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Laser  
Engraving  
Report PAGE 37

## DYE-SUB PRINTING

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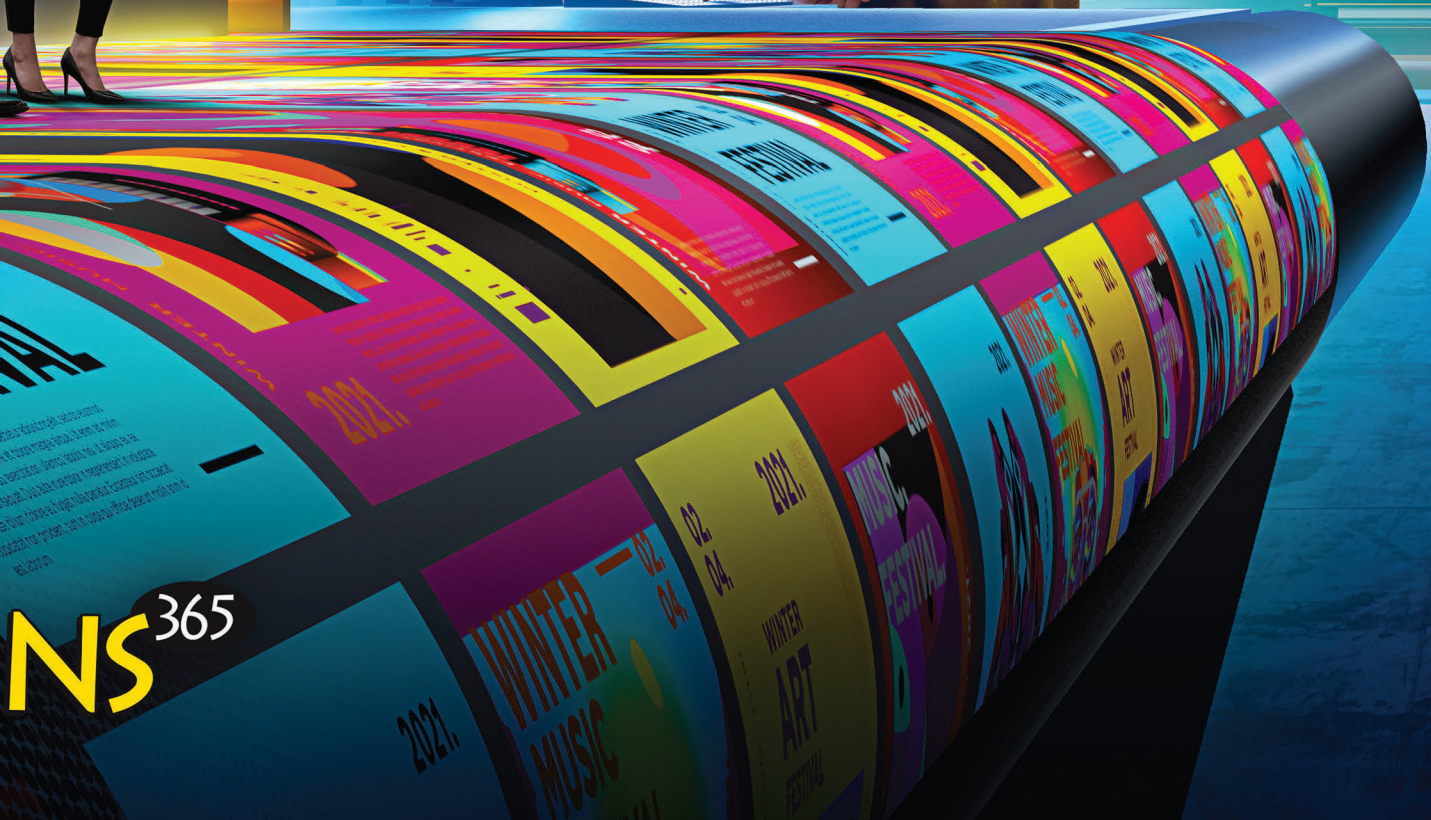
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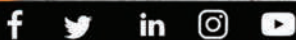
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**“According to the 2021 Laser Engraving Market Survey results, 78% of shops report sales being at the same level or higher than the previous year.”**

**GRAPHICS PRO STAFF**

from 2021 Market Survey, page 38

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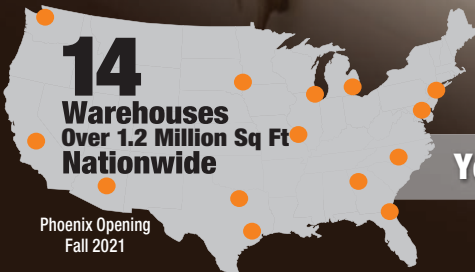


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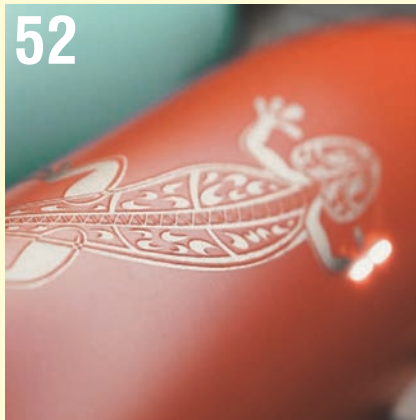
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With dye sublimation, not only can you create stunning images on snowboarding apparel, but also the snowboards as well, page 12. Image courtesy **Epson**. Inset image courtesy **Professional Glass**.

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# MAKE YOUR SUCCESSION SUCCEED

Every year we do a readership survey of laser engraving shops for our annual Laser Engraving Report. This year's findings were positive on the growth front, with evidence that the industry is rock solid even during times when a pandemic is disrupting life in many ways.

But there is one piece of information that is getting harder and harder to ignore about the many awards and engraving shops out there ... this industry is maturing, and younger people aren't stepping in to take over.

Our survey showed that 62% of respondents were over the age of 55. And 83% are over the age of 46. Not you, of course. You look great! Happy 29<sup>th</sup> birthday ... again.

But apparently, the generation of "everyone gets a trophy" was so stigmatized by the moniker that none of them are choosing to go into business to create trophies themselves. Another ominous sign is that Facebook is by far the most-used social media network by engraving shops. And while Facebook is still the most popular social media network out there, it's in decline and — much like our engraving industry — having a hard time convincing younger people that it's the place to be.

Any chance I get to quote Yoda, you bet I'm going to take, so remember that it's important to pass on what you have learned. If succession hasn't been something you think about regularly, it's time to plan. Even if you've got another 20 or 30 years left in you, having a plan for the future of your company after you are gone is never a bad move. Whether it's turning the shop over to a family member, trusted employee, or just a plan to sell everything you have to a total stranger and let the market sort it out, the future of your company is a big decision.

I don't bring this up because I want to see you go. I bring this up because the numbers say it's apparently on the horizon for many of you, and your retirement, your legacy, and your impact on the community are all things that you should take very seriously.

Here are a couple resources to look at to help you begin the process of planning for that next step:

**Succession Planning Shouldn't Just Be an Exit Strategy**  
<http://gpro.link/succession>

**Do You Really Have to Think About This? (Yes)**  
<http://gpro.link/nextstep>

And be sure to check out page 38 for more information from our annual Laser Engraving Survey. **GP**

## IN THIS ISSUE:

**HOLIDAY GIFTS AND CORPORATE AWARDS**

**SPORTS AND EVENTS MARKET**

**TEXTILE DYE-SUB PRINTING**

(Image courtesy Professional Glass)



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| SETTING NEW STANDARDS



## THE BIG “C” AND MISSING “M”

The first time I met my friend, Zach, he was standing in the reception part of the shop asking Frances questions about a custom sign job, but she quickly turned him over to me.

He described an apartment project he was just completing a few blocks away, one he built and intended to also own and manage, as he did with other properties further west in Dallas-Fort Worth. He shared that he wanted to try building in Longview (my hometown) because the cost of developing real estate was cheaper here.

Zach was African, but I wasn't sure he was African American because of his noticeable accent. For sure, he wasn't from Texas. Instead, I learned he was from an East African nation which, for our purposes, can go unnamed. I asked a few questions and got a small picture of his successful career, which was now bringing work to my corner of the world.

Zach was a personable guy, and I liked him immediately. I was also quickly learning to respect the amount of self-made success he had been able to experience, which was far more impressive than the career of the native Texan sign guy he had dropped in on. For someone who had been in the USA less than 20 years, he'd accomplished a lot.

As we wrapped up the business part of our conversation, I challenged my new friend by saying, “Zach, you know that what you've done, in the short time you've done it, is completely impossible!” Holding my best poker face, I waited for his response.

Zach hesitated a bit, then smiled and then replied, “No, it isn't. It's not impossible at all.”

“I never thought it was, Zach. And for that, we can both be thankful. Opportunity is good for everybody, and in America, it exists in abundance ... but not all of us see it as well as you do.”

Of course, I realized I was stretching the boundaries of inquiry of someone I'd just met but being the curious and somewhat uncouth fellow I am, I continued.



“Zach, don't people in your native country need houses, apartments, and so forth like we do here?” He agreed that was certainly the case, so I inquired, “Then why are you not putting your talent to work in the area of the world where you come from?”

To that, my last and final question, he had a one-word answer: “Corruption.”

Because of that unchangeable fact of life in the nation of his birth, he could not pursue his dreams where his family was and where his heart should have been. There he said it was “impossible.”

To me, the story of Zach, the developer, tells us a lot about how things work — and how they don't work, too. The all too obvi-

ous lesson is that corruption, the “Big C,” kills an economy because it depletes the oxygen in the lifeblood of a nation. That vital oxygen is simply “motivation.” Kill that one thing, and you kill everything. It's not complicated.

And the effect of corruption is not always somewhere else. My own father started a chain of auto parts stores back in the prime of his life, and the “chain” never got past two because the manager he put in charge of his second of 100 locations stole from the company, cooked the books, and the other 98 locations vanished in a cloud of smoke — smoke created from the torching of my own father's motivation. And so, I make my living in the sign business, not the automotive business.

Of course, there could have been worse outcomes. Giving credit where credit is due, I have to say I have taken out thousands of permits, mostly for signs but also for two or three commercial buildings and a house or two, and

I have never been asked for a single bribe or anything under the table. What a blessing. At least for now, life is still good in the USA, but we take these things for granted at our own peril.

I hope your business is blessed as well, and you're finding new opportunities and maybe new friends too.

*Rick*

**RICK WILLIAMS** owns Rick's Sign Company, a commercial sign shop in Longview, Texas. He has been in the sign industry since 1973 and has been a contributing editor to *Sign Business* and *Sign & Digital Graphics* since 1986. Contact Rick via email at ricksignco@aol.com.



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# Textile Dye-Sublimation Printing Comes Into its Own

**PURPOSE-BUILT PRINTERS LEAD THE WAY TO HIGHER MARGINS**

BY PAULA AVEN GLADYCH



**D**ye-sub printing on textiles is a growing part of the industry because its applications are vast. From soft signage to clothing to furniture and sports equipment, the possibilities are endless. Throughout this article, you'll see many examples of what can be done with a dye-sub printer, and in many cases, it's far easier to produce than the fantastic end products would lead you to believe.

## THE FIRST DYE-SUB PRINTERS

In the early days of dye-sublimation, it was a struggle for print shops to get into it because there were no dedicated printers specifically for that task.

"Everything was Frankenstein'd," according to Gary Barker, Digital Technology Group. "You would retrofit your printer, use someone else's ink or another piece of software. Today, several manufacturers are now manufacturing their own dye-

sublimation printers, their own inks and pairing them with known software. It is a lot easier for the end-user to get good consistent quality, and just the workflow process is much more streamlined."

Tim Check, Epson America, agrees, saying that over the past decade, the dye-sublimation market moved from "cobbled photo and CAD printers to purpose-built sublimation printers with consistent output and high reliability." The equipment

available in 2021 ranges in output volume from sampling size to high-volume digital production, while the cost of equipment has come down, along with the operating costs, to only be "a small portion of the overall cost of the apparel production," he says.

Epson has seen growth with digital textile print applications, and over the past 18 months, "there has been a shift from in-store to online purchasing. As such,

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(Image courtesy Epson)

The Texart RT-640 is a new printer from Roland DGA designed for sublimation printing workflows for custom and branded apparel, decor, and soft signage. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)



buyers have significantly more options and customization in the products – apparel, decor, gift items. Digital textile printing enables designers to create and sell unique designs on a made-to-order basis,” says Check.

Another more recent change is that dye-sublimation technology has become easier to use and more affordable in-house. That has prompted many smaller shops or large apparel or home design companies to purchase their own equipment rather than outsource those jobs to Central and South America or Asia.

What that means for the client is that jobs get completed more quickly and with shorter lead and turnaround times. What would once have taken months to complete can now be completed in a week or less and be ready to deliver to clients across the country. This is important, particularly in the fashion and apparel industry, where designers couldn’t respond quickly enough to smaller opportunities or test markets.

“The advantage of dye-sublimation is you can start small and scale your business,” says Barker. Many get started with dye-sub printing by personalizing smaller goods like hand towels, golf towels, baby blankets, or jerseys.

“During the pandemic, there was a serious supply chain disruption for all parts of the textile and apparel industry,” says Victoria Harris of Mimaki, resulting in a “significant shift to DTC/e-commerce creating a democratized market for small business and brands to compete” and a shift to more localized manufacturing.

“There is a demand for a digital solution to create less waste and obtain faster speed to market, which digital textile printing



(Image courtesy Mimaki)

SMART CHANGE STARTS HERE.

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Learn how Alan Spaeth from R&S Marching Arts works with the award-winning DGI POSEIDON dye sublimation printer with fluorescent inks to create unique, functional, and eye-catching high school band costumes and flags. With the ability to run the DGI POSEIDON at production speed whether you're printing process colors or with fluorescent inks, R&S Marching Arts produces 100 to 300 uniforms from design to production in less than a week.

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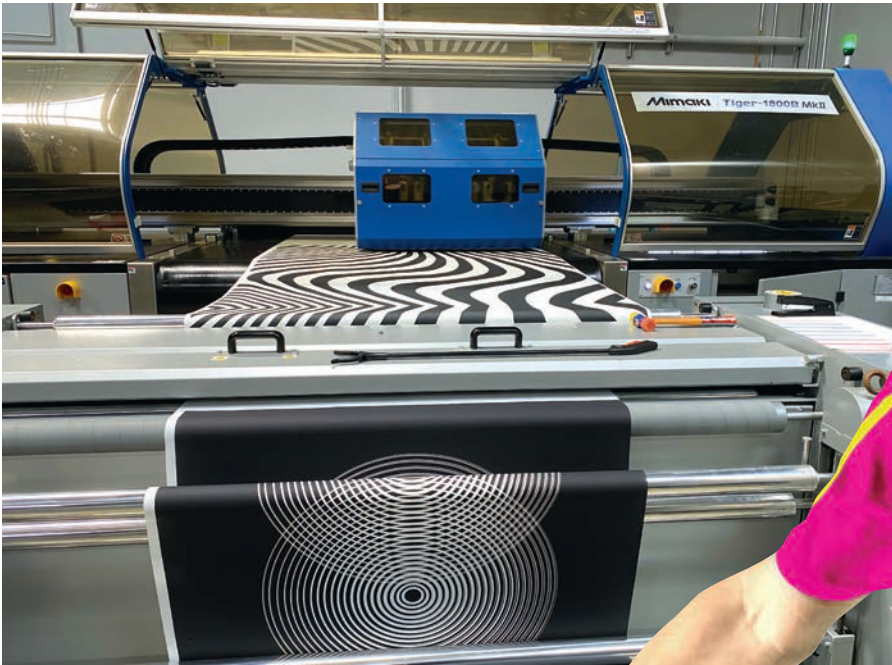


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The Tiger 1800 MKIII is a dye-sublimation printer that uses a belt conveying system. (Image courtesy Mimaki)



(Image courtesy Roland DGA)





(Image courtesy Epson)

aligns perfectly with, values being short-run production, greater variation of designs, vast customization, ability to create on-demand and support sales as they increase without having to stock large inventory which are at risk of costly meltdowns down the road,” she adds.

### TEXTILE PRINTING TECHNOLOGY

There are two types of textile printing technologies, transfer dye-sublimation and direct-to-fabric printing. According

to Harris, transfer dye-sublimation is very popular, especially among newer print shops, because it is a fairly easy process to learn.

Dye-sublimation is used for polyester materials and sportswear. The design is printed onto transfer paper and then sublimated onto the fabric using a heat press.

The difference between printing with pigment inks and printing with dye-sublimation is that dye-sublimation actually dyes the fibers making it wash and rub-resistant, whereas pigment inks are just laid down on the surface of the material, making them more susceptible to washing, fading, and cracking, says Lily Hunter, Roland DGA.

Many polyester fabrics have the look and feel of linen or cotton, which has fueled

demand for these products in the apparel and home decor industries, including athleticwear, athleisure, bathing suits, cushion covers, and table linens.

With dye-sublimation, customers don't have to worry about the ink on their furnishings transferring to their clothing.

“Digital printing has a nice advantage. We reduce lead times, increase efficiency, and can do it on demand,” Harris adds. “You don't have to order 30,000 units like you did before. Now you can produce 100 to 1,000, and whatever sells, you can make more of instantly.”

For direct-to-fabric dye-sublimation printing, a shop needs coated fabrics to hold the ink before it goes into the heat or steam press. If the material doesn't have a coating on it, the inks will bleed. If the fab-

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(Image courtesy Epson)



(Image courtesy Mimaki)

ric is for apparel, it also needs to go through a wash cycle to remove the coating.

In both transfer dye-sub and direct-to-fabric dye-sub printing, inks look very dull during the sublimation process until heat and pressure are applied.

That's when the solid ink particles turn into gas, and the gas penetrates the polyester coating or fibers, but it is the pressure that helps the color bloom, Hunter says.

### MARKETS FOR DYE-SUBLIMATION

Dye-sublimation printing is very versatile and can be used for soft signage, apparel, home decor, and promotional items.

The soft signage market is growing, but it is more "popular in Europe than in the states because in Europe PVC is outlawed. They can't do banners there. They have to do soft signage," says DTG's Barker.

In the U.S., silicone edge graphics have become very popular, especially in airports with numerous backlit advertising or informational displays. Instead of using films in those lightboxes, airports turn to textile dye-sublimation because the fabric can be front-lit or backlit, depending on the application. Fabric is easy to install, is more forgiving, durable, scratch-resistant, and lightweight, making it easier to box up and ship around the country. Trade shows have also started using more dye-sublimated soft signage in place of vinyl banners.

*continued on page 110*



(Image courtesy Epson)



(Image courtesy Roland DGA)

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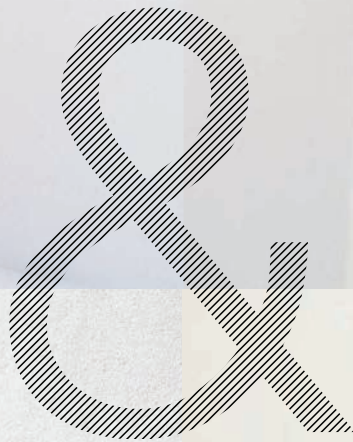
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# PROFIT AND PROFITABILITY

*KNOW WHERE YOUR MONEY IS MADE SO YOU CAN TARGET HIGHER MARGINS*



The average small business owner is not as well versed in the numbers of their business — the financials — as they need to be. (Image courtesy Jennifer Cox)

One of the reasons you launched your business was to “make money” with your embroidery machine and any other apparel decorating equipment to which you had access. Here we are, at the end of the year, and it is time to figure out the answer to this question, “How much money did I make?” And more importantly, to answer this question, “How much money did I get to keep?” That, right there, is the difference between profit and profitability. Making money is one thing. Building a business that pays you a reasonable amount of that money as your earnings and in addition to that, as profits, is an entirely different (and better) thing!

The average small business owner is not as well versed in the numbers of their business — the financials — as they need to be. It is OK to be honest with yourself. Most of us do not go into owning our business with a business background or any relevant business training.

If you are not comfortable with knowing and using the money numbers of your business, how can you measure your profits or profitability? The common systems to help you track the money going in and going out of your business offer many kinds of reports. It can be confusing, even overwhelming, to know what numbers to track. Once you know how to measure your profitability, you will understand the financial health of your business now, see changes as they happen, and you can plan for your future.

## **PROFIT VS. PROFITABILITY**

Profit and profitability sound similar and are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing.

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**Profit** (noun): *the monetary surplus left to a producer or employer after deducting wages, rent, cost of raw materials, etc.*

This is the amount of money your business makes after all the expenses/costs are paid. It is what people often call “the bottom line.” It is a specific, definable dollar amount.

Total revenue (money in) – total expenses (money out) = profit

**Profitability** (adjective): *yielding profit*

A more abstract view of your business, this is an overall assessment of how the business is doing. When people talk about their “margins,” they are talking about profitability. Tracked as a percentage, it is easy to see when your profitability is increasing or decreasing.

### WHAT ARE YOUR MARGINS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Getting your margin ratios is an excellent way to see how profitable your business is. To run your margins, you need three things from your income statement, which you can get from your bookkeeping system:

- **Gross Profit** = net sales – cost of goods sold
- **Operating Profit** = gross profit – operating costs
- **Net Profits** = operating profit + any other income – additional expenses – taxes

Once you have these three numbers, you can turn them into trackable percentages.

**Gross profit margin** = (gross profit divided by number of sales) x 100

If this margin is high, that means your profits are high compared to your costs. This is a very good thing! This percentage should remain fairly consistent over time.

**Operating profit margin** = (operating income divided by number of sales) x 100

You want this percentage to increase over time, as that shows you are financially healthy and the business is growing. If this number is not increasing, your operating costs are increasing, but your income is not. Time to figure out where your costs are going up and see what can be done about it. Or it might be time to implement a small price increase if you have not done that in a while.

**Net profit margin** = (net income divided by number of sales) x 100

This percentage indicates how much money your business makes from your sales. This is the metric that you really want to know and have it stay consistent or increase over time.

### MEASURE THE PROFITABILITY OF YOUR JOBS

Some of your jobs and some of your customers are more profitable than others. It makes sense to determine which ones are consistently contributing to the overall financial health of your business and which ones are less healthy for your business. Just because a customer places large orders, that does not mean they are the most profitable orders.

**Gross profit per job** = total income – total expenses

Once you have an idea of how profitable certain kinds of jobs and customers are, try to bring in more projects that will hit those optimum profit points. You may now know that orders for 12 pieces with a left chest design bring you 20% less profits than orders for 36 pieces, based on the number of heads you have. The next time a customer is



(Image courtesy Amy Rockwell)

waffling about how many shirts to order, encourage them to get 36 pieces if that is reasonable for their needs. That would be better for your business than three orders of 12 pieces over the next few months. Their total spend will be the same, but your profits will be higher. This is an example of how knowing your financial metrics and using them can have an immediate and significant impact on the overall financial health of your company! If you would like a simple job profits calculator tool, email me at [Jennifer@NNEP.com](mailto:Jennifer@NNEP.com), with the subject line “JPC Tool,” and I will send it to you!

Once you see how the different kinds of orders and different kinds of customers stack up as far as the amount of profits they bring to your business, you can in-

entionally spend your time, resources, and energy finding and bringing in the more profitable types of jobs and customers. Let the lower profit customers and orders find you — do not spend any time trying to attract them.

It is challenging to successfully, consistently, and constantly juggle all the responsibilities of owning and running your business. For many, knowing and working with the financials is something we put off to do “later.” Unfortunately, if you do not monitor, evaluate, and use the financial numbers of your business regularly, it is much more likely that there will not be a “later,” as your business will not survive.

After the holiday crush and as this year comes to a close, take the time to get these financial numbers of your business. Take a

“long view” look at them over the course of 2021. What changed, when, and why? Plan to calculate, review and more importantly, use these metrics at least once a quarter to guide you and your business in the coming year. At the end of 2022, it is likely that your profits and your profitability will be higher than they were in 2021, having used these numbers to help you run your business and make decisions. **GP**

**JENNIFER COX** is one of the founders and serves as 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. You can contact her at [jennifer@nnepp.com](mailto:jennifer@nnepp.com).

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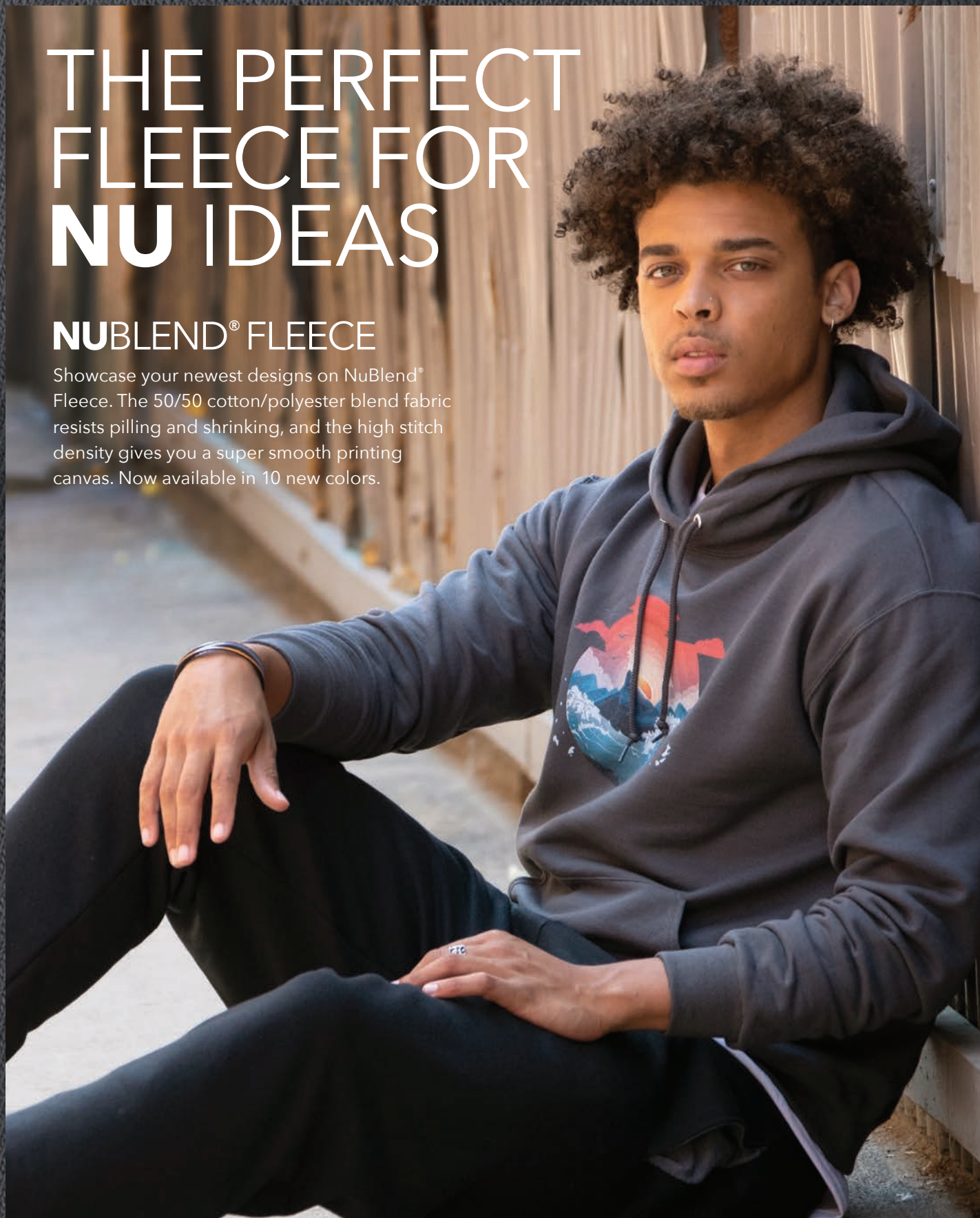
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# 7 Steps to Embroidered-Edge Patches



BY ERICH  
CAMPBELL

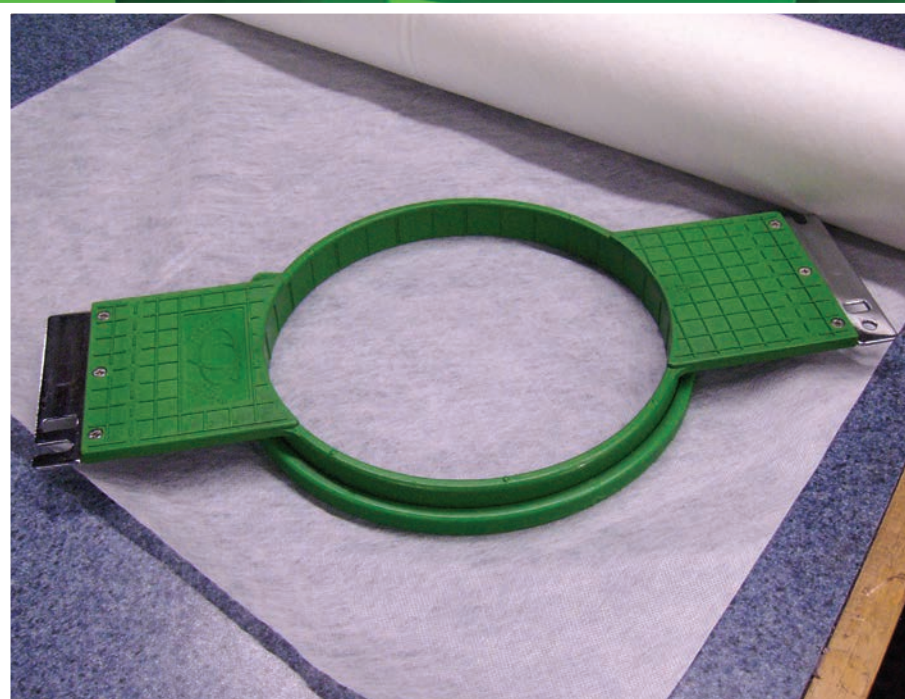
**S**mall-run, in-house patch production can be done by any embroiderer without the need for expensive additional equipment. Though larger quantities and efficiency may lead you to outsource, for low-count orders, high levels of personalization, creative treatments, or solidifying the creative direction of a patch order before mass production, creating embroidered-edge patches can be a useful tool for any decorator.

With nothing more than a file digitized with structural placement and border stitching and a specialty stabilizer, any embroiderer can produce clean-edged, collectible emblems that are sure to support any merch line's product mix or serve as a decoration method for everything from caps and outerwear to bags and other accessories. Following is one simple, single-hooping fabric-based patch-making method.

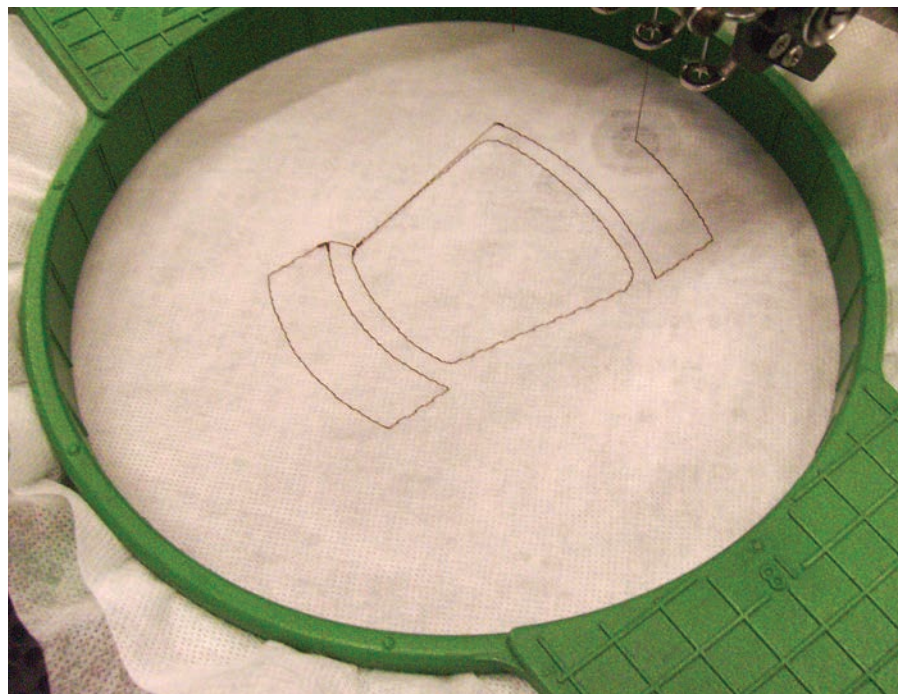
## **7 STEPS FOR FABRIC-BASED PATCHES ON SOLUBLE/REMOVABLE STABILIZER**

1. Hoop your chosen support material.

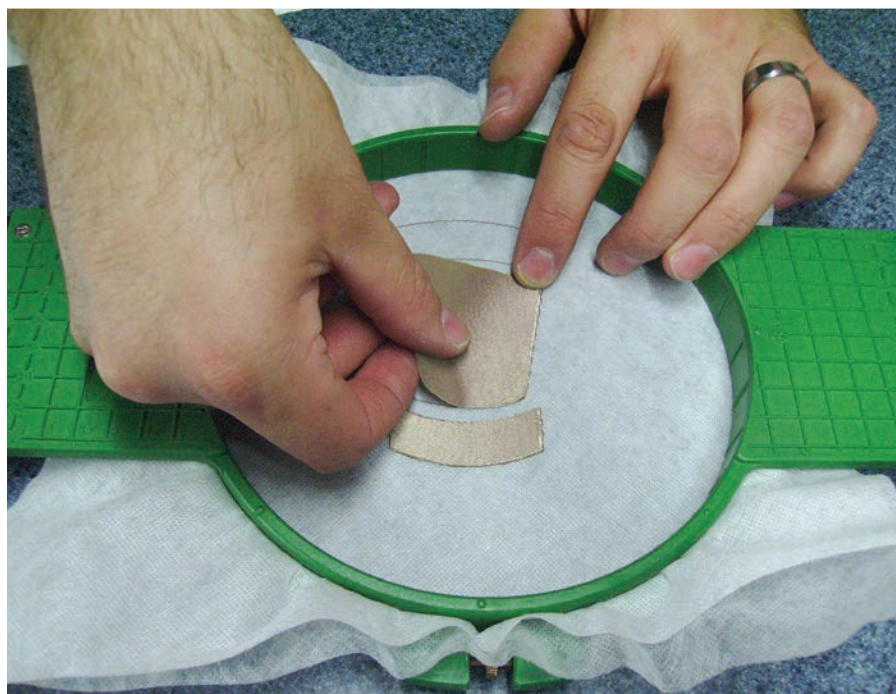
One of the simplest to use is a fibrous water-soluble stabilizer, though plastic films have become increasingly popular with 100-micron heat-away films and standard 20-gauge clear vinyl leading the charge. Note: film substrates are more likely to experience premature tearing during embroidery.



1. Hoop up a double layer of a fibrous, water-soluble stabilizer. (All images courtesy Erich Campbell)



2. Run your placement lines.



3. Using an adhesive, place the cut pieces on the stabilizer.



4. Run the tackdown stitching.

2. Stitch your straight-stitch placement line, showing the position of the patch on the substrate.
3. Place the patch material in the hoop, carefully aligning or entirely covering the placement area with material for pre-cut and hand-cut processes, respectively. You should lightly adhere the patch material to the substrate to avoid shifting. Examples shown here have utilized pressure-sensitive, adhesive-coated twill, but other materials require a light spray of embroidery-specific adhesive to secure them.
4. Stitch a tackdown zigzag or cut line. If using **pre-cut material**, this offers a chance to correct improper placement. If your zigzag doesn't fully capture the edge of the material or your material has shifted during the tackdown, it's relatively simple to remove loose zigzag stitching and move the material into the proper alignment before repeating the zigzag. For **hand-cutting**, you'll carefully remove the hoop and cut excess material away from the cut line after running a straight-stitch cut line during this stage. Cut as close to the stitched line as possible without cutting your cut line's stitches to avoid loose threads escaping the final edge.
5. Run your central design. The main decorative body of the design should run *before the outline*, as the satin outline has the most chance of compromising





5 (Above). Run your design and border. 6 (Right). The patches with embroidery complete.



7. Unhoop the stitched patches.

Trim away any excess material.



the stabilizer through closely aligned, dense perforations, particularly if you elect to use a film substrate. With the stresses of the central design, perforated stabilizer may allow deformation of the border or premature tear-out, ruining your emblem.

6. Stitch the final, full-density satin-stitch or faux-merrow border.
7. Remove the patch from the hoop and remove the excess stabilizer by washing/rinsing it in the case of water-soluble stabilizer or tearing it away in the case of plastic films.

With simple production and a low cost of entry, small-run patches can be the answer when decorating the occasional hard-to-hoop or hard-to-stitch item using adhesive applications, making heavy designs possible on light substrates, or if you're looking to add a useful non-sized item you can produce in-house. **GP**

**ERICH CAMPBELL** has more than 18 years of experience as an award-winning digitizer, e-commerce manager, and industry educator. He empowers decorators to do their best work and achieve a greater success. A current educator and long-time contributor to industry trade publications, Erich takes every opportunity to provide value to the industry.



**Top:** Rinse out the soluble stabilizer. **Above:** The finished patches.



# WRAPSCON MAN!

**CREATING AN ACTION-ORIENTED FIGURE TO REPRESENT A DYNAMIC SHOW**



We used Channels in Photoshop for this and most raster image separations. We tried to stay with six or fewer total colors, a white printer or baseplate, and a highlight white. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)

It's a bird; it's a plane; it's WRAPSCON? Wait. What? That's not how it goes! WRAPSCON ... A wraps event, for wrappers, by wrappers!

National Business Media — producers of *WRAPS* and *GRAPHICS PRO* magazines and the GRAPHICS PRO EXPO — presents WRAPSCON. It has become a must-attend event. The best graphics installers, leading manufacturers, and distributors in the business come together under one roof with a national audience to share tips and tricks, install techniques, and the latest products to boost this rapidly growing market. The latest in digital printing, vinyl technology, lamination, vehicle templates, wrap-specific artwork and tools, plus an expert educational panel, a thrilling competition, and more. If you have skin in the WRAPS game, then you gotta be there!

## THE WRAPSCON T

If you want an event to look like it has powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal events, perhaps a superhero is in order. Superheroes and villains alike have become a huge part of our culture over the last couple of decades. Not that these super-human creations haven't been around for some time in print; in a world of big-budget filmmaking, TV apps, and social media, they are bigger and brighter than ever. With multiple generations of fans, it seems appropriate to advertise with them. Though using licensed and trademarked figures like Batman or Superman is, how shall we say, frowned upon, creating our own character who can wrap tall buildings in a single sheet seems appropriate. This fun supernatural design was to be printed on



The deepest shadows had the tones greatly reduced so that they matched the original image and some portions were completely knocked out using the garment to be seen at 100%, making those areas completely black. The gray's transitioning nearby was only at about 20–30%.

T-shirts — because that's what we do. The action-oriented figure speeding toward the viewer, ready to apply a wrap with SUPER accuracy, has the tools and skills to be a force to be reckoned with.

Though we are sure the source file exists somewhere, this came as a flattened image that made the process a little harder for separation used for our screen print process. A layered file at 300 DPI to size is undoubtedly preferred. We used Channels in Photoshop for this and most raster image separations. We tried to stay with six or fewer total colors, a white printer or baseplate, and a highlight white. Luckily, we were printing on black garments, which eliminated the need for a black plate on the outlines. We love working on black because colorful designs really

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GPH121

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



**Top:** The flesh tones were handled by both reducing the densities and removing the base plate. **Above:** The colored inks followed by the highlight white ran wet on wet on 230s at the same tension using all 65/90/65 triple-ply, dual durometer squeegees.

pop, and we can get secondary tones and shadows without the need for additional screens.

We started with red because it is the most dominant and forward color in the original image and broke it down by using the magenta channel from the CMYK mode using Levels. We bumped the solid areas to 100% in density where it made up the character. The rest of the information on this channel represented the gray colorization and was simply removed. Similarly, we used various channels to get the other colors adjusted and isolated from all their neighbors.

Even though we weren't printing black for this design, the black resource channel from that CMYK mode was still important. We used it to control areas between colors and, in some cases, to knock out color or values for the garment to play its role in building the shadow areas. The deepest shadows had the tones greatly reduced to match the original image, and some portions were completely knocked out using the garment to be seen at 100%, making those areas completely black. The gray's transitioning nearby was only at about 20-30%.

The flesh tones were handled similarly by reducing the densities and removing the base plate. This gave us some secondary tones to create the shadows of the arm. There seemed to be a reddish tone in the shadow of the arm, so by placing a small percentage in that area, we were able to get a nice mixture to give us yet another tone. We used a bit of reverse technique to create a lighter tint using highlight white of the design for the lighter tone in the flesh areas as well. By reducing the density of the flesh to 70% over the white base and adding 25% white over the top, we achieved the high-light areas.

Last but certainly not ever least was the white printer or base plate itself. Essentially it becomes the grayscale of the full-color image. If this plate looks good as a grayscale, typically, the print will be pretty solid. We really rely on instincts here to adjust densities plus and minus. Some larger areas where the black of the garment would show through are completely knocked and represent the black line and deep shadow areas of the image. Some of the white, red, blue, and yellow brightest areas of color required 100% solid white to retain opacity where necessary. The gray areas typically don't need much or any base and have been reduced to lower percentages and represented without much help from the white. Most of these inks fell back nicely on the dark garments in variable densities for that light-to-dark highlight to shadow smooth transition.

Once seps were completed, we outputted on CTS with a frequency of a larger 45

LPI half-tone at a 22.5-degree angle for an illustrative or cartoon look appropriate for our superhero. We ran the white printer on a 156 TPI screen at 35 N/cm<sup>2</sup> followed by a flash and smoothing, heated iron in a Teflon screen. Next, the colored inks followed by the highlight white ran wet on wet on 230s at the same tension using all 65/90/65 triple-ply, dual durometer squeegees. Once set up, we ran the WRAPCON Man faster than a speeding bullet! **GP**

At 21 years old, **LON WINTERS** was the production manager for Ocean Pacific and started his 30+ year career reclaiming screens. He's the president and founder of Colorado-based Graphic Elephants, an international consulting firm and apparel decoration studio specializing in screen printing technical advances, plant design, layout, troubleshooting, productivity, quality analysis, and complete apparel decorating solutions. Learn more at [www.graphicelephants.com](http://www.graphicelephants.com).

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## CASE STUDY:

# Compact Infrared Dryers Make Big Jobs a Snap for Airbrush Guru



BY MARK VASILANTONE

**V**eteran airbrush artist Mark Rush founded Big Airbrush Inc. in 1985. The business has since grown to six stores in Florida Walmart supercenters that operate from 8 a.m.-11 p.m. 364 days a year. He also runs a successful online storefront and sells merchandise through his website [www.bigairbrush.com](http://www.bigairbrush.com) and Amazon Handmade.

In addition to his thriving business, Rush enjoys fame in the airbrush world. His inventions, including a line of silent airbrush compressors and customized airbrushes,

have improved the art of airbrushing and are used by artists worldwide.

Each store employs two to four artists who airbrush approximately 500 shirts per day per store, in addition to merchandise such as trucker caps, towels, license plates, sand dollars, and shoes. A Vastex D-100 infrared conveyor dryer cures approximately five shirts a minute.

“We do a million dollars a year in sales at each store. That’s a lot of shirts,” says Rush. “We have to be able to dry them as fast as the artist paints them. Some designs take

a few minutes to paint; some take longer. But without the infrared dryer, we would never be able to handle the volume that we do.”

## IMPROVED QUALITY & DRY TIMES

Airbrush artists traditionally cure painted shirts using a heat gun or a heat press. According to Rush, a heat gun can scorch shirts while a heat press accentuates areas of overspray, making them “stick out like a sore thumb.”

Furthermore, set up on a heat press can be time-consuming. To ensure the paint doesn’t seep through the shirt, the operator must place a barrier between the front and back of the shirt. Rush estimates that the heat press takes four times longer than the infrared dryer to cure a shirt.

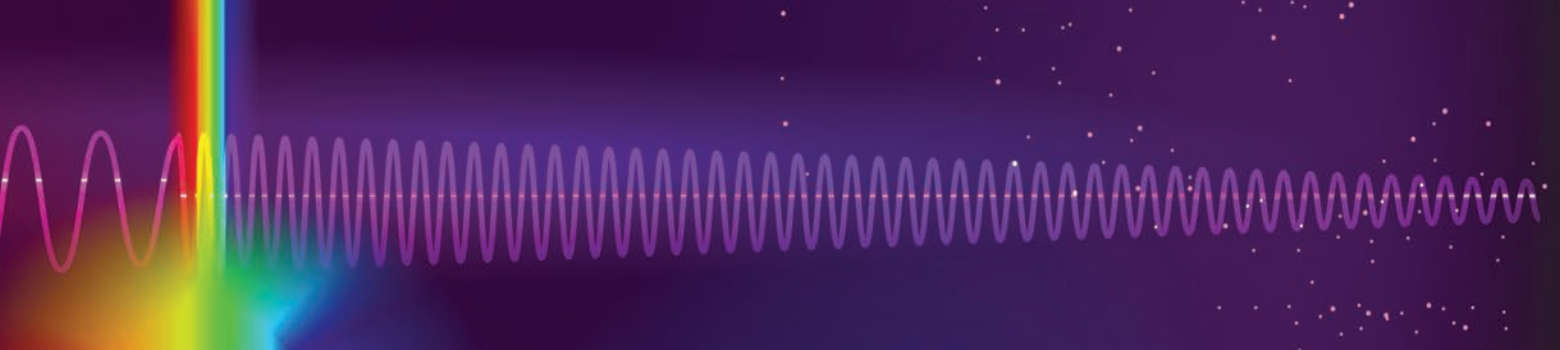
He was first introduced to an infrared dryer in the ’70s while working in a screen-printing shop in Colorado. After running a couple of shirts through the dryer, he realized that this method would also be suitable for drying airbrushed garments.

In 1978, Rush moved to Hawaii, where he airbrushed surfboards and T-shirts. When he returned to Colorado, he worked in another screen-printing shop — this time as an airbrush artist. He used the shop’s infrared dryer to cure his shirts and was immediately taken with the technology.

In 1984, Rush opened Big Airbrush in Panama City and purchased his first infrared conveyor dryer to dry airbrushed shirts and merchandise. As the business grew, he replaced the old dryer with a Vastex D-100



Although compact tabletop units, Mark Rush’s conveyor dryers are the workhorses of his six Big Airbrush stores. (All images courtesy Vastex International)



conveyor dryer and bought additional units until he had one in every store.

In addition to drying T-shirts, the dryer cures Rush's other products, including towels, license plates, face masks, and sneakers. "We run everything through it, except hats," he says. "Those we dry with a heat gun."

The dryer is set on medium-high (approximately 300 F) and stays at that temperature day in and day out. Rush claims that he has not burned a shirt in 36 years. The operator adjusts the conveyor belt's speed depending on the material being cured. Face masks, for example, dry faster than T-shirts, so the operator speeds up the conveyor belt. Gauging the correct belt speed is more art than science: the operator watches the shirts and masks as they enter the dryer's tunnel and adjusts the speed accordingly.

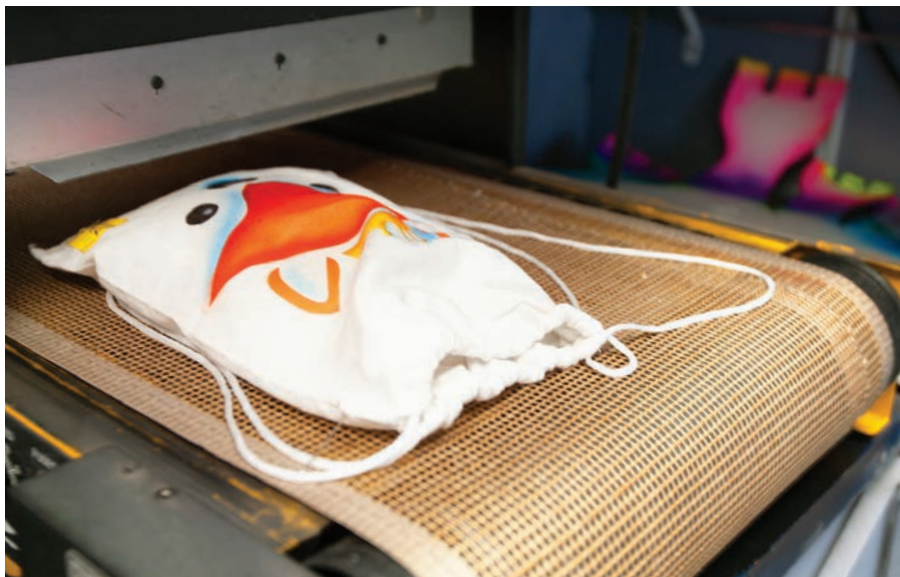
"The machine is capable of drying 20 masks a minute, but we can't paint them that fast, so we dry six to eight masks a minute," adds Rush.

Big Airbrush also uses the dryer to flash-cure vanity license plates before weather-proofing them with a clear coat of enamel. Finished plates are dry to the touch and hung on a rack to await enamel application, which takes eight to ten hours to fully dry in open air.

Rush has also found a use for the infrared dryer that reduces the need for spray adhesive, which contains solvent. "We spray adhesive on the back of our stencils to make them stick to the shirts," he explains. "It's environmentally unfriendly, so instead of spraying more adhesive on the stencils, we run them through the dryer, sticky side up, which reheats and reactivates the glue."

### THE GURU OF AIRBRUSHING

To call Rush a legendary airbrush artist would not be a stretch. In 1982, he graced the cover of the first airbrush magazine to be published. He was the first artist to start using a different airbrush for every color, and he developed the Iwata Great White



Garments exit the conveyor dryer and fall into the bin.

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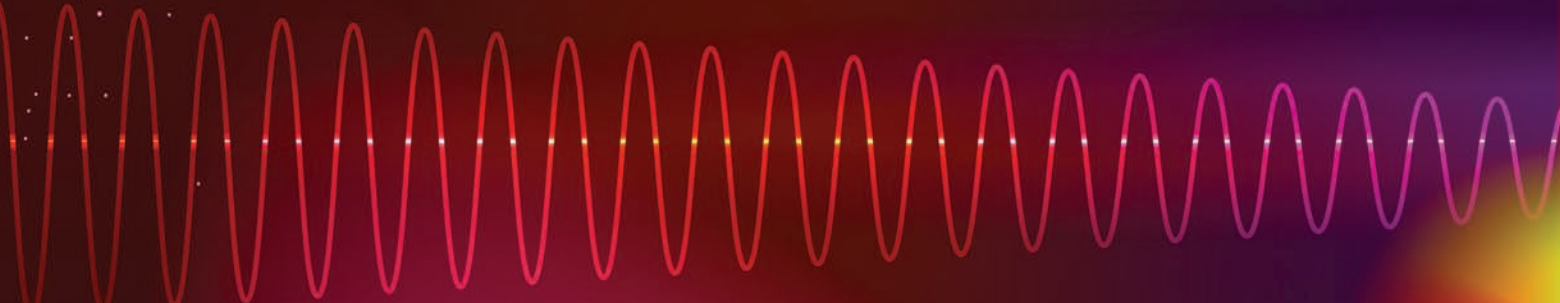






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and Hammerhead Shark line of silent airbrush compressors for which he holds the patent. He also developed a hand-cut stencil system and was the first to customize airbrushes with bullet-type tips and ergonomic features for greater comfort.

Rush's interest in airbrushing began as a child when he saw Ed "Big Daddy" Roth airbrush shirts at a fair. Soon he was airbrushing shirts in his parent's garage and selling his designs to kids at school. His first job was airbrushing dresses and jackets in an upscale clothing store.

Today, Rush uses siphon-feed airbrushes for all of Big Airbrush's T-shirt designs. Customers can choose from more than 1,000 stock designs or customize their orders.

His artists use Iwata Eclipse airbrushes for outlining and detail work and Paasche VL size 3 and 5 airbrushes for broad colorwork and light, fluorescent colors.

"When you're doing detail work, you need to get close to the shirt and use a small amount of air and paint for super-fine lines," Rush explains. "Then, as you



Once the infrared conveyor dryer reheats the adhesive on the stencil, Mark applies the stencil to the shirt and airbrushes finishing touches.

move away from the shirt, you pull back further on the trigger to let out more paint for doing fades. The whole idea is to create texture with the airbrush stroke so that you can make a cloud look fluffy or a palm tree look like it has bark on it."

Artists stretch shirts over Masonite boards and place them on an easel designed to hold 20 shirts simultaneously. Next, they walk up and down the row of shirts applying one color at a time. Finished garments are run through the conveyor dryer and fall into a bin upon exit.

"Once you pop the shirt in the dryer, you don't have to look at it again until you pull it out of the bin," says Rush. Shirt tags are numbered before they run through the dryer to facilitate sorting and packing orders.

Rush has had his D-100 infrared conveyor dryers for about eight years and has no plans to upgrade them. **GP**



**MARK VASILANTONE**, president of Vastex International Inc., purchased the company in 1999 from his father and Vastex founder, Michael Vasilantone. Mark has since more than quadrupled sales worldwide and continued to revolutionize the design and performance of Vastex equipment. In 2017, he oversaw the completion of the company's purpose-built manufacturing facility and world headquarters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.



His techniques and inventions are legend in the airbrushing world.

# THE LASER ENGRAVING REPORT

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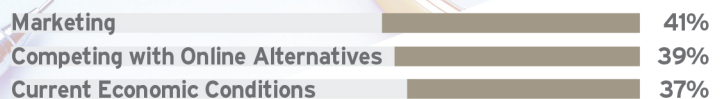
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# 2021 LASER ENGRAVING Market Survey

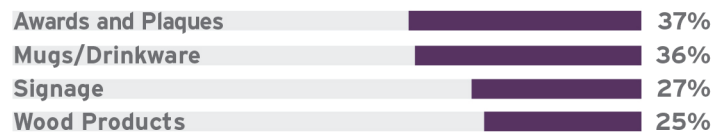
Results show continued growth among uncertain economic conditions

By GRAPHICS PRO Staff

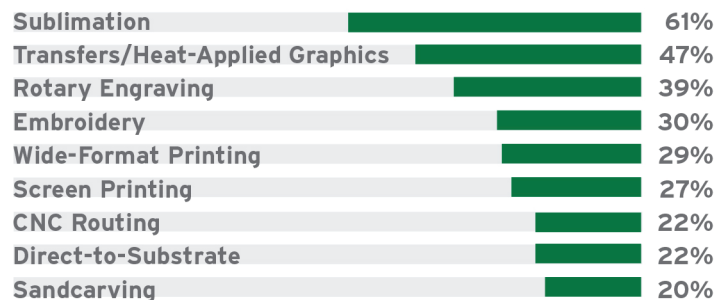
## Greatest Challenges in Laser Engraving:



## Top Laser-Engraved Products by Revenue:



## Additional Decoration/Customization Techniques Used:



## Top Considerations for Purchasing a Laser Engraving System:



LER

As the laser engraving industry continues to work its way through the lingering effects of a pandemic, the annual Laser Engraving Market Survey shows that business is still going strong for many shops throughout the country.

According to survey results, 78% of shops report sales being at the same level or higher than the previous year. And the industry was able to avoid a major problem for many other industries this year with only 12% of respondents saying supply chain issues were hampering business. Part of this may be because 82% of respondents said they don't source materials from outside the United States and therefore aren't waiting on the delivery bottlenecks of shipping ports.

Let's take a quick look at some other results of our annual survey:

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By keeping tabs on current trends, you can continue to make the most of the holidays and highlight your customer's milestones throughout the years to come. (Image courtesy GCC America)



# Personalizing Gifts with a Laser

## for Today's Market



BY JULIA SCHROEDER

**INDUSTRY EXPERTS SHARE THE LATEST LASER TRENDS IN PERSONALIZED GIFTS**

**W**ith a laser, the avenues you can take your business down expands more every year. Due to the creativity of laser operators, advancements in technology, and new substrates becoming available (or the lack of some substrates being as readily available), the laser industry continues to shift.

In particular, during the last year, shipments of material for substrates and laser parts were often delayed. Along with not being able to gather for special events in person, this particularly impacted the personalized gift segment of the laser industry.

We checked in with laser industry experts for the latest insights and updates in personalized gifts. According to Amy Dallman of Epilog, the personalized gift market is more important than ever.



Even mass-produced items, like an unassuming cutting board, can be transformed into a one-of-a-kind gift when customized with a cherished family recipe. (Image courtesy Epilog Laser)

“Everyone has their own comfort level when it comes to group gatherings, travel, etc. For some, events and gatherings are

still happening,” says Dallman, “While some people may pass on attending these types of events, they still want to give a meaningful gift or memento. For those who aren’t yet comfortable being in large crowds, receiving a personalized gift from a friend or family member can mean the world.”

Although the pandemic has separated us from each other, we still need emotional connection between people, says Matt Hsu, GCC America. Customized gifts are typically given to express care and create a deeper connection.

“At this moment, people need not only gifts, but a deeper emotional connection, and customized gifts can play this role,” Hsu explains. “For example, you may receive a gift from a friend with your own name or an inspiring idiom engraved on it, which will be very touching.”

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Holiday gifts are always welcome this time of year. (Image courtesy GCC America)

A personalized gift is a way for someone to feel like they have something truly unique compared to what others might have, adds Tom Tamburrini, Radian Laser. You may already create personalized gifts with your laser, or maybe you'd like to learn more about it but are looking for fresh inspiration to take back to your shop. By keeping tabs on current trends, you can continue to make the most of the holidays and highlight your customer's milestones throughout the years to come.

"It's pretty incredible to see the laser being used in conjunction with other tools and materials to produce highly creative custom gifts," adds Dallman.

#### **LATEST LASER MODELS**

Compared to customizing gifts with a laser engraver in the past, the latest laser models have increased capabilities and engraving speeds. As an example, lasers systems created by companies such as Epilog now feature camera recognition capabilities. This gives laser operators a real-time

image of the engraving table so they can quickly and accurately position their artwork on even the most uniquely shaped items, according to Dallman.

Advancements such as these allow engravers to breathe a little easier when engraving family heirlooms or other one-of-a-kind items, says Dallman. "Even on mass-produced products, knowing your engraving is going to appear exactly where you intend greatly cuts down on do-overs and material waste."

As supplies experience occasional shortages, saving on waste is crucial. As mentioned before, due to the pandemic, many substrate materials have seen shortages due to container unavailability, resulting in higher prices and insufficient supply. "The shortage of shipping containers is also affected by the pandemic, and some orders require frequent coordination to adjust shipments according to the situation," says Hsu.

Keeping in mind that supplies experience shortages from time to time, you

may consider offering various personalized gift options. This way, all your customers have meaningful options to choose from in your shop.

#### **PERSONALIZING GIFTS FOR TODAY'S MARKET**

Here are some of the most popular and unique products that you might consider adding to your arsenal.

- **Tom Tamburrini, Radian Laser, says:** Personalized drinkware continues to be a hot item this season. Many of our customers have added additional lasers to their operations to keep up with demand. The expectation is that this will continue into next year.
- **Amy Dallman, Epilog Laser, says:** Leatherette continues to be a great seller as it is incorporated into more products. We've seen leatherette-wrapped flasks, bottle openers, tumblers, and more. We've also seen an uptick in city map engraving or engravings that commemorate trips and/or travel milestones. For example, we



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As e-commerce platforms become more popular and easier to navigate, engravers can sell all over the world. (Image courtesy Epilog Laser)

have one customer who engraves a map on a piece of wood that includes all the U.S. state parks. It's usually customized with a family name and/or phrase, and the customer then puts a sticker or pin into each park location as they visit it. We have another who creates plaques with local lakes using a blue epoxy resin and then uses the laser to engrave local sites and landmarks around the lake.

- Even mass-produced items, like an unassuming cutting board, can be transformed into a one-of-a-kind gift when customized with a cherished family recipe. These are profitable products that are easy to source and engrave, plus they can be handed down from generation to generation.
- Engraved photographs are also unique—whether an engraved wedding portrait,

a graduation photo, or commemorating a new addition to the family. Wood is always a popular substrate for photo engraving, but painted canvas and slate are gaining attention.

- **Matt Hsu, GCC America, adds:**



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Acrylic photo engravings with family members' names are popular items that never fade away. Christmas tree hangings are also popular. In addition, there are holiday-themed stencils that can be used to decorate shop windows.



There are holiday-themed stencils that can be used to decorate shop windows. (Image courtesy GCC America)

## 5 GIFT IDEAS TO PERSONALIZE WITH YOUR LASER

- PAINTED CANVAS PHOTOS
- DRINKWARE
- BOTTLE OPENERS
- CITY MAP ENGRAVINGS
- CUTTING BOARD ENGRAVED WITH A FAMILY RECIPE

### LEVERAGING PERSONALIZED GIFTS

Personalized gifts are visual. If your customers can see samples of what you offer, it can evoke more emotion than simply talking about it. Dallman says it's crucial for engraving shops to have a variety of samples in their storefront or website that represent the types of services and products they can provide. In your shop or online, you can feature holiday-themed gifts, laser engraved gifts for the home, and more. Additionally, Dallman advises not to focus on just one theme or product.

Along with displaying your products in-store and online, you should consistently update your information on social media. Hsu says posting high-quality product photos attracts interested people to inquire.

"Going to the digital channels will continue to be a major focus," Hsu predicts. "Due to the impact of the pandemic, consumer behavior has turned into online shopping as people were first confined by lockdowns, and then many continued to work from home, so marketing on the internet is important."

As e-commerce platforms become more popular and easier to navigate, engravers can sell all over the world. "They'll need to perfect their engraving craft and remain competitive as more service providers enter the space," Dallman advises. However, "the future of personalized gifts remains bright, and we don't see the demand for this type of product fizzling out." Whether it's apparel, sublimation, or laser engraving, customized gifts continue to grow. **LER**

**JULIA SCHROEDER** is a freelance writer based in Chicago. Previously, she held the position of digital content editor for A&E magazine. She can be reached at [hello@juliawritesforyou.com](mailto:hello@juliawritesforyou.com).

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# Your Laser at Work

## TIPS FOR SELLING & PRODUCING PRODUCTS IN THE SPORTS AND COMPETITIVE EVENT MARKETS

BY BOB HAGEL



**T**he variety of sports has exploded over the years. You can easily make a whole business selling awards, identification, and pride products in the sports field. This article is not about selling trademarked professionals or college sports products to fans. I will focus on kids, teens, and adult individuals and team sports. Opportunities will differ greatly based on where your business is located and if you plan to focus on your region or local markets. I will assume you have a storefront and showroom to display products. If you sell online through your website or use an online shopping center, some of these tips will still apply.

### **YOUR LOCATION MATTERS**

Rural areas may have less localized opportunities, which also may be different from an urban or suburban location. Competition may be less available in sports but may focus on animal-based events. Your weather environment can also make a difference as well. Colder climates and the mountains offer more winter competition. Ocean access provides additional surfing, boating, sailing, and water-based competitions. Rivers and lakes offer similar events.

### **EXPANDING PRODUCT LINES AND PRODUCTION METHODS**

Sports-related products can be produced using various production methods from laser engraving, UV full-color print, screen printing, embroidery, sand etching, and many others. Starting with one or two will likely lead you to expand into other product lines requiring additional production methods. This expansion is often based on your ongoing customers. Many customers — from coaches, parents, and small business owners to school administrators — like to take advantage of relations that are already in place to order additional products. Don't be shy about asking customers about other sports-related product needs. When you hear the same products from multiple customers, consider expanding into these product lines. This expansion method is much more likely to be profitable than picking a product line because it's cool, others are expanding into it, or it's what you enjoy most of all the alternatives.

Before starting something new, consider the required financial investment and the learning curve and experimental time

it takes to produce good products economically. Expanding with additional products or even a new product line using the same or similar production methods is a much lower risk. Your primary risk will be a time commitment to learn the new product line, make samples and market them. Purchasing new equipment and the associated learning curve includes a much larger commitment. First, consider what additional products you can make with your present production equipment and staff.

If you want to consider new production methods and equipment, work through a plan. Who will be your production team? Is this a seasonal sport or event that you would be servicing? Large production volumes during a specific time of year can interfere with other orders. Your expansion plan should consider these challenges. Remember to fully explore production costs and prices to make sure the expansion is a profitable venture.

### **LABOR VS. PURCHASING ASSEMBLED PRODUCTS**

The sports trophy business is a great



Resin and preassembled trophies significantly reduce labor and packaging, as they are prepackaged. (Image courtesy Bob Hagel)

example of providing labor-intensive products. The typical kid's trophy with a plastic figure on a column sitting on a base requires excessive labor for the price most leagues or teams are willing to pay. The labor per trophy can be significantly reduced by offering preassembled trophies. Your primary labor consists of producing the personalized plate. Your time or employee time is money. This invested time is getting more expensive very quickly. Consider reducing labor costs by reducing assembly time and your fair labor time and charges should you custom-make products such as a trophy. Many shops undercharge their labor time, especially for the owner's time. If you work more than 40 hours per week, are you charging a fair hourly rate to justify working all those hours?



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## WORK AND STORAGE AREAS - PACKAGING

Sports leagues and many large sports events require a high volume of product to be delivered at once. Besides the production time this will take while still delivering on other projects, consider both production space and storage of the assembled products after production. Many customers will want the delivered products organized in some way. Perhaps by team or event type. Ensure you have the table space for production and assembly

and the space to sort or package the finished products. If packaging is required, consider the cost and time spent seeking out adequate packaging. This can be a much greater challenge if a product is shipped, especially if the products are easily breakable.

## SPORTS MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

In today's world, there are many sports and other competitive events for both kids and adults. Many provide awards to winners, recognize participation, celebrate

specific achievements, and even certify achieved levels.

A great example of monthly achievements is a local Krav Maga self-defense studio. They purchased many very large perpetual plaques of 60 or more plates. Each month they would order 20 or more plates to be engraved for customers reaching certain levels. Customers checked the plaques each month to see if their names were on them and if they made the next level. This customer provided me with a monthly stream of income and multiple large purchases of plaques filled with names.

If you begin seeking sports award opportunities, think very broadly. The diverse sports that take place in gyms and workout centers have grown rapidly. Martial arts and self-defense have expanded over the past 25 years. Corporate events and picnics often offer competition. Besides softball, other competitions like horseshoes, corn hole, or even disc golf could result in a trophy for the winners. So, besides kids leagues, think corporate summer picnics, non-profit fundraisers, gyms, schools, and colleges. You may even have semi-pro teams in your areas, such as baseball, hockey, and soccer. Some other sports to check into include lacrosse, rugby, cheer, ultimate frisbee, women's football, flag football, kickball, BMX motocross, pump track competitions for bikes and skateboards, model airplane flying, roller hockey, and all the rising related sports. Other competitions might include K9 trials (police dogs), fire explorer competition events, reality rallies, cook-offs, bake-offs for both professionals and amateurs, and many more.

Make a list and research all the possibilities on the internet. This will give you search words when seeking local or regional potential customers, as well as online business opportunities nationally.

## MARKETING

### Personal visits

Some very effective marketing can be

This trophy could be for a dog show or even a police K9 competition. (Image courtesy Bob Hage)





accomplished in person. Friendly visits to league fields and the many other city and county sports parks are places where you can get names of those in charge of awards, meet team moms and coaches. Other locations worth visiting include gyms, golf courses, non-profit events, and car shows.

**League sponsorships**

There is always a large volume of trophies for teams that make the playoffs. However, many parents get together at the end of a season to purchase participation awards and gifts for coaches. Generally, sponsorships of leagues or teams provide the opportunity to display a banner on the field. Even if you don't get the league's playoff trophy business, each of the teams



These resins in various sizes are good for several places or levels. They even make trophies for last place. (Image courtesy Bob Hagel)

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Three levels of trophies are shown here. Teens want large trophies, and this competition featured bigger trophies every single year.



will have a chance to see your business name all season long — keeping you top of mind for their awards and gifts. A tip for designing a banner is to keep the banner simple and not too busy. The business name should be easy to read along with the web address or phone number. A graphic of a trophy will let the reader easily connect your business name with providing awards. You only have a glance to connect! Any other sports-oriented locations such as a gym or dojo where you can place a banner are worth considering.

Don't forget the associations for each sport. They host tournaments that generally include trophies. Many national



The culinary cupcake challenge featured professional bakers, adult amateurs, and even a kid's contest. And the fans enjoyed eating the results. (Images courtesy Bob Hagel)



Generic photos or graphics do not offer a hint of the quality you provide. Your product photo makes it more personal. Personal works best!

There are so many opportunities that your competition does not know about. I even did awards each year for a series of national horseshoeing competitions. **LER**

**BOB HAGEL** recently retired after owning Eagle's Mark Awards & Signs for 18 years in Southern California. While owning the business, he offered a full line of personalized products using laser engraving, sandcarving, and full-color UV direct print on products. Today, he consults on starting and expanding personalized businesses and on improving production efficiency and quality. He can be reached at [rjhagel@verizon.net](mailto:rjhagel@verizon.net).

organizations have regional chapters that host most of the tournaments. An example of how you would search on your browser is to use a broad search term such as "martial arts associations" or even a broader search of "national sports organizations."

### Postcards

My favorite way to mail advertisements. Postcards offer several benefits. They are cheaper to mail out than flyers or letters. They are cheaper to print. There is less work to handle and prepare. Even if it is a short glance, the advertisement will be seen, and the receiver will decide if it is of interest to them. Many advertisements that are in an envelope never get opened. For the postcard to be read, keep them very simple and to the point. You have a glance to connect and about 15-30 seconds to tell the story. A postcard has one-and-a-half sides to display the information. Your business name and contact information can be on the same side as the customer address.

Provide a first name of the person they should ask for — this makes it much more personal. The backside should be a concise message to the point. The visual works best if it is a photo of your own work.

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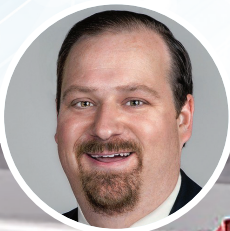
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# What to Look for in a Laser

**SOME SAY THE SECRET IS IN THE SOFTWARE**



BY DAVID STEVENS

There's a lot to consider when purchasing a laser — processing speed, bed size, laser power, capabilities — but evaluating the functionality of the operational software is a crucial step in determining what laser is right for you. As the laser industry continues to mature in terms of product development, workflow software is quickly becoming a key differentiator. Choosing the right laser software no longer just means the difference between working harder and working smarter; it can help you increase production, broaden your product capabilities, improve the quality and value of finished products, and reduce overall ownership and training costs. Here are some things you may want to consider when evaluating laser workflow software.

## **SEAMLESS WORKFLOW**

Seamless workflow is a huge advantage because when laser users can complete all process steps in a job within one software, it streamlines the entire process — making production more efficient and minimizing the need for training. Until recently, most laser software has operated as a printer driver, requiring a third-party



A great feature to look for in laser engraving software is the ability to see what the final product will look like before you even start the job. Several software programs offer cameras or provide other positioning assistance.

(All images courtesy Trotec)



Most laser software programs come with a material database that has recommended settings for commonly processed materials.



graphics program to create designs. The operation via print driver can be very cumbersome, especially if you want to make changes to a completed job, so it's important to be able to adjust your graphics in the laser software at any time. If you don't have experience with graphic design programs (i.e., Adobe Illustrator, CorelDRAW, etc.), designing or setting up your graphics can often be the most challenging part of the learning process, so make sure the interface is user-friendly and accepts the file type you will be importing from graphic software. Your laser software should be user-friendly, require minimal training, and provide an efficient and fast workflow from idea to finished product.

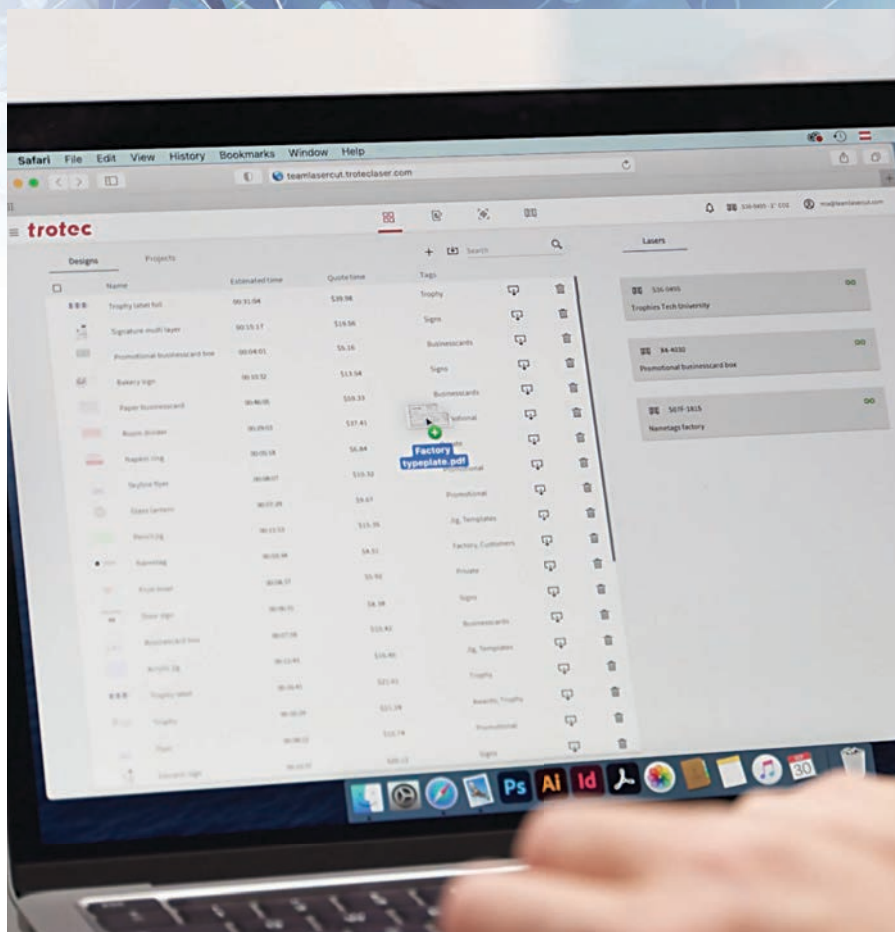
Integrated design capabilities are an essential aspect of the seamless workflow because they eliminate the need for a separate graphics program. This is a great solution for businesses that want to get their laser up and running quickly but don't have any experience with design software or for businesses that don't want the extra cost for additional licenses. You can create graphic, photo, and text elements and make adjustments quickly with the integrated workflow. Certain software even

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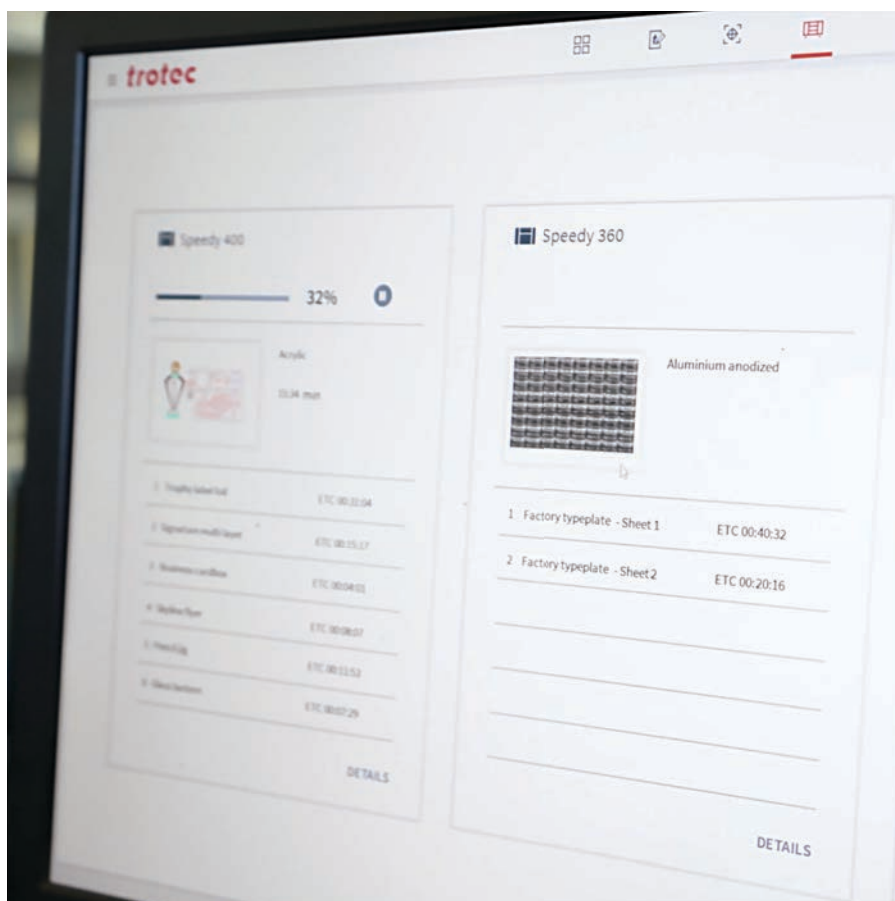
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Ruby software's file drag-and-drop feature.



recognizes images automatically, so only the desired dithering (raster) has to be selected for photo engraving.

### **NETWORK CONNECTIVITY**

As your business develops, it is important to have laser software that can support these changes. With order volume increasing and product offerings expanding, many laser users often eventually require more laser machines. This is where cloud-based, cohesive storage platforms will become increasingly important in the future.

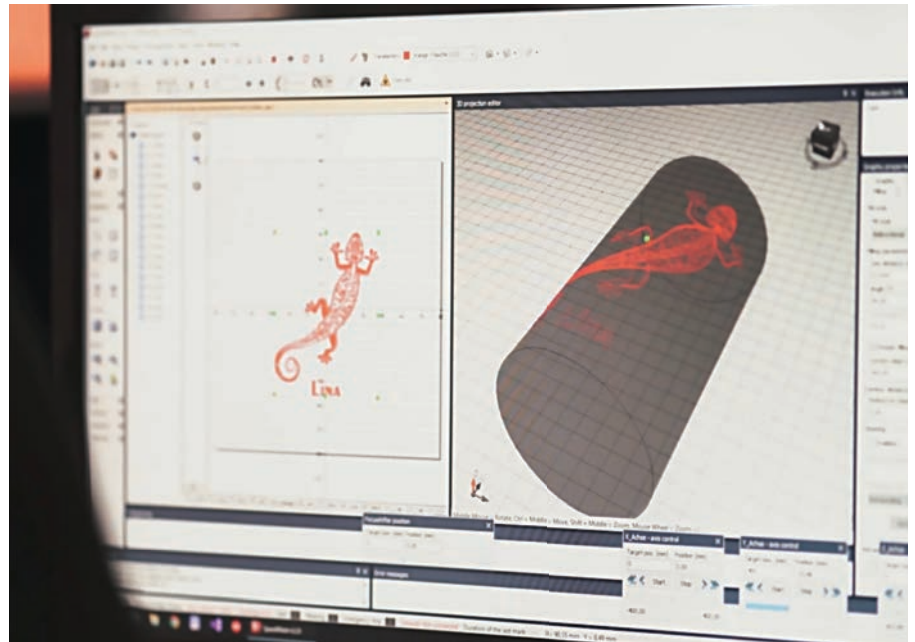
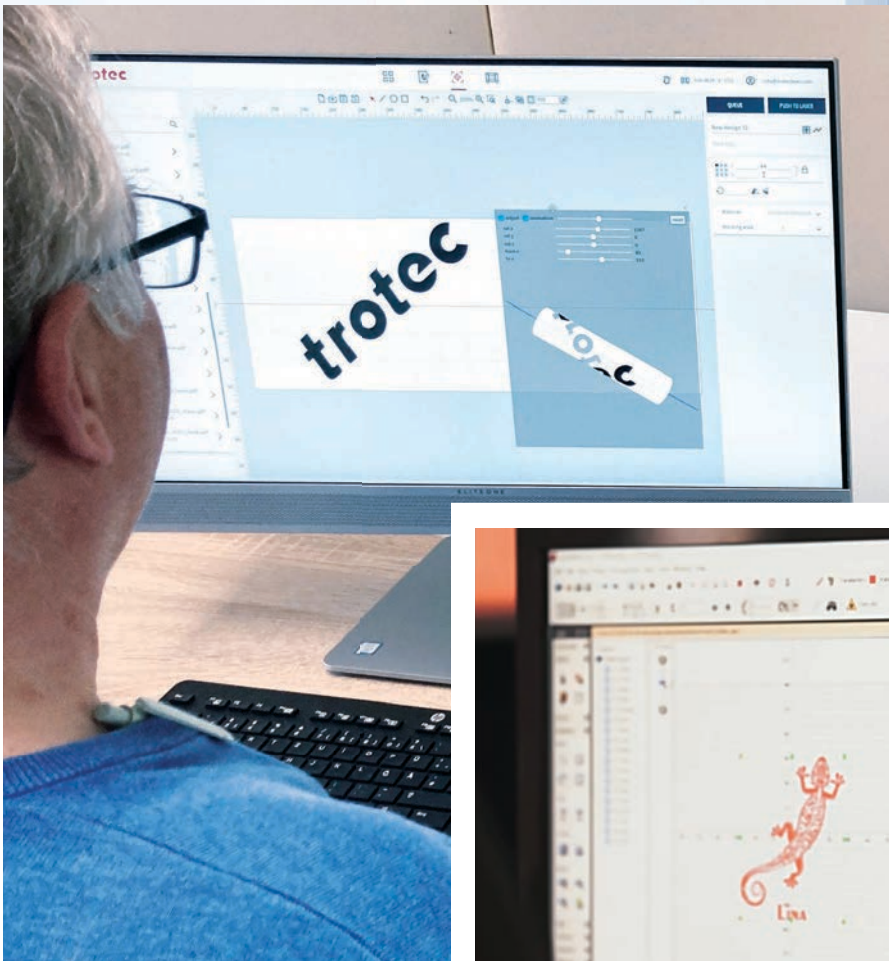
A web-based laser software can connect all laser machines in one network, locally or remotely. In this way, jobs can be distributed from multiple PCs or Macs to several laser machines. You can use this functionality to share jobs, designs, and laser parameters with other laser users within a company. With this level of accessibility, jobs can be prepared by one user and produced by another, whether in the office, at home, or in the workshop.

### **MATERIAL PARAMETERS DATABASE**

Most laser software programs come with a material database that has recommended settings for commonly processed materials. This saves you a lot of time, so you don't have to waste material dialing in power and speed settings for their products. But what if a material you frequently process isn't included in the database? Or what if the initial settings provided don't give your desired results? You want to make sure your software allows you to create and save your own parameters for repeat jobs, saving you time and money. This leaves out the guesswork and ensures that you get the engraving or cutting results you want, as well as product consistency.

### **ADDITIONAL FEATURES TO LOOK FOR IN A LASER SOFTWARE** **Visualization and Positioning Assistance**

Another great feature to look for is the ability to see what the final product will



look like before you even start the job. Several software programs offer cameras or provide other positioning assistance. This also includes programs that have a 3D visualization tool, which is especially helpful when engraving graphics that wrap around cylindrical objects such as tumblers, bottles, or glassware. This helps save valuable time and money to ensure your text or graphics are perfectly centered where you want them.

### Specialty Application Features

If you are looking to use your laser for one specific application, you want to make sure your laser software provides all the necessary processing tools to make your jobs quick and easy. For example, when laser processing rubber stamps and seals, some programs will automatically set the graphic to be mirrored or inverted for laser processing, so layouts can be designed as they are to appear printed on the paper. You can even set the cutting line so that it doesn't have to be drawn in the design.

When looking to create a clean and detailed stamp impression onto paper, for example, it is important to create

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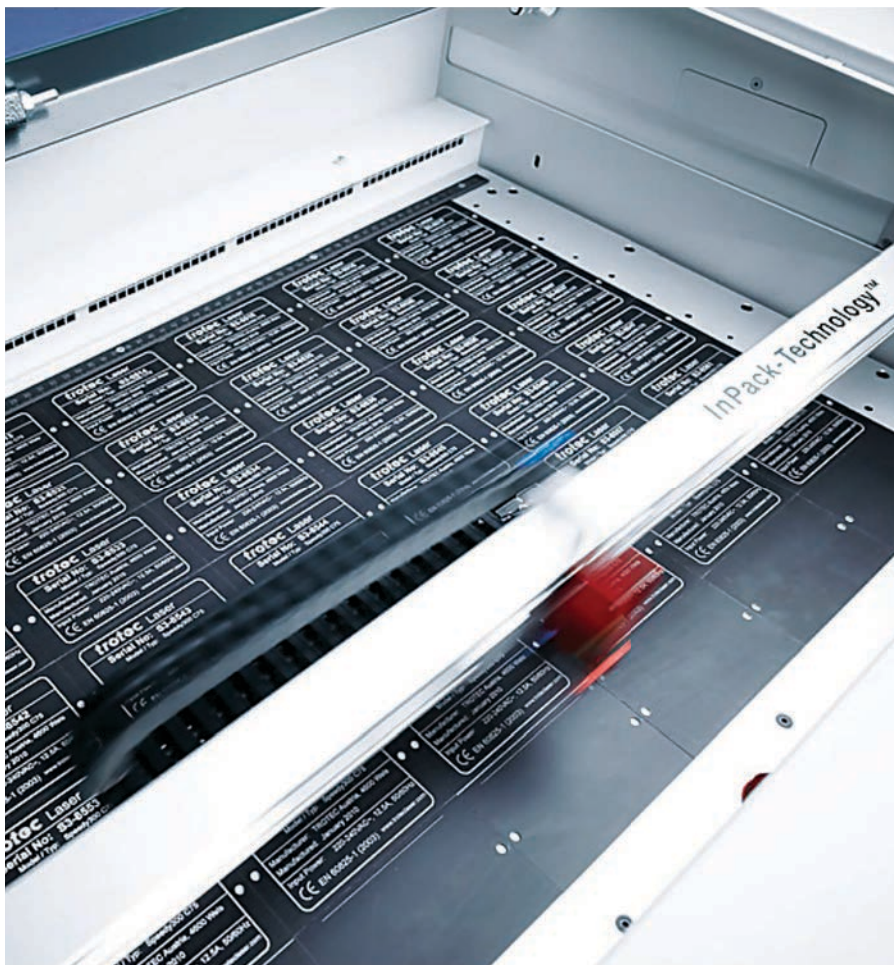


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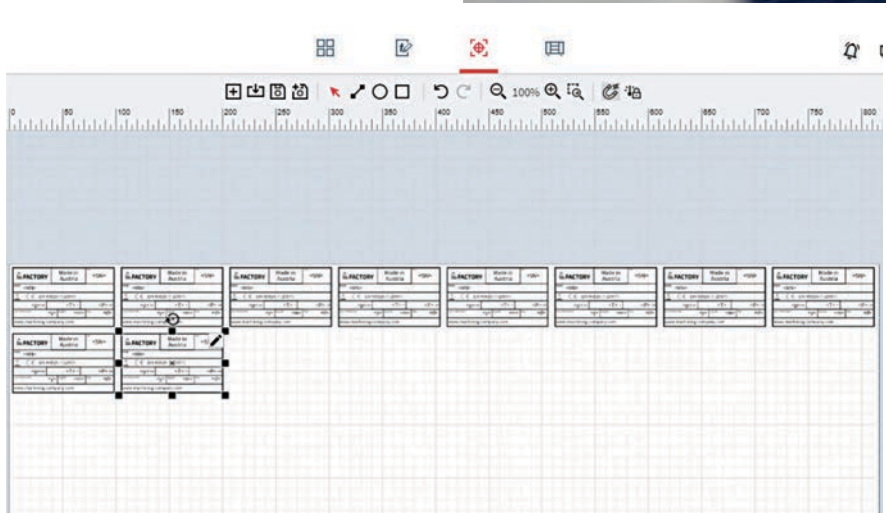
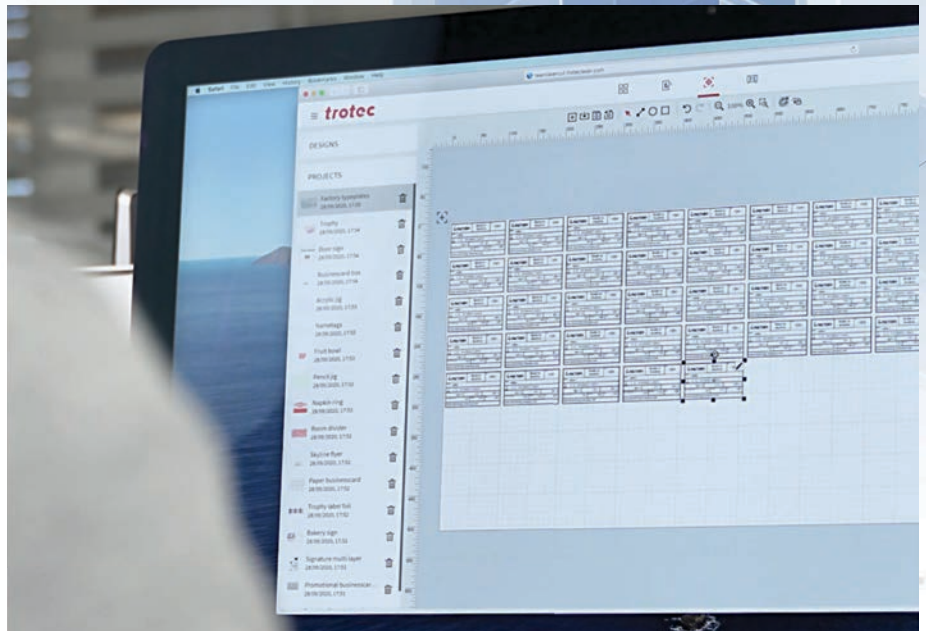
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“shoulders.” The shoulder will allow the characters and letters of a stamp text plate to offer more stability at the base. Depending on the intricacy and fineness of the stamp, some software has these settings already preprogrammed and ready for selection, likely in the material database.

Cutting printed materials is another specific yet popular laser application, especially for creating signage and displays. Some lasers offer a camera registration software that reads registration marks printed on your materials, cuts perfectly around your printed designs, and even

In many cases, laser software is just as crucial to saving you time and money, improving workflow, and meeting your business needs as the laser itself.



compensates for rotations and distortions. Another example is photo engraving applications. Good photo engraving software is helpful for many because it can take a great deal of experience and skill to navigate sophisticated photo editing software, and if you can make edits after you import the design, you can save even more time.

Other features to look for are things that will enhance the quality of your finished products, such as setting an order of operations for the functions within a job, improving your geometries to achieve the smoothest curves possible, or the ability to change your engraving direction. It's also a big advantage if you have a software program that is regularly updated. Web-based software programs like these can help your business become more "future proof" because they offer continuous improvements and support industry changes and the digital transformation of the times.

In many cases, laser software is just as crucial to saving you time and money, improving workflow, and meeting your business needs as the laser itself. Do your research and make sure the laser you choose comes with software that provides the functionality you need to be an efficient and profitable business. **LER**

**DAVID STEVENS** is known in the industry for his teaching abilities and helping customers improve their laser processing techniques. For nearly two decades, he held multiple roles at Universal Laser Systems, including applications lab manager. He's currently an industrial applications manager at Trotec Laser Inc. and heads the West Coast Applications & Inspiration Lab.

BY AMY DALLMAN

# LASER ENGRAVING COASTERS

*CUSTOMIZE CORK AT THE TOUCH OF A BUTTON!*



**C**ork is a sustainable, durable, and exceptionally popular substrate for laser engraving and cutting. Because cork coasters can be easily marked with a laser, they are highly sought after in the food and beverage industry. When personalized with a laser, they also make wonderful housewarming gifts, wedding favors, and promotional giveaways.

Not only are cork coasters a profitable product offering for engraving shops, but they are also readily available in all kinds of shapes and sizes through a variety of

sellers, including laserable material manufacturers and craft/hobby stores. Engravers can even buy cork in bulk to cut and customize their own coasters. It comes in a variety of thicknesses and patterns, making this substrate extremely versatile and unique.

In this how-to project, we'll walk you through the steps of customizing cork coasters. Whether you're doing one or 100, the process is, by and large, the same. In this project, we used a 40-watt Fusion Edge 12 laser with the following parameters:

**Speed:** 100%

**Power:** 70%

**DPI:** 500

**Dithering:** Standard

1. Start by inserting your material into the machine. You can focus the lens manually or use autofocus. (Fig. 1)

2. Next, in our software suite, we'll drag and drop our graphics onto the coaster. Epilog's IRIS Camera System features overhead cameras that allow the user to see a real-time image of the laser bed, so



Fig. 1

(All images courtesy Epilog Laser)

## TIPS FOR CUTTING CORK

Cutting cork can sometimes result in a residue or charring around the edges. To help eliminate this, users can try reducing their frequency settings. This means the laser pulses less, which can help with reducing the charring. Another thing to be mindful of when cutting cork is to make sure your lenses are clean. Cutting or engraving cork can produce significant smoke and residue, and using air assist will help reduce flare-ups.

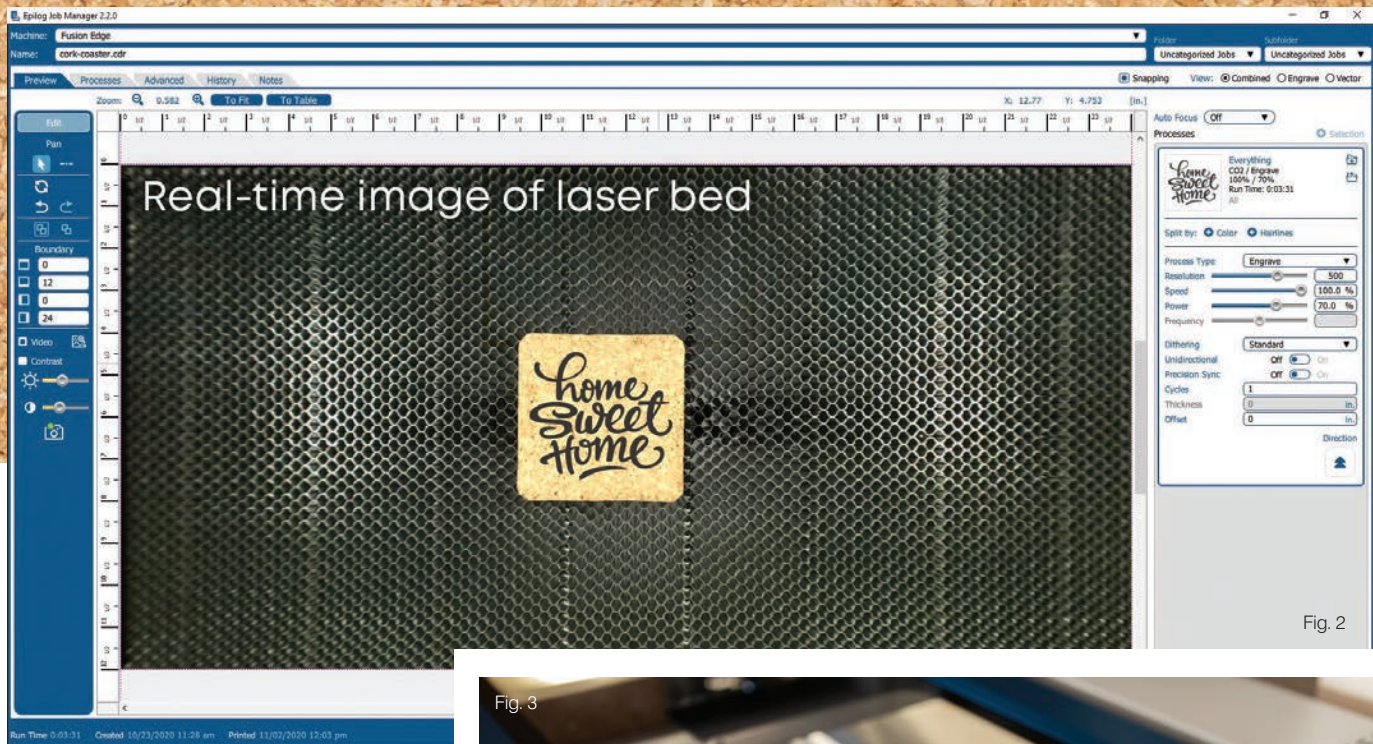


Fig. 2

laser operators can precisely position their artwork on the engraving piece. (Fig. 2) 3. Then, we'll send the job to the laser with the parameters listed above. Epilog includes a list of recommended settings for popular engraving substrates, including cork. Select the job at the 7" LED touchscreen and press the go button. (Fig. 3) 4. The laser does the rest! The job time estimator in our software suite and at the laser control panel indicates the engraving will take approximately 3 minutes and 31 seconds. If you were engraving multiple coasters, different graphics, and/or used different laser parameters for your wattage, the job time estimator would account for those variables, and a new estimate would be displayed. (Fig. 4)

As you can see, cork provides a great contrast when laser engraved, which makes the graphics/text really stand out. It's no wonder why this is such a popular substrate in the personalization industry – the possibilities are nearly endless! **LER**

**AMY DALLMAN** is the marketing communications specialist with Epilog Laser. In this role, Amy creates many of Epilog's communications, such as newsletters, case studies, and press releases. She also heads up Epilog's public relations efforts. Amy can be reached at amy.d@epiloglaser.com or toll-free at 888-437-4564.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: LASER ENGRAVING



## FOOTBALL AWARDS

**JDS Industries** offers the football Cobra awards, which are available in four sizes from 7 1/2" to 12", and offer a unique design, states the company. No assembly required, just add an engraved or sublimated plate.

**800-843-8853**  
[jdsindustries.com](http://jdsindustries.com)



## WOOD PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

**Colorado Heirloom** offers custom wood products and services such as laser engraving, direct color printing, and blind/drop ship. Made in the USA, the woods used are mainly from sustainable forests or recycled woods.

**970-667-4222**  
[coloradoheirloom.com](http://coloradoheirloom.com)



## LASER MARKER

**GCC America Inc.** introduces its new GCC LaserPro StellarMark 3DS laser marker, integrated with LFC D workstation, which allows users to process round and cylinder objects. The 3D scan head has a 300 X 300mm working area and the focus range is 100mm. The system is an all-in-one design (only for 20W/30W) that supports 1D, 2D, text, and logo marking with the G-Mark software.

**909-718-0248**  
[gccworld.com](http://gccworld.com)

## SMALL-FORMAT LASER ENGRAVER

**Epilog Laser** offers the Fusion Edge, a machine that incorporates some of the features of Epilog's Fusion Pro Series in a small-format system. Featuring a 24" X 12" X 7" work area, the Fusion Edge is available in 30-, 40-, 50-, and 60-watt CO<sub>2</sub> configurations, or a 30-watt fiber laser source configuration. It also includes Epilog's IRIS Camera System, which gives operators a real-time image of the laser bed so they can position their artwork and graphics.

**303-277-1188**  
[epiloglaser.com](http://epiloglaser.com)



## LASER MARKING PASTE AND SPRAY

**Johnson Plastics Plus** offers CerMark ULTRA black laser marking paste and spray, a formulation that creates durable

marks while maintaining glass and ceramic substrate integrity, says the company. CerMark Ultra is specifically formulated to laser mark on all markable substrates like metals, glass, ceramics, and more.

**800-869-7800**  
[jplusplus.com](http://jplusplus.com)





## LASER ENGRAVING MACHINES/ ACCESSORIES

**Radian Laser** offers laser engraving machines and accessories. Drinkware rotaries are used for multiple units to be marked in order to efficiently get jobs done, says the company.

**541-513-8366**  
[www.radianlaser.com](http://www.radianlaser.com)

## LASER MASK

**IKONICS Imaging** offers its Blazer Orange laser mask. Apply, laser, sandcarve, and peel. Reduce glass fractures from laser processing and increase your ROI with stage-carving on most items, according to the company.

**800-643-1037**  
[ikonicsimaging.com](http://ikonicsimaging.com)



## LASER ENGRAVABLE RUBBER

**Jackson Marking Products** offers laser engravable rubber by the roll. It's 8" wide and is available in various lengths, including 3', 6', 15', or 30' and comes in an orange-red color.



**800-782-6722**  
[rubberstampmaterials.com](http://rubberstampmaterials.com)

## BAMBOO AND CORK GIFT SETS

**Marco Awards Group** releases a new addition to its gift line — bamboo and cork gift sets. The bamboo wine and toolbox and the two-piece bamboo wine tool set are ideal for gifts or awards. The bamboo and cork toolboxes and round and square coasters are laser engravable.



**800-229-6592**  
[marcoawardsgroup.com](http://marcoawardsgroup.com)

## BRUSHED FINISHED METAL

**Rowmark** adds six new brushed finishes to the FlexiBrass line, a laser and rotary engravable material. The FlexiBrass product line combines the classic crisp definition of real brass with all the advantages of thin, flexible acrylic, says the company.



**877-769-6275**  
[rowmark.com](http://rowmark.com)

## LASER SOFTWARE



**Trotec Laser Inc.** announces that its laser software, Ruby, will have new features in 2022. Ruby will be compatible with more Trotec systems, such as the SP series, and it will allow for direct imports of more file formats. The software will also offer automated workflows and optimization of cutting jobs.

**866-226-8505**  
[troteclaser.com](http://troteclaser.com)

**LER**

'Tis the Season...

# Once Again

**SUPPLY CHAIN  
WILLING, IT'S TIME  
FOR ORNAMENTS  
AND GIFTS**

BY RUTH  
DOBBINS



**B**y the time you are reading this article, the holiday buying season will be in full swing, with snow flying for some of you readers. Maybe it is a little hard to imagine I am writing this article in my glass studio in September, enduring a heatwave of unprecedented 90 degrees Fahrenheit! No wonder I have to work on myself a bit to send my thoughts ahead to a much cooler time.

Usually, around September I send out reminders to my customers alerting them that it is all downhill from here and that they had better plan ahead if they wanted to be prepared for any orders coming their way for the holiday season. Some do this naturally, while others prefer to procrastinate to the very last minute, hoping they will get their products in time to enhance them with their blasting skills. Often that seems to work out, but then, we are experiencing COVID-19 right now, and nothing, absolutely nothing works the way it used to.

Manufacturers cannot get the materials for their productions, often waiting weeks and months to get anything, and those who order products for resale from abroad are facing equal if not worse nightmares, with ships taking months to get to the States. So, my words of warning will not reach you in time for this season, and I sincerely

**Top:** The most common type of ornament: made from regular glass, usually referred to as jade glass with a narrow bevel. (Image courtesy Professional Glass) **Left:** A clear glass round ornament with a pencil edge finish, a soft rounding of the edge. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)



hope you planned ahead in the fall to have products on the shelf.

**HOLIDAY STAPLES**

One of the main staples of the holiday season is ornaments. They can be used for any special occasion or holiday. This is one product that you absolutely need to have available but is affected by the supply situation. One could already tell that supply might be limited because all the vendors that usually offer discounts on orders placed before a calendar date in October

have not done so. In checking with one of my main suppliers, I have already had the arrival time for products from the Far East changed a couple of times. I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Ornaments come in many shapes and sizes, can be made from jade, clear, or optical/lead crystal.

The most popular shapes are still the circle and the oval; at least, that is true for many of my customers and our shop. Of course, choosing the glass type will have a bearing on the cost of the ornament and ultimately needs to fit into your customer's

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**Left:** These ornaments are made from optical crystal that was cut and polished. This glass is very pure and refracts the light in the facets beautifully, creating rainbow colors or prisms. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)

**Below:** Bottles of all sorts are a popular gift on the personal and corporate level. They can be customized to fit any occasion. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)



Another type of crystal ornament made from lead crystal glass blown or pressed into a mold. The facets are softer but still refract light but not as crisp as the optical crystal ones. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)



budget. After selecting the glass type you wish to order, you also will have to make decisions about the edge finish of the ornament. Generally, the jade and clear glass ornaments have a beveled edge or a pencil-polished edge. The fancier finishes, such as facets, are typically reserved for crystal ornaments, but even with those, you have the choice of two different fabrication methods. One, the ornament is made from crystal glass, and the facets are produced by a machine or by hand; this gives the facet a very sparkly and clean edge, refracting the light beautifully. Then there are some ornaments made from crystal that are poured into a mold with the facets incorporated. This is an all-in-one process where no subsequent cutting or polishing is necessary, but it tends to leave the facet lines somewhat softer and does not always give the same brilliance that a cut and polished facet has. In the past, you could get ornaments that used a bezel to attach the ribbon to the ornament. Now, we are usually only supplied with the ribbon, which is pulled through the hole and returned over itself to pro-

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Bottle stoppers are always popular. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)



Double-walled drinking glasses and mugs are trendy these days. Caution should be exercised when working on these delicate objects. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)

**Above:** Toasting glasses are also a great addition to anyone's presents, maybe for a special occasion. (Image courtesy Professional Glass) **Below:** Very popular are whiskey glasses with freezer stones; both items can be customized with initials or logos. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)





A special, custom gift created based on the theme of The Beauty and the Beast. (Image courtesy The Slee Corporation)



A special gift is a blown glass object mounted on a base. No two are alike and therefore are unique. (Image courtesy Professional Glass)

vide the hanging function. Most ornaments today come with a presentation box, which a few years back was not the case. It is important for your product to look professional. And do not forget to add your contact information with the item.

Some of the items we are asked to make for the holiday season can function as a holiday gift and a corporate gift. In this category, you would find any decorated bottle, be it filled with an alcoholic beverage or not. These can be very personalized for the recipient and can also sport a company logo. Another cherished item is any kind of glassware. Here I must note that as of late, there are two sorts of newer items that are very popular: the whiskey glass with the freezer stones and coffee/drinking glasses that are double-walled. You may have seen these advertised, and there are disparaging opinions as to whether you can blast on those objects

*continued on page 110*



# 5 Great Markets for Sublimation

**MARKETS THAT ARE A PERFECT FIT TO INCREASE YOUR SALES OF SUBLIMATED PRODUCTS**



BY JENNIFER FOY

Everyone loves wedding photo panels for the home. (Images left and below courtesy Unisub)



**T**rying to expand your sublimation business? Wondering what markets are perfect for selling sublimated products? While many markets have a fit, some popular ones stand out, with plenty of products to offer. Whether you have a desktop or large-format sublimation system, consider venturing into promoting and selling to these markets to grow your business.

**CIRCLE OF LIFE OCCASIONS**

Life is full of memorable events, and your customers want to celebrate them with one-of-a-kind gifts for those newly engaged or the newlyweds, babies, anniversaries, birthdays, and more. Expectant parents and baby gifts with names, initials, photos are all keepsake items worthy of a new parent cherishing. Think picture frames, photo panels, exterior signage (warning





**Above:** Picture frames can capture graduating senior portraits.

**Right:** Celebrating a soon-to-be new dad with a keychain. (Images courtesy Unisub)



those not to ring the doorbell while the baby sleeps), or keep it simple with a door hanger. Shirts and bag tags are perfect for a family reunion, especially as many have been apart for so long with the pandemic. There are plenty of opportunities to personalize products for these special occasions. An ornament to celebrate the newlyweds' first Christmas together or the purchase of a new home is a classic gift that can involve a name, monogram, date, or even place but also can be taken up a notch with a photo of the bride and groom. Many weddings have become smaller and more personalized due to the pandemic, so don't be afraid to also offer items that the bride and groom can give as gifts to the wedding party or even all the guests. The customization opportunities of sublimation are ideal for this type of application. Don't forget to speak to other life occasions, like new jobs, retirement, and more that your customers can celebrate with sublimated products.

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## THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

Personalized holiday gifts are at the top of the list, especially around Christmas. Even in pandemic times, gift sales in November and December 2020 were up over 8.3% from the same period in 2019.\* Of course, photo ornaments are always the seasonally appropriate product. Don't forget holiday-themed serving trays or offering to turn customer images from Christmas card photo shoots into a custom gift on a slate plaque or ChromaLuxe metal print. These products can run the gamut depending on your equipment, from small to larger pieces for wall display or even a larger serving tray. From a nickname or funny saying on a mug to flip flops with their name and favorite team colors – personalized gifts will have your customers winning this holiday season and coming back for more throughout the year.

## LIFE IS BETTER WITH PETS

People love to spoil and care for their pets. The \$103.6 billion pet market proves that point.\*\* Items can run the gamut from the obvious photo panel with a picture from their adoption or gotcha day. You can also offer products that are helpful if Fido gets lost. Full-color pet tags are available one-sided or as a two-sided item, and they can be attached to a sublimated pet collar. A leash hanger can prove useful for a pet owner and the pet to hang that sublimated leash on after getting home from walks to the park. Key chains and magnets with Fluffy's photo are sure to please the humans that the pet rules over. This is certainly a market to consider given the sheer number of homes with at least one furry friend who could use a sublimated pet bowl.

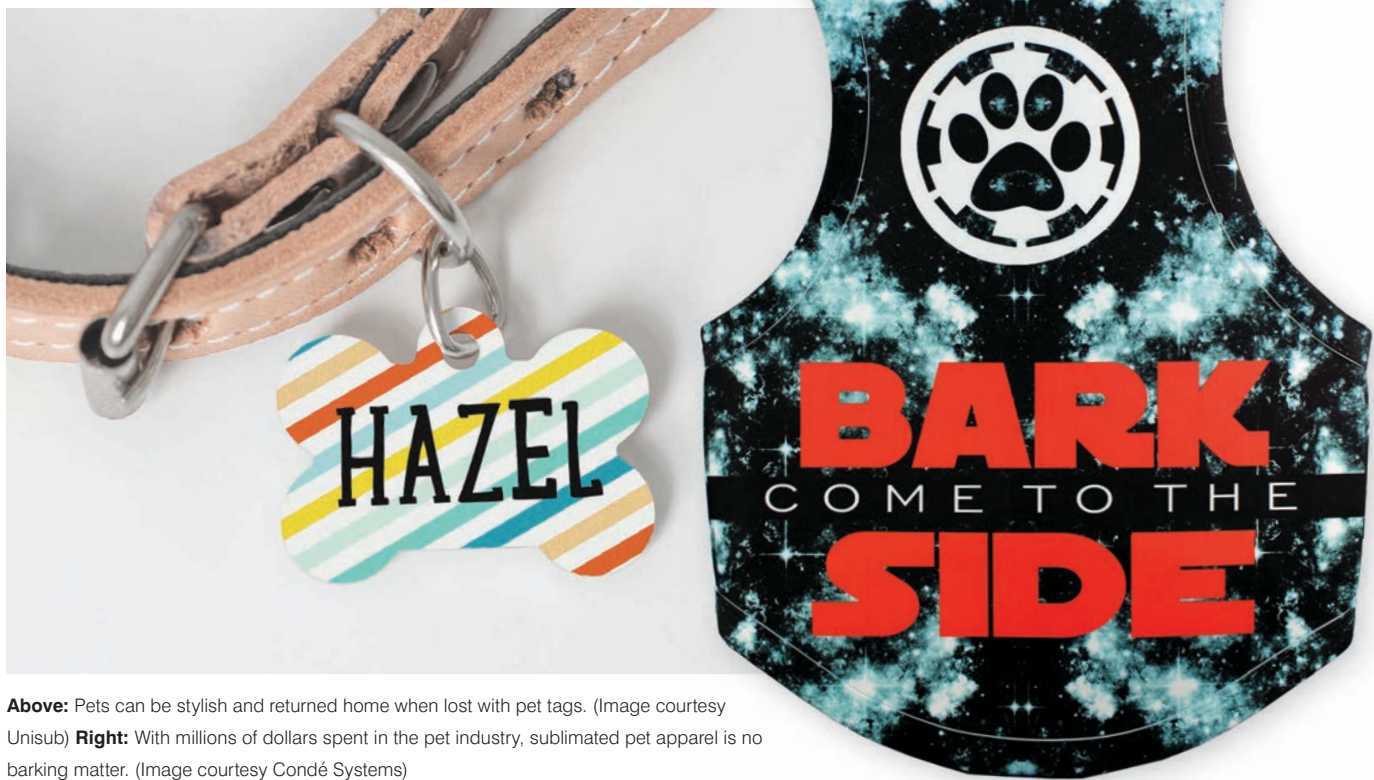


Serving trays can be great to use and celebrate the holidays. (Image courtesy Unisub)



Get those vacation photos from the Christmas card onto a metal keepsake ornament for lasting memories. (Image courtesy Unisub)

Sources: \* <https://nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/2020-holiday-season-one-record-books>  
\*\* [https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press\\_industrytrends.asp](https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp)



**Above:** Pets can be stylish and returned home when lost with pet tags. (Image courtesy Unisub) **Right:** With millions of dollars spent in the pet industry, sublimated pet apparel is no barking matter. (Image courtesy Condé Systems)



Customers want to decorate the inside and outside of their homes. (Image courtesy Unisub)

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**Left:** Even baby room walls need a little something, like this ChromaLuxe framed metal print. **Right:** Encourage your customers to get those photos off their phones and onto a photo panel or another sublimated product. (Images courtesy Unisub)



While sublimation is capable of printing the rainbow, sometimes you need to show customers that you can create a wide range of products for their home and gift needs. (Image courtesy ChromaLuxe)



Young or small, whether a sport or other extracurricular activity – parents and grandparents love to support their kids with their teams and can do so with an array of sublimated products.

### HOME DECOR FOR ALL

Home is where the heart is, and people enjoy making it personal on the inside and outside. Use multiple small photos in a grouping on a wall – encourage your customers to do something with all those photos on their phones. Add a lovely letterform type treatment to the center, and you've got more than just a photo wall collage for the home. Popular sayings or trendy graphics on natural wall panels sell in small sizes, from a great desktop decor piece to large 20" X 30" wall panels that might showcase a lovely illustration to display on a wall. Home decor isn't limited to just those ideas. Think key hangers or coat hangers, yard signs, interior hanging signs, or an exterior metal sign with a monogram. Coaster sets and serving trays make great home decor pieces for seasonal display or year-round use, depending upon the graphic used within the pieces. Sublimated home decor products can fit common decor styles, like mid-century modern, contemporary, Scandinavian, and farmhouse style designs. Especially with people continuing to be home more often than they were a few years ago, freshening up their home is something your customers are craving to do. Why not have them scratch that itch with your sublimated goods?

### THE BALL IS IN YOUR COURT

Specifically we are referring to kids and their sports/teams/extracurricular activities. There's been an increase in sublimators working with team photographers to offer more products or attending sporting events with a table or tent set up. The on-site setup may have pressed samples, pre-printed transfers, and blank products to press and hand over on-site. Products range from the common apparel items like T-shirts and sweatshirts to large buttons (for parents to wear at the game supporting the team), coasters, key chains, license plates, magnets, yard signs, socks, and more. Don't forget a bag tag commemorating that jubilee or race! Test out what products might make the best fit for

the group(s) you are selling to and those sporting events. Think about not just the products but also price points. Can you offer a package discount if they order three items or more? What are some easy ways to entice your customer to buy more?

Have a postcard, flyer, or a business card handout available (preferably something with a QR code) for customers to scan and visit your website for ordering. Customers can order those coasters that you sold out of with the team colors and, for an additional fee, the player's number. Another option is to include free personalization options as well.

When working with a local sports photographer, offer flexible products – keeping in mind the group photo, the individual player portrait, and items for parents or

grandparents. One tip is to keep your available product offerings to under 8-10 products. This allows you to test items with limited inventory and limit potential cost bottlenecks. Track what you sell at each sporting event, or work with a local sports photographer to find a product focus that allows you to grow your business. This will also make it easier to do a product analysis or review when considering what new items to add for future events or seasons.

The great thing about sublimation is that your creative and colorful personalized gifts can sell themselves to certain markets just by showing your customers what you can do with these blank products. Additionally, customization can be easy to make available to your customers. There's

no weeding vinyl or additional costs for adding a color to a designed product. For more inspiration on markets, visit [Unisub.com/Markets](http://Unisub.com/Markets) or contact your distributor for product ideas. **GP**

**JENNIFER FOY** has over 20 years of experience using Adobe software and working in the advertising, marketing, and design fields. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in visual communications from the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, and a Master of Arts in advertising from Syracuse University in New York. Her years of teaching experience include software and design classes for colleges in Atlanta, Georgia, and Louisville, Kentucky. Jennifer is the creative director at Universal Woods with the Unisub and ChromaLuxe brands. She's reachable by email at [jennifer.foy@unisub.com](mailto:jennifer.foy@unisub.com).

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# GRAPHICS|PRO

# Four Strategies for Growing Your Sublimation Business

**LEARN HOW TO GAIN REPEAT BUSINESS AND BUILD A REFERRAL**

BY DAVID GROSS



**A** big part of my job is talking with sublimators on the phone to resolve various technical problems with their computer, design software, substrates, production equipment, etc., such as, “What did I do wrong?” “How do I keep it from happening again?” and “Am I charging the right price?” Believe it or not, a question that I hardly ever get asked is, “How do I grow my sublimation business?”

Maybe callers limit their questions because they are wrapped up in the details of the problem or the stress of what’s going wrong, but I feel obligated to jump in and volunteer at least a few extra words of wisdom on topics that I feel they should have asked. Following, I discuss four strategies to help you grow your sublimation business through referrals and repeat business.



## STRATEGY 1: DELIVER MORE THAN YOU PROMISE

Embrace the philosophy of Lagniappe. Lagniappe is a French word often used in Louisiana (and along the Gulf Coast where I live) that simply means an unexpected extra gift. You can deliver a little more than your customer expects by offering unique design options, including a bonus product sample, or simply providing an order earlier than expected.

Examples of a bonus product sample include a new and/or complementary product imprinted with the same artwork as the rest of the order or a customized name badge that consists of the person’s name, company logo, and unique corporate colors. These little extra touches help build strong customer relationships and create fans and cheerleaders for your personalized products business.



A bonus product sample could be a new or complementary product imprinted with the same artwork from the order or a customized name badge. (All images courtesy David Gross)





02

**STRATEGY 2: CREATE A REFERRAL PROGRAM**

A great way to grow your business is to have your existing happy customers refer new customers to your shop. Full-color sublimated products are attention grabbers and, like a beautiful piece of jewelry, often get compliments and questions with little to no effort.

Although some of your customers may not need any motivation, take advantage of this potential word-of-mouth advertising by offering them price or product incentives for sending new business to you. This referral process is excellent for increasing your customer retention rate and revenue. Further, be proactive and find out what businesses, clubs, and organizations your cus-

tomers are plugged into, then produce a few customized product samples for specific decision-makers within those groups. For some, there could even be large-scale promotional or fundraising opportunities.

Being referred by someone within a group can be the difference between a cold sales call and a hot one, so prepare well and dazzle them with the full-color possibilities sublimation transfer offers.



03

**STRATEGY 3: BEAT A PATH TO YOUR DOOR**

Many times, sublimated gifts and awards are given to folks that don't have a clue who made them or how they can get more. Put your contact in-

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formation on every product you sell. Ideas include sublimating your company name or logo on the back of name badges, in the collar or inside the bottom hem of shirts, or on the back of photo panels. Another great idea is to transfer your information onto Rowmark MATES 2" round adhesive plastic stickers and then attach them to the bottom of coffee mugs and water bottles or the inside of phone cases.

Although I typically suggest being discreet in the placement of your contact info, it's possible to incorporate it directly into a product's main image area. This approach, however, might be a little tricky depending on the product's size and the potential of your logo distracting from the overall imprinted design.



**STRATEGY 4:  
PHOTOGRAPH  
THE PRODUCTS  
YOU MAKE  
AND SELL**

Since you can't show current and future clients all the product and design choices they have, excite them and inspire them by showing them examples of what you've done for others. Always take photos of the products you produce and sell. Then, with your client's permission, post those on your social media pages. Even better (and again with their permission), include your happy customer in the photo for extra impact.

For more sublimation ideas, take a look at my (and co-author J. Stephen Spence) new book titled "The Road to Sublimation Success: Harnessing the Power of Sublimation for Outstanding Profits." The book is currently available from Condé in a printed edition and a printed and digital Kindle edition on Amazon. I also recommend the newly updated edition of "125 Ways to Make Money with Sublimation," written by J. Stephen Spence. **GP**

**DAVID GROSS** is the president of Condé Systems Inc. For more than 25 years, he has developed and built the Mobile, Alabama-based company into a source for printers, substrates, and consumables serving the graphic art, photography, prepress, and desktop publishing industries.



Since it is impossible for you to show current and future clients all the product and design choices they have, give them inspiration using photos of what you've done for others.



## SMALL IMPROVEMENTS FOR BIG BENEFITS



**A**s we come to the close of another year, you should be looking toward the future. How has 2021 been compared to 2020 or 2019? As you start thinking through your business and reviewing, you might be coming up against some pretty glaring issues. Some of them might even seem like larger problems. But I want to share with you some small things you can focus on that will not only improve your business but will make your life easier. You will not be constantly faced with huge daunting tasks or attempting to make significant changes in your business.

Rory Sutherland had a TED Talk at TEDGlobal in 2009, and one of the things he discussed was a problem faced by Eurostar, a train that goes from London to Paris. The train was faced with the challenge of making the trip better, thereby increasing its ridership and improving the brand. The big solution was to spend 6 billion pounds and take several years to build new tracks that would reduce the time of the trip by 40 minutes. By contrast, Sutherland's suggestion was to take a smaller view of the problem and hire fun, engaging people to walk up and down the train and pass out free drinks for the duration. The passengers would ask for the trains to be slowed down. We need to look at our big problems and think of small things we can do right now to start fixing them. For his example, why not train the employees to have more empathy, allow them to be entertaining and be themselves, and live the "why" to the fullest. Southwest Airlines is a U.S. market leader for a reason, so why could it not work for a train?

I know you are not Eurostar or Southwest Airlines, so how can you do this for your business? Focusing on seemingly



small things and tasks can have a big impact on your company. We don't have to make wholesale changes or tackle massive projects to improve things, but we should look for small ways to make immediate improvements and let them build up over time. So, let's take a look at some specific examples.

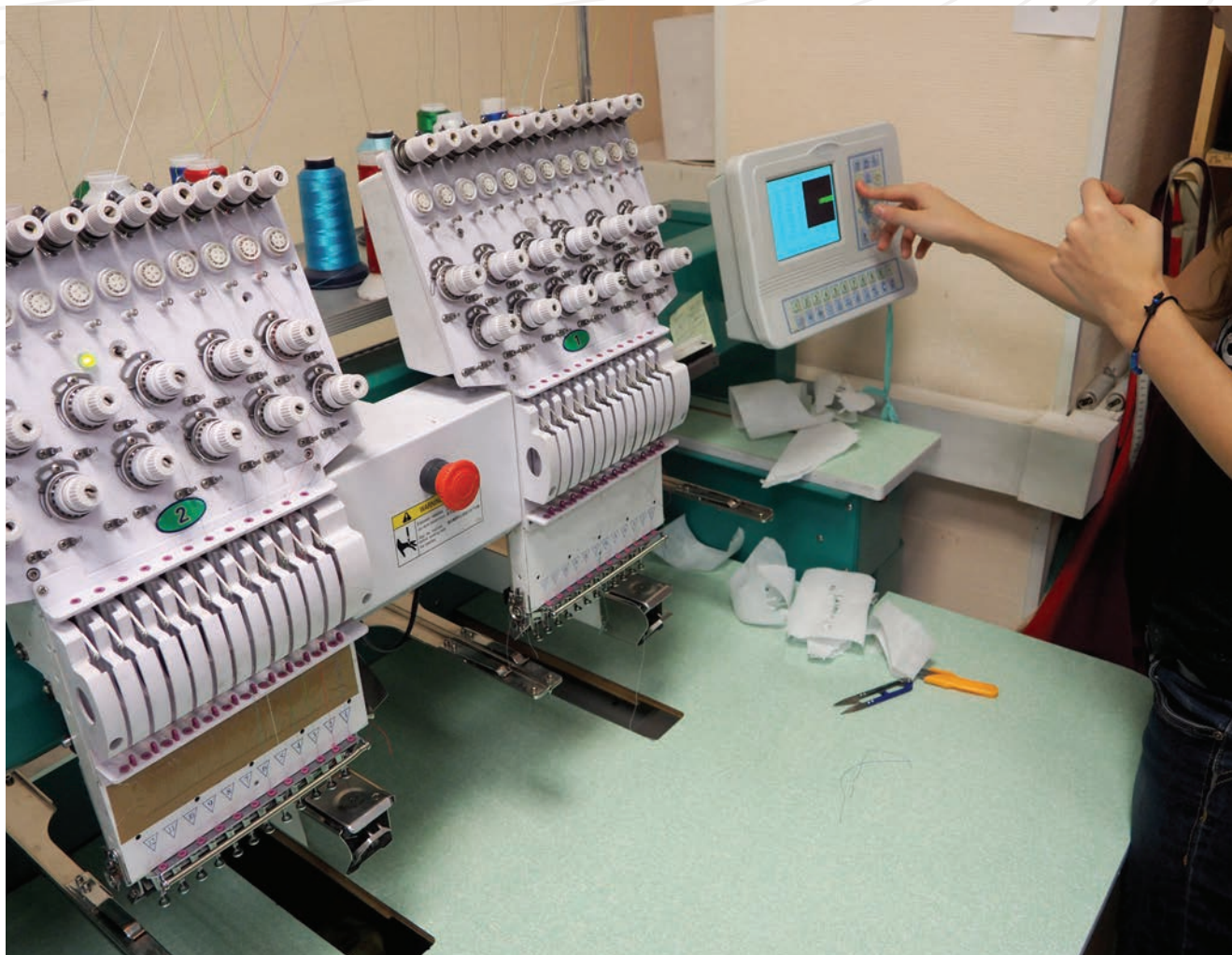
#### **HAVING A PLAN**

Yes, this can be big, like completing a business plan, which I am a huge advocate of, but in this context, it can also be small.

Having a plan or stopping to think about something before moving forward can make a huge difference. One of the small things I do to start each day is write down the five most important things I need to get done that day. This way, things don't completely derail me, like the usual daily rush of fires that need to be put out, people needing my attention, or my general knack for being drawn to shiny objects. Be intentional about each day, and you will find that you get more of what you need to get done for you.

#### **BEING ORGANIZED**

Like having a plan, this can be a huge thing to tackle, especially if you are a more creative type who seems to gather things, have huge amounts of clutter, and enjoys the chaos of 10,000 unread emails. But to think small, it only takes a few minor adjustments to see big gains. Start small, with something like always putting your scissors in the same place after each use. It could even be designating an area for the scissors, like an old coffee mug that didn't pass your quality control.



Those make great holders of small tools, like weeders, pens, and scissors. Or how about staging everything you need to complete a job together in one place and do that for the next few jobs you will get done that day before you start production? This allows you to focus on the job at hand and not run around looking for supplies while you should be focusing on making the perfect product for your customer.

### **IMPROVE YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE**

The number one thing to do is to have a website. I don't care how technically challenged you are, having a site of your own is easy. Take the time to set it up with WordPress, Wix, Squarespace, etc. It doesn't have to be a massive project; it

only needs to be a nice clean space online that you can call your own — a one-page website with why your customers should do business with you and what is in it for them with a clear call to action is all you need. You will hear people call this type of page a landing page. One of my favorite examples of this is my friend Joe Ortinau and his site <https://ortinauart.com/>. It needs to give your potential customers a place to take the action you would like them to take. If you already have a website, make some updates and add some pictures to keep it fresh. Google looks at how often a website is updated, so small changes make a big difference.

Ditching AOL/Hotmail/Yahoo email addresses is the next step. Since you have

a website, it should be free to have an email to go along with it. Which email would you open first if you were expecting an email from me: [aaron@oursuccessgroup.com](mailto:aaron@oursuccessgroup.com) or [woodyvber13@yahoo.com](mailto:woodyvber13@yahoo.com)?

Or another small step could be to spend five minutes double-checking the transactional emails your company is sending, like the automatic emails that go out when someone places an order or the emails for when the order ships. First and foremost, are they grammatically correct with good spelling? With tools like Grammarly, there is no reason for spelling errors. I think a lot of spelling and grammar errors come from relying too heavily on our phones. Phones should just be used as a tool when you



are not in your office, but business is done by computer.

Next on those transactional emails, make sure they make sense and help your customer have a better experience — not just make you feel better about berating them with your rules and regulations.

### EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

The biggest small change you can make and gives you huge rewards: practice empathy! Having excellent customer service is the easiest thing to do, yet it seems it is the last thing we work on. We learn how to make products, we improve our shipping methods, we do team-building exercises, but when was the last time you sat down for a minute and thought through your customer experience from start to finish? And, if this is a long process with lots of hoops, regulations, rules, etc., there is your first change. Make it easy for the right customer to do business with you. Don't give your current customers a reason to look for alternatives, and if you wow them beyond that, they will become your best sales representative, and you don't even have to pay them a commission.

The point here is to encourage you to look at the fine details of what you do. Think about the “user” or customer experience. Put yourself in their shoes when it comes to all touchpoints with you, and put your passion at the front of those interactions. This doesn't mean you have to be a perfectionist and get paralysis by analysis, but instead, put forth your best effort and show your customer and other stakeholders that you do care. It means putting yourself in your customer's shoes. Make those small improvements every day, and they will add up to greater success. **GP**

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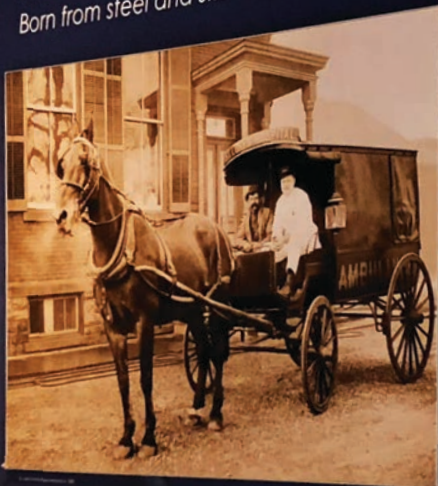
PANEL BY PANEL:

# 3 Steps to Apply Wall Graphics

Images courtesy of Malcolm Gieske.

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As the sun set on the 19th century, industry was transforming the Lehigh Valley. Railroads, mining and steel brought waves of new workers to the area and with them, great risks. Injuries were commonplace. And as the Bethlehem Iron Company (later known as Bethlehem Steel) became a national powerhouse, local leaders realized the need for the region's first hospital. St. Luke's was chartered in 1872 and is today the region's most expansive network.



BY  
MALCOLM  
GIESKE





## TOOL LIST:

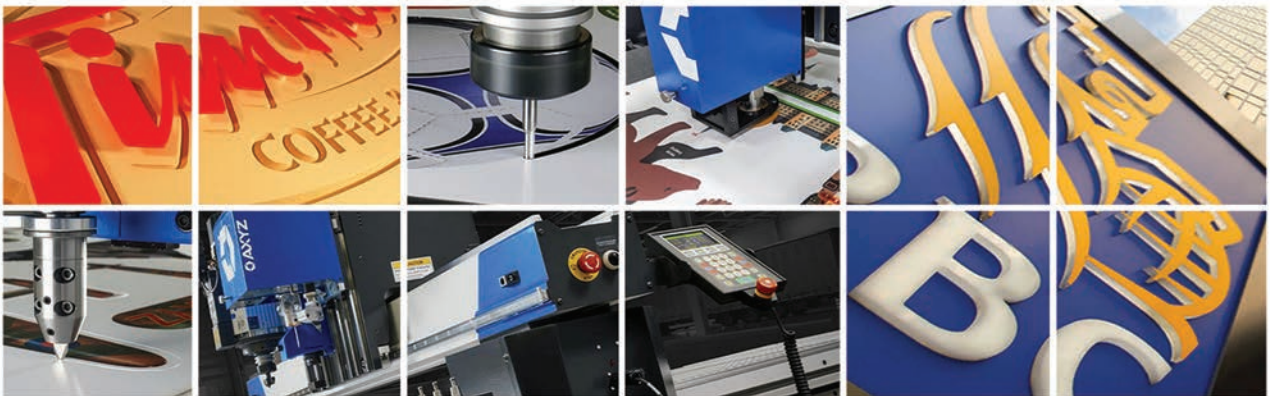
- Wall adhesion test kit
- 70% isopropyl alcohol, in a chemical-safe spray bottle
- Lint-free towels
- Tape measure
- Release liner backing cutter
- 2" medium tack masking tape
- Level
- Straight edge
- 6" or larger squeegee with felt buffer
- Ladder, scaffold, or high-reach powered lift
- Small flathead screwdriver
- Heat gun or torch

## STEP BY STEP

### STEP 1: DOES IT FIT?

As always, we want to be sure that our graphics are the correct size. Check the actual wall measurements against the printed dimensions. Customer-supplied dimensions are always suspect for error. We suggest on-site surveys whenever possible. With accurate prints, you can confidently start installing without laying up all the panels.

Another tip is to lay the rolled prints next to each other on the floor to get an idea of the overall print width in relation to the application surface. If the dimensions seem a little off, or there are unexpected obstacles in your way, it is best to spend the extra time and lay out all the panels on the wall with 2"-thick masking tape.



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## STEP 2: DOES IT STICK?

Years ago, we were not faced with many adhesion issues when it came to smooth wall installations. Enter low-VOC paints. These relatively new coatings have wreaked some havoc on the wall decorator industry. While it is nice that these paints provide a healthier environment for painters and building occupants, they tend to be difficult to bond graphics to. Low-VOC paints contain silicates and other chemicals that make adhesion a challenge.

The team at 3M has developed methods to combat the issue. Simply scrubbing the paint surface two times with isopropyl alcohol will “etch” the paint surface and dramatically increase adhesion. 3M also has a wall adhesion test kit, which measures pull force and allows for selecting the right film for any proposed surface.

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### STEP 3: APPLY

I heard Justin Pate once say, “Gravity is your friend.” Installation of wall graphics starts from the top down. Once the first panel is positioned, use the masking tape to establish a temporary hinge point, roughly 10” down from the top. Apply the tape on the edges at the hinge to secure the panel in place. I have found that applying the tape at a 45-degree angle, pointed upwards, reduces the stress on the tape and reduces shifting. If you have a long wall with many panels, you want to have the first panel lined up exceptionally well, and not have it move when taped in place.

From here, the top of the panel may be curled down, and a liner cutter may be used to expose roughly 6” of the top of the panel. This point will establish your permanent hinge. From here, remove the 6” tall section of liner, swing the film back against the wall, and squeegee from the bottom of the exposed adhesive up to the top. Trim off bleed from the top before proceeding. I am a fan of getting all work done at a specific elevation and then move on. There’s no sense in moving your ladder or scaffold unnecessarily back to the same position.

Once the top section is completed, the panel may be slightly pulled away from the wall to reveal the top of the remaining liner. Pull the liner down roughly 2’, leaving a slight curl that assists in keeping the unapplied film away from the wall. Many wall films have a slide-able adhesive, and you want to avoid adhesive pre-tack. With the liner holding the film from the wall, squeegee from the center out, with stroke widths approximately half the width of your squeegee.

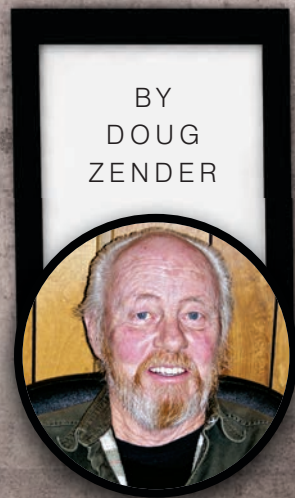
Once your application gets within a few inches of the curled back liner, pull the liner another 2’ and repeat until the entire panel is applied. The last step is to trim the bottom of the panel. The above sequence may be repeated on each panel through completion.

This process will vary with experience and material selection, and you’ll establish your own problem-solving/efficiency improvement techniques. There are countless tools and strategies to deploy that are beyond the scope of this basic guide. My advice for beginners is to get on the installer-related social groups and jump in on the conversation. Even us “old” installers are picking up ideas on the daily. **GP**

**MALCOLM GIESKE** is the owner of IDWraps.com, which specializes in fleet and retail graphics. He is a 3M UASG and PDAA Master certified installer with over 20 years of experience in sales and marketing.







# FONT Identification

**MAKING UP FOR THE LACK OF WHAT THE FONT IN CORELDRAW**

While back, I received a question regarding the What the Font feature that appeared in several versions of CorelDRAW but is no longer an included feature. Even if What the Font appears under your text menu, if you click on it, likely you'll get a message that says you are either not connected to the internet or a firewall is blocking access. The reality is that it is no longer able to be accessed from within CorelDRAW. For those unfamiliar with it, What the Font is a website that allows one to upload a sample font to procure a possible font match and identification, following the details on the website. Usually, it offers several possible choices for a match. For those who miss this feature, the good news is that you can still access it in your search engine. Type What the Font and you'll be directed to the website. Save it to your favorites for quick access. This is a very useful resource for identifying an unknown font, however, my sample font had some problems and the steps involved are a few more than previous. I'll explain briefly.



Fig 1: With What the Font open, I dragged the PNG to their interface. (All images courtesy the author)

### GETTING A SAMPLE

To get a sample of the target text, I first drew a rectangle around it over the bitmap, then shift selected the bitmap and pressed intersect. This placed a bitmap of only the rectangular area on top. With it selected, I pressed the crop icon and exported it to my desktop as a PNG. With What the Font open, I dragged the PNG to their interface (Fig. 1), but evidently there was not enough contrast between the letters and the background for it to identify anything (Fig. 2). So, I opened my PNG in PHOTO-PAINT and filled the background with white (Fig. 3). This time, when dropped into What the Font, in a few seconds it displayed about 10 possible matches ... none of which I had on my system, but each available for purchase. So, I looked through the fonts I had on my system and found a Futura family font that was a near match. I was able to substitute it instead of buying another font. What the Font is a valuable resource, but one must be discerning in its use.

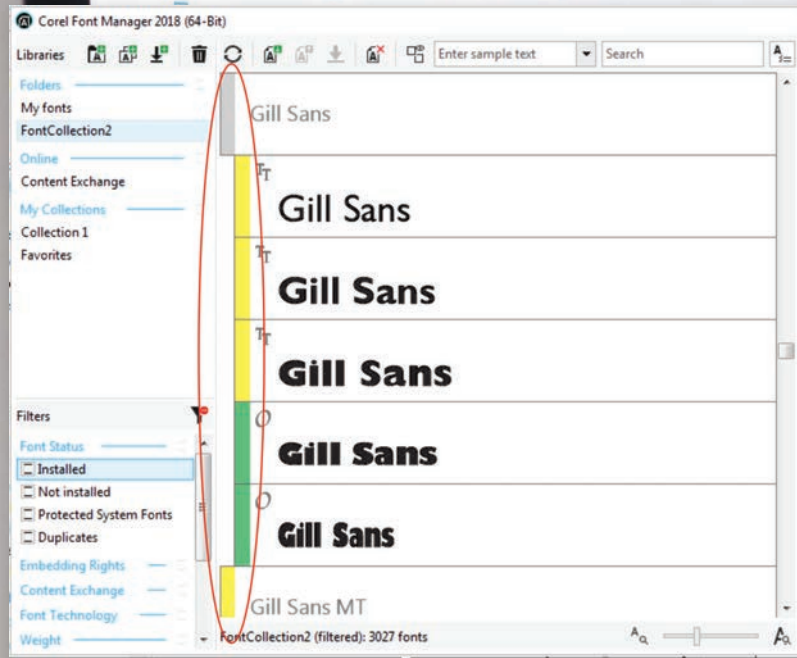


Fig 2: There was not enough contrast between the letters and the background for it to identify anything.




Fig 3: I opened my PNG in PHOTO-PAINT and filled the background with white to help find a match.





**Fig 4:** The Font Manager can be accessed by clicking the appropriate button in Application Launcher or by double-clicking the icon on your desktop.



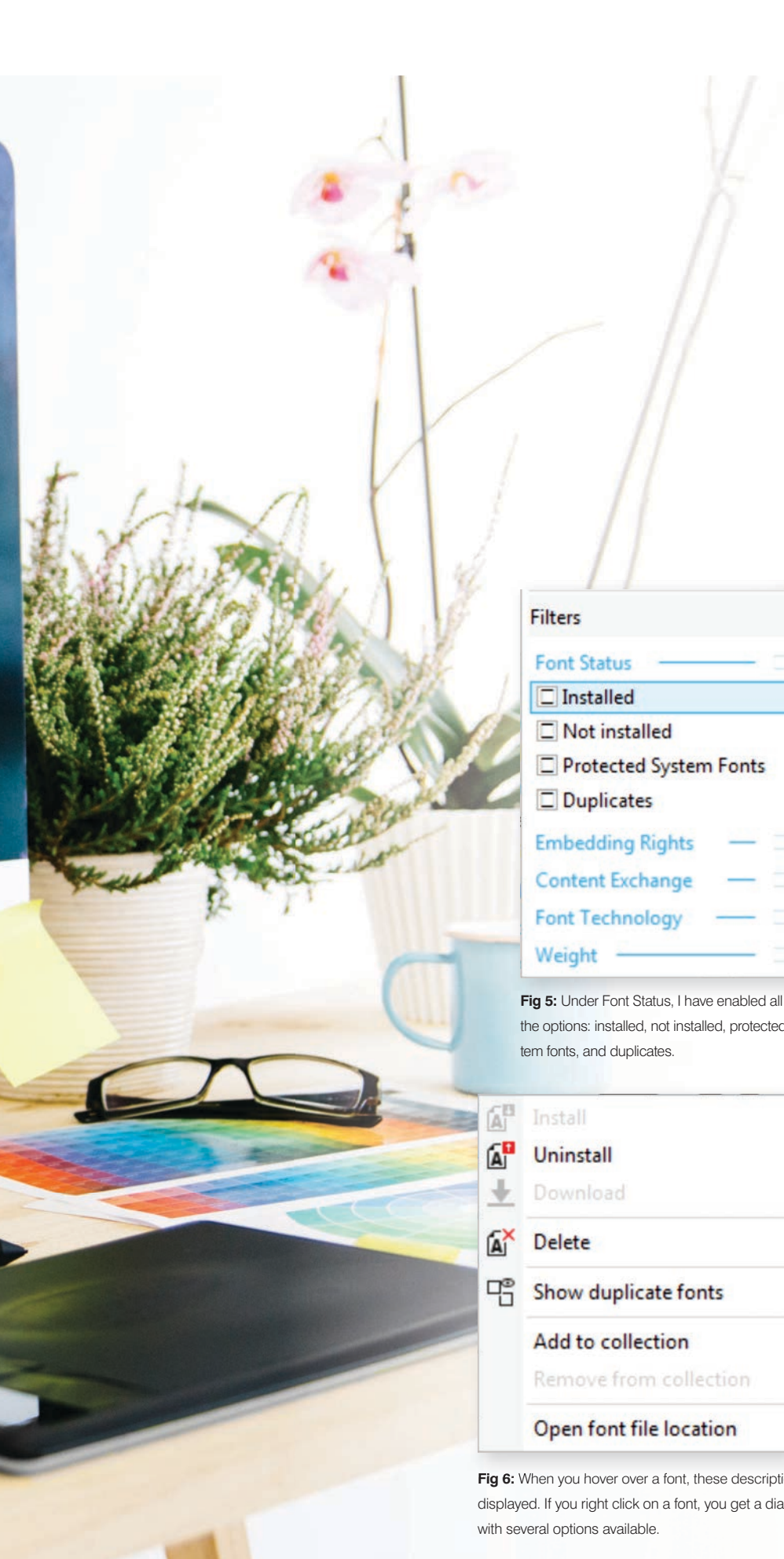
For many years and versions of CorelDRAW, the Bitstream Font Navigator was the font utility included with the program. Sometime between the release of X7 and X8, Corel's license agreement with Bitstream changed with the result of the Corel Font Manager replacing the previous Bitstream Font Navigator. What the Font is affiliated with Bitstream. Since, over time, I became very familiar with the Bitstream Font Navigator, the new interface was a bit foreign to my understanding and the Corel Font Manager was a challenge to my personal comprehension. It took some time for me to understand the new concepts and greater abilities of the new program. I had X7 installed with the familiar font utility, but when I upgraded to the 2018 release, the new utility was installed. I hope the following descriptions will help folks understand and use the new features of this powerful tool. Keep in mind that it is designed to catalog and organize all your fonts into a comprehensive system that seamlessly flows with CorelDRAW.

### **ACCESSING THE FONT MANAGER**

The first thing I noticed was that all my previous preferences were automatically recognized and displayed, so I didn't have to rebuild my font catalogs. The Font Manager can be accessed by clicking the appropriate button in Application Launcher or by double-clicking the icon on your desktop. Either way you will see something like Fig. 4. On the left side of each font is a colored rectangle ... green for installed, yellow for not installed and gray that indicates mixed status, usually because some fonts in a family are installed while others are not. Note also that there is a font type designation in the left upper corner of each font ... "O" for Open Type fonts, "TT" for True Type fonts, and sometimes a "T1" or "a" for Type 1 fonts. This is usually of little significance but should be noted that a duplicate font is typically better in Open Type than True Type







**Filters**

**Font Status**

- Installed
- Not installed
- Protected System Fonts
- Duplicates

**Embedding Rights**

**Content Exchange**

**Font Technology**

**Weight**

**Fig 5:** Under Font Status, I have enabled all four of the options: installed, not installed, protected system fonts, and duplicates.

- Install
- Uninstall**
- Download
- Delete
- Show duplicate fonts
- Add to collection ▶
- Remove from collection ▶
- Open font file location ▶

**Fig 6:** When you hover over a font, these descriptions are displayed. If you right click on a font, you get a dialog box with several options available.

font, since Open Type is newer technology. “T1” was a font type used exclusively by Macintosh systems for years. Some of the newer technology has made the compatibility between systems more available for cross-platform users, so most often it makes no difference.

Note that, in the lower left corner, under Font Status, I have enabled all four of the options: installed, not installed, protected system fonts, and duplicates (Fig. 5). When you hover over a font, these descriptions are displayed. If you right click on a font, you get a dialog box with several options available, like in Fig. 6. Install, uninstall, download, delete, show duplicate fonts, add to collection, remove from collection, and open font file location are all possible options, although some are not available or may be grayed out depending on how they exist. It is important to never delete a protected system font as these are necessary for the operating system to function properly. It’s part of the reason to display the font properties, to avoid inadvertently deleting a necessary font.

One of the options in Font Manager is to acquire fonts from the Content Exchange. This is of some value, but when I tried to download a particular font I got a “Please wait” notice that never went away and the font never appeared after a half hour of waiting. It seems that some are immediately available, and others don’t work well. Most of my often-used fonts were part of previous versions of CorelDRAW supplied on the install disc or were purchased from other font suppliers.

*continued on page 104*



# PRINT PREP

## IMPORTANT STEPS TO ASSURE PREDICTABLE OUTPUT

**T**he belief that making a quality print is simply a matter of opening an image and clicking the print button is pretty common. Anyone who has experience in the operation of a large-format inkjet printer, however, would balk at this fallacy. The production of a high-quality print is a lot more work than meets the eye. From concept to composition to color management to color correction, each step requires knowledge and skill that produces the best results. Print preparation can be complex, and in the final analysis, the output is dependent on the input.

### TIME AND MONEY

As you probably know, producing quality prints is an expensive proposition. The cost of the printer, peripheral calibration equipment and software, and the labor for maintenance can be substantial. Materials like ink sets and substrates are also pricey. It is therefore critical to set up a workflow where waste is reduced to a minimum. It certainly makes sense both in terms of time and money to understand the subtleties of professional color management, color correction, and the printing workflow.

### MONITOR COLOR

Having the best possible on-screen image is essential to predictable output and is usually the first step in setting up a print workflow. Color management is about having all the devices in the workflow speak the same language. Calibration software is either bundled with the operating system or is third-party software. Better yet, a colorimeter, a device that reads the RGB values of a monitor, is more accurate than calibration software. (Fig. 1) Whichever option you choose, calibration will provide the best possible on-screen image that the monitor can display.

### COLOR MATCHING

Matching a print to a monitor is the second step in the color management process. It's a matter of synchronizing the color that the monitor displays to the gamut of the printer. A device called a spectrophotometer is used to measure the color on a target print that consists of dozens of little colored squares printed on the substrate that you are profiling. (Fig. 2) When the target image is scanned, the device measures the characteristics of each square, and the software writes an RGB profile that can be accessed within the color settings dialog box.

### COLOR SETTINGS

Don't be intimidated by the color settings dialog box. I know it's big and complex but a close look at it will reveal its logic. (Fig. 3) The main features of the color settings dialog box assign a color working space to display the profile of the monitor or printer. The RGB working spaces field is where the RGB menu is and where the profiles for the printer are accessed. (Fig.



**Fig. 1.** A colorimeter, a device that reads the RGB values of a monitor, is the most accurate method for monitor calibration. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)



Fig. 2. A spectrophotometer is used to measure the color on a target print.

4) There are also profiles for CMYK offset lithography output to plates or film and several other printing environments in the list. Many printer manufacturers include pre-made ICC (International Color Consortium) profiles with the driver software that can be accessed from the menu. These profiles were made for specific printers, ink sets, and substrates. They change the RGB values of the image to match the color capabilities of the ink set and the reflective qualities of the substrate to produce an on-screen image that mimics the printer's gamut.

The pre-made profiles work well; however, a custom-printing environment is more accurate and preferable. If you are working in a production shop where you are continually printing to multiple sub-

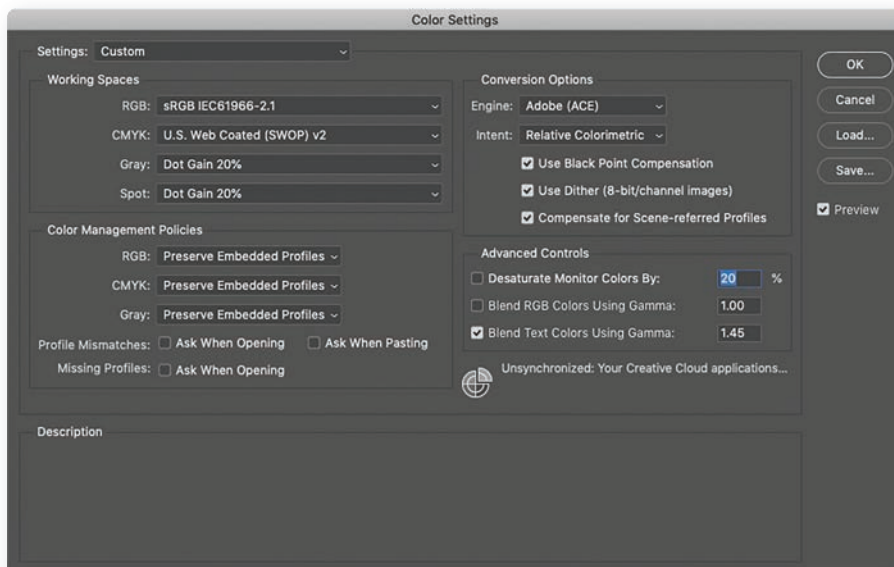
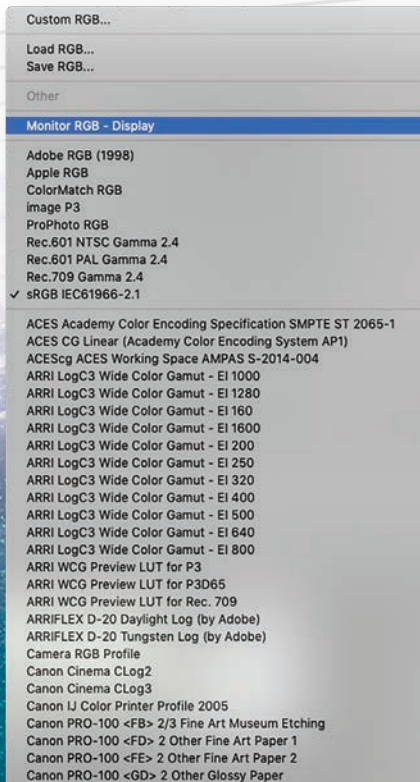


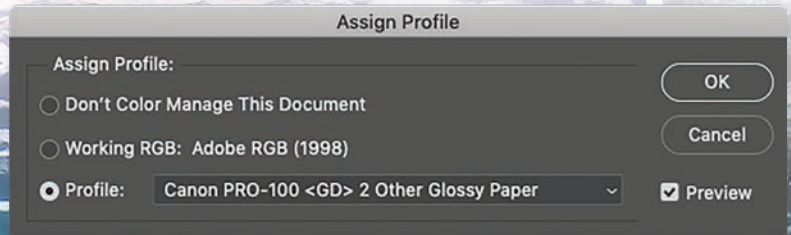
Fig. 3. The color settings dialog box assigns a color working space to display the profile of the printer.

## THE DIGITAL EYE



**Fig. 4 (left).** The working spaces field is where the RGB menu is and where the profiles for the printer are accessed.

**Fig. 5 (below).** The assign profile dialog box imbeds the printer profile so that it can be saved with the document.



**Fig. 6.** You're likely to see changes to the image's color when you assign the printer profile.



strates on multiple printers, custom profiles are the way to go. Of course, you'll need to purchase a colorimeter and a spectrophotometer, which are often available as a single device.

### **CREATE!**

Now that the computer is set up for optimal display, the image can be manipulated and adjusted using the many color adjustment tools like levels, curves, hue/saturation, vibrance, photo filter, etc., until the optimal on-screen image is achieved. This is the creative and fun side of the process where your visual skills will shine. Of course, nowadays, with the abundance of tools, commands, and filters available, almost any visual effect can be achieved.

### **EMBED THE PROFILE**

Even though the image appears correct on screen, the profile should be permanently attached to the image so that when it's saved and reopened, it will display correctly. From Photoshop's Edit menu, choose assign profile (Fig. 5) and select your custom profile from the menu, then click OK.

### **COLOR SHIFT**

You're likely to see changes to the image's color when you assign the profile as in (Fig. 6). Inevitably, you'll need to make further adjustments to improve the image. Apply adjustments like levels, curves, color balance, or other adjustments until the image looks correct and the color shift is mitigated. You can experiment with various adjustments, but you should realize that the printer profile image rarely looks precisely like the unprofiled image. There may be a few areas that don't quite match, especially in the blues and magentas because of the limited gamut of the printer profile.

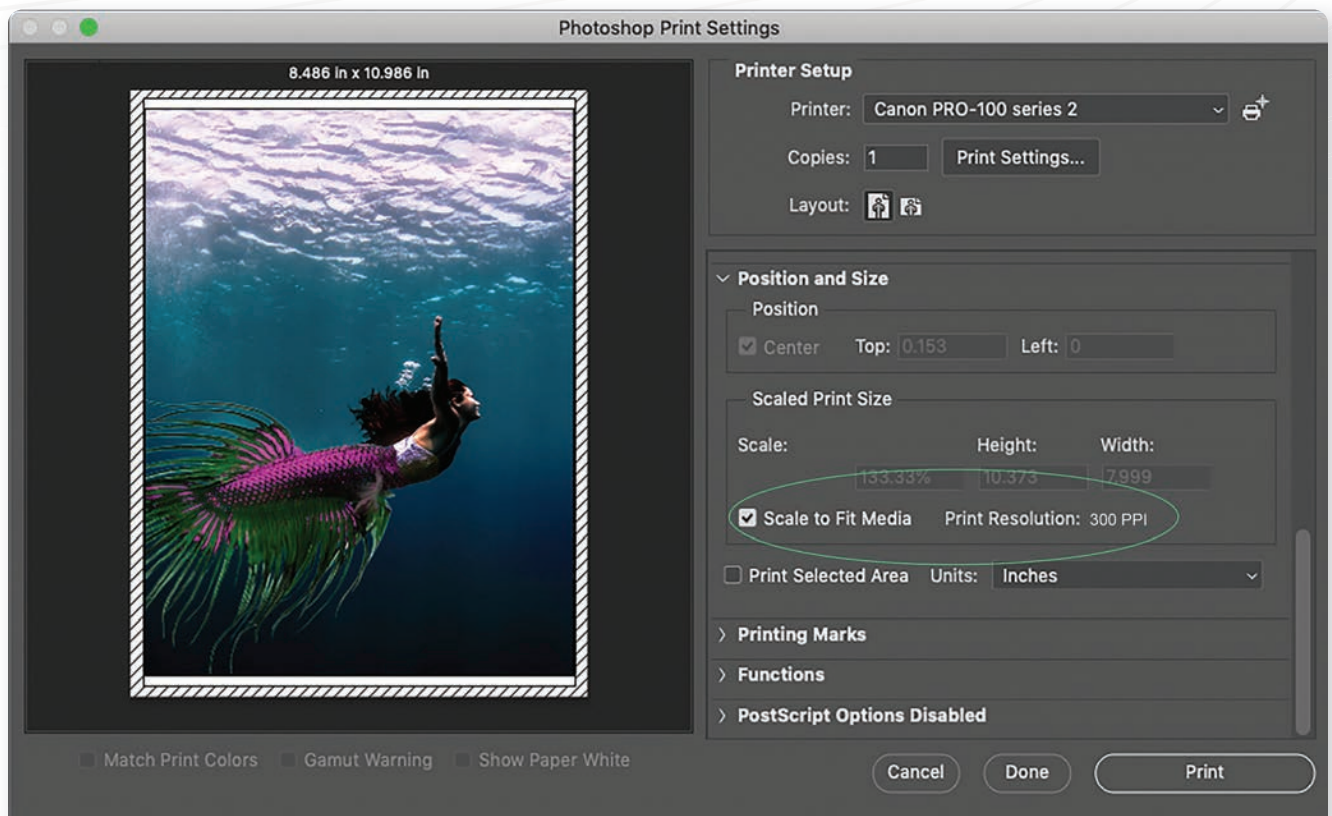


Fig. 7. Choose the scale to fit media option in the print dialog box to print to a smaller size.

### PROOF IT

The on-screen image may look great. Still, you'll want to proof the image before committing to the final print. If the final print is going to be large, it's wise to print a smaller version of the image first so you can see what it looks like on paper. Load the same substrate that the final will be printed on in letter size (8.5" X 11").

Choose the *scale to fit media* option in the print dialog box (Fig. 7) to reduce the image to a printable size. Choose either the portrait or landscape option depending on the image's proportions.

Scrutinize the print carefully. Seeing the image on paper will give you additional perspective than just seeing it on screen, and you're likely to observe minor corrections that need to be addressed. Make any changes that are necessary and save this smaller print for future reference. Don't forget to label the substrate.

### FLATTEN

Duplicate the image (image > duplicate) and flatten it. Flattening the image will reduce the file size and hasten processing

when it comes time to make the final print. Don't flatten the original document because you will want to save layers if, down the line, changes need to be made.

### FINAL PRINT

Turn the printer on and follow the prompts. Usually, it can take some time as most large-format inkjet printers go through a cleaning cycle when you start them. Wait for the auto nozzle check to complete. On the printer, choose either roll paper or sheet paper. Printers usually signal when another cleaning cycle or head alignment is necessary. They will also indicate the status of the ink reservoirs. If one is nearly empty, the icon of that specific color will blink or display an exclamation point. If it's completely empty, the printer will not operate. Open the paper tray and make sure that the paper is the correct size and is loaded correctly. Expand any trays that support the final print when it is output by the printer so that it doesn't fall on the floor.

On your workstation, choose file > print to display the print dialog box and choose the specific printer from the printer menu.

## DEFAULT COLOR MANAGEMENT

The default print mode is *printer manages color*, and that usually produces an unmanaged print and relinquishes color control to the print driver. To apply the profile you selected, you'll need to specify that Photoshop manages color. Click on the radio button (Fig. 8) and choose the profile for your paper and ink set.

Click the print settings to choose the target paper size — letter sheet for 8.5" X 11", Super A3 for 13" X 19" sheet paper, or roll paper for anything larger. Create custom sizes by clicking on the *manage custom size* option (Fig. 9). This is helpful for printing to roll paper but be sure not to exceed the roll paper's maximum width when you create a custom size.

To assure that Photoshop is managing color, choose print settings > color controls, and be sure that color sync and printer-specific color controls are grayed out. If your image is too big for the printer, you can scroll down and choose *scale to fit media*.

Finally, click the print radio button.

## PRINT STATUS

Check the status of the print by clicking the print monitor icon on your desktop. The printer will start making odd noises like buzzes and snaps as it processes the image, but don't worry — it's gearing up to deliver a perfect print.

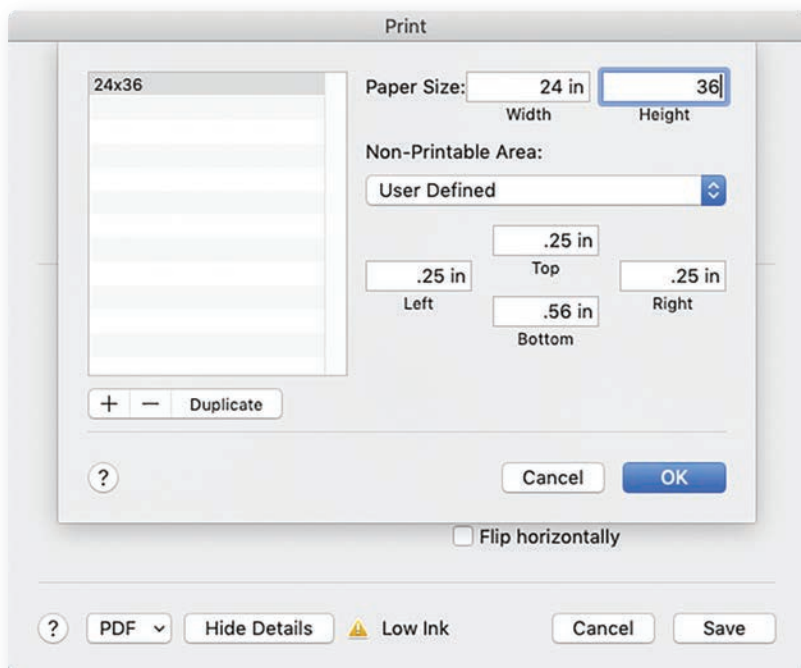


Fig. 9. Create custom sizes by clicking on the manage custom size option in the print settings dialog box.

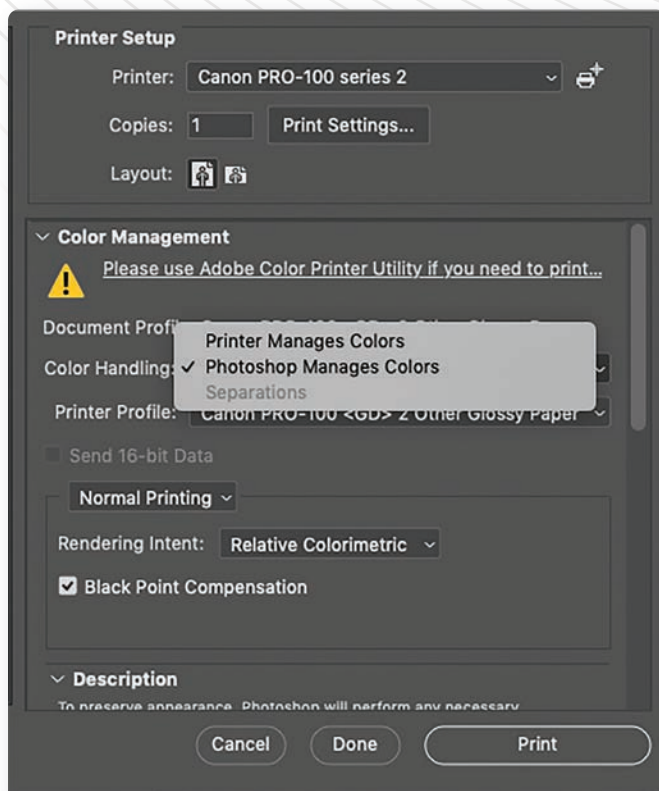


Fig. 8. To apply the profile you selected, you need to specify that Photoshop manages color.

## CONTROL

A controlled environment that produces the best quality print requires a little extra work. It's quite easy to let the printer manage color, for example, and get perfectly fine results, but working with the ICC profiles that the printer manufacturer provides or assigning custom profiles that you create provides a much greater level of control. Each substrate and ink set combination requires a unique profile that takes time to create. You might find that you accumulate quite a large collection of profiles for every possible printing situation. Professional print shops are geared up with a library of profiles to do what it takes to output images in the most efficient and accurate workflow that guarantees success with every print. **GP**



**STEPHEN ROMANIELLO** is an artist and educator teaching digital art at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, for over 31 years. He is a certified instructor in Adobe Photoshop and the author of numerous books and articles on the creative use of digital graphics software. Steve is the founder and CEO of GlobalEye systems, a company that offers training and consulting in digital graphics software and creative imaging.



# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: NEW PRODUCTS FOR 2022

For more on the suppliers featured in this section, please see website and phone information following each product.

## SIGNAGE & PRINTING



### UV FLATBED PRINTERS

**Roland DGA** announces its new VersaUV LEC2 S-Series printers, which the company says are UV flatbeds designed to maximize direct-to-object printing options for users. Available in two flatbed sizes (64" and 30" widths), the LEC2 S-Series printers offer print providers and manufacturers direct to product customization and direct printing on flexible and rigid materials.

**800-542-2307**  
[rolanddga.com](http://rolanddga.com)



### RIP SOFTWARE

**MUTOH** offers its Vertelith software, which now comes with its XpertJet 461UF and 661UF UV-LED printers. It automates processes such as layer printing, layout processing, and jig layout and production. The software also has two preview functions: RIP preview and soft proof. It also comes with MUTOH CMYK wide color gamut ICC input profiles.

**800-996-8864**  
[mutoh.com](http://mutoh.com)

### METALWORKER ROUTER

#### AAG Tailored Cutting Solutions

introduces the XYZ METALWORKER router. It is meant for fabricators looking to process nonferrous metals in low to high volume manufacturing environments. The product was designed for end-users looking to process sheets of material, including aluminum, copper, zinc, metal composite, and more. It has a rigid frame coupled to a stress-relieved gantry to reduce tool motor vibrations.

**800-361-3408**  
[axyz.com](http://axyz.com)



### UJF SERIES PRINTERS

**Mimaki USA** introduces four new UJF Series printers, including the UJF-7151 plus II and three new UJF-MkII e Series models. The UJF-7151 plus II incorporates eight print heads and eight ink slots, which can be configured for a four-color setup or up to eight inks, and it can print up to 1800 DPI. The new UJF-MkII e Series models include the UJF-3042 MkII e, UJF-3042 MkII Ex e, and the UJF-6042 MkII e. Mimaki says the printers offer better image quality and stability and enhanced operational performance over their predecessors.

**888-530-3992**  
[mimakiusa.com](http://mimakiusa.com)

### SOFT SIGNAGE DYE-SUB PRINTERS

#### Canon Solutions America

**Inc.** introduces the MS Impres hybrid dye-sublimation printers. The MS Impres 4180 prints up to 64" wide with four Kyocera 300 DPI print heads in a four-color ink configuration and can print at speeds up to 3,120 sq ft./hr. The MS Impres 4180 EVO expands to eight 600 DPI print heads and prints up to 3,354 sq ft./hr. The MS Impres 4320 handles media up to 126" in width, has four Kyocera 300 DPI print heads, and prints at 4,632 sq ft./hr. The MS Impres 4320 EVO adds the eight 600 DPI print heads and prints at 4,952 sq ft./hr.

**844-443-4636**  
[canon.com](http://canon.com)



# APPAREL DECORATING



## GRAPHICS SOFTWARE

**Digital Art Solutions** offers Graphics Builder 12, which combines ready-made designs with vector graphics, textures, and fonts. Users can choose what graphic elements they want and combine them into an interactive template. There are 72 editable designs, 72 illustrations, 40 typefaces, and four texture backgrounds.

**800-959-7627**  
[digitalartsolutions.com](http://digitalartsolutions.com)



## SUSTAINABLE BUCKET CAP

**Atlantis Headwear** offers its sustainable bucket cap, made of 100% certified recycled polyester twill. The product meets the Global Recycled Standard and offers product traceability via QR code. It features a 3 1/2" crown, 1 7/8" brim, and sewn eyelets.

[atlantis-caps.com](http://atlantis-caps.com)

## POLYESTER OUTERWEAR

**Charles River Apparel** introduces two new outerwear styles that the company says reflect its commitment to sustainable products: the Lithium quilted hooded parka for women and a Lithium quilted hooded jacket for men, both made of 100% recycled polyester. The products feature a full-zip design and are available in black, plus a navy color for the women's style only.

**800-225-0550**  
[charlesriverapparel.com](http://charlesriverapparel.com)



## RECYCLED PERFORMANCE CAP

**Sportsman Cap & Bag** offers its recycled performance cap, which is an unstructured, six-panel, mid-profile cap made of 95/5 sustainable polyester/spandex. The product features a pre-curved visor, D-ring micro hook and loop closure, and a performance sweatband.

**913-541-0901**  
[sportsmancaps.com](http://sportsmancaps.com)



## SFX HEAT TRANSFERS

**RhinoTech** offers its SFX heat transfer decorating process. Customers can use SingleStep heat transfer paper for light-colored apparel and RhinoDARK for black and dark-colored hoodies, T-shirts, sweats, and bags. The company says that these no-weed laser papers have the look and feel of a screen-printed garment.

**651-686-5027**  
[rhinotechinc.com](http://rhinotechinc.com)

# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: NEW PRODUCTS FOR 2022

For more on the suppliers featured in this section, please see website and phone information following each product.

## APPAREL DECORATING



### HEAT PRESS

**Insta Graphic Systems** offers its Insta 288 Swing Away heat press machine, its largest manual machine with 20" X 25" platens for ease of use with larger substrates and transfers. It can also be used as a sublimation heat press machine.

**562-404-3000**  
[instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com)



### CLASSIC TRUCKER CAPS

**Kati Sportcap & Bag** offers its USA-Made trucker cap, currently available in 10 colors. It features a classic max performance sweatband, snapback closure, structure, six-panel, mid-profile build. Each cap has a 100% polyester mesh back.

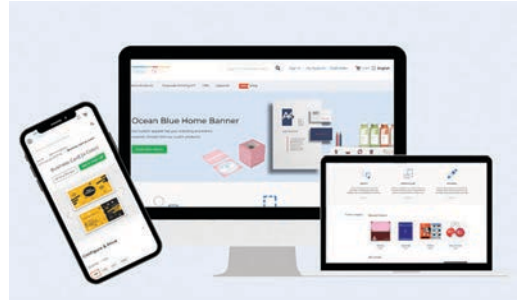
**800-392-5559**  
[katisportcap.com](https://www.katisportcap.com)

### WEB TO PRINT SOFTWARE

**Design'N'Buy** introduces a new version of its All-In-One Web2Print software. This product allows users to log into their account, browse through desired products, choose any print-ready template to personalize, and place the order on their own. The new web-to-

print editor has been re-coded on JavaScript ES6 to be fully mobile and template compatible. It also uses GraphQL for data exchange with front-end and back-end systems.

**347-647-9799**  
[designnbuy.com](https://www.designnbuy.com)



### TIE-DYE HOODED PULLOVER

**Independent Trading Co.** offers its PRM4500 unisex midweight pigment dye hooded pullover. The product is made with a 9-oz. 80/20 ring-spun cotton/polyester blend fleece with 100% cotton 30-singles face yarn. It also features sewn eyelets, 1X1 ribbing at the cuffs and waistband, split-stitch double-needle sewing on all seams, a twill-taped neck, and a jersey-lined hood. Available in sizes XS-3X.

**877-366-9911**  
[independenttradingco.com](https://www.independenttradingco.com)

### SUSTAINABLE FABRIC LINE

**Beaver Paper Group** introduces its TexStyles NatureSeries family of graphic fabrics. This line of sublimation fabric is made from CiCLO technology.

The company says fabrics made with CiCLO technology will biodegrade at the end of their life cycle within three to five years in ideal conditions.

**770-935-5080**  
[beaverpaper.com](https://www.beaverpaper.com)



# AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



## LADIES COTTON T

**Augusta Sportswear Brands** offers its Cotton-Touch Poly Cloud T from Holloway, which is a wicking T-shirt. It features a fully sublimated tie-dye design and is built with moisture-wicking, odor-resistant fabric and protects against the sun with 50+ UPF.

**800-237-6695**

[augustasportswear.com](http://augustasportswear.com)



## FACE MASK REELS

**Catania Medallic Specialty Inc.** offers its face mask reels, which allow users to have accessibility to their face masks. The retractable swivel reel can be personalized and attaches to garments using the deluxe bulldog clip.

**800-633-2586**

[cataniainc.com](http://cataniainc.com)



## ACRYLIC SHEET SET

**Marco Awards Group** announces its acrylic sheet set. The company says the acrylic sheet and black base are all that is needed to create a full line stand-up award. Users can cut and mount 1/4" acrylic sheet in the black base.

**800-229-6592**

[marcoawardsgroup.com](http://marcoawardsgroup.com)

## SUBLIMATABLE BURLAP

**JDS Industries**

**Inc.** introduces new sublimatable burlap products, including Laserable Leatherette items reinvented and wrapped in burlap. Customers can

choose from tote bags, portfolios, keychains, photo frames, and more.

**800-843-8853**

[jdsindustries.com](http://jdsindustries.com)



## BEVELED EMBLEMS

**World Emblem** offers its FlexStyle beveled emblems. The product is designed specifically for hard goods, hats, and heavy-duty garments, including outerwear. It comes in two finishes, including metallic and nonmetallic, and can be heat applied to any fabric made of 100% cotton, 100% polyester, or a cotton/poly blend. It also comes with a pressure-sensitive backing. The self-adhesive version can be applied to glass, wood, and metal.

**800-766-0448**

[worldemblem.com](http://worldemblem.com)



GP

## FONT IDENTIFICATION

*continued from page 93*

### ADDITIONAL ABILITIES

There are several additional abilities of Font Manager that I encourage one to explore in the help files associated with it. The ability to type a sample text stream and view it in a chosen font is a nice feature and being able to use a font that exists on an external drive is a new thing. I am still exploring and learning new stuff and haven't yet learned it all.

I want to share some font foundries I have used that have high quality fonts available for download and purchase: sign-na.com, letterheadfonts.com, and houseind.com/fonts/. These all offer a variety of new and unusual fonts with reasonable prices. Another resource for logo download is brandsoftheworld.com. It's free to use and offers a vast number of international vector logos in CDR, AI, EPS or PDF file formats for immediate acquisition. I have found these to be of immense value in my work. I hope they serve you as well.

As always, I encourage questions and insights be directed to [dezender1@gmail.com](mailto:dezender1@gmail.com). Questions will be answered ASAP. **GP**

**DOUG ZENDER** has used CorelDRAW extensively since version 4. His goal is to minimize the intimidation of the program and give users the sense that CorelDRAW is a friend, not an adversary. Doug began as a design artist, then moved into the sign industry in 1992 doing vinyl graphics. You can contact him at [dezender1@gmail.com](mailto:dezender1@gmail.com).



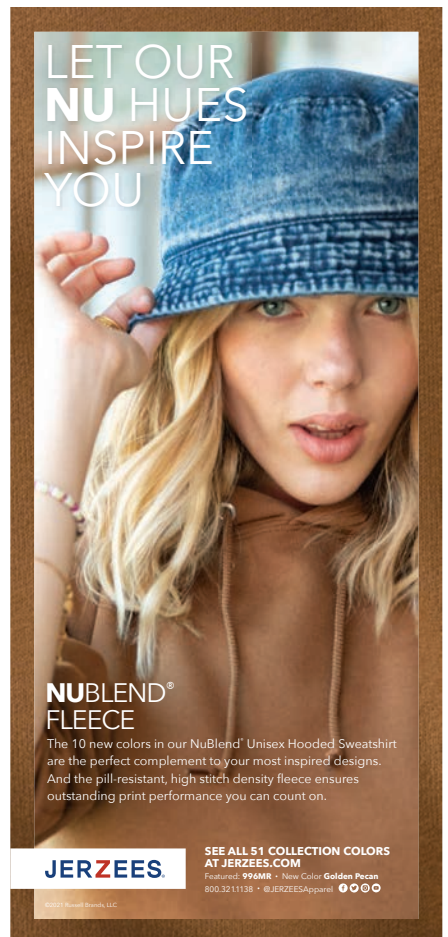
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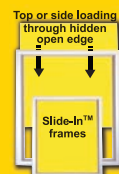
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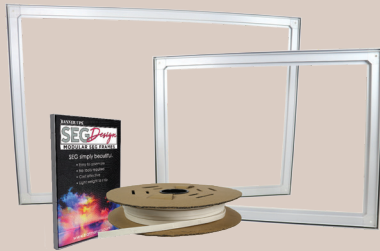
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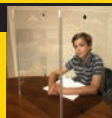
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## DYE-SUBLIMATION PRINTING

*continued from page 18*

Apparel is also a fast-growing market for dye-sublimation. It takes print shops to a new level because it involves printing on textiles, cutting them out, and sewing them together.

“Much of that is coming back to the states just because you have the ability to do shorter runs. Event- and time-sensitive driven projects can be done much faster and with the same level of quality as they are when they are exporting projects,” Barker says.

Check added that “as more designers gain experience with digital design and the virtually limitless possibilities of sublimation, we expect to see sublimation have a major impact for years to come.”

### LEARNING CURVE

For print shops new to dye-sublimation, the process is much simpler than it used to be. When deciding to enter this market, it is essential for a shop’s staff to understand each machine’s full benefits, uses, and capabilities to help them meet increased demand, says Check.

“When looking for an entry-level dye-sublimation printer, consider its versatility and ink technology. Dye-sublimation requires exceptional color saturation and high contrast, so it is beneficial to find technology that offers high-density black ink to ensure output has excellent tonal transitions and grayscale,” Check says. “By incorporating digital printing technology equipped with new feature sets and ease-of-use benefits, today’s apparel decorators can expand product offerings to better fulfill orders, provide quicker turnaround times, and meet the growing customer demand.”

Barker adds that “there are nuances to dye-sublimation that are different than other traditional methods of printing, but it is not something people should be afraid of.” He suggests making an informed purchase decision by buying the right type of equipment for your business and purchasing that equipment from a company that can support and train your staff on various

workflows, business concepts, and projects you want to develop.

“If you purchase the right equipment from the right company, you can eliminate many of the pain points of getting into dye-sublimation,” Barker says.

Hunter tells people wanting to get into this print process to outsource their sublimation projects at the beginning to build up their business first.

“Even if you know how to print, like on an eco-solvent printer, sublimation is a different animal. You can print, but the big learning curve is learning the heat press and finishing,” she says.

Shops should also make sure they have enough space for the printer and heat press because you don’t want the heat from the press to dry out the ink in the print heads.

Dye-sublimation needs to take place in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. The type of fabric used is also important.

Shops need to realize that fabrics, even when purchased from the same manufacturer, can have different weaves, threads, and fibers, which take to dye-sublimation in different ways.

“If you are going around shopping for the cheapest fabric, it can perform very differently, and your result can really be different in colors, in feel, the washability, even the stretch if you get some cheaper materials,” Hunter says. “They don’t hold stretch or recover from stretch, or if you have a snag, the way they are woven may not have a stop rip function.”

Screen printers wanting to get into dye-sublimation will have a different learning curve because they will have to learn the digital printing side of the equation even though they are already familiar with different fabrics, Hunter adds. **GP**

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## ORNAMENTS AND GIFTS

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or not. We have done it many times; however, use a good amount of caution when working on these items. First, they are very lightweight, and at times a little difficult to stabilize in the horizontal position to attach a stencil to them. A soft towel bunched up can help, or a bean bag that you can press the glass into to stay in place. Upon closer examination, you will see that those glasses have a small spot/hole at the bottom through which air is evacuated from the double chamber. Second, it is imperative not to allow abrasive to get into that! Third, adjust your blasting pressure downward and take it easy, and overall, be careful!

Along with these two items are all the others that fit into either category, like bottle stoppers or wine/spirit decanters. For corporate gifts, we see the usual desktop items like paperweights, business card holders, and such. Art glass blown objects have also made it to the forefront of the corporate gift list. And who wouldn’t like a colorful blown glass piece on their desk, knowing that no two objects are alike and that yours is therefore truly unique?

Well, I think this should give you some ideas of what is popular at the moment. It will also prepare you for when a customer may ask for one of these items. It is always better to appear to have heard of the product they are asking about. All that remains is to wish you success with your projects this holiday season, but more importantly, be safe so that you may enjoy another season the following year. **GP**

With over 40 years in the glass business, **RUTH DOBBINS** offers experience in all glass-etching techniques as well as infused and cast glass. Ruth holds a master’s degree in art and has been a partner in an art glass wholesale supply and studio company in Europe, which also placed great emphasis on a training program before joining forces with Norm. You can reach Ruth by email at [ruth@etchmaster.com](mailto:ruth@etchmaster.com) or by phone at 505-473-9203.

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