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» CONTENT

VOLUME 35

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“While there’s a great deal to be said for representing one’s branding accurately, more and more companies think of their decorated apparel and accessories less like the uniforms of the past and more like branded merch, more akin to a streetwear line.”

ERICH CAMPBELL
INDUSTRY EDUCATOR

from *Fashion-Forward Treatments*, page 28

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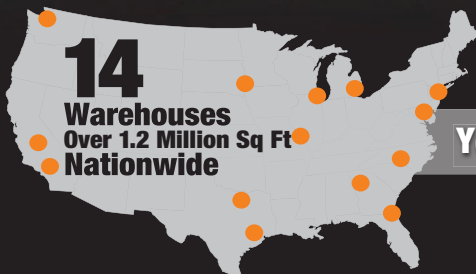
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This month, *GRAPHICS PRO* puts the spotlight on the complementary substrates, tools, and processes that elevate your business. The May issue cover art was provided courtesy of Walker Companies and Lon Winters, www.GraphicElephants.com.



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STEP ONE CASSIE GREEN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR



READY FOR GPX

It's crazy to think that at this time last year, we were still getting used to working from home, moving school to remote learning, and having non-essential businesses temporarily shut down. Perhaps even stranger to fathom was the loss of in-person events like concerts and trade shows.

In just one short year, we've been through it all, and yet as I sit here writing this, our crew at NBM is getting ready for our first in-person trade show of 2021, the first we've hosted since getting shut down last year. Despite all the chaos and unknown, we find ourselves preparing for what was once a major part of our lives, and I think I speak for everyone involved when I say how excited we are.

This month, GRAPHICS PRO EXPO will host its opening day in Irving, Texas, the very spot where we were when last year's shutdown orders came. I actually find something really beautiful in all that. Despite the challenges, the unknown, the difficulties, we have found ourselves back where it all began, having learned some lessons along the way. And as we attend what may be the first event for many of us since the start of the pandemic, I know there are many who are eager to learn even more about what's new, see the equipment in person, and yes, talk to another human being without having a computer screen separating us.

We can't wait to see you at the show and hope you're as excited as we are!

Until next time.

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MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF DECORATED ACCESSORIES

HOW TO LEVERAGE SHORT-TERM GRAPHICS

MOVE YOUR SUBLIMATION BUSINESS BEYOND FACE MASKS INTO THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

(Image courtesy Unisub)

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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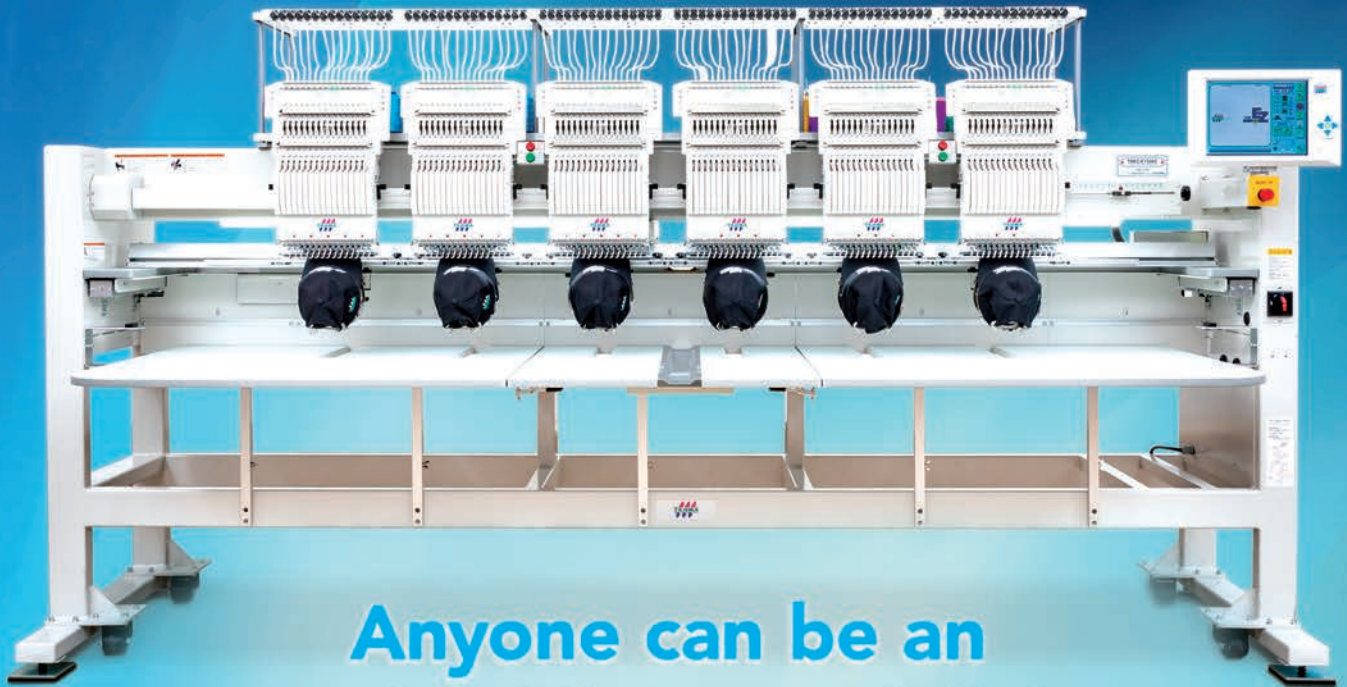
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NORMAL-ISH

Well, I don't think there would be many to argue with my assessment that 2020 was the most disrupting, frustrating, and even the most dangerous year that anyone can remember ... at least without being in an actual World War.

And all of that chaos and pain seemed to have come out of the clear blue sky, not expected by anyone. Kind of makes you a bit dubious of the abilities of the thousands of seers, tarot card readers, and fortune tellers who charge good money to tell their clients what's just around the corner. I am sure those who have gone broke, or worse, in the last year after getting a heck of a nice reading must be wanting their money back.

But that's not serious, of course, when we realize how many of us would like to have dear friends and family back. It was months before I became part of that seriously affected minority-now-majority, but the cost has been high enough in our corner of the world, even our corner of Texas.

Fortunately, most people close to me who contracted COVID-19 recovered, some even very quickly. But some survivors still struggle to get back to 100%, like my friend Steve, a 60-something-year-old diabetic who had a close call. Just to be sure he was still on track, I texted him the other day.

"How you doing, buddy? Better each day I hope?"

"Well, for the most part, but I can't seem to get past a low-grade pneumonia that's sure keeping me weak. I am getting a chest scam tomorrow," he replied.

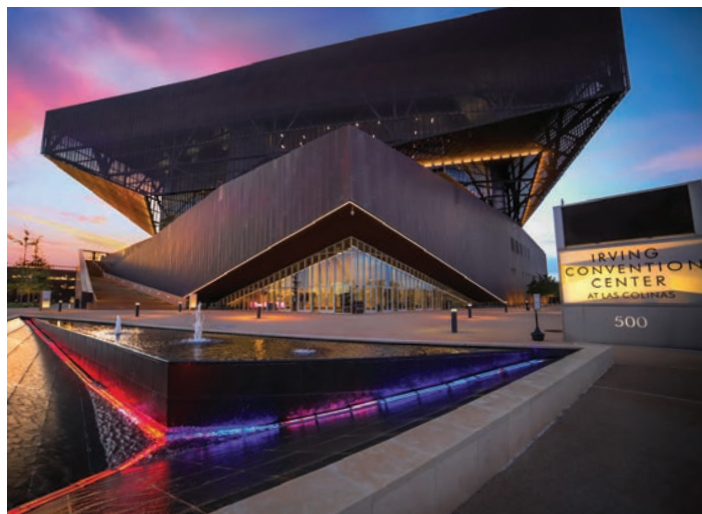
"I mean a chest scam," he continued.

"A scam!"

"Stupid phone," I chimed in, feeling his frustration.

Steve, a writer himself, texted once more, "Oh man! Auto-correct is my worst enema!"

"My worst 'enema,' too," I agreed, glad he still has his sense of humor.



Of course, the subject was COVID, which is probably considered by all to be our "worst enema," or our worst enemy, since at least 1918 anyway. None of us want to see anything like it again as long as we live, and hopefully we won't. But now we have to get back to living.

I think by the time you are reading this in print, for most parts of the country things will be slowly becoming, if not normal, at least normal-ish. And here in Texas, the land of "neanderthal thinking," we will very likely be ahead of that timeline, and you'll hear no complaining from me.

When this thing took hold of the U.S. back in March of 2020, I was attending

THE NBM SHOW (now GRAPHICS PRO EXPO) in Irving, Texas, and had an enjoyable day seeing the exhibits, talking to suppliers and manufacturers, and enjoying dinner with Bob Wieber, my old friend and CEO of NBM. That spring evening, we walked all over Las Colinas into the night.

But, when Bob settled into his hotel room, unknown to me, a call came from county authorities with instructions to shut the trade show down immediately, right that very minute, and the next day at the show never came. I was on the drive back to my shop in Longview, Texas before I learned there was nothing going on to have stayed for anyway.

Well, the first GPX trade show after the COVID shutdowns is going to be back in Irving, Texas, May 13-15. I intend to be there with bells and whistles. It will be a great step toward living normally, a step toward growing our businesses again, and a time to become an optimist once more. And it will be fun.

Hope to see you there, and I hope you have a great month. Let's all pray that "normal" will soon be here to stay. I bet we'll appreciate it this time.

Rick

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BY
STEPHEN L. CAPPER,
CRM



Running a Home Business, These Days

It has been said many times, “It isn’t where you start but how you end!” But these days, we might end up where we started. Many of us in the graphics business started from our homes and because of the global outbreak of COVID-19, both large and small companies have many employees again working from home.

In this article, we look at issues that are favorable but sometimes challenging when working from home and knowing the right time for us to move out of the house and (back) into a dedicated facility.

BUSINESS IS DIFFERENT

In the past, a great deal of business volume was conducted in the showroom, but business is changing. Today’s graphics business is being conducted more and more online. It is not unusual to sell large orders over the internet without ever seeing the client face to face.



**FIND SOME HELPFUL TIPS AND POINTERS WHEN DEALING
WITH THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING FROM HOME:**

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Business is different and the showroom of yesterday is not nearly as important to most stores. Thus, you can conduct business from your home; however, you will need room to store your inventory and to do the manufacturing and distribution. As a result, you might have to move to a larger facility or build on where you are.

I started in business at an early age of 12 on the front porch of my parents' home. The small business grew into the basement, then slowly took over space in several other areas of the home including the dining room table and front room. I am sure there are many of you reading this article that have had or are experiencing many of these same growing pains.

You will come to a day when you need to make the decision to move, grow where you are, or make other changes. That decision can change not only your business, but your life. This is a major decision that can propel you or be a yoke on your efforts to succeed. It is a crucial decision.

If you do not move, you may wonder if you might have missed something. On the other hand, if you had the major expenses of a facility other than your home during the COVID-19 shutdown, you could have been in real trouble; there are several ways to look at the issue. My point is, think before you obligate yourself just to impress others.

CRUCIAL THINGS TO CONSIDER

Wherever you live, where your business is, there will be several things to give serious consideration to. Here are a few things to think about:

- If you stay in your home/where you are, will you accomplish your goal(s)?
- Do you have a goal(s) and is it written down (it might change)?
- If you move, can you afford it? Or will the move make such a boost in your income that it will take care of itself?
- Are there others to consider that will be affected by your decision?
- What do you need to accomplish to grow, if you want to grow?

- Is this the best time to change, or if you do not, will it present other concerns?

These are just a few of the questions you need to ask yourself before doing anything. My situation was much different than most of you—my overhead was very low. My major concern was getting people to trust me to do their work.

My solution was, since there was no internet, to sell by phone. People didn't realize my age so instead paid attention to my knowledge of the recognition industry. I targeted a special section of business that I had grown up with and understood their needs. I created a unique line of product to offer my clients.

When it was time to grow, I tried several

things that did not work, but I focused on filling an unfilled need of my clients. It worked, and eventually I had the same problem you might be experiencing. I was growing and I knew I had to have more space and wanted to be more professional.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

These are just some points to consider when going back to the office/making the leap from a home-based business:

- If I stay where I am, will the zoning support my business activities?
- Whatever I decide, can the business afford it?
- Will I be able to grow and accomplish my goals?
- Will the extra expenses and overhead handicap me?

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PRO TIP: To keep your business and personal expenses to a minimum or at least a number that is completely manageable to you, remember that you have no one to impress but yourself... keep focused on your original personal goal(s). Those that had their expenses simple and controllable were able to deal with 2020 while others were stressed to the limit.

Keep in mind that the business climate has changed over the last years. Today, business is largely done without our customers meeting us face to face, so your need for a showroom or traditional business look is not as important to the client. However, you may need to improve your procedures with offices, warehouse, and distribution improvements.

There is nothing wrong with working from your home, but when you make the decision to advance to the next stage, if you are ready and determined to put in the time and energy, your business, your work, and your income might increase. Be ready!

Large and small businesses are now both running from home, either full time, part time, or some sort of hybrid. And many are considering going back to the office at the time of writing.

We have eight grandsons, three of whom are members of our team. And I must admit that those working at A-1 are taking us on a journey to the next level and their ideas are leading the charge.

We have two grandsons who work for Fortune 500 companies. Both are currently working from home every day and doing well.

The point of this information is that major companies now have employees

who are earning major incomes working from home. It is amazing to me how dedicated these two are to their jobs. Each of us can work from home and succeed with our business, but it takes dedication, focus, and complete commitment to the prize at the end.

This practice of working from home appears to be the way in which the future will be shaped for many in the corporate world. So, working from home is not a negative, but can be a productive and accepted routine business procedure. Just remember you have chosen a job that allows you the opportunity to run your business the way it works for you. You set the rules and you pay the bills—there is no right or wrong way.

If you sell over the internet, you might want to have your office in your home with the skillful use of your phone system and computer. You can then have a production or distribution center at a second location. This would allow you to keep your expenses under control. There is a slight concern here that you are not with your help all the time. There is the other avenue to travel where you work with a manufacturer who can manufacture for you and drop ship the order directly to the client under your label.

PROS AND CONS OF WORKING FROM HOME

First, a couple benefits:

1. *Conveniences:* When you are home, you get up and start working. No extra clothes, maybe you do not even comb your hair and keep on your house slippers ... no one is looking. They just want results.
2. *Expenses:* We have already mentioned the no extra clothes cost, but in addition there are no auto or travel expenses. And when it comes to your house, you already pay the utilities and overhead. If you have a dedicated area of the home for your business, you have a legitimate tax deduction. Of course, if you are working from home, you might need to travel to the client on occasion (this is when the showroom might have worked for you).

How do you measure the benefits from having the convenience of being able to conduct business from your couch or easy chair? Having your living and business under one roof has many benefits that are hard to measure. Some people find it difficult to focus without structure, but if you are a self-starter, then it might work well for you from home.

Now, some drawbacks. When I started printing my own ribbons in 1966, I went to a man in Cincinnati, Ohio with ATF (American Type Foundry) and he repeated something that I had heard many times, but it did not ring home until that day. I was asking for type face that was narrow, tall, and fine so it would hot stamp clean. He said, "For every action there is a reaction ... you have to give up something to get something!" There are drawbacks to operating your business from your home (this is only a short list):

1. You never have your own time to yourself. Customers are apt to need something anytime, day or night. Your time is not your own.
2. Your house will probably be in disarray.
3. Your zoning might become a problem, especially if you grow and semitrucks start delivering to a residential neighborhood.
4. When you get a tight delivery with an order, you may ask your family to help. If they have something planned, you are in trouble.
5. Hired employees might find their home to be a difficult working environment.
6. Tax deductions might be more contentious and questioned.

The major factors when making the decision to move out of the home:

- Space.
- Volume of dependable business (perhaps a contract).
- Family support.
- How much will this take from your profit?
- What is the actual cost counting all expenses?
- Will you need additional equipment?
- What is the cost of preparation of this new venture?
- How long can you survive without any business?
- How much of a commitment, i.e., length of lease?

- Is the building a good investment you could lease later?
- Are you in this full time or part time?
- Any partners to consider?
- What are your long-term plans and commitments?
- What is your clearly defined goal(s) (in writing)?
- What is your knee-jerk feeling—does it feel right for you?

In this article, we examined several elements of working from your home. There is no one to tell you what is right for you—only you will know what the right fit is. Never feel at a disadvantage either way, just stay in the lane you can manage until the time comes.

Many people over the years have grown

too quickly before they could afford it or before they had the knowledge to service a large account. It is important to know what your personal guidelines are for you. Also remember that nothing ventured, nothing gained.

If you have questions, feel free to call 317-546-9000 or e-mail me at stephen@a-1awards.com. **GP**

STEPHEN CAPPER, along with his wife, Nora, and their daughters, Jami and Toni, owns and operates A-1 Awards, Inc. in Indianapolis. He has been associated with the awards and recognition industry since 1958, and has given numerous seminars since 1979. You can contact Steve at 317-546-9000 or via email at stephen@a-1awards.com.

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END FOLD

This label has both ends folded in behind the label. They can be found on the inside neck of high-end clothing.

MITRE FOLD

The ends of this label are folded at a 45 degree angle and the two top ends are sewn. The label hangs down and gives a unique look.

WOVEN LABEL SAMPLES

Embellishment is a bit of detail, extra something, or peculiarity added to make an item more attractive. Within the apparel world, embellishments include features such as ribbons, buttons, appliqué, zippers, and adornments that can physically be attached to a garment. Hangtags could also be considered embellishments.

While the list is extensive, for usability and conciseness, I focus on the most popular embellishments in our day-to-day world of promotional apparel here at AMB3R Creative in this article. By far, our most popular embellishments are clip labels, patches, and pins.

CLIP LABELS

Clip labels are one of the most versatile embellishments in the promotional apparel realm. Clip labels are basically a small piece of fabric, woven with a logo or design, clamped around a clothing hem, and secured with stitching.

These should be marketed to customers who are looking for more than a single project, as minimum order quantities can be high, although the piece cost ends up being inexpensive. This adornment also serves across multiple industries, so these can be marketed to restaurants, churches, corporations, or streetwear brands alike.

Clip labels work on many types of garments and are a simple upsell that can be attached to a hoodie, a work polo, or a standard T. From a design perspective, the clip label is often such a subtle addition that it doesn't detract

Clip labels are basically a small piece of fabric, woven with a logo or design, clamped around a clothing hem, and secured with stitching. (All images courtesy Jeremy Picker)

from the main design while providing a hint of added value. Sleeves, bottom hems, and even pockets are ideal locations.

When producing clip labels, there are a few finer details to keep in mind:

- You'll need to decorate the garment at a production location that also offers sewing or embroidery services.
- Always ensure you have adequate production time to produce the clip labels as this is often done overseas.
- Verify the logo on the clip label is going the correct direction on both sides. We recommend drawing it out on actual scrap paper and folding it in half to get the best visual of how it will be attached, otherwise you may end up with a logo that is upside down. For a bottom hem or sleeve attachment, the top of the logo should be closest to the flat edge and flipped 180 degrees across the fold. This is especially important if you decide to print two different logos on each side for an added bit of versatility.
- Create guidelines for your decorator on how to place the clip labels on different sizes of garments.



Above: Patches get much more complex than clip labels as there are more options, techniques, borders, and backings to consider. **Left:** Screen-printed patches allow for photorealism and finer details.



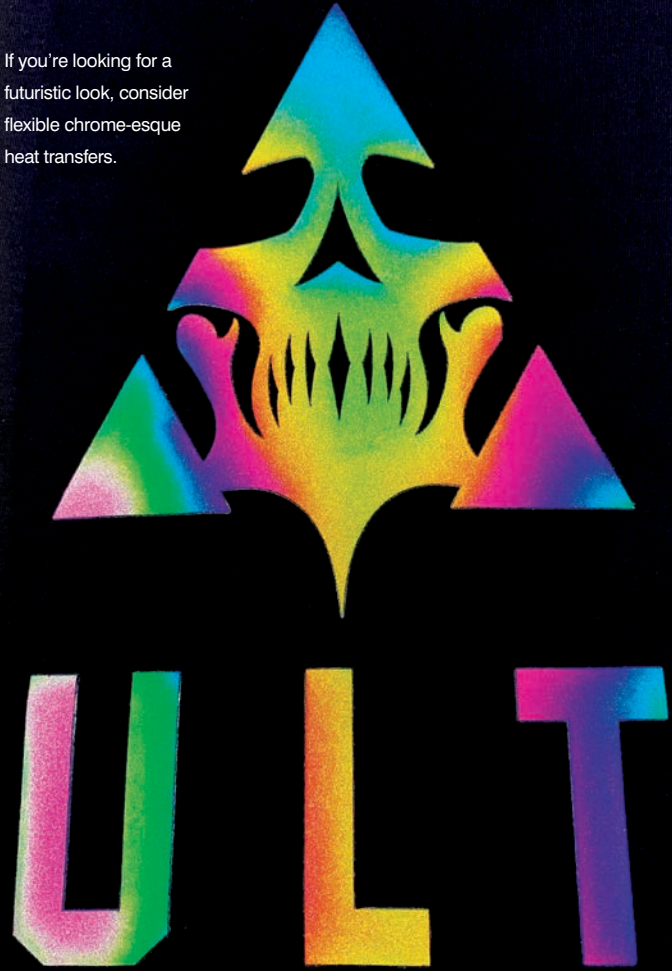
PATCHES

On a basic level, patches are an amazing asset to any customer wanting to create a cohesive merch line. Patches, when sized thoughtfully, can be used on hats, apparel, and sold as a stand-alone product, making them an attractive option.

Patches get much more complex than clip labels as there are more options, techniques, borders, and backings to consider. Each option has its own benefits and quirks.

Woven patches are great for a clean look with finer details. Full embroidered patches portray a classic or retro look. Debossed leather or polyurethane patches allow for a luxury, rustic, or hipster feel. Chenille patches are great for preppy styles, while PVC gives a sporty or street look. Sublimated or screen-printed patches allow for photorealism and finer details. If you're looking for something next level or futuristic, consider flexible chrome-esque heat transfers.

If you're looking for a futuristic look, consider flexible chrome-esque heat transfers.



When producing patches, here are a few points to consider:

- Gradient fades don't translate well with woven or embroidered patches unless your digitizer is amazing. Create spot colors for easier translation. For full embroidery, experiment by building up layers and don't skimp on stitch count. For woven, expect fewer color options but a more polished look.
- Define your patch borders and backing by their final use. I recommend iron-on backing for most patches unless you want Velcro. Iron-on backing will not work on PVC or leather. Check with your embroiderer to ensure iron-on backing will not affect their sewing machines or gum them up if you are attaching them to apparel or hats with thread.
- Double paper backing or plastic backing creates a more substantial-feeling patch.
- For stand-alone patches, full embroidery with a hot cut satin stitch border will be nice and flat for ironing. For hats, a patch with a merrow border is nice. For a vintage look, try an exposed edge on twill or canvas, and stitch 1/8" inside to allow the fabric to fray.
- For adventurous designers, do not be afraid to mix and match styles. You might try embroidery on a woven patch or felt on a PU leather patch.
- For packaging, you can use a glue dot on a backer card or place it in a bag with a stapled header card.

PINS

While pins are not often sold already attached to a garment, they are a great way for the end consumer to embellish as they please. Understanding the end user's intentions within a market is key to designing pins. For example, high-end die-struck pins for a tech conference or government service will be made with different specs than a punk rock band pin or a retail pin with a witty saying.

Some available options for pins include die-struck metal, soft enamel, hard enamel, printed, photo-domed, or just classic pin-back buttons. Most often, we opt for an enamel option as we find they are a classic, timeless option for most customers that balance perceived value and cost. You might suggest a pin for retail brands, summer camps to use for recognition, commemorative events, or simply as promotional giveaways.



Above: If you are creating a pin with enamel, think through the metal and fill type before you start designing. **Right:** Consider adding a backer card to pin designs. This is a low cost extra that elevates the brand.

When manufacturing pins, consider the following:

- If you are creating a pin with enamel, think through the metal and fill type before you start designing. Not all enamels work on all metal types. Know the look that you are trying to achieve.
- We find it helpful to imagine enamel pins like stained glass. Whatever metal type you choose, you want a thin line to separate every color. Utilize the metal as a color in the design.
- The size of the pin is important. A larger pin will require more backing posts. Smaller pins will not allow for large amounts of detail. Think about what the end user might attach it to. Will it need to be small and subtle for a lapel? Can it be large and flashy for a handbag or denim vest?
- Consider adding a second backing post if you do not want the pin/design to be able to spin when attached to apparel.
- You can change the clutch. A metal clutch has more staying power, but if it will be worn against skin, you might consider a more comfortable rubber clutch in a variety of colors. You might also opt for a jewelry style or magnetic clutch.

- Consider adding a backer card to pin designs. This is a low cost extra that elevates the brand.
- As a bonus add on, emboss or etch on the back of the pin. This can allow for a brand name, website, SKU, or pin name. You might also etch individual numbers for limited or collectible runs.

If you effectively learn when to market each particular embellishment, their benefits, and the production knowledge behind their creation, your customers—and your bottom line—will thank you. **GP**

JEREMY PICKER is the creative director and CEO at AMB3R Creative, a Colorado-based apparel design firm. He has over 20 years' experience in the fashion industry and brings a depth of knowledge in custom design, screen printing, embroidery, appliqué, finishing, and promotional products. He is a cancer survivor and a co-founder of ESTAINE, a high-end accessory line to support cancer education. You can reach him at jeremy@AMB3R.com and 303-304-9948.

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There are some staples that will forever be a part of promotional marketing and apparel accessories, such as headwear and patches. (Image courtesy AMB3R Creative)

All About Accessories

MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF DECORATED ACCESSORIES

BY CARLY HOLLMAN



In fashion, accessories complete a look. In promo marketing and decorated apparel, accessories create a well-rounded brand or offer a unique look for the wearer. In the sales and decoration of those accessories, it helps boost the bottom line. Because of these qualities, *GRAPHICS PRO* asked some of the experts what you should focus your efforts on to maximize the impact of decorated accessories.

TOP TRENDS

There are some staples that will forever be a part of promotional marketing and apparel accessories, such as headwear, koozies, and patches. And in each of these categories, trends inevitably come and go.

In baseball caps, Steve Mohr of More Sales notes a dip in the mesh styles that had a resurgence in recent years and a return to solid fabric caps.

Additionally, twills, brushed cottons,

nylon mesh, breathable moisture-wicking mesh, and chino cottons seem to be popular styles, according to Rich Soergel, Pacific Sportswear.

What's more, Mary Bakeman, SanMar, adds that she has seen a major trend of outdoor-specific headwear such as wide-brimmed and bucket hat styles that provide added sun and face protection.

A unique offering adjacent to headwear, says Mohr, is the eyeglass visor. Attaching



In baseball caps, there has been a dip in the mesh styles that had a resurgence in recent years and a return to solid fabric caps. (Image courtesy Gildan)

POPULAR COLORS TO STAND OUT IN THE ACCESSORY GAME, ACCORDING TO RICH SOERGEL, PACIFIC SPORTSWEAR:

- Bright orange
- Pinks
- Khaki
- Light blues
- Rich purples



Unique accessories like sunglass visors are great options for beach and vacation locales and provide a fun branding opportunity. (Image courtesy More Sales)

to glasses or sunglasses, the visor arches over the wearer's eyeline so as not to obstruct peripheral vision while still shading the face.

With the rise of highly customizable items that show the wearer's allegiance to their causes and interests, it's no wonder that patches have increased in popularity the last few years. Traditionally embroidered, which is still popular, Soergel says he has seen sales in wovens increase. However, for more cost-effective, modern, and time-effective options, full-color dye-sub and laser cut patches are popular as they can be heat applied to hats, bags, and more.

Classic koozies are forever a hit as promo and gift items. And while the traditional

foam styles will always be a great option, Mohr says neoprene styles, while less known, are a great alternative. "Neoprene will last longer and is durable while still being machine washable," he explains.

As with all things, trends change to reflect the times, and in such an unprecedented year, there is no doubt that the pandemic has shifted consumers' buying habits in all product categories, and accessories are no exception, says Bakeman. One of those changes, she explains, has been an influx of sales in blankets. "As the workforce has radically changed from the office to the home, people are searching for comfort and a focus on work/home balance. Blankets really fit that need," she states.

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NICHE MARKET IDEAS

With so many offerings in the accessories category, there are plenty of niche markets and marketing opportunities that can be easily overlooked. Here are just a few examples from SanMar's Susan Rye:

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS: There are plenty of eco-friendly, recycled products in our industry. Creating a story around that initiative is going to be even more important moving forward.

PET OWNERS: This has become a huge market for pet parents, especially during COVID-19. Consider matching scarves for pet and owner, or a cute felt bag to carry your pet with a heat transfer image of the pet and owner. There are so many options. ▶

LOCAL BUSINESS FUNDRAISERS: Fundraisers to support local businesses with part of your proceeds going to the designated small business can really be a win-win. Great items for these could be a decorated tote bag or hip pack.

MULTILINGUAL MARKETING: I see very little marketing collateral in our industry that is in Spanish or other languages. Connecting with audiences in their language can really make a difference.

Perhaps the biggest accessory of the year is face coverings. Traditional masks are a must for many, with the gaiter being an alternative option. (Image courtesy Pacific Sportswear)



(Image courtesy Aaron Montgomery)

And while the work force is still in flux from working at home or transitioning back and forth to the office, items to help keep people stay organized are also trending. She notes corporate style backpacks might not be top of mind, but they help keep everything organized. "Almost like a mini filing cabinet at home," Bakeman adds.

But perhaps, and most obviously, the biggest accessory of the year is face coverings. Traditional masks are a must for many, with the gaiter being an alternative option. As Mohr explains, gaiters not only allow for ease of pulling up and down as needed in public, they also serve the markets they were traditionally used for: fishing and outdoor.

DECORATION STATION

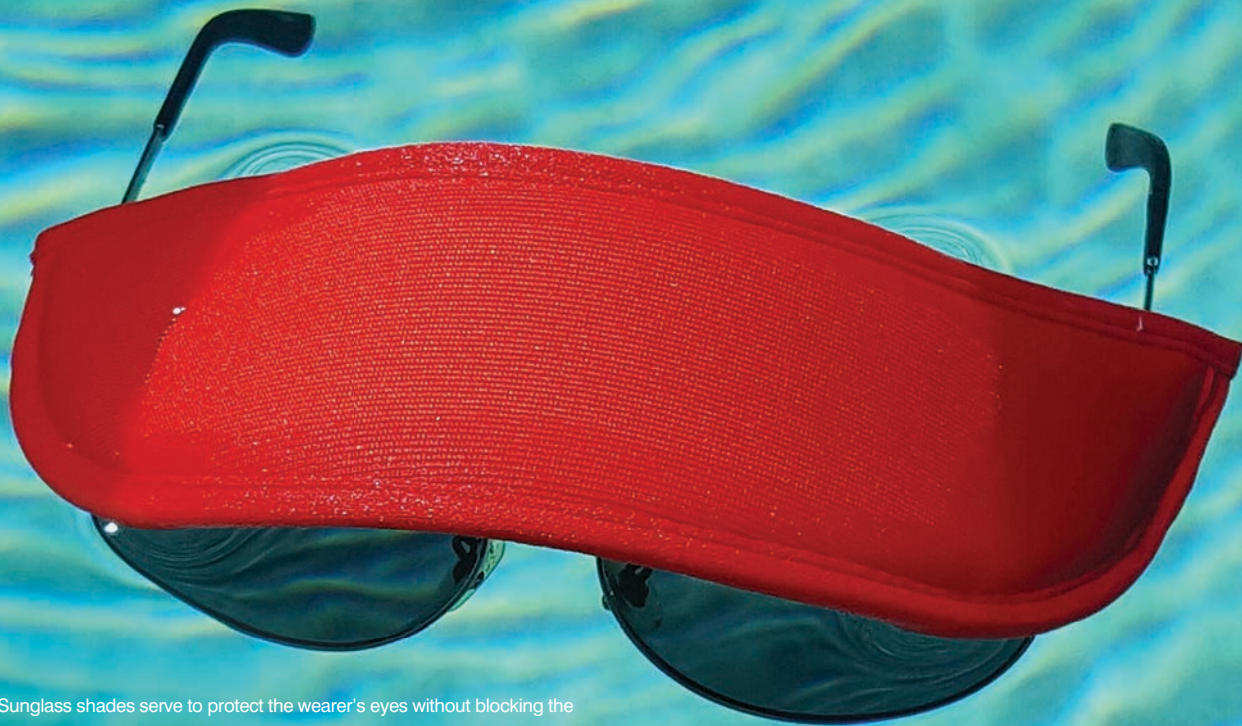
Accessories vary in so many fabrics, finishes, and uses, it's hard to pinpoint which decoration method works best. However, with all this versatility, it also opens up a variety of options to play with and offer to end users.

According to Mark Bailey, also of SanMar, screen printing, embroidery, and heat transfers are the most popular accessory finishes, with heat transfers being among the most cost effective and striking as they can easily be made in full-color. And depending on the substrate and use, 3D decorations such as studs, nail heads, and rhinestones can make for an elevated good.

Some other unique offerings, especially for the beach and resort markets, says Mohr, is airbrushing and tie dying, both of which add to the nostalgia we're seeing in retail at the moment and the carefree feel of vacation locations.

As always, it's important to consider what the product will be used for. Specifically, in the case of masks, its integrity cannot be broken. Thus, embroidery is often not the answer, unless it is decorated before assembly and another layer of fabric protection is present, says Soergel.

Decorators must also be mindful of placement with anything covering the face.



Above: Sunglass shades serve to protect the wearer's eyes without blocking the periphery view. As an added bonus they keep glasses afloat if they fall off in the water. (Image courtesy More Sales) **Below:** While the work force is still in flux from working at home or transitioning back and forth to the office, items like portfolios that help people stay organized are also trending. (Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

"You do not want to offer anything that might interfere with breathing," explains Bailey.

Regardless of the method, Soergel stresses the importance of making sure the decoration and brand stands out against the substrate's color and matches the shape, use, and purpose.

With the changing climate and shifting consumer trends, now is the perfect time to get into the accessory game to further diversify your offerings, help get your customers' brand in front of the people they're looking to engage, and encourage the end user to show their unique style. Having so many options can only help both you and them solidify placement in the community you serve and look good doing it. **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.

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JUMPING IN

PROFILE: TAMARA BOYER, THREAD ART & EVERYTHING PROMOTIONAL

Tamara Boyer, the owner/president of Thread Art & Everything Promotional, jumped into the embroidery business with both feet and has never slowed down. While working as a paralegal, she and a friend decided that they wanted to own their own business. After researching their options, which ranged from a pizza shop to an embroidery and promotional products business, they decided to open an embroidery business.

“When we went to have our business cards printed, the printer asked if we would be interested in running his new embroidery department,” Boyer says. She explained that the printer gave them the means to get the equipment they needed and a location in which to operate. That worked for about two years. Then, for a variety of reasons, they all parted ways.



In 2015, Boyer and her second husband had the opportunity to buy an existing embroidery business in a different state.

A GREAT WAY IN

Boyer went back to working for a lawyer and found that she really missed embroidery. She decided to start her own embroidery company, leveraging all that she learned while working in the other business.

“Since I started the embroidery department with the printer from the ground up, I felt so comfortable starting my own business,” she shares. “I knew all the fine details, what kind of machine to buy, where to buy supplies, garments, everything. The best thing I did was work for someone else in the embroidery world before starting out on my own. Honestly, it was a great way to get into the industry ... I had a safety net of someone else running that business.”

Eventually her husband joined her in the business,

taking on sales and customer relations. Despite the end of their marriage, Tamara and her first husband still continue to serve some of their original customers, even though the business moved to another state.

In 2015, Boyer and her second husband had the opportunity to buy an existing embroidery business in yet another state. The owners wanted to retire and leave the business in good hands. The Boyers inherited their customers and some employees as part of the agreement. “Because they were heading into retirement, the business had been in a kind of ‘winding down’ phase,” Boyer explains. “Since we took over, we’ve been able to build it up into a pretty successful venture.”

She shares that buying an established business does come with challenges. One of the biggest challenges they had to overcome almost immediately was restructuring the pricing. The existing customers had not seen a single price increase in years, if ever. “There were many difficult conversations with existing



Tamara Boyer, owner/president of Thread Art & Everything Promotional, jumped into the embroidery business with both feet and never slowed down. (All images courtesy Tamara Boyer)

customers, and we lost some business with the updated pricing,” Boyer says. “Much of the clientele has changed since we took over in 2015.”

Their second biggest challenge came in the form of the employees that stayed with the business. “Few things are more challenging and frustrating than running up against, ‘That’s not how we did it before ...’ day after day, week after week,” according to Boyer. Eventually, their staffing needs evolved, and they were able to get things running smoothly.

VALUE OF VARIETY

The business currently has three six-head and two single-head machines. They also have a vinyl cutter, sublimation printer, white toner printer, two heat presses, two cap presses, and a mug press. A lot of their work is contract work, but they are gaining more and more retail customers.

Boyer states that each year, they try to add a new piece of equipment to expand their offerings to customers. “I went to (a show) and decided to buy a heat press. I wanted to be able to do some type of

printing for customers that asked for it,” she expands. “We bought it at the show and took it home. The very next day, one of our customers asked about putting embroidery on the left chest of polos with a large printed number 7 on the back. It paid for itself quickly, and is useful for embroidery for flattening logos, appliqué, etc.”

I asked Boyer how she sees the industry changing and evolving. “Customers want a lot of options and they want them now,” she states. “We call it the Amazon



One of the challenges Boyer faced when purchasing the business was restructuring the pricing.

STITCH SOLUTIONS



Above and right: Boyer believes that working in the industry is incredibly satisfying, largely due to some of the unique orders and customer interactions.

Below: When asked what the best business advice she's received is, Boyer says, "It is OK to say no!"



effect. Patches and appliqué are really becoming popular." She also notes changes in equipment. "There's a lot of high-tech things out there for really high-end products, like the laser appliqué cutters right on the machines. Pretty cool, but very pricey and probably not right for us right now."

As far as advice for anyone thinking about getting into this industry, she recommends, "Work for another embroidery company first if possible. Learn all you can about the embroidery machine before jumping into digitizing. There are good digitizers out there—find them and stick with



them. Do not go for the cheapest one just because they call.

“If you don’t have a great file to start with it, it doesn’t matter what kind of machine you have or even how you hooped it, you won’t get good embroidery.” She also recommends that, “Every business owner should get an accountant! And don’t be afraid to ask for help—there’s a lot out there, from NNEP to Joyce Jaeger, etc.”

Boyer believes that working in this industry can be very satisfying. “A lot of the time, the most satisfying jobs are the ones that don’t make much money. We’ve had a person wanting embroidery on an item, but right away. We had a really full schedule. After talking, it was for a dying

relative, without much time. We dropped everything and did it.”

One of Boyer’s biggest pet peeves in the industry is when a customer does not respect her time, like demanding that a job be done quickly, then not picking it up by the tight deadline. Another peeve is what she describes as tape gun overuse. And finally, she mourns the loss of the common courtesies of saying please and thank you.

How she handles stress or gets unstuck? “Sometimes you just have to walk away for a little while—have a cup of tea, turn on a diffuser, clean the house, go do something else, outside the business.” The best business advice she’s ever received? “It is OK to say no!”

The Boyers took a big risk by initially buying the business with employees, and it has paid off. Once they “cleaned house” by updating their prices and getting the staff sorted out, the business took off. Boyer happily says, “I never thought I would ever have sales this high!” **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.



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Print designs can be combined with embroidery to create stunning multimedia looks; this piece is more complicated than most, consisting of a quilted screen-printed base and 3D embroidered appliqué elements, but a simple printed appliqué or direct print combined with embroidery can create a striking contrast in textures. (Image courtesy Erich Campbell)

Fashion-Forward Treatments



UNIQUE EMBROIDERY IDEAS TO PRODUCE APPEALING APPAREL

BY ERICH CAMPBELL



he sport shirt, button down, or jacket with a left-chest logo, the cap with logo front and text over the arch, knit hats with front-and-center logos exactly the same as the cap for the same customer ... Standard garment and decoration combinations like these have been the staples of garment decoration for decades, and all usually feature line-for-line reproductions of the customer's stock logo, arranged in the same way that the website, advertising, and letterhead for the company in question always has been, as much as the stitches allow.

While there's a great deal to be said for representing one's branding accurately, more and more companies think of their decorated apparel and accessories less like the uniforms of the past and more like branded merch, more akin to a streetwear line. As such, embroiderers and other decorators are more consistently called to create something unique that employees will proudly don, which reflects corporate culture and has a livelier approach than



Top: The addition of a simple rip-away appliqué can create amazing visual interest on its own, but the ability to sublimate white glitter flake material with a full-color image makes for a stunning way to include print in an embroidered piece with reasonably low overhead. **Above:** Even a simple monogram can be vastly altered through thread choice. Tonal coloring creates a subdued look, while metallics garner shine, and a variegated “zebra” thread creates cacophonous stripes, all without a single change to the file. (Images courtesy Erich Campbell)

reproducing the logo from the company newsletter.

With customers looking for more stylish decorations, what can we do as decorators to make our offerings look appealing when buyers are awash in options? Luckily, the equipment and software we use as well as the providers with whom we subcontract for specialties are readily tuned to more fashion-forward treatments that can give any logowear more impressive visual impact.

BREAKING THE STANDARDS

Decorated apparel can look staid and stolid largely because most decorators stick to the standards, and there's nothing necessarily wrong with that. It's easy to stick with garments that perform predictably; threads of the same content, sheen, and thickness; and processes that are comfortably achievable.

Though these standards can create greater efficiency, they can result in largely similar outcomes in the decoration unless we stretch a little creative muscle in our execution. The great thing is that it often only takes a small deviation to greatly alter the



Loosely inspired by the bold "DEN" type, this retro treatment was created using spun-polyester thread to give a fuzzier texture as well as a wash-away topper that lifted the stitches above the substrate for a looser, loftier appearance. Not all decorated apparel made for a company or brand needs to directly reproduce the immediate logotype to be valuable, depending on the intended use and audience. (Image courtesy AMB3R Creative)

look of any given decoration. By addressing a combination of the following standards, we can vary the look of our finished work, even before we alter the original art.

The lowest hanging fruit is to swap in an exciting garment or accessory, but to me, it's the most basic attempt at producing interesting apparel. The best approaches to interesting, non-standard decoration with pieces that have their own unique

appeal is with coordinating decorations.

The garment is the foundation for all decoration, but slapping the usual stock-standard decoration on a cool garment isn't enough to produce that retail-styled look, though it's a start. Think beyond the garment as the canvas—create with your embroidery itself, from small-run patches, to key tags and stitched-on patch pockets.



The commodity woven labels we have taken for granted and even eschewed as sizing and neck tags can be utilized to create brand-supporting decorations like these. Coordinating elements akin to these drawstring covers can unify a brand and make an otherwise less remarkable garment feel like a custom, made-to-order piece without the effort or expense of having fully custom pieces made. (Image courtesy Erich Campbell)

MATERIALS MATTER

The standard 40-weight polyester thread is far from the only option when it comes to stitching designs. Even before we address alteration of the design itself, swapping out from the standard, high-sheen polyester can greatly change the character of an embroidery. Everything from matte-finish threads with the standard thickness, thicker and thinner threads that require some alteration of density and stitch length to use, or threads with different fiber content, to fuzzy sheen, twisted variegated, ombre color treatments, or even metallics can change the character of your design.

Add to that the world of texture and tone you can achieve by adding appliqué, from PU leathers, to felt, to faux fur, to the retro class of tackle-twill, and it's easy to see how small alterations in the materials we use can make a major difference.

Appliqué may be seen as the classic addition to embroidery, but so much more can be brought to the table to refresh our decoration. From taking a note from retro stylings to applied emblems and the addition of woven decorations, labels, and tabs, to sublimation on polyester panels or even over polyester embroidery, it takes little more than a heat press and purchased transfers to add anything from dimensional molded badges, cut vinyl and plastisol prints, to placed rhinestones, studs, or foil. The textural contrast and variation can make the dimensional nature of embroidery even more impressive.

PUSH THE ENVELOPE WITH PLACEMENT

While some of us have never deviated from those prescribed chest, sleeve, yoke, and cap crown areas, others find that anywhere you can reasonably hoop, adhere, or otherwise clamp, and through which a needle will travel can be a canvas for embroidery. From early experimentation with hip placements and hems, I've found that though decoration is always meant to be seen, the subtle details of a coordinating decoration in an unexpected spot can take a piece from standard to stunning.



Two caps with identical embroidery couldn't look more different. The application of a sublimation print over white polyester thread on 3D foam makes for bold patterns and colors on this piece. (Image courtesy Tom Farr, Buzzard's Bay Embroidery)

These non-standard placements have a way of drawing the eye and provide additional opportunities to reinforce branding. Look to hoods, cuffs, the added patch pockets, drawstrings, zipper pulls, taping, and tags for places where you can make your mark and add to the overall allure of a garment.

INNOVATIVE INTERPRETATION

To create something truly unique, look at all of the previous categories for points of differentiation from the norm as a palette from which to create. Choose garments that fit the style and culture the customer wants to evoke, potential design placements that suit the garment, and create the feeling of a unified and thoughtful system of branding.

With that ground laid, turn to the customer's art assets and look to make a cohesive vision that brings in various inspirations. Look at popular clothing lines that evoke a similar feeling to that which the customer is looking to create, styles of art and design that appeal to the customer's sensibilities, and the wide range of materials and decoration options we have at our disposal. With these stylistic cues in mind

and other art assets in hand, we can blend the influences to come up with something interesting and new.

Rather than slavishly reproduce the slickly designed vector art that comes from a corporate style guide, distress the art and apply it to rough-cut multi-layer appliqué that evokes a worn vintage collegiate style. Replace a multicolor logo with a single-color rendition in reflective thread or on a reflective panel to add functionality that complements a smooth techwear-inspired garment. Create or recreate art that coordinates with the customer's look but brings in cues like thick-lined high-color art from the '60s and '70s, rendering it in spun-polyester thread to create a softer, fuzzy finish that complements the classic styling.

Render logos in stitch types that seem handmade, from simple treatments like multi-pass or whip stitch satins applied to otherwise standard lettering, to entirely recreating logos from stitches that stem from crewelwork or cross stitch. We can highlight a single brand element, the bust of a character or mascot, or even create custom letters that refer back to the

continued on page 94



DUMBING IT DOWN A LITTLE ... OR NOT!

A SIMPLE SCREEN-PRINT PROJECT

In last month's column, we shared a pretty complicated piece that took weeks to create and separate, not to mention the prepress involved with up to 15 screens, raster/vector components, split whites, split blacks, special effects, and more.

My last two articles had a cold theme, what with a white walker and a chameleon sitting on an ice block. It's about timing. We jumped the gun apparently,

twice. This was a time to bring it down a notch or 12. A 15-color is not all that practical for most of us, so we thought we would share a little more common and simple project we just completed recently.

SPORTY DESIGN

Hopefully, as we emerge from the pandemic, spring and summer sports begin to look a little more like they did in years

past. Soccer has been a favorite since the ancient Greeks. It is one of the world's most popular sports. FIFA organizes the World Cup tournament every four years, featuring qualifying champions from countries all around the globe. Likely, most of these athletes were involved in high school and/or club sports in their amateur years.

With kids and coaches on our own team involved in the sport for decades,



The Lutheran High School (LuHi) girls soccer team chose some super slick Nike black poly garments with an interesting vertical striped pattern. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)

we do our fair share of athletic apparel. Team identities and spirit apparel may be as necessary as the ball itself at all levels. School name, sport, colors, and the mascot brand the team, its history, and represent the student athlete's team pride.

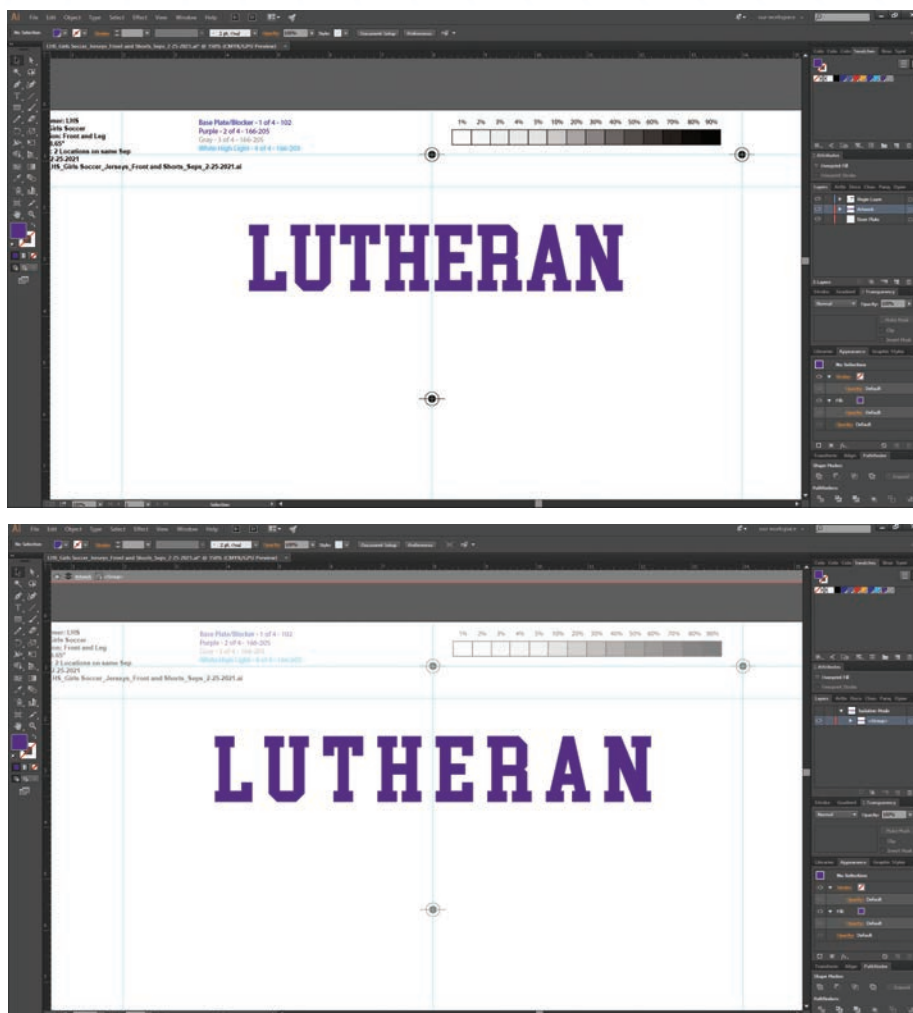
We like simplicity for youth athletic apparel, particularly for uniforms. The Lutheran High School (LuHi) girls soccer team was looking for something clean with a little flair. We stayed basic, but kicked it up a bit. See what we did there?

The color pallet for LuHi is purple, black, and white. They chose some super slick Nike black poly garments with an interesting vertical striped pattern. We set up a simple, clean three-color design. After selecting the type tool, we typed in LUTHERAN then created outlines. By ungrouping the objects, we spread the letters out manually for a better layout.

We copied and pasted in back to create a clean, athletic type solution. It did just the trick for our girls.

The lion is their mascot, and we added it above the type on the right. Then we duped and flipped him to the center for the shorts. A two-color matching number completed the design with satisfactory approval from our customer.

We mustn't forget the white printer or base plate since this was going on black garments. We needed a full base to keep the whites bright. We would use this as our bleed blocker as well. We added an overall half point choke to them both as well as quarter point gutters between the purple and white for them to stay nice and clean on press. Once LuHi approved our digital mock-up, we proceeded to the rest of prepress output from Illustrator on CTS.



We set up a simple, clean three-color design.

PERFORMANCE PRINTING

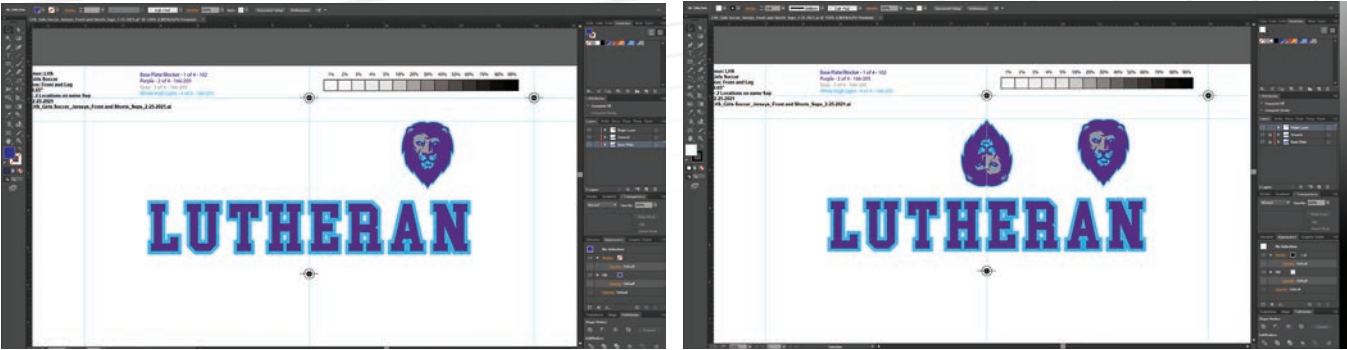
The garments were polyester performance fabric, so we used lower cure inks designed to cure in the 270 F range, keeping the poly at lower temperatures in hopes that the dyes in the fabric would not release to minimize bleed.

First, we printed the black carbon bleed blocker on an 83/70 (83 TPI with a 70u thread). After flashing and smoothing, making sure not to exceed the gel temp

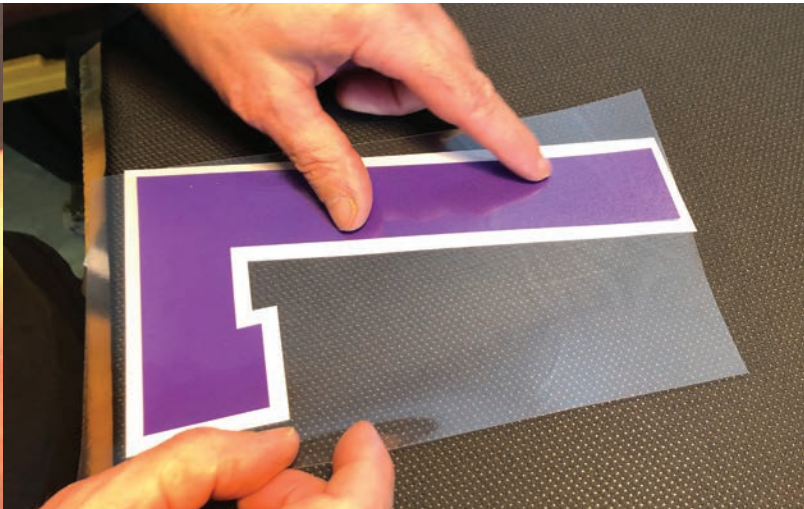
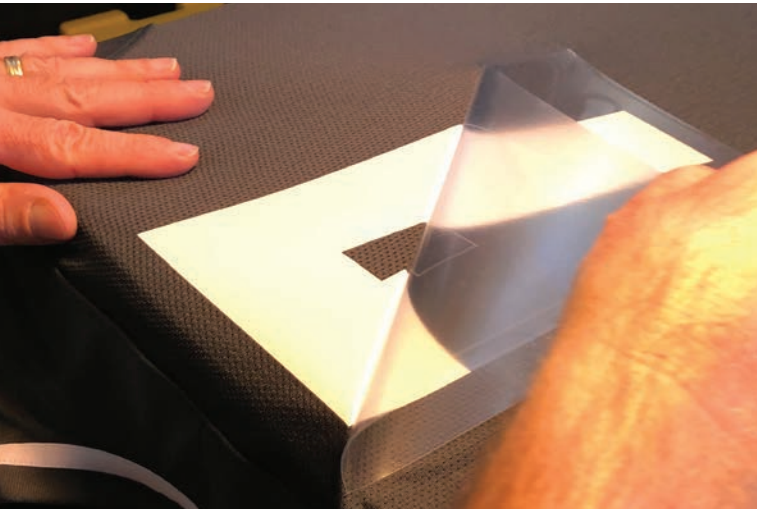
on press, we printed the white printer on a 156 followed by another flash and cool. The purple printed directly on the blocker as it was a violet and didn't really need the help of the white printer using a 230. After another flash, we finally printed LC white on another 156.

All the screens were quality dyed mesh stretched on retensionable frames and stabilized at 30 N/cm². Setup was fairly simple using our preregistration system. After

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



Above: We added the lion mascot above the type on the right. Then we duped and flipped him to the center for the shorts. **Below:** After the screen printing was complete, we added the two-color transfer numbers.



We used our lasers to line the lion logo up exactly in the same location as the swoosh on the other side.

just a small micro adjustment, we were good to go. Squeegees were all sharpened triple-ply dual durometer 65/90/65s at a medium pace and a 10-degree angle. We used our lasers to line the lion logo up exactly in the same location as the swoosh on the other side.

Simple and ready to rock. Not so fast—that purple ate us up. We have done plenty of work for LuHi athletic teams over at least two decades, and we know what purple we always use, right? We put in two different purple inks and pulled them right back out. Maybe we should have checked the specs, right?

After 10 minutes of searching and finding the reference, it was missing the purple info. Perfect! We cleaned squeegees, floods, and the screen twice before we got it right. The first purple was too red,

the second too blue, and the third was just right, a 50/50 blend. Apparently, this was our first rodeo. At least we were clever enough to set the shorts up on the same screens and were able to tape off the jersey design and print them just changing platens.

For these polyester garments, we set our dryer belt speed to have a full minute in the chamber and reach a temperature at 270-280 F for at least 10 seconds. At the end of the dryer, we set up fans to help cool; we cold stacked side by side, trying not to stack the hottest shirts on top of each other. All this in an attempt to keep the poly as cool as possible.

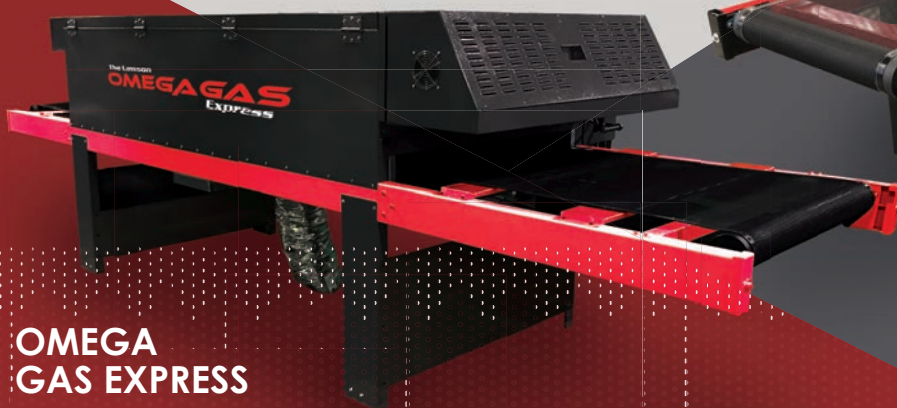
After the screen printing was complete, we added the two-color transfer numbers. We don't do numbers all that often but switched years ago to transfers,

particularly for two-color versions. We just can't screen print them efficiently in our setup. Of course, this added to our ink color matching challenge as well. Based on this story, it doesn't sound like we do much efficiently. Sometimes simple becomes complicated. Another lesson learned! Specs updated, we assure you. **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.

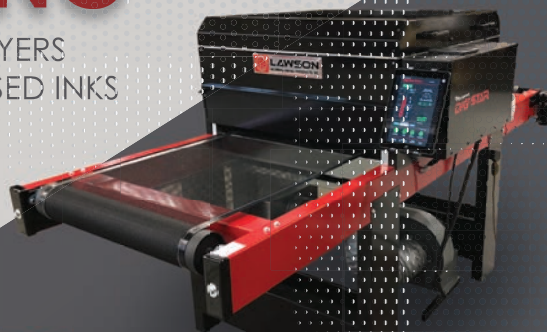
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www.sportsmancaps.com

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www.royalapparel.net



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Kati Sportcap & Bag offers patch solutions, including embroidered, woven, sublimated, and leather patches. A common border seen on embroidered patches is the over-edge stitch or merrowed edge. To add a finished edge, a laser cut can be added to patches.
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AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



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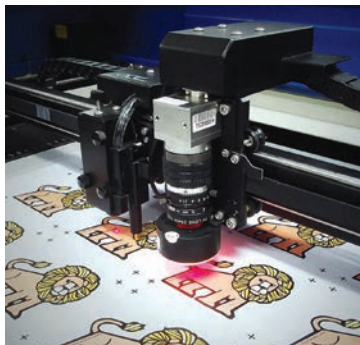
www.jpplus.com

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM

GCC LaserPro offers SmartVISION Pro CCD module for the S400 and Spirit series, an artificial intelligence system that learns and memorizes any type of printed graphics and recognizes them as registration marks before searching mark locations to perform contour cutting for printouts.

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www.rolanddga.com



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Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions offers Avery Dennison Supreme Defense Gloss, a gloss clear paint protection film that provides protection from outdoor weathering conditions while enhancing the vehicle's finish and helping to maintain its resale value, states the company. Supreme Defense Gloss repels water and dirt and has self-healing capability.

www.averydennison.com



ROLL-TO-ROLL SIGNAGE PRINTERS

Epson offers its 64" Epson SureColor R5070 and R5070L. They feature multi-purpose resin ink. The 64" SureColor R5070 and SureColor R5070L roll-to-roll signage printers with water-based resin ink are

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www.duetsbygemini.com

GP

Floor graphics face a unique challenge of needing to apply easily, stand up to significant abuse while protecting the image, and remove easily when it's time to change out the decal. (Image courtesy General Formulations)

Short and Sweet

HOW A PRINT SHOP CAN LEVERAGE
SHORT-TERM GRAPHICS

BY JULIA SCHROEDER

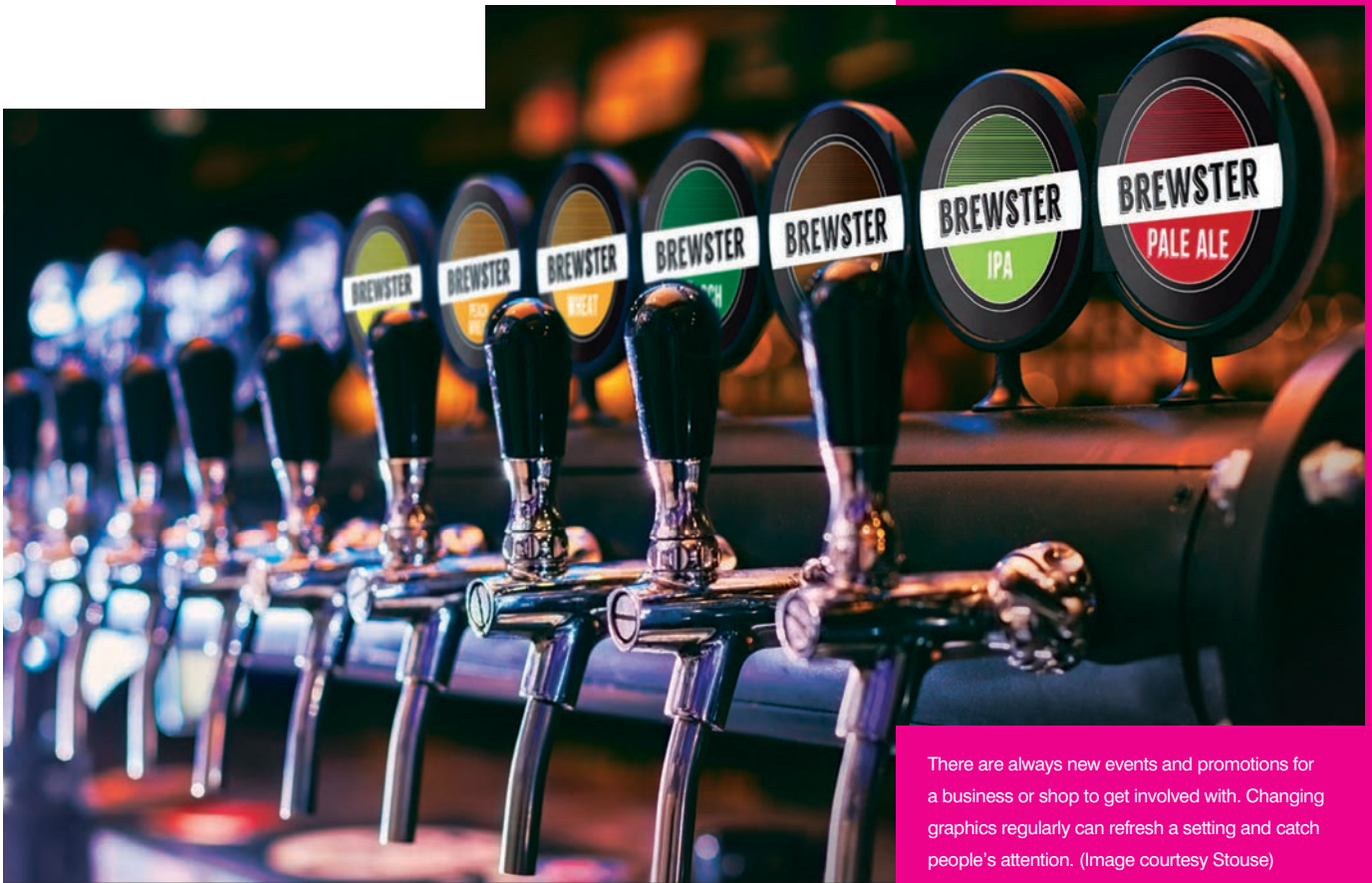


W

ith the help of short-term graphics, companies have more ways to communicate time-sensitive information than ever before. Short-term graphics have sprung up in almost every facet of public space, with an extra increase in the past year. Though the pandemic heightened the need for temporary wayfinding and advertising, short-term graphics can be used to communicate messages well beyond the circumstances that call for it now.

THE SHORT VIEW

"In the beginning, no one really knew how long this pandemic would last so there was a huge demand for short-term graphics in places such as grocery stores, home improvement stores, and places of worship," says Shaun Jaycox, S-One. When the pandemic hit and subsequent shutdowns went into effect, people needed something that would stay in place for up to three months, but cheap enough to be thrown out after that time.



There are always new events and promotions for a business or shop to get involved with. Changing graphics regularly can refresh a setting and catch people's attention. (Image courtesy Stouse)

Typically, short-term graphics are inexpensive and can fit almost anyone's budget, Jaycox explains. This means they can be replaced with new graphics at a lower price than your typical medium- to long-term options.

Along with supporting the pandemic's temporary demands, short-term graphics are often used in relation to events, wayfinding, and advertisements. They typically fall into the categories of informational, decorative, or promotional signage, and can be found on a range of surfaces, explains Jay Kroll, General Formulations.

Some of the many options include vehicle wraps, exterior and interior signage, magnets, vinyl decals, canvas prints, roll labels, yard signs, and banners. "They represent a broad category of materials that need to apply easily, stay put, look great, and remove cleanly and easily when the job is done," Kroll says. "With the use of short-term graphics, a city can be transformed to host an international event with anything from floor decals at the airport to fully wrapped stadiums."

Short-term graphics can be seen as decal-covered city buses, wall graphics that transform hotel lobbies, and dressed up dining areas in restaurants with event-specific artwork. The ease of use and clean removal of short-term graphics, Kroll mentions, lends flexibility to print providers and business owners to treat every surface as a canvas for communicating a message.

"In the pandemic landscape, it has been critical for businesses to be able to communicate with customers regarding the constant change in requirements, or expectations for safety and social distancing, in addition to establishing guidelines for how to go about doing business," states Kroll. "That level of customization and speed of response is best served with short-term removable

*** A NOTE ON MATERIALS NEEDED:** Adhesive vinyl is one of the most used materials for short-term graphics, at least during the pandemic due to the need for floor graphics, Shaun Jaycox, S-One, poses. Typically, those are printed with latex, solvent/eco-solvent, and UV-curable printers. Besides printing equipment, other items a shop needs to expand short-term graphics include a grommet machine and banner welder to make hems and pockets in a banner, and laminate.



Heavier material should always be used for outdoor use, along with good finishing techniques. (Image courtesy Leister)



Some of the many options for short-term graphics include vehicle wraps, exterior and interior signage, magnets, vinyl decals, and more. (Image courtesy Stouse)

graphics, and those graphics need to meet the print and quality standards of a long-term solution.”

Short-term graphics have been used in several different aspects of the pandemic, from outdoor banners to notify customers that a business is open to what services it may currently offer.

“Additionally, we are seeing more graphics being used to help with social distancing inside certain establishments,”

says Ken Huber, Leister. “One of the largest growing types of graphic would be floor graphics. They are everywhere, showing people how to queue up, which direction to walk, and so on.”

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FLOOR GRAPHICS

Floor graphics face a unique challenge of needing to apply easily, stand up to significant abuse while protecting the image,



(Image courtesy Stouse)

MARKETS IN NEED OF SHORT-TERM GRAPHICS

JENNIFER HOYT, STOUSE

- Restaurants
- Healthcare
- Real estate
- Point of purchase/retail
- Adult beverages (wineries/ breweries)
- Automotive
- Food productions
- Outdoor sports
- Political groups
- Schools
- Service industries
- Events

CUSTOMIZING SHORT-TERM GRAPHICS

JAY KROLL, GENERAL FORMULATIONS

Fortunately for shop owners, the range of materials available allow for boundary-free dreaming when it comes to design. For example, floor graphics can be customized to match the customer’s brand and color schemes, or temporary wall murals can incorporate funky colors and tailor a space to a specific product, idea, or strategy. The print community has some of the most creative and resourceful individuals I’ve met, and we’ve worked hard to make sure they have the media resources they need to realize their vision.



(Image courtesy General Formulations)

and remove easily when it’s time to change out the decal. Surface preparation is key, both for application and removal of the graphic.

“There will always be factors that are beyond (the installer’s) control, like a broken shopping cart wheel that scrapes and damages a floor graphic,” says Kroll. “But they should think through the project with installation and removal in full consideration, including the environmental conditions and any special equipment needed.”

Kroll recommends that shops should ask their distributor specifically for floor-approved base films and laminates that include all of the



Short-term graphics have been used in several different aspects of the pandemic, from outdoor banners to notify customers that a business is open to safety/health-related reminders. (Images courtesy General Formulations)

necessary non-slip certifications required in public spaces.

APPLICATION ADJUSTMENTS

Whether you would like to provide floor graphics, magnets, or wall art, there are specific considerations to keep in mind. “Depending on the application, it’s important to know the product’s limitations,” says Jaycox. Examples of this include slip resistance, clean removability, durability, and cost.

“Just as we consider the surface and size, our thinking on a project needs to go beyond ‘will it stick.’ For instance, multi-purpose removable adhesives that can be both high-tack and removable (HTR) provide a solution for wood, metal, concrete, and more,” Kroll states. “You wouldn’t use a low-tack removable in these instances, but those are valuable real estate for short-term graphics.”

According to Kroll, adhesives have come a long way from the binary low-tack removable and permanent, but there is still a

need for application-specific solutions and consideration for what you ultimately want the graphic to do.

Huber explains it is also important to be aware of the environment that the graphic will be in each day—outdoors or indoors, weather conditions (including humidity), potential for physical damage or abrasion due to location, and more.

When looking at outdoor versus indoor use, the finishing is a key part of the process, but the most important factor is the material being used, according to Huber. Heavier material should always be used for outdoor use, along with good finishing techniques. In addition, it’s important to hem the edges of a banner and grommet when necessary.

CHANGES IN CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

Even when there’s no pandemic, there are always new events and promotions for a business or shop to get involved with. “A short-term graphic is the easiest way to display a specific message,” says Huber.

Changing the graphics regularly can refresh a setting and catch people’s attention.

Since many customers have become used to looking down on the floor for where to stand and which direction to take, Jaycox suggests, “Why not include an advertisement there as well?”

As customers’ expectations and practices have changed, there’s going to be a bit of a dance as businesses find their new normal post-pandemic, Kroll predicts. “In addition to using short-term graphics to communicate sales and safety standards, I think we’ll see expansion of the idea that every surface can be a space to inspire a welcoming atmosphere and build customer loyalty as we make their experience easy and memorable.” **GP**

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



Signage: The Unforeseen Printing

The role signage plays in local communities and the technology behind it

BY MATT
McCAUSLAND



Above: The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in signage orders, from “We’re Open” banners and floor spacing for local shops, to supporting local communities with yard signage for virtual graduations, birthday celebrations, political communications, and more. (All images courtesy Matt McCausland)

Over the past year, new and unforeseen circumstances have impacted the economy and print industry. Sign shops of all sizes have had to re-evaluate business plans to keep doors open and meet new, ever-changing state and local regulations. As an industry, printing has pivoted.

Many local print shops maintained an essential business status by leveraging their technology to create personal protective equipment (PPE), while others used their equipment to create a variety of signage to support local communities. As a result, printing orders have increased for both corporate and residential signage, and print shops have proven to be an essential part of the new and changing city infrastructure.

As state and local regulations changed, it was crucial for sign shops to help local businesses with marketing and communications strategies to ensure employee and customer safety with the most up-to-date

information. Print shops were the backbone of relaying local messaging. Signage and its corresponding printing technology became imperative to keeping customers informed and local businesses top of mind.

Signage was everywhere, from branded to-go packaging items, “We’re Open” banners, and in-storage signage and floor spacing for local shops, to supporting local communities with yard signage for virtual graduations, birthday celebrations, and political communications. To complement the growing signage orders, manufacturers received a spike in incoming orders as print shops looked to increase efficiency and expand signage product offerings.

OUTDOOR SIGNAGE AND SOLVENT TECHNOLOGY

Outdoor signage has become so common that it is often part of the scenery, unconsciously absorbed and rarely discussed.



Because there is a wide variety of indoor signage currently in demand, print shops should invest in technology that specializes in output versatility.

Trend of 2020 and Early 2021

However, this year outdoor signage became a primary way of communicating.

In addition to traditional billboards and building wraps, local sign shops have seen an increase in banners being printed for brick-and-mortar stores and local restaurants, yard and street signage to represent local and national political candidates and propositions, and even neighborhood signs in lieu of traditional gatherings to celebrate graduations, birthdays, and baby showers. Signage has been a primary way of making people and local businesses feel seen, heard, and celebrated during this difficult year.

When creating outdoor signage, sign shops know that ink technology is critical. Solvent printing has become synonymous with outdoor signage due to its ability to withstand a variety of weather conditions and retain a professional and clean look without smudging. Solvent output is considered weather-resistant, durable, smudge resistant, scratch resistant, and impervious

to hazards such as abrasions and cleaners. For sign shops looking to invest in a new solvent printer, the three factors to look for include color gamut, lamination time, and efficiency.

Wide color gamut is critical for printing signage. It's important to capture custom brand colors and have the ability to achieve any color thrown into the project. Today, select solvent printers have the ability to hit over 98% of the Pantone Color Guide by offering ink colors outside of the traditional CMYK color scheme. Advanced solvent printers offer formulations in red, white, and metallic silver to support the expanded color gamut and hit specific branding colors such as Coca-Cola red or Barbie pink.

In addition, when selecting a solvent-based printer, sign shops need to consider the off-gassing time. All solvent prints are required to go through an off-gassing process that can take from 24 to 48 hours.

During busy seasons with orders waiting to be fulfilled, it is important to find technology that is efficient and works with a print shop's existing workflow. Due to rapidly changing technology, there are now solvent-based signage printers that reduce the off-gassing period to the same day, or as fast as six hours. Leveraging a signage printer with a lower curing time, local print shops can quickly laminate and complete the influx of projects with less downtime, allowing for additional jobs and increased revenue during the year.



TOP COFFEE

SPECIALITY COFFEE

As the industry continues to adapt and print shops purchase new equipment, it is critical to understand the benefits of different ink technology, as well as limits and potential versatility.

INDOOR SIGNAGE AND RESIN TECHNOLOGY

While foot traffic declined for large retailers this year, many consumers have stepped up to support local brick-and-mortar shops and restaurants. Communities have come together to show appreciation for their local businesses.

Retail stores, restaurants, bakeries, hair salons, and just about every type of business with walk-in customers required additional signage this year. Whether it was posting updated health and safety guidelines, incorporating new floor graphics that identify the required six-foot social distancing, or updating store-specific guidelines to protect workers, local sign shops fulfilled these changing needs. With ongoing changes from the government, these signs had to be replaced often, underscoring the relationships between local businesses and sign shops fulfilling the orders.

Because there is a wide variety of indoor signage, print shops should invest in technology that specializes in output versatility. Indoor signage encompasses everything from wall mounted advertisements, wall and floor adhesives, and hanging restaurant menus, to wayward signage and more. Customers are generally closer to this output and therefore color consistency, quality, and output durability are essential.

Similar to outdoor signage, there are different attributes to look for when printing indoor signage. Multipurpose resin ink does not require an off-gassing process, delivering environmentally cautious, professional



quality graphics that are highly scratch resistant for a variety of media substrates, making it an ideal technology for indoor signage. The variety of substrates allows print shops to provide customers with options ranging from wallpapers, fabrics, uncoated papers, and other traditional signage media.

Another key benefit of resin printing technology is its ability to deliver consistent, repeatable color. This is great for indoor signage where customers may be close enough to see the different printed panels. Consistent, repeatable color delivers output ideal for hitting specific brand colors, large wall installations, and repeat orders placed months later.

In addition, short-term indoor graphics produced with resin inks often do not require lamination due to their high scratch resistance. There are now resin printers in the market designed for fast-paced environments that incorporate integrated heating technology and deliver output ready for immediate lamination and hot-swappable ink systems, automatically switching from an empty ink pack to a new ink pack mid-print for uninterrupted printing.

NONTRADITIONAL SIGNAGE AND UV FLATBED TECHNOLOGY

In a year where signage has been crucial for communications, nontraditional signage has also been popular. This includes promotional goods, rigid substrate prints, branded takeaway items, and more. Every local restaurant struggling with new guidelines has had to adapt and remind customers they are open for takeout or outdoor dining.

A great way to stay top of mind is by providing branded takeaway items to customers. These items then serve as signage to others who see them, serving as a visual reminder that the business is open. Custom printed wine glasses and mason jars also serve as unique takeaway items in states where restaurants served to-go alcohol for the first time. This year

the political atmosphere also leveraged nontraditional signage by using branded pop sockets, coffee mugs, phone cases, bumper stickers, and signage board yard signs.

There is an endless number of nontraditional signage opportunities that require a flatbed printer in lieu of traditional roll-to-roll printers. One of the key benefits of flatbed printing is its versatility—flatbed printers can handle traditional media as well as thick sign boards and promotional 3D items without requiring additional lamination. The ability to print on thicker media is ideal; it provides enough space to print on a variety of thick wooden or PVC board signage, perfect for tables, doors, and other 3D items.

Today, there are UV flatbed printers on the market that accommodate thick media and deliver outstanding ink technology, touting up to 10-color ink sets featuring red ink, gray, opaque white ink, and varnish for added effects. If your UV flatbed printer includes white ink, make sure there is a circulation system to limit sedimentation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Nobody could have predicted the significant role the signage industry would play in 2020, and even in these first several months of 2021. Manufacturers received an unforeseen number of orders on signage printers to accommodate the changing climate. As the industry continues to adapt and print shops purchase new equipment, it is critical to understand the benefits of different ink technology, as well as limits and potential versatility.

However, the applications over the past year underscore signage printing advancements and the importance of ink versatility as print shops cater to meet changing customer output requirements. **GP**

MATT MCCAUSLAND is the senior product manager, Professional Imaging, at Epson America Inc.

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RESTORATION TECHNIQUES: PART 2

MORE METHODS FOR RESTORING ANTIQUE AND DISTRESSED PHOTOS

Editor's note: Find part 1 of this series in the April issue of GRAPHICS PRO, page 90.

In last month's *Digital Eye*, I revealed a few tried-and-true techniques for addressing physical flaws in old and distressed photos. We've seen that time is not kind to photographs, and many forces can compromise these precious artifacts. But happily, we have seen that images can be restored with a few miracle tools, techniques, and filters that are dedicated to this purpose. Where once the airbrush, a skilled eye, and a giant process camera were the remedy, now new digital tools offer incredible accuracy and fidelity in eliminating scrapes, scratches, dust, and mold, healing the ravages of time and neglect.

FADING

Unfortunately, physical defects like abrasions and scratches are not the only

problems presented by age. Most prevalent is the deterioration of emulsion that results in fading and discoloration. Often the fading is inconsistent and varies over the surface of the photo and needs to be corrected using a variety of special techniques.

Sunlight—Sometimes fading is a result of exposure to sunlight. Ultraviolet (UV) light affects the chemical composition of emulsions. The darkroom chemicals that were used to print the photographs contain light-absorbing molecules called chromophores. When light is absorbed by these compounds, the UV rays break down the chemical bond of the emulsion, causing the colors to dissipate and fade.

Pollution—Another factor that causes fading is the chemical composition of the environment. Toxins and air pollutants, household chemicals, second-hand smoke, and dust can damage the

chemical composition of photos and result in the breakdown of the emulsion. Fading and discoloration is also caused by the reaction of chemicals with non-archival photo paper or matboard.

REMEDIES

Fading, no matter how it was caused, can often be remedied by a brightness and contrast adjustment using Levels or Curves as long as there is enough detail on the photograph to begin with. However, an area of highlight that has been completely washed out, where the detail has vanished, may be un-restorable without compositing from other source photos.

Gradual Fade—A common problem is the gradual fade from one side of the image to the other, for example, the left side is darker than the right (Figure 1), industrial-strength techniques need to be employed using special masks to apply precision contrast adjustments.

To get an idea of how this problem might be corrected, here is a step-by-step technique that uses adjustment layers and gradient masks. In this example, the left side of the image has faded and become too light. The right side of the image has become muddy with limited contrast. We'll brighten the image and balance the contrast so that the tonality evens out over the entire surface. Here is a link to this image if you want to try it out: <http://gpro.link/di-geyetest>. Of course, you can apply this technique to your own faded images as well.

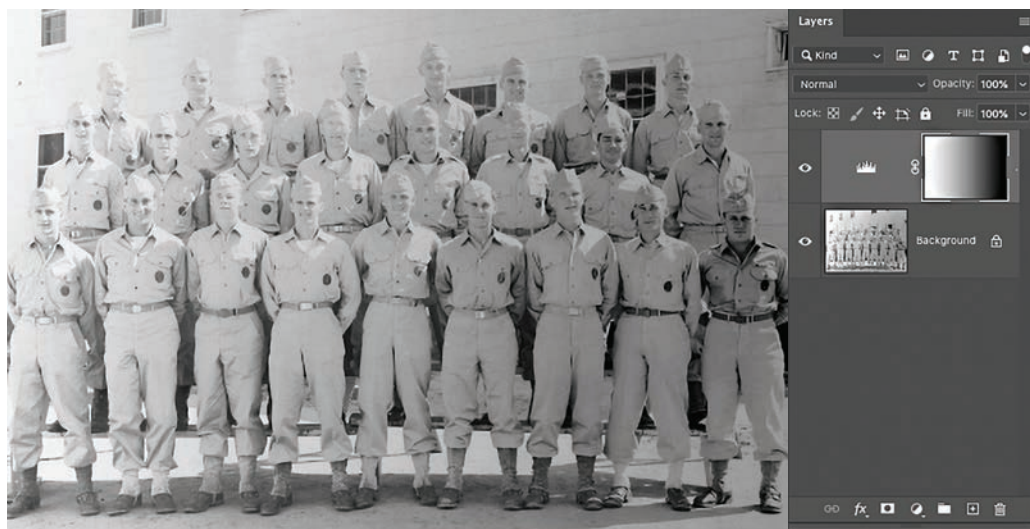


Figure 1 (left). When a photo has developed a gradual fade from one side of the image to the other, contrast adjustments with special masks are employed. **Figure 2 (right).** Click and drag the gradient in the direction of the fade from right to left. You'll see the gradient appear on the layer mask thumbnail although the image doesn't change. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

1. With the image open and the layers panel visible, choose Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels. Name the new layer “Darken.”
2. Click the Foreground and Background icon in the Tools panel to choose black as a foreground color and white as a background color.
3. Activate the Darken layer’s layer mask by clicking on its thumbnail.
4. Choose the Gradient tool. In the Options bar, choose the Linear Gradient icon. Make sure that the Foreground to Background gradient is selected from the Gradient Picker.
5. Click and drag the gradient in the direction of the fade from right to left (Figure 2). You’ll see the gradient appear on the layer mask thumbnail although the image remains unaffected. The darker part of the gradient is on the right and the lighter part of the gradient is on the left.
6. Double-click the Darken adjustment layer thumbnail to reveal Levels control in the Properties panel.
7. Drag the Black Shadow slider to the right until the contrast on the left improves and the areas darken (Figure 3). You may also want to drag the Midtone slider to the right a bit to improve the contrast.
8. Make a new adjustment layer and name it “Lighten.”
9. Repeat steps 2 through 4.
10. Target the layer mask of the Lighten layer. Click and drag the gradient from left to right this time.
11. Double-click the Lighten adjustment layer thumbnail to reveal Levels control in the Properties panel.

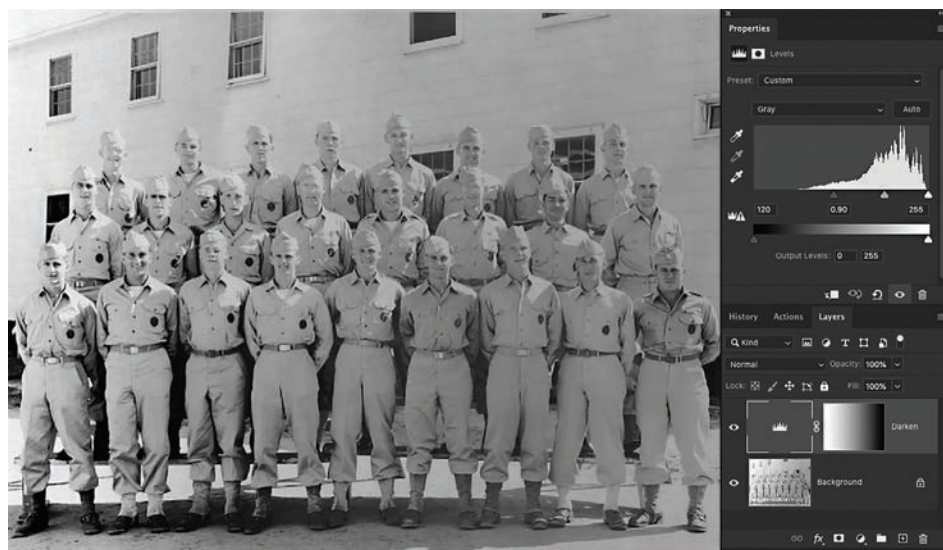


Figure 3. Drag the Black Shadow slider to the right until the contrast on the left improves and the areas darken.

12. Move the White highlight slider to the right until the contrast improves and the tonality is consistent across the picture.
13. Now you’ll perform a global contrast adjustment to optimize the contrast of the entire image. Once again, choose Layer>New Adjustment

Layer>Levels. Click OK in the New Layer dialog box, then name the layer “Global.” It appears above Lighten in the stack. This time gently drag the black slider to the right and the white slider to the left for a modest tweak of the brightness and contrast of the entire image (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Perform a global contrast adjustment to optimize the contrast of the entire image.



Figure 5 (left). Vignetting was a common practice seen on cabinet card portraits of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Figure 6 (above). A light or dark vignette can be added with the Camera Raw Filter. **Figure 7 (opposite).** Famous pictures that were originally black and white have been skillfully transformed into vivid, colorized works of art. (Color by Klimbim)

VIGNETTING

Vignetting simply means that the edges of the picture are either darkened or lightened and fade towards the center to emphasize the central content. Vignetting was a common practice in cabinet card portraits of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Figure 5). In Photoshop, vignetting is pretty simple to perform with the Camera Raw Filter.

Open an image and go to Filter>Camera Raw Filter. Click on the Effects menu and choose Vignetting. Expand the panel by

clicking on the arrow on the right. Choose a style: Highlight Priority, Color Priority, or Paint Overlay. Drag the Vignetting slider to the left to darken the edges with negative values or to the right to lighten with positive values.

Next, adjust the midpoint, roundness, and feather of the vignette. The Highlights within the vignette can be controlled with the Highlight slider that activates when there is a negative value in the Vignetting box (Figure 6).



COLORIZING

The colorization of a black-and-white image can transform it into a special document that communicates the nuance and elegance of earlier times. It's a common practice these days. I've seen a lot of famous pictures that were originally black and white skillfully transformed into vivid works of art (Figure 7).

In order to colorize a grayscale image, it must first be converted into a format that supports color. RGB is the usual choice, but sometimes LAB is substituted. Although there is no significant difference in the

appearance of the RGB image from the grayscale, it supports color information that can be easily manipulated. If the image has been scanned as a grayscale, it can be converted in Photoshop by choosing Image>Mode>RGB Color.

After the black, white, and gray pixels from the single-channel grayscale are converted to RGB, they contain red, green, and blue information on three separate channels. Gray pixels have equal RGB values. When a group of gray pixels is colorized, the red, green, and blue components are remapped into unequal values.

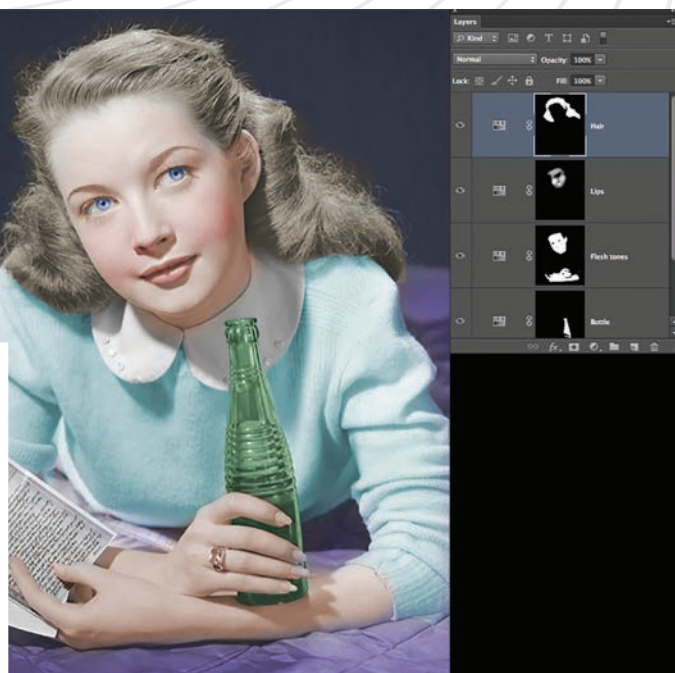


Figure 8 (left). Checking the Colorize box on the Hue and Saturation panel converts the equal hue, saturation, and brightness values to those values of the current foreground color.

Figure 9 (above). An original black-and-white image with one that has been colorized with adjustment layers.

Checking the Colorize box on the Hue and Saturation panel (**Figure 8**) converts the equal hue, saturation, and brightness values to the values of the current foreground color. The sliders change to represent absolute values instead of relative ones. The Hue slider reads from 0 degrees on the left to 360 degrees on the right, and the current foreground color's position on the color wheel is displayed.

Drag the Hue slider until the area changes to the desired color. The Saturation slider increases or decreases the intensity of the color, and the Lightness slider will darken or lighten the area if dragged to the left or right, respectively.

While each different color requires a separate Hue Saturation adjustment layer (**Figure 9**), colorizing images with adjustment layers has several advantages. Adjustment layers enable subsequent editing of the color at any time. Also, a

layer mask is automatically created based on the selected area so that the color can be isolated to a specific shape and location. Furthermore, all the advantages of layers are available including opacity and blend modes that can mitigate or enhance the layer's color and even blend colors between layer in the stack.

TINTING

Black-and-white photos can be tinted into sepia colors that were often created using organic inks from the cuttlefish back in the early days of photography. Since scanning a photo in grayscale mode creates a pure black, white, and gray image that does not support color, convert the grayscale to RGB. Then, from the Adjustments panel, apply a Photo Filter adjustment (**Figure 10**). By default, the panel displays a color swatch of the Warming Filter (85).

Other filters and colors can be selected

from the Filter menu. The color's density can be increased by dragging the Density slider to the right. For custom colors, click on the color swatch to display the Color Picker. Checking the Preserve Luminosity box maintains the image's tonal relationships when making the adjustment.

SHARPENING

Sharpening is usually the last step after an image has been repaired, adjusted, or colorized. A photo may very well need to be sharpened to enhance contrast between edges and to reduce any blurring caused by early fixed lens cameras. There are several sharpening filters designed to perform this process. I recommend that before applying a sharpening filter, save a version of the picture and flatten it. Then, convert the flattened layer to a smart object to be able to reduce or enhance the sharpening at a later time if necessary.

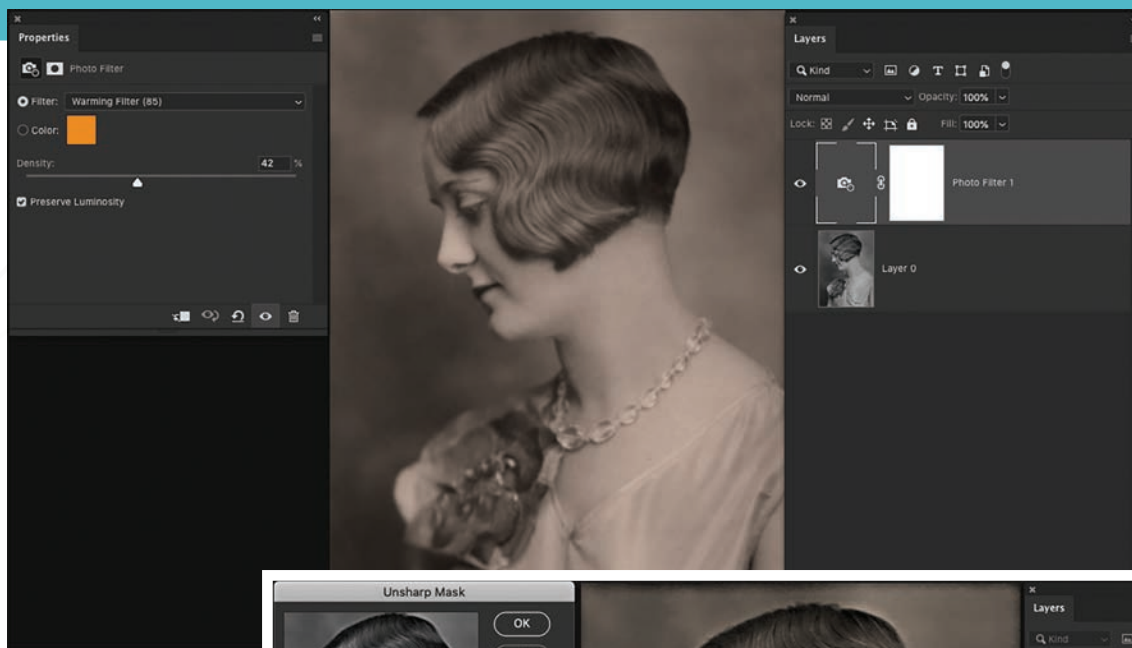
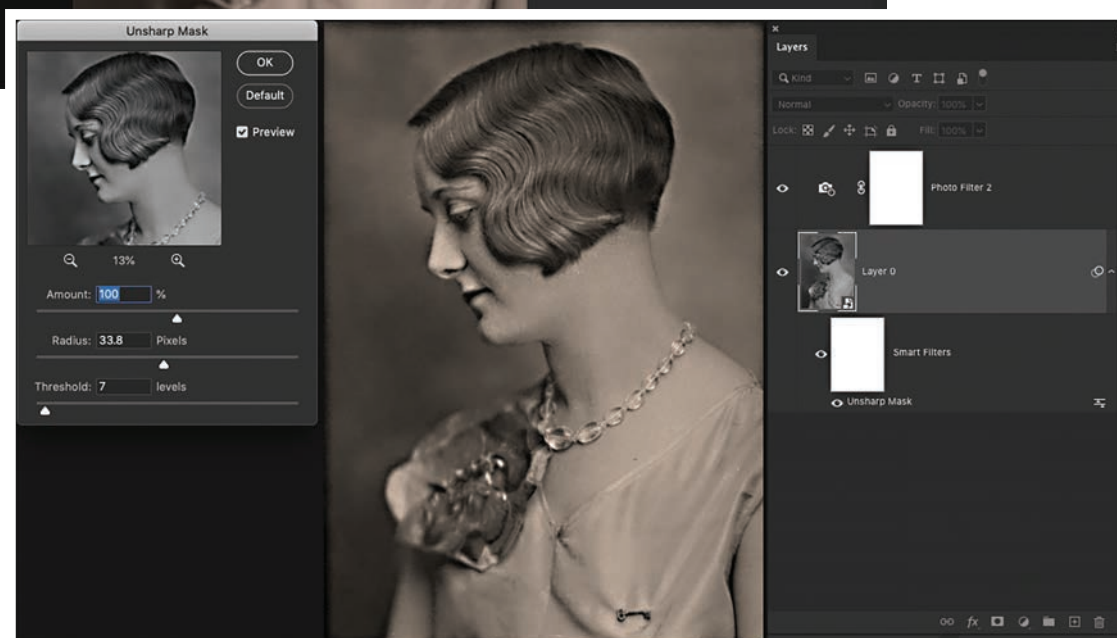


Figure 10 (above).

A Photo Filter adjustment applies a tint to match the sepia-colored original.

Figure 11 (right).

The Unsharp Mask filter increases the contrast between adjacent edges.



UNSHARP MASK

The Unsharp Mask filter (UMF) gets its unusual name from an old photographic technique of making an exposure through a blurred negative mask to increase the edge contrast of a film positive. It is the work-a-day, all-purpose sharpening filter.

That being said, you should try experimenting with Smart Sharpen and Shake Reduction filters to see which produces the best results. The filter you choose really depends on the image.

The UMF has three sliders (Figure 11). Drag the Amount slider to around 100%. The image doesn't change until the Radius slider is dragged. Contrasting edges become crisper and cleaner, and the

image's focus improves. Next, adjust the Threshold slider to mitigate any noise that has resulted from the sharpening in the areas of less contrast. Avoid over-sharpening.

OLD PICTURES

In Restoration Techniques parts 1 and 2, I've presented a few methods that are commonly used to restore old photos. Believe me, there is a lot more to this subject than I've been able to present. Indeed, there are countless strategies that can transform old and distressed pictures into pristine works of art.

In the first article, I covered the best tools and methods to eliminate abrasions, scratches, dust, and artifacts. Part 2 adds a

few important techniques to making the best possible picture from an original, faded, or discolored source image. All of these techniques when applied to old pictures promise to help us connect to and better understand our past. By all means, try them out. **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.

Sign Design 101: Part 2



BY MATT CHARBONEAU

Knowing your audience
and their focal velocity

Editor's note: Find part 1 of this series on Sign Design 101 in the April issue of GRAPHICS PRO, page 86.

You may remember a comment I made from my last article in which I propose the concept of knowing a bit more about the sign, the message, the audience, and the environment the viewer is experiencing. Are they troubled, worried, excited, in a hurry, or does the sign they are looking for give them hope? Who is the audience that will read the sign you design?

Here's a great example of how our reality affects what we do: Do you have poor eyesight? Do you struggle to read signs at a distance?

If you do, I bet you prefer signs with bigger text and spacing that's cleaner and easier to read. The reason that aspect is at the top of your mind is because you live with it daily.

Understanding your audience is critical to designing an effective sign. Are they senior citizens at a retirement village who need to know the new safety rules for social distancing, or are they 18-year-olds riding dirt bikes at a local track? Two completely different audiences, so know your audience and design for them.

I need to speak directly to anyone who has wondered about my use of the word “readability” before we go any further. It’s true that legibility is most likely the proper word to use, but if that is the case, why don’t they call the people who look at the newspaper “legiblers” rather than readers, and why don’t they call those magnifying eyeglasses you can buy at the grocery store “legiblers,” and why don’t they say that the people who follow someone’s articles in a magazine are “legers”?

READ TIME

Traffic studies done by various industry organizations pay close attention to the



In this example, the intangible message is delivered by way of a simple, short, and sweet thought. This is a perfect example of “selling the sizzle, not the steak.” This sign communicates a feeling and an emotion that speaks directly to the heart of the golfer hoping to rekindle that spark in the relationship they have (or had) with their father. (All images courtesy Matt Charboneau)

Billboards have a distance at which they are most legible, or readable. In this case, with the clean and easy-to-read font choice, the read time on this design is much longer than it is on some. This example leaves out all of the urban clutter that typically surrounds a billboard in a rural setting. Remember that readability is king in the sign world, and it’s never ok to drive down the center of the road like this person did who took the photo.





When I chose the font for the billboard, I had a lot of options to choose from. Here are some of the options I put together that clearly demonstrate how font choice is almost as important as layout, contrast, and content. Throw out those flowery, sappy fonts and commit yourself to designing signage that is readable, not cute. Use the squint test and see which of these maintain readability ... and which ones don't.

time a viewer is given to read a sign while moving past it at a certain speed. This is commonly referred to as "read time." If a billboard is located along a highway where speed limits are posted at 65 mph, the read time is much less than a sign located along a road with a 30 mph speed limit.

Add in trees and an overpass, and that once generous 5-second read time for a billboard could be knocked down to 2 seconds or less. Understanding these challenges is critical to designing a successful sign.

This also applies to short-distance signs like those found within most wayfinding programs. No matter what the line-of-sight distance is, the math needs to take place, the message needs to be analyzed, and the sign needs to communicate specifics in a certain way, with an anticipated end result. Here are a few

questions to ask of the sign size, message, colors, materials, etc., as you design the sign:

- Where is the viewer standing when they first see the sign?
- What are they doing when they approach the sign?
- Are they most likely rushed, distracted, frazzled, or calm while reading it?
- What facts are they trying to extract from the sign?
- Is it information they are seeking or is it telling them something they need to know?
- What is the expected reaction to the information on the sign?
- What unexpected actions could occur after they read the sign?
- What consequences might this bring about?

We all have a variety of moods and feelings that affect how we react to the visual impacts that affect our day, but regardless of how together we may think we are, we almost always PUSH on the door when the sign clearly says PULL in big 4" letters smack dab in front of our face. This is the human factor we as sign designers must learn to manage.

SELLING THE SIZZLE

A long time ago in a mid-sized town in Colorado, I was assigned the job of designing a new billboard display campaign for a local but nationally backed golf accessories store called Las Vegas Discount Golf. The owner of the shop at that time was ready to

go with the same type of billboard display he had always done in years past. He and the advertising rep would fill up the billboard by listing all of his clubs, bags, balls, and shoes at a discounted price in hopes of attracting new and old customers into the store before Father's Day.

I asked the store owner to let me come up with a different concept that I felt might work better for his sales. This took place a long time ago, but the concept and design I came up with was similar to the one shown in the images.

The message is clear, basic, simple, and with one request, one thought, one statement that his potential customers might understand and relate to: "Take Dad for a Father's Day Drive." The play on words works beautifully for painting the picture in the reader's mind—it's the intangible element we call the "sizzle." To list out all the golf equipment that was on sale would be the "steak," and we all know that outdoor signage is not the place for a print or web-based ad design.

continued on page 94



HERE COMES THE JUDGE

Starla Miller of Miller Decals on what it takes to officiate the Wrap Olympics



BY JEF WHITE

When vehicle wraps professionals gather this summer at WRAPSCON in Indiana, there will be room for a little friendly competition.

A vehicle wraps event for wrappers, by wrappers, WRAPSCON is set for June 15-17 at the Indiana Convention Center. Highlights include exhibits and demonstrations on digital printing, vinyl technology, lamination, vehicle templates, wrap-specific artwork, tools and more, as well as the popular WRAPSCONCONNECT in-depth panel discussion.

Also featured is the one-of-a-kind installation showdown known as the Wrap Olympics.

The WRAPSCON Wrap Olympics tests the wrap skills and mental toughness of 32 two-person teams as they battle through six elimination stages.

Showcasing the talents and versatility of some of the nation's best wraps installers, it's a must-see highlight that annually entertains and inspires.

Watching over the proceedings will be head judge Starla Miller of Miller Decals in Acworth, Georgia. A long-time industry leader and wraps advocate, she offers her thoughts on this exciting, unifying part of WRAPSCON.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE WRAP OLYMPICS?

STARLA MILLER: It's a platform for two-person teams to showcase their design talent and wrap skills through a succession of challenges, from wall graphics, floor graphics, and vehicle wraps to designing an impromptu helmet wrap or even a bowling ball and pin.

The events utilize current vinyl industry products available to explore during the show and our emcee, Kevin Kempf, details attributes of those products in his narration of the event.

Q: WHAT'S YOUR ROLE IN THE WRAP OLYMPICS?

SM: I am the head judge and take responsibility for the tempo of the event. Collectively, our exhibit team decides on criteria for judging each round.

Q: AND WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

SM: Our exhibit team consists of Kevin Kempf of PG Nola in New Orleans; Jen Carney of Carbon Wraps in Winter Park, Florida; Luis Tirado of WBC Graphics in Orlando; Keith Vu of Savage Wraps in Milpitas, California; and Adam Sumner of Wrapix in Burbank, California.

Q: HOW DID YOU END UP JUDGING THE WRAP OLYMPICS?

SM: In 2017, THE NBM SHOW (now GRAPHICS PRO EXPO) added the Wrap Olympics as a highlight of WRAPSCON. I was honored when they asked me to be part of the judging team.

Having been to numerous competitions where my husband, Jim Miller, had been a competitor, I had observed the process firsthand. That experience, along with ensuring quality control on wraps completed for Miller Decals LLC, laid the foundation for my role as a judge.

TUNE IN AS STARLA AND JIM MILLER CHAT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS ON IN GEAR WITH THE SHOP PODCAST:
<http://gpro.link/millerpod>



Image courtesy Starla Miller

Q: WHAT CAN ATTENDEES AND COMPETITORS LOOK FORWARD TO AT THE EVENT?

SM: The WRAPSCON Wrap Olympics brings wrappers together for cordial-but-fierce competition where everyone grows in resiliency, builds confidence in their skills, and forges friendships that will last a lifetime.

In the end, we are all winners—but only one team is crowned. This is truly the event

that every wrapper should schedule annually to attend, and I'm looking forward to seeing everyone in Indianapolis June 15-17!

For more information about WRAPSCON, including WRAPSCONCONNECT and the Wrap Olympics, visit Graphics-Pro-Expo.com/wrapsccon/. **GP**

JEF WHITE is executive editor of *THE SHOP* magazine and briefly served as editor of *WRAPS* magazine back in 2008. He can be reached at jwhite@nbm.com.

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THE VALUE OF UPSELLING AND CROSS-SELLING

Welcome to summer! OK, we are still a little under two months away from the summer solstice at the time of writing, but schools are starting to wind down, the weather is warming up, and people are thinking about finally getting away. Because of this, a slowdown might occur for many people in our industry, and this is the time to turn up our sales efforts.

This month, I want to talk to you about the art of the upsell and cross-sell to maximize sales and bring in more business with the same amount of “selling” work. The goal of upselling and cross-selling is to create larger orders from the customers we are already selling to.

ESSENTIAL KEY

Before we get to upselling and cross-selling, let us first discuss an essential key for when you plan to upsell and cross-sell

products. The importance of knowing your customers and what is important to them will allow you to know which add-on products are going to be best for each customer.

Successful business owners understand what their customers want and the most effective way of making their product or service available to their core customers. The depth of knowledge about your customers is also crucial. It requires knowing more than their names, ages, and incomes. To best serve your customers and offer them more than they realize they need, know your customer’s hobbies, tastes, and interests along with what they watch, listen to, and read, and most importantly, the specific problem they have that you solve with your products or services.

Understanding your customer’s buying behavior is also crucial. You need to comprehend what type of person is

most likely to need or want the product or service you provide. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is their reason for purchasing your product or service?
- How often are they going to need to buy that product or utilize the service?
- Who are they buying for?
- Where are they most likely to purchase?
- How do your products or services solve a problem or serve a need for your core customers?

Lastly, before diving into upselling and cross-selling, let’s focus on the last question above, as it is the most important. A fundamental way to make sure we get that last question correct is to understand the four basic needs that every customer might have. You can then determine what products or services will best fit those customers from these four basic needs:

1. The need for attention.
2. The need for affection.
3. The need for appreciation.
4. The need for acceptance.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

With this understanding, you are ready to start looking at ways to maximize your sales through the art of cross-selling and upselling. There is a slight difference between upselling and cross-selling, and while it might not seem of consequence, a quick understanding of the difference will help you place the right products in front of the right customers.

Upselling is convincing customers to upgrade to another, pricier option. An example would be talking to a customer about mugs and choosing a 15-oz. mug



An upsell helps the customer see the need to get something slightly better than they had picked out instead. (Image courtesy JDS Industries)

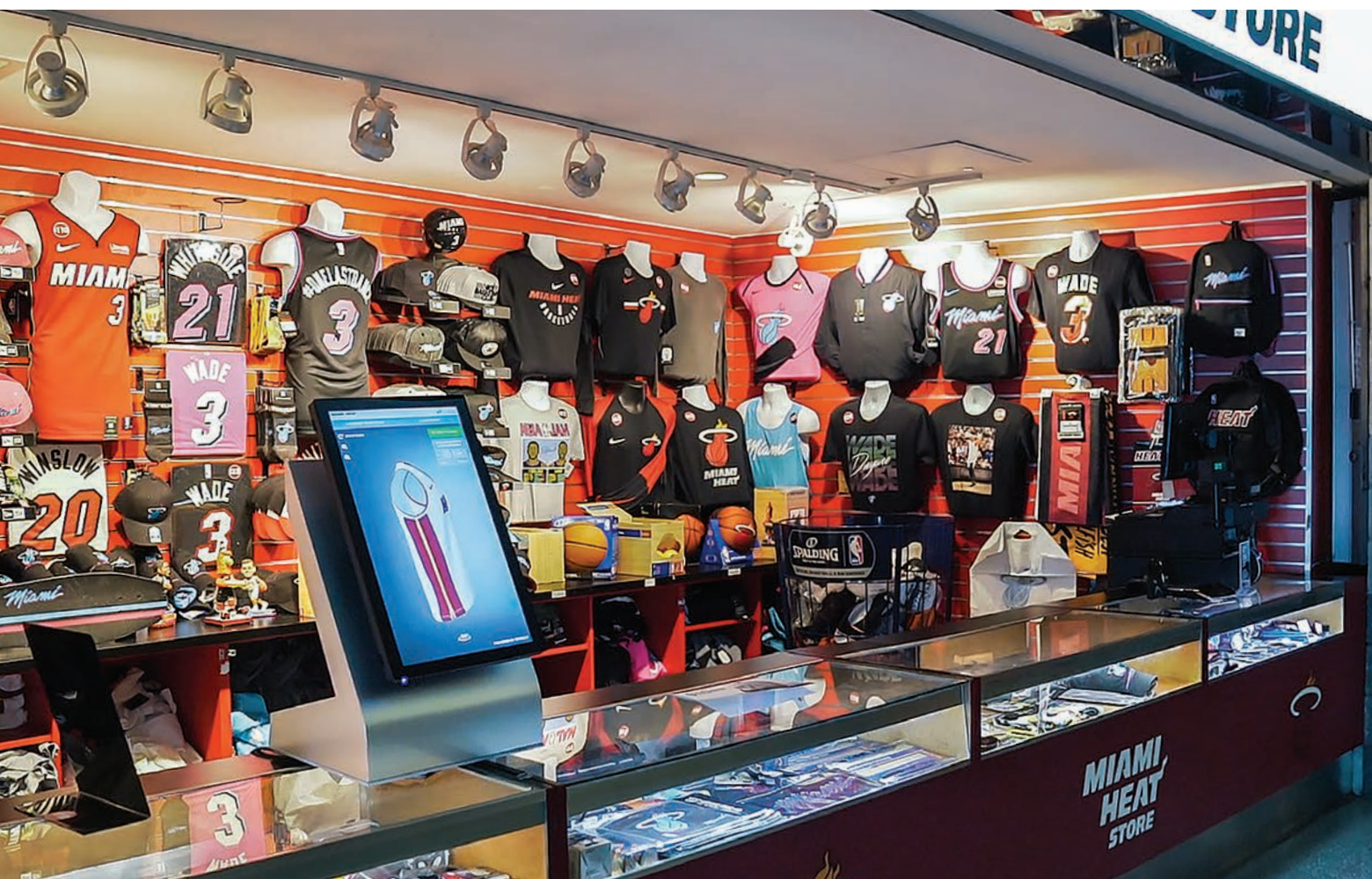


THE RISING TIDE OF BUSINESS



with a colored rim and handle compared to a plain 11-oz. white mug. An upsell helps the customer see the need to get something slightly better than they had picked out instead.

Cross-selling is selling a client supplementary services or products that can help satisfy a previously unfilled need. An example is offering a towel and a beach bag to go along with a pair of personalized flip-flops. Cross-selling is where you add additional items or services, so the customer purchases more than just what they initially thought they needed.



Cross-selling is where you add additional items or services, so the customer purchases more than just what they initially thought they needed. (Image courtesy Stahls')

And as I mentioned, the key to this is knowing your customer, because upselling and cross-selling is a delicate balancing act. No one likes the feeling of being cheated or milked for their money, which is why upselling and cross-selling are built around finesse rather than dogged determination. Upselling and cross-selling are a soft sell, with the promise of discounts or more bang for their buck.

But the art of it is that you must first have the customer's trust before attempting this. Otherwise, you might end up looking more like the finance guy at a car dealership where the customer just leaves feeling dirty, used, and turned off. We instead want to make sure that we use the knowledge we have of who our customers are to properly find something that will make the experience better and then lead to more sales.

APPLICATION

Let's close this out with a few great ways we can use the art of cross-selling and upselling in our industry.

Suggest a premium product—Come back to understanding your customers and then determine which of those basic needs you can meet for them. For example, when buying shirts, would your customers pay extra for products made in America or that are eco-friendly? If yes, make sure to upsell such products. You are helping them fill a need by saying they supported an American company or did their part for the environment.

Offer seasonal collections—Seasons create a lot of needs for your customers. Cross-sell weather-appropriate products like warm beanies and sweaters for winter, or create a unique beachwear line for summer.

Offer product bundles—Product bundles are multiple items sold as a single purchase. Some people call them "package deals." Usually, they're made of an add-on like polo shirts with a hat or a

kitchen towel with a cutting board. A bundle is sold by pricing it cheaper than the actual total of those items. Still, for you, the added order volume and the ability to get rid of inventory or introduce new things to customers is worth the discount.

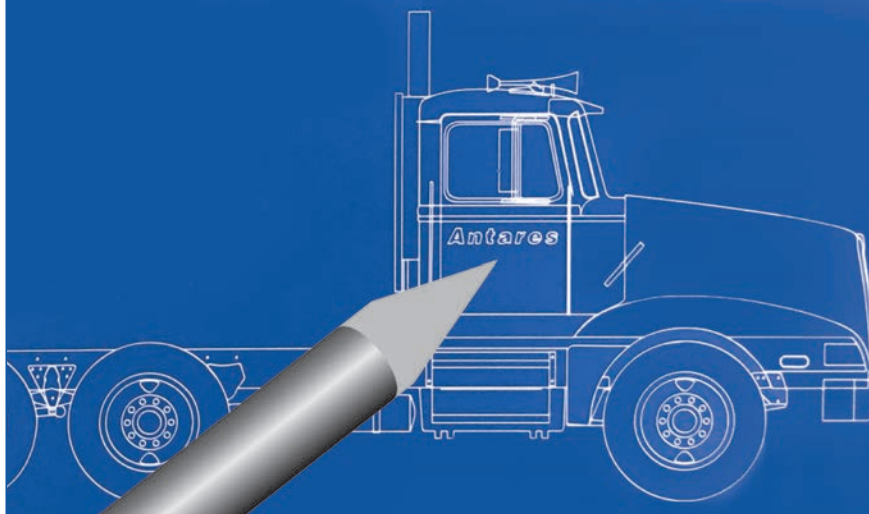
No matter if it is online, in person, or some other method, selling is an art. It requires tact, grace, sensibility, and persistence. But deep down, when we truly believe in ourselves and our products, it is something we can all do and probably do without noticing. It does take practice.

I'm horrible at sales if you were to look at the traditional definition of making calls, offering products, and closing deals. What I am great at is being a problem solver.

But it took practice to realize that was my sales "tactic." By focusing on your customer and their needs, you can be yourself and provide solutions to earn more sales. **GP**

AARON MONTGOMERY has been certified by New York Times best-selling author Jack Canfield as a Success Principles Trainer and is the Co-Founder of OurSuccessGroup.com. Aaron has over 25 years of experience with personalized products and small business development. You can find Aaron co-hosting the decorator's industry podcast 2 Regular Guys Podcast (www.2regularguys.com). You can also check him out on his own podcast channel and weekly live videos called Small Business Saturdays (smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com).

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Beyond Masks

MOVING YOUR SUBLIMATION BUSINESS BEYOND BASIC FACE MASKS INTO THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

BY JENNIFER FOY



This last year or so has no doubt been a big change in business for everyone. You may have started in the sublimation industry with masks or shifted to masks from other products, but now as we begin to move into the post-pandemic world, businesses open up, and people get out more, it's time to think about how to shift your sublimation product offerings to keep (or get) your business thriving.

One approach is by expanding from the face masks to other fabric offerings including door mats, T-shirts, and aprons, as well as move into other apparel items

such as flip flops. You should also consider adding in hard surface sublimatable products. Well-known products like metal prints and mugs are just the tip of the iceberg—there is so much more.

SIGNAGE AND INTERIOR DECOR

Don't narrow the field of signage—think commercial and residential use for signage, which can evolve into interior decor in some instances. Commercial spaces need exterior signage for parking, curbside pick-up directions, or menu signs inside on the wall. There might be smaller ones scattered on tables or bar areas (look for

easy-clean surfaces from germs like the ChromaLuxe metal), some that display new hours for a bakery, or even restroom signs that are color and design themed to match branding.

For residential signs, customers typically want smaller items like garden stakes for walkways or gifts, yard signs congratulating the graduate, or a new baby announcement. Exterior door signs such as "Please do not knock as the baby is sleeping" can help direct Amazon or brighten front door decor for an upcoming holiday with something colorful. Inside the home, small- and large-format metal prints or





If you decide to add mugs in, consider adding in a small mug heat press. (Images courtesy Unisub and JDS Industries)



Move beyond fabric and into flip-flops, coasters, and more to really see your sublimation business grow. (Image courtesy Condé Systems)



Left: Coasters are among the constant hot sellers for most sublimators of personalized or photo gifts. (Image courtesy Unisub)

Below: Fun tumblers, water bottles, and mugs are always popular, especially as the weather gets hot and people keep drinking more water. (Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

wood photo panels can showcase a recent family outdoor portrait, share an inspiring quote, or display original artwork (which might even include kids' drawings).

People have spent much of the last year-plus at home and will continue to freshen their spaces. Encourage them to do it with your products! I mentioned that signage can be interior or exterior depending on the products and your tools. For exterior sublimation, you want to use material that is UV-graded for outdoor use as well as exterior sublimation inks in your printer. Decor isn't for every company to produce and take on, but a wider range of sublimated products can be.

PHOTO GIFTS AND PERSONALIZED PRODUCTS

These are two separate groups but at times they can overlap, depending on the product and the imagery or design used on the product. Celebrating will become bigger as we start to be able to get together again. Get your customers to come back and give you that photo they took of grandma getting to hug her grandson for the first time in more than a year. The digital images

off their cell phone can be transformed into a personalized gift.

Don't forget about the family portrait from the Front Porch Portraits trend that hit the country last year. Local photographers went around and spaced 6 feet away from a family as they sat/ stood/played on their front porch while the photographer snapped a few. The photographer would then get the family a digital file.

That same trend has continued again this year as the weather warms up and we move away from winter. What a great gift or home decor item to have that portrait put into a metal print.

Highlighting the graduate with a custom yard sign, congratulating the newlyweds with a monogrammed cutting board, cute keychains with their names or a photo for each of the bridal party members, bag tags for the team with their numbers and last name in the team colors ... photo gifts and personalized products can range from magnets to photo panels, serving trays, coasters, drinking cups, and more. There are so many options with sublimation.

It was noted in a 2017 survey that the average person has 630 photos on their cell phone. That was 2017, so you can imagine what it is now. Encourage your customers to get their



Image courtesy Unisub

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Ornaments aren't just for Christmas. They make a great wedding keepsake as well. (Image courtesy Unisub)



TO LEARN HOW TO ADD METAL TO YOUR SUBLIMATION BUSINESS, CHECK OUT THIS ARTICLE BY JENNIFER FOY:
<http://gpro.link/addmetal>.

photos off their phone (or cloud account). Communicate how they can get those images into your inbox (or wherever) to make some great sublimated photo products.

Events will start happening more—people are already planning. While they won't be large, these micro events will happen. A micro wedding, for example, is with a small group of people. The couple still wants to have the event but on a smaller scale. They might rent a greenhouse instead of having it at a larger garden facility. The couple still wants to have the greeting signage, the name markers for guests, needs directional signage,

etc. It just is all on a smaller scale versus a 200-plus guest wedding.

A family reunion might be with 30-50 people instead of 100. They still will want those T-shirts, and don't forget to upsell. Add-ons like a photo panel for each of them that can be given out after the reunion, a magnet, or something more formal like a slate photo piece or a serving tray work great. Don't forget those people who've been eagerly awaiting the time to travel for the last two years and just booked a family vacay. They want to have those Disney 2021 or 2022 bag tags to commemorate the event.



Top and above: Inside the home, small- and large-format metal prints or wood photo panels can showcase a recent family outdoor portrait. (Images courtesy ChromaLuxe)

Going from masks to other fabric items is an easy way to start expanding your product offerings. (Image courtesy JDS Industries)



MOVE FORWARD

You may have started out sublimating masks, and we are happy that you could join the sublimation industry, but now is your opportunity to move forward beyond masks and into a flourishing sublimation business.

A few last tips for you:

- Wondering where to get products and support? Contact a distributor! You can find one by Googling sublimated products, or go to <http://gpro.link/unisubbuy>.
- Use the groups on Facebook. Yes, it's not a true professional relationship, but sublimation-themed Facebook groups are sharing, asking questions, and offering suggestions.
- Videos: Run a search on YouTube.
- Distributor videos and tip sheets: Many distributors offer

support; you can also join (for free) StartToSublimate.com for information, tips, and tricks on pressing hard surface items. **GP**

JENNIFER FOY has over 20 years of experience using Adobe software and working in the advertising, marketing, and design fields. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communications from the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, and a Master of Arts in Advertising from Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Her years of teaching experience include numerous software and design classes for colleges in Atlanta, Georgia and Louisville, Kentucky. Jennifer is currently working as the Creative Director at Universal Woods with the Unisub and ChromaLuxe brands. Jennifer can be reached by email at jennifer.foy@unisub.com.



Powder Power

BENEFITS OF POWDER-COATED SUBLIMATION BASES

BY RICHARD DETTMAN



Sublimation printing technology has advanced by leaps and bounds in the past few years, becoming one of the fastest growing options in the decoration field. Most recently, powder-coated sublimation has become a growing technology in the decoration field due to some inherent physical advantages of powder-coated bases over liquid paints.

Powder coatings and liquid coatings have been battling in countless decorative fields for decades. Currently, powder coated sublimation is regarded as one of the most unique innovations seen in the field during the past couple of decades.

As a solid deposition technology, powder coating enables the creation of very thick textures with high impact and scratch resistance. Added to this, powder coatings are able to be manufactured with solid particles and additives that offer extreme UV resistance along with surfaces with anti-graffiti, anti-microbial, and anti-skid characteristics.

For many years, photographers, designers, architects, and printers have used metal prints to showcase photos, artwork, and

digital images. Now that there are two strong options in the market, professionals in every area of sublimation are benefiting from these new options.

THE RIGHT CHOICE

Naturally, this begs the question: Which technology is better for sublimation? The answer is not simple. Both technologies have advantages and disadvantages; the key to success is in the selection of the right technology for each particular application.

Liquid coatings can be easier to apply, as they do not require heat to cure, can be applied on site after installation, and offer smooth, glossy finishes because they are sprayed on in a liquid form. On the other hand, powder coatings are more resistant to impact and scratching, and are more flexible, making them better for post-forming applications. Powder coatings are also more resistant to chipping and wear because they can be applied in much thicker layers. In addition to their physical toughness, powder coatings provide

Above: In addition to their physical toughness, powder coatings provide excellent color retention and are volatile organic compound (VOC)-free. (All images courtesy Richard Dettman)

excellent color retention and are volatile organic compound (VOC)-free, which makes them a more environmentally friendly option.

Images sublimated on powder coatings can resist outdoor exposure for up to five years, depending on the type of powder. Resistance to weather, corrosion, and chemicals makes powder coating a more durable finish than common liquid coatings for sublimation.

Powder coatings are resistant to cracking, peeling, chipping, abrasion, rust, and damage due to chemical exposure. They are recognized for being highly durable and retaining their color and gloss well. That is why sublimatable powder coatings have become popular for architectural, industrial, and OEM decorative applications since the early '90s.

Powder-coated sublimation panels are available in many finishes like smooth glossy and smooth matte, and many various types of textures, and even with special additives, like glow in the dark, anti-microbial, anti-graffiti, and anti-skid.



Above: As a solid deposition technology, powder coating enables the creation of very thick textures with high impact and scratch resistance. **Above right:** Images sublimated on powder coatings can resist outdoor exposure for up to five years, depending on the type of powder. **Right:** Powder-coated panels are usually available in sizes up to 48" X 96". You can also special-order oversized panels in 5' X 10'.

Powder-coated panels are usually available in sizes up to 48" X 96". You can also special-order oversized panels in 5' X 10'. Standard thickness is 0.047" up to 0.12".

Powder-coated sublimation aluminum panels can be sheared, drilled, punched, or cut with a CNC machine, making powder-coated panels quite versatile. You can create a variety of shaped products using a CNC router, as powder coatings do not chip.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The sublimation printing segment has evolved to be very profitable and does not require high initial investment. Liquid coatings have dominated the market for many decades; however, it looks like we now have an alternative that provides solutions for applications that were previously unavailable. **GP**



RICHARD DETTMAN is Director of Sales of Duraluxe Panels in Coral Springs, Florida. For more than 20 years, he has owned, operated, and consulted with development of products for the custom print-on-demand transfer industry.





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LASERING LEATHER AND LEATHERETTE PRODUCTS

Leather and leatherette products are great for decor as well as functional items for the home and office. Leather is used for a wide variety of products including book covers, coasters, wall hangings, and smartphone covers. It is common to have leather products personalized with initials, names, or even favorite graphics.

Some laser engravers may be intimidated by the thought of lasering leather and leatherette products, so I'll delve into the dos and don'ts as well as a few tips for getting great results.

PURCHASING VERSUS CUSTOMER-SUPPLIED

There are a variety of sources for leather and leatherette products. The safest way to purchase them is from laser industry sources. Leather that is good quality and has been prepared for lasering is readily available from many industry suppliers.

Both leather and leatherette plaque plates are available and should be lasered and displayed as samples. Most customers would not know they are available or think to ask for them. They are perfect for themes such as western, outdoor and nature, agricultural, military awards, and decor. Leatherette products designed and manufactured for laser engraving are becoming popular. A wide variety of products are available including notepad and business card holders, coasters, wallets, wine tool sets and bottle boxes, keyrings, desk name plates, and dozens of other products.

Leatherette and real leather can also be bought in sheets. Real leather is available from supply stores selling equipment and supplies to leather smiths. Sheets are

typically uneven cuts, and the thickness can vary on the same sheet. Leather and leatherette sheets are great for learning and experimentation, as well as making your own products.

Customers will also bring in their own products they have either purchased or made themselves for personalization. I highly recommend practicing on scraps or pieces of sheet goods before lasering a client's product. Keeping a variety of scrap leather around allows you to practice on similar pieces as a customer's product.

Faux or synthetic leather is made from polyvinyl chloride or polyurethane. Faux leather products are not laserable and typically melt or laser right through the material. It can be difficult to tell the difference between synthetic leather and real leather.

Leatherette (seen here in a selection of color samples) and real leather can be bought in sheets. (All images courtesy Bob Hagel)



Over the years, I had a few situations where the customer told me the product was made from genuine leather. One was a Bible cover that lasered through the cover and several pages; it was thin plastic. Another was a high school football coach wanting to use footballs as awards. They were not footballs used in game play but cheap products he purchased in a store just to use as awards. The laser melted the first ball I tried, yet he still swore it was real leather.

I adopted the rule that if I could not verify the material as real leather, nor was

the product marked as leather, I would not laser the product.

LASERING LEATHER

Industry-purchased leather products are consistent in thickness and finish. Getting the best laser settings may take experimentation. Your laser may come with recommended speed and power settings, or you can call technical support for suggestions. It is always best to start with higher speeds and lower power settings.

You can sacrifice one of the products and laser a small portion of it with several

sets of settings. Once you have satisfactory results, make notes regarding the product brand, type of leather or animal source, leather thickness, and how it was finished. Your notes are likely to come in handy in the future, especially if leather is not a material you laser often.

Remember, leather is a hide, or to be blunt, animal skin. Lasering it may give off an unpleasant smell, especially if it is not finished and left natural. The cause of a poor result is likely too much power or too slow of a lasering speed. Burning the leather is difficult to fix, and the bad

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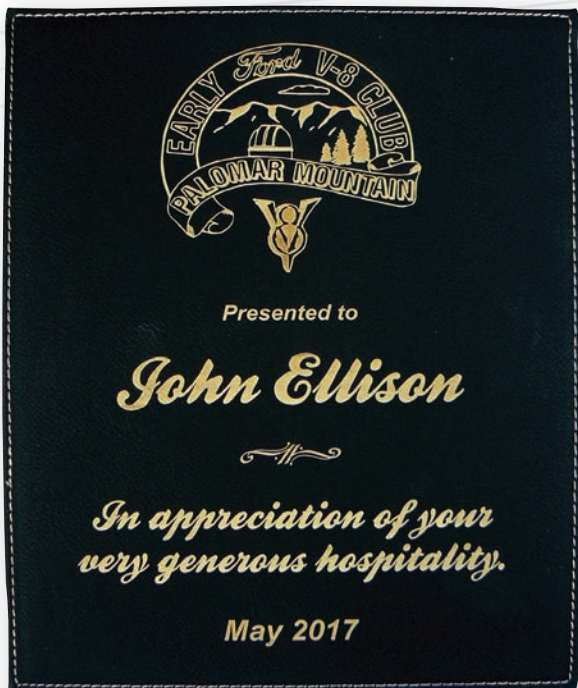
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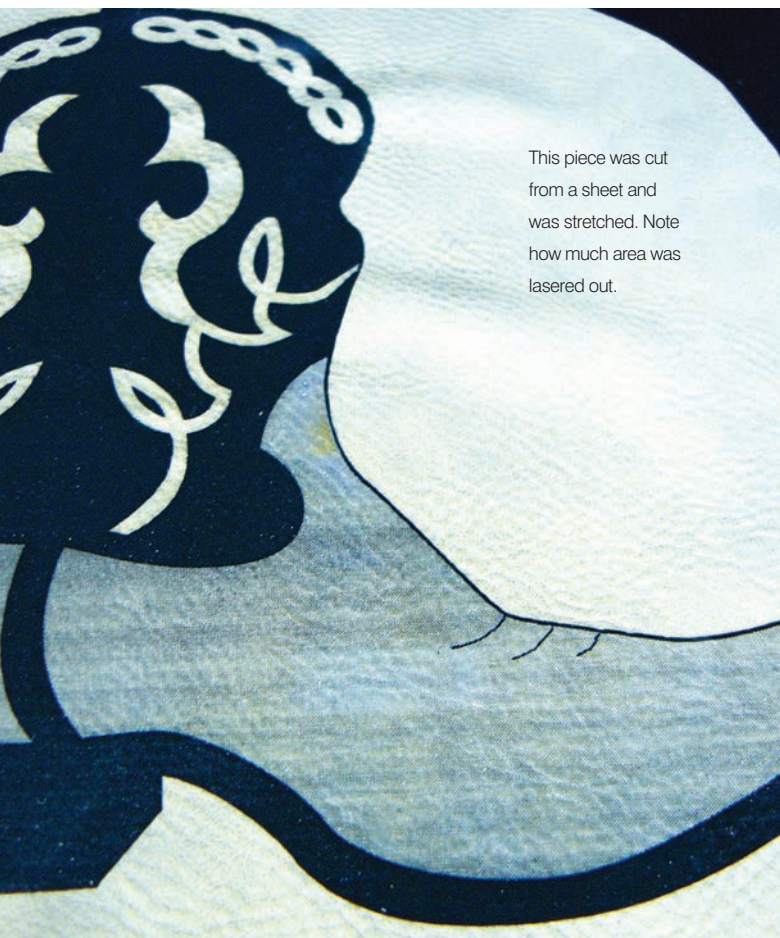
/ SETTING NEW STANDARDS



YOUR LASER AT WORK



Above left: A leatherette plaque plate that lasers gold. There are a variety of sources for leather and leatherette products. The safest way to purchase them is from laser industry sources. **Above right:** This leatherette project was cut from a 12" X 24" sheet. Photos can be lasered, providing a unique and beautiful look.



This piece was cut from a sheet and was stretched. Note how much area was lasered out.



These key rings demonstrate the availability of several colors and shapes.

smell may not go away, so less is best to begin with.

If you enjoy lasering leather products, you might want to seek out some local leather smiths. Many work out of their garage and have started as a hobby and made a side business with a specialty line of products. Partnering is a great way to create a continuous income stream. This also allows the partner to offer a service most of their competitors don't.

Cutting genuine leather with the laser is possible. It gets more difficult the thicker the leather is. Laser cutting leather thicker than 1/8" or 3/16" thick is likely difficult and will result in too much burning.

CLEANING LASERED LEATHER

Lasering (rastering) unfinished (not stained) or naturally finished leather may result in a low-contrast graphic or text. Darker leather dyes provide good contrast as the leather will be a light color underneath. Unfinished leather can be quickly coated with Neatsfoot oil or other leather treatment, which will somewhat darken the leather and make it easier to clean after lasering. On some thick leather, I have even used clear floor wax paste with good results. I use two to three coats with 10 minutes or more drying time between coats.

Lasered leather often leaves natural oils, or some burned dye or other finishing product on the leather, and requires cleaning. A leather cleaner is best for natural leather. Stained and finished leather can be wiped with a damp cloth or with a little soapy water. Leather cleaner also works well and can provide a nice fresh scent, ridding the product of any bad smell.

LEATHERETTE PRODUCTS

Lasering leatherette products is different from natural leather. The surface is a



Thick unfinished leather is difficult to cut without burning it and is also difficult to clean.

laserable synthetic leather with a subsurface of color such as gold, silver, black, or a natural-looking brown. There are a large variety of surface looks and subsurface colors. Many are realistic-looking faux leather. With a fair amount of experimentation, I found a set of power and speed settings that worked well for all the surface and subsurface combinations.

When I was first introduced to the line of leatherette products, I was hesitant to laser out large portions of the product. I was fearful of uneven lasering that would result in large text or graphics with small portions that either did not laser evenly or laser out the surface at all. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of results. As you can see from the photos of the various leatherette products, the results were very even.

I purchased sheets in every color combination to experiment with lasering (rastering) and laser cutting. As the material thickness is relatively thin and consistent, cutting out the leatherette into shapes was fast and easy. Cutting does not require high power settings, and fairly fast speeds work well. Just make sure the sheet is lying flat on your laser table and you don't stretch the sheet before or after you laser and cut it.

Cutout shapes can be taped or glued to wood or other hard materials. If you use glue, use it sparingly and again, don't stretch the leatherette when applying it to the base.

CLEANING LEATHERETTE PRODUCTS

Leatherette can be cleaned with a little water or even a little soapy water. Go light on the soap. It is unlikely you will even need to clean it as power settings are low and fast speeds are used to laser and cut. If any cleaning is needed at all, it is likely just the edges.

I really loved working with leatherette products as the results are awesome and I received a lot of compliments. Working with leatherette sheets provided a lot of opportunities to be creative and provided custom products that looked expensive to make. They are great for lighting up your creative juices! **GP**

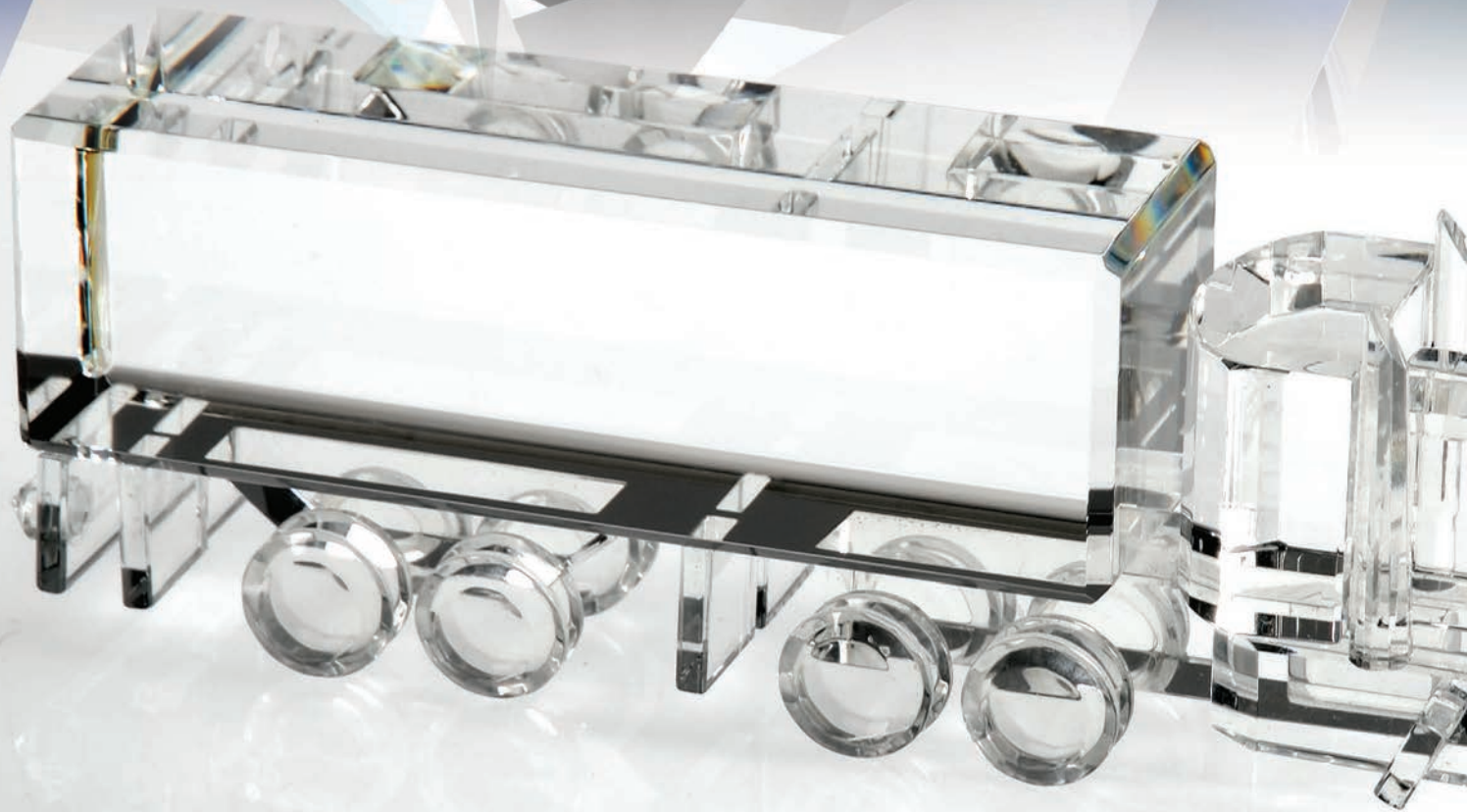
BOB HAGEL recently retired after owning Eagle's Mark Awards & Signs for 18 years in Southern California. While owning the business, he offered a full line of personalized products using laser engraving, sandcarving, and full-color UV direct print on products. Today, he consults on starting and expanding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

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Good Reasons

BY RUTH DOBBINS



Those of us who have been in the awards and recognition industry for a while tend to forget that there are others who may want to get into this line of business but are not quite sure if it is the right thing to do. As a newcomer, you may not know what is involved. What you may not know is that quite a few other industries use similar processes to create the artwork necessary for this work, and that the equipment necessary is fairly reasonable in price. You may already have some of the skills without knowing it.

So, let's take it from the top and see what is necessary to get started particularly in the glass awards arena.

WHY GLASS?

Glass is one of the oldest materials that mankind has used. Nature makes the original glass as a byproduct of volcanic eruptions, called obsidian. The ingredients for glass are pretty basic—sand, soda, and lime—and require only one further element: heat at around 2,000 F.

Not too many other substances can change their form from semi liquid



Let your customers see the endless opportunities that are available with glass and crystal items. (Image courtesy Crystal by Design)



LEARN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GLASS AND CRYSTAL:
<http://gpro.link/glasscrystal>.

to semi solid and take on almost any shape. It comes in many colors by adding various chemicals to the basic recipes, but it is used primarily in its clear variation in manufacturing. The clarity of glass and its ability to refract light and produce sparkle and rainbow effects make it a desirable product.

Crystal is a specific type of glass that is admired for its purity. Most people are familiar with lead crystal, but there are over 300 different types of crystal. Optical crystal is the purest and is usually reserved for such critical objects as lenses for microscopes, cameras, or observatories.

Much could be said about the use of

glass dating back thousands of years, but I must leave that as a study for yourself, should you be interested. Today, you have several glass manufacturers to choose from who produce everything from award blanks to gift items, ready for you to use by embellishing them with text and imagery of your choice. Not only that, but glass is recyclable, not just once, but indefinitely. There are thousands of shapes and sizes available to choose from.

ARTWORK

Most of you already know what it takes to create good artwork for the various processes you may be engaged in already.

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PREMIUM
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Besides awards, there are also a plethora of utilitarian items and gift items that are always sought after, such as keepsake boxes and paperweights. (Image courtesy Crystal by Design)



Today, you have several glass manufacturers to choose from who produce everything from award blanks to gift items. (Images courtesy Insta Crystal LLC)

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Photoshop and graphic programs like CorelDRAW and Adobe Illustrator provide the means to create the necessary artwork to decorate glass and crystal.

The basic requirement is that you create a black-and-white image. Most of you can already do that. We are talking about bitmap images, and even if you can't design things yourself, there are millions of images available as clip-art collections.

These are the types of images you will use to process your stencil material with, which in this case is a photo-resist. These materials allow you to reproduce fine-detailed images and small text on your glass surface. Should you consider doing larger projects in glass, you may have to be able to create vector images so that the design can be



Most of you already know what it takes to create good artwork from the various processes you may be engaged in already. (Image courtesy Insta Crystal LLC)

cut by a plotter or a laser. Still, we are talking about black-and-white artwork. In general, you print your image on a transparency-like film, which is the basis for producing a photoresist stencil.

PHOTORESIST

These are resist materials that are light-sensitive coated films that need to be processed by means of exposure with an ultraviolet light under safe light conditions such as a yellow light. When placing your artwork onto the emulsion side of the film and exposing it for a few seconds, the image is transferred to the film without being visible to the naked eye.

After exposure, the film gets washed out with warm water and the image

appears. The black areas of your design wash away and become the areas that get blasted into the glass. After the washout, the stencil is dried and is then ready to be applied to the glass surface ready for blasting. And yes, the stencil material is self-adhesive.

This is the “quick and dirty method” of describing the stencil production, but it really is pretty easy and requires minimal equipment: an exposure light, yellow light, and access to warm water. These stencils can be placed on silicon release paper for storage and be used whenever you are ready. There is one special film where you can skip the

text continued on page 82

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Let your customers pick up an award made from glass and one made from acrylic, and they will always favor the weighted glass object. (Images courtesy Crystal D)

The clarity of glass and crystal and the ability to refract light and produce sparkle and rainbow effects make them desirable products. (Image courtesy Topmost PRISM Crystal)



Right and opposite: Glass can be manufactured in a variety of shapes and colors, meeting many different needs. (Images courtesy Topmost PRISM Crystal)





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water washout, but these stencils cannot be stored for later use—they need to be used within a 24-hour period.

EQUIPMENT

This is the main expense to the whole process, but a complete abrasive blasting setup can be purchased from \$1,500 to \$10,000, depending on your production level and needs. A setup consists of a blasting cabinet, a pressure blaster, and an exhaust system.

The cabinet size depends on the size of the projects you want to make. They can have an attached pressure pot or a separate free-standing one. The same is true for the exhaust system: some cabinets have them attached to the back of the cabinet while others have a separate unit standing next to the cabinet. Much of this depends on your space available for the work—for some it needs to be compact.

Besides these items, you need a compressor, which a lot of shops already use to operate other equipment. Again, these are the basics and much of these individual components have been written about previously. The abrasive you use to blast with is usually aluminum oxide or silicon carbide, of which we prefer the latter.

CONCLUSION

As you can tell from the above descriptions, it is neither difficult nor expensive to get into creating glass awards and recognition pieces. People are simply attracted to glass and if they can hold a piece in their hands that bears their name or favorite design, they are always a happy customer. Let your customers pick up an award made from glass and one made from acrylic, and they will always favor the weighted glass object.

Price is, of course, a big factor. When you start looking at the multitudes of glass shapes and sizes, you will quickly learn that it is relatively easy to meet a customer's budget. Besides awards, there are also a plethora of utilitarian items and gift items that are always sought after. Everyone loves a mug with their name on it or a bottle of wine with a dedication to remember a special day by. And our frontline workers still deserve that special award that recognizes their efforts. Of course, you can also combine glass items with sublimation processes or make use of your laser by cutting stencils with it since there is a special laser film available just for that. The opportunities are endless. **GP**



Most people are familiar with lead crystal, but there are over 300 types of crystal. (Images courtesy Crystal by Design)

With over 40 years in the glass business, **RUTH DOBBINS** 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, or by phone at 505-473-9203.

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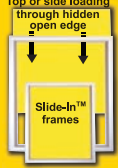
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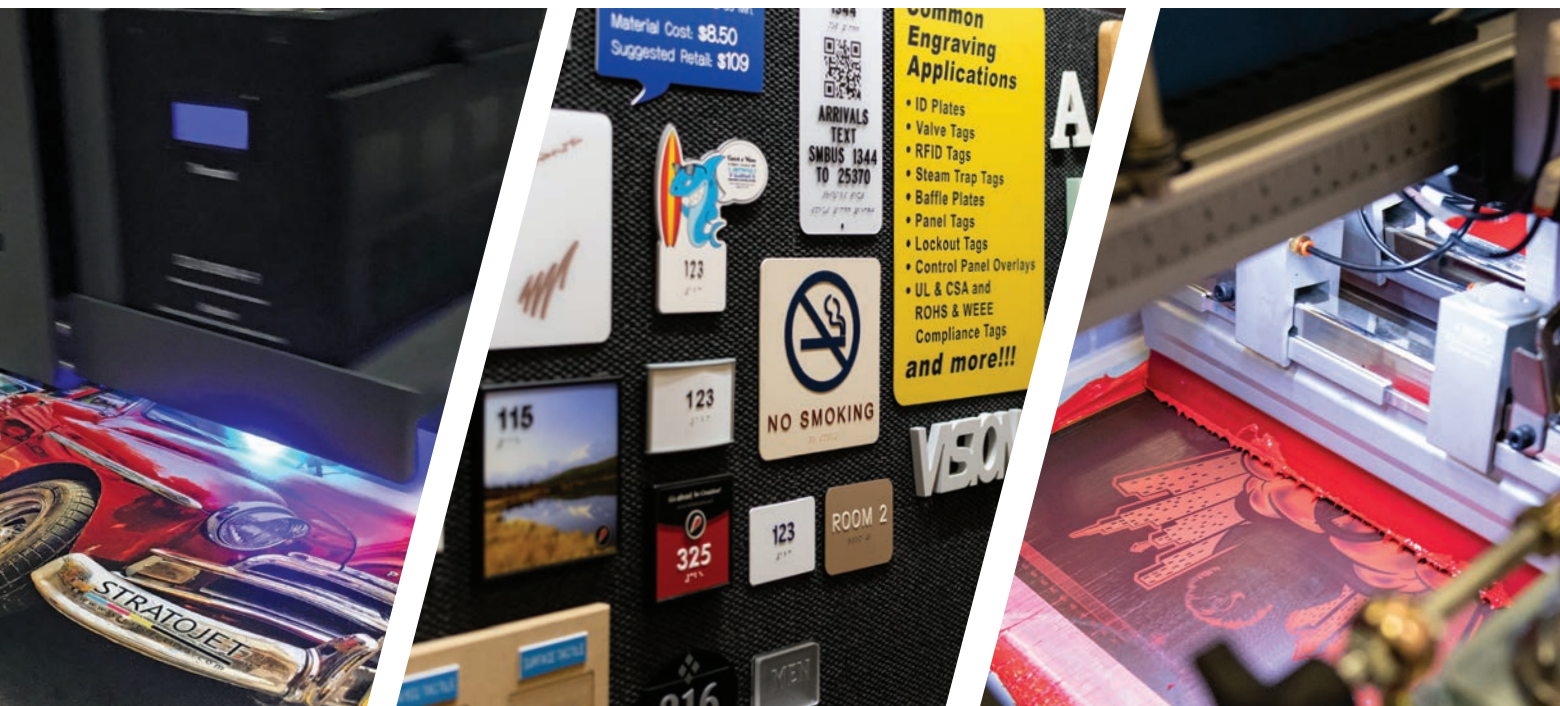
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- ★ Indicates Featured Exhibitors
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☐ Action Illustrated.....	622	☐ GSG 🍏.....	400, 500, 600
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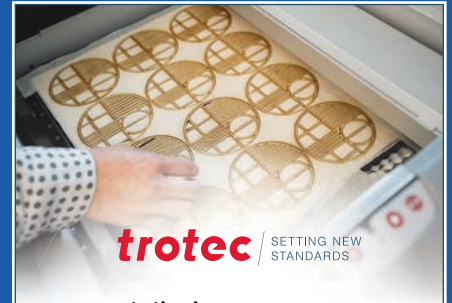
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WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2021

10am to 4pm

- Print on Purpose - How to Start and Grow a Successful Print Business
Presented by: **Digital Technology Group**
- Join the DTG Revolution!
Presented by: **Hirsch Solutions Inc**

THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021

8am to 9:30am

- Get the Most from your Laser Investment: Tips & Techniques to Save Time & Increase Profits
Presented by: **Epilog Laser**
- Troubleshooting Sublimation
Presented by: **JDS Industries**

11am to 12:30pm

- Skills, Strategies & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment
Presented by: **Trotec Laser**
- Why UV Print & Why Now
Presented by: **PDS Equipment**

1:30pm to 3pm

- Embroidery 101
Presented by: **GSG**

THURSDAY CONTINUED

4pm to 5:30pm

- Profitable Sandcarving - Small Investment, Large Potential
Presented by: **IKONICS Imaging**
- Should you Print Licensed Logos?
Presented by: **Transfer Express**

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2021

8am to 9:30am

- CorelDRAW A to Z
Presented by: **Corel Trainer**
- Expand your Apparel Decorating Solutions with GSG
Presented by: **GSG**

11am to 12:30pm

- Screen Print with Just a Heat Press
Presented by: **Transfer Express**

1:30pm to 3pm

- Learn Sandcarving with Rayzist Photomask
Presented by: **Rayzist Photomask**

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2021

9:15am to 9:45am

- Panel: Top Business Tips for Post-Pandemic Success
Presented by: **GRAPHICS PRO**



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FASHION-FORWARD EMBROIDERY

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customer's club or company, a favorite slogan, an element of their location, or anything that relates to their brand to add layers of meaning and decoration.

The key here is recognition and recombination. Recognize what fuels the customer; add your inspiration built from observing retail brands, designers, and other decorators; and create novel combinations that respect customer needs while hinting at these influences. Ask your customer the feeling they want to convey, the message they want to send, and what excites them about their favorite brands, and use that as your springboard.

VALUE FOR VALUE

This creative tweaking and boundary breaking may seem like overkill for some, but it behooves us to understand that for the highest end customers, the landscape has changed. The ability to decorate well, have on-time delivery, and offer capable customer service are no longer differentiators in the top shops. When we want to court customers that do more than bargain-hunt, we need to be brand consultants, not commodity stitchers.

By creating looks that add promotional value, that help strengthen identity, and add a sense of unique style, we increase the perception of our value, and in turn increase the estimation of our worth. Though not every job requires or offers opportunity for moving beyond the basics, showing our ability to rise above the usual can inspire confidence in our shops, even with those customers who will rarely move beyond the staples. **GP**

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

SIGN DESIGN 101

continued from page 57

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

An example of a tangible benefit is the paycheck you receive from working at your job. The intangible benefits are the sense of freedom, accomplishment, and success you obtain when you pair the hard day's work with the paycheck.

"Take Dad for a Father's Day Drive" captures the visual image of a father and his adult child out on the golf course and automatically fires off a series of mental conversations that take place almost unconsciously:

- "I haven't seen my dad in six months, what a great idea."
- "It's been too long—I gotta' call my dad and set this up."
- "I wonder if he can still out-drive me on that par-5 hole."

These are all questions that immediately race through our heads when we read a sign that has a targeted, piercing message that fires up our intangible benefits meter and takes our minds to another place and time. That is the power of intangible sign design. Not once did we mention golf clubs or balls or shoes—it's about the experience to be had.

Because the owner of the golf store was instantly able to visualize being on the course with his dad or his son, the advertising concept made perfect sense and he instantly understood my intent. It also worked for all the customers that came into his store that weekend. They did not come in looking for those cheap golf balls—they came in looking for anything that might enhance the experience, prolong the memory, and make the most of their special day they had planned together out on the course.

You probably never realized the power that resides in communication via signage. So, let's change your outlook on the purpose of signs.

At this point, you may be starting to look at the whole process of sign design in a much different way. Perhaps it's not

just as simple as picking a big fat font. Perhaps there needs to be some thought put into the project. Perhaps your customer has an idea for their sign that is not what they need and won't do the job they need it to do. Can you tell them that and still win the job, or do they just get frustrated and leave?

So many signs fail because they are too busy, have too much color, too little contrast, wrong fonts, bad spacing, bad kerning, and poor layout. Whose fault is that? Is it the customer's or the sign company's?

Yes, some customers can be nearly impossible to convince, but they are few and in most cases, your customer depends upon your design skills to provide them a solution to their sign needs. Establish your role in the sales process early, as the solution provider and expert in your field, and you will find more times than not that your customer will respond accordingly and let you design the sign the way it needs to be designed.

Moving forward, we will next look at the process of maintaining legibility in your sign designs and how to effectively reduce the number of words on a sign without losing the message. It's a process that takes a bit of practice but once you get the hang of it, you will find yourself doing it in every situation throughout your daily communication.

We will also explore more of the readability disciplines that affect how logos are designed, how they do their job, and why most logo designs fail on a sign before they ever get printed or painted or implemented. **GP**

MATT CHARBONEAU started his career in the sign industry in 1985 as Charboneau Signs. In 2017 he published the Pre-Sale Sign Survey Field Guide. In 2019 he started Storm Mountain Signs and the Sign Design Institute. Contact him at Matt@stormmountainsigns.com; www.stormmountainsigns.com; and 970-481-4151.

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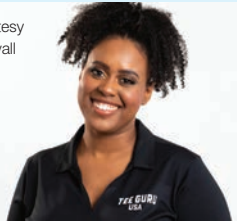
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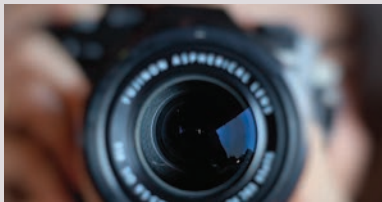
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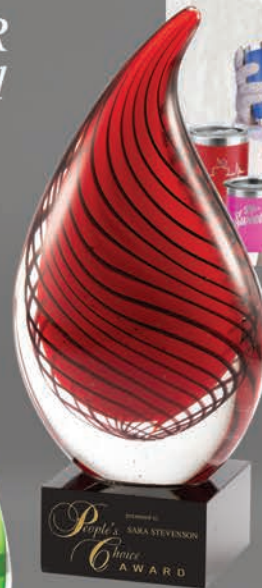
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