — for our partners and for the end consumers who wear our hats with confidence and pride.

Yupoong Inc. was founded on a simple but powerful belief: that innovation should serve people. Our mission has never been about producing the most hats — it's about creating better hats that uplift communities, inspire individuality, and redefine what headwear can be. Every stitch and seam carries our commitment to human experience and the endless pursuit of perfection.

Our journey began with a single vision: to revolutionize the headwear industry by creating caps that challenge convention. Guided by precision, craftsmanship, and creativity, we continue to develop products that combine technical excellence with thoughtful design. Open-minded and forward-looking, we place mindful engineering at the core of everything we do, resulting in an expanding portfolio of industry-defining headwear that influences global markets one cap at a time.

Innovation is embedded in our DNA. The original Flexfit cap, introduced in 1994, changed the headwear industry forever — offering a fit and feel unlike anything before it. From that foundation came Flexfit 110, Flexfit 210, and Flexfit Delta — each a testament to our ability to reimagine comfort and performance while maintaining timeless style. These innovations, along with our heritage YP Classics collection, illustrate our constant evolution and our refusal to settle for anything less than exceptional.

Today, Flexfit stands not just as a manufacturer, but as a partner in progress. We collaborate with brands and businesses worldwide, helping them express their identity through quality headwear designed for modern life. With every cap we create, we bring together technology, design, and a deep respect for craftsmanship — continuing our mission to perfect the fit, performance, and experience of headwear.

Because at Flexfit, we're not just making hats — we're shaping the future of how the world wears them. GP

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Los Angeles Apparel



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213-275-3120

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

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

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

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

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

MUTOH America



The XpertJet 1641SR Pro II is built for production speed and reliability. For print service providers looking to scale their operations without compromising on quality, MUTOH's latest release delivers exactly what the market has been asking for. The XpertJet 1641SR Pro II 64" eco-solvent printer combines enhanced speed, smarter workflow features, and the made-in-Japan reliability that MUTOH customers have come to expect.

Performance that moves your business forward

The XPJ-1641SR Pro II isn't just an incremental update, it's a significant leap in production capability. At the heart of this evolution is the newly developed MUTOH AccuFine HD Pro printhead, which delivers up to 60% faster print speeds compared to the previous model while maintaining superior dot placement and image quality. For high-volume shops running multiple jobs daily, this speed increase translates directly to improved throughput and faster turnaround times.

Complementing the faster printhead is an updated front dryer system that provides 20% improved drying capacity. By increasing surface contact with the print material, the enhanced dryer keeps pace with the printer's increased speed, ensuring that faster production doesn't create bottlenecks in your workflow.

Smart features for real-world production

Understanding that print shops often run extended jobs, MUTOH has equipped the Pro II with a smart take-up unit that automatically turns off the motor when no printing is occurring. This intelligent feature extends the motor's lifespan and gives operators peace of mind when running overnight jobs or large-format projects that span multiple hours.

The printer also includes MUTOH's full suite of advanced print technologies: i-screen optimizing technology reduces banding for smoother images, DropMaster2 automatically calibrates bidirectional alignments, Feed Master handles automatic media feed adjustments, and the Nozzle Area Select function keeps production moving even if clogged nozzles are detected. The Media Tracker system prints barcodes to track remaining media, eliminating waste and guesswork.

Versatile applications, eco-conscious ink

The XPJ-1641SR Pro II excels across a wide range of applications — from vehicle wraps and window graphics to banners, signage, decals, and tradeshow graphics. Its versatility makes it ideal for print service providers looking to expand their service offerings or shops that need one reliable workhorse to handle diverse customer demands.

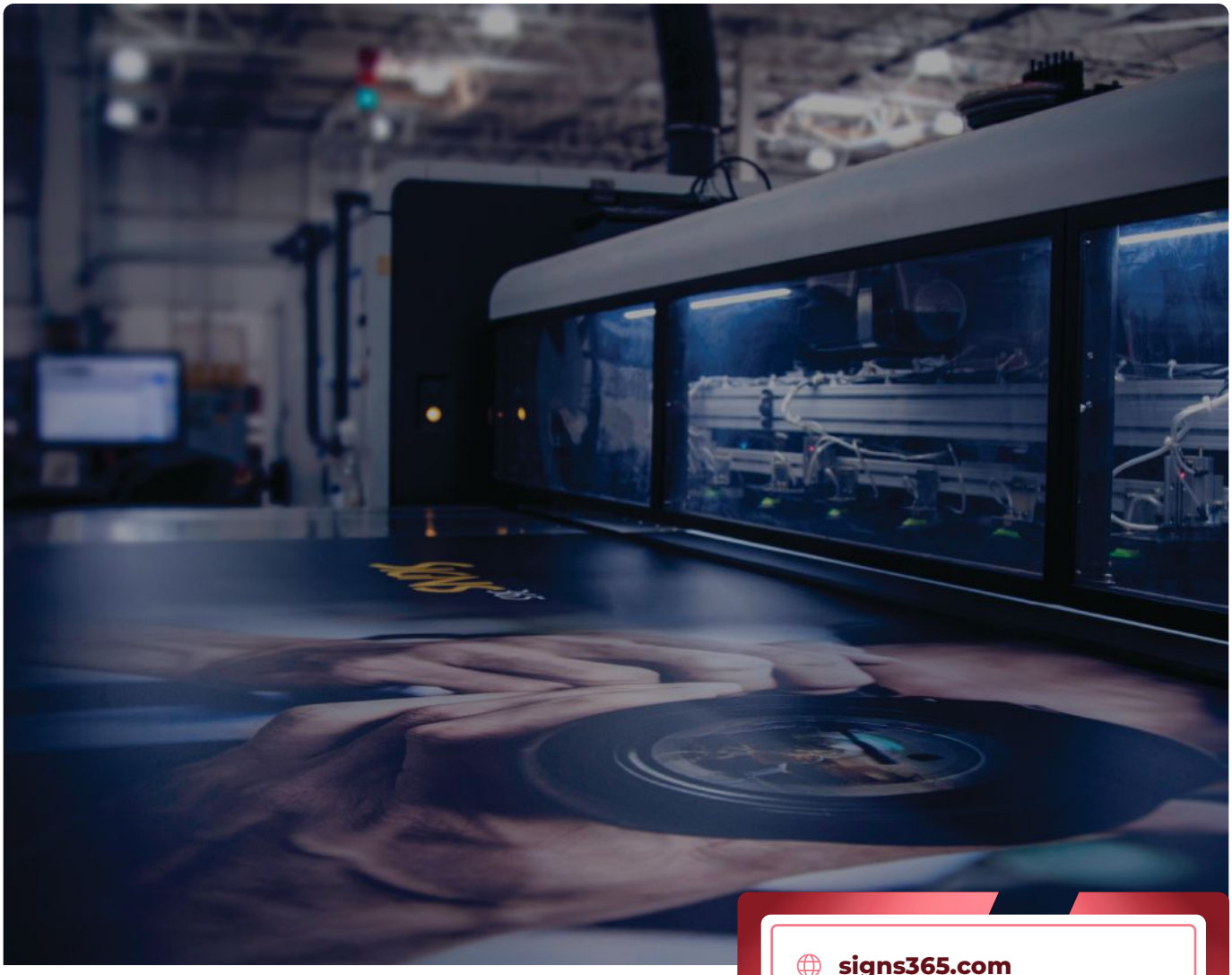
Running MUTOH MS41 Eco-Solvent ink, the printer meets GREENGUARD Gold certification standards for low chemical emissions. This certification makes it safe for use in sensitive environments like schools, healthcare facilities, and indoor commercial spaces — opening up additional market opportunities for print businesses. The ink delivers up to three years of outdoor durability when unlaminated.

Ready to run from day one

Every XPJ-1641SR Pro II includes MUTOH's VerteLith RIP software and a complimentary one-year subscription to SAi Flexi DESIGN MUTOH Edition — a combined value of $1,600. This complete software package ensures users have powerful design tools and advanced color management capabilities right out of the box.

The XpertJet 1641SR Pro II is available now through authorized MUTOH dealers. For shops ready to elevate their large-format signage capabilities with a printer built for both quality and production speed, this latest release from MUTOH delivers the reliability and performance needed to stay competitive in today's demanding print market. For more information or for a FREE print sample, please visit mutoh.com. **GP**

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STAHLS'





For more than 90 years, STAHLS' has helped decorators, brands, and businesses like yours bring ideas to life. From the earliest days of hand cutting felt athletic lettering to developing today's most advanced apparel decorating technologies, we make it possible for more decorators to print branded merchandise and turn creativity into opportunity.

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it." – A.C. Stahl. That forward-thinking spirit still drives everything we do today.

As the global leader in custom decorating technologies, we are the one stop shop for products and services designed to help decorators of every size succeed. From Hotronix heat presses made in the U.S. and precision engineered, to custom screen printed and DTF transfers, our solutions are built for speed, consistency, and professional results. Everything we do is made to simplify production and give decorators more ways to create without the added worry or stress.

STAHLS' gives you the tools, training, and confidence to make every order happen. We are the company trusted by the pros. At every level, we put players on the field and turn moments into memories, one piece of customized apparel at a time. Every STAHLS' product is safety certified, lab tested, and built to last, on the field and off.

We provide products, service, and education that ensure your success come first. We are proudly family owned and operated, headquartered in Michigan with manufacturing and fulfillment facilities across the globe. That means shorter lead times, more responsive service, and the dependable quality you can count on with every order.

Education is the foundation of everything we do. Through our YouTube channels, podcasts, webinars, live events, and hands-on training classes, you can learn new techniques, explore new markets, and gain the skills to build your brand. Whether you are just getting started or ready to expand, we are here to help you print more branded merchandise today.

Our team continues to innovate and push the industry forward with new technologies that make decorating easier and more creative than ever. Products like UltraColor MAX DTF transfers and LIQUID 3D dimensional emblems bring unmatched quality, texture, and detail to your designs, helping you stand out in a crowded market.

Through transparency and trust, everyone wins together. That belief drives how we work with decorators, distributors, and brands across the industry. We know success is built on shared goals and lasting relationships, not transactions. When you work with STAHLS', you gain a partner that understands your challenges, supports your growth, and celebrates your wins right alongside you.

More than a manufacturer or supplier, we are your partner in progress. With every press, transfer, and innovation, we help you work smarter, grow stronger, and decorate every order with confidence. **GP**

stahls.com
info@stahls.com
800-478-2457

STAHLS' Fulfill Engine







At the heart of STAHLS' commitment to innovation is Fulfill Engine, a connected ecosystem powering the next generation of print on demand. Built to simplify and scale custom apparel production, Fulfill Engine links decorators, distributors, and brands through one seamless digital platform that standardizes data, automates production, and enables orders to be fulfilled on demand in quantities as little as one.

Fulfill Engine's next-level technology unites the entire supply chain under one roof. Apparel suppliers, equipment manufacturers, and decorators work in sync through a shared workflow that eliminates manual processes and connects every step from online order to final shipment. For decorators, this means less time managing complexity and more time creating. For customers, it means faster turnaround, consistent quality, and total transparency.

Inside the new STAHLS' SF-1 Innovation Hub in Michigan, visitors can experience the full power of Fulfill Engine in action. The state-of-the-art facility was designed as both a production center and a live innovation lab — a place where automation, technology, and creativity come together to advance the future of apparel decoration. Multiple decoration methods run side by side, including direct to film, embroidery, laser engraving, UV printing, and LIQUID 3D, the patent-pending dimensional emblem technology exclusive to STAHLS'.

LIQUID 3D brings texture, color, and depth to branding like never before, creating premium raised logos made in the U.S., shipped and fulfilled in five days or less, and in quantities as little as one. This new logo technology delivers unmatched dimensional detail for headwear and accessories without the traditionally long lead times or overseas sourcing that limit high-end customization.

Combined with Fulfill Engine's automation and on-demand workflow, decorators can now offer elevated customization and more decoration methods without adding any equipment, overhead, or labor. It is a model built on collaboration and shared success — proof that when technology removes barriers, creativity can truly scale.

Through transparency and trust, everyone wins together. That philosophy extends beyond STAHLS' partners and customers to its internal teams, suppliers, and education network. From global apparel brands integrating Fulfill Engine into their e-commerce platforms to small businesses discovering on-demand production for the first time, the mission is the same: simplify the path from first idea to finished product and empower decorators at every level.

Together, Fulfill Engine, LIQUID 3D, and SF-1 showcase the STAHLS' vision for a smarter, more connected future where collaboration, creativity, and efficiency meet — and every order tells a story. **GP**

fulfillengine.com
info@fulfillengine.com

ColDesi





ColDesi is a leading provider of production equipment, software, and support solutions for the custom printing, promotional products, and decorated apparel industries. With more than 25 years of experience, the company has built its reputation by delivering practical, production-ready technology to businesses of all sizes.

Founded as an embroidery business, ColDesi has evolved into a comprehensive equipment supplier serving multiple segments of the customization market. Its portfolio spans direct-to-film (DTF) printing systems, UV flatbed printers, UV/DTF printers, embroidery machines, white toner printers, print and cut systems, and professional-grade heat presses. ColDesi also supplies workflow software, consumables, and automation tools, providing customers with an end-to-end solution that reduces integration challenges and improves production efficiency.

At the core of ColDesi's mission is its commitment to advancing production capabilities through innovation. The company holds numerous patents and continues to invest in automation, digital workflow integration, and equipment engineering. These advancements are designed to optimize throughput, minimize material waste, and maintain consistent output quality, essential factors for manufacturers operating in today's on-demand production environment. ColDesi's technology enables decorators, print providers, and fulfillment operations to meet shorter lead times, accommodate variable order sizes, and diversify product offerings without compromising precision or profitability.

Customer support and training are critical components of the company's value proposition. Every purchase includes a structured onboarding process, led by a customer care representative who ensures that new equipment is fully integrated into existing workflows. ColDesi's online training platform offers detailed, self-paced instruction on setup, operation, and maintenance, while live virtual and in-person training options provide deeper technical guidance. This multi-tiered approach is designed to shorten ramp-up time and equip production teams with the skills necessary to maximize machine performance from day one.

Ongoing support is delivered by an in-house technical team with direct access to every piece of equipment sold. This approach allows ColDesi to deliver fast, informed solutions to operational issues, including troubleshooting and application-specific assistance. With no outsourced call centers, customers receive direct, knowledgeable support from specialists who understand the realities of a production floor.

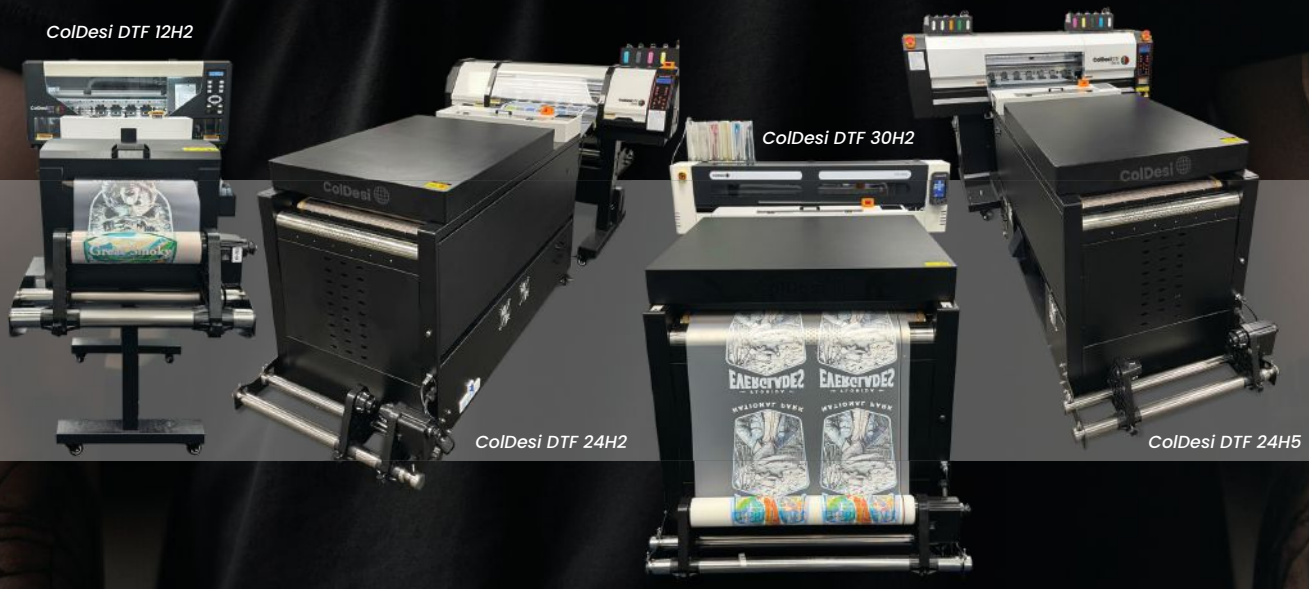
Beyond equipment and service, ColDesi acts as an educational resource for the industry. Its resource center offers articles, videos, and podcasts focused on production techniques, workflow optimization, business strategy, and market trends. Demonstrations, both virtual and at ColDesi facilities, provide an opportunity to see equipment in action under real production conditions.

Today, thousands of businesses worldwide rely on ColDesi's technology and expertise to power their customization operations. Through continuous innovation, reliable equipment, and comprehensive support, ColDesi enables decorators, manufacturers, and fulfillment providers to scale their capabilities, improve efficiency, and compete more effectively in a fast-evolving marketplace. **GP**

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Hanes



Hanes is turning 125! Since 1901, Hanes has been making everyday apparel known around the world for quality, comfort, and value. And in 2026, we're celebrating 125 years of being the brand you know and trust with styles your customers love to live in. As we look ahead, we're committed to offering the best in the printwear space by creating new silhouettes, innovative features, and in-demand shades that make it even easier for decorators to do what they love.

Starting in January 2026, all of our Hanes branded printwear apparel will be exclusively distributed through S&S Activewear. Ordering will be easy, as you'll have access to your favorite Hanes styles in plenty of colors and deep inventory, including the coveted heavyweight Beefy collection.

Fifty years ago, a legendary tee was born. In 1975, we saw that the T-shirts being used in the branded printwear world weren't getting the job done. That's why we stepped up and created the Hanes Beefy-T, the first T-shirt designed for screen printers. This year, we celebrated the iconic tee that has been a go-to, decorator-friendly blank for half a century.

Inspired by creators, our Beefy-T (5180) is all about the details that matter. We crafted the Beefy-T to be bold, with 6 ounces of 100% U.S.-grown ring-spun cotton. It's designed with double-needle stitching and shoulder-to-shoulder taping for extra strong seams. Plus, we added Clean Canvas print technology to solve some of the most common decorating issues.

To celebrate 50 years of the Beefy-T, we introduced the new Beefy-T Retro Street Tee (5180R). This vintage vibe T-shirt has an even heavier weight, at 7 ounces, and is oversized for the perfect level of comfort. Made with 100% American-grown ring-spun cotton, this new style also has Clean Canvas print technology, making it the optimal platform for your next inspired design.

As we come to the end of our year-long Beefy-T celebration, we've chosen to keep the party going a little longer and give you the next generation of Beefy. Our 13-ounce heavyweight Beefy Sweats have officially dropped. With three unisex relaxed fit styles, our Beefy Sweats collection is crafted with heavyweight three-end fleece and delivers a premium feel and reliable construction. You'll find these soft fleece styles are built with cross-grain fabric to resist shrinkage and ribbed side panels for added stretch and ease of movement.

Our Beefy Crewneck Sweatshirt (OG600), Pullover Hoodie (OG700) and Quarter Zip (OG900), offer the extra details that make the difference, including ribbed cuffs, tear-away neck tags, and cover stitching on the seams. These silhouettes are created with a 100% U.S.-grown cotton face that provides a consistent decorator-friendly performance, and they come in time-tested colors that are sure to compliment any project.

From Hanes' Beefy-T, the tee that started it all, to the new Beefy Sweats, these powerhouse heavyweights are the right canvas to immortalize all of life's greatest hits. For style that's iconic and comfort that's loved, choose the legendary Beefy collection.

Beefy: The original heavyweight. GP

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SOLID STATE
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SCAN TO SHOP

LAT Apparel



Every lasting legacy begins with a single thread — a spark of inspiration and a promise for tomorrow. For over 40 years, L.A.T. Apparel has been quietly shaping the way we think about quality, comfort, and care in apparel. What began as a father's simple search for clothing worthy of his daughter has grown into a trusted brand.

L.A.T.'s story is one of devotion. Founded on the belief that generations deserve better — better fabrics, better fits, and better values — the company quickly grew from a personal mission into a reputable organization. Today, it remains rooted in that same foundational purpose: to create garments that bring people together.

Headquartered in Georgia, L.A.T. Apparel continues to build meaningful connections across every part of its business. From internal teams to distributors, decorators, and retail partners, collaboration is central to the company's success. That spirit of partnership is reflected in every product, and in every relationship built along the way.

L.A.T.'s portfolio includes standout brands like Rabbit Skins — beloved for its soft, safe, secure, and stylish apparel for little ones — and Live & Tell, which celebrates self-expression and individuality. Each piece is crafted with attention to detail and a dedication to comfort, reflecting the company's belief that clothing should do more than just look good — it should feel like home.

But L.A.T. is more than a manufacturer. It's a legacy brand, one that has grown through trust, purpose, and consistency. In a world of fast fashion and fleeting trends, L.A.T. stands out by staying true to its roots: putting people first and delivering apparel that lasts — both in quality and in meaning.

Whether it's a baby's first onesie, a custom tee for a community event, or a cozy favorite that gets better with every wear, L.A.T. Apparel is there — quietly weaving care into every thread. **GP**

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Mactac



For over 60 years, Mactac has been at the forefront of pressure-sensitive adhesive (PSA) materials development, revolutionizing digital printing, mounting, laminating, screen printing, and cut vinyl applications. Trusted by printers, distributors, exhibit houses, and signage professionals across the industry, Mactac's commitment to quality and durability is unmatched.

Recently, Mactac made significant investments to enhance its capabilities and better serve customers. Highlights include the acquisition of Duramark Products in 2021 and Spinnaker Coating, LLC in 2022. These strategic moves have expanded Mactac's North American manufacturing and distribution footprint by 40%, with new state-of-the-art facilities and assets dedicated to increasing coating capacity and ensuring consistent, high-quality production.

Mactac's extensive product portfolio is designed to transform a variety of surfaces — from windows and walls to floors and vehicles — making it a go-to choice for indoor and outdoor signage, vehicle wraps, tradeshow displays, retail signage, and environmental graphics. Whether short-term or long-lasting solutions, Mactac products deliver superior quality, vibrant visuals, and enduring performance.

Mactac's latest innovation — the Gruv product line — is designed to simplify and elevate graphic installations. From partial to full vehicle wraps or signage, the Gruv line offers tailored solutions that prioritize ease of application, performance, and reliability.

The Gruv Slideable (GV1029S) product stands out from the rest. Designed with installers in mind, this glossy white vinyl features repositionable adhesive, enabling quick, precise adjustments during installation. The film formulation coupled with the air egress liner provides optimal conformability and printability, helping to achieve bubble-free, professional results every time. With its durable finish and exceptional appearance, the Gruv Slideable is perfect for vehicle graphics, partial wraps, and signage projects.

Complementing this is the Gruv 7 Air Egress cast media (GV729), a versatile, cost-effective solution suited for walls, signage, and partial vehicle wraps. Available with both permanent and removable adhesives, this cast film offers outstanding durability, ensuring graphics withstand the elements and stand the test of time.

Mactac's Rayzor 1.5-mil cast overlaminate, available in gloss and matte Finishes, can be paired with Gruv Slideable and Gruv 7 to protect and enhance durability.

For signage applications that require easy, bubble-free installation, the Gruv 4 and 5 Air Egress vinyl media—GV400 and GV500 series—are ideal. Crafted with advanced air egress technology, these products help to achieve smooth, professional finishes on walls, decals, and signage projects, reducing installation time and minimizing errors.

Mactac's mission is to provide innovative, reliable solutions that elevate graphics projects. The Gruv line is making installations faster, easier, and more stunning than ever before.

Explore the full potential of Mactac's graphic solutions and discover how the Gruv product line can transform graphics projects and elevate branding. Get in the Gruv with high-quality Mactac graphic solutions. **GP**

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Mactac's new **Gruv Slideable** is a 2.0-mil gloss-white, highly conformable and repositionable cast vinyl. The micro-channel liner is essential to our no-show pattern and bubble-free installation. **Gruv Slideable gives you a clear edge in performance**.

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Learn More
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OTTO CAP

For more than three decades, OTTO CAP has been recognized as America's largest source for custom headwear and blank caps. As a dedicated B2B one-stop shop, we focus exclusively on providing businesses with premium-quality headwear solutions that deliver craftsmanship, consistency, and value. Our mission is simple — to help distributors, decorators, and brands bring their ideas to life with high-quality products and exceptional service.

At OTTO CAP, we know that every detail matters. From fit and fabric to structure and stitching, our commitment to quality is reflected in every cap we produce. Our extensive lineup includes classic baseball caps, stylish truckers, performance-driven golf hats, warm and comfortable winter beanies, and premium lifestyle designs — all crafted to meet the diverse needs of our B2B customers across industries such as promotional products, corporate apparel, retail, and private-label manufacturing.

To ensure fast and reliable delivery, OTTO CAP operates three strategically located warehouses in California, Georgia, and Texas. This nationwide network allows us to fulfill orders efficiently and minimize lead times, ensuring that our customers receive their products quickly and reliably. We also provide free ground shipping on eligible orders, making it easier and more affordable for businesses to stock up on bestselling styles.

Quality and convenience are at the heart of everything we do. We proudly offer free blank samples, giving customers the opportunity to feel and evaluate the quality of our products before committing to large orders. Every embroidery order includes free digitizing, ensuring logos and artwork are optimized for clean, professional stitching. For eligible headwear orders, we also provide free backing, ready for instant production right out of the box — all at no extra cost.

Our business is built on trust, partnership, and long-term relationships. When you choose OTTO CAP, you're not just selecting a supplier — you're partnering with a team dedicated to your success. Whether you need custom-decorated headwear or blank stock, our experienced staff works closely with each client to provide tailored solutions, consistent product quality, and responsive service from start to finish.

As we continue to grow, our goal remains the same: to be the No. 1 headwear partner for businesses across the country. With innovation, craftsmanship, and customer commitment at our core, OTTO CAP continues to set the industry standard as your one-stop solution for custom headwear and blank caps — built for business, trusted by professionals, and worn with pride.

OTTO CAP — where quality, reliability, and partnership meet. GP

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Advertising Specialty Institute

Graphics may be your specialty — but what if you could do more without doing more? The Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) makes it simple for graphics professionals to expand into promotional products using the creativity, expertise, and client trust they already have.

ASI's powerful software platform, ESP+, is built for graphics-focused businesses ready to unlock new revenue streams. The streamlined, end-to-end system complements your existing workflow, allowing you to easily search, price, and order from a trusted network of promo vendors — no inventory, no equipment, and no risk.

With fast product search, intuitive navigation, and client presentation tools, ESP+ helps you deliver branded merchandise alongside your current services. Built-in CRM functionality keeps projects organized from concept to fulfillment, saving time while ensuring a smooth client experience.

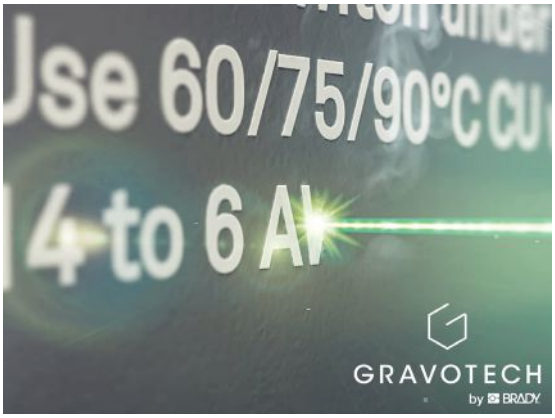
For more than 65 years, ASI has helped businesses like yours evolve and grow through technology, education, and industry connections. Whether you're looking to boost profit margins or offer clients more ways to showcase their brand, ASI provides everything you need to make it happen — seamlessly. **GP**



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Gravotech



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

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



Hirsch Solutions

For over five decades, Hirsch Solutions has been the trusted partner helping apparel decorators grow, innovate, and succeed. More than a distributor, Hirsch serves as a complete solutions provider, connecting businesses with the industry's most advanced equipment — from Tajima embroidery machines and Brother DTG/DTF printers, to Mimaki wide-format systems, Adelco dryers, and Dekken folding and bagging machines.

What sets Hirsch apart is its commitment to partnership over sales. The Hirsch team works side-by-side with customers to ensure every investment delivers real results — whether you're starting your first embroidery business or scaling high-volume production. With hands-on training, technical support, and industry expertise, Hirsch provides everything you need to build a stronger, more profitable operation.

Headquartered in Huntersville, North Carolina, Hirsch proudly serves customers across North America and partners with some of the world's most recognizable brands. From innovation to installation, Hirsch stands behind every machine it sells — because when you choose Hirsch, you're not just buying equipment; you're building your business with a partner who's invested in your success. **GP**

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

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

You only get all that with SanMar.

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

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

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

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

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

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Beginning in January:

You've been asking for this brand, and we're thrilled to announce that **31 Richardson headwear styles—plus 15 exclusive performance apparel styles—** will be available from SanMar.

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Shown: the iconic Richardson 112 Cap

AWDis







At AWDis, we design premium blank apparel built for decorators, creators, and brands that demand more from their garments. Every style in our range combines comfort, quality, and outstanding printability — giving you the perfect foundation to bring your vision to life.

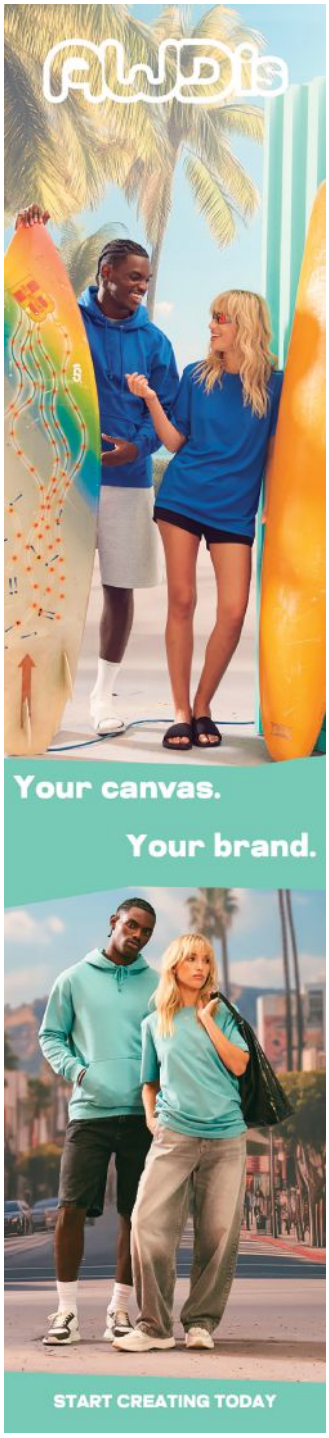
Our collection features a variety of on-trend styles made with decorators in mind. The JHA001 College Hoodie is a true classic: available in 49 colors and crafted from soft, durable fleece that's perfect for screen printing, embroidery, or DTG. For those who prefer a crew, the JHA030 College Sweatshirt delivers everyday comfort in an incredible 50-color palette, making it a go-to for customization and rebranding.

When it comes to heavyweight styles, the Urban Heavyweight Series takes center stage. The JHA113 Urban Heavyweight Sweat and JHA101 Urban Heavyweight Hoodie feature dense 10-oz fleece and a smooth, cotton-faced surface — ideal for bold graphics and premium decoration. Stepping up the game even further, the Signature Heavyweight Range introduces the JHA120 Signature Heavy Hoodie and JHA123 Signature Heavy Sweat, both crafted from 13-oz fleece for a true streetwear-inspired fit and feel.

Beyond our product lineup, AWDis stands for creativity, innovation, and self-expression. We create blanks that move with the market — from timeless college fits to oversized heavyweight silhouettes and trending cropped styles. Our designs balance comfort and printability with fashion-forward details, ensuring every piece feels retail-ready straight off the press.

Built on our commitment to quality and trend awareness, every AWDis blank offers consistency, durability, and a smooth surface made for decoration. Whether you're printing vibrant graphics, layering embroidery, or rebranding for retail, AWDis gives you the perfect canvas to make it your own.

AWDis — always on trend, always ready to brand. GP



awdis.com/us

info@awdisusa.com

Gemini



At Gemini, we have a passion for sign making that's 60 years strong and counting. We are a second-generation, family-owned wholesale manufacturer of dimensional signage, plaques, and signage supplies. Since 1963, we have worked exclusively with authorized Gemini partners to help them grow their businesses and strengthen the sign industry. Explore the widest range of dimensional signage materials and finishes through our portfolio. Our manufacturing facilities perform an extensive range of processes to produce quality signage products for any application. Our signage product portfolio includes flat-cut metal, cast metal, fabricated metal, flat-cut acrylic, flat-cut PVC, formed plastic, injection-molded plastic, laminate signage, dimensional printed signs, plaques, ADA and wayfinding plaques, bronze memorials, thin-gauge metal signs and plates, and lit signage with several lighting styles. GP

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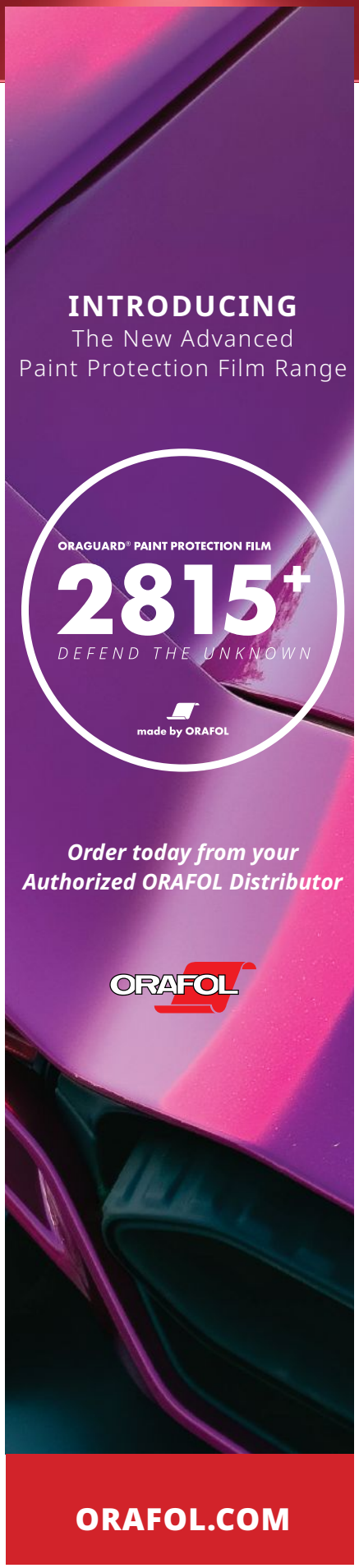
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GEMINI



ORAFOL Americas



With more than 200 years in business, the ORAFOL Group continues to set the highest standards in quality, innovation, service, and environmental responsibility. Through change and transformation, as well as forward-looking growth and expansion strategies, the ORAFOL Group has developed into a globally successful business over the decades.

Based in Black Creek, Georgia, ORAFOL Americas Inc., an ORAFOL Europe GmbH subsidiary since 2006, changed its name from ORACAL USA in a continuous effort to better align with the ORAFOL Group companies.

ORAFOL Americas Inc., Graphic Solutions Division manufactures premium vinyl graphic films, digital media, laminating films, and reflective products used in signage, graphics, digital printing, screen printing, and traffic and safety applications. Additionally, ORAFOL Americas markets a wide range of industrial tapes for applications ranging from the solar industry to point-of-purchase applications. The company's distribution network spans the U.S., Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean with eight state-of-the-art facilities.

The Black Creek facility is one of the most modern of its kind in the Americas and ensures both high-quality product and rapid turnaround time for delivery. This facility underwent an expansion in 2009 that included approximately 160,000 square feet of additional storage space for finished goods, and close to 50,000 square feet of ground floor space for packaging and shipping. In addition to the plant expansion, capital investment in an adhesive coating line and automated roll retrieval system brought the total capital investment project to $20 million. With ORAFOL, you can always be certain you are connected to innovation.

Graphic Solutions | Black Creek, Georgia
Reflective Solutions | Avon, Connecticut
Adhesive Tape Systems | Black Creek, Georgia
Advanced Polymer Films | Wallingford, Connecticut
Advanced TPU Films | South Deerfield, Massachusetts
Optic Solutions | Rochester, New York
Canadian Operations | Oakville, Ontario, Canada
Automotive Graphics | Lake Orion, Michigan and Saltillo, Mexico

GP

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info-americas@orafol.com
912-851-5000

Beaver Paper & Graphic Media, Inc.



With over 40 years of experience, Beaver Paper & Graphic Media Inc., a proud member of Koehler Paper, stands as a cornerstone in the sublimation media industry. Renowned for our flagship products, including TexPrint sublimation paper, ProTex protection tissue, TexSewn cut and sew paper, and TexStyles graphic fabrics, we cater to the diverse needs of the dye sublimation and digital print sectors.

Our global presence is marked by our headquarters in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and our state-of-the-art facility in Willstätt, Germany. We pride ourselves on our unparalleled commitment to excellence, continuously reinvesting in research and development to enhance our processes and product offerings. At Beaver Paper, quality is not just a promise; sublimation is in our DNA.

We are dedicated to providing our customers with exceptional service, ensuring that you receive exactly what you need, when you need it. Our comprehensive portfolio of sublimation media is designed to facilitate your creative projects, empowering your visions with products that deliver outstanding results every time.

Join us in experiencing the Beaver Paper difference, where innovation meets reliability, and sublimation dreams come to life. Discover why we are a trusted partner for businesses worldwide and why sublimation truly is at the heart of what we do. **GP**



Crystal by Design

Crystal by Design is a family-run, wholesale partner specializing in premium crystal and glass awards, gifts, and recognition pieces — crafted to honor achievement and designed to inspire. Founded in 1996 by Eric Chen, the patriarch of our family, we've spent nearly three decades refining a simple promise: deliver beautiful, durable recognition — accurately, on time, and with the kind of care people remember.

Eric helped pioneer many of the designs now prevalent in the market, and that foundation guides our style today. Our aesthetic is modern minimalism: crisp lines, balanced proportions, and generous engraving fields that showcase without distraction.

As a small business, every order matters to us. That scale is our strength. It lets us slow down where precision counts and speed up where timing is critical. When the deadline is tight, we move — offering same-day shipping on in-stock items to keep your customers' presentation day on schedule. For your convenience, we also have an in-house engraving team that delivers meticulous, hands-on quality control.

We're built for B2B. Distributors and retailers choose us for quality, fair pricing, and a broad range of products to fit every budget so you can serve diverse programs without compromising standards. Behind the scenes, we manage inventory with intention: disciplined forecasting and frequent replenishment mean the right pieces are on the shelf when you need them. We also work continuously to keep prices competitive without sacrificing the materials and craftsmanship that define our products. Shipping matters, too. Our logistics workflow emphasizes efficient, protective packaging to help items arrive safely while maintaining a polished unboxing experience.

Most of all, we're grateful. You have choices, and when you choose to work with a small business like ours, you help sustain the craftsmanship and service that defines this industry. Since 1996, Crystal by Design has partnered with customers across North America and internationally to make recognition memorable — for the recipient who earned it, and for your brand that stands proudly behind it. **GP**

crystalbydesign.com
customer.service@crystalbydesign.com
888-358-8298





Infinity Her found a gap in the promotional headwear market and made it their mission to fill it by creating the perfect women's baseball cap, designed with features specifically engineered for her.

Today's promo end buyers are more intentional than ever, opting for functional, high-quality products that will actually get used. A recent Advertising Specialty Institute survey showed that the top two reasons women keep promo products are due to their utility and quality. Function is everything! Plus, when it comes to the top promo industry buyers, women are showing up.



infinityforher.com
infinityher@infinitypg.com

Infinity Her is proof that designing with women in mind leads to lasting impact. The brand's success comes from listening to real feedback and solving overlooked pain points, like sweatbands that resist makeup stains and hats that work for both ponytail and hair-down days. Imagine handing out branded caps at a women's marathon, designed with these features. You're not just giving away a hat; you're offering something she'll actually use, from the starting line to her next adventure. Every wear becomes a touchpoint with your brand. That's the power of quality, thoughtful, and functional promo.

So where can you find Infinity Her headwear? The line is carried by six Sportsman's Cap & Bag wholesalers: S&S, McCreary's Tees, SLC Activewear, Kati Sportcap & Bag, and Carolina Made. You can reach out directly to these companies for pricing and samples. You can also visit infinityforher.com where you will see the full line, get marketing support, and learn more about the Infinity Her brand. GP



Nova Polymers





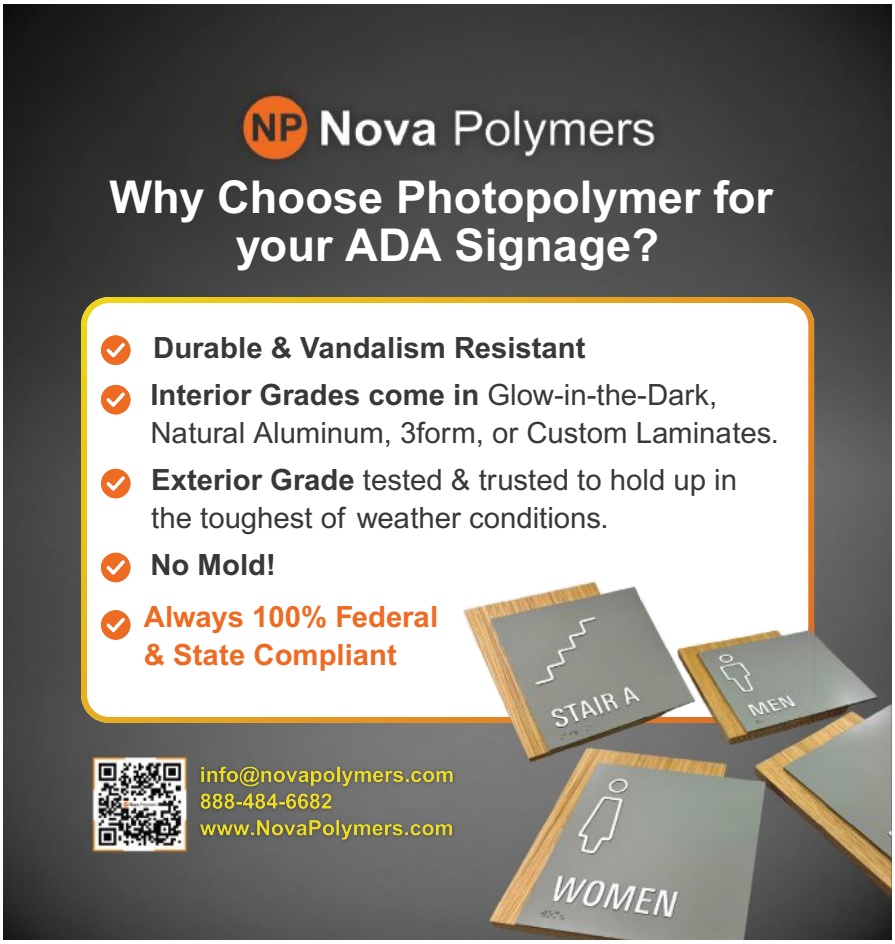
Our mission is clear: to revolutionize the way sign architects and fabricators express themselves while ensuring inclusivity for all. We supply the equipment and materials needed to create ADA-compliant photopolymer signage, as well as ample ADA resources for architects and designers.

The Nova Polymers system

Our integrated approach combines advanced 100% ADA sign design software, precision fabrication techniques, and flexible painting processes to deliver exceptional results for ADA signs. From custom designs to ADA-compliant solutions, Nova Polymers has been tried and tested to continuously stay true at providing a seamless and efficient system that brings your vision to life.

Nova Polymers has achieved Clean Air GOLD certification for its Novacryl PT Series through Intertek's Clean Air program. With this indoor air quality certification, we guarantee our products comply with the recommended minimum VOC emissions and low-emitting materials for CDPH, WELL, and LEED.

novapolymers.com
info@novapolymers.com
888-484-NOVA



ADA signage training & support

Enhance your knowledge and skills with our ADA signage training and support. Gain a comprehensive understanding of ADA compliance, braille specifications, and photopolymer sign workflow solutions.

Our ADA/Braille Sign Specifications Webinar discusses the ADA 2010 Standard For Room Identification Signs CES Course. This course is registered and eligible for course credit with the AIA and IDCEC. It focuses on the ADA and its relation to room identification and wayfinding signage.

ADA-Braille 100% compliant signage is not just our business — it's our mission.

Nova Polymers isn't just a company; we're pioneers in ADA compliance, igniting creativity and accessibility across North America. We're more than just an equipment and raw materials supplier; we're a beacon of in**nova**tion and inclusiveness. **GP**

PRODUCT PICKS

Each month, the GRAPHICS PRO team receives hundreds of product press releases. Here are a few that recently caught our attention.



Epson SureColor S8170

Epson has introduced the SureColor S8170 solvent printer, which the company says provides over 20% faster print speeds and improved print quality compared to the previous generation. Touting a compact and efficient design, it features the latest generation print head and a six-color ink set ideal for medium to large shops producing signs, banners, stickers, vehicle wraps, and more. Designed to maximize production capabilities, the SureColor S8170 features the UltraChrome GS3 ink set, including light cyan and light magenta. The fast-drying ink set is engineered to allow for same day lamination and the ability to mix and match ink packs. The design includes a media feeding and tension mechanism to provide stable media handling and accuracy for a variety of substrates including vinyl, banner, canvas, paper, and more. Its 4.3" touch screen gives print providers the ability to view and manage print settings directly on the screen. **epson.com**



Tackle Twill Letters from Ninja Patches

Ninja Patches, a division of Ninja Transfers specializing in custom heat-applied emblems, now offers custom Tackle Twill Letters. Each patch combines layered fabric and intricate stitching designed to deliver a three-dimensional look and feel traditionally reserved for professional embroidery shops. With heat-applied backing, customers can now press letter emblems in minutes using a standard heat press — no sewing required. Available in three sizes, each patch can be fully customized with one or two lettered fabric layers and up to three lines of text. **ninjapatches.com**

Avery Dennison's Neo Matte Black Paint Protection Film



Neo Matte Black Paint Protection Film (PPF) joins the Neo Noir Gloss Black PPF to give installers and car enthusiasts two black aesthetics with modern style and noticeable color depth in mind. Its nonreflective finish is designed to offer dramatic restyling, a stealth aesthetic, and the protection of a paint protection film. The science-driven innovation behind the polyurethane technology is said to provide defense against rock chips, scratches, road debris, and long-term weathering. Backed by a seven-year warranty, the wet-apply film also offers adhesion, self-healing performance, a hydrophobic topcoat, stain resistance, and conformability around curves and recesses. Neo Matte Black can be applied as a full wrap for a complete color change or used to create accents.
graphics.averydennison.com/ppf



Ink Innovations Total Joy Washout Booth

Ink Innovations has launched the Total Joy Washout Booth, designed to make professional-grade screen reclamation accessible to every print shop. Engineered for longevity, the Total Joy Washout Booth is constructed from heavy-gauge .062" aluminum (thicker than 16-gauge steel) and equipped with 100% stainless steel hardware. According to the manufacturer, the aluminum panels are engineered to ensure the booth will never rust, chip, or peel. The Total Joy Washout Booth ships via UPS Ground as a compact, easy-to-assemble kit. The booth is designed to mount directly onto a standard Mustee Utilatub laundry tub, available separately for around $65 from most major home improvement retailers.
inkinnovationsUSA.com



Roland DGA View Thru Adhesive Film

Roland DGA has introduced View Thru Adhesive Film — a universally printable 80/20 perforated one-way vision media with removable adhesive that's ideal for use on glass in offices, stores, medical facilities, schools, and other settings where privacy is important. This 6.5-mil PVC film allows for 80% of the media to be printed on, while the other 20% of the media, with its perforated 1.5-mm hole pattern, enables one-way, see-through security. View Thru Adhesive Film is designed to allow the end user to create the decor, retail messaging, and graphic imagery desired, while still maintaining a functional viewing window for those inside. Additionally, it is engineered to help protect interior furnishings from direct sunlight that can result in fading. **rolanddga.com**

Preserving history one sign at a time

How Studio 618 designed unit & wayfinding signage for the historic Spinning Mill Lofts

By Lauren Stern

Studio 618, my story-driven signage and wayfinding consultancy based in Charlotte, North Carolina, was tasked to design a custom interior and exterior signage family as well as a unique fiber art focal wall (check out the March 2025 issue to read more about the fiber art focal wall element) for Taft Development Group's property, Spinning Mill Lofts. Once a historic textile mill, the property has been transformed into a mix of stylish amenity spaces and 25 loft-style apartments, surrounded by eight garden-style buildings in downtown Clayton, North Carolina. For this project, we aimed to design something timeless that tied in beautifully with SouthPark Interiors' vision, reflected Yellow Duck Marketing's clean, modern branding, and celebrated the building's textile roots that make it so unique.



Photo by Megan Morales.



Monument sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)



Discarded brick structure for monument sign. (Photo by Taft Development Group)

It all starts with the unit sign

A unit sign can really set the tone, so it's always the first thing Studio 618 focuses on in our signage projects. For this multifamily project, we drew inspiration from the industrial vibe of the refurbished textile mill. Acrylic panels and corrugated metal laminate were combined to create a cool, textured look that complements the building's metal beams and architectural details, as well as the interiors designed by SouthPark Interiors. The pops of yellow, inspired by SouthPark Interiors' color palette, frame the triangular metal panels and pull the whole color scheme together beautifully.

One person's trash is another person's treasure

You don't always get the chance to weave a property's history into its signage, but this project was a rare exception. From the start, Studio 618 knew it was something special. The site is home to a historic textile mill that dates back to 1901 and operated until 1976. Today, it's been reimagined into apartments and amenity spaces, but traces of its past remain throughout, including metal beams, original wood doors, historic wood flooring, and discarded brick structures that tell the story of its industrial roots.

When Taft Development Group mentioned they wanted to repurpose some of those old brick structures for signage and wayfinding, Studio 618 was all in. It's not every day you get to design signs that literally incorporate pieces of history.

Studio 618 had a blast incorporating Yellow Duck Marketing's logo, which strikes the perfect balance between modern design and a subtle nod to the past. It fits beautifully on the monument and secondary entry signs. To bring everything together, corrugated metal was added to the brick base to echo the building's industrial character, a material that also shows up in some of the interior signage.

Sure, it might have been easier to build something brand-new from scratch, but where's the fun in that? Using elements from the original site adds depth, tells a story, and makes this community truly stand out in a sea of lookalike developments.

An intentional approach

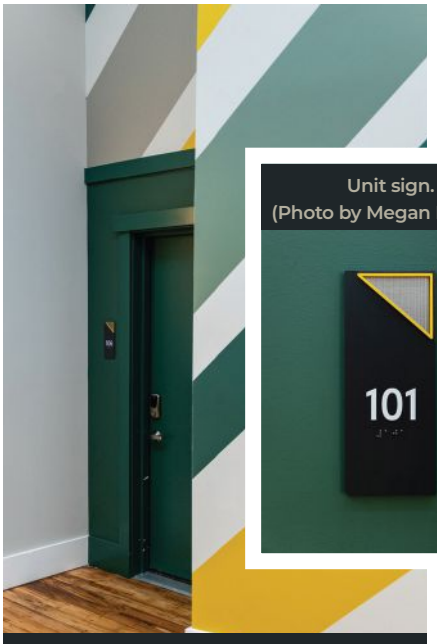
Every project Studio 618 takes on follows the same core principle: *Intention*. If I had to sum up what our company is all about in one word, that would be it. Everything we do has a purpose behind it. Whether it's a three-level garage covered in creative murals, a custom feature wall for a high-end office, or a signage and wayfinding system for a multifamily community inspired by a refurbished textile mill like this one, every detail is intentional. Each design choice needs a reason, and "because I like it" is never enough.

Before starting Studio 618, the



Secondary sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)

Discarded brick structure for secondary signs. (Photo by Taft Development Group)



Unit sign in corridor. (Photo by Megan Morales)

Unit sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)



Close-up detail of corrugated metal laminate on an amenity sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)

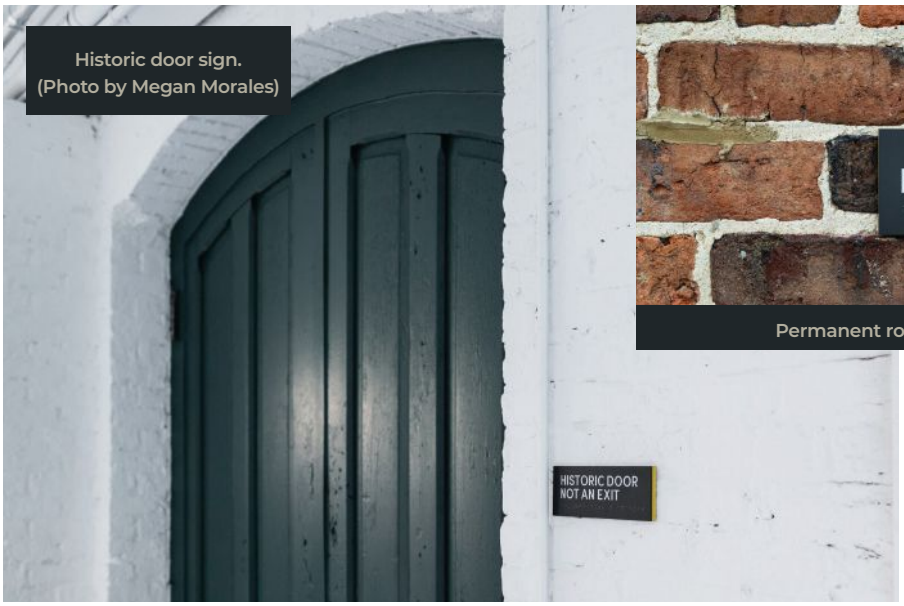
importance of design strategy and storytelling was instilled in me at my previous company, and it's something I've carried forward ever since. It's about focusing on the why before the how. When a project is built on intention, it gains meaning and purpose. It can even become part of the story that residents, tenants, and clients connect with. That's exactly what happened here, giving the client a narrative to share about the inspiration behind the design and how it ties back to the building's history.

No other multifamily community will have signage quite like this. Sure, someone could replicate the idea, but the mix of distinct branding from Yellow Duck Marketing, the beautiful interiors by SouthPark Interiors, and the unique history of this refurbished textile mill make this project one-of-a-kind. What makes it special is the story, the intention, and how everything comes together to create something truly unique.

Why custom signage is a good investment

Whether you're developing a new building or upgrading an existing one, investing in custom signage is always a smart choice. Thoughtful, intentional signage can help you achieve several key goals:

- **Intentionality:** Creating a beautiful multifamily community like Spinning Mill Lofts involves many moving parts, including architects, interior designers, and engineers, so signage can easily get overlooked early on. The projects that succeed most are the ones where signage is planned intentionally from the start. For example, thinking about unit sign placement while planning corridor lighting can prevent common issues. In past projects, I've seen lighting installed in ways that didn't work with the signs, such as being too bright, too low, or on the wrong side of the door. Planning early avoids those kinds of problems.
- **Stand out from the rest:** A unique, well-designed signage package makes a property feel special. The client could have chosen stock signage, but it would not have reflected the industrial character of



Historic door sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)



Permanent room sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)



Post and panel directional sign. (Photo by Megan Morales)

> We love how the custom woven and textile-inspired signage ties in with the interior design and the building's historic industrial details — it truly enhances the authentic charm of the Spinning Mill Lofts.
>
> - **Emily Hiott**, VP/director of design at SouthPark Interiors

the building or tied into the materials and color palette. New properties with high-end finishes tell a story, and repeated generic signage cannot do that. Every Studio 618 project is different, from nautical-themed signs at a waterfront property to moody bronze and wood signage in a luxury condo to industrial-inspired signs like Spinning Mill Lofts. Each package complements the property it lives in.

- **Make a lasting impression:** With so many new multifamily buildings being constructed, custom signage can set your property apart. First impressions matter, and a well-designed signage system can make people feel welcome and encourage them to return. Having been a renter for over 15 years, I experienced countless cookie-cutter multifamily buildings that lacked character, which made me hesitant to commit. When a building does not invest in a warm, unique experience, it reflects poorly on them. Intentional, high-end signage helps your building stand out, creates a positive experience for residents, and ultimately elevates the property above the competition.

Final thoughts

When designing a project, it's important to think about how your signage fits into the bigger picture. Take the time to dig into every detail, from interior design renderings and furniture choices to textile patterns and architectural elements. This thorough approach ensures the signage not only serves its function but also enhances the overall look and feel of the property. Great signage can tie a project together, tell a story, and help it stand out from the competition. Bringing an experiential designer on board early can make a huge difference, so don't wait too long to get them involved. **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.

Smart signs:

A revolution in real time

By Dee Burkhardt



Images courtesy of Signarama

Digital and multimedia signage used to be novelties, but as costs have fallen, technology has advanced, and personal devices have made consumers more tech-savvy, smart signage has become a standard rather than an exception. It's revolutionizing our industry by vastly expanding the communication possibilities for clients and giving them exciting new ways to share messages with their own customers.

Smart signage is in high demand across several industries, including hospitality, retail, healthcare, and education, and the variety of options gives users great flexibility. Small businesses with limited needs can just use cost-effective QR codes, for instance, while large corporations can go all-out with full-scale digital display systems. Whatever they choose to invest in, they'll find solutions that enhance their marketing, increase engagement, and provide measurable return on investment (ROI).

By catering to this demand, your franchise can secure larger, higher-value projects that often bring recurring business for content updates, technical maintenance, or system upgrades.

Smart solutions

Smart signage has been widely adopted by businesses and organizations that need to communicate with the public frequently and in real-time. Schools, churches, municipalities, and event venues are driving much of the demand for on-premise electronic message centers (EMCs), which give them the ability to instantly control messaging. They often use EMCs to share schedules, safety alerts, or community news. Retailers, restaurants, and convenience stores benefit from the ability to update promotions quickly and capture attention from passing traffic.

EMCs can be purely commercial, like the stock market tickers our shop created or the system we installed for a radio station, which was synchronized with the music feed so that passing drivers could see the current song

playing and tune in to get it on their car systems. In some cases, we've incorporated feeds for stock market tickers or other real-time data.

QR codes have also grown in popularity as a complement to EMCs. Customers like using them on business cards, event signage, product displays, and even vehicle graphics. They save time; with a quick scan by a mobile device, contact information or website links load directly into the phone without manual typing.





Customer benefits

These solutions resonate because they combine visibility and flexibility. A static sign can only say one thing, and updating it can be time-consuming. But an EMC can cycle through multiple messages, adapt to the time of day, or display live feeds such as weather or traffic, and the change can be made almost instantly. It gives businesses a much bigger communication footprint without taking up additional square footage. That makes it more cost-effective. With a static sign, every change means a reprint or refabrication. With an EMC, the customer can update messaging instantly, often from their phone or computer. That saves time, reduces costs, and keeps their message current. The systems are paired with cloud-based content management systems, allowing customers to log in from any device, create playlists, schedule messages, and even integrate RSS feeds for live data.

QR codes add another layer of ROI. By placing them on supporting signage such as event signs, product displays, or vehicles, customers can drive people directly to menus, schedules, or contact information without incurring the cost of creating new graphics.

Benefits & challenges

As for your shop, smart signage offers recurring revenue opportunities. Clients may need content updates, technical maintenance, or system upgrades, creating opportunities for ongoing revenue streams.

A further benefit is that many customers who use these technologies find them intuitive and don't require much training or coaching. The ability to drag-and-drop graphics, schedule announcements, or integrate automated feeds makes it easy for them to keep content fresh. For non-EMC projects, QR codes are also straightforward for customers to implement and for end-users to interact with. When clients see that EMCs and QR codes give them endless messaging without endless printing costs, the long-term value becomes clear.

You do need to spend a little time getting them completely onboarded. EMCs require reliable internet access to pull in live data or cloud updates, so you'll want to work with clients to ensure their networks are properly set up and they understand the basics.

While technology is powerful and can even be dazzling, one old rule hasn't changed: Content still matters. When it's so easy to create the message, it's tempting to overdo it. Coach your clients on the need to keep messages engaging and impactful by being short and legible. The same goes for QR codes — they must be sized and placed correctly to be effective.

Customer first

Digital signage innovation matters, but only if it aligns with what a shop's customer base is asking for. When clients are looking for an EMC, live data integration, or other smart features, offering those solutions becomes essential to staying competitive.

That said, not every market demands it. For shops whose customers are primarily interested in traditional building signs, vehicle graphics, or branding projects, digital signage may not be a top priority. Those who do make it a priority must invest in more than equipment; it's critical to dedicate time to studying new systems and vetting vendors to ensure they're delivering reliable, proven solutions. Decisions should always be guided by the needs of your specific client base, and that's no less the case with smart signage. GP



Dee Burkhardt is the owner of Signarama of Fond du Lac, Appleton, and Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. After more than 40 years in the industry, she remains committed to staying ahead of industry trends, embracing new technologies, and delivering creative, impactful signage solutions.

Wraps training & certifications

Find the courses you need in 2026.



Avery Dennison professional instructor Charlie Trujillo, CEO of Lettering Express, demonstrates the technique of trimming a vehicle wrap. (Image courtesy of Avery Dennison)

(Images courtesy of Avery Dennison)

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

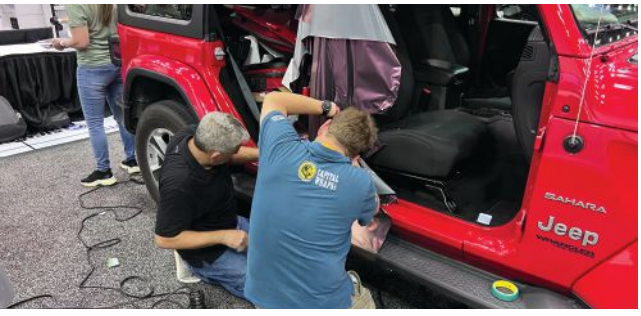
Find a list of resources for wraps training in 2026 at right.



Wraps professionals from across the country compete at WRAP OLYMPICS as part of GRAPHICS PRO EXPO's WRAPSCON.



Justin Pate, owner of The Wrap Institute, kicks off an Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film training with a classroom lecture on material dos and don'ts. (Image courtesy of Avery Dennison)







A skilled wrapper understands the importance of trim work. Here is Justin Pate demonstrating the technique for trimming around headlights. (Image courtesy of Avery Dennison)



Attendees at GRAPHICS PRO EXO learn wraps skills with hands-on training from certified professionals such as Adam Sumner of Wrapix Imaging and Wrapix Academy.



An Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film application is demonstrated first before class participants have the opportunity to work with the films themselves. Pictured is instructor Justin Pate, The Wrap Institute. (Image courtesy of Avery Dennison)



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- GPX WRAPSCON Academy
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- Mactac
- Master The Wrap Initiative
- MUTOH
- ORAFOL + KPMF
- STEK USA
- The Wrap Institute
- Wrapix Academy
- Wrapper Mapper
- WrapStar University

Why attention to detail drives success

The small things are key

By Aaron Montgomery

If you've ever stood back and looked at a finished product like an embroidery hoop or a piece of engraved wood and said, "That'll do," you already know that small compromises have a way of sneaking into everything. A stitch that's a little off, a burn mark you plan to sand out later, a shortcut you swore you would not take because the pressure of getting it done is driving you forward. Each compromise chips away at the pride that once got you started. But you do it because you think you have to compete with the person down the street.

I've been in this industry long enough to know that business owners don't lose their passion because they stop caring. They lose it because they get tired of fixing mistakes that shouldn't have happened. Tired of customers who don't see the difference between "good enough" and excellent. Tired of racing through jobs without the time to do them right because they were "competing" with the online company willing to do it for less and didn't care about the quality.

But when you look closely, that fatigue often comes from one missing ingredient: The attention to detail that got us excited about the skill of decorating, to begin with.



siraphol – stock.adobe.com

Craftsmanship is a mindset, not a skill

When I started helping small business owners build systems for growth, I realized something powerful. The most successful people weren't always the most talented, well-funded, or experienced. They were the ones who took pride in the little things that nobody else noticed. They developed their system, were confident enough in it to have an open mind to improving it, and never wavered from their commitment to being the best at that activity.

That's what craftsmanship really is. It's not just about knowing how to run a machine or master a technique. It's about caring enough to notice when something's off and having the discipline to fix it before anyone else even sees it.

In embroidery, that might mean stopping the machine to correct a single loose thread instead of letting it run. In woodworking, it could mean sanding one more time, even though your hands are sore. In screen printing, it could be that micro registration adjustment as you go through a run. And in business, it's the same mindset. Double-checking invoices, responding to emails with care, packaging every order like it's a gift, or other strengths of the business that make them stand out.

Excellence isn't perfection

There's a difference between striving for excellence and chasing perfection. Most people operate as perfectionists as almost an excuse to not put themselves out there. The long-term success stores understand they will never be perfect and set their focus on excellence.

I've met plenty of decorators who beat themselves up because a logo wasn't perfectly centered or a color tone didn't match exactly. But the goal should be

to honor the work and let that little bit of obsession drive excellence, but not hold back progress. When you pour that kind of care into why you do what you do, you start to attract customers who value the same thing. They might not always know why your work feels different, but they feel it. That's the secret. Excellence has energy. People can see it, touch it, and trust it.

The small things that build big reputations

Every detail tells your story. I once ordered a custom wreath from a small maker. It was beautifully designed, but what really impressed me was how it arrived. I could have spent half the money for something similar from a big box store, but this maker expressed her care for making my home look a little brighter. The packaging was clean, the label had a handwritten thank-you, and the care instructions showed the love and also made the product last many more years than an off-the-shelf version would have. That extra care told me everything I needed to know about who I was buying from.

The attention to detail builds trust without saying a word, and trust means they come back. They tell their friends. And before long, your craftsmanship becomes your marketing. Too many decorators spend thousands of dollars trying to get more customers before they've mastered the small moments that make customers stay.

Systems protect craftsmanship

Here's the part that surprises people. Attention to detail doesn't have to mean slowing down or years of apprenticeship and hours of toiling. In fact, the right systems make attention to details faster than the messy alternative of trying to recreate the process each any every time. I've watched embroidery shops transform just by creating better checklists. Simple things like thread color verification, hoop alignment, and a final quality review before packaging can eliminate 80% of mistakes.

I was talking to a client this week about how she went from a side hustle to leaving her day job six months before her original plan because her embroidery business grew so fast. She still works out of her home (though she is in the process of building a standalone shop), and we talked about how she did it. She has been more intentional about the details and the processes, and she utilized FUNdamental No. 8 of my book, the "FUNdamentals of Business Success," to develop her very own systems.

When you start to care again

The most common turning point I see in small business owners happens when they stop chasing "more" and start chasing "better." They slow down long enough to see the customers who already love them, the products that could be great with a little more care, the systems that need a little tightening. The turning point comes from the steady rhythm of doing small things well over and over again.

Attention to detail is an act of gratitude that says, "I'm thankful for this opportunity, and I'm going to honor it by doing it well." When you approach your work that way, everything starts to feel lighter. You stop rushing. You stop cutting corners. You stop feeling like you're drowning in your own business.

True craftsmanship walks the line between confidence and humility. It's being proud of your skill but open to learning. That humility keeps you teachable, which is where real success lives. The decorators and makers who last decades in this industry aren't the ones who get every stitch perfect. They're the ones who keep improving the way they care. I look at my friend, Erich Campbell, as a great representation of this mindset. I'm not an embroiderer personally, but I get to work with a lot of them, and they have all told me they learn so much from Erich, especially when it comes to digitizing. Yet Erich works constantly to develop his skills, provide more value, and worries about the free content he is sharing and its value to those watching. He wants to be proud of what he puts out into the world.

Small details, big legacy

You may never know who's watching. Someone might see your embroidery on a cap or your engraved cutting board at a family dinner, or a personalized T-shirt on a family of tourists, and ask: "Who made that?" Legacies are built through quiet excellence repeated daily. That becomes something solid. Reputation, loyalty, and pride are the precursors to profit.

When you hold that kind of integrity in your hands, it changes how you show up. You speak kinder. You listen better. You lead differently. Because excellence in your craft trains excellence in your character.

Success in this industry doesn't start with big breaks or bold strategies. It starts with one mindset: care enough to notice. The next time you're tempted to say, "That'll do," pause. Take another look and instead ask, "Does this make me proud?" That's what real craftsmanship looks like. And that's what drives true success. **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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Unlocking profit with vibe coding

Which tool is right for your shop?

By Marshall Atkinson

I'm about to introduce you to two words that might soon become your shop's new best friend: Vibe coding.

On a scale of one to 10 for familiarity, most people in the decorated apparel industry would probably score it a negative 37. That's perfectly fine. The whole reason for this article is to make that introduction.

At its core, vibe coding is the ability to build simple, useful software tools without being a programmer. Think of it as telling a system what you want in plain English, and it builds the app for you. In our world, where shops often Frankenstein together spreadsheets, supplier portals, and bits of management software, this is a game changer.

Margins are thin, labor is tight, and customer expectations keep climbing. Shops need ways to reduce mistakes, save time, and stay flexible. Vibe coding allows you to create tools that fit *your* workflow, not the other way around.

So, consider this your handshake introduction. In the next few pages, we'll look at how one fictional shop, ABC Printing, used three small vibe-coding projects to stop margin leaks, ease the load on their team, and push more profit back into the business

Why vibe coding will matter to you

As a shop owner, you know all too well the daily headaches that come with the grind: inventory issues, pricing issues, profit issues, scheduling issues, and hundreds more. Why does it always seem like we are putting out fires?

The decoration part of the job is, to some degree, the easiest chunk of the work. However, the systems around the work usually cause the most pain and potentially the most lost profit.

Most shops in the industry get by with a multiple-choice mix of management software, spreadsheets, manual systems, and some funky leftover process from ten years ago that you just can't shake. They do the job, but they don't always conform to your way of running things.

Here's where vibe coding can help. Think of vibe coding as giving your shop its own set of problem-solving Lego bricks. With these tools, you can build virtually anything, so what's the biggest pain in your shop? Simply describe the tool you need in plain English, and the AI assembles the problem-solving Lego bricks for you. It literally builds itself.

The barrier to entry is low. These platforms cost about $0 to $25 per month, and most small projects can be built and tested in hours. That's one less rush freight bill or one order reprint you'll never have to eat again.

The real benefit? You don't have to wait for updates from an industry supplier or try to force a system to work the way you do. You can build small, practical fixes that fit your shop, reduce mistakes, and keep more profit in the business.

Meet the platforms

Now that you have a general sense of what vibe coding can do, let's look at three of the most popular tools that could make it possible for you. Remember, the good news is that you don't need to be a developer, have a background in developing apps, or need to spend thousands of dollars to solve your challenges. These platforms are designed for nontechnical people who want to build something useful for their shop,

Base44

Base44

Strengths
Quick builds from plain-English prompts, built-in hosting, and automation features

Best For
Prototypes like order checkers, production dashboards, or training tools

Lovable

Lovable

Strengths
Full-stack builds (front end + back end), strong templates, customizable design

Best For
Inventory systems, CRM-style tools, or employee training portals

Knack

knack*

Strengths
Structured app builder with forms, user roles, and workflow logic

Best For
Scheduling systems, order portals, or admin dashboards

fast. Here are three worth knowing:

Think of these as different flavors of the same idea. **Base44** (Free to start, next tier $16 per month) is perfect when you want to get a solution up and running quickly. **Lovable** (Free to start, next tier $25 per month) gives you more polish and flexibility and is great if you want to build something that retains information. **Knack** (Free to start, next tier $19 per month) shines if your project needs structure, multiple users, and more formal workflows.

Remember, the important part isn't mastering these platforms. Pick one. Build a small project, and see what happens. Once you realize you can build a tool that is customized to your needs instead of waiting on someone else's software to deliver what you need, the possibilities really open up.



Case study No. 1: Smarter embroidery scheduling

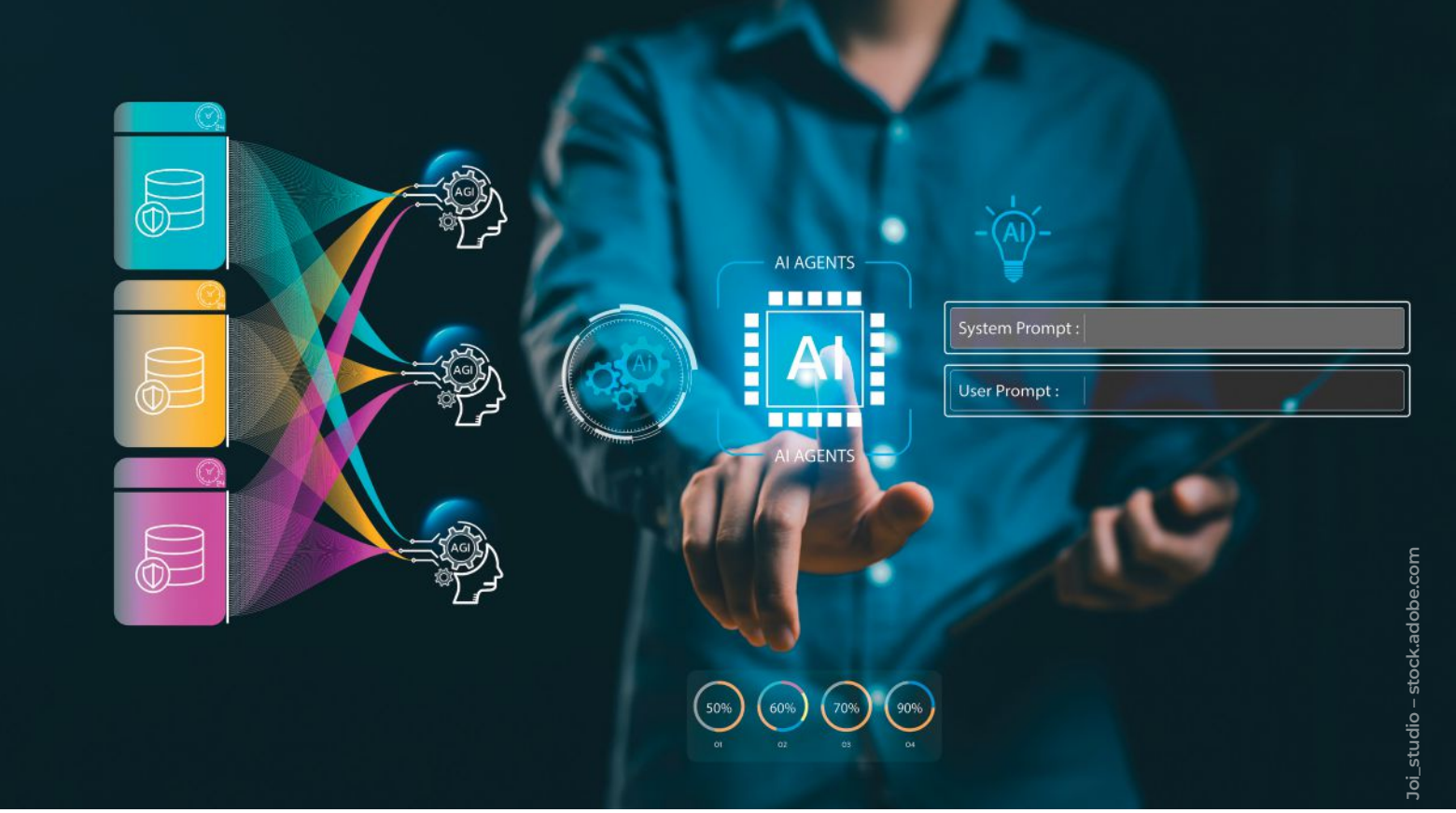
At ABC Printing, embroidery was often the trouble spot. Jobs ran longer than expected, machines were overloaded with orders to run, and overtime became routine. The issue wasn't the stitching. It was the scheduling. Orders were assigned without a consistent way to factor in stitch counts, machine speeds, difficulty level, or the number of heads on each machine.

With vibe coding, in about two hours of effort, ABC created a scheduling app that finally simplified the math around an order. The app calculated run times using key details: stitch count, needle speed, difficulty, and machine heads. They built in a short buffer between jobs so the calculated run times flowed directly into a more realistic production schedule.

For the embroidery manager, this meant clear visibility. The calendar showed when each machine would be available, taking the guesswork out of daily planning. Of course, this was shared with the sales team so they could be more aware of production availability

For the crew, it meant steadier days and fewer late nights. And for the business, it meant on-time orders, happy customers, and overtime costs that dropped back into profit.

If you have ever had to explain to a client why embroidery took longer than promised or paid for overnight shipping just to make a deadline, you already know the pain. ABC's small scheduling tool turned those headaches into predictable, manageable days. That consistency didn't just reduce stress. It helped protect the margin that keeps the shop strong.



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Case study No. 2: Smarter inventory for online stores

At ABC Printing, online stores had exploded. They already had hundreds of active stores and were adding about a dozen more per week. Each one looked simple to the customer, but behind the scenes, there was chaos.

Due to service level agreements for some of the stores, garments, patches, and premade DTF transfers had to be stocked. Adding up all the garments, sizes, and products, there were thousands of SKUs to keep up with and organize.

A missed reorder often meant refunds, angry emails, and costly overtime or overnight shipping.

With the help of vibe coding, the ABC team built an inventory app to pull everything together. The system was built on their goals and standards. It tracked in-house stock automatically and had inventory levels set for each SKU. Each was assigned a minimum stock level and reorder point.

When levels dropped below a threshold, the app generated a reorder notification and sent it to a team member to pursue. As the app was linked to SanMar and S&S Activewear, it also pre-checked inventory levels. If a distributor was out of stock within the shipping window, the app suggested alternate blanks with a similar fabric, cut, or price point that were available, so the staff could offer options without slowing down. For the online store team, this meant less scrambling and frustration. Online stores stayed accurate, end customers received what they ordered, and purchasing could move quickly with substitutions without having to do the research.

From a bottom-line perspective, this helped manage the cash flow better with inventory and prevented a tremendous amount of over-ordering, which was a challenge before they built the app. Here's the reality of this for you. If managing even a handful of online stores can feel overwhelming, imagine multiplying that feeling by a hundred. The vibe-coded app ABC Printing built made it possible for them to scale confidently, protect profit, and deliver a smoother experience for their customers.


Amonthep – stock.adobe.com

Is vibe coding right for your shop?

Without even visiting, I know that you have processes embedded into your shop that don't quite work the way you want them to. Maybe you have patched it together, maybe you live with it, but deep down, you have that nagging feeling that something isn't working correctly.

Hey, that's why we've put together a short "vibe check" quiz. Let's see how you do.

1. What's one process that gives you the biggest migraine every week?
2. Where do mistakes keep happening, even after you've tried to fix them?
3. What's clunky or broken, but everyone keeps doing it the same way because "that's how we've always done it?"
4. What process takes too long?
5. Name something that involves a spreadsheet, a whiteboard, sticky notes, or maybe all three combined?
6. What costs you the most money? Overtime, errors, rush freight, or over-ordering?
7. What KPI information do you want on a dashboard?
8. What is hidden and wish you knew more about what's going on in your own business?
9. Where do you hear the most grumbling from your staff?
10. If you could wave a magic wand and improve one thing in your shop, what would it be?

If one or more of these sounds familiar, then checking out vibe coding might be worth exploring.

Next step: A vibe-coded app for you

Does this mean you have to rebuild your entire workflow? Of course not. It means picking one small headache and creating one small tool to solve it. Here's a simple go-to strategy framework you can follow:

- **First, identify the pain point**: Choose the process that wastes the most time, money, or energy. If you are going to solve a problem, then let's solve one that matters.
- **Second, map the basics**: Write down all of the pertinent information you already track. This could be sizes, stitch counts, SKUs, time, or anything you measure. What else is involved? What should success look like? In a short sentence, write out what you want.
- **Third, pick a platform**: Start with one vibe code option such as Base44, Lovable, or Knack. They all work, but they are all different. Experiment. It's OK to feel awkward and even fail. This is how you learn. You don't need to master all of these. Just get one to work for you.
- **Fourth, build small**: Don't try to fit everything into one tool. Have a tiny success doing one small thing. Build it to completion so that it works every time. You can expand on that or use the process to build something more complex.
- **Fifth, test & refine**: Chances are, other people will be using whatever you build. Get their input before you start building, but also after you complete the app. Their feedback is what makes this strong and sticky. Your tool is of zero use if nobody uses it.

Remember, the goal isn't perfection, it's progress. Your goal is to save time, reduce errors, and protect profit. You can connect the apps and automate them. Over time, these building blocks can be systemized to fit the way your shop runs, not the other way around.

Picture your shop running without the constant fire drills and headaches. Orders flow on time, your staff knows what to do, and problems that used to drain profit are under control. That utopia is possible. Vibe coding could be the vehicle to get you there. But you have to start. Like any journey, it takes a first step. Are you ready to put one foot forward and try vibe coding? Let's solve one headache this week and let the results show you what's next. You can do this! **GP**

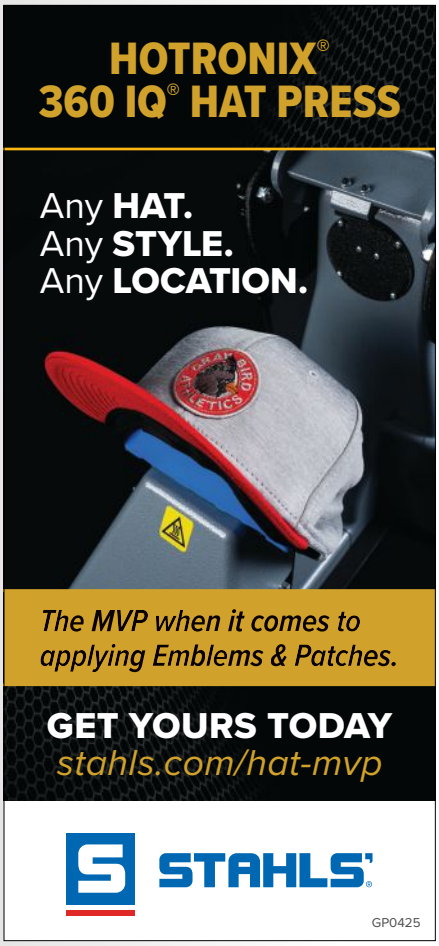


Marshall Atkinson lives and works in Mesa, Arizona. He is a frequent contributor to industry magazines and a popular trade show educator. Recognized for his industry education contributions, he was elected to the Academy of Screen and Digital Printing Technologies in 2020.

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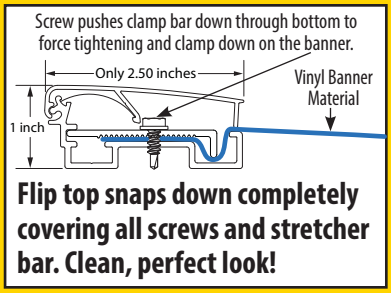
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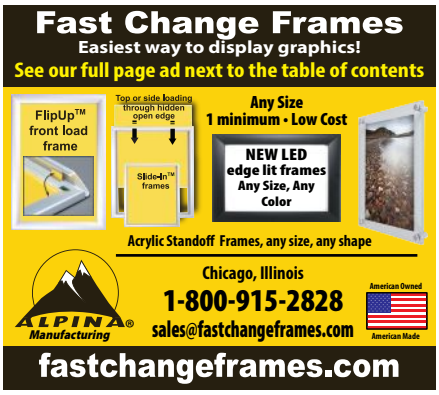
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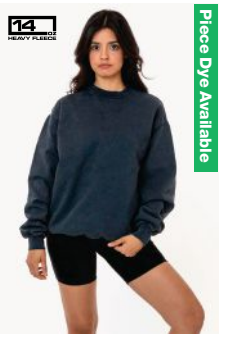
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