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SECTION:
INTERIORS**

Page 35

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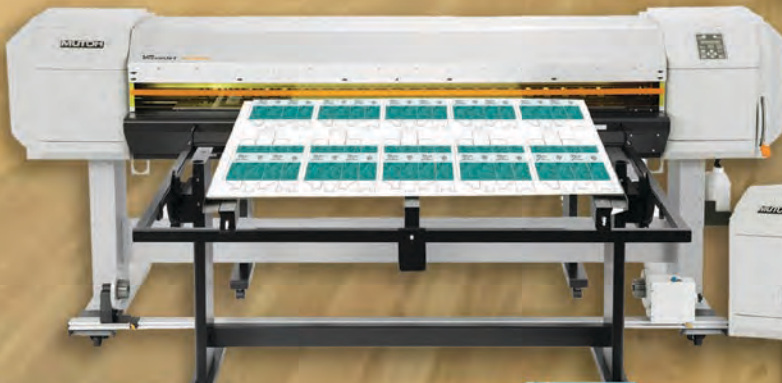
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» CONTENT

VOLUME 35

JUNE 2021

NUMBER 10

“Sublimation ... has thousands of products to choose from. As business owners, we need to look at what equipment we have to work with, research the product, size of our production space, who are our customers, and how we are going to market to them.”

HOWARD POTTER
A&P MASTER IMAGES LLC
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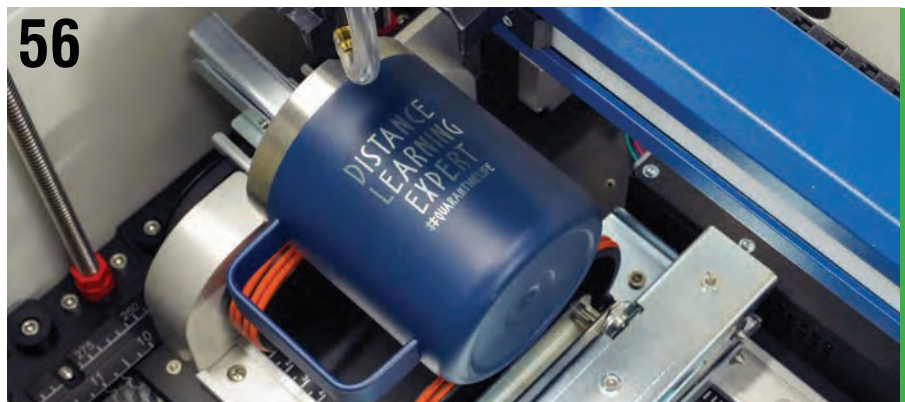
What's new in the laser engraving industry? These insiders have the scoop on technology, substrates, and more.

Featured in this month's issue is our special section, INTERIORS, on page 35.

It's packed with how-to tips and ideas from manufacturers to help you open new profit centers by taking a deep dive into interior application opportunities.



SIGNAGE & PRINTING



AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



APPAREL DECORATING

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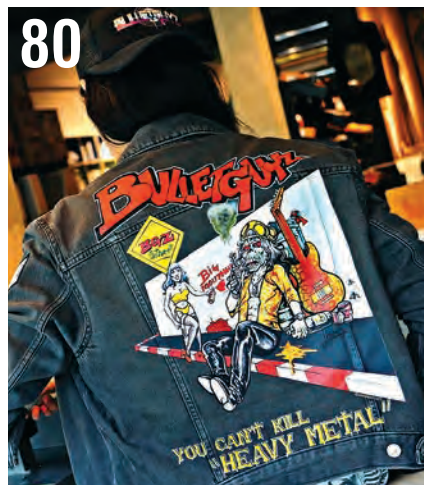
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As business gears up and shops prepare to pivot yet again, the opportunities to grow and expand your graphics business are almost endless. This month's cover art was provided courtesy **Deluxe Screen Printing Inc.** and **Rick Williams**.

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STEP ONE *CASSIE GREEN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR*



LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

One brief, overwhelming, emotional, exciting year ago, we launched *GRAPHICS PRO*. We launched it shortly after being sent home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We launched it via Zoom meetings, Slack chats, hundreds, no, *thousands* of emails and phone calls. We launched it while watching the world face many failures and many victories.

We launched virtual trade shows, scheduled phone calls just to “check in,” and worked as hard as ever to make sure you all received the support and education you needed to keep your businesses going. And in turn, we heard back from all of you: stories of survival, news of fundraisers and helping hands, even updates on growth and expansion.

It’s hard to believe that just one short year ago, I sat down to write the first editor’s column for this publication. It was not an easy year, not by a long shot, but it wasn’t wasted, either. While we are not out of the woods yet when it comes to the global economy and pandemic effects, we seem to be moving in the right direction. We hope to continue to be a part of that movement.

We continue to move forward, to work hard, to help each other through the good and bad. As I look forward to a year that promises just a hint of normalcy, I anticipate I’m not alone in the feeling of holding your breath yet knowing the exhale will be long and good. Continue to look to these pages for many years to come for support, education, a fun story or two, and much more.

Until next time.

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(Image courtesy Alphagraphics/EFI)

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THE TAMALE MAN

Another long day at the shop the other day found me driving a familiar path home just after dark. And like an internal GPS, as I passed an old house and caught the porch light in my peripheral vision, an involuntary memory came to mind. It was Mr. Cooper, and Cooper's Tamales.

He made them in the kitchen of that frame home, there on the corner of Whatley and LaFamo Road, and my dad was somewhat of a fan. On occasion, when driving his two boys to a fishing hole on the muddy Sabine River, we would take that same route and often stop at Cooper's place and buy a couple dozen tamales to enjoy while sitting on the riverbank waiting for the big one.

Where Mr. Cooper learned to make satisfactory tamales we never knew. He was just an East Texas redneck like the rest of

us, but he was a local entity, a man who sold cheap fast food from his back porch and out of an old ambulance-style GMC truck seen all around town.

Most everyone ate Cooper's tamales from time to time, but for about two bucks a dozen, we wondered how he made a living doing it. Was there something else he sold out of that old panel truck? A little moonshine? Some wacky weed?

It was a running joke, on either school bus or family station wagon, after seeing a dead deer or other such thing out the window, someone would cry, "Somebody call Cooper! Yep, that's tamale material right there!"

That wasn't really fair, of course. Even though no one knew what kind of mystery meat was in those tamales, surely it was store-bought and not collected on the

roadside. And judging from the many repeat customers he had, there didn't seem to be a lot of concern over his secret recipe or the ingredients it contained.

Cooper didn't live to be a really old man, but for a time he was locally famous. That was a long time ago, and today very few people still remember Mr. Cooper and his tamale business. That was way back in a time when sign guys did a lot of their work out of the back of an old truck like his, and it was all hand drawn, hand painted, and done with heavily pigmented oil-based paint.

I learned the trade from a real Hispanic American, Mr. Jesse Molina, and have stayed in it well over four decades. Of course, we've had to change with the times, adopt new technologies, and move forward. Like Mr. Cooper and his tamales, the old sign guys I once knew who were contemporary with him and knew how to do things the traditional way are all gone now and mostly forgotten. Those names include Mr. Couch of Couch Signs, the talented Mr. Hughes of Crest Signs, Jesse Molina, Brad Horner, and a few others.

For some reason, with Molina being nearly the lone exception, most of them barely lived to collect their first social security check. They worked steady and hard, and about the time they began to slow down, they abruptly stopped. Maybe it was all the paint fumes, or the white lead in those old paints that took a toll on their health (that and the drinking and smoking, of course). Or maybe, just maybe ... it was those dad-blamed tamales.

Recently I received my first social security check too, and am amazed at how time has flown. Because of the changing technology our sign shop witnessed and bought into, perhaps my exposure to



the common poisons of the trade was a bit less. And perhaps, like my old friend Molina, I might be the sign man-short-lifespan exception. Also, I haven't taken the hazardous path of really slowing down yet since slowing down sure seemed to be the beginning of the end for many of that generation of sign makers.

For me, I think I'll ease into retirement over a dozen years or so. If done that way, maybe I can live long enough to reclaim a lot more of my paid-in social security taxes than most of those fellows did.

Of course, I did eat quite a few of Mr. Cooper's tamales, and absorbed my share of leaded paint, screen ink, mineral spirits, lacquer thinner, and the multiple other toxins of the trade. No doubt they are part of my DNA by now, which can't be all that good.

So, to be fair to my wife, Sharon, I'd better keep my life insurance paid up for a while longer. And, for my own mental health and disposition, I'm going to try not to think about how fast time is flying by when I pass that old house, and

can almost smell those tamales cooking, when traveling that familiar path to the place I call home.

Have a great month.



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

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Get Ready: Opportunity is Here

THE NEXT FEW YEARS WILL BRING SOME OF THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC EXPANSION IN YEARS

BY DANA CURTIS

You have probably read or heard a lot about the 10 years between 1920 and 1929 — prohibition, flappers, gangsters. A period of economic prosperity referred to in France as the crazy years, or the golden '20s in Germany, emphasized by social, artistic, and cultural dynamism. A period so crazy it could only end in the greatest economic collapse in history on Black Friday in October 1929.

Humanity experienced innovations in the fields of transportation, communication, fashion, entertainment, medicine, and infrastructure. The United States and Europe, reeling from the end of World War I, converted their wartime factories to produce consumer goods, and the age of consumption began. There was also something you may be familiar with as you read this, a pandemic that ravaged the world and made everyone stay inside.

Fast forward 100 years. We're here again.

THE NEW ROARING '20s

What's coming (and possibly already here) will make last century's myths look like child's play, in my opinion. A combination of stimulus, vaccine distribution, and pent-up demand is going to explode this economy.

People want to get out. They want to live their lives again. They will have money to spend. They will have regrets to vanquish.



They will have loved ones to avenge. Did I mention they have been stuck inside? I predict we will witness a new cultural revolution, technological change, medical breakthroughs, and re-evaluate the ways we communicate with each other.

But those are all articles for another day. You came to these pages to talk business.

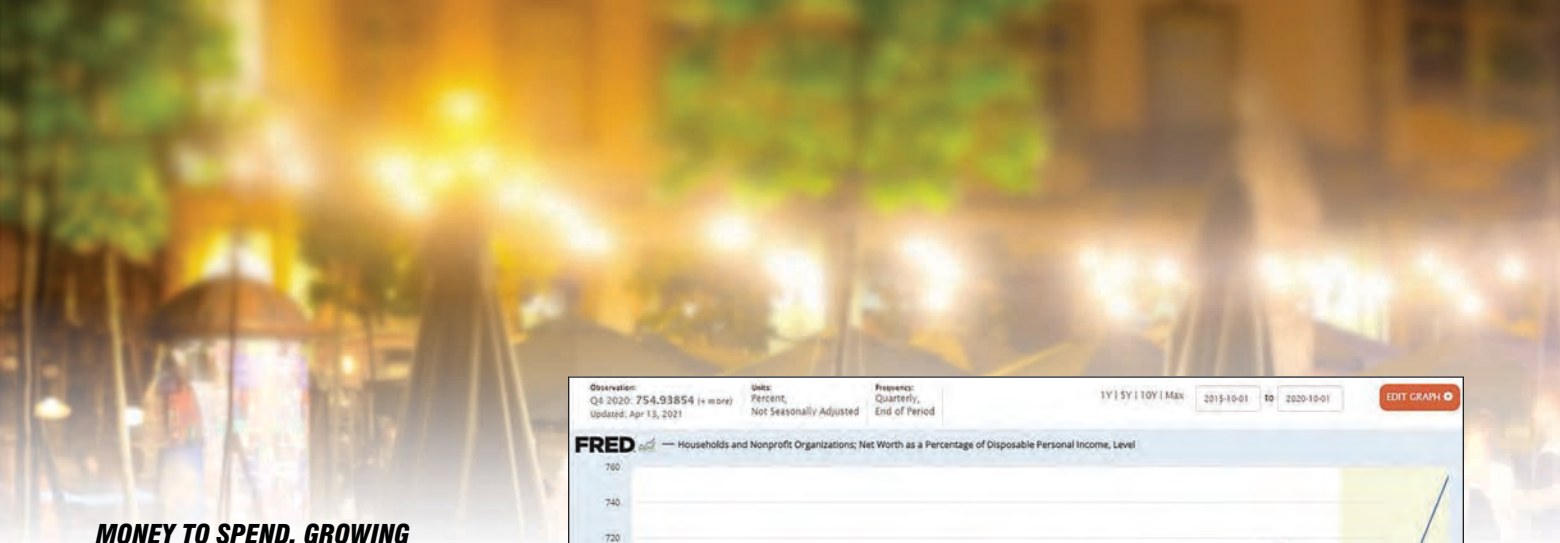
INFLECTION POINT

Back in March and April, two important financial figures both made huge predictions about 2021 and beyond.

The first was from JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon: "I have little doubt that with excess savings, new stimulus savings, huge deficit spending, more QE, a new potential infrastructure bill, a successful vaccine, and euphoria around the end of the pandemic, the U.S. economy will likely boom."

The second was from the chairman of the Federal Reserve bank, Jerome Powell: "What we're seeing now is really an economy that seems to be much at an inflection point, and that's because of widespread vaccination and strong fiscal support, strong monetary policy support ... we feel like we're at a place where the economy's about to start growing much more quickly and job creation (is) coming in much more quickly."

That means the fuse has already been lit. The dynamite is about to go off.



MONEY TO SPEND, GROWING EMPLOYMENT

If you had no money going into the pandemic, you came out with some. If you had a little going in, you came out with a lot. Don't believe me? Check out **Figure 1**: the key here is the words "disposable personal income." In other words, money we can spend on things we want.

The crash in March 2020 affected millions and shuttered multiple industries. In 2021, employment figures show a strong recovery, and forecasted models all indicate our best days are ahead of us (**Figure 2**).

As unemployment trends down, labor force participation is trending up. People are getting back to work and will have money to spend beyond staples like food and shelter. They can start getting back to their lives again. One great way to forecast expected rise in consumer demand is to see what the advertising markets are doing.

THE AD MARKET IS WAKING UP

It's a common problem for marketing and sales teams that when business goes down, so does the marketing budget. Belts get tightened. Things like travel and events get cut. Businesses stop spending money and focus on essential spending like keeping the lights on and retaining as many employees as possible.

Michael Nathanson of MoffetNathanson believes advertisers will spend the most money they have since the late 1990s. He credits his indicators as TV, online video, search, and social media.

Where will those dollars go? The internet (**Figures 3 and 4**, page 14).

Any growth strategy that does not include digital marketing is missing the boat. People want to get back into the world and they will be bringing little electronic billboards with them called phones.



Figure 1. At the time of writing, people have money to spend. The key here is the words "disposable personal income." (Figures courtesy Dana Curtis)

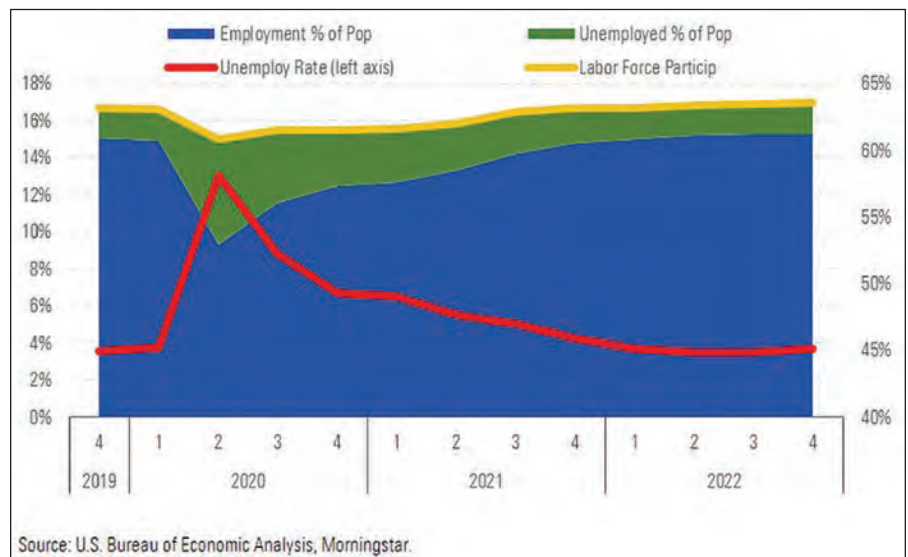


Figure 2. In 2021, employment figures show a strong recovery, and forecasted models all indicate our best days are ahead of us.

WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING?

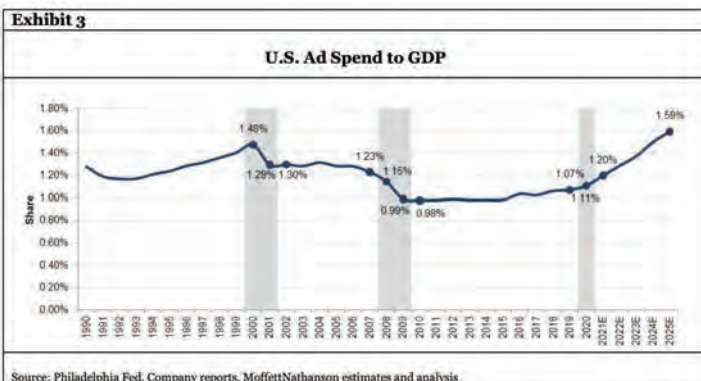
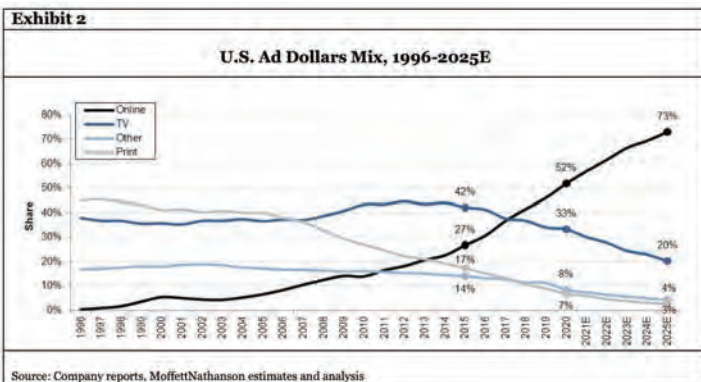
Now that you are aware of what's going on, here's how to harness the dragon: get outside and reconnect with all your old customers. If 2020 was the year of interior, 2021 is the year of exterior.

What did the pandemic do to us? We had to avoid loved ones, we couldn't go out to eat, couldn't travel, couldn't gather in groups of 50, and we had to rely on digital versions of our favorite activities. As things start to show signs of recovery, we've found ways to see loved ones. We

can go out to restaurants if we sit outside with plexiglass between us. We can go on road trips with our family. We've found ways to maintain some of our sanity.

What's the last thing left? Gatherings. Humans are a social species — we want to be around each other. That means events. Events are poised to explode. That means concerts, festivals, little league tournaments, retail, tourism, and parties. So many parties.

Bring your equipment with you to these events if you can. Got a vinyl cutter,



Figures 3 and 4. Michael Nathanson of MoffettNathanson believes advertisers will spend the most money they have since the late 1990s. Any growth strategy that does not include digital marketing is missing the boat.

engraver, heat press, or desktop printer? Bring your laptop and get out to these events. It's where your customers are. They will have money to burn and deep need to spend it, but they won't be coming to you. You need to be where they are. Your biggest capability to capture impulse buys is coming because you have a population of shoppers who want to be anywhere but home and they will have cash in their pockets.

That means personalization opportunities will have a huge focus in the new economy; apparel, custom gifts, and vehicle personalization are ready to take center stage again. Imprinted sportswear will surge with kids getting back out on to the field and back to school. Cars will get back on the road again, which means decals and wraps. Retail will surge in shopping centers — that means custom engraving, dye-sub, heat press, floor graphics, custom cut vinyl decals, directional signage, wall graphics, and point-of-purchase displays.

Back in Q1 the focus was on the home because that's where we were (if you missed it, check out my article in the March issue, page 12). Now it's time to get back outside. It's summer in the Northern Hemisphere — get some sunshine and fresh air.

You may have caught up with friends and loved ones via Zoom. Online happy hours were popular during the pandemic. Now it's time to reconnect with as many of your past customers as you can.

Many businesses focus solely on attracting new customers, but you need to spend a good chunk of your time retaining current and former customers. These are people you already



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know to be a good sales potential; they've already bought from you.

Here are a couple of key elements to use to retain your current customers:

1. **Stay in Contact:** This means by phone, email, eNewsletter, direct mail, and in person, if possible.
2. **Post-Purchase Assurance:** Follow up on their most recent purchase(s). Your customers need to feel like they are being supported for their purchase and with the item or service they purchased. How many times have you purchased a product, then felt completely abandoned?
 - A. Something as simple as a thank-you note with your contact or customer service information can go a long way in retaining a great customer.
 - B. Think of it as a simple, "I didn't forget about you. You are why my business is successful."
 - C. It's an unexpected gift at an unexpected time.
3. **Deals and Guarantees:** Always offer your current customers the best deals and guarantees you have. Show them you appreciate their business or even come up with a club specifically to reward loyal customers. You can also do this with a preferred pricing option.
 - A. The trick here is to offer it personally. Don't use an ad or a social media post that everyone can see. Use email or direct mail. Something that says you tried to find them.

During periods of trauma (like a once-in-a-generation health crisis, for example) people are going to feel marginalized. They are going to feel left out, or worse, singled out. They need to know that someone cares about them. This is your opportunity to give them the unique experience they don't get from their government, the cable company, or cell phone provider. Let them know someone appreciates and cares about them.

Your old customers will provide new customers. Get their testimonials, have them tell their story to others. Give to your old

customers and they will pay it forward with new business to you. It's what's known as Social Proof. Per Wikipedia: "Social proof is a psychological and social phenomenon wherein people copy the actions of others in an attempt to undertake behavior in a given situation."

How useful is a review on Amazon versus clever marketing copy? How valuable is a referral from a friend or neighbor for a plumber/electrician/mechanic? Those work just as well for your business. Your old customers can bring them to you. Give them a reason.

THE ROARING 2020s

We're almost halfway through 2021. The CDC said in April that 50% of Americans

had at least one vaccination. Government infrastructure bills are flooding congress. Stimulus payments are arriving in people's bank accounts. The SP500 is still climbing. Travel restrictions are easing. States are lifting mask mandates. People want to escape their homes and get back out there.

Who will be waiting for them? You. **GP**

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

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Hybrid printers allow you to accept a wide range of jobs without having to go through extensive training. (Image courtesy Al-phagraphics in Arvada, CO/EFI)

Everything You Need to Know

About a Hybrid Printer

BY
CASSIE
GREEN



There are a lot of reasons to consider adding a hybrid printer to your product lineup, especially these days. More and more, graphics professionals are looking for ways to grow their business, to be versatile, and to be more efficient. For those specifically looking to expand their printing business into rigid materials, a hybrid printer is one piece of equipment that fits the ticket.

But beyond those reasons, if you're just starting out in the printing world, hybrid printers allow you to accept a wide range of jobs without having to go through extensive training. These printers also don't require a lot of maintenance, both points that make this equipment less intimidating to take on.

THE RIGHT TIME

The first thing you need to consider is when it's the right time to purchase a hybrid printer. According to Thomas Krumm, EFI, if you're at the beginning of your printer journey, a hybrid is a great option. "It allows you to accept a wide range of applications," he notes.

Mark Crawford, Fluid Color, agrees, adding that substrates also play a key role into this decision. "When to

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Right: Owning a hybrid printer allows shops to expand their services into rigid materials. (Image courtesy Fluid Color)

Below: Following simple maintenance tasks will keep your hybrid printer running at peak performance. (Image courtesy Konica Minolta USA)



purchase a roll-to-roll or flatbed versus a hybrid is based on percentage of roll versus rigid work,” he points out. “Customers that do a small percentage for roll work many times can get by with an inexpensive roll printer and a flatbed.” He adds that finding that “sweet spot” is when the roll versus rigid percentage gets closer to the same volumes.

Speaking of the production process, efficiency is also a major consideration when

it comes to purchasing decisions. Todd Smith and Ed Bokuniewicz of Konica Minolta USA advise that a shop should consider this equipment “when you are looking to reduce labor costs of mounting roll media to foam core, increase your production time and output, and expand the types of applications your shop is doing.” They add that if you already own a flatbed router/cutter, the hybrid can make a great complementary addition.

With any new equipment, training can spook a business owner when deciding whether to purchase it. Luckily, there isn’t a huge learning curve associated with hybrid printers. Crawford notes that training on most hybrid printers is not difficult. “Typically the most difficult part of printing is making sure that the third-party RIP is configured properly to RIP the customer’s file,” he notes.

Most manufacturers offer training and support when the equipment is purchased. “For an experienced operator, training can normally be achieved in two to three days. For beginning operators, more time will be required if they don’t have experience with wide-format workflow,” add Smith and Bokuniewicz. From there, operators will gain confidence as they use the printer. “The operator will learn over time how to handle various applications from printing on different types of substrates, like acrylic, glass, metal, printing on objects, (and) creating jigs. It all depends upon what applications the shop is exposed to from their customer base and what applications they want to produce.”

DOWN TO DETAILS

There are many other details shops should know about hybrid printers. For example, there are some maintenance procedures to be aware of.

(TH)INK SPECIFICS

THOMAS KRUMM, EFI

What applications does an expanded ink set open up for PSPs?

It goes to having all sorts of inks for all sort of applications. (Some manufacturers, including EFI) have thermoforming for thermo printers. We have ink sets that allow embossing and layering for printing something that looks and feels like wood. We can make things feel like leather, to feel like embossed names.

Then we have other things like clear ink, which allows us to create high-value prints, like very high gloss prints that accent certain areas of the print, or could be a flood over the entire print. We also have our white ink capability that we print on back-lits for diffusing the light so viewers don’t see the light on the other side of the light box. We can do dual prints: one message on the back during the day, then a different image shows at night. These are high-value applications that graphics shops can charge more for.

We can do anything with white that we can do with color. We have a lot of customers doing wallpaper or window films — they can adjust what you can see through.



Below: You can do so many applications with a hybrid printer that you need to govern what you know you can do and what you can't do. Figure out what you can do before you sell a project. (Image courtesy EFI)

“The type of maintenance that takes place is wiping the heads at a certain frequency and changing the filters at a certain frequency,” says Krumm. He notes that some manufacturers offer a checklist that outlines what needs to be done once a week, once a month, etc.

Smith and Bokuniewicz specifically suggest following those recommended procedures. “Daily startup procedures, maintain and cleaning print heads with approved wiping clothes ... treat those print heads like gold. Keep them clean and the print head plate as well,” they state, adding that filter replacements are also common.

The big kicker when it comes to maintenance: white ink. “Typically, hybrid printers will have white ink and (we) have seen customers neglect their white ink channels, either through not properly maintaining them, or running flush through them as needed,” note Smith and Bokuniewicz. “This can cause clogged inkjet print heads, and potentially a need for print head replacement.”

Speaking of ink, hybrid printers offer a color gamut that will keep customers happy. As technology improves, so do the benefits this equipment offers. “We like to talk about it as an ecosystem. You have the RIP, the ink sets, and you have the printer,” notes Krumm. “At the same time as getting inks with a greater gamut,

on the printer side we are getting smaller drop sizes and getting more accurate with placement.”

“For UV-based inks, the color gamut will satisfy most customers with traditional CMYK inks,” add Smith and Bokuniewicz. “Ink properties like color gamut, tackiness, adhesion, (and) flexibility are all parts of the ink formula. (Our company) provides a general-purpose ink that fits most applications. However, some manufacturers have different ink sets for specific applications like thermoforming.”

On top of those improvements, speed is also a major selling point with this equipment. “When the printer’s printing, it’s making money,” Krumm points out, specifically calling out the nonimage side of the process. “Your setup time is important; the faster the printer goes, the more effect on the nonimage time.”

But Crawford believes a shop shouldn’t just buy the fastest printer out there and hope for the best. “The ability to have a hybrid printer that can print on both roll and rigid media is the key. With our line of printers, we can determine what the best entry point for speed is for the customer’s current production and then they can upgrade in the field to achieve higher speeds as they grow without having to purchase a new printer.”

A FEW MORE THINGS ...

Like any equipment, hybrid printers don’t come without their share of challenges, though they’re pretty minor. “Some challenges, such as managing large 4’ X 8’ substrates, especially like acrylic, will probably need two people to help manage the sheets on the press,” Smith and Bokuniewicz say.

Krumm builds off this point, calling to attention the plethora of applications hybrid printing is great for as being a potential challenge. “Sometimes you stretch your imagination a little too far and take on work that you go through too much testing for,” he says. “Be careful of foreign substrates and special applications, make sure you test first, make sure you can finish the job, print it, and not have a lot of waste.”

Those few challenges are generally not scary enough to stop a shop from diving into the hybrid printing world. In the end, there are so many support options and applications that it’s hard to say no to adding this technology. **GP**

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BASIC WOOD AND METAL SIGN WORK

Recently we were asked to make a swinging wooden sign for an existing entrance structure marking the driveway into a 1,000-acre ranch near Grand Saline, Texas. The client was the son of a customer for whom we made a somewhat similar sign nearly 20 years before. We don't make that many wooden signs anymore, and this would actually be a combination of wood and metal, a simple method we are familiar with as compared to masking, blasting, painting, and so forth.

BRINGING THE DESIGN TO LIFE

After a couple of attempts, a design was settled on. Our initial efforts focused on finding time to get this job moving during a busy season at the shop. But before long, I was out at the home center looking for some suitable rough cedar lumber to construct the sign from.

The size was nailed down at 39" high X 48" wide, and rough cedar boards measuring at 8" wide and 1" thick seemed to fit the bill. To get the edges straight and true, the width of the boards would

be ripped down a bit on a table saw, requiring six boards all 6 1/2" wide. The actual edges of some of the boards were a bit damaged, so this trimming would also clean that up as well.

It is important to hand-select multiple boards that will be used to create a single sign, because those boards need to be very similar in color and texture, and with about the same number of knots and flaws. You can't have one perfect board among multiple flawed and distressed boards, and the color of



Our proposal for this combination wood and metal sign used a photo of their empty framework plus our proposed 39" X 48" sign. (All images courtesy Rick Williams)



Selecting boards that make a wood background of a somewhat uniform character is an important step.

The logo and letters weren't routed in or sandcarved around, but were to be 3/16"-thick powder-coated aluminum.



each needs to be consistent as well. If one plank stands out as greatly different from the rest, that is all the human eye will see and likely the text or logo will play second fiddle.

To us, this method of making a custom wood sign is much quicker and less expensive than a sandcarved sign and looks more substantial than a routed sign. The logo and the text would be cut from plate aluminum, and the same aluminum would be used to make a couple pair of metal straps, which would hold the boards tightly together.

The plate aluminum did not need to be particularly thick, as nothing would be threaded for studs, so 3/16"-thick mill finish 5052 aluminum was chosen for use for text, logo, and strapping. The straps would be through-bolted using stainless-steel flathead bolts, but the lettering and logo would use simple powder-coated flat-head counter-sunk screws to hold them in place, also made of stainless steel. All metal parts and hardware would be powder coated a durable satin black finish. Nothing was painted.

After CNC cutting of the metal parts,

they were prepped for powder coating. Some small parts had to be daisy chained (wired) together so they would not be lost during the powder-coating process. In fact, both these small logo parts and the smaller letters in this job were tabbed together when they were cut on the waterjet so they would not fall between the slats and into the deep blue sea (the 3 feet of muddy water in the bottom of the waterjet).

One step in between cutting metal parts and powder coating them was locating all the holes that would be needed in each



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SHOP TALK



Because small parts and small letters can slip to the bottom of the waterjet tank, elements are tabbed together before cutting begins.



A fiber-type flap wheel was used to remove the small burr from the backs of each part, and the same disk would be used to prep parts for powder coating.



Using our pattern, the holes needed in each part are located so as to miss cracks between boards.



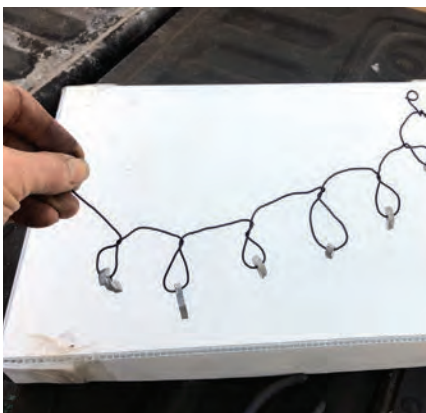
The small stainless flathead screws would fit flush into recesses made by a counter-sink bit.



Here, all the parts are accounted for, drilled, counter-sunk, and ready to go to the powder coating shop.



The 1/4"-diameter eyes the sign would swing from were modified with special steel tabs with a single hole. These would reach the top bolt on the straps and be pinned in place.



Before powder coating, the tiny parts of the cow's head logo were wired together so nothing got lost and all got coated.



The actual powder coating with a satin black finish is the easiest part of the job. Baked in a large oven at 400 F, the smooth black finish will last for many years.



The boards were ripped down to 6 1/2" wide, and six boards make up the 39" height of the sign. Each board looks like it belongs with the others.

part, keeping the hole locations away from the seams or cracks in the boards. All the parts were lined up with a paper pattern showing the exact placement of each part, and the hole locations were marked. The holes in the straps were also located, putting two bolts in each board, spaced correctly and symmetrically.

The metal parts were drilled on a drill press. After that, a counter sink bit was used on the drill press to get the right recess in each hole so the heads of the flat-head screws were truly flush with the surface of the metal.

One strap was used as a pattern and all other straps were drilled the same, allowing for two bolts through each board. Each strap was beveled a bit at the top to identify the orientation since the hole

pattern might not be perfectly reversible. These holes were also counter-sunk for the 3/16" stainless bolts that would be used to squeeze the boards together.

A fiber-type flap disk of a fine grit was used to smooth the burr on the back edges of all metal parts, and to prep the front sides of the metal items for powder coating. All that was left was hanging them on a rack and doing one last cleaning for dust and contaminants before they were sprayed and baked in the oven.

But, before carrying the parts to the powder coating shop, two hardware items needed to be made to ensure this sign would hang and swing in the wind for many years without the hardware pulling out of the wood. Two medium-sized eye screws, made of 1/4" round steel

with threaded ends, were modified with a couple of small pieces of flat stock cut to shape on the waterjet. The flat steel items were welded to the ends of the eye screws. These flat pieces provided a hole that would line up with the topmost hole in the metal straps.

Secured in this way — to the metal straps holding the sign together — the eyes cannot pull out like they could if just screwed into wood. The two notches made in the top boards that allowed this to fit together were last filled with clear epoxy, which will prevent any motion of the hardware, reducing some wear and tear.

Powder coating is the easiest step, and even if we had to contract that out, the bill would be fairly small. Prior to assembling the sign, our trimmed and



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Where Finishing Comes First

SHOP TALK



The sign would be allowed to naturally age and turn gray, but a sealer was still used to control the process. The sealer is applied with a brush to all sides of each board and their ends.



Large antique furniture clamps were used to hold the boards snugly together while the straps were put in place and bolted to permanently hold the boards together.



Eye screws were secured by the top strap bolt, then using a pattern, each letter and logo part was set into place.



The cow's head graphic involved a number of small parts that were a bit fun to keep up with during the process. Using the pattern, parts were located and pilot holes were drilled. Then the pattern was removed in pieces as parts were permanently screwed in place.



The straps were through-bolted, but all other parts were secured with stainless screws that were powder coated to match.



Though located 100 miles away, the client arrived at the shop within two hours of being called. The next day he sent this photo of the installed sign, which will slowly turn gray to match the supporting structure.

cut-to-length boards were sealed with regular Thompson's WaterSeal. This product was painted on both sides of each board, and the ends and edges too. Then it was allowed to dry a day or two.

After that, two large furniture clamps were used to pull the boards together snugly, and the straps were put in place and holes drilled. Sliding one end off the edge of the worktable allowed access to the back of the sign to secure the matching strap in place, sandwiching the boards together and tightening the nuts firmly.

Once the sign itself was solidly assembled, our plotter-drawn paper pattern was used to locate each metal letter or logo part, and small pilot holes were drilled to about a 1/2" deep. The pattern was

removed in pieces as the parts were permanently screwed in place with the screws that had been powder coated to match.

FINAL TOUCHES

The assembly of this type of sign takes a bit of time but is simple if using a pattern. The modified eye screws were put in place at the top, with the top strap bolt going through their modified ends. Lastly, the notches where they fit, though concealed by the straps, were filled in with clear five-minute epoxy.

Since we were not contracted to install the sign, the final step was simply to give the customer a call. Even though his location was about an hour and a half away, he was standing in our shop in less than two hours. I guess he really wanted that sign!

He did send us a final, on-location photograph, and from all indications is a pretty happy camper. Who knows, maybe the next time we deal with this client it may be 20 years from now and his son might be the one looking for another cedar ranch sign. But at 66 years old, and 48 years in this business, I'm pretty sure I won't be the one to build it! **GP**

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

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GRAPHICS|PRO

Customer Service Creates Repeat Clients

BY CHARITY JACKSON



BUILD AND SUSTAIN YOUR BUSINESS ON EXCELLENT SERVICE

I have a confession to make: We don't have any graphics on our shop van. I know, I know, pathetic. Really, it is. But in our defense, we've been so busy lettering everyone else's vehicles that our poor van is an empty canvas just begging for a wrap. It's coming, I promise. It's already designed — along with the rewrap

of our lobby walls and front counter. But you know how the proverb goes: "The cobbler's children have no shoes" — in our case, the wrap guys have no wrap.

The main point of my confession is that we really don't advertise. We no longer have an ad in the phone book or an on-line paid listing, we stopped doing Yelp,

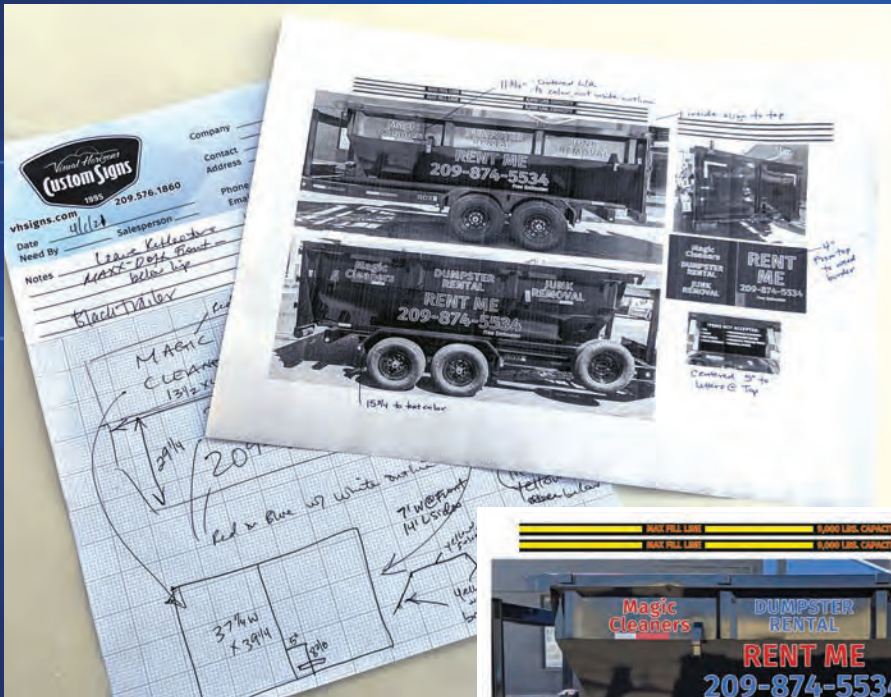
and we don't do any cold calling. Other than signage on our building, all of our jobs come from repeat business and word-of-mouth advertising — customers telling others about us. Hands down, this is the best type of advertising.

We've gone through at least two recessions and now a pandemic since we've

Besides our Pantone color charts, we also have custom printed Roland DGA charts. This gives us the exact colors we can expect on our metallic, premium, and calendered vinyls. Chosen colors are noted in the customer's paperwork.

(All images courtesy Charity Jackson)





Simple jobs like spot graphics on trailers are a common project. This customer knew exactly what info he wanted on the trailer. Quickly scratched-out notes and a proof showing the graphics on a scaled photo of the trailer ensured we listened to his requests. Measurements for future trailers were clearly noted on a printed proof.

been in business. When times slow down, we do cold calling, we call customers, and we run sales. Business is an up and down cycle, and we've gone through enough of these waves to know we might have to hustle some years more than others. But we've always come through it all OK in the end because the number one thing we do right is our customer service.



COMMUNICATION

I received an email from a customer this morning asking me if I had received the email he sent me the previous day because he hadn't heard from me. I've worked with this guy for years at the large company he works for, and he constantly shares our name with other departments.

I checked the time on the email and sent him a quick message: "Hey Kevin, yes, I did get the email; it came in at the end of the day, so I haven't had a chance to check the details yet."

His response, "Oh, no problem. You usually respond right away, so I thought I better check to make sure it went through." Of course, I went on to joke about how I must be slacking. His email came in at about 4 p.m. the day before, and his new email came in about 9 a.m. the following day.

So, either I have my customers super spoiled by quick responses, or I'm doing something right. Maybe it's both. Either way, this email exchange reminds me that

customers really do appreciate hearing right back from you.

I go through my emails numerous times throughout the day, deleting junk, filing the ones I want to reference later in folders, and responding to customers. If I can take a minute to answer a question or provide a resource, I shoot off a quick response and move on. If it's something I need to quote, research, or take a bit of time to respond thoroughly, I still shoot off a quick response letting the customer know I received their email and will be getting back to them with the info/proof/quote they need. It only takes a minute to do it, and it makes a significant impact.

Even on days that I'm going to be out on an install, I still shoot off emails in the morning and again in the afternoon. This way, my customers hear from me within 24 hours.

How many times have you emailed or called a company requesting a quote on something, and you don't hear back for a few days? Those in-between days are super

important because sometimes you find another company that responds quicker, or a slow response makes you hesitant.

We want to have our kitchen cabinets painted and have been slowly gathering estimates. Two companies gave us verbal quotes, nothing formal. A third company I messaged through their online form and then followed up with an email providing photos of our kitchen and detailed measurements so I could get the ball rolling quicker. Within minutes I received an automated email assuring me they received my email. By that afternoon, I received a text message with an estimate, along with an attached PDF detailing what I would get for the price.

Their quote was about \$1,500 more than another quote we received, but I was so impressed with their customer service, quick response, and detailed estimate that we may end up going with them despite the extra cost. With how smooth the process went to get a quote, it gives me confidence that the rest of the project should go just as smooth.

LISTENING

When working with customers, it's tempting to want to do the talking while explaining methods and materials, and there is definitely a time for that as part of the sales process, but listening should come first. Before we can explain anything, we must first find out what information the customer is needing.

When a customer comes in, especially when it's someone we haven't worked with before, the conversation usually starts with something like, "I have a new work truck, and I need to get some lettering on it." Or I need a sign for my building, or a banner for a special, or an A-frame to put at the street. However the conversation starts, there is always the same message: the customer has a need and wants to know if we can help them.

A list of questions must be answered before we can help them; this is how we prompt the customer to talk and where we



Taking clear notes on this customer's needs, working with him on color selection, and tracking sizes for future orders makes it easy for the customer to order from us in the future. Since color variance was a problem with his last sign shop, we've kept a sample print on file along with clearly noted colors and print files.



listen to gather the necessary information to walk them through the process. Along with questions like, do you have a digital version of your logo, how much coverage are you imagining, do you have a budget in mind, what do you hope to achieve with this advertising, we also gather photos and measurements of the vehicle itself.

Gathering information and listening to the customer's needs is one of the most important parts of sales, and how they decide if they want to work with your company. We recently removed graphics on two of a customer's vehicles and re-lettered one of them (the other was being sold). The customer drove 45 minutes to our location instead of using the sign shop right in their town. As she explained, he didn't listen to her, acted like she was disturbing him, and was generally rude. At no point was price part of the equation, just his attitude and lack of customer service.

PRICE

This brings up another point. If your customer service is solid, then pricing is not a priority. Now, let me add a caveat to this. You, of course, can't and shouldn't charge outrageous prices and expect to get them just because you're a super nice person with excellent communication skills. A customer who feels confident in your work and knows that working with your company will make their life easier will often consider pricing a secondary factor.

And frankly, those are the kinds of customers you want. We're not the cheapest sign shop in town, nor are we the most expensive. To me, this means we're right where we need to be. If we were always concerned with being the cheapest, we would constantly be working on getting customers at rock bottom prices. These kinds of customers aren't usually loyal, they're just looking for cheap. I want customers that appreciate our service, quality materials, and top-notch workmanship.

As I mentioned, a considerable portion of our customer base is repeat business. Most of these companies no longer ask us for a price each time they place a new

order. After years of taking care of them, they know that our pricing is reasonable, and if there are any price adjustments, we'll let them know ahead of time.

CONSISTENCY

In our industry, consistency is a big part of customer service. Initially, we think of customer service as that first phone call or talk at the front counter, but excellent customer service bleeds into every step.

We try to make the process as easy as possible for our customers. They're busy, and getting their vehicle lettered or getting a sign produced is probably just one of many things they need to take care of. By keeping excellent records of the customer's job, we can streamline the process for them on reorders.

Precise notetaking of measurements of installed graphics on vehicles, recording the vinyl colors or Pantone colors used, keeping all artwork on file and cataloged for easy finding, and filing paperwork and sample prints with their paperwork ensure consistent reorders. When a customer parks their vehicles next to one another in the yard, they want to see matching colors and consistent placement.

We recently earned a new customer with our customer service. He had been getting his vehicle graphics for his company from another supplier, but every order would have a different green color. He provided digital artwork, and using our color charts, we worked with him to pick out the green he wanted to use on all future jobs.

We noted colors and decal sizes in his file and attached a small sample print to his paperwork. In the future, we'll be able to match his graphics, so from now on, there are no surprises. **GP**

CHARITY JACKSON is co-owner of Visual Horizons Custom Signs based in Modesto, California. She has been in business since 1995, and has worked in the sign industry for over 25 years. You can visit her website at www.vhsigns.com.

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How Can Large-Format Providers Use Technology to Beat the Market?



In a large-format print market now worth billions, the PSPs who offer something extra can reap huge rewards

Large-format printing continues to be a profitable segment. By 2025, the worldwide market for large-format printing will be worth \$11.2 billion [1]. Despite this prodigious growth, parts of the core large-format business are becoming increasingly commoditized.

This is particularly true for deliverables such as banners and posters, which are some of the easiest applications to produce. This has prompted some print service providers (PSPs) to use the period of upheaval we are going through to re-position and diversify their businesses. They are doing this by expanding into higher-profit applications as a natural next step. Some applications are simply worth more.

Differentiation is key to growth. This realization has sparked a dash to innovate, with printers looking for new business models, new opportunities, and even new types of product to help them prosper in the locked-

down business landscape. The best way to do that is to diversify and be able to offer something your competitors do not.

If necessity is the mother of invention, lockdown is its father

No one can accuse the large-format sector of failing to be inventive and entrepreneurial. When the pandemic hit, many PSPs switched almost instantly to printing public-health and social distancing signage.

Many print providers have moved into the creation of signage and other public-health information assets to help clients cope with the current emergency. “We saw a big interest in the social-distancing templates from print providers who were moving fast to help their communities and keep business flowing during lockdown,” says Tom Wittenberg, HP Large Format Events and Industry Relations Manager, NA.

As well as producing signage for social distancing, many print providers are also accelerating the development of online businesses while looking for new ways to differentiate their company by providing

new and innovative high-value and high-margin applications. These high-value applications include window graphics, vinyl clings, and two-sided stickers.

Another aspect of how PSPs have responded is by developing the ability to work remotely with clients who are no longer able to physically attend the print provider’s premises or input into the print process. The challenge has been to find ways to work with remote clients while keeping the actual business of printing running efficiently. At the same time, PSPs are optimizing their cost structure and actively searching for efficiencies.

New technologies and new opportunities

With this need for high-quality public-health signage comes opportunity. Across the industry, we’re seeing an upward trend for printer decor applications that are not just purely informative, but also “high-value”, creating particular experiences for the end-user. A recent HP study of large-format print providers in Germany, India, and the



U.S. found that the average profit margin for some types of signage was significantly higher. These included window signage, short-term textiles, and backlight graphics. Looking at the three highest-grossing applications, the study found that 60% of all orders were printed on latex printers, almost twice the number produced on solvent printers. Industry research shows that for the highest-margin applications, HP Latex is the technology of choice.

“In many high-value categories, customers want most print jobs on latex,” says Wittenberg. “Because many providers don’t have latex printers, a lot of these jobs end up being outsourced. For providers who do have the right hardware, this creates the opportunity to build two new revenue streams: the jobs that come to them directly, which they no longer have to outsource, and the jobs that other PSPs bring to them. And the best way to do this is to take advantage of the unique competitive edge provided by HP Latex 700/800 Printer Series. As a result of their versatility and their white ink capabilities, HP Latex 700/800 Printer Series help PSPs deliver services in-house that would traditionally have been outsourced.”

The HP Latex 700 and 800 Printer Series

Another stand-out feature of the latest and most advanced HP Latex printing technology is the ability to use white ink. In some applications, using white ink to enhance effectiveness can help print providers increase margins by up to 13%. [2]

Take the lead in an evolving print market

“Thanks to HP Latex, print service providers can produce in-house high-value print jobs that can drive an average gross margin higher than 30%,” says Wittenberg. “The new generation of HP Latex 700 and 800 Printers radically improve the customer experience, helping to ignite business growth and adapt to future needs. We continue to innovate across our large format portfolio with new products and solutions to enable our customers to be equipped to win those high-value jobs they are after.”

As the market for large-format print evolves, PSPs need to find new ways to add value and stand out from their competitors. Upgrading to the latest generation of latex

printers opens up new revenue streams, from existing customers and from erstwhile competitors, and it gives print providers the ability to produce a wide range of print jobs that have a measurably higher impact for customers.

To find out more about these game-changing printers, join us at one of our Latex 700/800 Academies. They’re a quick 90 minutes and give you the entire run-down of the products – advantages, benefits, and applications – plus the opportunity to speak up and get your questions answered by the experts.



About Tom Wittenberg

Tom is the HP Large Format Events and Industry Relations Manager for North America. He has been in the printing industry for nearly 36 years. As a turnaround professional, he has led successful sales, operational, and financial overhauls of three global printing companies to double and triple sales and profit in three years prior to joining the HP Marketing team.

1. <https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/large-format-printer-market-worth-11-2-billion-by-2025-exclusive-report-by-marketsandmarkets-tm-823408713.html>

2. Based on a research conducted by Keypoint Intelligence July 2020 and commissioned by HP, over 100 print service providers across the U.S., Europe, and India.



DOUBLE EXPOSURE

SUPERIMPOSITION FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT

Building an image with current technology often transcends the limits of what was once considered impossible, impractical, or too labor intensive. If you really think about it, in the digital world almost any idea can be realized by knowing where to go to find the right tools and commands to generate magical effects of altered reality.

Since documents can be built with successive layers stacked in such a way that content can be repositioned and manipulated at any time, developing a non-linear and dynamic workflow, the potential to produce the extraordinary is real. In this *Digital Eye* article, we'll explore practical methods that stretch the bounds of visual reality using superimposed images and special effects. I use Adobe Photoshop CC for this purpose but remember, many image-editing software packages have similar capabilities.

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

What is a double exposure? It's a retro-term to describe when two or more pictures are shot on the same film frame. Back in the day, when a photographer wanted to achieve this effect, a preliminary exposure was made. The film was not advanced in the camera and then another exposure would be shot directly on the same frame.

Sometimes the double exposure was accidental. The photographer forgot to advance the film and interesting results miraculously occurred. Other times the double exposure was planned. It sounds simple, but to do it right required adjusting the f-stop or the shutter speed so that the final picture would not be over-exposed. The whole affair took place either in the camera or in the darkroom where negatives would be exposed one after another onto film or paper (Figure 1).

LAYERS

Nowadays, perfect double exposures are a lot easier to achieve because of software that facilitates compositing images. The importance of knowing how to use layers and all of their attributes to your best advantage is critical to producing creative double exposure-type images. Because layers separate content and can be endowed with special effects, variable opacities, and blending modes, effects can be achieved that were formerly difficult or even impossible to create.

Let's look at a few methods of how digital double exposures can be produced for dramatic effects.

OPACITY

Perhaps the simplest double exposure is to stack layers then adjust the opacity of one of the layers, as in the Tarahumara dancers in the "Rita of the Sky" movie



Figure 1. A vintage double exposure made with two consecutive shots in the camera. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)



Figure 2. Perhaps the simplest double exposure is to stack layers and then adjust the opacity of one of the layers, as in the Tarahumara dancers in the "Rita of the Sky" poster.

Figure 3. A white to black gradient fill was applied to the interior of the layer mask in order to fade the figures from top to bottom, and a global opacity adjustment of 75% was applied to the layer, giving the figures their ghostly appearance.



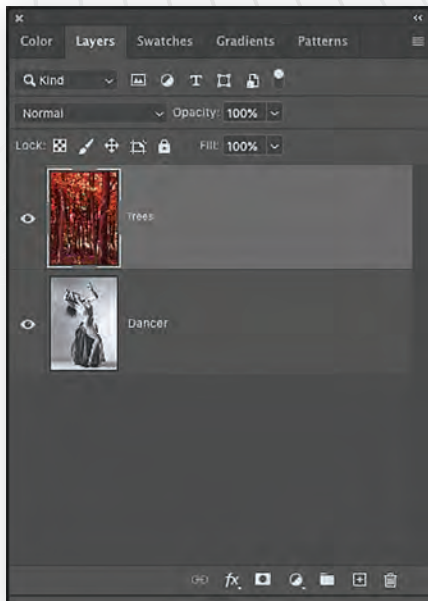


Figure 4. Stack the layers so that the image you want to superimpose is on the top.

poster (Figure 2). In this example, there are two methods used for controlling opacity: a global opacity adjustment and a layer mask.

The work begins by selecting the content on the topmost layer, in this case the Tarahumara dancers. A black layer mask was created to knock out the background. A white-to-black gradient fill was applied to the interior of the layer mask in order to fade the figures from top to bottom (Figure 3). Finally, a global opacity adjustment of 75% was applied to the layer, endowing the dancers with a ghostly appearance.

CLIPPING MASK

Another method for creating a double exposure is to make a clipping mask. A content-based clipping mask knocks out the exterior areas of the content on the top layer and superimposes the content of the bottom layer within the resulting shape. Combined with additional features like blend modes, layer masks, and layer styles, this technique can result in extraordinary dazzling effects. This example is pretty artsy.

To create a clipping mask:

1. Stack the layers so that the image

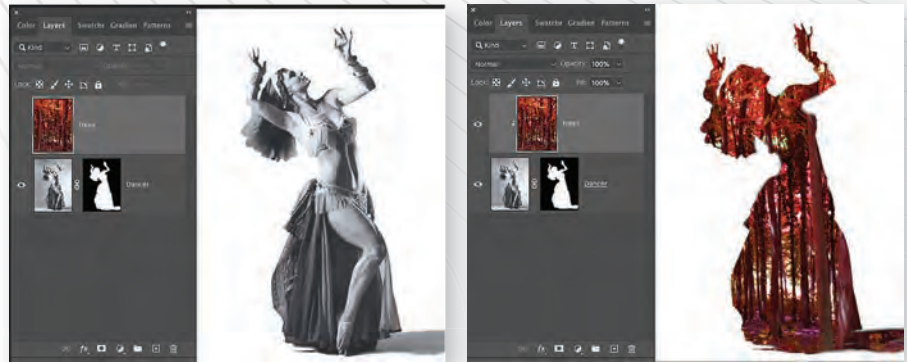


Figure 5 (left). Conceal the contents of the selection with a layer mask so that the desired image is completely surrounded by transparency. **Figure 6 (right).** With a clipping mask, the top layer content is superimposed into the shape of the bottom layer.

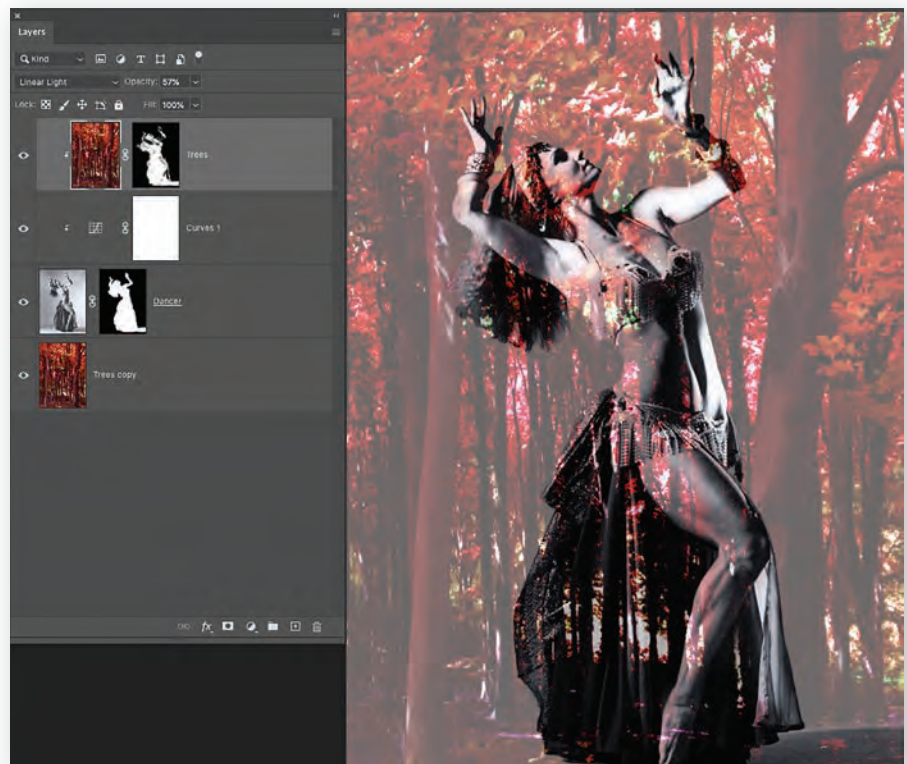


Figure 7. The red forest background is the top layer copied with reduced opacity and dragged to the bottom of the stack.

- you want to superimpose is on the top (Figure 4).
2. Select the content of the bottom layer.
3. Conceal the contents of the selection so that the desired image is completely surrounded by transparency by making a layer mask. Go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection (Figure 5).

4. Clip the two layers together by placing the cursor between the two layers and press Option (Mac) or Alt (Win). You'll see the Clipping Mask icon. Then click the mouse. The top layer content is superimposed into the shape of the bottom layer (Figure 6).
5. Experiment with color and transparency by applying a blend mode

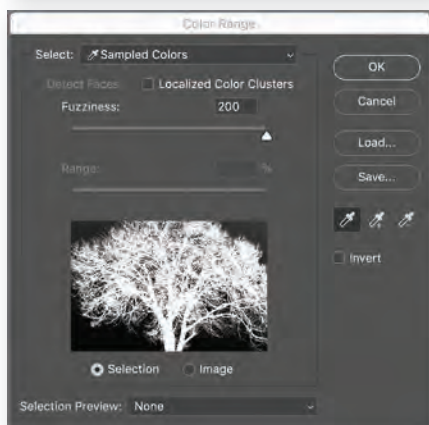


Figure 8 (top). The process starts with an image of a tree. **Figure 9 (above).** Carefully select the tree image with the Color Range selection feature.

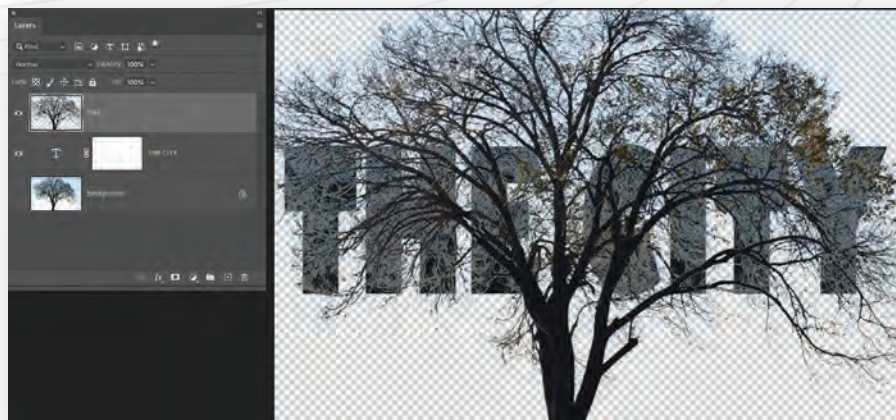


Figure 10. Generate the text using an extra bold text character, in this case Gill Sans Extra bold, and position it under the tree layer.



Figure 11. Superimpose the tree image over THE CITY text and mask the surrounding areas.

such as Linear Light (like this example), Hard Light, Soft Light, or any of the blend modes found in the layers panel to the topmost layer.

6. Adjust the opacity of a specific area of the topmost layer with a layer mask. Paint the layer mask with shades of gray to mold the superimposed image to the contours of the content.
7. Clip a levels or curves adjustment layer to the dancer to improve contrast.
8. Choose an appropriate image for the background. In this case, I copied the topmost layer, reduced its opacity, and dragged it to the bottom of the stack (**Figure 7**).

TYPE

Superimposing images into a type character is another form of double exposure

that can produce a dramatic headline effect. This method uses multiple images, layer masks blend modes, and layer styles combined into a text frame. It starts with an image of a tree (**Figure 8**).

1. Carefully select the tree image with the Color Range selection feature found in Photoshop's Select menu to isolate as many of the fine branches of the tree as possible (**Figure 9**).
2. Copy the selected tree to a new layer (Layer>New>Layer via Copy).
3. Generate the text using an extra bold text character, in this case Gill Sans Extra bold. Position it under the tree layer (**Figure 10**).
4. Select the text by pressing Cmnd (Mac) or Ctrl (Win) and click on its thumbnail in the layers panel.
5. With the selection active, target the tree layer and click the Layer Mask icon to superimpose the tree im-

age over the city text and mask the surrounding areas. Conceal the text layer by clicking on its Visibility icon (**Figure 11**).

6. Drag the NYC skyline picture to the document and place its layer below THE CITY text layer. Reduce its opacity to 90%.
7. Once again, target the tree layer and apply a layer style to the text. I applied several to this image including Bevel and Emboss, Stroke, and a red Color Overlay, but you can experiment and have some fun with it (**Figure 12**).
8. Make a new layer. Press the Cmnd (Mac)/Ctrl (Win) key and click on the text layer icon to generate a selection. Choose Edit>Stroke and apply a three-point border to the outside of the selection.

continued on page 110

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Image courtesy
Canon Solutions
America



Image courtesy
Avery Dennison
Note: This image
was taken
pre-COVID.

COURTESY OF AVERY DENNISON

A Supply Chain Commitment to Coverage

The supply chain serving the graphics industry is a vast network of organizations, people, activities, resources, and even technology that manages the flow of raw materials, products, and even services that become available to you. When the world was forced to slow down and shift how business was being conducted during the pandemic, keeping the supply chain intact and operational was an important objective for many manufacturers, including Avery Dennison.

Signage materials, including those used for pandemic safety graphics such as Avery Dennison SC 950 and HP 750 cut vinyl films, and MPI 2903 calendared film, remained in high demand, and Avery Dennison worked to provide customers with the materials essential to their business.

As we look to move past the pandemic, there are hidden moments within supply chain management that offer a positive perspective of the supply chain's future ... and the future remains with the commitment and acknowledgement of the people and the efforts behind the scenes.

Yes, today's manufacturing plants have robots that improve process and efficiency. However, it is the commitment of every individual working as a member of a

larger team that maintains and improves productivity, even when there are outside forces making it a challenge to operate. Supply chain and procurement teams worked together — masked, socially distant, and even remotely — to manufacture, ship, and offer sales and customer service support when it was needed.

Procurement teams played a vital role in helping to procure raw materials that would allow both suppliers and the manufacturing plants they serve meet growing demand. Dan Ashmore, director of procurement for Avery Dennison Graphics North America, recognized the immediacy of the impact COVID-19 shutdowns would have, coupled with other late 2020/early 2021 challenges, which included two hurricanes and a winter storm that caused a deep freeze in the deep south. The actions Dan and his procurement team took to help the supply chain continue to operate included:

- Global sourcing of components required by suppliers to produce products, including expedited air shipment. This was a situation where the global breadth of Avery Dennison divisions and resources helped to diminish the long-term impact of

raw material shortages.

- C-Suite level engagement with key chemical suppliers to ensure maximum allocation of raw materials made scarce by the Texas winter freeze event.
- Procurement negotiated preferred scheduling of Avery Dennison needed materials with their suppliers, based on their global relationships.
- In some cases, suppliers focused their efforts on working with Avery Dennison to ensure their ability to service manufacturing requirements and meet customers' high demands.

"You have to remember that what you do every day is a conscious commitment to something bigger than yourself," says Dan. "During the slowdown and uncertainty all around us, we knew that each order could mean a make-or-break moment for the businesses and shops we serve in the graphics community. One small delay can cause a bigger supply chain disruption, and we knew that we had to do all we could to ensure the film lines would keep on running, the expectations on the quality of the materials would be maintained, and to keep you in business."

Pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, supply chain and procurement rely on the dedication and resourcefulness of the people and processes behind the scenes. Let's not lose sight of the dedication that helped to keep you covered throughout the past year and who will continue to make signage and advertising films available.



Learn more about Avery Dennison and cut vinyl films for signage and safety graphics, visit graphics.averydennison.com/covered. **INT**



Outdoor relaxation zone
& Pet station



We've Still Got You Covered

It's been more than a year since the world was forced to slow down. During that time, Avery Dennison continued to provide customers with materials essential to their business. Now, we've still got you covered with **Avery Dennison® SC 950 & HP 750 Cut Vinyl Films**.

With industry-leading weedability, highly conformable performance and dependable color stability, you can count on SC 950 and HP 750 films to cover all of your immediate signage and advertising needs.

Give the films a try and learn more at graphics.averydennison.com/cutvinylfilms



A Growing Market with New Value-Adding Applications

COURTESY OF CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA

Large-format graphics are an increasingly fragmented market, with a growing demand for customized one-off prints. These include bespoke wallpaper, as well as very short runs, for example, a few banners or panels for an exhibition or corporate event. Digital technology gives PSPs the flexibility to create such applications quickly and affordably, and thus serve numerous segments and different individual customers. Here are a few application ideas to get you started.

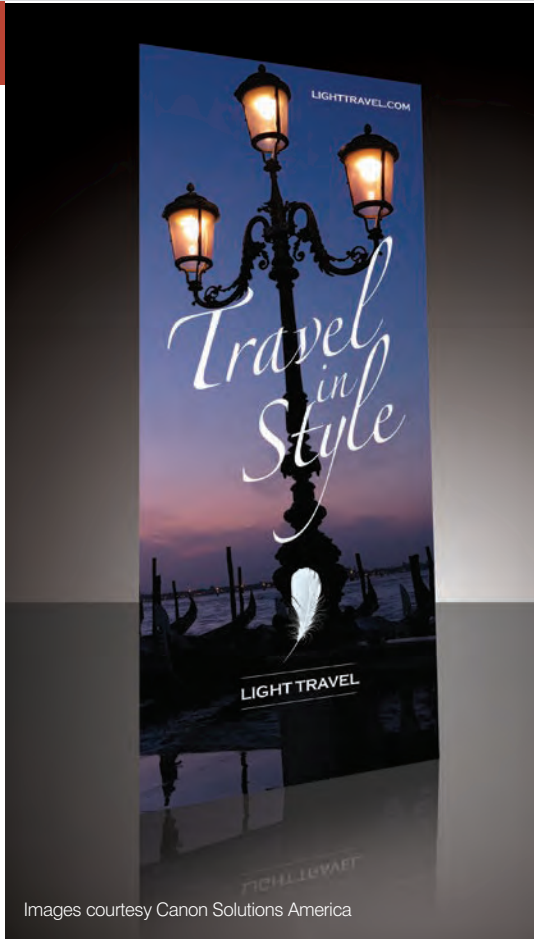
INTERIOR APPLICATIONS

- Posters
- Banners
- Backlit Display – glass, acrylic
- Permanent, Semi-Permanent, and Permanent Point-of-Purchase (POP) Displays
- Corrugated Floor Displays
- Wall Divider Panels
- Exhibition and Trade Show Materials and Panels

EXTERIOR APPLICATIONS

- Billboards
- Banners, Backdrops
- Durable Printed Panels
- Vehicle and Fleet Graphics Decals/Transfers

Digital printers, such as those in the Arizona series, are able to produce increasingly stunning images that not only attract attention but also stimulate human emotion. New applications on a wider range of substrates are being developed all the time, motivating PSPs to explore the many commercial opportunities that digital technology is opening up. **INT**



Images courtesy Canon Solutions America



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Images courtesy
Zund America Inc.

COURTESY OF ZUND AMERICA INC.

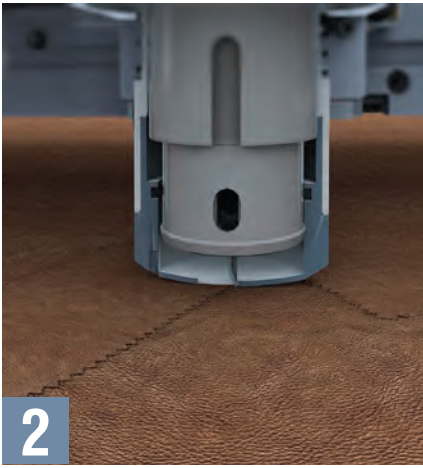
5 Applications Primed for Creative Designs

With so many modular tooling, material-handling, and digital workflow options, Zund cutting and routing solutions can be used to successfully meet the challenges of interior design and production projects. Here are five creative applications:

1 Graphics labels and decals, posters, prints, display pieces, canvas — the possibilities in digital printing and finishing are endless.

2 Upholstery. Whether textile or leather, small series or custom made, upholstery manufacturing relies on Zund for creating digital patterns, pattern-matching, and maximum material yield.





2

3 Home furnishings. The demand for individualized goods is growing. Custom-printed curtains, pillows, bedspreads — a perfect scenario for Zund cutting solutions with automated nesting options, high-speed cut-to-print registration, and reliable material-feed/spreading devices.

4 Carpet and flooring. Custom carpets and floor mats: another digital cutting application for



5

which Zund offers modular, specialized tooling and automation — unsurpassed versatility in perfection.

5 Furniture. Furniture made of corrugated/honeycomb cardboard? Zund offers specialized oscillating and v-cut tools. Printed or unprinted, special design projects can be handled easily and profitably. **INT**

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Get More from Your Vehicle Wrap Media

COURTESY OF MACTAC



Images courtesy Mactac



Once upon a time, vehicle wrap media was just that — media that was used to wrap cars, trucks, SUVs, RVs, and other vehicles. But times have changed. Today, you can find a vehicle wrap media designed to meet a wide range of graphic applications, making vehicle wrap media more versatile than ever before.

Wrap a car and an old guitar with the same media? That's the idea.

For example, Mactac's newest IMAGin B-free GRUV vehicle wrap media is designed for vehicles and general-purpose wraps. From full or partial wraps on cars, trucks and trailers, buses, boats, motorcycles, dirt bikes, golf carts, and more to long-term signage on virtually any flat, slightly curved, or complex surface, the possibilities are endless.

Get your GRUV on with two product options:

- GV729v2BFD: 2.1-mil gloss white print media with permanent bubble-free air egress adhesive and outdoor durability of seven years.
- GV929v2BFD: 2.0-mil gloss white cast vinyl print media with permanent slide-able bubble-free air egress adhesive and outdoor durability of 10 years.

PSPs and distributors also save on space and expenses with Mactac short rolls, which allow you to only buy the material you need. GRUV is available in 75' and 150' roll lengths. Additionally, customers can take advantage of Mactac's media/laminate bundle program, which offers discounted pricing on high-quality full and partial vehicle wrap products. **INT**



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- Kiosks and ATMs
- Countertop and point-of-purchase (POP) displays
- Entertainment venues, i.e. casinos, museums, sports venues, theme parks
- Public transit stations/transportation (bus, train, etc.) and airport/plane/airline safety
- Public restrooms and other public settings
- Healthcare and retail settings
- Distribution centers
- Multi-family housing
- Graphic protection, i.e. inkjet prints, screen prints, photographic prints, transparencies



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Images courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus

TOP 10 Home Decor Items

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS

We've all been spending a lot of time at home lately, *a lot of time*. And, if you're like us, you're probably tired of looking at the same stuff. Thankfully, we've got an entire list of items to offer your customers to give their homes a personalized makeover. From contemporary to country-chic, there's something for everyone.

1 MAPLE OR WALNUT CUTTING BOARD

Ah ... the kitchen. We've been spending a lot of time in the kitchen trying new recipes. These natural wood cutting boards will keep your customers chopping and cutting for years. Personalize with a laser or rotary engraver to add a special touch.

2 HOME DECOR FAUX WOOD SIGN

Commemorate a special occasion or add some new designs to any space with this faux wood sign. Personalize with heat transfer printing, UV-LED printing, or laser or rotary engraving. This sign makes for a great wedding gift for that special couple.

3 SADDLE COLLECTION PORTFOLIO

Help your customers avoid getting important work documents mixed up with their kids' latest finger-painting project. These customizable leather-like portfolios can help keep everything neat and tidy. Customize with a name, initials,

or company logo using laser engraving or UV-LED printing.

4 RECTANGLE HANGING SLATE

Made from 100% natural slate with authentic stone cut edge, this hanging slate fits with virtually any decor and makes for the perfect housewarming gift. Engrave with a laser engraver to reveal a contrasting light gray mark, or personalize with full-color UV-LED printing.

5 LIGHT-UP PHOTO BLOCK

Perfect for the rec or dorm room, these light-up photo blocks come with a removable, sublimatable insert that offer outstanding image reproduction. These battery-powered light-up blocks are a great way for your customers to illuminate the memories they find most important in their lives.

6 SUBLIMATABLE WELCOME MAT

People are just starting to visit others again. And when they do, your customers will want to greet them in style with a personalized, full-color design on this sublimatable welcome mat. It's perfect for a family name, street address, or witty saying.

7 SUBLIMATABLE APPLE WATCH BAND

Add a touch of personalization

for your customer's Apple watch with these trendy sublimatable watch bands. Sublimate with a school logo for a recent graduate or personalize with a team logo and jersey number and offer your customers a unique fundraising opportunity.

8 SHADOW BANK BOX

This bank box comes with a removable, sublimatable insert and makes for a great home decor or gift option. This item has been particularly popular for wedding receptions as a place to collect gifts for the happy couple, or as a way for the newlyweds to save for a future purchase.

9 ROUND SUBLIMATION SLATE

This natural stone slate plaque offers an area for full-color imaging with either sublimation or heat transfer printing. Let your customers pick the photo and offer them this unique item that works with any home or office decor. Great for anniversary, wedding, or birthday gifts.

10 SUBLIMATABLE ZIPPER CASES FOR TABLET

Help your customers keep their tablets safe from accidental scratches around the house. Fully customizable through sublimation or heat transfer printing, these tablet cases fit most standard tablets and let your customer's personality shine through. **INT**

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D. Rowmark & IPI Plastic Sheet Material

E. SG500/SG1000 Ink #609101, #609102, #609103, #609104

F. SG1000 Sublimation Printer #PRNT1000N-609000

G. iColor 560 Heat Transfer Printer #ICP560W120S

H. Sublimation Paper #SUBJP8511

I. Frosted Glass Mason Jar #XP9100F

J. Ceramic Car Coaster #CCM32

K. Faux Wood Decorative Tray #HD409W

L. MDF Dark Faux Wood Round #HD170WRD

M. 11oz Economy Mug #XP8435



COURTESY OF CLARKE SYSTEMS

Top 10 Benefits of Outsourcing



Images courtesy Clarke Systems

- 1 Get access to skilled expertise.** Would you go to a family doctor to handle brain surgery? Of course not! Experts say companies that make too many promises may often be cutting corners somewhere in the process.
- 2 Focus on core competencies.** The quality of your core competencies will suffer as your business grows if your workload increases with additional tasks that are non-skillset functions.
- 3 Better risk management.** By outsourcing to a competent outsourcing partner, you reduce the risk involved in having the same task done in-house by staff that may not be as competent in that field.
- 4 Increase in-house efficiency.** Develop your internal task force and use them more efficiently.
- 5 Improve customer service.** With on-time deliveries and high-quality services your customers will be





delighted. Outsourcing can help you benefit from increased customer satisfaction, thus creating a stream of loyal customers.

6 Cut costs and save big. Outsourcing piecemeal work is almost always going to be cheaper than hiring permanent full-time staff.

7 Give your business a competitive edge. Through strategic outsourcing to a partner,

you not only provide your customers with best-of-breed services but increase your productivity while managing your in-house resources intelligently. Outsourcing can help you surpass competitors who have not yet realized its benefits.

8 Things get done fast. One of the top reasons small businesses tend to outsource work is because it will get done quicker.

9 You get peace of mind. Choosing to outsource with a reliable third party or manufacturer should give you peace of mind that tasks are being handled expertly and efficiently without you having to worry or lift a finger.

10 See an overall increase in your business. Outsourcing shows an increase in your productivity, customer loyalty, level of quality, business value, profits, and more. **INT**



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Avery Dennison



A Room Refresh You Can See and Feel

COURTESY OF AVERY DENNISON

The most impactful way to elevate an interior space is to involve as many senses as possible. That's why so many businesses, homes, and offices are turning to specialty self-adhesive vinyl with textures or finishes to attain their branding and aesthetic goals.

Specialty self-adhesive vinyl with textures or finishes are becoming more popular due to their unique look, reliable print performance, and easy application. Using textured wall films, like Avery Dennison MPI 2600 Series wall films, you can achieve the look and feel of stucco, canvas, stone, and more in the form of an adhesive film.

Most textured graphics can be applied in the same manner as other, more traditional vinyl films. Since the adhesive is already part of the construction, this means there isn't a need to outsource someone that hangs wallpaper using the traditional, labor-intensive paste process. With textured self-adhesive wall films, the installer

simply needs to remove the liner and apply the graphic using a squeegee.

Overlaminates cannot be used on textured and finished vinyl; however, a clear coat can extend the lifespan of the graphic material. Most textured wall films typically offer a two-year durability — the perfect amount of time before needing to refresh the look of a storefront, hospitality area, or restaurant. There are also short-term removable adhesive options on the market, perfect for trade shows and point-of-purchase displays that need to be removed frequently and easily.

The visual effect of textured and finished wall films is truly impressive, all the while coming in at a fraction of the cost of installing a new wall or completing a renovation project. Not to mention that many restaurants, stores, and offices operate on a rental basis, so a full-on renovation and installation of stone, stucco, or canvas walls is not possible.

Print providers should be aware of some

of the nuances when printing to specialty textured or finished materials. Textured films do have a harder time adhering where seams overlap. Avery Dennison worked with Justin Pate from The Wrap Institute to create a video to show two methods to ensure good adhesion at the seam. The video is posted on the Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions YouTube channel and is titled "Avery Dennison Wall Install Protocol with The Wrap Institute's Justin Pate."

Spring is the perfect time to refresh interior spaces. Take your refresh to the next level by selecting an easy-to-install, specialty self-adhesive vinyl with a texture or finish. It is an upgrade that noticeably revitalizes traditional spaces. Friends, employees, and patrons alike will take notice of the new wall films they can see and feel.



Learn more about interior spaces with textured surfaces at graphics.averydennison.com/interiors. **INT**



Large-Format Outdoor Applications

COURTESY OF CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA

Traditionally, the majority of large-format graphics applications were produced for temporary indoor printed signage for in-store promotions and events, such as point-of-purchase (POP) graphics and exhibition wall panels. Outdoor applications include billboards, fence panels, and canvas products such as banners, as well as applications for permanent usage as metal road signs and company names on vehicles or buildings. Curing technologies and inks are further developing to achieve the levels of durability necessary for such usage.

NEW SUBSTRATES

Large-format graphics applications can now be produced on an increasing range of flexible and rigid substrates. These include but aren't limited to:

- Coated papers and boards
- Corrugated board
- Flexible and rigid plastics
- Textiles
- Metal
- Wood
- Ceramic tiles
- Glass composites
- Aluminum sandwich boards

These applications are increasingly being printed with UV-cured inks on flatbed inkjet printers, such as the Arizona UV Series printers. The ability to produce customized prints easily and cost-effectively is enabling PSPs to offer targeted (right-place, right-time) campaigns, making this valuable marketing tool now affordable for everybody, even small retail outlets. **INT**



Images courtesy Canon Solutions America





Transform Rough Walls with Ease

COURTESY OF MACTAC

Images courtesy Mactac



There are many ways to increase branding and promotion opportunities, and one of those is applying unique graphics to non-traditional surfaces, such as rough walls.

Rough or textured concrete or brick walls don't have the best reputation for making graphic installation easy. But, with IMAGin RoughRAP RR100 wall wrapping film from Mactac, even the most challenging applications are a breeze.

Case in point: Graphics design and sign company 84 Sign Shop installed RoughRAP graphics to California University of Pennsylvania's athletic

stadium concrete bleachers. When complete, an installer said, "This was our first time using Mactac material and after this experience, we will be using more in the future. The material bit into the stadium concrete so it looked flawless. The install went smoothly, and we couldn't get over how great the seams blended in."

With excellent conformability and bond, RoughRAP transforms the walls of sports arenas, grocery stores, schools, and more with ease. Follow these tips to make RoughRAP work for you:

1. Prepare and pretest the surface.
2. Use the right tools.
3. Use the hinge method.
4. Apply heat to conform the film to the surface.
5. Relax, reset, and finish the graphic.

Using PERMACOLOR RAYZor overlaminates with RoughRAP will extend graphic life (up to 18 months outdoors), allow for easier handling, and deliver superior graphic protection. **INT**





Top 10 Drinkware Items

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS

Images courtesy
Johnson Plastics Plus

Whether it's a traditional coffee mug or new style of portable tumbler, personalized drinkware and accessories have always been a great way to make money. With so many options available, it can be hard to figure out where to start. Here's a list of the top 10 drinkware and related items to help you expand your product offering.

1 SKINNY TUMBLERS

The hot item for summer is the 20-oz. Skinny Tumblers in white, stainless steel, or four shimmer colors. These tumblers can be personalized and decorated with sublimation, heat transfer printing, or vinyl.

2 WINE TOTES

With the ability to personalize with sublimation or heat transfer printing, wine totes make a great way to give wine as a gift or make a statement when arriving at your next gathering.

3 SKINNY CAN INSULATORS

Keep cans of your favorite skinny beverage cold with can insulators.

Personalized with sublimation or heat transfer printing, beverage insulators make great promotional give-a-ways or unique wedding party favors.

4 CAMP MUG

The perfect complement to any camping trip, traditional camp mugs have retro styling and can be customized with sublimation or heat transfer printing. Add a name, initials, or campsite logo to these mugs for a one-of-a-kind look.

5 COLOR RING MUG

Classic white on the outside with a fun pop of color on the inside, color ring mugs are a fun way to start the day. Fully customizable with sublimation or heat transfer printing, color ring mugs make for great corporate give-a-ways or products to sell for school fundraisers.

6 64-OZ. GROWLERS

Growlers are a great way to take home your favorite brew from the local brewery. Designed to keep beer fresh, growlers can be personalized with a name or logo with heat transfer printing, UV-LED printing, or laser engraving using CerMark marking sprays or pastes.

7 STEMLESS WINE GLASSES

One of the most popular items during the warm summer months is the 12-oz. stemless wine glass. Ideal for socially distant gatherings or sitting around the fire pit, stemless



wine glasses can be decorated with sublimation, heat transfer printing, or laser engraving.

8 STAINLESS BOTTLE OPENER

Customized bottle openers make for great wedding party gifts or promotional give-a-ways. For use with sublimation or heat transfer printing, personalized bottle openers make a statement and keep you at the ready to pop the cap on your favorite summertime beverage.

9 STAINLESS FLASK

Another wedding party staple, personalized flasks are the perfect summer gift. Customize with sublimation, heat transfer printing, or laser engraving with CerMark marking sprays or pastes. With a screw-on cap, these flasks will keep their precious contents safe and secure.

10 SQUARE BAMBOO COASTERS

Keep tables safe from condensation rings with bamboo coasters. Made from environmentally responsible bamboo, these coasters can be personalized with heat transfer printing, UV-LED printing, or laser engraving. Durable and stylish, these coasters look great in any home, office, or board room. **INT**





Digital Print Possibilities: Creativity for Interior Decor

COURTESY OF CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA

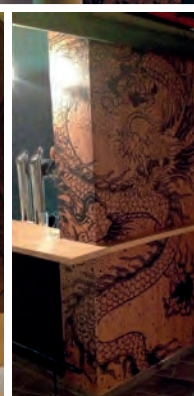
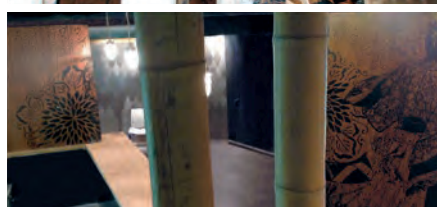
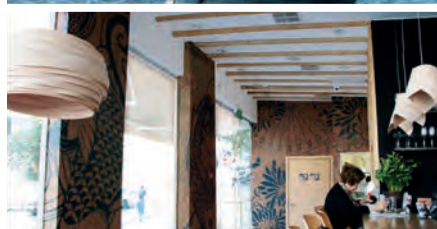
The interior decor market places additional requirements on the printed output, such as a strict size and color consistency when paneling large surfaces. This applies not only within a single job, but also when you need to provide reliable and repeatable color reproduction over time.

While the need for applications for exhibition stand builders and event hosts effectively disappeared during the pandemic, there was significant new demand for floor signage and interior decor. PSPs able to respond quickly with the right applications within fast turnaround times were ideally placed to meet this unexpected need in the market.

DESIGNER CREATIVITY

As architects and designers become increasingly aware of the possibilities new generation digital printers offer, we are seeing more and more indoor applications in the form of room dividers, printed glass panels, and textured ceramic tiling — with astounding results.

The entire value chain is learning how to capitalize on the flexibility, versatility, and added value of digital printing. Growth is being fueled by the ability to print on an increasingly wide range of substrates, which is opening up new markets, in particular in the lucrative interior decor and architectural materials sector. In addition, the ability to print in low quantities means that PSPs can produce small runs cost-effectively. At the same time, the reliability and productivity of digital devices is also increasing access for digital solutions to the higher-volume segment. **INT**



Images courtesy Canon Solutions America



Graphics That Stick in a Post-Pandemic World

Images courtesy
Avery Dennison

COURTESY OF AVERY DENNISON

As people across the globe look forward to the return of “normal” in a post-pandemic world, there are undoubtedly changes that are going to stick around. While many would like to leave all of COVID-19 in the past, there are a few trends that may be welcome among the general public. Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions Graphics Product Manager, Cassandra Yu, answered a few questions about the place graphics will take in a changed world.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS ABOUT HOW STORES CAN CONTINUE TO UTILIZE NEW GRAPHIC SPACES IN THE POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE?

Although the pandemic will end, social distancing barriers and visual cues may become more permanent fixtures. This presents an opportunity for brands to connect, communicate, and drive engagement with consumers. One thing retail stores can consider is how their graphics can:

- Create zones
- Trigger more efficient shopping if space is a limiting factor
- Provide interactive opportunities

As stores need to reformat and reinvent themselves, they may want to think about

graphics solutions that can be flexible and not-so permanent. For traditional vinyl signage, ease-of-installation, compatibility with various surfaces and textures, and removability will all be important factors.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT BRANDS OR STORE OWNERS CAN DO TO BE PREPARED WITH SIGNAGE FOR ANY FUTURE UNFORESEEN EVENTS?

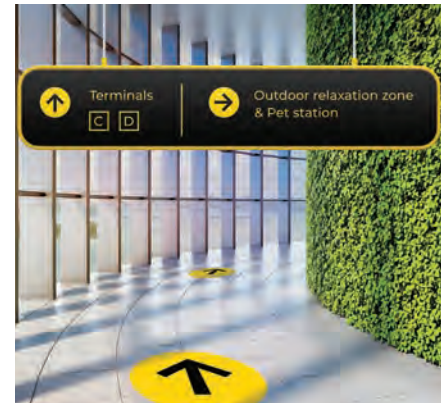
My advice would be to budget for unforeseen events that may require new or additional signage beyond a brand’s annual or seasonal promotional expenditures. Another key would be to leverage the expertise of sign shops/franchises and installers to help pick the right solutions to fit specific needs. In many cases, sign shops are diversifying solutions and services and adding ready-made designs that take the guesswork out.

HOW WILL GRAPHICS BE USED IN NEW OUTDOOR SPACES THAT HAVE BEEN CREATED IN LIGHT OF COVID-19?

There will likely be an increased demand in outdoor and environmental exposure durability requirements as well as materials that are compatible with exterior surfaces like concrete, asphalt, brick, and building facades.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUTDOOR SPACES WILL CONTINUE TO GROW?

It is likely, but not across the board — only where it makes sense. Depending on geographical area, some regions may have a limited window of opportunity to leverage outdoor space and will need to think about indoor implications as well. Other factors need to be considered as well like additional outdoor maintenance, safety, compliance and regulations, and service offering type. Outdoor spaces may also need to consider UV and surface protection solutions to keep customers and property safe.



THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE WORKSPACE. HOW WILL GRAPHICS PLAY A ROLE IN POTENTIAL HYBRID WORKSPACES AS WELL AS MEETING SPACES?

Due to a changing work environment, I believe there will be a higher use of graphics materials that enable multi-use functionality, like the Avery Dennison Vela Dynamic Display technology, which can transform conference rooms from transparent to private. There also will need to be future development of graphics materials to meet the need for safety enabling, self-cleaning, and no-touch activation.

ARE THERE ANY DINING-SPECIFIC USES OF GRAPHICS THAT EMERGED DURING COVID-19 THAT WILL CONTINUE TO BE USED?

There’s a good chance that touchless menu, service, and payment solutions may continue. Other innovations in the restaurant business model that are likely here to stay are: increased curbside pickup, outdoor dining, and dining “pod” options. Signage can help aid these solutions in seamless communication with customers to provide a positive experience.



For more information on the Avery Dennison films mentioned in this article, visit graphics.averydennison.com. **INT**





Choosing the Right Heat Transfer

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS

One of the key factors in your success with heat transfer printing is choosing the right paper for the right substrates. Not all heat transfer papers are created the same, and picking the right paper can make your process more efficient and improve your transfer results.

PAPER FOR GARMENTS AND SOFT GOODS

Transferring to T-shirts, sweatshirts, tote bags, and other soft goods is one of the best uses for heat transfer printing. With the ability to do short to mid-sized orders on a wide range of fabrics, there's no shortage of customized options you can offer your customers.

There are several different transfer papers made specifically for garments and fabrics. For starters, the iColor 2-Step Select paper is a good, all-around transfer media for both light and dark garments. This paper is ideal for the cost-conscious customer who's looking for a personalized shirt that can withstand 50 or more washes and offer good color reproduction.

For customers looking for a little more durability and vibrancy, the iColor 2-Step

Premium transfer media offers great color reproduction on both light and dark garments and will take up to 100 washes.

Finally, for customers who need outstanding wearability on a sports blend shirt, the iColor 2-Step Premium Stretch transfer media is the perfect choice. This media is designed not to pull or peel on stretchy materials and lasts for up to 100 washes.

There are transfer papers that have specialized looks as well, like the iColor 2-Step Glitter transfer media and the iColor 2-Step Metallic transfer media. Check the manufacturer recommendations, as these papers are not compatible with all toner heat transfer printers.

PAPER FOR SIGNS, DRINKWARE, AND OTHER HARD SURFACES

Heat transfer printing isn't just for garments. Your printer can create any number of personalized items, including drinkware, awards, signs, and home decor items with the right paper.

To begin with, the iColor 1-Step Hard Surface transfer media is a good all-around choice for personalizing acrylics, metal, ceramics, glass, and wood. It will offer good color reproduction and durability and is ideal for home decor products and awards.

For items that require additional durability, such as drinkware and leather goods that may be handled on a regular basis, the iColor 1-Step Premium Hard Surface transfer media offers additional protection against scratching and chipping.

Finally, if you've got a special request for a metallic look for a transfer, the iColor Presto! 1-Step Metallic Hard Surface transfer media is the answer for you. This transfer paper works with glass, ceramics, and metals, making it a great way to take drinkware personalization up a notch.

PAPER FOR SPECIALTY APPLICATIONS

Every now and then a customer will contact you with a unique request, such as personalizing a candle or creating temporary tattoos. With a heat transfer printer and specialty papers, you can customize any number of odd-shaped items.

The iColor 1-Step Aquaclear transfer media allows you to create full-color transfers for items that can't fit in a heat press or are heat sensitive, such as candles, toys, and soft plastics. With the iColor Tattoo Transfer media, you can create full-color customized temporary tattoos for your customers. Finally, offer your customers personalized window clings with iColor Window Cling sheets.

WOW YOUR CUSTOMERS!

Choosing the right paper for the project can make all the difference with heat transfer. The beauty of heat transfer is you can customize thousands of items, and using the right paper will have your customers saying, "Wow!

I didn't know you could do that!" **INT**



Images courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus



10 Applications for Anti-Microbial Overlaminates

1. Keypads/touch screens
2. Kiosks and ATMs
3. Countertop and point-of-purchase displays
4. Office environments
5. Gyms and schools
6. Entertainment venues
7. Public restrooms, transit stations/ transportation
8. Airport, airplane/airline safety
9. Healthcare and retail settings
10. Distribution centers

Anti-microbial overlaminates offer businesses peace of mind and added protection for employees, customers, and end-users.

Mactac's PermaGard Shield overlaminates feature built-in protection that continuously eliminates microbial contaminants and inhibits microbe growth. They are ideal for high-touch areas and graphic images and help protect users by reducing the spread of disease-causing (or sickness and infection-causing) organisms such as Staph, MRSA, Salmonella, E. Coli, VRE, Listeria, and Pseudomonas.

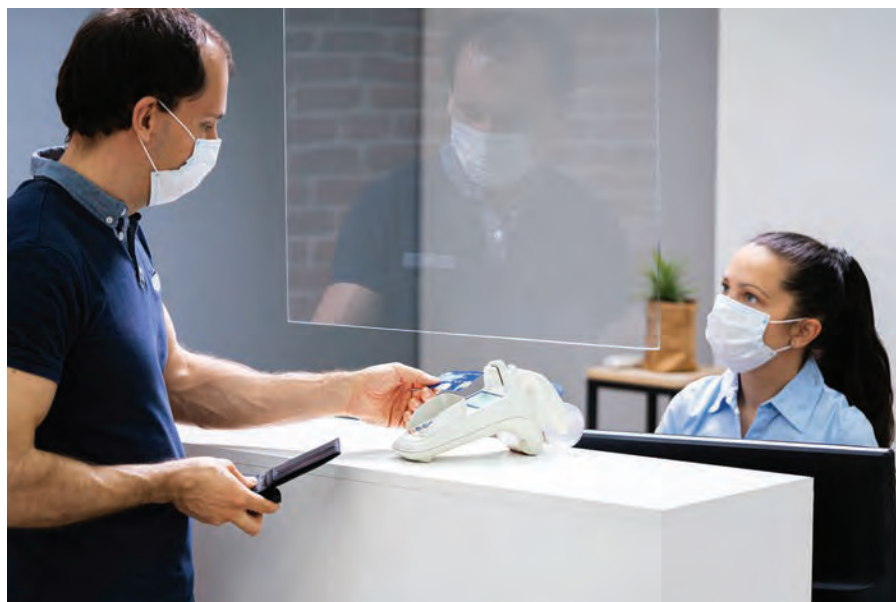
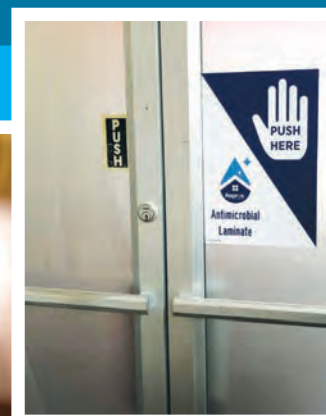
At Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, PermaGard Shield was used to ensure the walls of the doggy relief area were clean and protected.

After the project was complete, the owner of the project's design agency said, "When this material was suggested to help block out germs and protect not only the walls but the passengers and their pets, we knew this was what we were looking for. The finished space looks awesome, and we don't have to worry about wear and tear."

*Performance of PermaGard Shield has been verified by an independent testing lab in accordance with ISO22196. **INT**

COURTESY OF MACTAC

Images courtesy Mactac



(Image courtesy Trotec)

**WHAT'S NEW WITH THE
LASER ENGRAVING INDUSTRY?**

BY JULIA SCHROEDER



The Current Status of Laser Engraving

These days, the effects of laser engraving and cutting equipment can be seen almost everywhere. From protective sneeze guards and signage to custom tumblers and awards, the unique products fabricated with a laser continue to grow. With improved software, higher wattages, and increased capabilities, laser systems have more personalization options than ever before.

LASER ENGRAVING TODAY

“From the maker and hobby industry to high-end industrial fabrication, lasers have evolved to work in a wide range of markets and industries — changing the world with the power of focused light,” says David Stevens, Trotec.

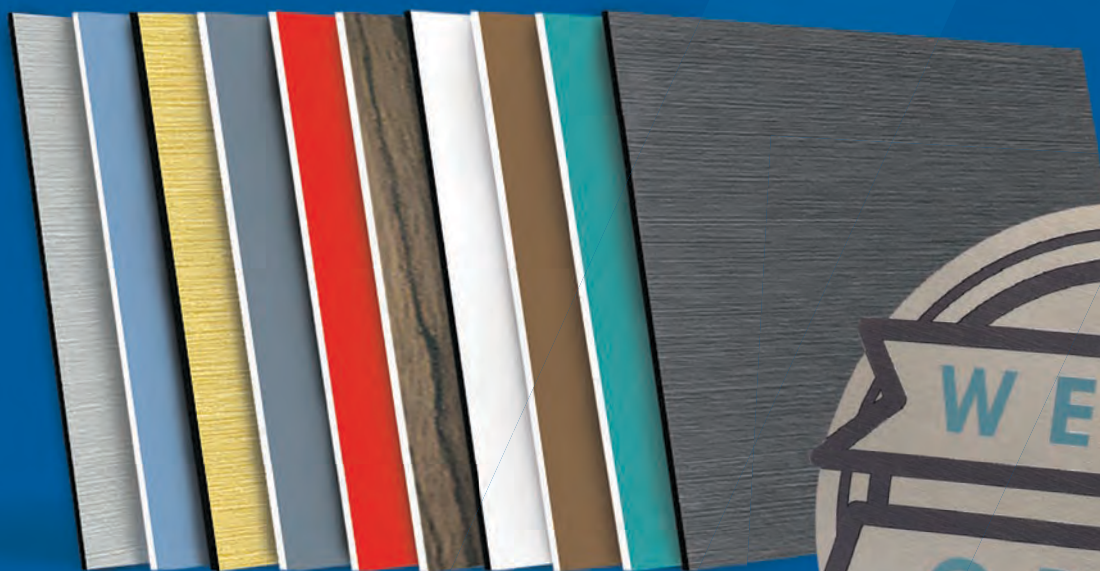
Over the years, more brands, sizes, wattages, and accessories have emerged, as well as materials that have been developed specifically for lasers and have evolved



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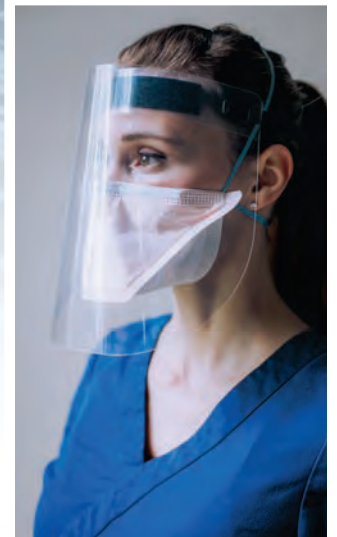
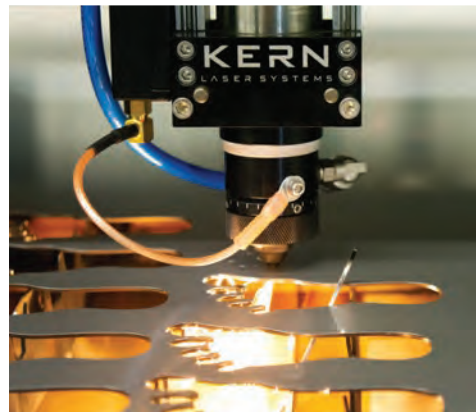


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Left: The unique products fabricated with a laser continue to grow. (Image courtesy Epilog Laser) **Center:** Higher wattage systems can engrave and cut materials at faster speeds, especially thicker materials like stainless steel. (Image courtesy Kern Laser) **Right:** In the past year specifically, there has been an uptick in the use of acrylics and plastics to accommodate for signs, lighted graphics, lettering, and PPE. (Image courtesy Kern Laser)



Over the years, more sizes, wattages, and accessories have emerged, as well as materials that have been developed specifically for lasers that have evolved alongside the technology. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)

The possibilities are almost endless when it comes to personalization with laser equipment. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)

alongside laser technology, Stevens explains. Today’s lasers require less maintenance, are capable of faster speeds, and can be operated with minimal experience.

From the usability to the ability to get up and running quickly, along with the speed of systems, laser operators’ expectations of a system have also changed, according to James Stanaway, Epilog Laser. “The laser gets to top speeds faster than ever before, and that equates to higher productivity,” he explains.

Along with faster speeds, the most noteworthy changes include higher wattage, advanced software and features, and the products that shops have pivoted their business with.

Higher wattage: Higher wattage systems can engrave and cut materials at faster speeds, especially thicker materials like acrylics, steel, and aluminum, explains

Katlyn Dykhoff, Kern Laser. These lasers can now be used for many applications that used to require multiple tools for a single process.

Software and features: Newer, more user-friendly web-based operational software offers more control and ease of use, and improved material settings, Stevens points out. Additionally, features like cameras and vision systems have further expanded the ability and diversity of markets for laser technology. With many laser machines today, camera recognition capabilities provide operators a real-time image of the laser bed.

Power utilization on some machines has also dropped, which means that users can plug the machine into a standard electrical outlet, according to Kevin Rosen, Roland DGA. In addition, integrating multiple machines has become simpler, allowing a

smooth workflow that incorporates both laser cutting and UV print personalization, for example.

Products and materials: Some of the most common materials that can be processed with a laser include wood, glass, textiles, and acrylic. In the past year specifically, there has been an uptick in the use of acrylics and plastics to accommodate for signs, lighted graphics, lettering, and PPE, Dykhoff says.

Laser shops have expanded their business in other ways as well. “We didn’t anticipate it, but the real estate market boomed during the pandemic,” Stanaway adds. “We saw a lot of customers targeting real estate agents to customize their promotional products (water bottles, tumblers, mugs, etc.), as well as personalize closing gifts for buyers — wine glasses, cutting boards, and home decor.”

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LASER ROTARY SUBLIMATION HEAT TRANSFER UV-LED PRINTING

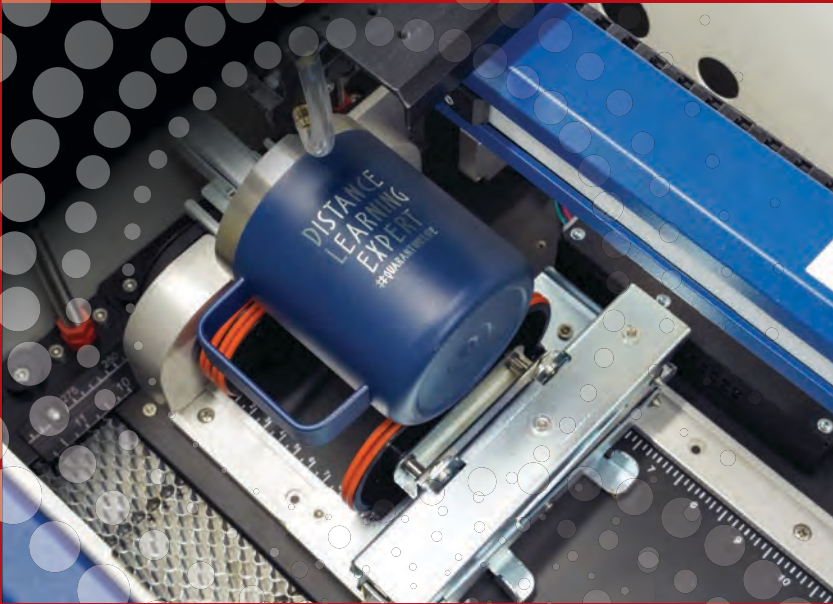


Image courtesy Epilog Laser

ROTARY ATTACHMENT: A MUST-HAVE ACCESSORY

Ancillary tools such as rotary attachments and specialized lenses remain the same, but we've seen even more use of the rotary attachment than ever before. It's become a must-have accessory for customers, and they've discovered the revenue potential of engraving glasses, mugs, tumblers, and much more. — **JAMES STANAWAY, EPILOG LASER**

One of the most popular applications for laser engraving is customization and personalization of drinkware. Many people carry their own water bottles these days, and they want their bottles customized to reflect their personality and lifestyle, be it with a custom text or graphic, or their favorite Disney character. Companies are also taking the opportunity to add their logos to promotional items like drinkware. — **KEVIN ROSEN, ROLAND DGA**

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

Whether you are in the market for your first laser or are looking to upgrade to accommodate the changing market, Stanaway recommends getting the largest and highest wattage system your budget and space will allow. With space and budget in mind, other considerations include ease of use, warranty, and after-sale support.

"Wireless connectivity is also an essential feature as customers have more connection options than ever before," Stanaway says. "Other features to look for will ultimately depend on what your primary applications are." For example, you'll need a vector table if you plan on doing any cutting with your laser. If you envision customizing wine bottles, tumblers, or mugs, then you'll benefit from having a rotary attachment.

"Truthfully there are many different tools that can assist your laser engraver in the production process, it just depends on what materials you are using and what kinds of applications they are being used for," Dykhoff states. For processing metals, for example, you will need a tumbler for deburring, a brake to fold the metal, and a shear to cut metal sheets.

It's also possible to upgrade your laser equipment with a variety of accessories, including focus lenses, worktables, rotary attachments, registration software, and more, depending on your application, Stevens says. "These tools can allow you to expand your offerings but also streamline your process even further."

Stevens adds that investing in an exhaust blower or filter for a new laser can prolong the life of a laser system by keeping dust and debris from building up inside, but is also necessary for safety reasons. In addition to accessories, a computer with high-quality design software such as CorelDRAW, Adobe Illustrator, or a free graphic software such as Inkscape is necessary, unless the laser has an integrated design software.

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TRADITIONAL VERSUS LARGE FORMAT

Looking more specifically at traditional and large-format equipment, the main differences between the two options are what applications they are used for, and what they can process, according to Dykhoff.

“Large-format systems, which are typically offered in higher wattages, make it possible to laser engrave and cut full sheets of plywood, MDF, plastics, and more,” says Stevens. “Whereas more traditional laser systems hold the advantage of faster processing speeds due to the smaller, lighter motion systems when engraving and/or cutting thin materials.” Though large-format systems are typically seen in high-production environments, it is becoming more common for laser manufacturers to offer both types of laser systems to accommodate a broad customer range.

LASER ENGRAVING TOMORROW

The future of the laser engraving industry points to the continued advancement of its already diverse capabilities. Stanaway predicts that manufacturers will continue to put resources into making the user experience as convenient and safe as possible, as well as develop faster, higher wattage systems. This also lends to an increase of the types of materials laser systems can process.

As equipment costs decrease and laser engraving machines become more reliable, the hobbyist market will continue to grow, adds Rosen. “We anticipate seeing growth in consumer product customization by hobbyists, as well as by kiosk owners and other small businesses.”

Stevens continues to see growth in the manufacturing industry as well, as it

incorporates large-format and galvo laser systems to replace outdated mechanical processes.

With laser systems becoming more widely used and available, Dykhoff also dabbles with the potential of lasers in outer space as it could be beneficial to making parts for repairs on the International Space Station, for instance.

“Truly the sky is the limit when it comes to laser customization services,” finishes Stanaway. **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.

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PRICING YOUR LASER SERVICES AND LASER ENGRAVED PRODUCTS

There are many different types of businesses related to laser engraving. You may have a hobby that has turned into a side business. Your business may be designed to produce a full-time income, yet be located in your home. The business may be full-time, and you rent or own a shop with a showroom. Whichever it is now, or is planned for the future, all the various aspects of pricing are important to consider.

Making major pricing changes for established customers is difficult to do, especially if the result is a large increase. You want as much consistency in the beginning as possible yet you still need to make money.

WHAT IS PROFIT

Profit is a misused word. For instance, TV programs or ads might suggest that buying a home for



The customer provided these wood plaques. My lasering charges had to include the more complex layout to engrave the text and graphics over the six plaques and all the graphics work.



These displays were for a custom order of 200 vintage doorknob displays for an old 1800s Virginia hotel converted to apartment condominiums. The displays were given to investors and early buyers. The design time could be spread over 200 pieces, making it an economical project for the developer. (All images courtesy Bob Hagel)

\$200,000, fixing it up for a cost \$60,000, then flipping it for \$325,000 produces a profit of \$65,000. Wrong! The time you spent finding, planning the work, and actually working on the house is work that is worth a salary. Let's say a salary to cover that time is \$20,000 — your profit would be \$45,000.

Profit is the dollars left over when all the expenses are paid, including a reasonable salary for the work you did. Profit is payment for the risk you take. Not all risks you take produce a profit. That's why they are called a risk. So, think of your business producing a fair salary for the owners and a reasonable profit related to the money you put at risk. Another way of looking at it is that profit is the interest you earn on the money invested.

Perhaps if this is a hobby-turned small side business, you don't consider the cost of your laser (and other equipment) as an investment. Yet, the percentage of time used for business is considered an investment. If your business is a fulltime adventure, consider a fair salary and a return on your investment. You will want to target a profit or interest on the investment you are making in your business. What is a fair return for the money you are investing?

PAY YOURSELF A FAIR SALARY

Determining a fair salary to use in calculating pricing when you start a business is challenging. You may be able to find out the wage paid to a local laser operator or similar job such as a machine operator at a shop or factory near you. This is a good starting point.



FOR A LIST OF ITEMS THAT BOB HAGEL RECOMMENDS YOU KEEP IN YOUR EMERGENCY REPAIR KIT, HEAD ON OVER TO <http://gpro.link/laskit>.

If you are the lone worker in your business, have a partner, or hire one or two people, you will also want to assign them wages based on their responsibilities. The other responsibilities a small business owner has include marketing, sales, and accounting, at minimum. If you are the only worker, consider that your salary needs to cover all these responsibilities, including production.

You may not be able to pay yourself a salary now, or at least not at this calculated rate; however, it should be considered in your pricing. You now have an expectation and goal to shoot for.

WHAT PRICING HAS TO COVER

In addition to salaries and a reasonable profit, what are all the other costs that must be covered by your prices? Let's focus on the costs most often forgotten.

Obvious everyday expenses include your rent, utilities, insurance, and the cost of consumables and small equipment (those things that you don't consider assets that can be resold or have real value when you retire). Others to include: computers, software, taxes, training, and education. Don't forget services such as web hosting, internet, and phone, which can be expensive.

Professional services may include payroll, tax preparation, legal, and accounting. Maintenance and repairs including those related to your shop and your equipment are often not considered. Don't forget your laser will need parts replacement such as an X-axis motor and an expensive laser tube at some point. Parts replacement should be both in your budget (save for it) and a consideration in pricing.

LASER SERVICES PRICING CONCEPTS

How should you approach pricing your services and products? Engraving used to be priced based upon the number of letters

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YOUR LASER AT WORK



The K-bar display was designed by me; however, I paid a local woodworker to make the displays. Many were sold to Marines. The design time was brief.

engraved. That worked for slower rotary engraving. Today, it would be considered impractical.

Do you price by the word, line, or square inch? How do you consider pricing for oversize text and graphics? I found pricing my laser engraving services by square inches to be a simple calculation and

accounted for any graphic or text size.

Another approach is based on laser time. By the minute with a minimum project time is common. One to two dollars per minute is usual. That equates for \$60 to \$120 per hour. Laser services must account for the use of the laser, your investment, maintenance, repairs, electricity,

space, and labor. Don't undercharge! I think about the service charges I pay for car repairs, then I felt much better about my service fees I used to charge.

Layout and preparation of the text and graphics must also be considered. Included in my calculation for square inches lasered was basic layout and typing of text. Complex layouts and any editing or preparation of graphics was charged in addition to the lasering fee.

As many graphics I received (especially small business logos) were poor quality and added 10 to 45 minutes of additional work time to the project, we charged for graphic preparation by the hour (or part of). You should also consider in your fee any special software you have purchased to assist with editing graphics.

COMPETITION

Don't let competition dictate your pricing. You do want to do some local or regional research and consider others' prices, but your prices should reflect the level of customer service, expertise, and customization you offer. Do you offer a higher level of graphic art expertise than your competition (which justifies a higher wage)? Do you have a wider product and service

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offering? Do you showcase and inventory an especially wide array of products? Understand the difference between your business offerings and others around you.

If you strictly sell on the internet, the same applies no matter where your competition is located. Remember, in the end, your prices must cover all costs including a reasonable salary and a fair profit. As many businesses don't make it more than a few years, you cannot rely on your competitor's prices to assess making your targeted income and profit.

LASERING YOUR CUSTOMER'S PRODUCT

When you sell products along with your lasering services, you have more income to cover your costs. Lasering your customers' products does not afford you this opportunity, yet you will still spend time handling their products.

Consider that you will often need to unpackage and repackage a customer's product. This may seem trivial; however, this time can add up. If you are lasering 100 products for your customer, it can add an hour of work time, so consider charging a higher lasering fee. What about a lasering job that does not go well? Who pays for replacing the product? Other potential costs: time to figure out how to best laser the product (like a fold-up knife), product holders, testing text size and angle on scrap, etc.

We would often laser or sandcarve products for third-party businesses such as other shops or marketing firms and promotional product brokers. Product was often purchased by the third party and drop-shipped to us and required a lot of handling time. Many third parties want the services at a discount, yet we were not making any income on the sale of the product that would cover our product handling time.

This was considered in our third-party pricing, especially when we realized many third parties lacked the industry

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YOUR LASER AT WORK



Left: With standard size plates, we could quote the personalization fee included with the plate (not including graphics). **Below:** A custom order that required a plaque design, layout, and a complex project of attaching the baboon skull to the plaque with all hidden attachments. Time was also spent finding the appropriate font.



knowledge and provided all the information we needed to perform the job up to our standards. As we could not contact the end customer, we often found we had to invest extra communication time with these projects.

SELLING YOUR SUPPLIER-PURCHASED PRODUCT

How much to mark up the products that you purchase from your suppliers is a debated point in our business. Typically, it's a X times markup, and the higher the wholesale purchase price you pay, the lower the percentage of markup. For very low-cost products, the markup may be six times or higher. Some shops only markup two times.

In determining your markup policy, consider these costs. Your research and ordering time may be extensive. If the desired product is among your inventoried products or one you sell often, research and ordering may be routine. We offered a level of customer service that could include a substantial amount of product research and special orders. Our markups were higher on these special orders. Rush orders that interrupt your production schedule or require special orders and shipping time should also receive a higher markup.

Shipping costs also must be considered. Your shipping costs can be substantial. I have seen shipping charges larger than the total product purchase price. If you are marking up two times, shipping costs will account for much of your markup. Consider what shipping costs add to an order. You may find on average shipping adds 1/2 or 3/4 times the cost of each product. So if you are considering a two or three times markup, you would have to markup 2 1/2 or 2 3/4 (or 3 1/2 to 3 3/4) times to obtain your target markup.

YOUR DESIGNED AND PRODUCED PRODUCT

Some of you design and create your own products to sell. It is important to consider your creative time pondering product

ideas and especially your design time. Design time can be substantial. Also consider the product uniqueness in determining pricing.

You may offer custom-designed products for customers that will not provide repeat orders for the same design. This can be especially challenging as the design time can only be spread over one or a few produced products. If the design is a product that you believe has a larger audience, discuss this with your customer. You may want to forgo the design fee for the right to sell the product without creating a problem with your customer.

We used three different pricing methods in our shop: per square inch for personalization; X times markup of product for resale; and by the hour (or minute in 5-minute increments) for graphics, custom production of product, design time,

and table time (assembly, unpackaging and repackaging, etc.).

My goal in this article was not to provide a specific formula or a single approach to pricing. I wanted to highlight the many details and complexities to consider when planning a pricing approach. It is important to be thorough upfront as your prices will impact your business success for many years to come. **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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Finding Clipart ONLINE

BY CLAY BARBERA



An internet search has replaced much of our industry's legwork when it comes to finding an image or client's artwork. In the past, we might have referred to a clipart library, or even expected the customer to have some form of their logo in a semi-production format. Today, most conversations about artwork are expected to start and end with "just get it off my website."

The most obvious hurdle when working with artwork sourced online is its legality. Because this can also be so obviously addressed, we will skip most of the specifics to simply say do not take anyone's art, efforts, or logo without express written permission by authorized person(s). Knowing that the internet is full of alternative sources, or you have confirmed the client's ownership, we'll continue.

GET, GIVE

The importance of getting as much information as possible from your customer or prospective customer is obvious. It is paramount that you also give as much

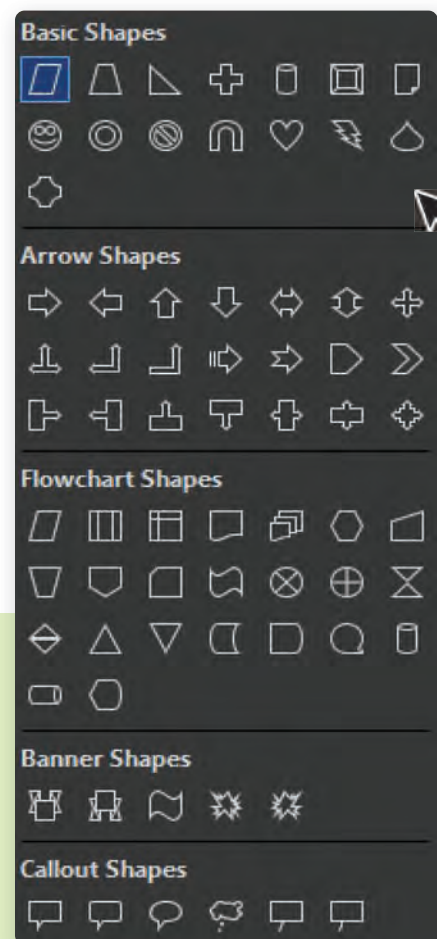
information as possible, too. Use this conversation, whether virtual or in person, as an opportunity to tell them how important the detailed information from them is, and what your design process truly entails. Here are some talking points and follow-ups:

- Where can I find your artwork? That image is not production-ready.
- What colors are most important? Some processes charge by number of colors. Colors often look different when processed. Screens show millions of colors, while the production process uses hundreds.
- What size are you wanting this? That is much larger than we see on your phone/computer screen.
- Do you have the font? We will re-type your text in a similar script type.

Notice how you inform the customer with questions and guide them with your follow-up statements, all the while nudging them to understand that what you do is not as simple as "copy-paste-print." You may not want to waste your time explaining digital versus vector to your customer.

A friendly "yes we can do that" followed by the above conversation, then ending with the value you bring should suffice.

Do give effort to explain what your time, expertise, and unique equipment is worth and how they relate to your price point. Just make sure that their expectations are on par with your technical and production abilities.



Left: An internet search has replaced much of our industry's legwork when it comes to finding artwork. (All images courtesy Clay Barbera) **Right:** Do not be afraid to draw simple design pieces. Your design software has many-a-tool to simply make stars, ovals, shields, and other basic/common shapes.



DON'T BE AFRAID TO DESIGN

If you can easily find what you need in a quality production-ready format, go for it. A clipart book is near useless when considering the time it may take you to flip pages, correspond with discs and drives, then import and adjust ... Technology and the internet have come a long way in just the past few years, but you do need a basic understanding of design software and a bit of editing skills to work with any form of stock art.

Look at each image and its graphic elements as pieces: background, foreground, primary art, secondary elements, and text area(s). Each of these can be found or created separately, then put back together.

Yes, I said "created." Do not be afraid to draw simple design pieces. Your design software has many-a-tool to simply make stars, ovals, shields, and other basic/common shapes.

It may take more time to find then convert to a production format the simple parts of your image than to just draw it. Don't be afraid, you can do it. A little design practice will help you for years to come. Your graphics proficiency is a force multiplier for your business.

TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Now, let us get into some specifics and recommendations from me. Regarding your search tool itself: Surely I am not the first to

tell you that "Google is king." I may be the first to let you know that there are options when working with this internet overlord:

- Beyond adding words to your search, such as "vector" or "blue," click near the text you typed on the Tools or Settings button. You will find a plethora of filters for your search. When looking through such a massive instrument as the internet, your biggest hardship will be to limit your results specifically for what you need.
- Adjust your search based on size, color, type, and importantly, rights/licenses. Note: Be careful as online postings of images may not be perfectly accurate for free-to-use, etc.

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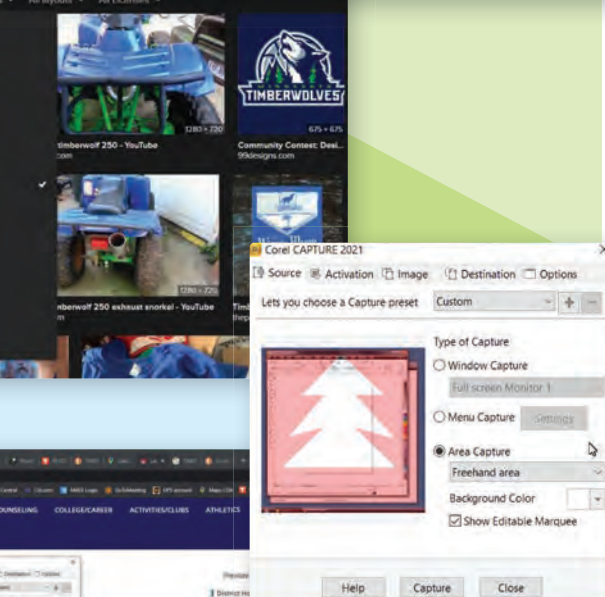
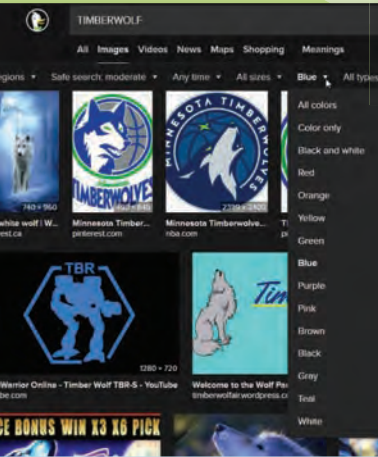
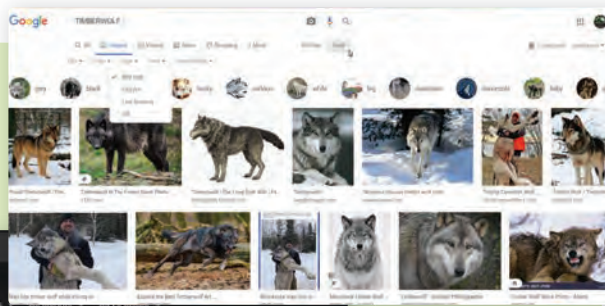


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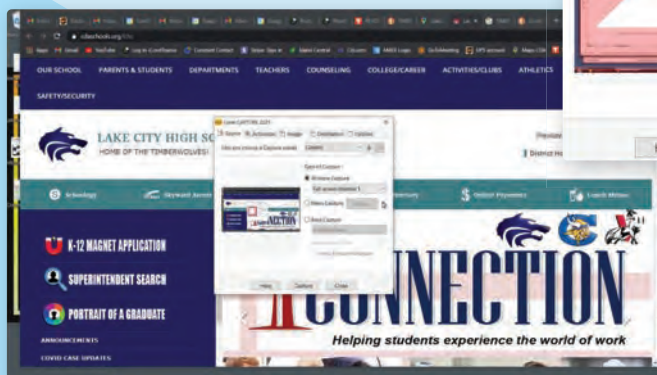


DuckDuckGo is a search engine that uses Google's base algorithm and search results but does not prioritize (as much) based on corporate imbursements.

Right and below: Adjust your search based on size, color, type, and importantly, rights/licenses.



Above and left: Corel-CAPTURE can make things incredibly easy for you, helping you when you have to grab a client's logo of their site.



- The type of file you want differs greatly based on the image, or the portion of the image that you are trying to find. As PNG files slowly replace JPEGs, we are less apt to run into large white squares behind every graphic.
 - By saving the image to your computer (Save As), instead of the typical copy/paste directly into your design software, you will avoid much of these solid, unusable, and irrelevant backgrounds, though the file itself — even a PNG — may have a square around it versus a transparent background.
 - In your settings, near the search text you typed in, you will find some Advanced Search options, including Safe Search. This relates to objectionable and mostly adult content. Your searches are naturally being filtered this way, often to our benefit, but can restrict a great deal of the quality results we may want and can use. Please remember to turn these function(s) back on if your computer is used by youngsters or sensitive persons.
- You may be able to naturally narrow your search results by adding some out-of-the-box words to your search. For example, if you know that you will remove the background with, let's say, a color-masking function, then adding the word(s) "snow," "water," or "silhouette" to your search may give you the image you need with easily removable inner or outer section(s).
- DuckDuckGo is a search engine that I often recommend. It uses Google's base algorithm and search results but does not prioritize (as much) based on corporate imbursements. Try it. Search for a product blank or an unbranded image on DuckDuckGo. It will automatically provide a relatively private search and tracker blocking, meaning that neither someone else's searches, nor social media, nor email history, etc., will change the results you get (as much).

Your computer likely has, while your design software no doubt includes, a screen-capture

continued on page 110

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO EXPAND YOUR SUBLIMATION OFFERINGS

Does your company offer sublimation? If not, that's OK. This article is for you. Not sure what to add to your sublimation product line and why if you do already offer it? This article is also for you!

Sublimation, like many other processes, has thousands of products to choose from and it can be overwhelming to know what and how much to offer. As business owners, we need to look at what equipment we have to work with, research the product, size of our production space, who are our customers, and how we are going to market to them.

THE PRODUCT

Our company owns three heat presses that only heat press flat surfaces, a hat press, a convection oven, and a sublimation printer. Knowing what your equipment is capable of is important when selecting new products to sublimate. If you do not have the equipment for the product you want to bring in, then you have another cost to add, so it is important to take a step back and double check that your equipment can handle any new product(s).

Researching the product is important. Is it a fad or not? Is it easy to sublimate?

How is the stock on this item? If something is a fad, be cautious. Make sure that you get in early on the trend and don't carry too deep of stock or you could be stuck with it. If you get in early enough on the fad, you can capitalize and make a healthy profit quickly, but just keep your eyes open and pay attention to how sales are moving to reduce any backend potential loss in stock of the item.

If the item is not a fad, that is usually a safer item to move to next. Just be aware that your competition will most likely have this product, too, so make sure you



Above: Before you add a new product to your sublimation offerings, do your research. Is it a fad? Is it easy to sublimate? Do you have the right customer base? **Right:** Your goal should always be to maximize your profitability within your workspace. (All images courtesy Howard Potter)

print that product as good as them or better. Making sure this item is easy to sublimate is a must no matter the size of your company. The last thing you want to do is bring in a new product that is not easy to work with. It can create a massive error rate and loss of income — order six to 12 pieces to test on. The easier the product is to work with, the easier you make it on yourself and your staff.

Research the stock of this item. Make sure you know how many wholesalers or manufacturers produce it. Order samples if they are not the name brand and

compare pricing. Always create a backup plan in case your vendor runs short, and make sure your pricing structure covers all pricing for both vendors in case you have to switch on the fly to keep orders getting done on time. You don't want to increase pricing for your customer or have to take a loss in profit.

THE SPACE

What is the size of your production space? Each new product takes up a certain amount of space along with your equipment, so your goal should always be to

maximize your profitability within in your workspace.

Make sure the new product you bring in has a fair profit margin that you can produce quickly per hour within your workspace. In our case, for example, our sublimation room is only 14' X 14' with our computer/print station, heat presses, oven, production tables, and stock shelves. In that little space, one person can keep the printer printing, load the convection oven with up to 24 mugs, and in between run a heat press. By setting a room up like this, you create a productive workspace for any

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MAKING SUBLIMATION MOVES



You can create stronger sales and improve profits by adding the right products to your sublimation services.

Knowing what your equipment is capable of is important when selecting new products to sublimate. If you do not have the equipment for the product you want to bring in, then you have another cost to add.



If you want to be successful with a new product, you have to put the time in and do the research.

new products you bring in, it takes fewer people to be productive, and makes your space more profitable.

THE CUSTOMERS

Knowing your customers has been talked about forever, but it is important. Knowing your customers and their needs is another form of data analytics that help you take controlled, calculated risks. Talk to your customers. Get to know them. What do they wear? What items do they use in their line of work? What are common items that everyone uses? How often do these items need replacing?

Knowing all of this information gives you a head start on picking new items that will most likely have an 80% success rate versus not studying your customers and picking a new item with only a 20% success rate. Your basic research is the cheapest and most valuable information that you have. If the item is used often or is popular, guess what happens? Your sales naturally increase out of the gate and become steady.

Once you understand your customers, you can work on a marketing plan to educate them on your new product(s) that you offer. Everyone works with a different size marketing budget and that is OK. No matter your size, you should always look to gain the largest return with the least amount invested.

For example, our company did \$2.4 million last year and spent around \$20,000 on marketing, which is under 1% of our gross sales. Focus on selling a quality product with top-notch customer service and turnaround time.

Once you have built pricing for your new products, create sales flyers for them right away. You can add these to your website, give them to customers as they come in, email them to customers, and post them on all of your social media platforms. Think about all of the different ways to promote simply with a sales flyer.

Another great way to promote a product is to existing clients. If they spend a certain amount with you, throw in a free gift with their logo on it using the new products. Spending \$10 to \$20 to promote directly with that customer can lead to a \$250 to \$1,000 order in most cases, but you will never know that if you do not try. It is easier to promote to an existing customer than a new one. That is another simple low-cost way to promote a new product.

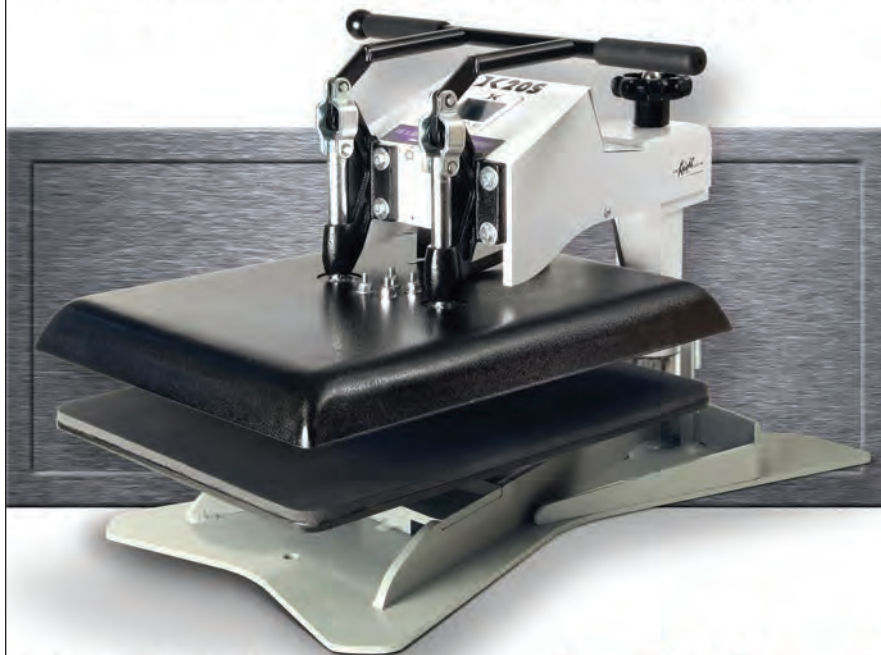
Radio, TV, and SEO for websites are great tools, but costly, with no guarantee on your return of your investment, nor do you know how many people or who will walk through your door to order based on those ads. So, it is important to market to who you want as a customer.

Remember, if you want to be successful with a new product, you have to put the time in and do the research, which can take a lot of effort. But in the end, you will typically create stronger sales and improve your profits per item that you want to bring into your customers. **GP**

HOWARD POTTER has been working in the promotional industry for 17 years, from designing to building brands and a family-owned business. He is the co-owner and CEO of A&P Master Images LLC with his wife Amanda. Their company offers graphic design, screen printing, embroidery, sublimation, vinyl graphics, and promotional items. Howard, his family, and the business reside in Utica, New York. For more information, please visit masteryourimage.com.

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GROW AND EXPAND BY FOCUSING ON 3 SIMPLE THINGS

As we continue to navigate what we hope is the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, our businesses can seem complicated. With all of the pivoting, figuring out new marketing techniques, and navigating, how can we quickly grow and not get overwhelmed?

First, we must understand why we are doing all this pivoting. The simple answer is to be able to serve our customers. What can be lost is that customers buy from us because of the experience, not because of the marketing technique or complicated systems.

To simplify this needed growth and recovery, I believe that we need to focus on the three things customers care about. This way, we ditch the overwhelm (for ourselves and our customers) and refocus on the experience we provide for our ideal customers. Along with simplicity comes some good news. According to new data from Podium, 28% of consumers say that price matters less since the pandemic. Attending to the customer experience is key, not the need to cut costs and lower prices.

Before I dive into the three things that customers care about, I need to explain what I mean by customer experience. I'm talking about an experience that exceeds expectations. It's not just enough to provide a quality product in a reasonable amount of time. That should be the minimum requirement to earn customers' business. It is no longer sufficient to grow and thrive. But by focusing on these three things that customers genuinely care about, you will create a customer experience that will exceed your customer expectation.

Here they are:

1. Speed
2. Clarity
3. Empathy

Let's break down all three and discuss how to focus and improve them in your business.

SPEED

Speed is a choice. I say this all the time and borrow this phrase from marketing and customer service guru Jay Baer. Speed can mean a lot of things when it comes to your business. But first, we must believe that it is crucial and believe we can be exceptionally fast.

When a customer contacts you, what is your minimum standard for a reply (and not just the auto-response)? Most companies reply within one business day to emails, or return phone calls in a few hours. What if you always reply in 30 minutes to emails and return phone calls in 10 minutes? That is exceptionally fast service.

Some of you might say, "OK, he has lost it. How am I going to reply to emails in 30 minutes without it being an auto-responder and still try to grow my business?" Here's the deal: When you decide that speed is important, you find a way.

Start by getting a Virtual Assistant. I use a company called iWorker.co, and it costs \$5.95 per hour. You can have them help you respond to emails during certain hours or help with other tasks so you can focus on your customers.

However, you must first decide what part of speed is essential to you and your customers. Then set a clear standard in writing that is something you "brag" about in your marketing. Make sure you, and everyone involved with your business, follows the standard to the letter. Don't allow room for any gray area or exceptions.

CLARITY

Many of us are on the lookout for complaints about our business, but are we on the lookout for clarity warnings? When your customer says, I'm confused, how do I, or other indicators that they don't have all of the information, do they have to pick up the phone and call?

According to Baer, 81% of millennials say they have to "summon courage" before making a phone call. So, lack of clarity is not going to result in a phone call. It will result in them moving to the next company that is clear upfront.

Do you have an FAQ page on your website? Even if you do, update it regularly. Go back through old emails, messenger threads, and other customer interactions and see what questions you have answered. I'd even suggest

keeping a log by the phone if you field phone calls. Find patterns then figure out ways to explain your products and services more clearly.



The bonus is this is all great content too. You can take the questions, make them blog posts, do live videos about the answers, and use them as posts on social media. But the key is then to organize them into an easy-to-find page on your website. Plus, you can make this FAQ into an easy-to-use guide on how to buy your products; allow people to download it as a PDF. You can even use that PDF as a free guide to acquire new leads.

Lastly, make sure you prioritize reviews. People look to reviews more and more to feel comfortable with their buying decisions, and it helps them find clarity to see what other people have to say. A great tool I suggest is called www.helpfulcrowd.com.

EMPATHY

This comes naturally to some and not so naturally to others. For all of us, look at it like this: Be kind no matter what. No matter what the person on the other side is doing, be kind. Focus on the feelings, not the facts.

One way to show more empathy is to embrace complaints. Getting a customer complaint is valuable to your business. Research shows for every 100 dissatisfied customers, only five ever actually complain. When you hear from one customer and fix the issue, you are fixing it for other customers in the future.

Since focusing on these three things is all about exceeding expectations, make replying to all reviews a priority, good or bad. Always take their feelings into account and avoid the facts. You might win the battle by proving you are right, but you will lose the war of keeping customers if that is your focus. If you must be correct, then something is broken in your process or policies, and you missed the clarity from our second point.

RECAP

To recap, spend your time focusing on improving these three things in your business, and you will see sustainable growth faster than any marketing funnel, paid ad strategy, or whatever else you have researched.

Speed — Have a set standard for responding to customers, getting orders out the door, or some other way you can exceed expectations.

Clarity — Have a well-organized FAQ page, point to it often, and continuously update it.

Empathy — Make reviews a priority, and just like speed, have

a standard and system to reply to all of them quickly and without the need to be correct. Focus on the feelings.

These three things matter to the customer above all else, so put in the effort to honestly evaluate how you are doing. Then get to work implementing ways you can become better. **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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Decorating Decisions

DECORATING T-SHIRTS? HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DTG AND SCREEN-PRINTING EQUIPMENT

BY CARLY
HOLLMAN



T-shirts are undoubtedly the bread and butter for many apparel decorators' businesses. And if you're looking to get into apparel decoration, there's a good chance T-shirts are one of the main reasons you've decided to start exploring it. But how will you decorate those T-shirts? Screen printing or direct-to-garment (DTG)? Manual or automatic? Not to mention, once you're done printing, how will those creations be dried?

GRAPHICS PRO went straight to screen printing and DTG equipment manufacturers to help answer some of these questions to clarify what may be best for your business plans.

PROS AND CONS

Screen printing finds its strength in production speed and cost, says Paul Zingone, Vastex International. Specifically, it is ideal for high-volume print jobs ranging from 100 to 1,000 duplicated prints.

According to Ryan Moore, Ryonet, this can translate to costs ranging between 6–12 cents in consumables and ink, and 15–75 cents in labor, depending on the size of the shop.

That being said, sources agree that screen printing's biggest weakness is set-up time. Between making the screens, setting up the press, and cleaning up, there is quite a bit of time involved. "As the number of colors increases, so does that setup



Short runs tend to make more sense with DTG as setup on a press can take a long time. (Image courtesy Ryonet)

time,” explains Zingone. For a small order, you can easily spend more time in the setup of that printing, although with larger orders, the setup time becomes a lower percentage of overall time spent on the job, he adds. Check out the example on page 83 for more discussion on this topic.

Conversely, DTG shines in small run, customizable scenarios. “DTG can print that one item in 5–10 minutes start to finish, is relatively easy to setup, and doesn’t involve any cleaning or many supportive processes to run,” says Moore. What’s more, the color options are endless. Where screen printing requires a different screen for each color, DTG can print every color of the rainbow and beyond.

These prints are also done in high-quality, photorealistic images, says Paul Crocker, DTG Connection. As for its customization abilities, he explains that there is not a significant setup process for each unique graphic, with the only additional time needed being changing the graphic itself. He adds, “With DTG, there is virtually no difference in per piece printing cost if you are printing a single shirt or 500 of the same graphic, or printing 500 unique designs for that matter.”

The biggest drawback to DTG, according to Moore, is the slower speeds and often-higher cost. The initial investment tends to be high, but the consumables

(inks and pretreatment) tend to run up the bill. What’s more, the lower-cost printers run the risk of being converted printers, meaning that traditional printers are converted to use DTG water-based inks. This can lead to breakdowns, poor performance, and little support.

To combat this, Zingone urges shops looking at DTG equipment to consider those designed specifically for the task and going through a reputable company to ensure any troubleshooting or maintenance issues can be easily addressed. It is also important to note that DTG utilizes water-based inks, meaning that it is mostly limited to cotton fabrics for best results and requires pretreatment.

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CASE STUDY: COVID-19 UN- MASKS BUSINESS OPPORTUNI- TIES FOR SCREEN PRINTERS

BY MARK
VASILANTONE



With the onset of the pandemic, many screen printers saw the door to their livelihood closing. However, most found new avenues for growth through community involvement and printing face masks using a platen built for their manual presses.

MI SCREEN PRINTING

Schools and events previously comprised the majority of MI Screen Printing's customer base. When shutdowns went into effect, the company, located in Mooresville, North Carolina, reached out to small businesses in the area.

"When COVID hit, we were forced to think outside the box and started helping those in need," says Danielle Gordon. "We had a huge amount of overstock shirts, so we printed 'Support Local Businesses' on the front of the shirts and our logo on the back."

Danielle and her husband Jason printed approximately 500 one-color shirts on their press and gave them away to local businesses, who in turn gave some to their customers. The couple also set up an online store and raised \$1,000 for small businesses in the area.

As the city began to reopen, recipients of the free shirts reached out to the shop with T-shirt orders. Soon the Gordons received queries about printing masks.

"We tried five or six test prints on our (platens) using a lot of adhesive to hold the masks down, but the masks moved around too



MI Screen Printing supplied the Mooresville Fire Department with neck gaiters printed on the Vastex face mask platen. (All images courtesy Vastex International)

DTG shines when the number of colors seems limitless or needs photo-realistic quality. (Image courtesy Vastex)

WHAT AND WHEN

If you're still wondering which method is best for you, it's smart to think about which items and quantities you're planning to produce.

While the exact number of items varies, the consensus seems to be that the higher the number and simpler the design (meaning one to six colors, generally), screen printing is king. This can vary from a one-color 24-item job to 1,000-plus prints as these numbers will provide easy setup and the costs will be efficient.

This is also where manual versus automatic comes into play. Based on scale, size, and pricing, automatic can be the best way to knock out high quantities of duplicate jobs without much holdup beyond setup. Zingone also notes that he prefers using an automatic on jobs that use an underbase and/or thick inks. "It saves a lot of wear and tear on your body. It can also get a nicer print with the right screen, pressure, and angle used," he explains. Because of this, especially for large orders, this translates to more consistency.

Other considerations include placement, size, and fabric composition of the substrate, says Moore. He notes that while both methods work well with cotton, synthetic fibers such as polyester and neoprene as well as thick items such as sweatshirts and towels are often more difficult to print with DTG, which makes screen printing the best choice in these cases.

In the case of DTG, Crocker notes that there are two considerations when choosing it. The first is color variation. DTG doesn't care if there is a single color or one million colors in a graphic. There is no difference in file prep or printing time regardless of the number of colors in the graphic.

The second thing is customization or small to medium print runs. Since there is little effort required to prepare an image for printing, it's easy to accept small jobs. However, adds Crocker, it is also possible to use DTG to print jobs with hundreds or thousands of shirts.



Highly detailed prints shine with DTG. (Image courtesy DTG Connection)

SCREEN PRINTING SETUP EXAMPLE

To demonstrate how long setup for screen printing can be, Ryan Moore, Ryonet, offers a real-life example: "I recently printed a birth announcement pillow for my newborn nephew and decided to time myself from start to finish. Nothing was prepared, so I had to do every step of the process from scratch, minus a CTS (computer-to-screen) machine and the use of film. The Ryonet gear I used was fast and effective, but even so, it still took almost an hour to do the process from start to finish, just to print one item."



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Left: DTG produces the best images on cotton items with a pretreat but can be printed on a variety of substrates. (Image courtesy DTG Connection) **Right:** Consider the art when deciding to go with screen printing or DTG. (Image courtesy Vastex)

much,” says Danielle. “When we got our first order for 1,000 masks from our local school district, we knew we needed to find a better method.”

MI Screen Printing purchased a Vastex double face mask platen. In addition to printing masks for schools and small businesses, the couple received mask orders from the town of Mooresville for its local fire departments and emergency medical services.

SECOND BREAKFAST SCREEN PRINTING

As mask mandates went into effect, other screen-printing shops followed suit. Scott Bukieda of Second Breakfast Screen Printing in Pittsburgh ordered a mask platen to fulfill requests from existing customers, namely CrossFit gyms. “We knew that the environment was changing and masks were going to be the norm, so it was an easy decision to purchase the platen,” he says. Most of Bukieda’s customers ordered masks with company logos or names. **GP**



Second Breakfast Screen Printing prints masks with company logos.

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

DRYERS

After deciding which decoration method works best for your business or the job at hand comes the next important decision: the dryer or curing unit. This decision is crucial in curing prints, which, in turn, makes your images last and look good. But which is best for screen printing or DTG?

According to Zingone, conveyor dryers are the best method for screen printing because of the speed and consistency they provide. These dryers allow the decorator to drop the garment on the belt and focus on printing the next shirt.

Beyond these qualities, Moore notes the importance of air-flow, which most conveyor dryers provide.

As for DTG, Crocker states that because of the smaller scale more DTG printers produce, it's not uncommon for shops to utilize a heat press, although higher-volume shops and those who prefer the method can also take advantage of a conveyor dryer's qualities. Not only does a heat press take up less space, but it is versatile for multiple decoration methods and substrates, and can easily be moved around the shop, while a conveyor dryer must be plumbed in to accommodate for the necessary gas line.

However, when working with high volumes, heat presses will struggle to keep up. And, as Moore explains, they can often leave the print flat and shiny, a quality many retailers don't want.

In short, it comes down to what you need and want to accomplish within your business and what methods will best serve your goals and customers. No one decoration method is one size fits all. It all comes down to design, substrate, and quantity. If you can't fulfill an order, consider partnering with a nearby company so that everyone gets a piece of the pie and customers leave with the product they envisioned.

While there are different considerations when it comes to screen printing versus DTG to decorate T-shirts, the truth is, the market has space for both, so find what suits your current needs and become the master of your craft! **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.

For large runs, screen printing is the most cost- and time-effective decoration method. (Image courtesy Ryonet)



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SURF'S UP

SURFER-INSPIRED SCREEN PRINT

“Surf or Die!” — a slight modification of the surfer’s variation on the “no guts, no glory” credo; borrowed from “Skate or Die.” Today, most know a version of this phrase. We see it in print, on TV, movies, online, in video games and apps, graffiti, tattoos, and yes, even

on decorated apparel. “Surf or Die” is an expression that reflects the rich culture and lifestyle.

It’s a battle cry. It’s the emotional expression of a real surfer’s heart. It epitomizes the life of a hardcore surfer. It’s a raw and timeless motto that captures a

surfer’s spirit and essence. Go surf, or get dead — ride a surfboard ’til death do us part. It sounds like an authentic and inspiring now-or-never, all-or-nothing legit surf phrase for the fanatics. The phrase has spread throughout the world and was the center of this article’s project.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

We went with a pretty straight-forward graphic style and a moderate amount of detail and contrast. Poster style graphics were a great solution. We researched our roots from icons like Ocean Pacific, Rip Curl, and O’Neill. “The Endless Summer” movie posters would be perfect for our template here. Vintage travel posters for reference and layout inspired and guided our composition.

Most of this design was created and manipulated in Adobe Photoshop with the type set in Illustrator. It would be a sunset design with some low-lying clouds in the distance. The bright sun rendered in flat white would draw strong contrast against the colors around it. A gradient of red, yellow, and white incorporated the setting sun in warm colors contrasting the cool tones used in the water.

We used the Cutout filter under the filter menu, which gave us basic tones cut down to shapes that represented values of our photo. Once the filter produced the result, the colors were flattened, making it easy to select and copy to their own layers and channels for further rendering, coloring, and manipulation.



The bright sun rendered in flat white would draw strong contrast against the colors around it. A gradient of red, yellow, and white incorporated the setting sun in warm colors contrasting the cool tones used in the water. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)

Black, aqua, and purple made up the foreground surf. Even though they are only three flat values, they recreate the photo nicely and would print with ease. The purple isn't 100% in its value, unlike the aqua and black. The purple would overprint the aqua and create additional tones.

For the distant ocean, we reproduced the same effects as the foreground and used only two colors. A glint of the sun on the water was added with a bright white reflection. The aqua blue water was a single color but appears as two because we removed the base in areas to allow the

ink to print directly on the garment.

The clouds were handled in the same fashion as the other elements and helped with the consistency through the design. Similar to the ocean in the distance, we mixed some percentage of yellow in the white of the clouds to give us a little hue and push back some of the brightness. We altered the contrast by using image adjustment options in the Levels, Curves, and Brightness/Contrast palettes.

We added an edge treatment to get away from the rectangle. Our border was a combination of random splatter texture and

palm trees. We added the pier for an urban flair.

With all the background elements rendered, we could see the composition before placing the surfer in front. We used a black-and-white stock photo as contrasts are a little easier to pull apart. We removed most of water with exception to the shadows where the board meets the water. After the surfer was extracted, we used levels to maximize the light and shadow values to simplify the representation of the figure and let the silhouette do all the work.

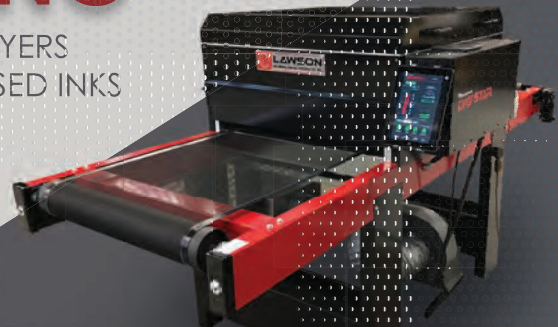
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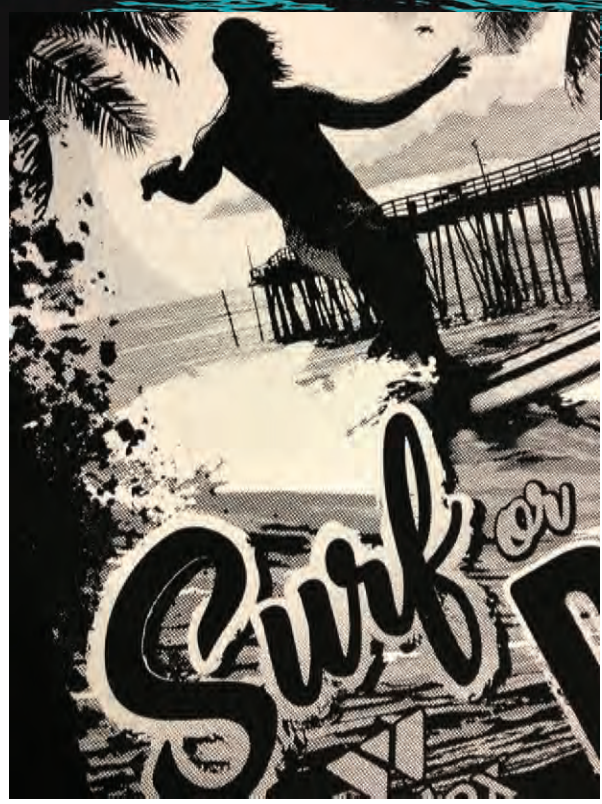


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SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



Left: The border was a combination of random splatter texture and palm trees. We added the pier for an urban flair. **Above:** We chose a loose script for Surf. For the word DIE, a heavy-weight font delivered the bold warning. We also added a choppy stroke around all the letters to further the aggressive messaging.



We would let the dark of the garment create the silhouette, black outlines, and shadows.

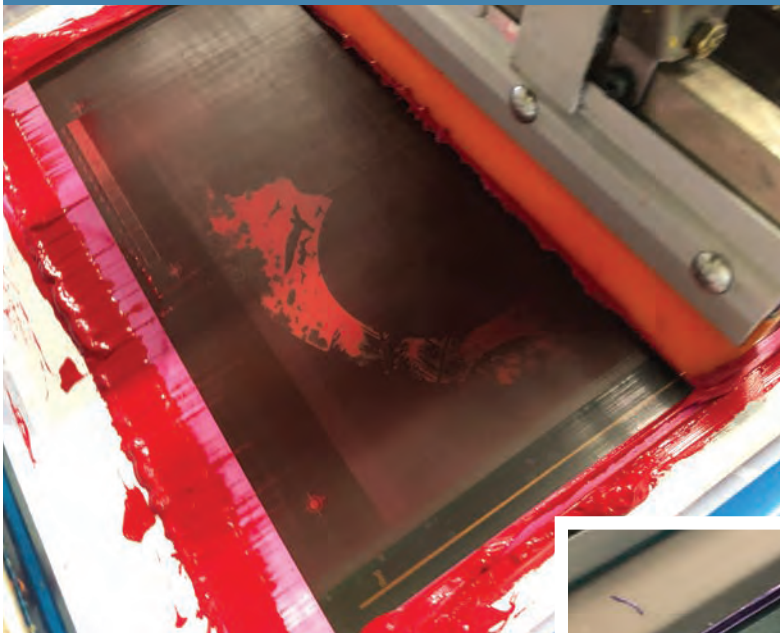
We finished out the design with our extreme slogan “Surf or DIE.” We chose a loose script for Surf because, like, “Hang loose, brah!” For the word DIE, a heavy-weight font delivered the bold warning. We also added a choppy stroke around all the letters to further the aggressive messaging.

Since we laid out our text in Adobe Illustrator, it made it easy to change size and shape. To achieve the distressed look for our text, we used a textured stroke in the Brushes palette. Once our type solution was complete, we exported it over to Photoshop to place the final element.

PRODUCTION

The base or white printer was broken up, and we decreased some densities for additional tones. We would let the dark of the garment create the silhouette, black outlines, and shadows. This image would print on dark colors as well as black, so we incorporated a black screen but still used some of the garment for dark areas.

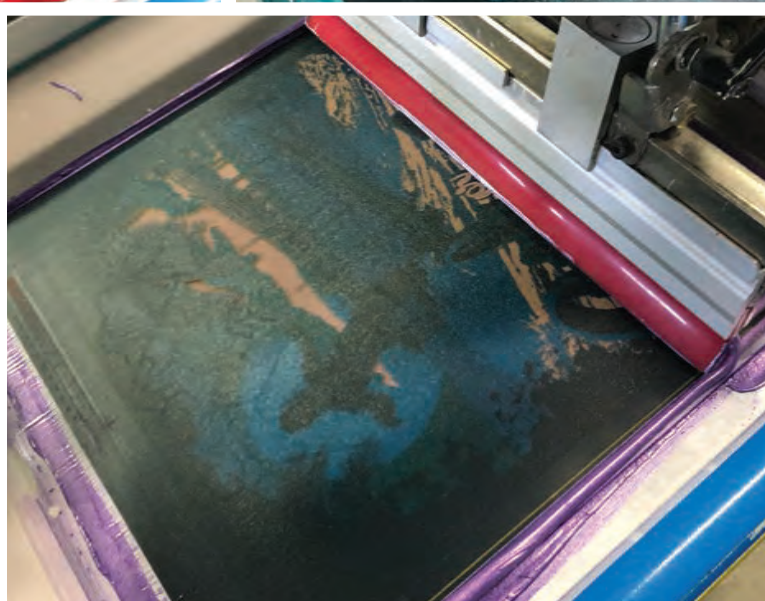
Once seps were completed, we outputted on CTS with



a big, chunky frequency of 25 LPI for a graphic illustrative look. We ran the white on an N-166 TPI screen at 45 N/cm² using a 65/90/65 triple-ply dual durometer squeegee.

Besides the metallic gold, we added 5-10% colored inks to metallic silver to achieve a purple and teal metallic final print. Those printed on N-128 meshes. Next, the red and the highlight white ran on N-272s at the same tension using harder 75/90/75s. We wrestled with print order and some tricky flashing as we couldn't print the metallic wet on wet. Not sure we would recommend running three or four metallic inks on one print.

The thrill of a great print brings great excitement, and we just want to keep doing it over and over. We love the thrill, and it expresses an attitude and lifestyle. We will continue with the do or die, sink or swim, make or break, and all or nothing. "Print or Die!" **GP**



We wrestled with print order and some tricky flashing as we couldn't print the metallic wet on wet.



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.



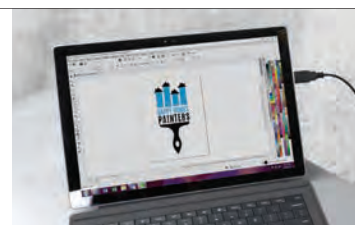
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Selling Promotional Products



...WITHOUT THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS OF NEW EQUIPMENT



BY JEREMY PICKER

If you are a screen printer, DTG business, or another decorator, and you are not yet offering promotional products — such as totes, bandanas, mugs, and pens — you may be selling yourself short and leaving a good chunk of change on the table. Companies spend billions of dollars on promotional products each year, and there is a good chance this includes many of the individuals already on your email list.

We all know acquiring new customers is much more expensive and time-consuming than expanding offerings to customers you already have, who already like you. Tapping into this side of the decoration industry is a game-changer, and I am speaking from experience.

Expanding your offerings to include promotional products is a great way to not only get an upsell from a client, thus increasing your bottom

You can subliminate mousepads, bags, face masks, mugs, and there are many blanks suppliers, enabling you to order them on an as-needed basis. (All images courtesy Jeremy Picker)

line, but also solidifies your company as a client's go-to for more than one type of product. At first glance, the idea of expanding into mugs as a T-shirt business or pens as an awards engraver might invoke anxious thoughts of spending thousands of dollars on new machinery, storage, and process upgrades. However, there are some solid ways to break into the industry and make creative movements to increase your offerings using the equipment and space you already have.

Some of you may already offer promotional products, but by comparing similarities in production methods across products while examining your core competencies, you may find some lucrative expansion opportunities.

There are two main ways to expand your offerings, and they are not mutually exclusive. The first option — handling everything in your shop — gives you the added benefit of control. The second option — outsourcing to a few trusted decorators elsewhere — leans on their years of expertise and allows you to examine the products before offering them to your customers.

OPTION 1: IN-HOUSE

If you like to have everything in-house and maintain control over every aspect of the process, it might be simple to add on a few items with just a bit of research on materials and products that will lend themselves well to the equipment you already own.

Screen Printing: Most of my personal history is in the apparel industry, and this is where most of my production knowledge lies as well. If you operate in the apparel decorating world, this section is for you. Much of the apparel industry is the T-shirt industry. If you solely offer screen-printed shirts and not other screen printables such as totes or bandanas, you may be missing valuable upsell opportunities. Sometimes, this can even use the same

screen and setup if the conditions and designs allow for it.

Larger automated print shops can benefit from adding on these “flat” promotional items, but if you run a smaller business or are screening by hand, you may have even more options, albeit more time-consuming. It is often possible to do simple one-color prints on cylindrical objects such as a bottle or a mug with just a screen and some strategic rolling. If you have a client who often orders simple designs, use the same design for a few simple water bottles — just ensure the ink is appropriate for the substrate surface you plan to print on.

You might also consider adding one- or two-color screen-printed plastisol transfers to your repertoire if you have a heat press. While this might seem daunting at first, the process is fairly simple. Transfers can last almost as long as screen prints and allow you to use your current technology to print on hats, jerseys, add sizing tags, and anything else that might be better suited to this type of transfer than a traditional screen print.

Sublimation and Heat Transfer: Sublimation technology comes with fabric limitations, but there are much fewer limitations than you think. You can subliminate mousepads, bags, face masks, mugs, and there are a ton of blanks suppliers so you can order them on an as-needed basis for projects.

Keeping this process in-house also allows you to personally experiment and come up with some more adventurous options that you might not be able to order from a larger supplier. You can often get inexpensive add-on jigs for printing on certain hard goods or rounded objects.

OPTION 2: COLLABORATION

If you want to maintain a lean infrastructure and let those with the good equipment solve a problem for you, know that your promotional product offerings can

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Companies spend billions of dollars on promotional products each year, and there is a good chance this includes many of the individuals already on your email list.



Once you feel comfortable adding on one new product, you can start with more.



At first glance, the idea of expanding into pens as an apparel decorator might seem daunting. However, there are a few ways to break into the industry to increase your offerings using the equipment and space you already have.

essentially be endless. Most promotional products companies can help you cut down on the cost of shipping blanks and cut out time by simply decorating the blank products that they already stock.

There are thousands of these types of companies, many specializing in a single type of product, so the vetting process can be time-consuming. But if your client loves you and wants to know if you can make pens as well as shirts, the answer can be, "Oh yes! Absolutely!" with no hesitation. While sometimes utilizing your equipment and skills may be the best option, just because you can print business cards with your personal computer doesn't mean you should.

By private labeling or blind shipping from wholesale promotional product

companies who exist solely for this purpose, you can gain an advantage while still being picky about the companies you work with. These companies are often familiar with the needs of apparel companies who are expanding their offerings.

CONCLUSION

Before diving headfirst into a new offering, do at least some basic-level research so you can direct your clients appropriately, just like you do with your main offerings. If you want to offer wall prints, for example, ensure you know how your material is going to react with oxidized paint or textured walls so you don't end up losing a valuable customer you already have.

Once you feel comfortable adding on one new product, you've got it and can

start with more. While you do not have to add on 50 products at once, staying stagnant can be less efficient than it appears on the surface, and with a little collaboration, your end customers 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.

The Upside-Down Year

FACING THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY KRISTINE SHREVE



If there is one way to describe 2020, it would probably be as the year that turned everything upside down. The way we were used to conducting business, living our lives, and interacting with those around us was tipped on its head and we all had to learn new ways to live, both professionally and personally.

One thing that's evident is that the pandemic has caused a lot of change and stress among those in the garment decoration space. Coping with closures, surviving supply delivery delays or shortages, figuring out how to deal with clients and employees while still preserving the necessary amount of space, and simply keeping the doors open were challenges the industry as a whole faced. The pandemic brought a wide array of problems and required being both committed and clever when it came to finding solutions.

NOT-ALL-NEGATIVE NUMBERS

When talking about the pandemic, a lot of the focus has been on the havoc it has brought. There are the hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and

the millions of people worldwide who have died of the disease. There's the toll that has been taken on frontline and health-care workers who have been fighting this fight for over a year.

COVID-19 did wreak havoc on the garment decoration industry with companies temporarily shutting down, reducing production, or some going out of business entirely. The pandemic has certainly been a life-altering experience.

But despite the sadness, when Pew Research Center asked Americans about the pandemic and their experiences, it wasn't all bad news. In that survey, a majority of Americans (89%) mentioned having at least one negative change in their life as a result of the pandemic. But a smaller, though still relatively substantial, group (73%) revealed there had been at least one unexpected upside to the pandemic. Two-thirds of Americans (67%) mentioned at least one negative and one positive change since the outbreak began.

I'd guess that if the Pew Research Center did a survey of garment decorators, the numbers would be about the same.

There have been both positive and negative experiences, and most people have had a mixed outcome, with some bright spots shining through. There's no doubt it's been a tough time for many, but the fact that there have also been positive aspects shouldn't be overlooked or ignored. (To view the complete results of the Pew Research study, visit <http://gpro.link/pewpan>.)

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

One positive aspect has been the increase in connectedness. While it seems like a paradox, as people were barred from congregating in small groups, or from standing next to each other, a lot of us still found ways to make connections. Maybe it was a drive-by birthday bash. A lot of people also found ways to connect online through social media or online platforms like Zoom.

People are social animals and desire relationships. COVID-19 made us more aware of that need and more committed to feeding it. As Carolyn Cagle from Stacy, Minnesota-based Strikke Knits explains,

“COVID slowed me down personally and helped me to hone in on what people want in my shop and what I want to do. It also brought me closer to my mom as she lived with us for the duration.”

Another unexpected facet of COVID was the drive to innovate. Lyndsie Salcido, creator and show runner of Applique Getaway in Irving, Texas, had this to say: “The whole purpose of our business is to bring people together, so not being able to gather brought on a lot of anxiety and concern for the future of our event. Instead of focusing on the fear and uncertainty, we switched gears and focused that energy on finding new and creative ways to serve our attendees and vendors. The things we learned while organizing and hosting our first ever virtual event will

elevate our upcoming in-person events to a new level and allow us to continue to reach new audiences.”

Some companies switched to making masks in lieu of the products they had formerly made. Others stepped up their eCommerce game and learned to service the buying public in new ways. From figuring out ways to deliver product without making contact to redesigning shop floors to keep people safe while still maintaining production standards, the pandemic forced companies to think about their old processes from a new perspective.

In some cases, the pandemic inspired companies toward an entirely different mode of business, one that either was more successful, more enjoyable, or both, for the business owner. Heidi Wade,

owner of Basket of Crazy in Mansfield, Ohio, changed her product line and way of doing business. As she puts it, “It made me do a total pivot ... I’m using all of the skills and knowledge I have used for working with small businesses in another direction. I still have a few small businesses that I take care of their uniforms and promotional products. Now my main focus is on making bags and Halloween goodies.”

Gillian Allen of The Cats Pajamas and Thibodaux Toppers, both headquartered in Thibodaux, Louisiana, had a similar experience while managing her businesses during the pandemic. “It definitely made me think about priorities and self-care,” she says. “Not taking risks to be out and about yet managing to pivot to masks to get me helping and feel productive. Now



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that I have been vaccinated, I am reassessing what direction I want to take.”

Dealing with the pandemic also helped a lot of business owners focus on restructuring their business or their lives to make things less stressful. Katie Wubben, who owns the brick-and-mortar store Marketplace on Mill Street in Lake Mills, Iowa, learned to use a combo of automation and prioritizing to help reduce her stress level while also providing good customer service. “I have made my hours more convenient for me, and customers have respected that easier than ever before.” She utilized automated inventory and online invoices to let customers know what the store had without her having to be there.

Wubben also notes, “I am currently working on getting more online shopping for my website to make it easier for local people to pre-order and shop anytime with curbside pickup.”

Another effect of the pandemic was an increase in corporate social responsibility. Companies began to look for ways to support each other and the communities they were in. Many garment decoration



companies participated in fundraising initiatives that supported businesses in their communities and helped bring additional, and much needed, revenue to those who were suffering. Companies retooled production floors and switched from making garments to making and donating masks or PPE to help frontline workers.

As the pandemic caused shutdowns and lockdowns and changed how people were employed, there was an increase in companies looking after the health and welfare of their staff and working with

employees to try and keep the paychecks coming and the doors open. The focus went from making a profit to making a difference.

ONLY THE FUTURE KNOWS

Since the pandemic has not officially been declared to be over, it remains to be seen exactly what good impacts of the experience will remain and which will fade as time goes on. Some garment decoration and promo product companies may never choose to or want to do things in the same way again. Others may go back to the “same old-same old” and count themselves lucky to be able to make that choice.

The pandemic has illustrated both the good and the bad aspects of society and offered opportunities for change and growth. Like most life changing experiences, some of what has occurred has been painful and some of it has opened new possibilities and new ways of working, creating, and growing a business. **GP**



KRISTINE SHREVE is the founder and CEO of Kristine Shreve Consulting, which offers writing, marketing, and business development services. The company can be found at www.kristineshreve.com. Kristine is also the creator and host of the Business + Women podcast and is also the Director of Marketing and Outreach for Applique Getaway. Kristine was the Director of Marketing for Ensign Emblem and EnMart from 2006 to April 2020.

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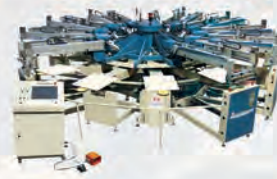
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EXHIBITING COMPANIES

Exhibitor list and class schedule as of May 2021, please visit GRAPHICS-PRO-EXPO.com/IN for the most up-to-date list.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Amity Digital	328	<input type="checkbox"/> KPMF USA Inc 🛑 🐉	359
<input type="checkbox"/> Apex Transfers	145	<input type="checkbox"/> Leister Technologies	353
<input type="checkbox"/> Ascentium Capital	106	<input type="checkbox"/> LRi/Laser Reproductions Inc	440
<input type="checkbox"/> AWDIs/Citadel Brands	130	<input type="checkbox"/> Madeira USA Ltd	132
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MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2021

10am to 4pm

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

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021

8am to 9:30am

- Epilog Laser - Get the Most from your Laser Investment: Tips & Techniques to Save Time & Increase Profits
- JDS Industries - Troubleshooting Sublimation
- 3M Commercial Solutions- WRAPScnnect – Panel Discussion

11am to 12:30pm

- STAHL'S' - Top Apparel Trends and How to Print Them
- PDS Equipment - Why UV Print & Why Now

1:30pm to 3pm

- Trotec Laser – Skills, Strategies & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment

4pm to 5:30pm

- Rayzist Photomask - Learn Sandcarving with Rayzist Photomask
- Corel Trainer - CorelDRAW A to Z

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 2021

8am to 9:30am

- Transfer Express – Should you Print Licensed Logos?
- ORAFOL Americas - Mastering Architectural Window & Wall Graphic Applications

11am to 12:30pm

- Transfer Express – Screen Print with Just a Heat Press

1:30pm to 3pm

- IKONICS Imaging - Profitable Sandcarving - Small Investment, Large Potential

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2021

9:15am to 9:45am

- GRAPHICS PRO* - Panel: Navigating Post-Pandemic Issues Impacting the Graphics Market



TRAINING IN THE HALL

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JDS Sign Supply.....	315
KPMF USA Inc.....	359
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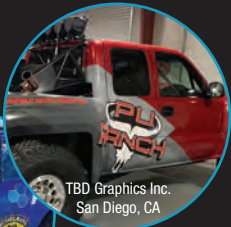
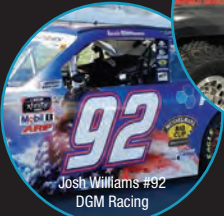


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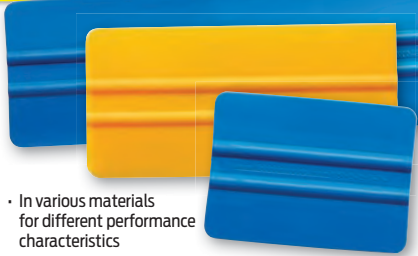
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THE DIGITAL EYE

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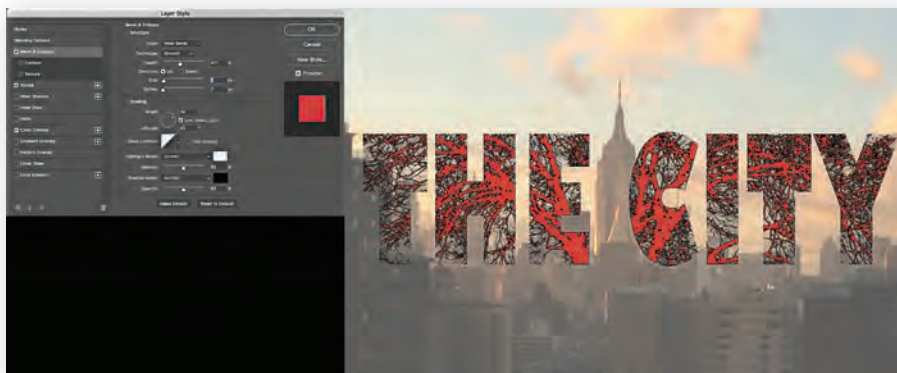


Figure 12 (top). Apply Layer Styles to the text. **Figure 13 (above).** For even more thrills and chills, apply a Gradient Map Adjustment Layer to the top of the layer stack.

9. For even more thrills and chills, apply a Gradient Map Adjustment Layer to the top of the Layer stack. Experiment with choosing Gradients from the list or make your own with the Gradient editor (Figure 13).

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE

Double exposures have long been the province of specialized camera and dark-room techniques. While fun to play with, they had their limitations and it was difficult to accurately predict their outcome. Image editing software has changed all that and made double exposure images easy to manipulate, commonplace in advertising and fine art, and accessible to photographers and digital artists.

In this article, you have seen a few extraordinary effects that can be achieved

using sandwiched images of variable transparency in combination with layer masks, clipping masks, blend modes, type, and adjustment layers. Now is the time to give it a try using your own images or the images from the article that you'll find at this link: <http://gpro.link/digeyemages>. Have fun with it and happy doubling. **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, and the CEO of Fireboy Productions, a publishing company.

FINDING CLIPART

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function. CorelDRAW's graphic suite calls it CorelCAPTURE. This tool can make things incredibly easy for you. Too often our clients dismissively say, "Just get my logo off my website," and we try not to roll our eyes in response. Capture tools can help. In CorelCAPTURE specifically, you can adjust:

- Where you'd like to capture: an entire screen, window, menu, or highlighted area.
- You can choose what resolution (DPI) you need the image in, and in what size (dimensions).
- You can also adjust how the image is saved onto your clipboard (copy/paste/Ctrl+V) and/or in a specific file format, such as a JPEG, on your desktop.

We've come a long way since the 'PrtScr' button, though that Windows function alone may be the bit of help you need. To access your clipboard, which is everything that has been recently copied, use the keyboard shortcut by holding down the Window key next to your Fn and/or Alt keys, and then hit the V key.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Notice that all of the methods, techniques, and advice I've given in this article are completely without cost. In concert with a good bitmap to vector tracing software, and some basic design knowledge, the internet can be your easy and inexhaustible source for art. We live in an amazing time, with near-infinite resources, at our fingertips. Get more use out of the awesome assets we all take for granted with a little bit of practice, some perspective, and quality training. **GP**

CLAY BARBERA has been teaching business concepts and Corel skills to imprinterers since 2005. His training events, videos, and learn-inside-Corel plug-in remain unique in their ability to focus on real industry priorities. Clay prides himself on his casual capability to tailor his education to the individuals in front of him, their unique business needs, and personal learning curves.

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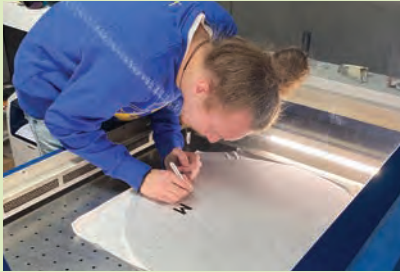
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