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*“I’ve always enjoyed managing and have always been an independent person, so owning my own company allows for this.”*

CARLA SCHLOSSER  
SCHLOSSER SIGNS INC.

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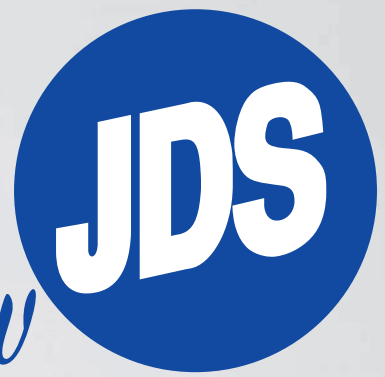


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APPAREL DECORATING

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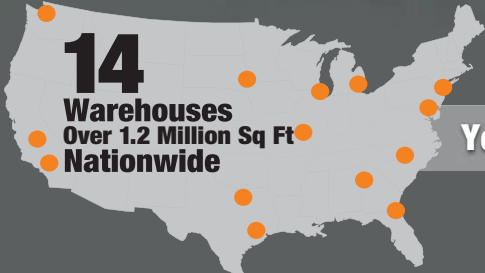
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**STEP ONE** CASSIE GREEN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR



## SUCCESS STORIES

There are a lot of cool things going on in the graphics industry. Maybe that's stating the obvious, but this month's theme of niche markets has introduced us to some pretty talented people doing unique things with their equipment.

Just a couple weeks ago, I was virtually introduced to Dan Supple of Supple Rockers. Their business handcrafts heirloom, customized rocking chairs that combine the worlds of baseball and woodworking (check out their work on the cover of this issue). Using their laser machines—they have multiple in various sizes—and working together with others, these guys have done business with everyone from the New York Yankees to Division 1 colleges. They've found a way to turn their love for baseball into a niche market success.

One of the ways they continue to succeed is by constantly exploring new technology. And we know from talking with others that they aren't alone. As graphics professionals everywhere continue to discover their own niche markets, many are constantly researching and adding new equipment.

Whether it's connecting people to industry resources, providing educational content, or simply being introduced to someone for the first time, we enjoy hearing about and being a part of those success stories. As you read through this issue, you'll find plenty of takeaway information to keep moving in the right direction.

Until next time.

(Image courtesy Jen Carney)



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**HOME DECOR: AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS USING WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE**

**HOW TO FIND SUCCESS IN THE FACE OF INCREASING LIGHTING REGULATIONS**

**MAKE THE MOST OF DTG FOR FUNDRAISING EFFORTS**

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# R-E-S-P-E-C-T

**T**he other day, on my way to a sign install job over in Canton, Texas, I found myself following a farm truck pulling a trailer load of large, round hay bales, and I thought of old George. For a few years, George was the only bull of our large herd of three cattle. I bought him as a calf, and he grew into this massive muscled up animal who would sometimes cock his head and ram a horn into a 1,500-pound bale of hay and toss it around the pasture for fun and exercise.

Now, a 200-pound man can't begin to budge bales of hay like that, but to old George they were toys. George was solid colored, dark reddish-brown, and built like the bulls you see fighting matadors in Mexico. But to me, he was just a big pet.

One day I was doing some fence repair, tightening barbed wire to the southeast corner post of our six-acre farm, and George came over to see me. I knew what he wanted, some cattle cubes I would often give him to snack on, which he sometimes ate out of my hand. But, I had work to do and I didn't bring George any treats. When he got close to me, I put my hand on his nose and pushed him back and told him to go away. He stepped back, hesitated and then stepped close again, and I scolded him and gave him another shove, then went back to my work.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him move again and I knew I had made a serious mistake. George was playing, and though he had no malice in him, he was about to pin me against that large cross-tie corner post and break every bone in my body, a game to him, almost certain death to me.

Just in time, and flat footed, I managed to high jump a 5'-tall barbed wire fence

without getting a scratch. The landing I made on the other side of the fence wasn't very graceful, but I didn't break anything, and that was all that mattered.

Now, the mistake I had made was not recognizing who had the real power in this relationship of man and beast, which sure wasn't this dimwitted sign man cowpoke. I never forgot it again.

In this business of ours, the commercial sign business, we regularly deal with real power, and that power comes in many forms. Real power always deserves respect,



and we are the ones who'll pay the price if we ever forget it. I didn't always realize this to the degree I do now, but I certainly should have.

Some of the forces at play in the work that we do include the basics, like plain old gravity, which can be a force with life and death anytime you're more than a very few feet off the ground. Others include electricity, wind, even power tools ... and anything hydraulic.

But power, as I mentioned, comes in many forms, some not necessarily physical. But they are serious enough just the same, especially compared to the rather pitiful limits of the person writing this column. A short list of these would include all city inspectors, which are always holding a better hand than I am, and City

Hall in general. Whoever said, "You can't fight City Hall," knew what he was talking about because he'd tried to do it with predictable and disastrous results.

Let's not forget the nice sales tax folks from the state comptroller's office who gave us a surprise month-long audit last quarter. Their reputation is so fearful that we were contacted by about 10 law firms who were ready, for a price, to rescue us from their merciless clutches. And last, but certainly not least, is the good old IRS. Well, it is certainly old anyway, and that's the best thing I can say about that.

Now all of these sources of power are real and all are forces to be reckoned with. We certainly know this, but all it takes is a little neglect, carelessness, or even a bit of arrogance and the consequences, whether physical or financial, can be unpleasant at the least, and catastrophic at worst. And, when we are young and invincible becoming a statistic of one kind or another is all too possible. Whether it's plain old gravity or the tax man, an attitude adjustment is the very least thing we might get by with.

We're all in business for the long haul, so it's best to deflate that ego a bit and try to be realistic about who or what really is in charge. And always, be careful, never turning your back on the beast at hand. If so, you'll likely have a really great month, but for sure it will be a whole lot better than it might be.

*Rick*

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# Pivot to the Home

**PRODUCTS AND APPLICATIONS YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD PROVIDE THAT ARE DESIGNED FOR THE HOME**



BY DANA CURTIS

**2**020 was the year of staying home; some of us by choice, most of us out of necessity. When you spend so much time in a certain place, you start to notice things that you may have previously taken for granted or were simply lost in the background. These things could be furniture, window treatments, rugs, appliances, and picture frames. As you sit on your Zoom call looking around your house, does it ever occur to you: “Why did we ever buy that thing?! It needs to go. Now.” There is a famous idiom: Familiarity breeds contempt.

If you think about it, how much time did we really spend at home before COVID-19 flipped everything upside down? In a 24-hour day, 8 hours or so should be dedicated to sleep, and your average workday

is 9 hours, plus commute. At this point, the very real possibility is that more than 75% of your life has been spent *not* experiencing your home. Even if you love your home, have you ever spent that percentage of time with it?

Do you get the sense that unfinished projects, older decorations, maybe even your furniture are starting to haunt you? Have you caught yourself staring at the floor and saying to yourself, “I hate that rug”? Whether you have or not, your potential customers are dealing with these emotions.

## **IDENTIFYING TRENDS**

Americans have more money to spend. The United States Personal Savings rate is up over historic averages according to



Every part of the home is an opportunity to customize and upgrade. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)

the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Refer to **Figure 1** (page 14) from the St. Louis Federal Reserve.

The average personal savings rate among Americans was 7-8% over the past five years. During the first wave of lockdowns, it ballooned to over 30%. As some local restrictions eased and people got back out into the world, that number has dropped slightly. As of November 2020 (the latest data available at the time of writing), the savings rate was at 12.9%, which is still almost double the historical average.

The National Association of Realtors has been tracking housing inventory since 1982. This is the lowest they have ever seen the national inventory count. Median home prices have risen

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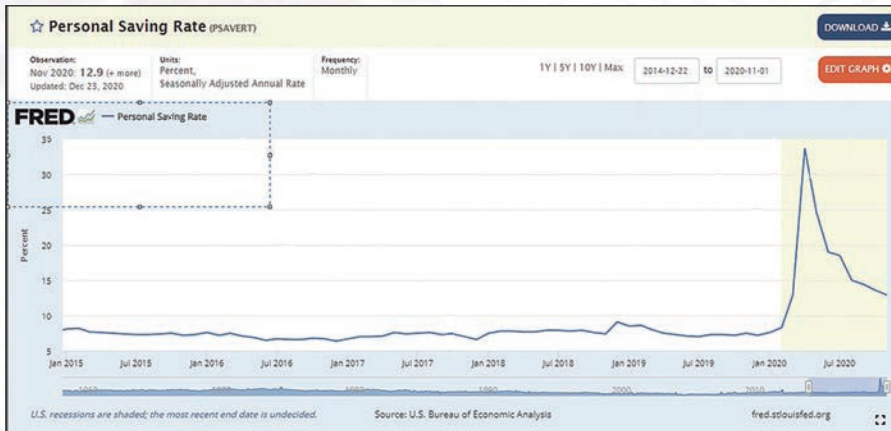
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**Figure 1.** This is an interactive chart; visit [www.fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PSAVERT](http://www.fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PSAVERT) to see more. (Graphic courtesy the St. Louis Federal Reserve)

14.6% compared to November of last year, and mortgage rates are at historic lows. Homes are selling within 21 days, which is a historically high rate. The number one reason sellers gave for moving during the pandemic? That they need more living space.

Home improvement stores are feeling it. Stocks in Home Depot and Lowe's peaked up 18% and 42%, respectively, during Q4 of 2020. Home decor retailers are also up. Stocks in Williams Sonoma and Restoration Hardware peaked up 49%, and check out the year Restoration Hardware has been having in **Figure 2** (left).

Bars, restaurants, concerts, and sports arenas are empty or at limited capacity. Work from home means commercial real estate is empty, and with no commute, the car is parked. People are spending a lot more time re-evaluating their living space and the familiarity is breeding contempt ... contempt for the old.

*Editor's note: All numbers were recorded at the time of this writing but are constantly moving so may be different at the time of reading.*

### **TIME FOR THE SOMETHING NEW**

How can you take advantage of this chaos? Think about products and applications your business currently provides that are, or could be, designed for the home.

Graphics professionals already have the equipment they need—printers, engravers, and routers. Put them to work on graphics, personalization, and decor. Beware of any regulations around these technologies being used indoors if your business is primarily set up for outdoor-durable graphics. You may need to alter your workflow to put more safety measures in place for things like material and ink



**Figure 2.** This is an interactive chart; visit [www.finance.yahoo.com/quote/RH/](http://www.finance.yahoo.com/quote/RH/) chart to see more. (Graphic courtesy Yahoo Finance)



chemistry or applications coming in contact with humans.

Vinyl banner may be one of your most popular applications, but it may be time to put those rolls in the corner for now. Think of other home-friendly materials—textiles, canvas, fabrics, heat transfer, and cast films with removable adhesives. This is where you can inject creativity into your designs and show off your personality.

The home is filled with various textures that need custom applications—carpet, wood, plaster, glass, and ceramics like tile. Each media that is designed for these surfaces offers multiple choices for your customers to personalize their living space. Take into account moisture levels for the intended space and exposure to any elements like light and heat.

Every residential home has a few key similarities in terms of function. There are specific areas for key living functions—cooking and food prep, sleeping, and bathing. Each of these areas can have dedicated applications.

Think about the largest area of ignored real estate in the home: walls and floors. Wall graphics should absolutely be driving your revenue right now. Specialty films like neon, holographic, and textured can all be cut with a plotter in your customer's favorite design. Digital products like removable wall canvas and vinyl can be printed and contour cut to put your customer's favorite sports team or television celebrity on the wall. Whiteboard vinyl is perfect for the new home office. Chalkboard vinyl is perfect for the new school remote classroom. Have any

**Above:** Graphics professionals already have the equipment they need—printers, engravers, and routers—to personalize home decor. (Image courtesy Fisher Textiles)

Your customers will want new additions to their home as they continue to adapt to life outside the office. (Image courtesy Top Value Fabrics)

bright white matte vinyl? Make it a screen for a projector until we can go back to the movie theatre again.

If your customer is not interested in direct applications, explore indirect applications through textiles. Dye-sublimation and direct-to-fabric technologies can customize shower curtains, tablecloths, flags (we still have sports!), webcam backdrops, drapes, blankets, sheets, and floor rugs. Think fine art prints on canvas and glossy papers and custom printed frames.

What do we place in the middle of the room? Engraving and routing technologies can customize school supplies for the new student desk in the corner of the dining room. Build furniture, drink trays, utensil holders, crafts for the countertop, and small accent tables for common areas. What about the items we use every day? Engrave cutlery and glassware. Dye-sublimate coffee mugs and kids' items.

Are wraps dead? Not at all! Personal vehicles may be parked, but you have plenty of other items that deserve the wrap treatment. Video game consoles and laptops are begging for personality. Wrap appliances for the man cave or to give personality to the garage. Wrap musical instruments like guitars or drum sets.

### **HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS**

We may have vaccines, but the pandemic is far from over. The time to strike is now while people are starting to realize that work from home and school from home are quickly becoming life from home. Your customers will want new additions for their home as they continue to adapt to life outside the office.

Every part of the home is an opportunity to customize and upgrade. Your business can provide that upgrade, and you can grab a customer you never thought you would get. Once you develop a relationship with your new home services client, where do you think they will go for birthday banners, stickers, and sports trophies once things go back to normal?

This is a golden opportunity to take advantage of the chaos and get in on the home upgrade wave that is in full effect right now. Pivot to the home and unlock hidden profits to grow your business. **GP**

**DANA CURTIS** is the founder and CEO of Biztools, a strategic consulting firm that helps small businesses multiply revenue through improved customer experience and pivot to new markets. Visit his website at [www.biztools.biz/graphicspro](http://www.biztools.biz/graphicspro), or contact him via phone: 602-529-4562; or email: [biztools.biz@gmail.com](mailto:biztools.biz@gmail.com).







# Position Yourself for Success in the Face of Increasing Lighting Regulations

BY J. BRYAN VINCENT



Sign companies across the country are facing more and more regulations around lighting in outdoor environments. (All images courtesy J. Bryan Vincent)

In today's climate, sign companies across the country are facing more and more regulations around lighting in outdoor environments. Regulations come from a wide range of jurisdictions including homeowners' associations, municipalities, the state and federal government, not to mention standards from various shopping centers and corporations with specific requirements.

Historically, local zoning boards were not as focused on lighting color, type, or intensity and most often regulated placement, size and design, materials, and spacing. More and more municipalities are increasing their regulations to include hours of operation, colors, and intensity of the lighting to comply with aesthetic master

plans and dark skies initiatives to reduce light pollution. This can include emission intensity of the entire sign or per square foot of surface as well as very specific color temperatures of white LEDs.

Sign curfews can also vary from area to area. Some municipalities have specific hours of the night where signage must be turned off or dimmed, while others require signs to be turned off when the business is not open.

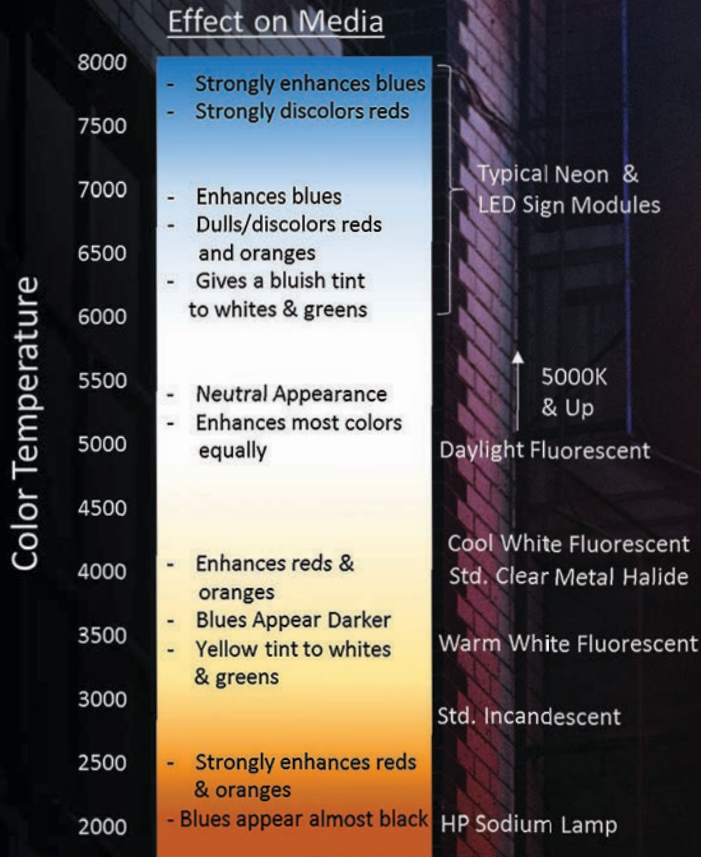
## THE CHALLENGES

Unfortunately, some sign supply manufacturers, distributors, and sign companies are ill-prepared to respond to the increasing specificity of illumination requirements. Historically, LED manufacturers

for illuminated signs had one mantra: make it brighter and lower cost. This was coupled with a need to keep white LEDs consistent.

White light with a blue or violet hue are more sensitive to the human eye and therefore appear to the human eye to be "brighter." Therefore, LED signage has typically oriented its manufacturing at color temperatures above 6,500K and defined that as "white." As a result, many manufacturers offer limited correlated color temperature (CCT) options below 5,000K.

This also creates issues with those making sign regulations, as they often confuse brightness with the color temperature of the light. I have heard many times from



Correlated color temperature (CCT) is a way to describe the light appearance and is measured in degrees of Kelvin (K) on a scale from 1,000 to 10,000.

sign makers that their customer says the sign is too bright, so they want to use a warm white LED.

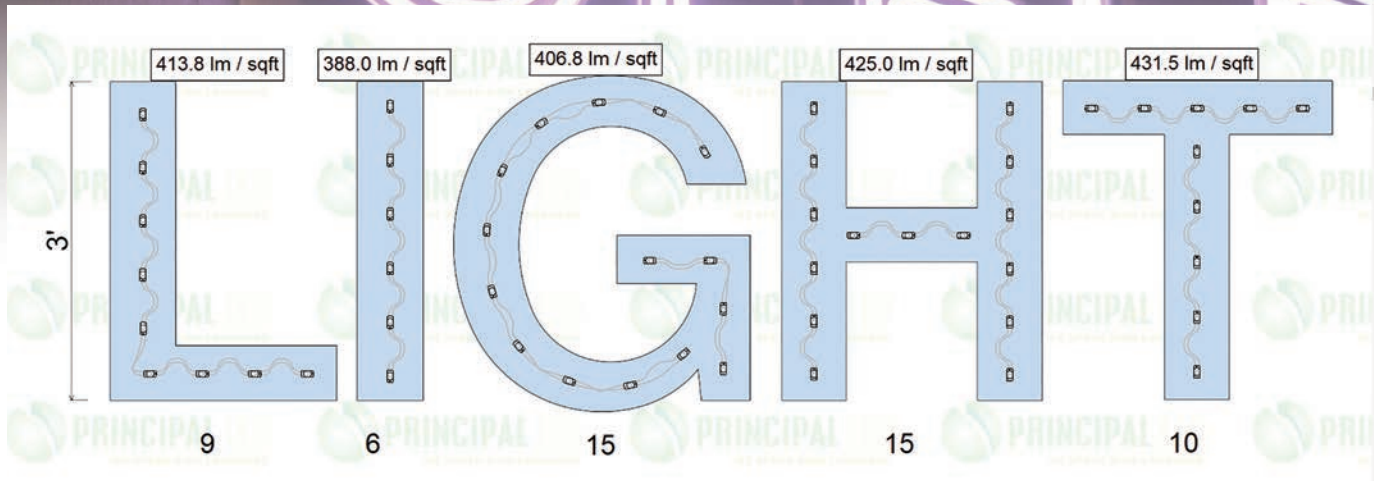
CCT is a way to describe the light appearance and is measured in degrees of Kelvin (K) on a scale from 1,000 to 10,000. The lower the CCT or Kelvin value, the more yellow the light looks; the higher the Kelvin, the more bluish the light looks. It turns out that 4,800K is the color closest to direct sunlight; therefore, it will render graphics closest to their natural reflective color during the daytime.

However, CCT is not related to brightness and refers only to the hue (coolness or warmth) of the light source. It is critical to make sure you listen carefully to your customer's needs and make sure they understand the difference between "brightness" and "color."

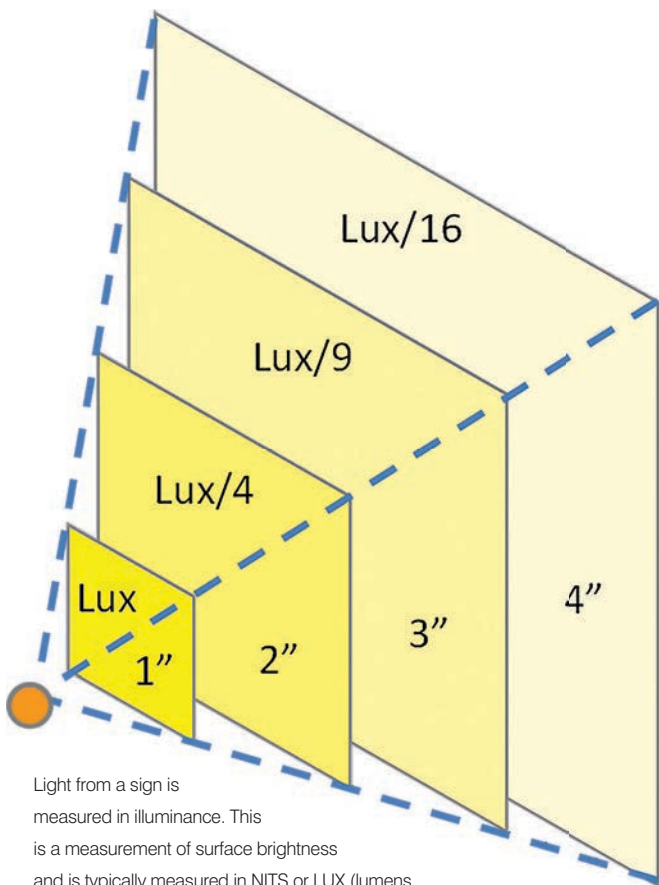
The other problem for a sign maker is knowing a-priori how much "light" is coming out of their sign. Many of the light intensity regulations are also based on white or broad-spectrum lighting and there is no standard conversion for determining light output for colored faces using red, blue, and green LEDs for







One problem for a sign maker is knowing a-priori how much "light" is coming out of their sign. Many of the light intensity regulations are also based on white or broad-spectrum lighting and there is no standard conversion for determining light output for colored faces using red, blue, and green LEDs for example.



Light from a sign is measured in illuminance. This is a measurement of surface brightness and is typically measured in NITS or LUX (lumens per square meter).

example. Light from a sign is measured in illuminance. This is a measurement of surface brightness and is typically measured in NITS or LUX (lumens per square meter).

On the surface, you may say, "That is simple. I know the lumens of each LED in the sign and the surface area of the sign; therefore, I can just perform a simple calculation." Well, it is not that easy, and there are several factors that determine the actual LUX measured at a sign face:

**The quantity and intensity of the LED module.** This is the simplest part of the equation. Often the issue is finding LEDs that are not too intense for shallow letters that require a larger number of LEDs to get even illumination.

**Sign shape and dimensions.** Light drops off as an inverse square of the distance from the sign face. This non-linear relationship means that if you double the distance, you decrease the light by four times. The distance not only depends upon the physical distance, but the optical beam angle of the LED module. Other factors that impact "distance" to the surface are the stroke of the sign and the beam angle of the LED.

**Sign materials.** The optical transparency of the face material (or materials if you have a secondary vinyl overlay) will also affect the sign LUX. Acrylic, polycarbonate, flex face material, and digital printing all have varying levels of optical transparency. Optical transparency can also vary with material thickness. Another factor is the paint type and reflectivity inside the sign. These face materials combine to improve the quality of the light, with diffusion and a reduction in glare, and the return material helps direct the light forward.



maurices

Knowing what variables drive illuminance at the sign face, planning, and using simple tools such as a LUX meter to verify illuminance prior to completing the sign will help reduce frustration, time, and ensure the project complies with any illumination regulations prior to installation.

#### **KNOW THE RULES**

You may be thinking, how do I keep all this straight? The key is knowing the municipal guidelines and reaching out to your LED provider in advance of starting the project.

Many LED manufacturers can provide recommendations on the right LED and layout to get close to the target illuminance. This can reduce the need to add costly dimmers or a second surface film after the fact to stay in compliance. “We can evaluate the various parameters and have good history with so many varying sign types, we can usually make a product recommendation that meets the customer’s target output at the lowest possible cost,” says Derek Hopper, Principal LED engineering manager.

Another important thing to do is build a representative letter or section of the sign and take light measurements prior to the sign being completed. Light meters that measure LUX and foot-candles that are less than \$50 are worth the investment to confirm the sign illuminance is within compliance.

As sign companies face more and more pressure to comply with a range of illuminated sign requirements, I believe we will see significant innovation around IOT and control, estimation tools, and a broader range of color and color temperature options to help meet the ongoing needs and challenges of sign fabricators. Regardless, knowing what variables drive illuminance at the sign face, planning, and using simple tools such as a LUX meter to verify illuminance prior to completing the sign will help reduce frustration, time, and ensure the project complies with any illumination regulations prior to installation. **GP**

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**J. BRYAN VINCENT** is an expert in the field of solid state lighting and electronic materials. He has dedicated the past 10 years to developing LED solutions specific to the sign industry and is a managing partner at Principal LED. He has a bachelor’s degree in chemistry and a Ph.D. in chemistry/materials science.





# THE AMBIGUOUS EDGE

*ASSURING CREDIBILITY WITH COMPOSITE IMAGES*



**Figure 1.** In Soviet Russia, the physical elimination of the state's political opponents at the hands of the secret police was swiftly followed by their eradication from all forms of pictorial existence. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

**C**redibility! A big question during these troubled times. What is true? What is real?

While that certainly applies to the political landscape and even more so the human condition, it applies perhaps not quite as profoundly but just as much to your composite images.

Why? Because unlike any other time in the history of graphic technology, images that are seen by millions can be easily and undetectably manipulated. To be able to alter the content of an image so that the changes are imperceptible is a skill that requires a keen sense of observation and a practical knowledge of the tools and techniques that enable these alterations.

## **INDISPUTABLE**

The photograph was at one time considered the indisputable record of an event. It didn't take long for folks to realize that photos can be altered with techniques that in the darkroom are primitive by today's standards.

Adobe Photoshop, released in 1991, is one of the most popular and universally used image-editing software. In the past 30 years, the word Photoshop has transitioned from noun to verb—"to Photoshop" has come to mean to alter a photograph, often with intent to mislead or deceive. Photoshopping, however, didn't begin with Photoshop.

In Soviet Russia, for example, the propaganda machine altered photographs to reflect the regime's



**Figure 2 (above).** A feathered edge gradually blends the colors of the pixels from the selected content to the destination content. Hard-edged selections, like the eye on the left, can compromise the credibility of an illusion, whereas a feathered edge like the eye on the right and the mouth makes the transition virtually imperceptible.

**Figure 3 (left).** The editing process starts by making a rough selection close to the edge of the content.



**Figure 4.** The interface displays the image window with a default white mask that conceals the areas surrounding the selection.

ever-shifting set of preferred “alternative facts.” In the 1930s through the 1950s, the physical elimination of the state’s political opponents by the secret police was quickly followed by their eradication from all forms of pictorial existence (Figure 1). Skill with an airbrush, liquid opaque, and a process camera was a rare, highly prized commodity in those days. Nowadays, these same effects can be achieved with considerably more ease.

### **FEATHERED EDGE**

Accurate image compositing, whether to add or eliminate content, has a lot to do with the transition of pixels from one edge to the other, and that means feathering the edge of a selection so that a gradual transition of pixels can be achieved. A feathered edge consists of a series of pixels that transition from opaque to transparent over the distance of a specified radius. This feathered edge

gradually blends the colors of the pixels from the selected content to the destination content.

Hard-edged selections can compromise the credibility of an illusion whereas a feathered edge makes the transition virtually imperceptible, as in **Figure 2**.

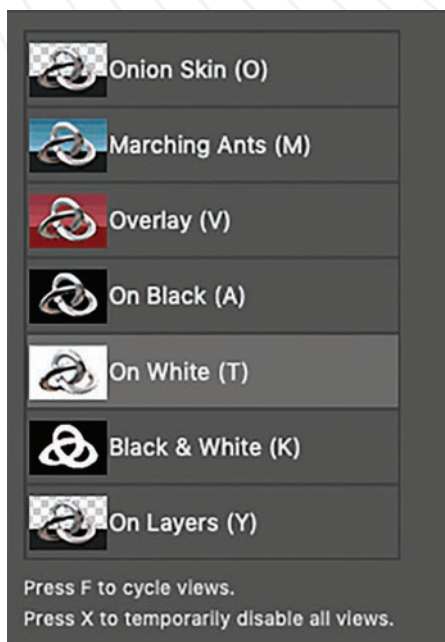
### AMBIGUITY

The question that arises in certain images is, where do the pixels begin and where do they end? I'm talking specifically about images with fuzzy or ambiguous edges. You may encounter content that is tough to select because it has a complex background and no clear perimeter. Fine hair or fur, for example, blurs into the surrounding areas. The edges are ambiguous and difficult to determine.

### WEAR A MASK

We see a lot of masks these days but the kind of mask I'm talking about is not one that protects from the spread of viruses, but a silhouette of a region whose edge precisely follows the contour of the area that it selects. To select an ambiguous edge, a special mask must be made that preserves as much edge detail as possible while capturing subtle transition tones. When the edges of an image are ambiguous and complex, the mask needs to express this ambiguity as numerous levels of variable transparency.

I can't say that making this type of mask is easy, but with a little experimentation you can get the job done with precision and a bit of elbow grease, thus ensuring accuracy and credibility. After all, as all digital artists know, a great deal of the work in Photoshop doesn't affect the image at all. It is mostly about creating and



**Figure 5 (left).** The mask can be displayed in any of seven different modes by choosing an option from the View Mode menu. **Figure 6 (right).** In the upper left corner of the interface, there are a series of tools that navigate the interface and manually adjust the edge.



preparing tools that will later aid in altering the image with spectacular effects.

### SELECT AND MASK

In this case, I want to select the entire figure—the cute little girl. Selecting and refining the ambiguous hair area is a little tricky because the content and background are similar in tone and color, and her hair is a wild tangle.

The process starts by making a rough selection as close to the edge of the content as possible with any of the 10 selection tools (**Figure 3**). After the initial selection is made, click the Select and Mask button from the Options bar that is visible when a selection tool is active. (The command can also be found in the Select menu.)

The importance of this interface cannot be stressed enough when determining the quality, precision, and dynamics of a selection. In fact, the software engineers at Adobe have refined this interface over the last few versions and have added new features that expand and streamline its application. So, let's have a look at it.

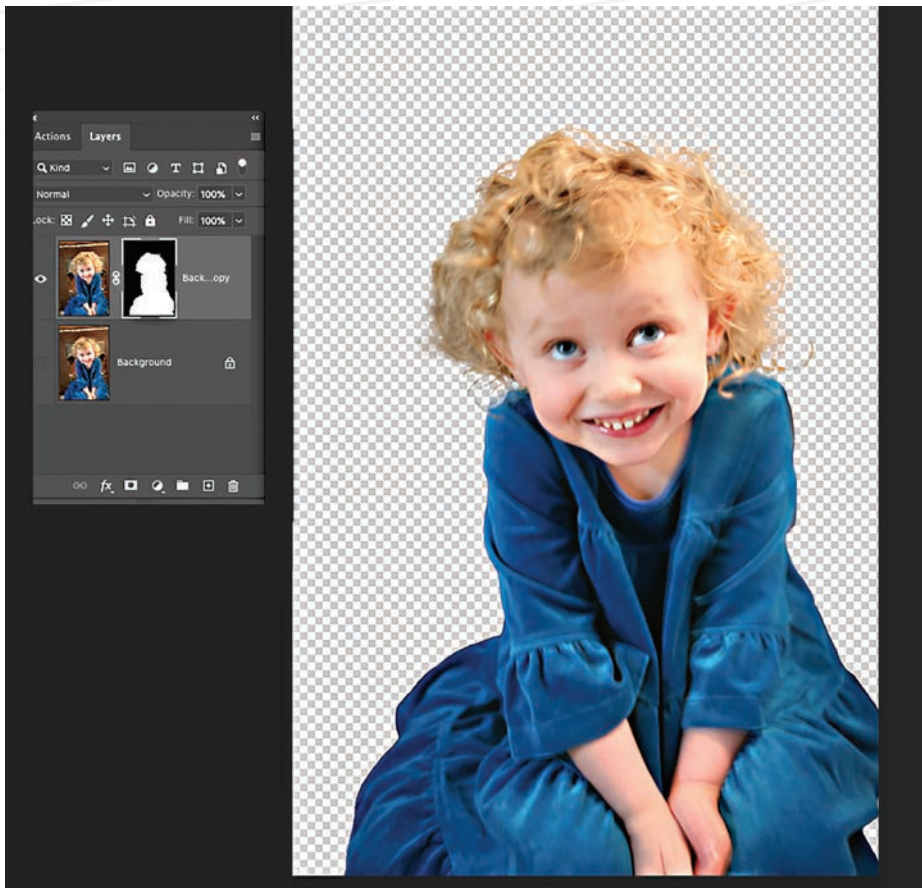
### VIEW MODE

The interface displays the image window with a default white mask that conceals the areas surrounding the selection (**Figure 4**). The opacity of the mask can be controlled with the slider in the control panel. I've set it to 72% so that I can see the part of the image that I'm masking to be sure that I'm not eliminating any critical detail.

The mask can be displayed in any of seven different modes by choosing an option from the View Mode menu (**Figure 5**). The options are: Onion Skin, Marching Ants, Overlay, On White, On Black, Black on White, and On Layers. Choosing the view that best displays the transition will depend on color and tone of the surrounding areas.

### PERFECTING THE EDGE

The new Refine Mode checkboxes determine how the edge is sampled, either by its intuitive awareness of the "object" as defined by the content of the selection or by the object's color. Color Aware is used



**Figure 7.** Now that the selection is made and the content is on a layer, you'll want to do a little cleanup by painting directly on the layer mask.

for simple or contrasting backgrounds. Object Aware is used for hair or fur on complex backgrounds.

### HAIR

Another great new feature includes the Select Subject and Refine Hair options. With a single click, Select Subject selects the main subjects in a photo as defined by their edges. Refine Hair refines difficult hair selections. For best results, check the Object Aware box when using the Refine Hair option.

### EDGE DETECTION SETTINGS

Radius determines the size of the selection border where edge refinement occurs. Use a small radius for sharp edges and a large one for softer edges.

Smart Radius allows for a variable width refinement area around the edge of your selection. Among other uses, this option is helpful if your selection is a portrait that includes both hair and shoulders. In such portraits, the hair might require a larger refinement area than the shoulders, where the edge is more consistent.

### GLOBAL REFINEMENT SETTINGS

These settings control and size the quality and softness of the selection edge.

Smooth reduces irregular areas and softens pixelization of the selection border to create a smoother outline.

Feather creates the feathered edge I previously talked about. It softens the transition between the selected content and the surrounding pixels.

Contrast, when increased, causes feathered transitions along the selection edge to become harder edged.

Shift Edge Inward or Outward decreases or increases the size of the selection by shifting its borders inward to include less content or outward to include more content. This feature helps remove unwanted background colors from selection edges.

### FURTHER REFINEMENTS

In the upper left corner, there are a series of tools that manually adjust the edge and navigate the interface (Figure 6). These tools help to include or exclude critical details, especially the Refine Edge tool. By dragging over the edges with the appropriate-sized brush, the selection can be added to or subtracted from to more closely conform to the details present on the edge.

In combination with the other controls, these tools offer the necessary precision to create the perfect selection down to the finest detail. Depending on the complexity of the selection, the size of the Refine Edge tool should be adjusted as you work to be able to precisely select or deselect the desired content. This is where the process can get a little tricky and where persistence pays off.

### OUTPUT

The Output To section of the panel determines how the selection is saved. The choices vary depending on your goals. I usually save the selection as a new layer with a layer mask, thereby preserving the original and also having the ability to further refine the mask if necessary.



**Figure 8.** Composite, tweak, and adjust the image with your favorite techniques to finish the job.

Checking the Decontaminate Colors option neutralizes the colors of translucent pixels so that they better pick up the colors of their destination background.

### **CLEAN UP**

Now that the selection is made and the content is on a layer with a layer mask (Figure 7), you'll want to do a little clean up. Quick work can be performed directly on the layer mask with black to eliminate unwanted pixels or white to add pixels. Finally, composite, tweak, and adjust the image with your favorite techniques to finish the job.

In the case of the girl, I dragged her picture and the layer mask to a field of

sunflowers. I copied the layer and superimposed it over the original and then applied a Hard Light blend mode to pop the color. I applied a Curves adjustment layer to manage the contrast, and a Vibrance layer to enhance the color in various places (Figure 8).

### **ACCURACY AND EASE**

Making and refining selections is the most labor-intensive process of image editing. That said, it's critical that your selections accurately embody all of the essential elements including the minute details that assure credibility. Fortunately, we have the Select and Mask feature that intuitively assists in reducing labor when selecting

ambiguous and complex areas such as tangles of hair. I think you'll find that using this tool can produce exciting results beyond your expectations and assure that your image doesn't look Photoshopped.

### **GP**

**STEPHEN ROMANIELLO** is an artist and educator, teaching digital art at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, for over 29 years. He is a certified instructor in Adobe Photoshop and the author of several books on the creative use of digital graphics software. Steve is the founder of GlobalEye Systems, a company that offers training and consulting in digital graphics software and creative imaging.



"Channel letters without trim cap provide a much cleaner, more finished look, which opens the doors to channel letters that are viewed at a closer distance," says Matt Charboneau, Storm Mountain Signs. (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties)



OSTEO STRONG

459

# Adjusting the Cap

THE PROS AND CONS OF TRIM CAP-FREE CHANNEL LETTERS

BY MATT DIXON



**A** recent advancement in channel letter construction is the ability to use a specially manufactured coil to fabricate letters that don't require traditional plastic trim cap. Trim cap is the notoriously unattractive element that is used to attach the acrylic face to the letter return.

The main reason a trim cap-free letter is sought after by customers is simply because it looks great. A trim capless channel letter delivers a clean, contemporary, high-end appearance as well as sturdy construction. In fact, several major commercial real estate companies, like Simon Property Group, do not allow trim capped channel letters on any of their properties.

But like everything else in life, that beauty comes with a cost. Trim cap-free channel letters can be more costly to produce and therefore may prove cost prohibitive to some clients. Sign companies, however, can benefit by offering a premium letter solution that commands a premium price because there is a lot less competition in that segment of the market.

## INSIDE LOOK

Dave Brazzell of Brazz Specialties in Commerce City, Colorado, has been producing channel letters in his shop since 1996. His first foray into trim cap-free letters came after he made the decision to upgrade his channel letter bender and purchase a ChannelBender brand letter-forming machine from SDS Automation.

"We traded in our old machine and got the newest version. One of several upgrades on the Super ChannelBender is its ability to produce Trimless letters. So, we started building Trimless letters using the Trimless LetterForm coil that SDS Automation developed in 2015," Brazzell says. "They're real high-end channel letters, and we built beautiful sets."

Trimless is a trademarked name that refers to letters produced using LetterForm, a proprietary, UL recognized channel letter coil from SDS Automation. LetterForm is compatible only with ChannelBender brand machines.

This method of trim cap-free channel letter production worked well for Brazz Specialties for some time, but when a non-work-related event

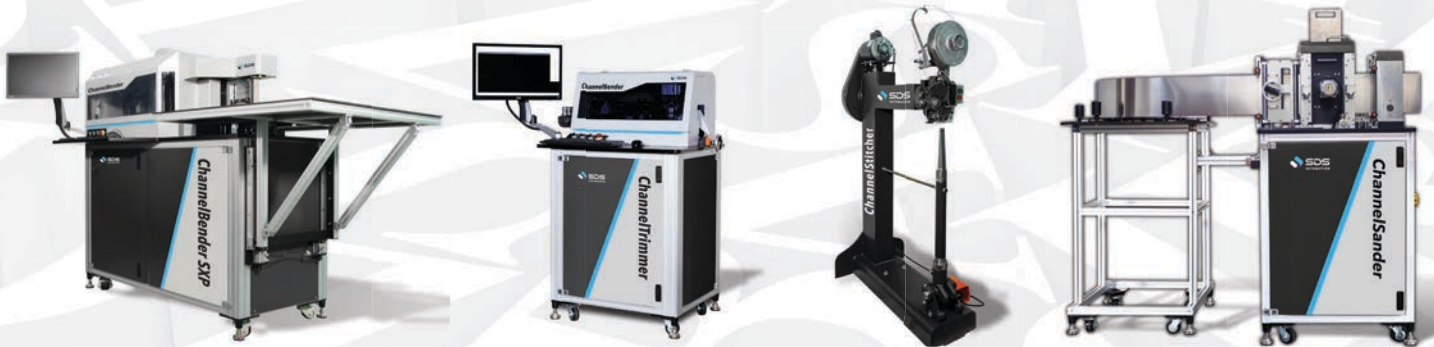
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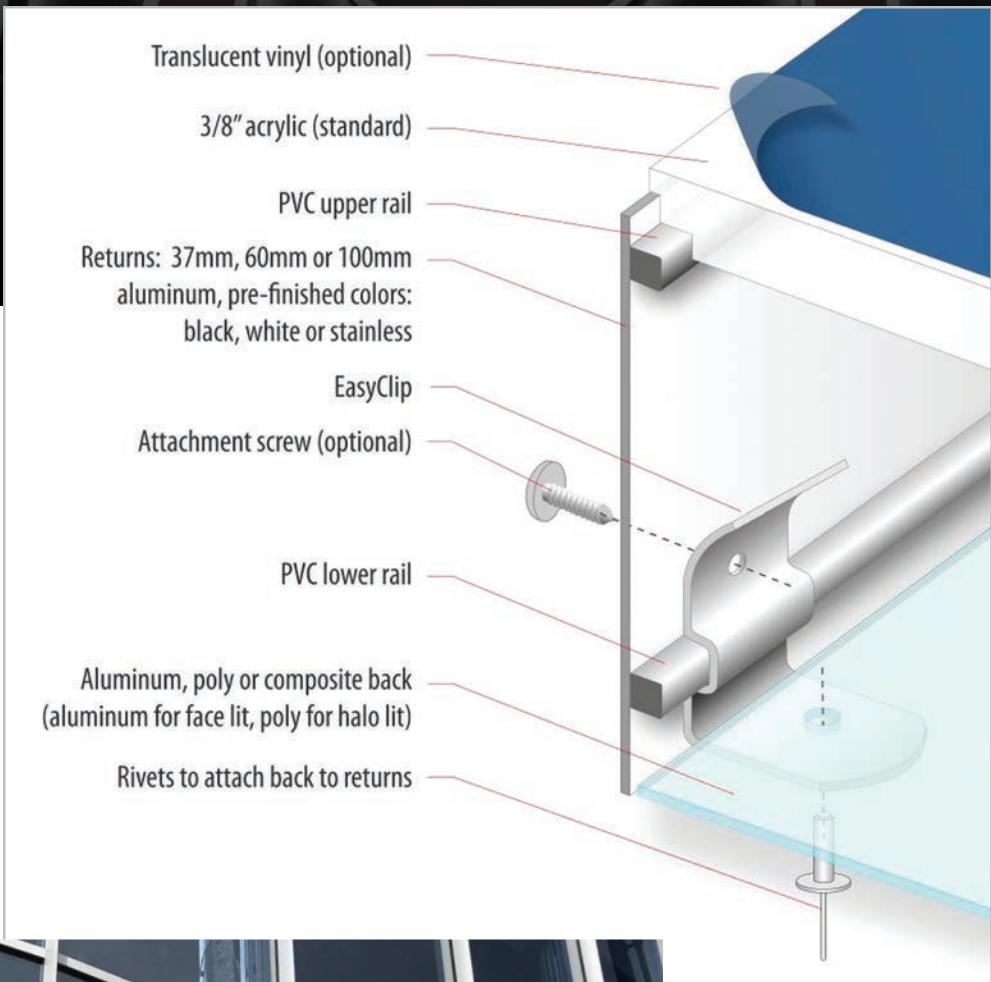


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# HOTEL



**Figure 1.** (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties)

happened, the shop's expert on creating the letters was gone before he could pass his knowledge on to others. This greatly slowed down the rate at which their letters could be produced.

In response, the shop looked into other ways of doing trim cap-free letters that were more accessible for employees to build. Their solution was to convert normal channel letters into trim cap-free letters, which gave the shop a second option of letters they could more readily build but were not quite as high-end as the Trimless letters.

"What we decided to do was use a 3/8 acrylic face and put a step in it," Brazzell says. "And we

have these mounting tabs that we glue on the inside. So, we sort of kept it to where I didn't have to glue the face to the can."

**THE SALE**

The first consideration for any shop that wants to offer trim cap-free letters is if they can sell them. Brazzell says that by offering capless letters, you are offering a product that isn't as easy to find from large wholesalers. With regular trim capped letters, "It's like mom-and-pop grocery trying to compete with Wal-Mart right now," he says.

He adds that in side-by-side visual comparisons, consumers will gravitate toward the cap-free letters right away. "They're much better looking if you stand a trim cap letter next to a trim cap-free letter," Brazzell suggests. "The customer's always going to go for the capless letter. It just looks so much cleaner."

Of course, because the letters are not an apples-to-apples comparison, price-conscious customers may typically choose the less expensive option, which is the trim-capped version. For example, if a channel letter sign or logo is positioned high above the ground, it won't be closely inspected by people passing by and the



Trimless channel letters can command a premium price in relation to letters featuring a trim cap. (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties)



Trimless channel letters give designers more options when creating signs. (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties)

best traits of the trim cap-free letter would go unnoticed, making the upgrade less desirable.

One way a salesperson can convey the added value of the capless letter is focusing on the intended use. “We call them indoor letters, so it’s really in your face, up close, a really slick-looking letter versus anything that goes outside,” Brazzell says.

There are a lot of variables shops need to account for to determine the pricing levels at which they should offer trim cap-free letters, but Brazzell recommends starting with what a shop would charge for reverse pan letters and adjusting from there.

### THE DESIGN

Another benefit to trim cap-free channel letters is in the design phase, where they give designers a bit more flexibility.

“Channel letters without trim cap provide a much cleaner, more finished look, which opens the doors to channel letters that are viewed at a closer distance,” says Matt Charboneau, Storm Mountain Signs. “They can also be kerned tighter—mounted closer together, if needed—making the overall finished look more refined, and more ‘museum quality’ in appearance.” He goes on to say that it also eliminates the shadowed “border” that appears on a channel letter when viewed from an angle.

The design of capless letter signs can also take less time. “Designing channel letters without trim cap is simply faster, easier, and more efficient,” Charboneau says. “Especially when doing 3D perspective renderings. None of the step-out dimensional aspects of the trim cap need to be illustrated—no shadows, no highlights—therefore, the drawing takes less time and looks nicer in the end.”

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The ChannelBender SXP can form traditional face-lit or halo-lit channel letters of nearly any height and anywhere from 1" to 8" deep while also being able to process specialty materials like Trimless LetterForm. (Image courtesy SDS Automation)

## THE BUILD

While there are many ways to construct capless channel letters, the obvious way is the one that your shop can handle, whether that means having the right tools or the right talent. "There's also some stuff about them that makes them tricky to build," Brazzell says. "It takes a really highly skilled person to do it." A good example of a trim cap-free letter construction courtesy of Brazz Specialties can be seen in **Figure 1**.

There are numerous bending machines on the market; however, all letter bending machines are not created equal. The accuracy of the output can vary greatly from one manufacturer's machine to another. It takes a good quality bending machine to get highly accurate results.

No matter which method you choose to create your letters, you're going to need to use some aggressive adhesive, which can come in many forms, some of which are toxic and need special handling. For example, Brazzell says that he had to add additional ventilation to his shop to account for

## THE PROS AND CONS OF TRIM CAP-FREE LETTERS

### Pros

- Increases output capacity of the bending machine by about 40% by eliminating the need to produce a notched flange on the channel letter return
- Premium product commands a premium price
- Less competition in the market
- Clean look
- More design options
- One less major failure point

### Cons

- Higher skill needed to fabricate
- Can be more difficult to install
- Not recommended for larger letters
- Letter has to be sealed to avoid light leaks out the back

the fumes and concentrated odor of some of his adhesives.

"And then if you use the accelerator—a spray that you use to get the glue instantly dried—that glue and the accelerator together smells like a really bad old lady's perfume so the whole shop just reeks if you don't have the ventilator going," Brazzell says.

Lastly, shops should prepare themselves for the headaches that come with custom colors when dealing with trim cap-free letters. While the problem of matching the trim cap to the return has been eliminated, a larger problem arises in the lack of options for colored acrylic faces.

"A Trimless letter face will have an exposed edge to keep the face from falling into the can. The thicker the exposed edge, the better for manufacturing," Brazzell says. "But then too much exposed edge changes the look, and too little exposed edge is fragile. We tend to leave about 3/16" exposed as our standard. You are able to leave a very thick edge exposed and it dramatically changes the look.



**Left:** Brazz Specialties installed Trimless channel letters at the Dazbog Coffee location in Denver International Airport. (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties) **Below:** The main reason a trim cap-free letter is sought after by customers is simply because it looks great. (Image courtesy Brazz Specialties)



“The downside to the exposed acrylic edge is it will need to be masked off when painting the returns a custom color, and that can be painstakingly slow with a fair amount of time cleaning them up after the masking tape is removed,” Brazzell continues. “A red return and red face letter will still have a thin white edge exposed, and this could be a problem trying to convince the customer that the edge is mechanically important and there are no reasonable alternatives.”

### THE INSTALLATION

The installation of the trim cap-free letter can sometimes be a drawback, partly because installers do fewer trim cap-free letter installations and aren’t as proficient. This means more time to complete the installation and more overhead added to the letter cost.

“As a wholesale manufacturer, our job is to keep the installer’s time on site as short as possible,” Brazzell says. “You don’t have to train an installer how to put a trim cap face on, but a Trimless letter is a little trickier. We found that sealing the letter back in the shop is the best way, and then installing Riv-Nuts and studs and Paige Wall Busters helps so the installer doesn’t have to install the faces in the field. They like that much better.

“We try to offer a few tricks to the installer putting up their first set of letters,” he adds. “We have to show them that the flatter they can install the can, the better the face will fit and not leak light.”

But once the letters are up, then shops can expect to do less

maintenance on them compared to capped letters. “I think if it’s installed correctly, you’ll get a lot more years out of a trim cap-free letter than you will from a trim capped letter,” Brazzell says.

### THE FUTURE

While trim cap-free channel letters are making inroads to being a more widely used product, it’s unlikely they will be a one-size-fits-all channel letter solution any time soon.

“I don’t think trim cap-free letters are going to replace regular letters,” Brazzell says. “At first I kind of thought about how these are the new thing. But it’s not. They have their drawbacks. If you just need a cheap, down-and-dirty liquor store sign, you wouldn’t use these.”

Trimless letters are also not appropriate for anything larger than about 36" tall, maximum.

The trim cap-free channel letter has gained a solid footing in the workflow of electric sign companies across the country. But while the reason for their success in the marketplace is evident, there’s no reason to think the tried-and-true trim cap is destined for the scrap heap quite yet. **GP**

**MATT DIXON** is the managing editor of *GRAPHICS PRO* magazine. He can be reached at [mdixon@nbm.com](mailto:mdixon@nbm.com).

CITY GRAPHICS

# Shop Profile: Wrap City Graphics

**GOING STRONG IN THE TWIN CITIES**

BY MIKE CLARK



**H**aving business savvy is a solid starting point for those going into the wraps industry. For Kimberly Korb, owner of Hopkins, Minnesota-based Wrap City Graphics, knowing how to be nimble, efficient, and customer-focused were all skills already in her wheelhouse. “I worked in consumer products in food R&D,” she states. “I had been sold twice, and I could tell that my business unit was about to be sold a third time.” Not wanting to leave the Twin Cities, Korb says she decided she’d go into business for herself.

“If I owned (the business), then it would be my decision on when we would sell,” she says.

### **ON THE MOVE**

Korb started searching for opportunities, and in 2005 she found the first location of where she’d venture into the world of automotive graphics. Appearances and layout, however, were not all that sightly. “(It was) this really run-down sign shop,” she notes, “and they didn’t even have a printer.” Despite those factors, Korb says she saw potential.

The business did have a sizeable client list, and by all accounts was a busy shop, plus Korb says the company was close to home, so she opted to take the operation over. Within a short time, things began to take flight. She initially hired two employees while she focused primarily on the operations part of the business.

The business steadily grew over the next few years, and with the onset of the 2008 recession, Korb decided it was time to make some changes. “With the economy tanking, I found a great building in a different city, but it was still relatively close



When Kimberly Korb moved her business from its first location to a new building, it officially became Wrap City Graphics. (All images courtesy Wrap City Graphics)



Korb has continued to make strides in building the business's reputation.



**Above:** Wrap City Graphics works with clients ranging from small local businesses to large organizations.

**Below:** In addition to automotive installs, the business does a sizable set of indoor graphics each year as well.

to our customer base," she explains. Korb bought the building, previously an automotive shop, and remodeled the facility into a full-service wraps business. With the move to the new building, the company officially dubbed itself Wrap City Graphics.

Despite the Great Recession's hurdles, Korb says Wrap City was able to weather the storm. "Our business thrived because many high-level people, particularly men, lost their jobs," she says. "So, they went out and either bought a franchise or started their own one-man business like electrical or HVAC services." All those new businesses and franchises, Korb points out, needed someone to provide vehicle graphics, to which she and her team delivered.

**BUILDING A NAME**

Since 2008, Korb has also used other measures to grow the shop's reputation. One







of those moves included becoming certified with the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). As a WBENC-certified business, Korb has seen an influx of customers who align with the organization. The company also holds affiliation with groups such as the United Application Standards Group and certification with 3M. Additionally, the shop is certified in architectural vinyl films as well as polyester films.

Korb says the company's business model is part of what she believes helps attract and retain clients. "And I think one of the things that sets us apart is that I'm very customer-focused on helping other small businesses grow and be successful," she explains. "They can sense that I'm trying to help them spend their money wisely." To that end, Korb says the employees aren't on commission, helping reinforce that they're striving to match clients with



**Above:** The shop is certified in multiple signage categories including architectural. **Below:** This project was a bass boat and SUV full wrap.



the best solution instead of offering them the flashiest new finishes.

In addition to customer-facing measures, Korb is a proponent of green-friendly initiatives and energy efficiency at the shop. The building is heated with filtered, recycled motor oil, which she points out cuts down drastically on heating costs during the harsh Midwest winters. At the same time, cooling is done with high-efficiency Mitsubishi air conditioners.

With the auto-wrap industry being one of the higher waste sectors out there, she's also taken measures to address this issue. The shop's set of wide-format Roland printers use eco-solvent inks that feature recyclable cartridges. The business minimizes vinyl scrap waste by either selling it off on Craigslist or donating it to places



One of the company's more notable jobs was a wrap install affiliated with Super Bowl LII.

like local daycares or the Ronald McDonald house.

That green-conscious mindset has also landed the business some high-profile clients, like the Veterans Affairs (VA). “The commissioner (of the VA) is very focused on being green,” she states. “They (took interest) in what we were doing because their fleets are either electric or flex-fuel vehicles.”

### THE BIG TIME

In more recent years, Korb has continued to make strides in building the business’s reputation. Roughly three years ago, she took part in a program funded and organized by the Small Business Administration (SBA) called Emerging Leaders. Candidates need to interview to be accepted to the limited spaces available, and the class typically lasts a full year. The course covers multiple topics like finances, marketing, and human resources,



Owner Kimberly Korb and her staff focus on finding the right solutions for their customers and operate on a non-commission basis.

and requires students to develop a business plan to graduate.

“It really caused me to think about how I wanted to grow the business,” Korb says. That course helped push the business out

into the architectural finishes realm and increase the number of offsite installs the company performed.

On the heels of this experience, the business landed a job in 2018 connected to Super Bowl LII. Thanks to Korb’s WBENC certification, the business had already previously done a series of installs for the venue, U.S. Bank Stadium. Over time, she says she and her team had gotten to know the people in charge of running the stadium, so companies like Aramark would routinely call the business for new work when the venue sought new graphics and installs.

With the big game coming to the Twin Cities, the shop was selected to wrap Super Bowl-branded cars. “It was unbelievable for us,” states Korb. “We did six weeks’ worth of volume in one week, and we wrapped four cars in full wraps.” Despite the demanding nature of the work and the long hours, she says the team was excited about the opportunity. When the wraps were completed, “They sent a 53’ semitrailer to pick



Thanks to Korb’s hard work, dedicated employees, and multiple certifications, the business continues to thrive.

*continued on page 94*

# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SPECIALTY SUBSTRATES AND EQUIPMENT

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

## APPAREL DECORATING

### SOFT-WASHED T-SHIRTS

**Cotton Heritage** offers 24 single, 5.5-oz., 100% combed ring-spun cotton and soft-washed T-shirts. Heathers may vary. It is side-seamed and tightly knit, with tear-away labels. Available in 30 colors.

**323-722-5592**

[www.cottonheritage.com](http://www.cottonheritage.com)



### TIE-DYE T-SHIRTS

**Carolina Made**

carries Colotone's youth tie-dye T-shirts. Features include 5.3-oz. 100% preshrunk cotton with double-needle stitching throughout a classic fit. Over 90 colors available in sizes YXS-YL.

[www.carolinamade.com](http://www.carolinamade.com)



### ANTI-FOG MASKS

**Pacific Sportswear**

**Company** offers a line of custom, branded masks called SofMask. The mask features a proprietary anti-fog nose guard to keep glasses steam-free.

**800-872-8778**

[www.sofmask.com](http://www.sofmask.com)



### DTG PRE-TREAT SOLUTION

**DTG Connection**

introduces its SK pretreat solution. SK pretreat works with all water-based direct-to-garment printers including RICOH, Brother, and Epson.

[www.dtgconnection.com](http://www.dtgconnection.com)



# APPAREL DECORATING



## KNIT CAPS

**Sportsman Cap & Bag** offers a line of knit styles from Cap America. This USA-made collection is comprised of a 12" plaid knit (item RKP12), a 9" static pattern beanie (item RKS9), a 12" static pattern knit (item RKS12), an 8 1/2" beanie (item TKN28), and a 12" cuffed knit (item TKN24).

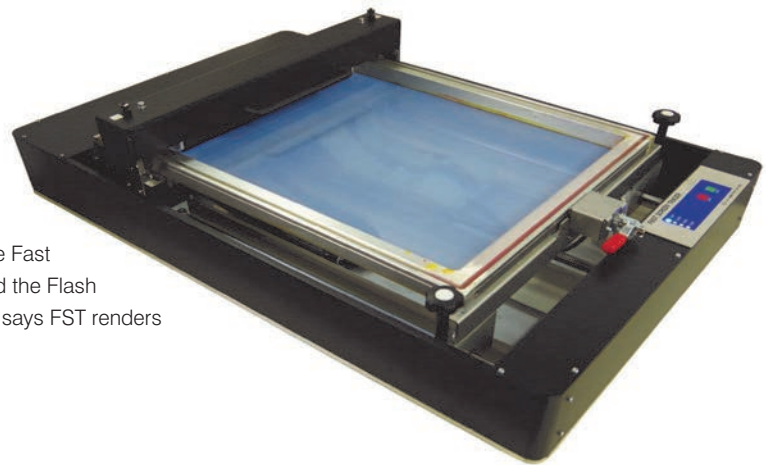
910-541-0901

[www.sportsmancaps.com](http://www.sportsmancaps.com)

## SCREEN TRACER

**Kazoku Inc.** announces the availability of the Fast Screen Tracer (FST) Digital Screen Maker and the Flash Screen Memory Printer (FSM). The company says FST renders the emulsion process unnecessary.

[www.bit.ly/digitalscreenmakers](http://www.bit.ly/digitalscreenmakers)



## FACE MASK PLATEN

**Polyprint** offers the 2-in-1 'Fit & Flat' Snap-On face mask platen for garment decorators to create personalized face masks. The platen allows TexJet users to print on both Fit and Flat type masks. DTG printers can use one main platen with two different set-up options: the Fit type for triangular masks and the flat type for flat masks.

[www.polyprintdtg.com](http://www.polyprintdtg.com)



# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SPECIALTY SUBSTRATES AND EQUIPMENT

## AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



### ■ SUBLIMATION MATERIAL

**JDS** offers Subli-Tru, a smooth white material that sublimates and has been incorporated into many of the items from the Laserable Leatherette line. Choose from portfolios, coasters, keychains, photo frames, and more.

**800-846-8853**

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



### ■ LASER ENGRAVABLE RUBBER

**Jackson Marking Products** offers laser rubber by the roll. It measures 8" wide by 3', 6', 15', or 30' long, and comes in an orange-red color.

**800-782-6722**

[www.rubberstampmaterials.com](http://www.rubberstampmaterials.com)



### ■ SUBLIMATION MAGNETIC DART BOARD

**Sublimation101** offers its sublimatable magnetic dart board. It features magnetic material with a fabric surface, two sides that are sublimatable, and includes four-piece magnetic darts and spare parts for hanging.

**908-842-8082**

[www.sublimation101.com](http://www.sublimation101.com)



### ■ PRINTED SHEET STOCK

**GS2 Awards** has taken its MDF and made it ready for your projects, states the company. These sheets are recommended for custom jewelry, signage, and adding color to projects. New designs are being added constantly.

**303-747-3869**

[www.gs2awards.com](http://www.gs2awards.com)

# AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



## LASERABLE MATERIALS

**Trotec Laser** offers more than 1,000 materials including plastic, acrylic, wood, and paper, specially designed for laser and rotary engraving. Trotec's Digital Print Series features print receptive, plastic sheets designed for printing with UV and LED curing inks. The surface is pre-treated, and the core consists of modified, impact acrylic.

844-529-0730

[www.engraving-supplies.com](http://www.engraving-supplies.com)

## PLASTIC ENGRAVING STOCK

**Marco Awards Group** offers the Freeman Flex premium laserable plastic engraving stock. It comes in three finishes of brushed gold, brushed silver, and gloss black. Freeman Flex is offered in .020 thick material, small case quantities, and is 3M adhesive backed. Freeman Flex can mount on any curved surface.

800-229-6592

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



## VINYL CUTTER

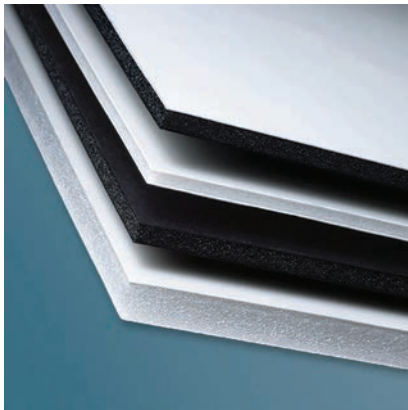
**GCC** offers the Jaguar V 160 PPF, equipped with a media take-up system for roll-to-roll media. The Jaguar V PPF is designed to cut up to 1,570 mm, specifically for automobile-related applications such as window film and car paint protection film.

909-718-0248

[www.gccworld.com](http://www.gccworld.com)

# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SPECIALTY SUBSTRATES AND EQUIPMENT

## SIGNAGE & PRINTING



### RIGID SUBSTRATES

**3A Composites USA** offers its FOME-COR Collection. The collection offers a variety of products with bright-white, double clay-coated facers for screen printing and direct digital printing applications.

**800-626-3365**

[www.3acompositesusa.com](http://www.3acompositesusa.com)



### LIGHT BOX LEDS

**SloanLED** expands its PosterBOX family with new PosterBOX ID light box illumination for interior signage and POP applications.

**888-747-4533**

[www.sloanled.com](http://www.sloanled.com)

### RETROFIT KIT

**Universal Lighting Technologies** offers its LRAXC LED strip fixture retrofit kit with Bluetooth controls. The LED strip retrofit kit is used for replacing 4' or 8' fluorescent strip fixtures with LEDs.

**615-316-5100**

[www.unvlt.com](http://www.unvlt.com)



### INTERIOR SIGNAGE MATERIAL

**Rowmark** offers PrintMark, which features a gloss finish and contains an acrylic cap and an ABS core. PrintMark is used for interior signage projects, industrial marking, and personal identification applications.

**419-425-8974**

[www.rowmark.com](http://www.rowmark.com)



### SUBLIMATED BLANKETS

**Fisher Textiles** offers Blankets-On-Demand, which includes fully finished plush flannel and polar fleece blankets available in three sizes for sublimation printing.

**800-554-8886**

[www.fishertextiles.com](http://www.fishertextiles.com)



# SIGNAGE & PRINTING



## CARGO LOADER

**InnoLIFT USA** introduces the XXL Straddle Loader for pallet-load deliveries. This loader lifts its load and itself into and out of the delivery vehicle, including Mercedes Sprinter, Ford Transit, and Ram ProMaster cargo vans, box trucks, and semi-trailers.

866-934-5438

[www.innoliftusa.com](http://www.innoliftusa.com)



## SIGN SUBSTRATES

**Johnson Plastics Plus** offers 3A Composites sign substrates for temporary or permanent installations, indoors or out.

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# HOW TO CREATE AN ARTISTIC PRODUCT

**D**uring these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional business can be the difference between paying the bills and borrowing money or shutting your business down. Creating a few of your own products or a line of them can add to your revenue stream.

Consider creating new products with the equipment you presently have as it may be too risky to invest in equipment for this purpose. The financial investment is not the only risk—the learning curve and the time this takes can be an even greater risk. If you are just starting up, creating and selling your own product may be a way to get started, especially if you are working from home or turning a hobby into a business.

## WHAT YOU NEED

What does making your own original product entail? Before we get to the product idea, let's discuss the other aspects of what might be needed.

Graphics are usually an essential part of a lasered product. Do you have art skills? Does someone you know or is a family member artistic? You can also buy art from many internet sources, just be careful you don't use copyrighted art without permission and especially art requiring a license, such as cartoon characters. A few great artistic fonts, especially those that have some thickness to them, display well when lasered. If the material you are engraving does not have a lot of contrast between the engraved and unengraved background,

thin graphics and fonts do not stand out.

What materials can you work with? Thin wood sheets, leather or leatherette, 2-ply acrylic sheets (two colors), cast acrylic, and metal pieces (coated, anodized, or sprayed with a metal marking coating) are all options.

Do you need woodworking or metal smithing skills? These are some of the things to take into consideration when forming ideas for creating your own product. Begin by making a list of skills you have easy access to and materials you are familiar or like working with.

## INSPIRATION AND IDEAS

Unless a few of your own products will be your whole business focus, don't be concerned about finding large markets for products. The larger the market, the more competition. Niche markets have much less competition, if any.

Explore what you like and those avenues that are close to you. Consider hobbies, collectables, destination travel themes, decor, kid's rooms, and other areas where organizing, identifying, communicating, and displaying items is important.

Let's look at some examples. You may live in or be near a town that is a destination travel location. If not, think of a location within an hour's drive of where you live that people go to spend a weekend. Products are often sold by local shops and museums regarding key aspects of that location. It may be a natural feature, a building, wine country, or a historical site. Is there a special graphic scene you can use to depict the destination? It may even be a scene found on a sign. I recreated a well-known graphic from a sign in the town I live in along



This depicts a well-known graphic in our city created over 100 years ago. The graphic took many hours in front of the TV tracing over a photo of the sign. This reproduced graphic cannot be found anywhere else. (All images courtesy Bob Hagel)



A holiday village "Welcome to our Family" mini sign.

with a stone arch that is the entrance to our old town area.

Our area has dozens of wineries. There are many wine-themed graphical items sold by the wineries and local stores. Are there products you can create that tourists would buy to remember their special trip with friends or family?

A growing holiday hobby is displaying miniature villages. I created a variety of signs to provide the village with a family name or perhaps the name of the town they grew up in. I also had signs for many small local businesses such as a corner store, meat market, and tailor. Family member's names would be included on the signs, such as Johnny's Sports or Lisa's Bait & Tackle. These miniature



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signs were made to scale for the villages, which were all about the same size.

I had clients that made metal tags for those that collected and built vintage cabs (18-wheeler types). One client sold the plastic shift display for old Oldsmobile's as they dried out and had to be replaced. It took me a while to get the size and placement of letters correct (P, D, L, N), but once I did, I made a large number of them quickly.

I made a whole line of switch cover wall plates in each of the

**Left:** These light switch covers were created from specifications I found on the internet. I tested them in my home. Graphics are simple and made to fit each light switch cover size. They look great in kids' rooms.



I designed the graphic and made the product to store wired ear plugs, which are difficult to store on their own without twisting the wire and damaging it.

**Above:** The Forest is Calling wood slice has been popular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Left:** Every child's first holiday is very special, and most parents want to mark the memory.

gang sizes (one to four switches) that included simple graphics for kids, sports themes for TV rooms, and business logos for waiting and conference rooms. I found measurements on the internet for every size and type of switch cover and used simple graphics from coloring books and line drawings to design the covers. I could add one of the many graphics I had to any size switch cover as I worked out a production method beforehand.

Here is a brief list of areas to explore that can lead to product creation ideas:

- Hobbies
- Decor themes
- Collectibles
- Annual events
- Swords/knives
- Kids' rooms
- Gaming (online and board)
- Cars/trucks/motorcycles
- Destination themes
- Gardening (flowers and vegetables)
- Travel and parks
- Beer/wine/spirits
- Woodworking
- Participative sports (running, swimming, biking)
- Cooking/baking
- Motorized models (cars and aircraft)
- Holidays
- Miniature trains and villages
- Metal smithing
- Memorials and memories
- Jewelry making
- Family history
- Places lived

What will the product do for the end-user? People like to show off their accomplishments and perhaps even use their display of pride to find kindred spirits. And displaying items is a large part of many hobbyists' and collectors' desires. Products are also needed to help organize, track, and store parts; and to identify, label, and communicate specific collectibles or parts. The ultimate pride is displaying what you spent many hours and resources making or locating.

### **PRODUCTION AND PROFIT**

Making a profit relies on simplicity and not offering too many choices. You don't want to offer to customize every graphic or font choice a customer wants. Offer one graphic or a small choice that you have prepared and fitted on the product before offering it. Font choices should also be just a few or one that works well.

Assembly should be simple and straightforward. Family members can be a great help, and in these times of being closed in, you can make it a family-oriented business that you can all enjoy working on together. It can also be a learning experience for the kids.

Making products that you can fit into your regular business production schedule or other job and family responsibilities is ideal. Do you have an off-season or slower time where some parts or all of the product can be made? For instance, if you sell a product for the winter holidays, manufacturing the bulk of what you expect to sell during the summer will greatly reduce the pressure during a busier holiday season.

Consider the effort that goes into shipping and protecting a product from breakage. If you will be shipping, consider the cost and storage area you need for shipping materials. Cost and space can be more than you expect. Also consider shipping costs as they can be substantial when you are not the size of the big online stores.

And keep in mind: creativity is problem solving! In the next article, we'll cover how to price, market, and sell your creative, artistic, and themed products. **GP**

**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).



# HOME DECOR AS A NICHE MARKET

**PRODUCT IDEAS, MARKETING TECHNIQUES, AND A SUBLIMATION TUTORIAL TO GET YOU GOING IN THE HOME DECOR MARKET**

**W**hen considering a niche market, home decor is an excellent choice for numerous reasons that we will explore in the following article. Home decor is one of those sublimation markets that is both trendy and profitable.

On the whole, this product category represents almost everyone. Why? Because all of us live somewhere and either rent a space or own a house. One of the first things someone wants to do

when they move into a new place is to decorate and make it feel like home. As a result, the home decor niche tends to be in demand year-round with no shortage in sight. The myriad of sublimatable substrates available to decorate and offer your customer base makes this niche market an excellent choice.

## PERFECT PRODUCTS

Here is a partial list of some of the top sublimation items that someone should

consider when starting out in this market:

- Pillow covers
- Throw blankets
- Floor mats
- Frames
- Decorative jars
- Tiles
- Photo slates
- Wall letters
- Clocks
- Coat hangers
- Cross plaques
- Keepsake boxes
- Decorative plates
- Coasters
- ChromaLuxe aluminum art panels
- DIY lamp shades



A wall clock that's been sublimated on an 8" X 8" sublimation tile with a hole drilled in the middle. (All images courtesy Cheryl Kuchek)



The materials needed to sublimate a DIY lampshade.

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SUBLIMATION BASICS AND BEYOND



Step four (top left) is to lint roll. Step five (bottom left): repositionable spray is crucial to a quality finished product. Step six (right): read through the stacking order outlined in the article.



Step eight (above): preparing for the second press—be sure to grab all the layers. Right: the final project.



Even with all the substrates available, you don't have to be limited in what you sell based on current substrates. You can purchase 100% polyester fabric and sublimate your own material that can be used for numerous home decor projects. Check out YouTube for no-sew home decor projects.

Creating personalized curtains for nurseries or children's rooms can be a quick and profitable project if you can sew. Linen is still one of the most sought-after fabrics used in the home decor space. Remember that you are not limited to one type of style. Home decor styles include traditional, shabby chic, rustic, regal, French country, and farmhouse, just to name a few.

**UNIQUE LOOK**

Items that you don't see often sold on places like Etsy or Jane are wall clocks. Wall clocks serve a dual function of a decorative statement as well as perform a useful function—telling you the time. Even though many people wear Apple watches and almost everyone carries a cell phone with them, there is still something attractive and useful about wall clocks.

There's also a high-perceived value when adding personalization to any substrate. So, adding something personalized that is going to be seen as a piece of wall art in addition to telling time allows for a healthy markup with a relatively low-cost outlay, which means an excellent profit potential for you.

Lamps are another product found in most homes, and it is a great one to add to the home decor niche market. And with the rise of the smart home and specifically smart bulbs, table lamps are gaining new ground as popular home decor products.

You can make a one-of-a-kind lampshade by buying some DIY lampshades from places like Hobby Lobby or Michaels. Imagine the charming appeal and profitability of selling personalized lampshades. Add even more value by sublating a matching pillow cover to spruce up any home. Interior designers love to offer custom personalized items because of the perceived value and markup they can add.

## HOW TO: DIY LAMPSHADE

A DIY lampshade takes about 45 minutes to an hour from start to finish.

### Supplies you will need for a DIY lampshade:

- DIY lampshade (Hobby Lobby or Michaels)
- Lampshade template (comes on the shade)
- Glue gun, but fabric glue can work
- 100% polyester fabric, 1/3-yard
- Finishing trim
- Scissors
- Printed transfer
- Repositionable spray
- Parchment paper
- Flat sturdy cardboard (for pressing full bleed)

If you want a full-bleed pattern, you will need to have a printer that can print 28" either in width or length. I use the Epson F570 and a Geo Knight DK20S heat press. I am going with a full-bleed, so I will need to press it twice.

### Steps to make a DIY lampshade:

**Step One:** The heat press temperature should be set at 400 F and the time at 60 seconds. Pressure: light to medium.

**Step Two:** Dry your printed image by allowing the heat press platen to hover over the transfer for 10 seconds.

**Step Three:** Prepressing is crucial if using the polyester linen from Condé. It will shrink some and will cause ghosting on your final product if you don't prepress.

**Step Four:** Lint roll to prevent potential dust particles from being heated up and causing permanent blue specks.

**Step Five:** Spray repositionable spray on your transfer.

**Step Six:** Stacking order:

- Cardboard (used for double pressing).
- Parchment paper on top of cardboard.
- Image should be facedown/polyester fabric faceup.
- Parchment paper for top of stack.

**Step Seven:** Press for 60 seconds.

**Step Eight:** Preparing for double pressing.

- Slowly open the heat press and grab the cardboard at the top and underneath and turn the entire stack 180 degrees.
- Be sure that the heat platen covers some of the design that is already pressed. This will help prevent lines where you press a second time.

Note: Repositionable spray is vital for the success of your fabric turning out correctly if you want to do a double press. It is important that the transfer not move while you turn the entire stack. Also, having one continuous printed image is key to not having a press gap when finished.

## STAGING

When selling online, staging is also an important factor to be considered. What you want to create needs to be eye-appealing so that when a customer views what you currently have to offer, it is

*text continued on page 94*



Here you see a T-shirt with no staging (left) versus a T-shirt with staging (below).



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# A Special Golf Award

## A COLORFUL, NICHE SANDCARVING PROJECT



BY RUTH DOBBINS

**N**ot too long ago, a previous customer of ours approached us to create another award for a golf tournament. Ok, I thought, remembering the one we had done for her multiple times: a Martini glass with the winner's name etched into it. But no—she said this time it was going to be different. One of the ladies playing at her golf club had passed away and there was going to be a memorial golf game in her honor.

She described the woman as a very colorful one in many ways, but she had one defining identifier: she always wore colorful high heels to the club house. These shoes were her trademark so to speak, and the customer wanted me to include that phenomenon in the award. Little did I know at that time that the “award” was



The decanter with all the curved surfaces. (All images courtesy Ruth Dobbins)

not one in the general award sense, but it was a fairly expensive crystal decanter from Villeroy & Boch, with very convex surfaces.

This decanter was an elegant and obviously expensive item, and the thought of adding a colorful shoe to it did not sit well with me initially. But it was for a good customer, and so I was not going to say no right off the bat. We said we would think about a concept and get back to her with a layout.

### ASSESSING THE LAYOUT

First of all, we would need to get an actual decanter from her because of all the curves in the glass object and they, her group, had already purchased them ahead of the tournament. So, in view of COVID-19 and all, we met like masked bandits in a parking lot halfway between our locations to receive the decanters, seven in all.

After I returned to the studio with the decanters, I realized what I would be up against: not just curves, but planes that

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<http://gpro.link/sandodd>.

curved away from any straight-on view, which would make it somewhat difficult to see what might be etched on the surface. The best bet was the wider transition area between the large container for the libation and the neck of the decanter itself.

The spout of the decanter was crowned with a heavy crystal stopper that had a flat surface. We had to establish the circumference of the decanter and the curvature to be able to get the text to line up with the curved surface. We created the layout so that the text would wrap around the neck of the decanter on the only relatively flat surface of the object. Besides the text, we added a silhouette of the shoe the customer submitted to either side of it and,

in addition, we also added the shoe to the flat surface of the stopper.

When we submitted the design to the client, she wondered if all the shoes could be represented in color. Looking at the elegance of the decanter, I decided that that would make the whole object look a bit gaudy considering all the colors that were present in the shoe. It did not take much to convince the client of that and so the decision was made to only color the shoe on the stopper.

#### **BLASTING**

The blasting process was, as usual, the least time-consuming step of the overall project. It took much longer to apply the

stencils to the curved area and make sure that the text appeared more or less in the same spot on all decanters.

After the stencil application, the next step was also crucial: covering up any and all parts of the decanter that should not be blasted. At \$100 each, I did not want to have any mishaps and be responsible to replace any of the items. We used quite a bit of cling wrap and masking tape to make sure all non-stencil parts were adequately covered, including the stoppers as well.

The decanters were fairly thick, so I was able to blast some depth into the surface. The shoe on the stopper especially needed to be blasted deeply in order to create a subsurface good enough for the paint to



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**Left:** The stencils applied, and the decanter covered with shrink wrap and tape ready for blasting **Above:** The blasted decanter. **Below:** My painting stand was a cling wrap box with holes cut into it. You can see the blasted stoppers and my sample of the colored shoe.



be applied. After the blasting process, the decanters were cleaned off, being careful to not let any water or cleaner get into it. The stoppers had to be cleaned by blowing the surface off to remove all dust from blasting but leaving the stencil in place for the painting process.

**PAINTING**

The actual area to be painted was small and required many colors, so spray paint was not a viable choice. After thinking about this for some time, I came to the conclusion to use an unconventional method of achieving the color: Sharpies.

I had to keep in mind that the stopper would be handled and also cleaned every

now and then, so I was not going to use the Sharpie straight up. I needed to protect the color from being touched and also seal it in to ensure it would not wear away from cleaning. I decided to spray the deep blasted area with a clear UV protectant first, then paint, let the paint dry well, and then spray the surface with the protectant again.

To see if I liked the result, I made a couple of samples on clear glass first. This way I could also decide on the colors. Even though the colors could be quite random, I wanted to have all the stoppers be more or less the same, which meant using each color on each stopper, one after the other. The bottoms of the stoppers were not

flat, however, and so I had to resort to a simple aid to handle the stoppers during painting and also keep them level during the process.

I got out a dispenser for shrink wrap and cut six holes into the top of the box, which would serve as my painting stand. Then I proceeded with the treatment: first the clear UV coat, then the individual colors, and then another clear coat. It is always important to let each layer dry well before proceeding with the next. Also, when mixing products from different manufacturers, it is always prudent to make a sample so that you can see if the products get along with each other or not. You surely do not want to find out about that after

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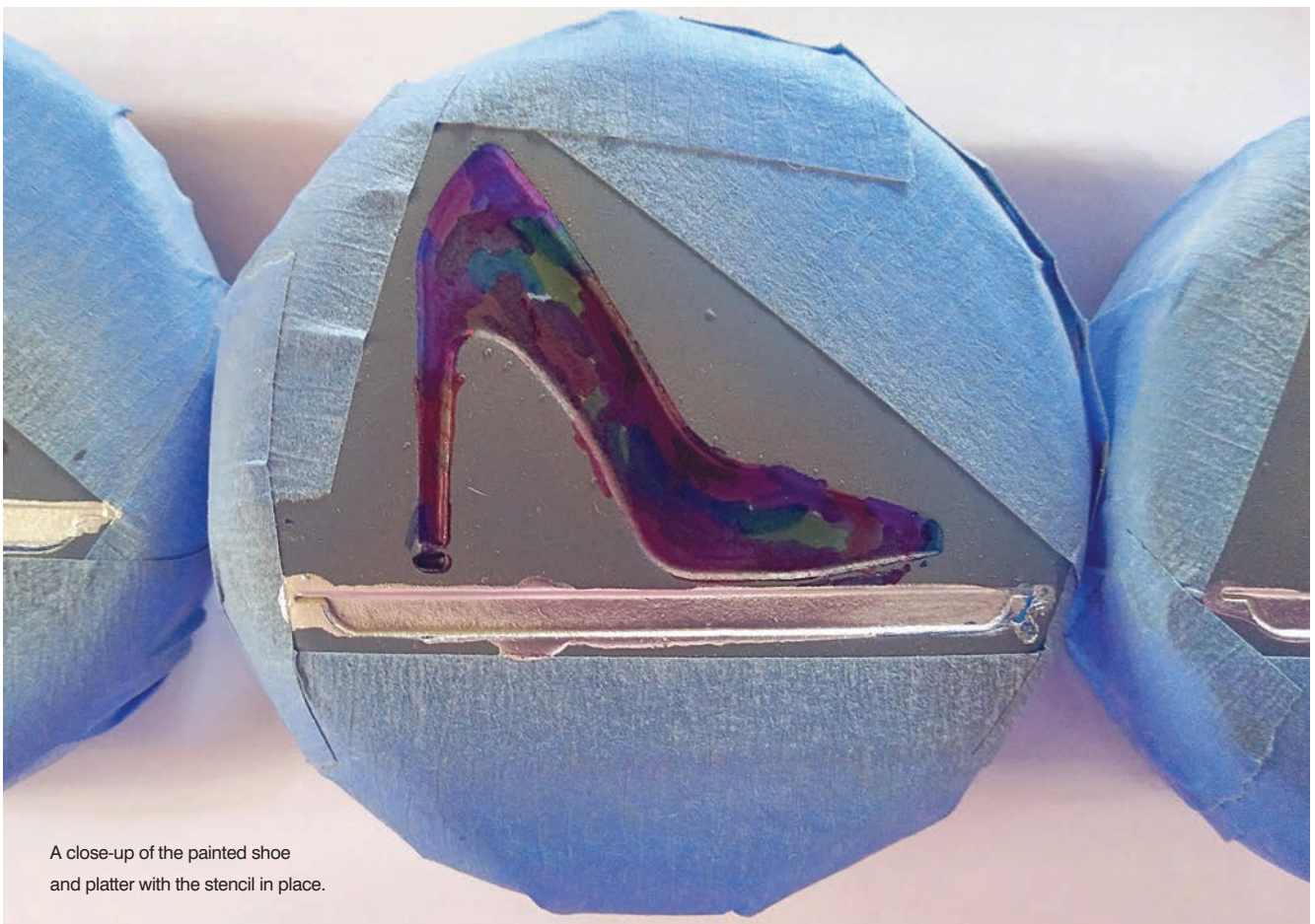
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The advertisement features a collection of high-quality crystal awards and gifts. On the left, there is a large, vibrant pink heart-shaped award. In the center, a classic cut-crystal decanter sits on a matching base. To the right, a clock is mounted on a crystal base, and a small, elegant stopper is perched on a rectangular crystal pedestal. The background is a light, textured teal color. The Prism Crystal logo is in the top left, and the Topmost World logo is in the top right. Contact information is provided at the bottom.

All shoes painted; the bottom line in silver represents a silver platter.



A close-up of the painted shoe and platter with the stencil in place.



**Left:** The painted stopper inserted into the decanter. **Below:** The finished decanter.

you thought you were finished with the project and all stencils are removed.

After any painting project, we keep the items in house for at least 48 hours to make sure that there are no issues and that the paints are actually cured, not just dry to the touch. Only after I was sure that all was well did I remove the stencil and wrapping from each stopper.

The project was completed, with the decanters back in their special boxes and ready to be delivered. Another meeting like drug dealers in a parking lot, and the decanters were in the hands of the client, who just loved the outcome. It is still nice to see the delight in customers' eyes when they are happy with the products we make. **GP**

With over 40 years in the glass business, **RUTH DOB-BINS** offers experience in all glass-etching techniques as well as in fused 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.





# TIME TO FOCUS

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING YOUR NICHE MARKET

**W**elcome to March, the end of the first quarter of 2021, and possibly some more stability. We are getting back to normal, or at least the current normal, and it should be starting to pick up again for most of you. If it is not picking up for you, then this issue comes at a perfect time. The content within it is telling you, “Hey, time to focus!”

It is important to focus on a niche that is right for you more than ever. With the

rising costs of online advertising and a massive influx of new businesses online, you must have a niche to focus on. It seems like every crafter is suddenly becoming a business, and the market can be hard to reach if you are not speaking to your ideal customer.

Suppose you are struggling to grow or meet your goals. Typically, a big reason for that is trying to be everything to everybody. But what ends up happening

is you are nothing to nobody. We have talked about different types of niche markets in the past, but one of the questions I get all of the time is, “How do I find my niche?”

### **NICHE BY DEFINITION**

First, we need to clarify what focusing on a niche means and how people might use the term. Plus, I want to describe how I’m defining niche marketing and





why it is essential to a successful business.

A niche market is a group of specific potential customers who connect to your message. I may have talked about this in the past, but it is worth repeating. A niche market is not in any shape or form an identification of the only people you do business with. I highly encourage you to accept any business that you can and make a profit.

You also need to be happy taking those jobs. In fact, our niche might shift many

times because of some of the new projects we get to do, so never look at a niche as limiting your potential business. It is quite the opposite. Having a robust and tight niche allows you to reach more people for less money and have more conversion (potential customers become customers). Plus, if your niche is a passion of yours, you will have more fun.

Many people will look at niche markets as several small areas of focus, and they are not wrong. As you grow your business,

you might very well be working towards several niche areas simultaneously, but when you are not growing or achieving your goals, it is most likely due to a lack of focus. I look at niche markets as a way to get laser-focused on who exactly your ideal customer is, and it's not just the ones with money. These are the people whom you love doing business with, and they love doing business with you. The money almost seems inconsequential to both parties.





### **KEEP DIGGING**

With that definition in mind, how the heck are we going to find our niche? First and foremost, a niche must be two things: something you connect with and something that fills a need for others. In the confines of those two things, the next step is to start asking questions.

I typically like to start looking at my past a bit to see if there is a pattern. Questions like, what jobs did you have that you loved? Who were the customers or clients you worked with that made it seem like time flew by? What are your success stories? All this questioning and deep diving are to spot trends. Let's keep digging.

After spotting some trends in your past, look at some other personal preferences and business areas. Questions to ask include:

- What are the skills that you or your business are known for?
- What things do you find yourself doing where you lose track of time?
- What are the things that annoy you that you wish you could solve?
- What do you see others you care about struggling with?
- And my personal favorite: if you had all of the time and money in the world, what would you be doing?

The last question tends to throw some people for a loop. They wonder how things like relaxing in a mountain lodge or drinking cocktails on a tropical beach can have anything to do with their niche market. The connection point is in the activity.

If you had all the time and money in the world, 95% of people (and 100% of successful small business owners) would not be able to sit that still for that long. So, what would you find yourself doing at the mountain lodge or on the tropical beach? Determining ways to stay warm or cool depending on the location, or helping others capture their memories of those relaxing vacation type events?

TO DIG DEEPER, WE HAVE A ONE-PAGE NICHE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE THAT CAN HELP TEASE OUT THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ON PAGE 60 THAT YOU CAN FIND AT [www.oursuccessgroup.com/downloads/Niche\\_Assessment.pdf](http://www.oursuccessgroup.com/downloads/Niche_Assessment.pdf)



We can go back and frame these things in the fact that a niche must be two things, something you connect with and something that fills a need for others. Whatever we pick here makes sense because when faced with the possibility of having all the time and money in the world, we can point at our niche. Then add it to how it could be of service to others, and you have the connection.

Lastly, we want to look at the things we love, specifically the things we love to do and the things we love to have. If you love to learn and love to have decorated socks, you now have a potential niche. There are others out there who want decorated wild and crazy socks and are looking for more education, maybe spending time on YouTube or places like that. That could be your niche.

But there is a method here, as you don't

just want to pick one of each. Make a list of at least 10 or more of the things you love to do and another list of the things you love to have. Then prioritize those lists in order of importance to you. If you get stuck and have two that are close to the same priority for you, ask this question about the two against each other: If I pick number 1 but could never have number 2 because of it, would I still choose it as number 1?

Finally, with these prioritized lists, you can take and start matching up the two of them and see what things might work together as a niche.

Then you take all this data (a review of your past, the answers to the questions, the prioritized lists with potential niche markets) and find the trend. Find the things that are jumping off the page at you. Use your gut!

If you recall in this column in last month's magazine, we discussed finding your why (<http://gpro.link/findwhy>). Armed with your why and these potential niche markets, you can look for groups of people who have an obstacle you can remove with your products or services. But the critical identifier is to make sure their values and "why" are aligned with you. **GP**

**AARON MONTGOMERY** is the co-founder of OurSuccessGroup.com. You can find Aaron co-hosting the podcast 2 Regular Guys Podcast ([www.2regularguys.com](http://www.2regularguys.com)). He has his own podcast channel and weekly live videos called Small Business Saturdays Series. New episodes are released weekly at [smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com](http://smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com). You can find out more about Aaron at [www.aaronmontgomery.info](http://www.aaronmontgomery.info).



# Notable Names

**HIGHLIGHTING THE  
WOMEN OF THE  
GRAPHICS INDUSTRY**

BY CASSIE GREEN

**The graphics industry  
is filled with talent.**

*Be it full-color sublimated custom home decor, vehicle wraps with stunning, intricate details, personalized print apparel for local businesses, and more, the creativity in this industry is far-reaching.*

*This month, we decided to dig into the talents being demonstrated by the women of the industry. Some bring business and marketing expertise to the table, some are graphic designers and artists, and some are out in the field getting their hands dirty. Many do it all. Whether working alongside partners or friends, these women shine at what they do. Featured here are just a few of the many women who are making waves in the graphics industry.*





**JEN CARNEY,**  
CARBON WRAPS



**WREN GEORGE,**  
WRENSONG CREATIONS



**CARLA SCHLOSSER,**  
SCHLOSSER SIGNS INC.



**KYM GANELES,**  
ARTIST PROOF COLLECTIVE



**HAYLEY MULLIN,**  
SOCKPRINTS

## JEN CARNEY – CARBON WRAPS, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

**What you do:** *"I am the co-owner of our husband-and-wife company. I started solely on the business side, ensuring all paperwork, finances, scheduling, etc., were in order. When I graduated from grad school in 2014, I added wrapping to my arsenal. Now, we both handle all aspects of the business, from incoming calls and emails, client meetings, sales, accounting, designing (although Steve has a bit of an edge on me there), to installations. We are able to tag-team our efforts and rely on each other in a completely different way than when we started in 2009."*

**Favorite part about what you do:** *"First, I value making people happy. From beginning to end, I want to make sure our clients get an experience worth their time and money. When our clients see their project complete and they get excited, I know we accomplished our goal. Second, when people come in and ask, 'What color was the car originally?' If they can't tell, then I know we wrapped it well."*

### Instagram and Facebook:

@carbonwraps and @womenofwraps

(Images courtesy Jen Carney)



Jen Carney has created some serious waves in the wraps side of the graphics industry since her start in 2009. She and husband Steve started Carbon Wraps after both were laid off from their jobs. "The artistic nature of restyling vehicles is what primarily drew me in," she recalls. "To start us off, Steve wrapped his full vehicle in a carbon fiber design he came up with. Hence the name Carbon Wraps."

Both brought something to the business: he had design and some wraps knowledge, and she had the business know-how. Together, they drove all over Orlando marketing their new business. And though it started as a money-maker, it's now become a passion. "While necessity initially brought me in, I decided to stay in the industry because I grew to love it," Jen says.





Of course, the money aspect is always nice. Carbon Wraps certainly has seen its fair share of success, and much of that has to do with their customer approach. “In my experience, giving time to clients is so important—they will notice,” Jen believes. “We have noticed when a client comes in that was referred, their reason is our customer service.”

Besides running a successful business, Jen has also created Women of Wraps, a social media group for women in the wraps industry to network, support, teach, and learn from each other. “While the traditional view of the car industry is male dominated, there are several women in it,” she points out. “Most of the women I have met through the years have been behind the scenes and not in the spotlight. I thought it would be inspiring to see some of the women that put in work, either on their own or alongside male coworkers and



partners.” And it doesn’t matter their role; whether in sales, design, accounting, or something else, according to Jen, all women should be highlighted.

Being at the forefront of such a group as well as co-owning her business has lent Jen a bit of experience, most of which she loves to share with other women. “It’s not just about taking in the knowledge, but also putting that knowledge into practice,” she offers. “Learn as much as you can, pay attention to the details, and above all else, have confidence. Take advantage of learning opportunities. There are many great courses to take—take them all.”

## WREN GEORGE – WRENSONG CREATIONS, FORT ATKINSON, WISCONSIN

**What you do:** *"(I) began etching glass using a catalog start-up kit to make unique gifts for friends and family. We have many design options ... I enjoy adapting and combining designs, and love the challenge of creating a new design. All pieces are hand-crafted and often combine multiple techniques including surface etching, carving, stained glass, and hot glass."*

**Favorite part about what you do:** *"I love, love, love the idea to application part. The 'how am I going do that? Wait ... whoa! That might work,' the creative part, the figuring it out ..."*

**Website:** [www.wrensongglass.com](http://www.wrensongglass.com)

(Images courtesy Wren George)



**W**ren George actually got her start in the industry by accident 35 years ago, but judging by her work, it was probably more serendipity. "(There was) a need for a whole passel of gifts for a bunch of very special people, during a time of unsettled income and an expanding family," she says of her beginnings.

And despite the accidental fall into the world of sandcarving and glasswork, she's managed to find success, a word she gives a nebulous definition to. "Funny ... success has many definitions ... whose do you choose for your own? For me, I make a comfortable income, have all my expenses covered, can enter my studio or office happy and at peace, and make beautiful things that give others the chance to be a hero."

One might wonder why she's remained a "one-horse carriage" after so many years, especially since she fills nearly every role needed to keep a business up. "I am all the things, save one: owner, manager, bookkeeper, designer, technician, artisan, quality control, promoter ... I do have a rockin' maintenance guy that can fix anything, or build most anything," she laughs. So



why stay solo? A lot of it has to do with a piece of advice she once received: “The minute you hire another person is the minute you become dependent on them. Be aware and cautious.”

That doesn't mean she thinks doing everything alone is always the best solution. “Subcontracting is a very useful and effective option,” Wren believes.

And being a woman in the graphics industry for so many years, she has some advice to give to other women—two pieces of advice to be precise. “The first is to always consider what you can't live with,” she says. “The second is never delegate the part you love the most!”

As for the future, it sounds like Wren doesn't plan on leaving the glass world any time soon. “(In five to 10 years, I see myself) still playing with broken glass and fire at the same time! I would love to teach and coach again. And always learning, trying new ways to manipulate and stretch the absolutes of chemistry, physics, art, just to see what happens ...”





**CARLA SCHLOSSER – SCHLOSSER SIGNS INC., LOVELAND AND DENVER, COLORADO**

**What you do:** *“I’m one of the owners and CEO. My partner and co-owner is my oldest son, Alex, who is president and general manager. He and I have been working together for more than 21 years. Alex works on the operations side of the business and manages project managers, fabrication, and installation and service. I work with overall management and sales. Together we provide vision and strategy to accomplish company goals.”*

**Favorite part about what you do:** *“I’ve always enjoyed managing and have always been an independent person, so owning my own company allows for this. I enjoy strategic thinking, problem solving, and taking risks. It feels good to see staff grow through coaching and development. It’s always a good feeling to know our clients are satisfied and have positive experiences with us. Finding solutions to the ever-challenging landscape in business is satisfying to me.”*

**Website:** [www.schlossersigns.com](http://www.schlossersigns.com)

(Images courtesy Carla Schlosser)



**B**e persistent, be tenacious, and be resourceful. These are just some of the reasons Carla Schlosser attributes her many years of success to in the sign industry. Any business that has been around for over 21 years certainly stands as the perfect example of that philosophy.

Founded in September of 1999, Schlosser Signs was born from an idea that came about on a family road trip. “I had just ended a job to stay at home with our four kids full time and thought this would



be a good way to manage the family while also giving us the opportunity to be our own bosses, some freedom to our typically pre-determined schedules,” Carla remembers. “My husband at that time was installation manager for another local sign company, so it made sense to us to stick with an industry we already had experience in.”

Coupled with that experience and her strong work ethic, Carla also says she received a bit of solid advice over the years that’s helped. “I’ve gotten a lot of really great advice from really terrific people over the years,” she says. For instance,



she was once told that not everyone will like you. “About 25% of the population will never get along well with your personality. Get over it. It’s business. We don’t have to like each other all the time, but we do have to trust each other 100% of the time.”

And after being in business for so many years, she has some advice of her own, particularly for other women in the graphics industry. “Be prepared to stay on top of rapidly evolving technology, understand and be prepared for unexpected challenges that inevitably happen, exhibit confidence, and, probably what’s been most important for me over these past several decades, is to be resourceful,” she offers.

Schlosser Signs maintains its Minority/Women Business Enterprise (M/WBE), and Carla feels that other women out there should also spend time doing what they are passionate about. “We’ve been blessed with having good intuition to take the right steps more often than not.”

She plans to carry those philosophies well into the future. “(Where do I see myself in the future?) In five years, still working hard. In 10 years, playing hard.”

## KYM GANELES – ARTIST PROOF COLLECTIVE, DENVER, COLORADO

**What you do:** *“I’m the lead designer. I hold degrees in Fine Art and Art History, but ‘artist’ isn’t always the most reliable career choice, financially speaking. I’d previously worked as a teacher and a glass artist, but I was ready to make the move into something more stable and fulfilling.”*

**Favorite part about what you do:** *“The constant variety—every project is different and requires me to flex my creative muscles. I can’t imagine working a job where I had to do the same thing over and over and over.”*

**Website:** [www.artistproofcollective.com](http://www.artistproofcollective.com)



(Image courtesy Kym Ganeles)

**B**ased in Denver, Colorado, Artist Proof Collective has grown quickly since its start in 2016, and thanks to her passion and creative “muscles,” Kym Ganeles has been a big part of that growth.

She’s been in the industry for 16 years, but after making the move from teacher and artist to lead designer at Artist Proof, she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love my job,” Kym shares. “Hopefully in five to 10 years, there will be fewer masks involved.” She’s of course referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had its impact across the graphics industry as a whole.

But that hasn’t stopped Kym, or Artist Proof Collective for that matter. You might have previously caught a few stories about the business on the *GRAPHICS PRO* website about their live printing event as well as its Mask Mobile concept. Perhaps that’s why Kym attributes flexibility as a big reason for her success.

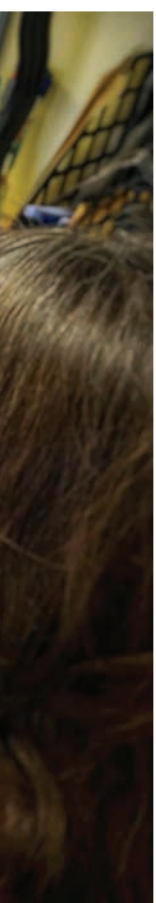


(Image courtesy Kym Ganeles)

“Sometimes you need to adapt your style to fit the job at hand,” she points out. “You’re not going to love everything you create, but part of creating design (as opposed to creating high art) means that you’re ultimately creating for someone other than yourself.”

That same flexibility and capability to adapt probably has something to do with a piece of advice she once received. In fact, she feels it’s the best piece of advice she’s ever received. What is it? “Don’t take anything too personally,” she says. In doing so, adapting your style and flow becomes much easier.

And being in the industry for so many years has allowed her to be able to offer her own advice to other designers out there. “Illustrator is more important than Photoshop,” she believes. There are probably more than a few graphic designers out there laughing about that one.



## HAYLEY MULLIN – SOCKPRINTS, TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA

**What you do:** *“My business partner, Jann Middo, and I co-founded Sockprints in 2009. Jann brings a wealth of hosiery experience and expertise to our company. She worked for K.Bell socks as the SVP of design and managed and worked with many national accounts, including Costco and other major retailers.”*

**Favorite part about what you do:** *“The creative process and the opportunity to learn something new daily. In addition to staying on top of the printed apparel industry, we are also eCommerce entrepreneurs. Learning about SEO, website design, marketing, and a whole lot more keeps it interesting for sure! How we reach our customers is an ever-changing landscape, and it's exciting to explore new ways to do it.”*

**Website:** [www.sockprints.com](http://www.sockprints.com)

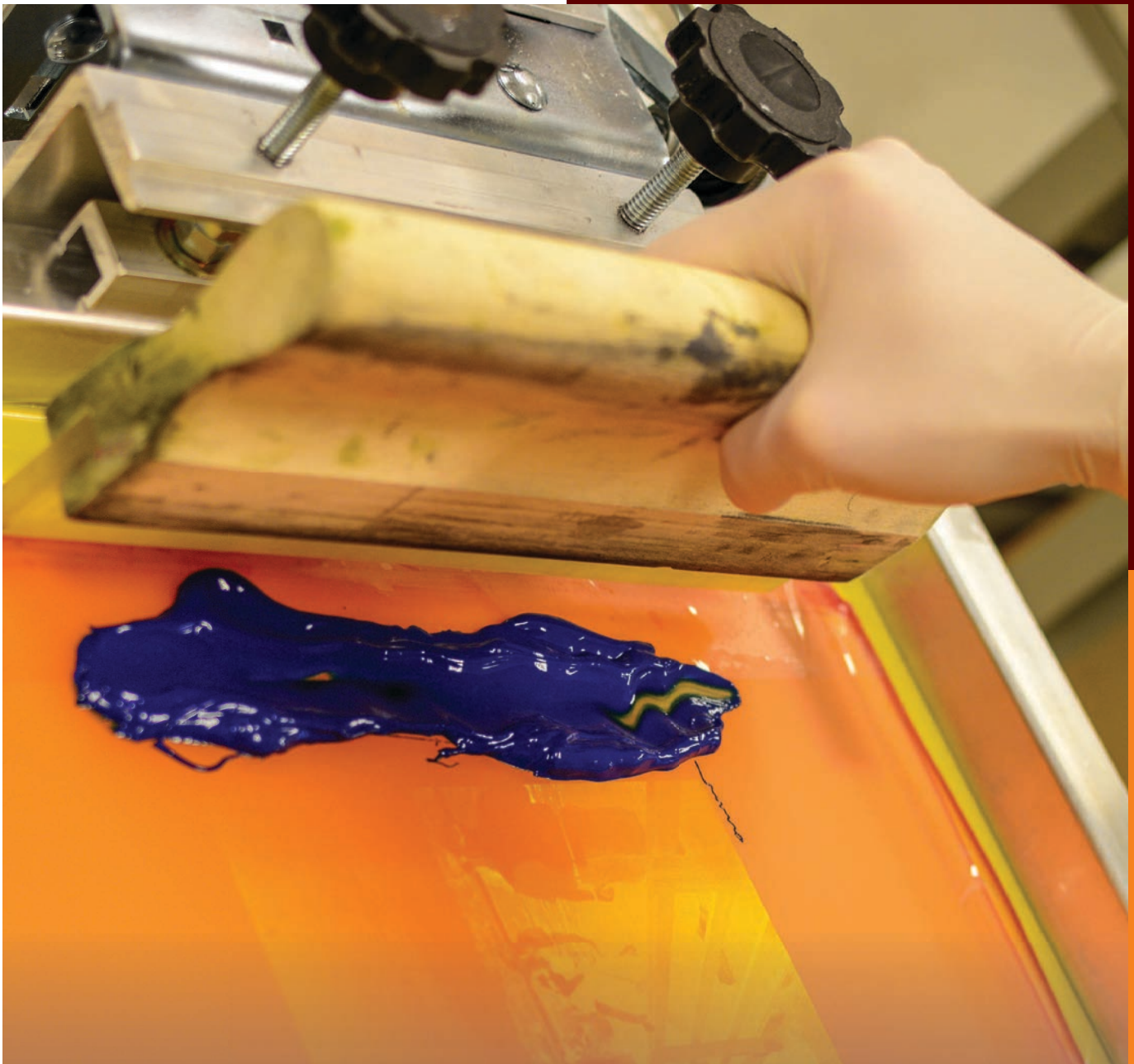
**W**hat bloomed from a meeting of two moms on the sideline of their daughters' team soccer field has grown steadily into a successful business. From that meeting, Jann Middo and Hayley Mullin created Sockprints, a business that offers fully customizable socks as well as other items including canvas totes, face masks, pillowcases, and more.

“I knew that I could start a home-based business pretty easily with a DTG printer, heat press, and the computer I already owned,” she recalls. “I’ve always enjoyed the creative process—crafting, scrapbooking, sewing, and other visual projects—and thought this would be a great avenue to explore.”

Hayley points out that their success blooms from sticking to the best advice she ever received: “Persist and persevere. Failure is not an option.” She was also advised to tap into all available resources and ask for help. “If you’re fortunate enough to have a partner, as I do, lean on them when needed to get through the challenges and vice versa,” she adds.



(Image courtesy Haley Mullin)



But that's not the only reason they've succeeded as a business. Hayley also believes in downright hard work. "There's no such thing as a 40-hour work week as an entrepreneur," she laughs. "Being able to 'divide and conquer' all the tasks related to running a business with my business partner and knowing there is someone who has my back is huge when it comes to the success of Sockprints."

Because these couple mantras have helped her for so many years, she wants to pass them, as well as other helpful hints, on to other women looking to dive into the business pool. "Jump in and get started with what and who you already know," she suggests. Hayley points out that there can be a lot to learn when taking on a new industry, so implementing some familiarity helps. "Exploring areas

you are familiar with gives you the confidence to tackle the areas you don't know. Trust that there are always new avenues yet to be discovered."

When gazing into the crystal ball, Hayley sees nothing but good things to come. "We see ourselves continuing to pioneer DTG sock printing by exploring new knitting fabrications, styles, printing techniques, and designs," she says. "Customizable products are a growing industry, and we hope to continue to play an important role in the sock printing category!" **GP**

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**CASSIE GREEN** is the executive editor of *GRAPHICS PRO* magazine, and previously served as the editor for *A&E* magazine. You can reach her at 720-566-7278 or [cgreen@nbm.com](mailto:cgreen@nbm.com).



Shop Profile:

## HOOPING IT WITH DEBORAH EVANS OF DESIGNS BY DEBORAH

**D**eborah Evans is the owner/operator of Designs By Deborah, located in Nashville, Tennessee. She has run her home-based embroidery business since 2009, but she was doing embroidery well before she started her company.

The business is in the renovated garage. She has plenty of space for her six- and 10-needle embroidery machines and all the other stuff that comes along with them, and was glad to move the business into the garage from an upstairs bedroom (she had to hold the machines while they were stitching upstairs because they vibrated on the wood floors so much). Evans explains, “Things are much better on the concrete floor in the garage, even if it is a bit colder.”

### WHIRLWIND OF PROJECTS

Evans believes that her sewing background helps her in her embroidery business. Her mother made their clothes growing up, and Evans learned a bit of her sewing skills at home. She is self-taught for the most part. She made the wedding and/or bridesmaid dresses

for her three daughters. “It was after that that I saw the embroidery machines and got into the embroidery more than the sewing,” she says.

And in every sense of the word, Evans is a perfectionist. “I did not find that out until I hired somebody to help me do some sewing,” she laughed. “I had 75 dresses to sew for the high school chorus, so I hired a girl to help me since I had two sewing machines. Needless to say, she wasn’t with me very long. I made those dresses for seven years.”

“Because I can sew, I get orders that maybe others would not do,” Evans continues. For example, she makes and embroiders funeral arm bands for the West Point class of 1966. “These are to be used when attending funerals for deceased members of the class,” she elaborates.

When it comes to projects in general, Evans does more monogramming than anything else. “When a neighbor found out that I do embroidery, she went and looked at my Facebook page. She liked something I did for a baseball team. She hired me to make pillows for her sons with their initials. On one, I put the son and his wife’s initials. On the other, I designed it with four initials, for the parents and their sons.”

She described a recent monogramming order that was particularly memorable. “I had a gal get my name and number from the bulletin board at JoAnn’s. She wanted me to do a simple monogram on a scarf. When she brought me the scarf, I was almost afraid to do it. It was a Gucci wool scarf, and it still had the price tag on it, \$497! She got it on sale, a bargain at \$275. The monogram came out beautifully. Now she is asking me to do 50-100 hats for her.”

Evans also did more than 50 leather keychains for a realtor company. “The keychain was leather on either side of some thick cardboard. There



The funeral arm bands for the West Point class of 1966, which are to be used when attending funerals for deceased members of the class, according to Evans. (All images courtesy Deborah Evans)



was no way that cardboard was going to go on the embroidery machine,” she recalls. “I had to take the leather off, embroider the leather, and then sew the leather keychain back together. She paid good money for this order, because there was no way I was going to just charge for the embroidery stitching.”

Evans had to use her industrial sewing machine to sew the keychain back together, as a regular sewing machine could not handle it. “I’m kind of proud of that one,” she laughs. Talk about customer service!

“I make monogrammed towels for every bride that has her bridal shower at my church. A group of ladies donates the cost of the towels,” Evans says of yet a different project. “I match the bride’s colors, if they

have chosen them. I buy the towels, because I do not want to work on the super thick towels or on the \$5 towels.” Evans had hoped that this program would bring in future orders from these young couples. “It turns out that most of the kids that are getting married are moving away. They are not sticking around to be potential customers, unfortunately. It has not worked out the way I hoped, but I do enjoy doing it.”

#### **WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK**

Evans puts in maybe 15-20 hours per week in the embroidery business, unless she has a bigger order that she needs to finish. She does not do much to promote her business anymore but does have a Facebook page.

When a neighbor found out that Evans does embroidery, she hired her to make pillows for her sons. On one, Evans put the son and his wife’s initials. On the other, she designed it with four initials, for the parents and their sons.



## STITCH SOLUTIONS



Evans had to use her industrial sewing machine to complete this keychain project.

She also posts her business cards on local bulletin boards and belongs to a local networking group.

“I do a farmer’s market in the summer. I’ve done that for four or five years now. Each year, it gets a little better,” she says. “For the first couple of years, I was the only one that had anything other than food in my booth. I just signed up to take credit cards, so I think that will help me sell more this year.”

I asked Evans about what advice she would give to anyone just getting into the business. Her immediate answer was, “Research!”

- Research the equipment you will use (need versus want), the cost of the equipment, and how much room you will need to place the equipment.
- Research the local and state laws governing business license, taxes, and fees you may need to pay.
- Research sources for stabilizers, threads, and other supplies.
- Research costs and pricing.
- Decide how much time you will devote to the business.
- Decide if this is a hobby you love or a job you will love.



When asked about what advice she would give to anyone just getting into the business, Evans' immediate answer was, "Research!"

- How many hours are you willing to spend?
- Is there training available? (John Deer with [www.digitizingmadeeasy.com](http://www.digitizingmadeeasy.com), Wilcom/Hatch and YouTube have some great training classes/videos to check out.)
- Decide what software you need to be able to work with designs for your particular machine.

Because she now receives her Social Security benefits, she chooses to keep the business small. "I want to stay busy, but I do not want to be overloaded," Evans says. She wants enough business to support all her

embroidery expenses, but not so much income that she risks her benefits or that the orders begin to feel like work. **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).

With fundraising and charity events seeing an increase, it makes perfect sense to utilize DTG printing to personalize items. (Image courtesy Polyprint)

# Direct to Fund(raiser)s

**WHY DTG IS THE PERFECT FIT FOR FUNDRAISING EFFORTS**

BY CARLY HOLLMAN



**W**ith an increase in need for charity and fundraising efforts over the last year, it's only natural that the apparel and custom gifts world would need to evaluate how to quickly get goods out for any given cause. As such, it makes perfect sense to use one of the most efficient and easily customizable disciplines there is: direct-to-garment (DTG).

## **DIRECT BENEFITS**

This method not only allows for easy drop ins and customization, but its inherent turnkey nature allows for quick turn times as well. "You can offer an endless array of designs. Let the customers pick out their own image and even customize it with their name. Having choices will help you sell more shirts," insists Taylor Landesman, Lawson Screen & Digital Products.

In addition, DTG can be easily added to previously done decorations, such as screen

printing, to create further customized goods. According to Brian Walker of RTP Apparel, to take advantage of this dual-decoration technique, the screen print can be mass produced ahead of time, with space left for names, numbers, etc. This can help create reasonable stock inventory before the campaign begins, but then offer fast turn-around times once orders go live.

With this ease of customization, Landesman adds that once live events are deemed safe again, decorators can also print on-demand while the customer watches, which adds extra value in the eye of the end-user.

What's more, Adam Tourville of Direct Color Systems (DCS) adds that DTG is great for high-color designs. In contrast to screen printing, which requires a separate screen for each color, DTG is unlimited in its color capabilities in a single run. "You can print a 12-color concert shirt with a small DTG machine at the

venue," he points out. However, keep in mind that all dark substrates need to be pretreated when using DTG. Fortunately, blanks can be pretreated ahead of time to be ready to print on-demand.

According to Walker, the length of time pretreatment can be done varies by manufacturer, from two weeks to a month to years. However, he jokes that if pretreating by hand, it's like fish—it's always better fresh. Regardless, moisture needs to be removed prior to printing for best results, so a hit on the heat press is an advisable step.

On top of its ability to create hyper-customized and colorful goods, DTG helps with the bottom line. Gary Barker of Digital Technology Group expands, stating that fundraising is all about reducing expenses. And with the relatively short runs required of fundraising efforts, the limited setup with DTG makes it the perfect solution.



### MAKE THE MOST

So, how can decorators make the most of DTG for fundraising efforts? One step is to consider the substrate, which, once again, comes down to budget. “Typically, cotton shirts are the most widely used ... but also because DTG water-based inks work well with cotton,” explains Tourville. He adds that while at a higher price point, tri-blend and poly shirts are also compatible. But shirts aren’t the only options.

Barker states that with some foresight and creativity, other possibilities can open up, and in some cases, drive top line revenue and increase the success of the fundraiser for the organization. These items can include tote bags, koozies, hoodies/sweatshirts, towels, hats, and soft coolers. “Not everyone will want a T-shirt, so think outside the box,” he urges.

Landesman adds that the decorator should also think of the time of year

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A T-shirt isn't the only item that can be used for fundraising. Think outside the box with things like koozies, pillows, totes, and more. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)



With the relatively short runs required of fundraising efforts, the limited setup with DTG makes it the perfect solution. (Image courtesy Hirsch Solutions)



Each organization will be different from season-long sports fundraisers to short-term care goals for individuals. (Image courtesy Digital Technology Group)



**DTG ITEMS PERFECT FOR FUNDRAISERS**

- Cotton/Poly/Tri-Blend T-shirts
- Hoodies/Sweatshirts
- Hats
- Towels
- Koozies
- Soft Coolers
- Tote Bags

the fundraiser will be held. “Shirts are always a great choice, but the option of providing sweatshirts may not be the best for a summer fundraiser.”

Another thing to take into consideration is the longevity of the good. “The point of fundraising is to drive awareness. The swag and shirts are meant to be worn after the events to continue to drive that awareness,” says Tourville. As such, an investment in quality, versatile, and attractive products can help benefit the goals of the fundraiser. Which leads to perhaps the most important question for this type of work: What are these goals?

Each organization will be different,

from season-long sports fundraisers to short-term care goals for individuals. “Ask questions so you are able to understand the organization’s ‘why’ and then worry about ‘what’ you are providing (for the tangible goods),” states Barker. “If you can identify the why, it can help inform the design and creative fonts.”

Tourville echoes this sentiment, stressing to make the event and fundraising aspect as personable as possible. That connection will likely attract more interest and donors overall.

With DTG, fundraising does have the capability to make extremely personal and vibrant designs that work toward a

good cause, all while minimizing time and expense so the focus can be on the end goals of these feel-good projects. This relatively young technology makes it the perfect match for the time-tested act of giving back.

### INSPIRATION

Want some inspiration for fundraising success? We asked sources to offer some real-life examples using DTG technology. Here’s what they had to say.

“Snarky Cancer is a great example. They use DTG solely for fundraising events, online stores, and great causes. Mike Stephens is one of the owners



DTG not only allows for easy drop ins and customization, but its inherent turn-key nature allows for quick turn times as well. (Image courtesy Brother DTG)



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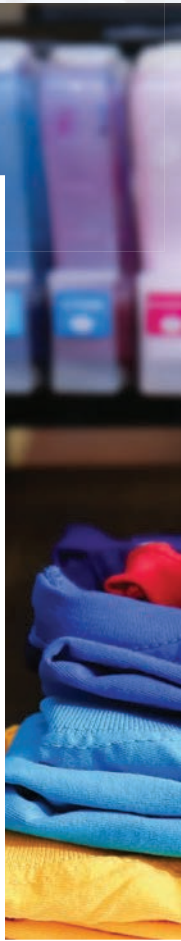
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With DTG, fundraising has the capability to make personal and vibrant designs that work toward a good cause, all while minimizing time and expense so the focus can be on the end goals of these feel-good projects. (Top image courtesy Epson; bottom image courtesy Brother DTG)



One goal of fundraising is to drive awareness long after an event, so longevity of the final product is key. (Image courtesy Same Day Tees)



FOR MORE TIPS ON HOW TO FIND YOUR AUDIENCE FOR COMMUNITY-ORIENTED FUNDRAISERS, GO TO <http://gpro.link/fundraising>.

and main operator of (the DTG equipment). Trish Stephens is the other owner and a fundraising mastermind,” offers Landesman.

“We worked closely with one of our customers to outfit four trailers, each with its own DTG printer for on-site fundraising at weekend sporting events,” notes Barker. “They averaged 6,000 custom shirts per weekend and recouped their initial investment in less than two months.” He believes that DTG presents one of the best fundraising opportunities for small businesses.

Walker also shares some thoughts. “A real-life example would be a ‘hot market’

fundraiser. Hot market printing would be, for example, having State Champion Football shirts available immediately after the clock runs out for your local high school finals game. If your home team wins, you could easily have and be printing shirts in the final minutes of the game—available to purchase immediately as people leave the stadium.” He notes that they could even be customized, and you could continue printing for as long as the demand for the shirts exists over the next week or two.

“And have enough shirts pre-printed for the team players to wear immediately after the game is over,” Walker adds. “It is just

thinking outside the box, seeing opportunities, and putting action to what you see. There is money to be made in DTG for fundraisers—just think a little differently than your screen-printing competitors or, if you do screen printing in house, how you can use DTG to make more money during those fundraising times.” **GP**

**CARLY HOLLMAN** is the former editor of *Printwear* magazine with over nine years of experience covering the decorated apparel industry. She currently works as a freelance writer and artist based in Denver, Colorado. She can be reached at [carly.hollman@gmail.com](mailto:carly.hollman@gmail.com).





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# WATCH YOUR TONGUE

## CREATING ICY DRAMA IN A SCREEN PRINT

Every generation has their own way of coming across that sometimes makes no sense at all. In the '70s, if the vibe was positive, folks said, "Far out, man," or, "Right on." A decade later, they might have said, "Totally radical," "Tubular," or even "Bodacious." People have said, "That's bad," but they meant it was good. What? But in general, many of these slang expressions fade into the past.

We may hear, "Take a chill pill," or "Chill out," meaning calm down or relax and not actually taking a pill or get cold. This slang became popular in the 1980s. It is believed that the slang term

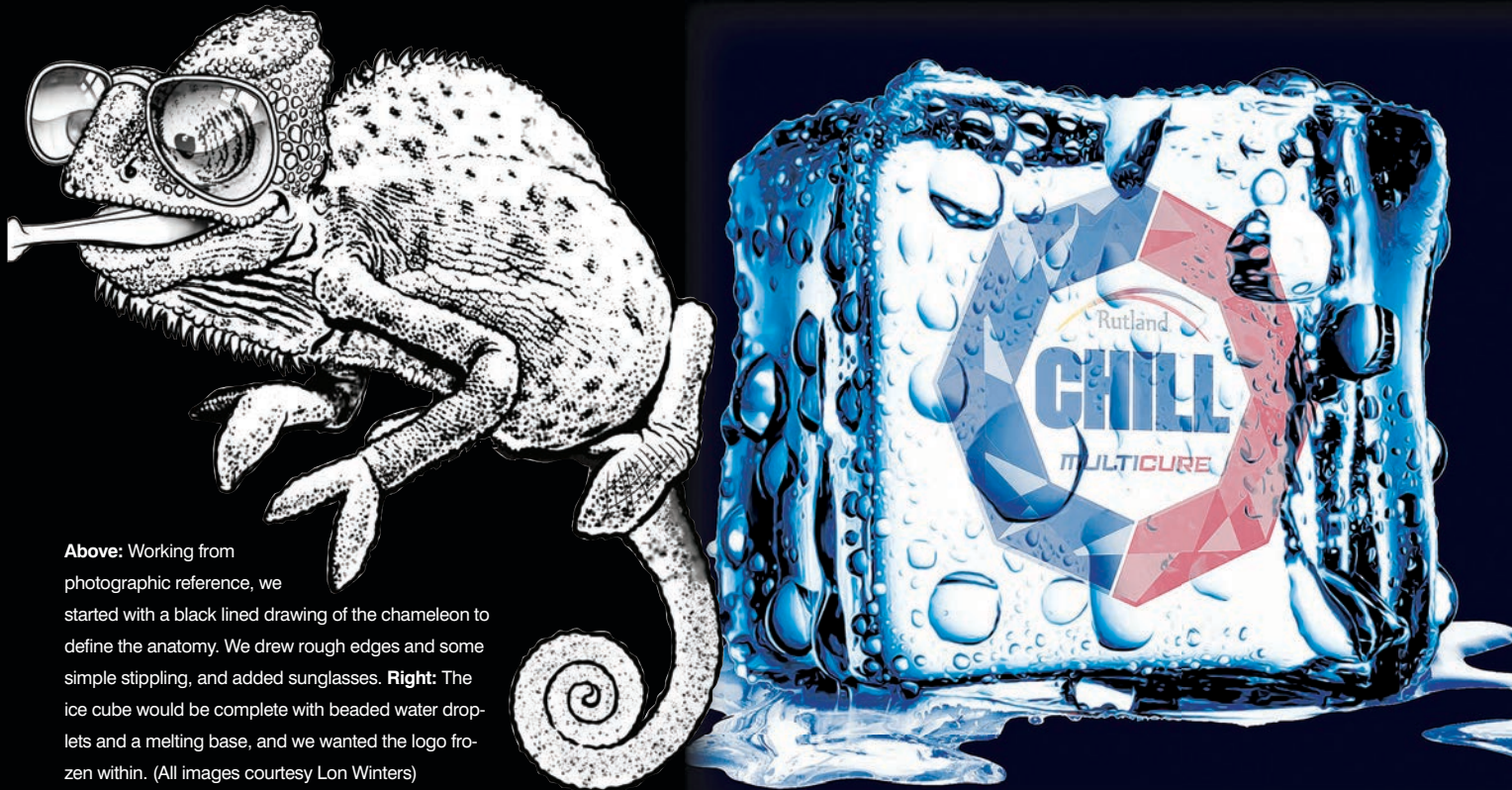
"chill" was first used by the Sugarhill Gang in the song Rapper's Delight in 1979. Oddly enough, in the 1870s, one could actually take a chill pill. There was a recipe for the homemade pills to help with fever. Arnold Schwarzenegger even used this slang in the Terminator movies. It seems "chill" has stood the test of time.

An ink manufacturer will be rolling out a new product soon that cures at lower-than-typical temperatures. The inks will be branded "Chill Multicure." Get it? Clever.

We were contracted for a series of designs as samples for customers and

dealers. With some client guidance, we kicked around a few ideas relating to the cold connection including the ice cream man (spy) flashing his "license to chill" in a James Bond spoof. We put together an icy tropical drink on the beach with the expression "feel the chill" as the sun sets into the sea. Even a snowboarding alien saying "Chillax" was thrown around.

One particular design, at the request of our client, was to incorporate a chameleon and an ice cube. We don't think reptiles like the cold but that didn't stop us from having fun with it. We always do.



**Above:** Working from photographic reference, we started with a black lined drawing of the chameleon to define the anatomy. We drew rough edges and some simple stippling, and added sunglasses. **Right:** The ice cube would be complete with beaded water droplets and a melting base, and we wanted the logo frozen within. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)

### A UNIQUE DESIGN

Chameleons have a unique look of bulging eyes and unusual feet. Most importantly, they have the ability to change colors and camouflage themselves from predators. Chameleons also have long tongues for snatching food—we had to use that.

This was an opportunity to utilize several contrasting and bright colors to render our little fella. We positioned him sitting atop the ice cube as if he were perched on a tree branch. Working from photographic reference, we started with a black lined drawing to define the anatomy. Rather

than a smooth form, we drew rough edges and some simple stippling for scales, textured skin, and to break up some of the colors moving throughout. We added sunglasses for personality and to make him even “cooler.”

The ice cube co-star would be complete with beaded water droplets and a melting base. This was challenging because of the reflectivity, transparency, and so much light and changing contrast quickly.

We wanted the logo frozen within. The combination of the whites, red, and blue densities overlapped for a diffused look of

the frost. We knew our white would gain on press, so we used a softer tone with lower densities in it as well as the red and blue. The cornucopia of tones had percentages ranging from 10 to 60.

The text was positioned on its side with a frosty motif. White was applied to one side of the beveled edge that helped define the highlight. We used Impact font for its bold form and easy readability, and used layer effects to extrude the form.

The icy drama was created with the Bevel and Emboss layer effect applied. By selecting the type only and then selecting

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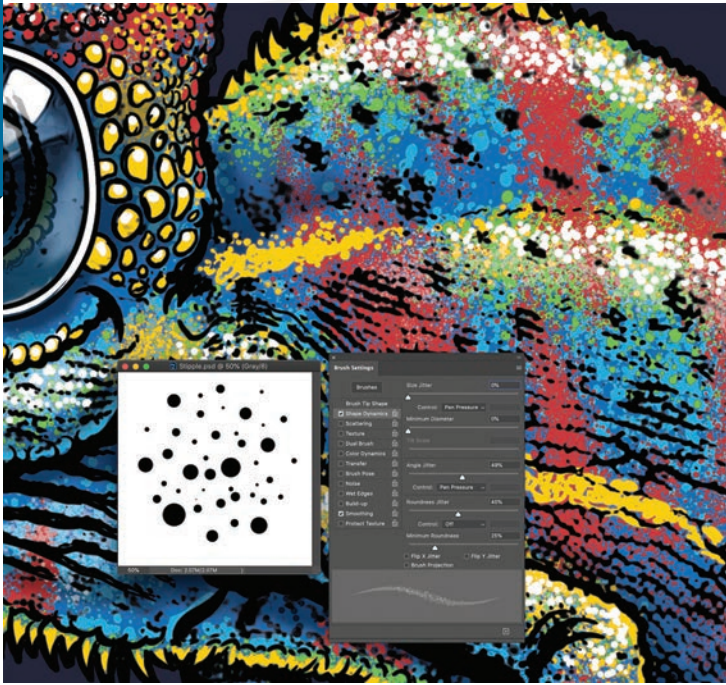
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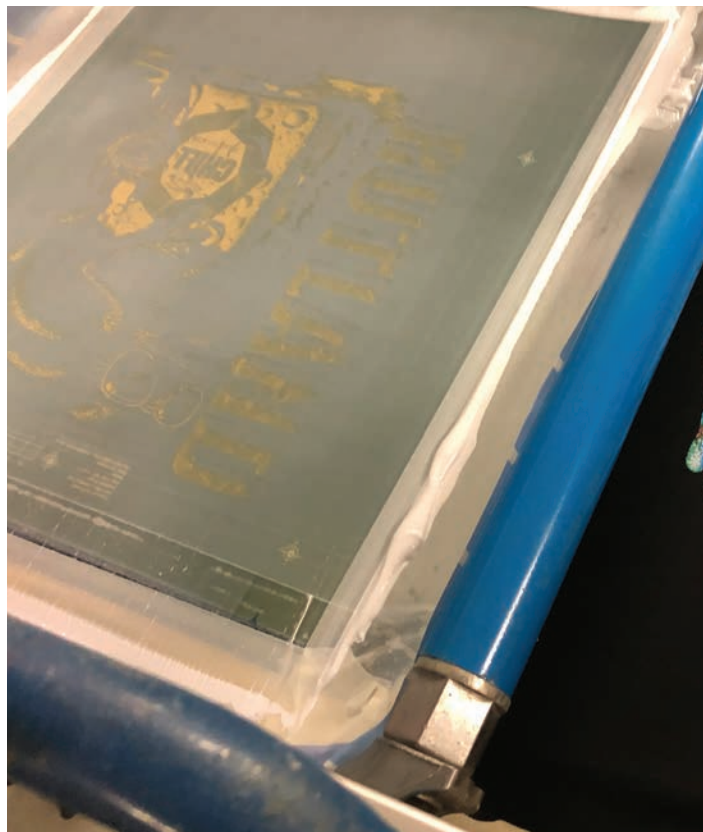
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SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



To simulate a stipple effect, we first made a cluster of dots with various sizes in a perfect square file dimension. Then under the edit menu, we hit Define Brush preset and made it into a brush for use with the Brush tool. Using the brush settings palette allowed us to define properties for pressure sensitivity on our drawing tablet.



We ran the white on N-166 TPI screen at 45 N/cm2 using a 65/90/65 triple ply, dual durometer squeegee followed by a flash and smoothing heated iron in a Teflon screen.



In all, we put together six original designs, did some bench marking and beta testing, photos and video, and printed a couple hundred of each image for the project

the texture, we added a mask at the bottom of the layers palette to mask out the negative area and trap it in the form of the type.

Our chameleon is the dominant element, so he needed to stand out the most. This was easy. All the color and the white of the ice was a nice balance between the two sets of values.

This scaled epidermis needed the color breakups to match the texture of the outline in its randomness and imperfections. To simulate a stipple effect, we first made a cluster of dots with various sizes in a perfect square file dimension. Then under the edit menu, we hit Define Brush preset and made it into a brush for use with the Brush tool. Using the brush settings palette allowed us to define properties for pressure sensitivity on our drawing tablet.

Who is not a fan of "A Christmas Story" and that unforgettable scene when Flick (acting on a triple-dog dare) stuck his tongue to the flagpole in the schoolyard? We had to go there, didn't we? Our chameleon has gone and stuck his tongue to the sub-zero text. With the natural length of a chameleon's tongue, we couldn't pass

it up! To illustrate it further, we blued up the tip where it touches to really feel the cold. It was a last-minute add.

Because of all the white, particularly in the frost, we split the highlight whites. The first would be somewhat transparent and act as a blending white. The second, more traditional so that we could maintain as much of the opacity in the brightest areas as possible. The whites build natural highs and lows that worked together and gave us more control on press.

The base or white printer was fairly dense because of all that white, but we

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SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



The client was pleased with the design.

decreased some densities for secondary tones. We would let the dark of the garment create the black outlined areas and shadows. This image would print on navy and teal as well as black, so we incorporated a black screen but still used some of the garment for dark areas.

**PRINT PERFECTION**

Once seps were completed, we outputted on CTS with a frequency of 55 LPI at a 22.5-degree angle. We ran the white on N-166 TPI screen at 45 N/cm2 using a 65/90/65 triple ply, dual durometer squeegee followed by a flash and smoothing heated iron in a Teflon screen.

Next, the colored inks and the highlight whites all ran wet on wet on N-272s at the same tension using harder 75/90/75s. That blending white ran on a high N-380 for an ultra-thin deposit and the transparency we were looking for.

In all, we put together six original designs, did some bench marking and beta testing, photos and video, and printed a couple hundred of each image for the project. All in a day's work. The client's response? "Over the moon." **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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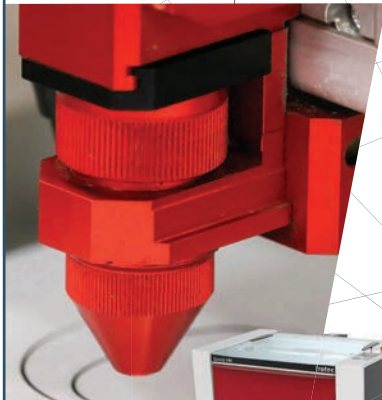
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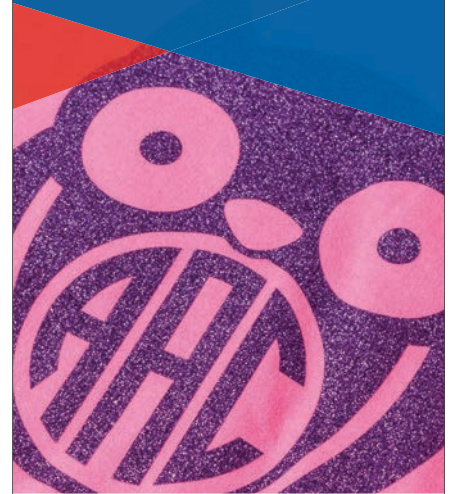
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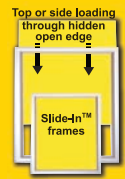
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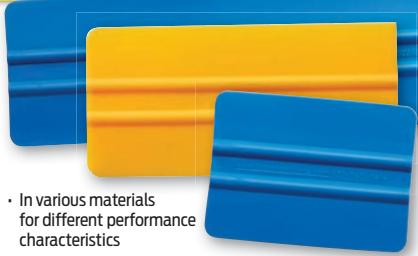
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## SHOP PROFILE: WRAP CITY GRAPHICS

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up the vehicle in front of our shop,” says Korb. That kind of presence, she points out, speaks volumes when it comes to solidifying a business’s word-of-mouth reputation.

### MOVING AHEAD

In recent times, Wrap City has been able to stay nimble despite multiple challenges outside of their control. Initially, Korb says she and her team were aware of looming shutdowns because of COVID-19, so they planned ahead as much as possible.

In late March of 2020, she sent the bulk of her staff home following statewide shutdown mandates. She implored her employees to maintain social distancing guidelines and play it safe while the business rode it out so that, ideally, they could bring everyone back once stay-at-home orders were lifted. Korb says she continued to keep up with essential bookkeeping so that the shop would stay current on the job list they needed to tackle once things were functional again.

“I started a spreadsheet of everything that came in because spring is a busy time for probably every sign company in the country,” she explains. “My designer was able to work from home, so we didn’t go completely dark.” Even with installations on pause, Korb says the team was still diligent about answering every email and phone calls from clients.

By early May, the shop was classified as office industrial and allowed to resume business. At that point, Wrap City had racked up more than 150 job orders and other potential leads. With springtime in full swing in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, the business started seeing a continued influx of people eager to get their boats and motorcycles touched up as parts of the country began to reopen gradually, and people started venturing outside. Korb began calling employees back to work with an abundance of caution.

Installers came in one day a week to tend to fleet jobs, while the shop’s production

manager came in a few times a week to keep up with volume. “We were smart and maintained social distance, gave everyone masks, and did all the things you’re supposed to do,” Korb says. Despite the continued constraints the pandemic has put on businesses, Wrap City is by all accounts running at full steam at the time of writing.

The shop also saw some other broader challenges. Minneapolis was largely the flashpoint for the nationwide demonstrations in response to the death of George Floyd. Korb says the situation hit home in more ways than one. “My production manager lives in the middle of it, and he (didn’t have) a nervous breakdown,” Korb says of the events, adding that employees on the design and install teams also live near where many of the protests and riots took place. “One of my designer’s husbands is in the National Guard, and his job is to organize and manage on all the helicopters that are flying over the city every night.” Korb says morale has improved gradually at the shop.

Despite the ups and downs of the broader world, and the sizeable growth Wrap City has seen, Korb points back to a recent install with a local moving company as an example of what she enjoys so much about her career in this industry. “I’ve been doing this long enough now that I remember when they had one truck, then two, and they’re up to 20 now,” she states. “We put unit numbers, so it’s fun to see them grow.”

The charge to help other businesses succeed, combined with a technical and creative element, all combine to make Wrap City Graphics a place where Korb says she feels right at home. **GP**

**MIKE CLARK** is the contributing editor for *GRAPHICS PRO* and *RV PRO* magazines. He previously served as the associate editor for *Printwear* and *Sign & Digital Graphics* magazines. Contact him at [mclark@nbm.com](mailto:mclark@nbm.com).

## SUBLIMATION BASICS AND BEYOND

*continued from page 51*

both eye-catching and attention-grabbing. Online shopping is a much different experience than seeing a product in-person where you can pick it up and feel its exterior surface.

What you want to do when you are staging your product is cause someone to stop and take a closer look at what you have to offer. The sentiment you want to invoke in a person is one that will cause them to want to take action, like, “Oh my gosh, that is so beautiful, how can I purchase that now?”

### Staging Tips:

- Pair items that complement what you sell, such as staging a T-shirt with some jeans, sunglasses, and flip-flops that get someone to notice.
- When staging your product, less can be more; don’t overdo the complementary items you add in the photo.
- White is the preferred color for the background most of the time, as it is clean and does not take away from what you are photographing.
- Real backgrounds such as a living room sofa, chair, or bed can be a perfect setting for staging.
- Using a tripod is recommended for consistency, stability, and focus.

In conclusion, home decor is a wide-open market that can easily be niched down to appeal to your customer base, especially with the array of sublimation products available. Start with what appeals to you and grow from there. Remember that is most likely the reason your customers started following you. **GP**

**CHERYL KUCHEK** is the owner of Just my Imagination DeZigns Inc. and has been active in the personalization industry for over 10 years. Cheryl has a passion for the industry and a love for helping people; she was the first to start a Facebook group to do just that. Sublimation for Beginners and Beyond is a resource to help those first starting out and those who are advanced. Cheryl can be reached at [cheryl@justmyimaginationdezigns.com](mailto:cheryl@justmyimaginationdezigns.com).

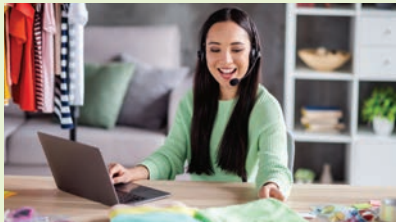
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