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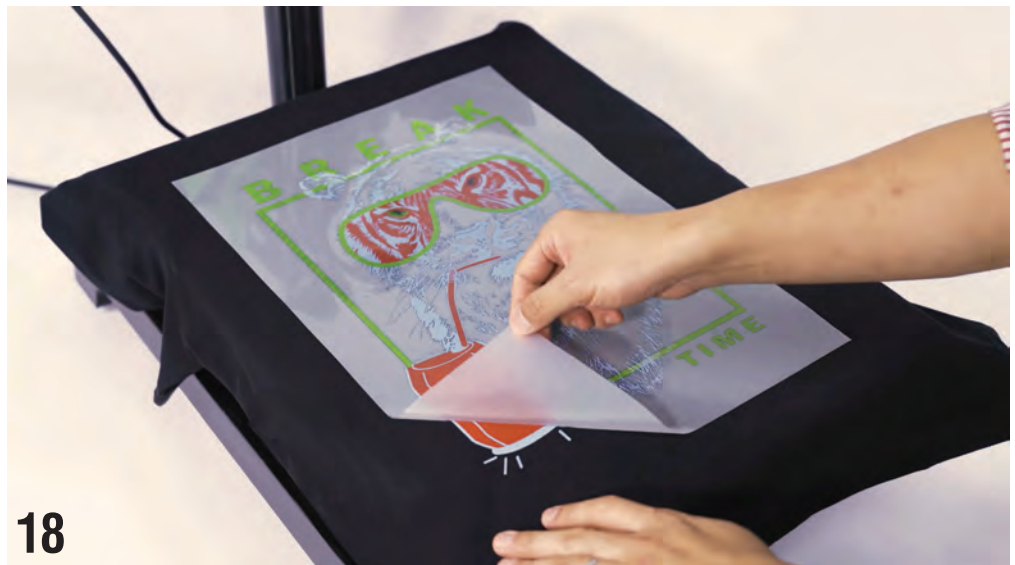
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In the foreground, wood products can be a big attention grabber for your business, page 44. Image courtesy Epilog. In the background, lamination is no longer just about adding durability to a graphic, page 50. Image courtesy KPMF.

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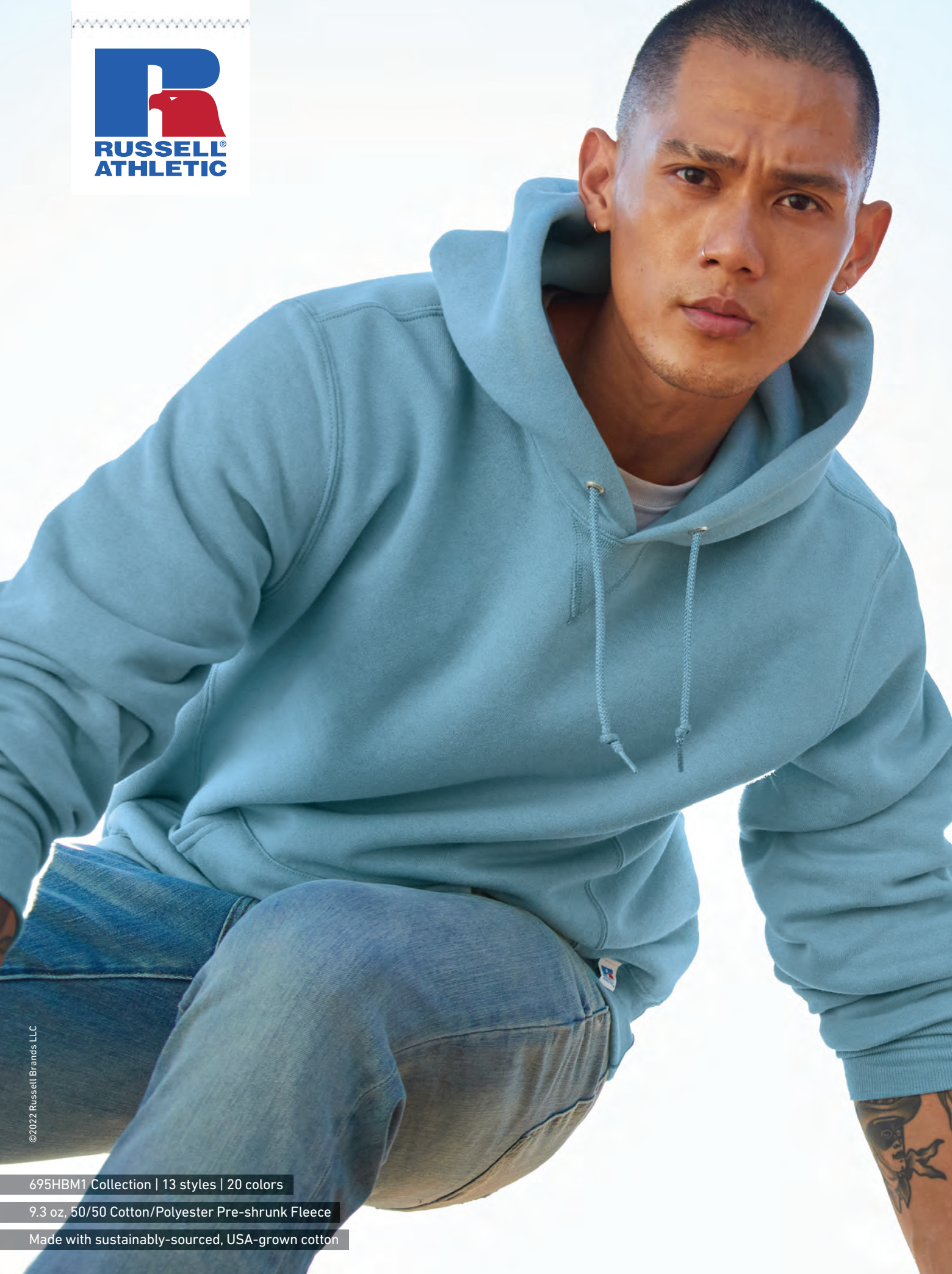
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FISH OR CUT BAIT

I remember when I was young, I was perplexed by the phrase above. Obviously to be a successful fisherman, you need to both fish and cut bait, so how could you go wrong doing either? It was only later that I figured out that the timing of each is really the most important part, not the activity itself.

It's not that different in the graphics industry. At GRAPHICS PRO EXPO throughout the year, we see so many people trying to make the decision between jumping into an established market segment or trying to avoid the crowd and immediately jump into the next big thing.

There are risks and rewards to both of those approaches to the graphics industry, of course. You either drop your line into a crowded and established pond where you know fish have been biting, or you reel in your line and try a different pond – maybe with some other technology like dynamite that may work great or may blow up in your face. Not sure how my metaphor went all Michael Bay here.

Another big risk when it comes to looking for the next big thing is that nobody really knows what the next big thing is until after the fact. It takes a lot of confidence to commit to landing in that sweet spot of customer demand, reliable technology, and profitability.

Fish or cut bait turns out to be a pretty hefty decision when it comes to graphics.

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PRESIDENT

DAVE POMEROY dpomeroy@nbm.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

MATT DIXON mdixon@nbm.com

MANAGING EDITOR

ALLEE BRUCE abruce@nbm.com

DIGITAL CONTENT EDITOR

MARIE FENNEMA mfennema@nbm.com

ART DIRECTOR

LINDA CRANSTON linda@nbm.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

IVETH GOMEZ igomez@nbm.com

MEDIA CONSULTANT, WEST

RYAN APPLEBAUM rapplebaum@nbm.com

MEDIA CONSULTANT, EAST

DESIREE DELFRARI delfrari@nbm.com

SALES SUPPORT

SYDNEY BATCH sbatch@nbm.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

PAULA AVEN GLADYCH, MATT CHARBONEAU, JENNIFER COX, RUTH DOBBINS, OSCAR GRANADOS, PAUL INGLE, AARON MONTGOMERY, HOWARD POTTER, MATT RHOME, STEPHEN ROMANIELLO, MARK RUGEN, KRISTINE SHREVE, SHELLEY WIDHALM, LON WINTERS, DOUG ZENDER

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EDITORIAL INTERN

NATHAN STROMBERG nstromberg@nbm.com



DIRECTOR OF SALES

JAMES "RUGGS" KOICHEVAR jkochevar@nbm.com

EXECUTIVE EXPO SALES MANAGER

PRINTWEAR AND A&E MARKETS

BRANDY JAMISON-NETH brandy@nbm.com

EXPO SALES MANAGER

SIGN & DIGITAL GRAPHICS MARKET

SARA REESE sreese@nbm.com

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GREENTEE PROMOS

Quickly Outgrows Home-Based Business

DTG AND DTF PUT GREENTEE ON A PATH TO SUCCESS



BY SHELLEY WIDHALM

Apparel designer Laura Amidon fell into direct-to-garment (DTG) printing in 2006 when her embroiderer discovered that his newly purchased DTG printer was not plug-and-play and needed a lot of coddling.

Amidon offered to help him operate the printer and quickly loved the new technology. She started using it to print some of her designs for her childrenswear business Young Mi, and within a year, her DTG printing business grew so quickly, she quit Young Mi after five years, taking her graphic design skills to her new business enterprise.

“That business grew faster than the children’s line, and I enjoy it. It’s still fun for me,” says Amidon, co-owner of Greentee Promos in Longmont, Colorado. “Every time I get really cool artwork, it’s amazing to see how beautiful it turns out.”

Amidon’s inventory of equipment includes an Epson F2100 DTG printer, a Freejet Plus DTG printer, an Epson 7720 for sublimation printing, a Graphtec vinyl cutter, two Geo Knight heat presses, and two Hottronix heat presses.



Laura Amidon, owner of Greentee Promos, has her print room in her house but plans to move her home-based business later this year to an industrial site. (All images courtesy Greentee Promos)

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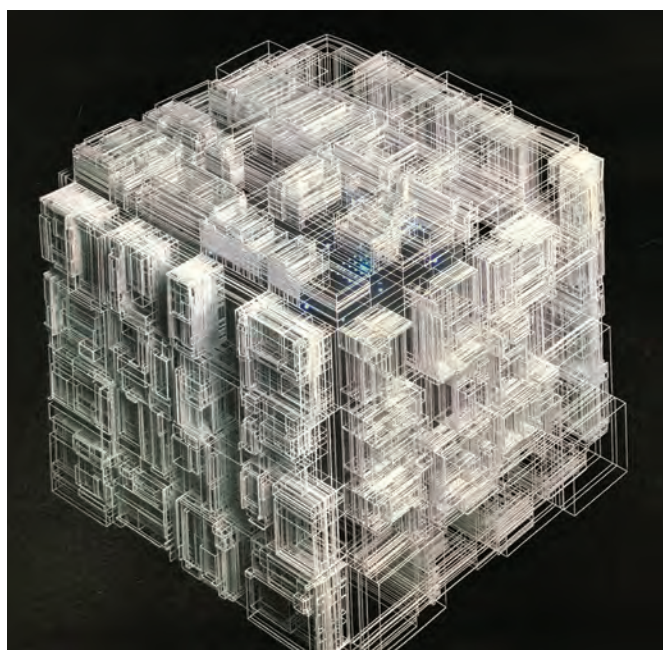
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Greentee Promos in Longmont, Colorado, prints up swag for various companies.

“I prefer making less per item than spending the time for one-off T-shirts.”



DTG printing allows for printing of fine lines, as seen in this geometrical design.

GREENTEE PROMOS' OPERATIONS

Greentee Promos, also known as DTG Colorado online, provides DTG and direct-to-film (DTF) printing primarily for wholesale and a few retail customers, plus other printing services like screen printing, banner printing, and cut vinyl. Amidon does everything from custom prints to large orders for events, printing full-color detailed images on both light and dark colors. She prints on most types of clothing, including T-shirts, hoodies, and athletic uniforms, and on canvas bags, wall hangings, backpacks, lawn chairs, tents, and sunshades.

Amidon came up with the name Greentee based off her use of an eco-friendly, water-based inkjet printer. At the time she started her business, which was out of her home, DTG was considered revolutionary for its ability to print full-color photographic images, while being an environmentally friendly printing process.

Greentee has since outgrown its home operation, and Amidon wants to order more equipment, so she's looking for an industrial space with hopes to move by fall.

“It's nice to be able to work whenever I want,” Amidon says. “But it's just gotten to be cluttering my home, and I really need it out of here.”

Amidon's printing and press equipment takes up 1,000 square feet of her and her husband's 5,000-square-foot home. She uses the living and dining rooms for two of her DTG printers and two of her heat presses. There's another DTG printer, a sublimation printer, a vinyl cutter, and a heat press in one of the bedrooms, and another bedroom is used for storing T-shirts. The family room is for the curing oven and another heat press. And in yet



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A smoke technique on a hoodie.

another bedroom used as an office, there is a screen-printing press and conveyor oven.

"My husband is a saint for allowing me to do this," Amidon says. "It's been great. All these years we've been here, it's been fantastic. We've just grown out of it."

GROWING PAINS

Lack of space is the primary challenge Amidon faces; plus, the fact it's divided up — she's seeking a large open space of 800-1,200 square feet. Another challenge is Amidon doesn't want to have friends over for entertainment "because it's such a mess," and "it's just T-shirts everywhere," she says.

"We want it to be one open space, so we can access everything pretty easily, because it's so chopped up right now," Amidon says.

She wants to bring on two full-time staff. Currently, it's just her and her husband, Craig, a sous chef who's assisting part-time in his role as co-owner. This will allow her to get more into the design work and hire out manual labor and sales.

"I am so busy these days, I need employees," Amidon says.



DTF-printed T-shirt.

A BETTER, BIGGER SPACE

With the new space, Amidon plans to continue with her same customer base, 95% contract work for resell and 5% retail. Her favorite customers are those working in trade and engaged in ad promo work, since they send her the right kind of artwork that's complete and printable and they also understand the apparel printing business.

"I prefer making less per item than spending the time for one-off T-shirts," Amidon says. "For \$25, the amount of communication takes a long time. It takes a lot of time, and I just don't have that."

Initially, Amidon focused on print-on-demand (POD), working with one primary large customer, but realized it was costly and that profit margins were low. She now does large orders but will do POD work for drop-ship fulfillment for a couple of regular customers and in emergency



A DTG-printed bee design.

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“DTG is preferable for multicolor prints in smaller quantities.”

situations, such as memorial T-shirts needing a quick turnover.

“I always make it a point to get those done for people because that’s important,” Amidon says, adding that to do the job, “it’s working round the clock.”

She’s considering expanding her embroidery services but will keep DTG as the heart of her business. She plans to add one to two more DTG printers and one to two DTF printers for additional printing capacities.

“We’re getting so busy, we can’t keep up with all the orders,” Amidon says. “Having a commercial DTF printer will speed things up a great deal.”

Order sizes for DTG are small, typically ranging from 30 to 150 units, while DTF printing can be up to 1,000 units. Amidon currently does both, using her DTG machine to carry out any DTF printing jobs, but the transfer process is time-consuming.

A DTF printer can print on rolls of film and does the printing, powdering, and curing all in one operation. With DTG, Amidon has to manually do the steps, printing on a 14" × 16" sheet of

film, then applying the adhesive powder, putting the film in an oven to cure it, and then pressing the image printed on the film directly onto the garment.

SCREEN PRINTING

Screen printing, which Amidon also does, is a four-color process, while with DTG, the full spectrum of colors can be used, allowing for the transfer of photographs onto the garment. The result with DTG is a more detailed image, unlike screen printing’s one- to two-color spot prints.

“With screen printing, you have to separate the colors, but with DTG, what you see on the screen is what you get,” Amidon says.

Screen printing is great for large quantity orders and one- or two-color prints, whereas DTG is preferable for multicolor prints in smaller quantities, Amidon says. As such, it’s more expensive to use DTG printing for a one-color job, she says.

DTG, which can be used on any substrate from cottons to poly-blends and polyester, results in images that are sharp, a look that



T-shirts for Guy Fieri’s “Guy’s Family Road Trip” on the Food Network.



DTG allows for printing images to polyester shirts.

is clean, and a print job that is durable.

“The print quality is amazing,” Amidon says. “The hand of it is nicer. It’s softer. It feels like a very soft print.”

DTF, however, has a more plastic, sticker-like feel and more hand to it, nor does it breathe through the fabric, Amidon says.

“There’s a process for every job,” Amidon says. “That’s one of the things that sets me apart is I always advise the customers on the best process for their particular job. It’s not always DTG or DTF, it could be vinyl or screen printing.”

Amidon gives honest feedback if she sees that the artwork will not look good on the garment and suggests how to alter it to fit the piece. She also likes that she can do both DTG and DTF for her customers.

“It can be a hard business. It can be an expensive business because repairs aren’t

cheap,” Amidon says, adding that regular maintenance is required. “This business is not for the faint of heart.”

She’s gone through six DTG printers, the first one the slowest, taking about 10 minutes to print a shirt, and expensive at \$20,000. Now, she can print a shirt in a couple of minutes and her end costs have decreased.

“DTG is definitely the heart of our business, and it always will be,” Amidon says. **GP**

Shelley Widhalm is a freelance writer and editor and founder of Shell’s Ink Services, a writing and editing service based in Loveland, Colorado.

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BY MATTHEW RHOME



DTF Checklist

DIRECT-TO-FILM (DTF) TRANSFER PRINTING HOLDS A LOT OF PROMISE AS A PROFITABLE PROCESS

Direct-to-film (DTF) transfer printing is creating quite a buzz in the decorated garment marketplace. However, with the DTF process being so new, many have been unable to find answers to questions on this emerging technology or information they need to know before making the decision to implement DTF into their business. When looking to start or expand into DTF transfer printing, businesses have a variety of factors to consider.

TRAINING & WARRANTIES

While making a DTF transfer is a relatively simple process, proper application and equipment training can help determine how fast a business can start producing a sellable product.

Knowing who is going to train you and how much experience they have with the equipment they are providing is very important. Be sure to ask about training, how extensive it will be, what type of training (in-person, online, videos, etc.), how long the training will be, and so forth.



Like the very early years of direct-to-garment (DTG) printing, where some companies repurposed desktop and large-format inkjet printers to create a cobbled-together solution, the same is taking place today with DTF transfer printing to print onto DTF film.

The main drawback of using modified, non-purposed built equipment is that there is a possibility that no warranty or manufacturer support is offered. Oftentimes, people buying this type of equipment have found that it is very difficult to get replacement parts such as print heads. In addition, the original equipment manufacturer most likely will not offer any type of repair service or technical



Find out if the printer you are buying has white ink management and, if offered, the terms and conditions of the warranty and tech support.

While making a DTF transfer is a relatively simple process, proper application and equipment training can help determine how fast a business can start producing a sellable product. (All images courtesy All American Print Supply Co.)

support if an issue arises when using these modified printers.

Another major drawback to using these reworked printers is that they are not intended for use with DTF inks, especially white ink. Titanium dioxide is a primary component of white ink that is used to produce an opaque bright white ink layer. However, if it is not properly managed, it can result in print quality defects and expensive print head replacements.

Most printers that are purposely manufactured to use white ink, such as DTG printers, have ink circulation technology to maintain white ink stability. You should know if the printer you are buying has white ink management and, if offered, the terms and conditions of the warranty and tech support.





Many DTF systems use thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) based powders, and it is reported by TPU manufacturers that these powders, when heated at high temperatures, may release MDI vapors.

DURABILITY & FABRIC RANGE

The worst thing a garment decorator can do is provide their customers with products that wash out or, in the case of transfers, peel away from the garment after a few wash cycles. Most garment decoration methods have a certified wash test that is conducted by a laboratory and use test methods developed by independent organizations such as the AATCC.

Most garment decoration machine and ink manufacturers use these tests and provide the results to garment decorators so they can feel confident about the durability of repeated washings and even the resistance to certain chemicals when applied to various fabric types. It is important to determine if the DTF products you are considering using in your business have some type of wash test certification.

SAFETY

As with any new decoration methods, there is a lot of conflicting information about how safe the use and production of DTF transfers really are. There are two parts of safety to keep in mind: how safe the finished garment is for your customer and the safety of you and your employees during the production process.

As we know, there are laws enacted to protect the consumer against harmful substances in many items, including clothing. These types of laws concern the finished garment and ensure that harmful chemicals are not contained in them.

Certain levels of phthalates, lead, and other carcinogenic substances are not allowed in products produced for children. It is essential for you to know if the DTF system you are going to use has safety certifications.

Many manufacturers have the finished product (i.e., printed and cured decorated garment) independently tested and certified to be free of harmful and prohibited substances using known organizations such as OEKO-TEX. All products used in the DTF process should have safety certification, including powder and ink. It's critical to ask for documentation on all items.

Many states, including California, have their own consumer protection laws, such

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Proper ventilation, air filtration, fume exhaustion, and protective gear should be used during the heating process or when heat fusing DTF powder to the printed sheet.



All products used in the DTF process should have safety certification, including powder and ink. It's critical to ask for documentation on all items.



as Prop 65. In those states, the level of harmful substances contained in consumer products is highly regulated. You need to know if the DTF products you are going to use comply. Manufacturers of these decorated products need to ensure they are aware of any potentially harmful substances that may be contained in any decoration method used in the business.

Secondly, businesses need to make sure that the products used to create the DTF transfer in the manufacturing process are safe for all employees to use in work environments. Always ask for an SDS or material safety data sheet for any chemicals or substances used in the DTF process, and make sure it has been updated for the DTF transfer process. Many chemicals may be safe "as is" but could potentially become hazardous when used in ways that are not intended.

It is recommended to always use proper protection, including gloves, eye protection, and the proper mask or breathing apparatus when working with DTF powders, as they can become airborne in the coating process. Businesses should not risk inhalation of the powder or extended skin exposure. Additionally, make sure that excess powder does not spread and contaminate other items during the powdering process.

Further precautions such as proper ventilation, air filtration, fume exhaustion, and protective gear should be used during the heating process or when heat fusing DTF powder to the printed sheet. Many DTF systems use thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) based powders, and it is reported by TPU manufacturers that these powders, when

heated at high temperatures, may release MDI vapors.

OSHA, the EPA, and the CDC have found that MDI vapors can cause a variety of serious health issues, including respiratory impairments, so businesses need to be very cautious in the heating process if these types of TPU-based DTF powders are used.

You need to know if the DTF products you are going to use have OEKO-TEX or other types of safety certificates. Make sure that a current SDS sheet is supplied, and thoroughly read and follow all safety instructions.

USING EXISTING EQUIPMENT FOR DTF

One last thing to know before buying a DTF transfer printer is that you might already own one. Many DTG printers can print DTF or DTG transfers. A potential drawback is that they may only print one sheet at a time and may not use roll feed transfer material.

As noted earlier, a benefit is that most factory-built DTG printers have white ink circulation and management, so there is less concern with print head issues. Also, many DTG equipment manufacturers will offer training and technical support directly or through their dealer network.

As with any decoration process, there are advantages and pitfalls with DTF transfers. The total process should be thoroughly investigated and explored. DTF has its place in the toolbox of garment decoration methods and can be a safe and effective way to decorate if businesses take proper precautions and have all the product information needed. **GP**



Matthew Rhome has been in the decorated garment industry for over 40 years. He is the founder of the direct-to-garment industry and the inventor of the world's first commercially available direct-to-garment printer, the "Revolution." He was awarded US Patent 6,095,628 on DTG printer technology in August 2000. Matthew was a member of the development team that produced the first DTG printer offering from Brother International and currently works for Epson America in DTG Business Development.



Know the terms and conditions of the warranty and the details of tech support on any equipment purchased.

Art Considerations for DTF Transfers
Dane Clement, Great Dane Graphics, shares some design pointers to ponder
<https://gpro.link/dtfart>

Image courtesy Great Dane Graphics

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BECOME A “PURPLE COW” WITH TEXTILE PRINTING



BY MARK RUGEN

Author Seth Godin is an entrepreneur and marketing expert who’s written nearly 20 books on business and marketing, including several bestsellers. In “Purple Cow,” he teaches you how to leverage the power of remarkability to succeed in a world already overrun with brown cows.

WHY BECOME A PURPLE COW?

To get attention for your product, target the right people. Your potential customers fit into a bell curve: On the left are the innovators and early adopters; the juicy center of the curve is made up of the early and late majority; and on the far side are the laggards, the ones who resist new products until the bitter end.

These days, the real value is in the innovators and early adopters. They will be the ones to market your product to the majority. Therefore, your purple cow must be both remarkable enough to attract the innovators and flexible or universal enough to appeal to the majority. Once they finally hear about it from a source, they’ll listen to it.

Premise: Nobody driving through the country even notices the standard-issue black and white cows. But what if you passed a purple one? You couldn’t miss it. You wouldn’t *want* to miss it. You’d be eager to check it out. A purple cow would be remarkable.

Your Shop: So, the question is, how can you become the purple cow and get noticed in your business?

One of the things that makes textile banners different from other media is motion. (All images courtesy Mark Rugen)



One of the things that make textile banners different from other media is motion.

Your Purple Cow: Maybe the answer is textile printing.

Keep in mind that not every shop prints textiles. Many stick to common media such as vinyl, banners, or PVC signage. Therefore, printing a banner on a textile or putting a textile in a hanging sign can make you different and get you noticed, and when you get noticed, you get more business opportunities.

HOW IS TEXTILE PRINTING DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MEDIA?

Textiles have motion.

One of the things that make textile banners different from other media is motion. If the printed textile is hung properly, you can let the air conditioning or wind do the job of getting attention. People notice motion, and a textile sign can move and attract that attention. This can make the textile sign more effective with the printed message.

Motion is probably one of the reasons you see printed flags in front of apartments for rent. The motion just screams, "Look at me!"

TEXTILES ARE EASIER TO INSTALL

Another nice quality of textiles is that they are lightweight and easily transported. This means they can be hung easily with lighter hardware, and even if they come loose, there is little worry about hurting someone.



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Several textile media come in very large widths, but many providers have widths that fit the typical 54–60" printer in our market.



There is a good chance you will need to cut the media, so you'll need to invest in a heat knife.



You will find that your customers seem to accept a higher value and, therefore, a bit higher charge for a textile sign. Play up the advantages.



Now that you offer textile printing, make a purple splash! Hang a textile banner outside your business with words like "Ask Me Why This Sign Sells More!"



TEXTILES OFFER VERSATILE CHOICES IN INKS

Interestingly, many textile choices can be used with multiple types of ink, from UV to latex to eco-solvent. So, if your shop has more than one type of printer, it is likely that, if carefully chosen, the textile can be printed by all devices. Be sure to look at the textile media specification for details about printer ink compatibility and ask the reseller for ICC profiles for your RIP. Ink acts a bit differently in textiles than it does on PVC media, so in addition to the specs, make sure your RIP has the needed options for printing properly.

THE RIGHT PRINTER FEATURES & NEEDED HARDWARE

Several textile media come in very large widths, but many providers have widths that fit the typical 54–60" printer in our market. Make sure your printer has the right tensioning for textiles so as not to stretch the fabric, as well as temperature ranges.

In addition, there is a good chance you will need to cut the media, so you'll need to invest in a heat knife. You'll likely have to either sew the edges or use a good banner tape made for textiles. Investigate suppliers of these tools and see if they have training videos on using them.

Textiles can easily be placed in plastic or metal frames for large backlight signs that attract and sell products. Find a good supplier of these frames and make sure they are easily assembled and sturdy, keeping the textile media tight.



Tips for Exploring Wide-Format Sublimation Printing

<https://gpro.link/wideformatsub>



DON'T BE AFRAID TO CHARGE YOUR CUSTOMER

You will find that your customers seem to accept a higher value and, therefore, a bit higher charge for a textile sign. Play up the advantages like storage, longevity, motion, etc., and don't be afraid to charge a bit more than your normal PVC sign equivalent.

Let the customer know that if the textile print is a seasonal sign, it will last for years and store easily. All these advantages will signal greater value and, therefore, a higher-than-normal charge.

MAKE A PURPLE SPLASH

Now that you offer textile printing, make a purple splash! Hang a textile banner outside your business with words like "Ask Me Why This Sign Sells More!" or "Ask Me About My Purple Cow!" with an image like the one in this article. Talk about textile printing every time you get the opportunity with customers.

Finally, don't get stuck making just flags and banners! Textiles can be used for many, many other applications. Custom throw pillows for gifts, backdrops, table drops, and much more are possible with this versatile media.

Start simple, maybe by making custom pillows but learn how to use this media for as many applications as you can and show the world your purple cow! **GP**

Mark Rugen is director of education for MUTOH America. He has owned and operated two successful sign shops in Alabama and has been in the sign and print market for 35+ years. He is best known as an expert in design software like FlexiSIGN & Print but is additionally recognized as a professional in color management, application finishing, and print media. Visit www.mutoh.com for more information. Discover wide-format printing training at www.mutoh.com/training.

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GETTING WORK FROM WORKWEAR AND UNIFORMS



BY KRISTINE SHREVE

When most of us think of selling uniforms, we may not even know how that's usually done. While it is a multibillion-dollar industry, many people are not familiar with the major corporations, Aramark, Cintas, etc., that make up the rental uniform sales force. These companies sell uniforms on a massive scale and have huge plants for decorating and cleaning the uniforms and workwear they sell. Their clients are usually large companies with huge workforces to outfit. The scope of the uniforms supplied and cared for is beyond the scale that most average shops could manage. Given that fact, does this mean that uniform or workwear sales are not something that can be done by a smaller shop?

WHAT TO CONSIDER

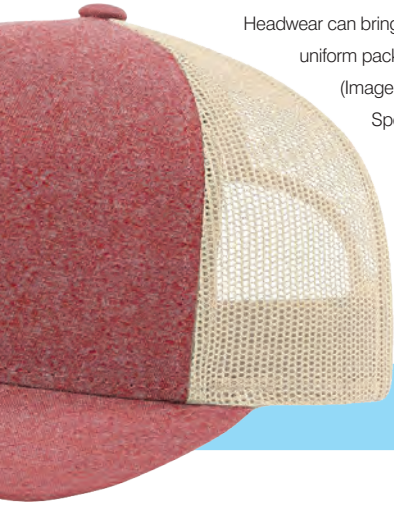
When a smaller shop is considering workwear or uniform sales, the thing to remember is scale.

Most likely, you will be selling to smaller companies with a smaller pool of employees. It is also not likely that you will be involved in cleaning the uniforms, as most smaller companies would expect employees to handle that however they choose. While decorating and maintaining uniforms for a thousand-piece workforce on a weekly basis may not be possible, embroidering lab coats for a local doctor's office, screen printing wait-staff apparel for a local pizza shop, or blinging out the staff shirts for a local spa is well within the reach of most small shops. This sort of work also has the potential to be very profitable. Staff turnover can mean repeat orders. A consistent uniform means once you have the process down, your production time can be reduced.

If a smaller shop is looking to get into selling uniforms or workwear, the biggest challenge may be figuring out what types of things to sell.

Image courtesy Toni Heitzman, Hot T's Designs





Headwear can bring a workwear or uniform package together. (Image courtesy Kati Sportcap & Bag)

Keep in mind that a uniform is defined as distinctive clothing worn by members of the same organization or employees of the same company, while workwear is heavy-duty clothing worn for physical or manual labor. So, they're roughly similar things but not exactly the same. A uniform could be a lab coat, a T-shirt, an apron, a dress shirt, or something similar but will usually be fairly lightweight and easy to decorate. Workwear, on the other hand, may be made of heavier material, may have requirements in areas like fire safety, and is generally going to be made up of garments that may be more resistant to decoration. If you have the right equipment, supplies, and decoration methods, workwear can be profitable, but it may require more specialized equipment and techniques than a standard uniform.

One way to get started with selling uniforms is to think about the decoration technique you already offer and what types of uniforms may be most suited to those techniques. This may allow you to



For workwear, oftentimes, rugged, durable outerwear is required to stand up to cold and harsh weather conditions. (Image courtesy Independent Trading Co.)



Image courtesy Toni Heitzman, Hot T's Designs

Researching and learning to meet the requirements of a specific industry can be beneficial and profitable.



A uniform could be an apron, lab coat, or a T-shirt but will usually be fairly lightweight and easy to decorate. (Image courtesy Q-Tees)

create another profit center using the equipment and technical knowledge you already have. While there are no hard and fast rules for what companies or industries may require or want a certain decoration technique or style, there are some general trends that may be helpful to examine.

EMBROIDERY

This is a traditional standard for medical lab coats. Many hospitals and clinics will have lab coats embroidered for doctors and sometimes all medical staff. Research laboratories may also use embroidery lab coats. Another fertile ground for embroidery can be embroidering names on uniform shirts. Some companies will use embroidered patches on shirts so they can simply remove and replace the patch if an employee moves on. Embroidered patches are also popular for hats and jackets. The advantage of embroidered patches is they can be removed, and the item can be reused. Another frequent use for patches is to cover an old logo or corporate branding that has changed. This, again, salvages the garment and still promotes the new brand. Embroidery is generally considered a traditional and classy look, so people going for a higher-end appearance may choose this decoration method.

RHINESTONES

Sometimes bling is the thing, and it can be popular for salons and spas. Some specialty medical offices, like dentists or dermatologists, may also like the more sparkly look. Often the company name or logo will be done with rhinestones, usually on T-shirts. This look is often chosen by companies that work in some aspect of physical appearance and may be meant to promote an image of luxury or wealth.



Placket shirts and workwear often go hand in hand. Some companies will use embroidered patches on shirts so they can simply remove and replace the patch if an employee moves on. (Image courtesy Carolina Made)

SCREEN PRINTING

Screen printing can be a common decoration technique for uniforms in the food service industry. Many delis, coffee shops, craft breweries, and restaurants may have their employees wearing screen-printed shirts. They may also sell the shirts to their customers as part of a merchandising package. Screen-printed patches may also be used on other service worker uniforms, like mechanics.

VINYL OR SUBLIMATION

These options may be less expensive for some companies and can still create a pulled-together appearance for a company's uniforms. Since washing will most likely not be done in an industrial setting, there is less worry of items fading or peeling. Vinyl could be a lower-cost and less time-consuming option in place of screen printing. Sublimation patches can also be a lower-cost option that would allow for more elaborate logos as well.

MEETING REQUIREMENTS

Once you've decided what sort of decoration you want to or can offer, the next thing is to examine the requirements for uniforms or workwear in the industries you want to target. If you want to target restaurants and bars or any type of food service uniforms, keep in mind there may be regulations about what can be worn depending on the type of job that's performed. Food service is also an area that



Jackets embroidered for a friend's business, Party with a DJ, based in Flower Mound, Texas. (Image courtesy Gillian Allen, The Cats Pajamas USA)



An embroidered apron for a personal health and wellness chef. (Image courtesy Lisa Lemonick, Scrappy Dappy Doo)

Specialty Supplies For Uniform & Workwear Decoration

FIRE RETARDANT/FLAME RESISTANT

Miami Thread: miamithread.com/Current%20Products.htm

Gunold Poly Fire Thread: gunold.com/embroidery-threads/fire-retardant-thread/

Madeira Firefighter Thread: madeirausa.com/fire-fighter/

Madeira Flame Resistant Bobbins: madeirausa.com/flame-resitant/

BLANK PATCHES

AllStitch: allstitch.com/collections/patches-emblems

American Patch: americanpatch.com/products/blank-patches/

Stadri Emblems: stadriemblems.com/products/blank-patches/

SPECIALTY THREADS

Wonderfil Flash Reflective Thread: shopwonderfil.com/product-category/flash/

Gunold Reflex Cry Reflective Thread:

gunold.com/item/reflective-200-reflective-thread-30-wt-gunold-reflex-cry-mini-king-cone

Madeira Reflect Reflective Thread:

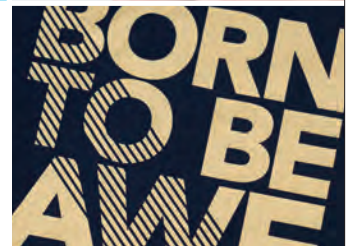
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generally requires uniforms that are easy to keep clean and from which stains and spills can be removed easily. Some uniforms may also be exposed to elements like food spills or dirt which can stain and would require washing more frequently, so a more durable form of decoration may be indicated.

When you're dealing with workwear, the challenge may be special safety restrictions depending on where the items will be worn and by whom. If you're decorating firefighter gear or a suit for a racing driver, or an electrical worker, you may have to deal with fire safety requirements and use fire retardant materials and threads.

Workers who interact with cutting tools like saws or work in places where they encounter animals that could bite may have reinforced areas on their workwear to protect them from accidents. Make sure that you investigate any special requirements the job may have and decorate the workwear accordingly.

Also, keep in mind that the plus side of this sort of work is that once you understand the requirements and can successfully meet them, both through technique and stocking the necessary

supplies, you may have a monopoly in your area for businesses that require that sort of workwear. So, although it seems like a more laborious process, researching and learning to meet the requirements of a specific industry can be beneficial and profitable.

FINDING SUPPLIES

Once you've selected the industries or categories for which you want to decorate, the next task is finding the necessary supplies. If you aren't inclined to make your own patches, the next best thing is to buy blank patches and decorate them yourself. If you're dealing with workwear that has special requirements, you need to find fire-resistant or retardant thread, bobbins, and stabilizer, if you're doing embroidery. If you're screen printing shirts for daycare or nursery school staff, you may want to err on the side of caution and use ink that is CPSIA compliant and certified, just to be safe. Finding supplies that meet the requirements of the garments you're decorating and the industry in which they will be used will most likely take some research and time, but once supply chains are established, having done the

Let's Talk Apparel in the Workplace

BY NATHAN STROMBERG



A branded polo can set the stage for customers walking into a business. (All images courtesy Fully Promoted)



Another option for workwear is a branded jacket.

Throughout the pandemic, the shift to working from home has allowed workers to change what they wear to work. Since they can work from the comfort of their homes, the style of clothing worn has become more relaxed.

Fully Promoted, a branded apparel and promotional products franchise, sees first-hand how workwear trends have shifted. The company's president Mike Brugger shares his insights.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED THE CORPORATE DRESS CODE?

In the early days of the pandemic, and with many companies still today, being on Zoom, Teams, and remote work, the dress code immediately went downhill. So, we've recommended to many companies and many of our clients to resend the dress codes and update them to the digital world so that even if someone's working remotely, they still look professional.

For the people that updated the dress code for remote work, the main thing that it did was people started dressing sloppily. Here at Fully Promoted, we're trying to buck that trend to remind people that the easiest way to look and dress the part is to have branded corporate apparel.

WHAT DOES CORPORATE CASUAL MEAN?

For us, we've been doing this for 20-plus years. It really started off with losing the tie, losing the jacket, losing the suit. When people did that, sometimes they would under-dress, and so corporate casual is a perfect blend of professionalism and casualness. It's that blend of professionalism and not being too casual, so staff feels good but still has that branded professional apparel. We've relaxed the

research may give you a competitive advantage.

Embellishing uniforms and workwear may not be for every shop. There are hoops that need to be jumped, supplies that need to be sourced, and, in some cases, regulations that require compliance. What makes this profit center attractive is the fact that most towns have smaller businesses that need uniforms, and they're not large enough to be worth the time and effort of the large-scale uniform rental companies.

Like corporate logowear or spiritwear, creating uniforms and workwear can be a way to tie clients to your shop since you know how to create what they need and meet any specific industry requirements. Doing this sort of work also offers opportunities for upselling and expanding into corporate wear or promotional items as well. A mechanic's shop or the local diner may also be an easier client to secure than a local school or hospital or larger organization. In the end, uniforms and workwear, like any job a business takes on, will be what you make of it, but this category has a great deal of potential, and shops that specialize in certain types of uniforms and workwear can do very well for themselves. **GP**



Consider fluorescent, sustainable options when you need your workwear to really stand out. (Image courtesy Atlantis Headwear)



Mike Brugger, president of Fully Promoted.

Q&A WITH MIKE BRUGGER OF FULLY PROMOTED

casual workplace environment, so it's a nice, loose-fitting shirt, or a shirt that's comfortable on employees, that they want to wear.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE APPEAL OF COLLARED SHIRTS IN THE WORKPLACE?

It sets the stage that you're there to do business. I talk to people all the time that you can see have a dress code of some type because they have that collared shirt on. The collared shirt is the minimum of what most businesses want to see. T-shirts did show up, particularly during the pandemic, but the appeal is it's the minimum standard of the casual side of representing a company. Managers like it because it shows that there's business; employees like it because it's not a dress shirt. It's a nice blend of what the employee wants and what the manager wants.

HOW ARE DECORATION TRENDS CHANGING?

The biggest trend we still see is embroidery. By far, that is the number one way to decorate garments. However, I do see the placement of that embroidery changing. It always used to be the left chest. Now, it could be the left or the right sleeve, it could be the yoke of the shirt, it could be the collar of the shirt. The biggest trend I see with decorating is a higher placement so you can see the logo on camera. Film embroidery is the number one option. With some of the performance fabrics, printing is popular or transfer vinyl.

WHAT ARE SOME DO'S AND DON'TS FOR WORKWEAR PROGRAMS?

I believe having multiple options is important for adop-

tion. If everybody has the same, they all feel the same, and you want some individuality with color. You want employees to feel good about putting that casual business shirt on. So have options; I think those that have one option have less adoption. Whether it's a cotton versus a polyester blend, some people are passionate about the shirts they wear, and they should (be) because they're wearing them all day.

WHY IS BRANDED WORKWEAR HERE TO STAY?

If you eliminate it, the employees will wear what they want, making it harder to enforce the dress code, so very few companies we work with completely eliminate a dress code. When you have that branded workwear, everybody looks like a team, and then it's easy to separate the employees from the customers. From a safety and security standpoint, I think those things are very important, and our customers believe the same.

Having a list of the approved shirts and branded workwear is something that employers and employees like because it eliminates what they have to wear. It eliminates the employee from having to think about what they can wear that day.



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SO WHAT?

GIVE YOUR AUDIENCE A REASON TO PAY ATTENTION

Have you ever been in a casual conversation with someone, and in your head, you hear yourself saying, “So what?” as they tell you about themselves? This happens a lot in conversations when we meet new people. And here is the bad news, that is exactly what happens in other people’s brains when you talk about your embroidery business with someone you just met! The person you are chatting with is probably thinking, “So what?” as you tell them about your business.

The key to changing that “So what?” into “Oh really, tell me more” is tucked into what you say in your very first sentence. Yes, it has been said many, many times before. But the advice is so good and so important that it is worth hearing it again. You must come up with an interesting way to introduce yourself and the services you offer to everyone you meet. You never know if that new person will become one of your best customers.

- “I make you look good!”
- “We are saving the world one stitch at a time.”
- “Life is a lot tougher when I am not in your closet every day.”
- “I helped you start your day today.” – This works well if they are wearing a logoed apparel item when you meet them!
- “I help a lot of folks get dressed each morning.”

These one-liner quips are unusual enough that they make the other person pause as they run what you just said through their head a second time (that is one of the secrets of a good quip). Ideally, they will then continue the conversation, ask you questions, or look at you with a “do go on” look on their face. Once you have that opening, you can expand on your comment to explain that you manufacture logoed, branded, custom, or personalized clothing and products. Notice that I did not use the word embroidery!

Embroidery is a word that conjures up an image of a little old lady doing something in her hands with fabric, needles, and thread. That is not the image we want to have associated with us and our businesses. When you change up your language and use the word manufacturing, they put you in a completely different category in their mind.

DON'T FORGET THE FOLLOW-UP

Take the time to come up with a quick statement that sums up what you do in a way that encourages the other person to ask you for more information. FYI – you also have to develop your next few sentences. You do not want to waste the opportunity you just created by not having the follow-up conversation well-rehearsed in your mind! Or wasting it by tossing out the word embroidery and having them put you in the “little old lady on the porch making doilies” corner of their brain.

In this brief conversation, you need to be able to let them know you can create customized, logoed apparel and products. You want to let them know how to get in touch with you and where you are located. You want to get their information and get the chance to give them your information. It is key that you always have your business cards on you. You never know if the person standing in front of you at the bank, in line at the grocery store, or waiting for their car to be done at the shop is the owner of one of the largest employers in your area! They have to go to the bank, buy groceries, and get oil changes, too, right?

Selling embroidered apparel often happens as you run



Think of your introduction in terms of snappy one-liners or sound bites. You must pique someone’s interest in just a few words. (Image courtesy Debbie Van Atta, Southern Lady Gun)

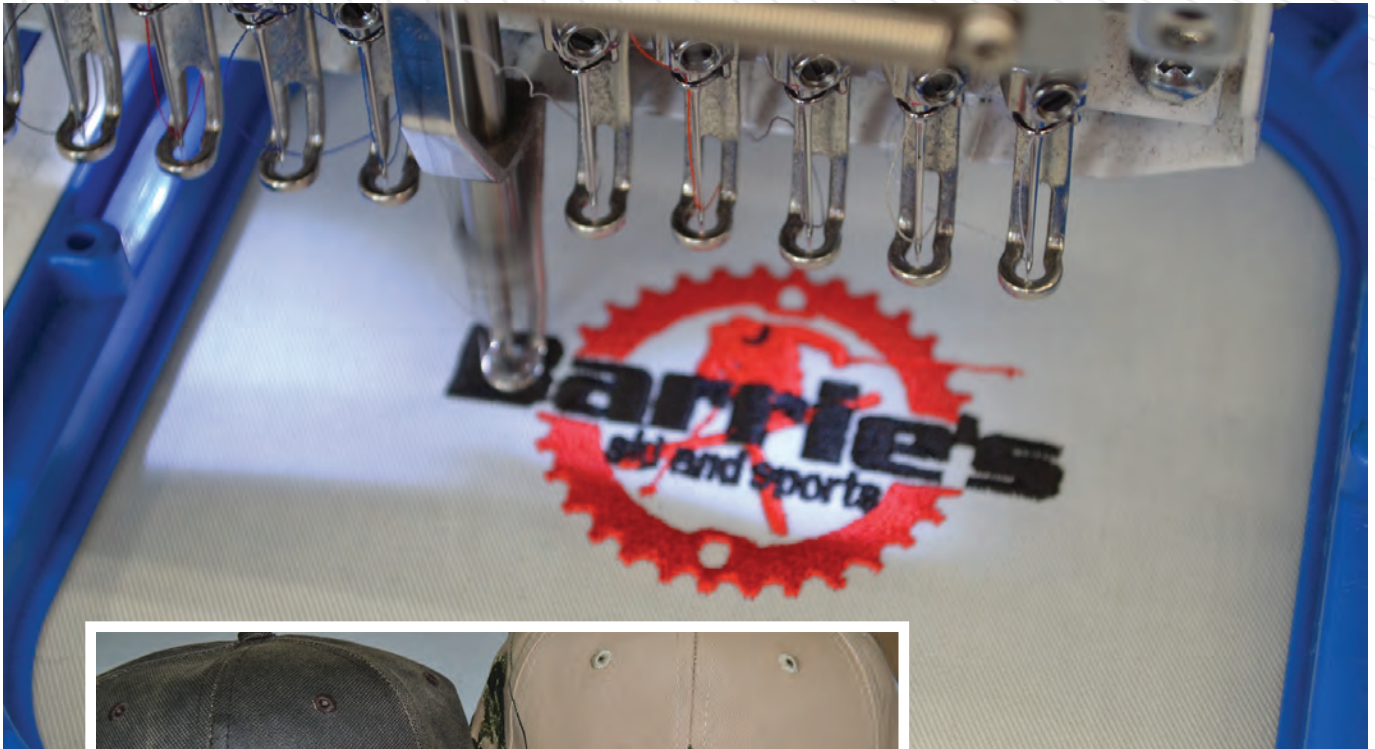


The key to changing that “So what?” into “Oh really, tell me more” is tucked into what you say in your very first sentence. (Image courtesy Cindy Proctor, Busy Bee Embroidery)

WHAT'S YOUR ONE-LINER?

Think of your introduction in terms of snappy one-liners or sound bites. You have to be able to pique someone’s interest in just a few words. When you can do that, you have created an opportunity to have a longer conversation and the opportunity to exchange information with that other person.

Some of my favorite attention-grabbing introductions include:



Selling embroidered apparel can happen anywhere, at any time. Being prepared to engage in a quick yet memorable conversation about your work is a skill that every successful business owner should have. (Images courtesy Troy Neu, Old Town Embroidery)

around town on errands, take your family out to dinner, or meet friends after work. Life and business are happening around us, all the time, everywhere. These random encounters are the easiest sales opportunities you will ever have – particularly if you do not view them as sales opportunities. These chance interactions are door openers. When you handle them smoothly and easily, you will open the door to doing a real sales presentation to a “warm” or interested party at some point down the road. Do not try to pitch your business over a grocery buggy. Ask me how I know. Ask for the chance to do that when and where it is more appropriate.

The other key to taking full advantage of these chance opportunities lies in asking the other person about himself or herself. You can learn quite a lot in a very

short period of time. What do they do? Where do they work? Do they enjoy it? By actively listening to the answers to these few questions, you can learn enough about them to know if a sales follow-up is appropriate.

Are you asking yourself, “Why do I care if they enjoy their work?” I ask this question for a number of reasons. If they enjoy their work, it is likely that embroidered apparel would be of interest to them. If they really dislike their career, it is unlikely they will want to spend money on that company name or industry, much less wear it! If they dislike their work, I ask if they like the industry. You may know of someone that is involved in that industry and be able to pass along a name or a company for him or her to research. Providing assistance, offered sincerely, may be the

right thing to do and open a door at some future point in time.

Selling embroidered apparel can happen anywhere and at any time. Being prepared to engage in a quick yet memorable conversation about your work is a skill that every successful business owner should have. Take the time to come up with your version of what you do that will make an impression and open the door for that conversation. It will pay off! **GP**

Jennifer Cox is one of the founders and serves as president of the National Network of Embroidery Professionals (NNEP), an organization that supports embroidery and apparel decoration professionals with programs and services designed to increase profitability and production. You can contact her at jennifer@nnepp.com.



NEW SCHOOL SPLIT FOUNTAIN

MIXING AND BLENDING FOR PROFITABLE APPAREL

We have a client who has several clothing lines in the western and country markets. In Colorado, we like to think of this as a way of life. Like music, there are only two kinds, right? Country and western! That still has to fit our rock 'n' roll lifestyle, as far as we are concerned. Today's country isn't your grandfather's country music. Who woulda ever thunk Kid Rock would cover Lynyrd Skynyrd and perform with Hank Jr.? But I digress ...

The Tin Haul brand is a bit of a bridge between bull riding and skateboarding, as it were. Sort of that country and rock 'n' roll vibe we're talking about. In fact, the brand is targeted at the extreme sports lifestyle with a bit of a western spin. While motocross, wakeboarding, and downhill are more mainstream, the Tin Haul wearer may also be into barrel racing, calf roping, and the aforementioned bull riding. It doesn't get much more extreme than that. It's like the skydiving of country.

SPLIT FOUNTAIN

We have probably told this story a time or 12, but not all that long ago, one of our, how shall we say, unseasoned printers thought she had come up with something very unusual and quite unique. She was sure she had invented the "blend" or "split fountain," as it may be referred to. On the same screen, she had loaded blue, yellow, and red next to each other. Using the squeegee, she manually mixed the colors, and when printed, a beautiful blend of blue to green to yellow to orange to red emerged on the shirt. "Brilliant!" Or so she thought. Those of us with a bit more experience know that the split fountain blend may have been done a time or two over the last century or so. There are times when we have to break out some of those "Old School" techniques to get the job done.

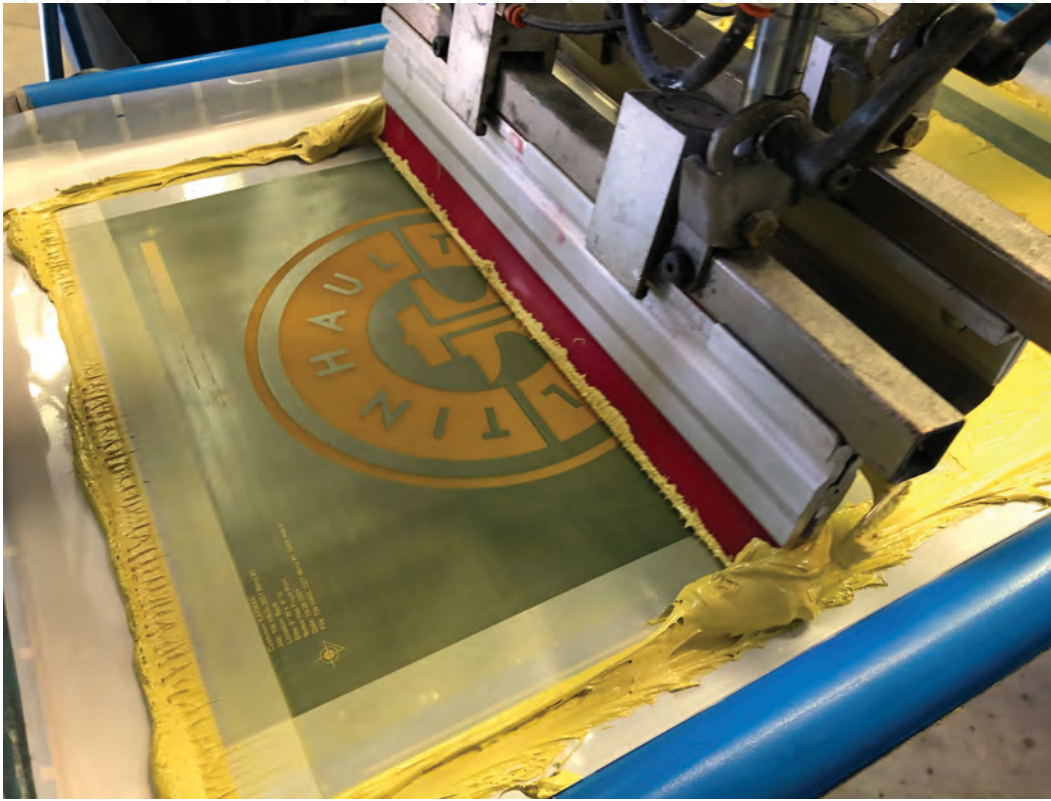
We recently had a project for Tin Haul that contained a color blend. Tin Haul was rolling out a whole new logo and catchphrase. "Wear your metal out!" Don't know what that means exactly, but OK. A new icon with direction from the client using colored magic markers blending from coral to gold to turquoise. OK scribbles from a designer who was convinced it was a masterpiece. Aren't they all? We would work with that. We certainly have been given worse direction.

We would mechanically build the blend for our separations. We opened the new logo in Photoshop and sized it accordingly on our art board. In the Layers palette, we renamed layer one to "original." We selected this layer and changed the opacity to 30% in transparency so we could see through the image. We would use the original as our reference guide to add in our colors for the mechanical blend. With this layer now locked, we added a new layer below we would do the work on.

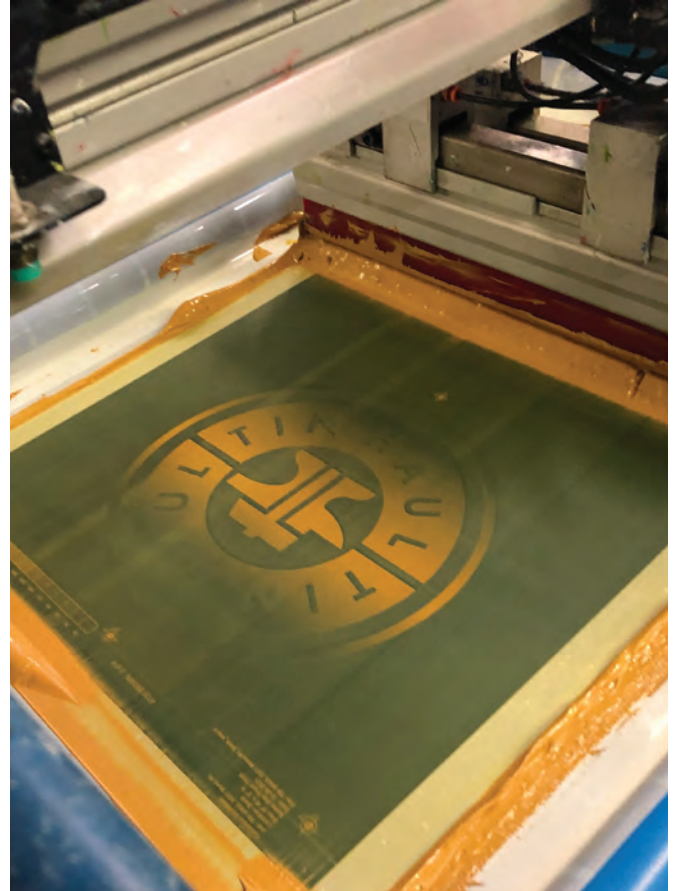
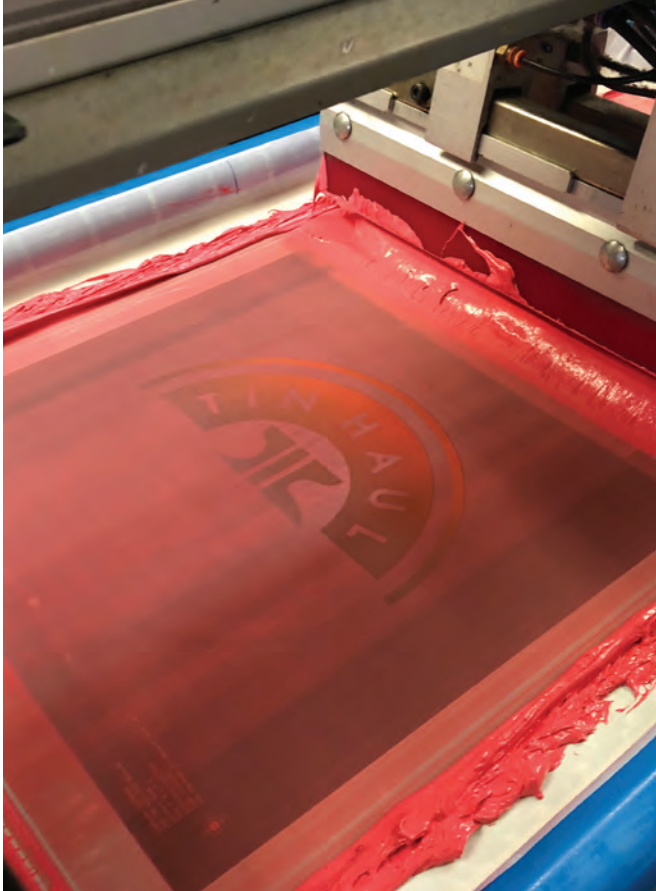
We dropped in base colors to start our color theory. The blend tools in Photoshop allowed us to mix the pixels of two colors to obtain additional colors



We recently had a project for Tin Haul that contained a color blend. Tin Haul was rolling out a whole new logo. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)



The separations were quite straightforward and ready for output as spot colors and layers. They would just need to be ripped and outputted at 65 LPI (lines per inch) at a 22.5-degree angle.



SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



We flashed and smoothed after the first gold.



We ran the rest of the colors wet on wet to help contribute to the split fountain.

by adjusting the layer's opacities. We added each color to separate layers in the Layers menu. With the top layer selected, we clicked Opacity and used the cursor to adjust the level of opacity, showing the bottom layer as it starts to become visible. We set the opacity level to 60%, which blended 60% of the top image with 40% of the bottom layer.

There had to be considerations paid to densities because they would need luminance and transparency as they overlapped each other. The trick was having some dramatic transitions between halftones. We went from 100% to as low as 5% in a very short distance to keep that blend smooth between colors. The white printer or underbase would help give brightness. Using a soft brush, we smoothed out the transition levels of density, which had to be accounted for. Utilizing the Info Palette as we painted was instrumental here. This allowed us to see exactly what our grayscale was doing as we adjusted. The palette indicated the amount of ink density or halftone that would be printed in any particular area. The separations were quite straightforward and ready for output as spot colors and layers. They would just need to be ripped and outputted at 65 LPI (lines per inch) at a 22.5-degree angle.

Three standard 230/48's (tpi/u - threads per inch/thread diameter in microns) were used for three colored screens. Proper exposure and resolution were critical to holding the dots all the way down. The white printer was built on a 156/54, and all screens were retensioned and work hardened at a 35 N/cm tension level.

We would custom mix the coral, turquoise, and gold to match our early direction. The first couple of strike-offs, though registered, just were not blending properly. This is where the voodoo, or hippy magic, as we like to call it, comes in. In the end, we changed out the white printer or base with the gold ink used in the blend. After a few more test prints, the inks began to "blend" between colors and

created the addition of the secondary transitional colors. It was important that the inks had similar viscosity or consistency, so one ink didn't overpower another and bury it. The squeegees were 65/90/65 triple-ply, dual-durometer. We flashed and smoothed after the first gold and ran the rest of the colors wet on wet to help contribute to the split fountain. With a little babysitting, the print ran smoothly, and the client was pleased with this and the entire line for next year. Sales are looking strong, and production orders are in the queue. **GP**

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



Watch video tips from Lon Winters!

<https://gpro.link/lonvideo>





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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: DIRECT-TO-SUBSTRATE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

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

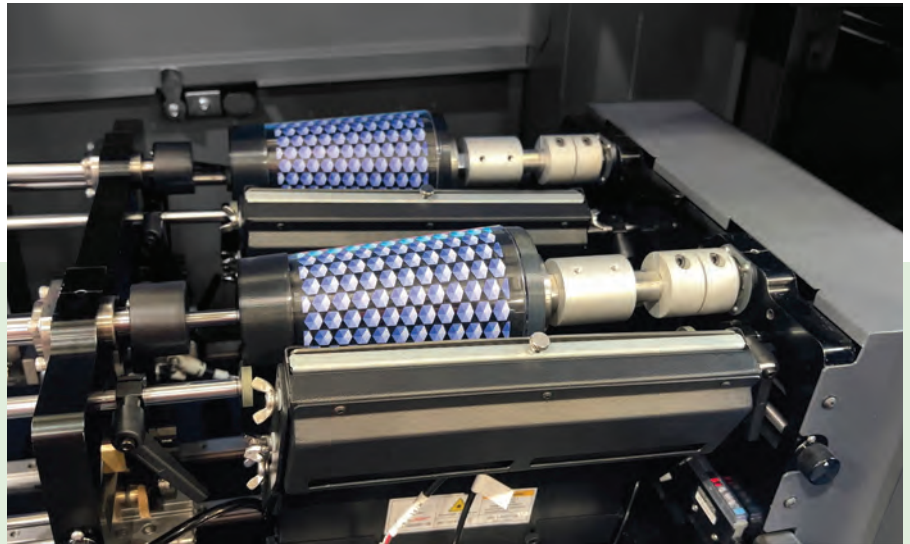


UV INKJET PRINTERS

PDS Equipment offers the Mimaki UJF 7151 Plus II model direct-to-substrate printer, which can project droplets up to 14 mm. This allows users to print on many non-flat products.

615-417-6999

pdsequipment.com



DUAL ROTARY PRINTER

INNOVATIVE Digital Systems announces the release of the TwinRev 360, a dual rotary unit that carries a maximum part length of 14.1" and diameter of 5.1". It can produce full-color images (WW+CMYK+VV) on a range of cylindrical items including glass, tumblers, jars, cans, and more. It's compatible with UV inks offered by IDS and digitalprintsupplies.com.

704-628-7679

ids-digital.com



GLASS-PRINTING SOLUTION

SwissQprint offers a solution for UV flatbed printing on glass. A pivoting alignment edge features five adjustable horizontal stops to ensure precise positioning of glass panels on the print bed, which is covered by protective air-permeable paper. The vacuum holds down the media and the paper retains ink printed in the bleed margin. The glass option and inks are retrofittable to swissQprint LED printers.

224-802-2770

swissqprint.com



PRETREATMENT

Image Armor announces the release of its newest pretreatment for white ink DTG printing, Image Armor PLATINUM. The company says it offers improved coverage, application window, and white ink lay down. PLATINUM works with most DTG printers and ink sets on the market and can be used with various fabrics like 100% cotton, tri-blends, and 100% polyester.

877-673-4377

imagearmorpt.com



MANUAL HEAT PRESS

Insta Graphic Systems offers the 256 Manual Heat Press, which can generate and evenly distribute pressure throughout the entire platen. Its cast-in tubular heating elements heat the upper platen from within for consistent heat.

562-404-3000
instagraph.com

DTG PRINTER

OmniPrint's newest DTG printer, the OmniPrint i2, can print 12" x 12" images in as fast as 55 seconds on a white shirt and 90 seconds on a dark shirt, according to the company. It prints on cotton, polyester, and blends using one-pass printing technology on a 16" x 20" print area. It features a bulk ink system and is compatible with DTF for 2-in-1 capability.

855-373-3538
omniprintonline.com



DIGITAL PRINT SERIES

Trotec Laser Inc. offers its Digital Print Series, which features print-receptive plastic sheets designed for printing with UV- and LED-curing inks. The surface is pretreated for ink adhesion, and the core consists of modified, impact acrylic.

844-529-0730
engraving-supplies.com



DTG PRINTER

LogoJET offers the T90 PRO direct-to-garment printer, featuring six Ricoh GH precision print heads, a suite of custom platens, and a 24" W x 36" L x 6" H imprint area. It uses CMYK + white water-based pigment textile inks and has an automatic product height sensor and a bulk DTG ink system.

337-330-8471
logojet.com



DTG PRETREATMENT SPRAYS

AlbaChem offers the AlbaChem DTG pretreatment sprays, which work on light and dark materials and are good for small areas or an entire shirt. The sprays are environmentally friendly with zero VOCs. The ALBA-PRE DTG pretreatment spray is for Epson and other DTG printers, and the ALBA-BRO DTG pretreatment spray is for Brother DTG printers.

800-233-4468
albachem.com

GP

THE FLEXIBILITY OF UV-LED Printing

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THE CURRENT SUPPLY CHAIN



BY OSCAR GRANADOS

During the pandemic's sudden stop in operations and everyday life, companies worldwide started rethinking their transition to digital printing. Many companies had containers in transit from overseas of preprinted fabric for 2020 summer collections, products decorated with the Olympics logos, among other items. All these turned into higher inventories or waste. Now, more companies realize the flexibility digital printing brings to the table and why it's the best way to do business from a sustainability standpoint. Not only from an environmental point of view but socially and financially as well.

With digital printing, customization and personalization businesses can offer more products with better margins, lower

inventory risk, improved cash flow, low waste, and happy customers.

The added value from customized products with complex images has no rival in the minds of consumers. It is proven that a low-cost product with names and/or a complex design has higher perceived value than a mainstream product with no personalization that costs more. Today product customization can be delivered in record times, increasing customer satisfaction and offering better turnarounds for companies. As a plus, there is a higher probability a consumer will reuse their customized products.

In our world of digital UV printing, we see huge growth in product decoration on-demand versus outsourcing high volumes to



(All images courtesy LogoJET)



reduce unit cost. Manufacturing companies are noticing that it is better to brand their products in-house to avoid large inventories in transit. Although mathematically proven to be valid in most cases, economies of scale showed their vulnerabilities recently, and, unfortunately, supply chains were affected badly, causing serious disruptions to everybody's business.

Today, businesses can buy a UV printer, brand, serialize, and even customize each product on-demand, ultimately providing better management of working capital and a better customer experience. This is of great value from a local manufacturing aspect, too, as you bring additional manufacturing steps to your plant, translating into more jobs for more qualified people. UV digital printing combined with creative minds also offers the possibility to add new products to portfolios and reach different audiences. This, in turn, brings higher value products with all its benefits.

In the end, it is all about being able to have a healthy business in and out. After the last two year's eye-opening events, we have to make sure we are not caught off guard again with our resources in the wrong place. It is time to think about whether what we are doing today is sustainable for our people, the environment, and our financial health.

UV digital printing has helped businesses diversify, add value to their products, manage inventories better, reduce time to cash, and reduce waste significantly. **GP**

Oscar Granados is the sales director for LogoJET, a provider of direct-to-substrate UV-LED printers.



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ENDLESS VARIETY CAN REALLY SPARK YOUR CREATIVITY



BY RUTH DOBBINS



Round rose wood box with mirror lid, no color fill, and the lid replicates the design on the box. (Image courtesy PGC)



A laser-engraved wooden urn with a color application. (Image courtesy PGC)



"Corn Maiden" wooden sign with color application, deeply abrasive blasted. (Image courtesy PGC)

Having my main focus usually on glass products, I need to remind myself that there are other substrates that also offer a great variety of products and can add some profitable items to your repertoire. Besides glass, we also work on stone, metal, and wood products. For us, that means employing the abrasive blasting method on these substrates. As it turns out, I was recently asked to write about wood products and with that I want to add that other methods of embellishing and personalizing these items are very viable, like laser engraving and sublimation. I want to concentrate on products that are possibly a little different from the variety of items we usually work on with glass.

So, I won't be talking about picture frames, plaques, name badges, coasters and desk accessories but rather offer other possibilities that may round out your offerings and that are not viable in glass, for instance. As I am not an expert on different wood types, I will have to leave that research to you. I do know that wood comes in soft and hard woods, and that these properties will influence how the wood behaves in any personalization method; this may be less of an issue in laser engraving as it is in abrasive blasting. Real wood is beautiful, comes in many colors and is relatively easy to work with and creates a connection to nature.

Being trained as a graphics professional in fine art, I was exposed to wood as a medium early on. I enjoyed working on woodcuts, printing them, and coloring them. During that time, I also realized that the carved or engraved wood itself made a beautiful piece and did not need to be printed. This opened the door for me to explore decorated wood as signs, door



Cigar box, laser engraved with various inlays in the lid of the box. (Image courtesy Trotec)

panels, etc. I'll include a sample of that in this article. But not everyone wants to work on large pieces, and small items are by far easier to sell.

BOXES

Boxes represent the largest category in the wooden product line. There are so many shapes and sizes to choose from and the application can range from a utilitarian container for everyday items such as keepsakes and jewelry to highly specialized ones such as urns or humidor, which create a temperature-controlled environment for cigars.

Boxes also serve the purpose of enhancing other products you may sell, such as wine or liquor bottles by themselves or as a set with engraved glasses, or a chess piece collection. A box can function as a presentation box for just about any item. These boxes can be purchased in a variety of woods and finishes and give you plenty of opportunity to add interesting items to your product line. Boxes can be abrasive blasted, laser engraved, or sublimated.

PENS

I became aware of these items when a student presented me with a gift: a fountain pen turned from wood. I would not have thought of that possibility back then but see that in the meantime this has become a very popular item and can, of course, be personalized. There are many sources for the readymade blanks, and you may even find a local woodworker who has specialized in turning wood to create pens of many styles. And they do not all have to be fountain pens.

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(Image courtesy Gavel Co)



(Image courtesy Epilog)



(Image courtesy PGC)



(Image courtesy Epilog)



(Image courtesy Epilog)



(Image courtesy JDS Industries)

BOARDS

This category has quite a few sub-categories. Here, we are basically talking about a wooden board of varying thickness, which will get a different name solely through its application.

I have encountered engraved wooden boards as ring binder or photo album covers as well as several applications in the hospitality industry: menu covers or clip boards that hold your credit card slip upon check out, usually with the restaurant logo engraved.

During the past several years we have experienced an explosion of micro-breweries in our area, and all of them offer beer samplers on a special board called flight board. This is also true for wine or liquor companies. Of course, any board can be fashioned into a plaque or picture frame, but that is a similar application as we know from our glass products, and I wanted to focus on different products.

Last but not least we should not forget the most basic application of a personalized board – the cutting board. Every kitchen has one, so why not decorate it with designs and/or name of the proud chef. This item could easily belong in my next group.

KITCHEN UTENSILS

There is a plethora of items that can be mentioned in this category, and I am pretty sure I will not be able to list all of them but at least the more common ones. The above-mentioned cutting boards would belong here and then there are several other items like spatulas of all shapes and sizes, wooden salad/fruit bowls, salt and pepper shakers, napkin holders, cookie molds, and the latest gag – rolling pins. When you research wood products you will see many of these items and it is not difficult to find a supplier.

TOYS AND GAMES

Even though to some they may seem like things of the past, there are a variety of toys that enjoy renewed popularity. From building blocks, alphabet blocks, trains, trucks, spinning tops and yo-yos, there are also several traditional games that

employ wooden boards and/or boxes to either house the game and/or play it on the wooden item: chess, backgammon and go come to mind.

GUN STOCK

Decorating guns is an age-old craft and can refer to metal parts as well as wooden parts. Many rifles and shotguns have wooden stocks and can be enhanced and personalized for the owner. There are craftsmen and companies who specialize in these products.

CANES AND BATS

This category is self-explanatory, and I do not have much to say about them. Walking canes have been decorated since their existence and bats of all sporting types have traditionally been enhanced with logos, names, and wording.

OTHER COMMON PRODUCTS

Now, there are some products you may already be familiar with in the glass, acrylic or stone categories, but just in case you have not considered them, these items can also be made from wood: Coasters, clocks, watches, key fobs and bag tags, desk accessories, name plates, plaques, ornaments, signs, bookends, picture frames and probably a few others that I have forgotten.

Manufacturers of these products are easy to find and many of them may be local or at least within the U.S., thus avoiding the supply chain problems that many glass and metal items have. **GP**



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



(Image courtesy Epilog)



(Image courtesy Epilog)



(Image courtesy Bob Hagel)



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CREATING A PIE CHART

ADAPTABLE FOR MANY OTHER PROJECTS

There is the ability in CorelDRAW to create nearly any image one can imagine. I want to walk through some steps to create a pie chart using the abilities of the program to perform mathematical calculations. All the following information was provided in a tutorial by Foster Coburn and may be a bit reminiscent of a high school algebra class. This is probably not something you'll use very often, but it's good to know about. Once you understand the mathematics involved, you can use it in many other projects. **Fig. 1** is the final image depicted here.

CREATING A PIE CHART

To begin this project, we'll start with some data: 40%, 27%, 15%, 11%, 7%. These will be the values used here but can easily be changed for your specific project. The first thing is to create a perfect circle using the ellipse tool at a 4" diameter (the size is not important as all the following info works at any size) and centered on the page. Next, select the circle and click the "pie" icon and the image changes to a partial ellipse. On the upper task bar are two dialogs: starting angle and ending angle. Depending on what version of the program you are using, the appearance may be a little different. (**Fig. 1**) At this point we want to change it to a 40% representation of the original. In the ending dialog box on the task bar, type $.4 * 360$ – this is 40% of 360°. The asterisk (*) symbol is a multiplication symbol. Keep in mind that we are working with a circle which is 360°, so 360 is our baseline dimension. Now, we have our first image. On the task bar, the starting angle is changed to 0 and the ending angle to 144. From here we need to create the next one directly on top. Select the image and duplicate it (easily done using the + key on the

numeric keypad). From here, we need to enter some data. Set the starting angle equal to the ending angle of the previous image at 144. Then in the ending angle dialog box type $144 + (.27 * 360)$ and then press enter. This should produce the second image as depicted in **Fig. 2**. It is probably good to change its color so it is different than the previous one. Each of the successive wedges will be created in a similar manner. So, we duplicate the second wedge and in the starting angle type 241.2. This is the ending angle of the last one. Then we type $241.2 + (.15 * 360)$ in the ending angle box and press enter. Now the next one is duplicated as before, taking note of its ending angle, which is 295.2. Now we type this number into the starting angle box. In the ending angle box, we type $295.2 + (.11 * 360)$ and press enter. Our last wedge starts at 334.8 and ends at 360. No math is needed for it. **Fig. 3** is our completed 2D pie chart. I have given each wedge a different color for clarity and added percentages to each. Notice that this chart was created in a counter-clockwise flow. By pressing the Reverse direction icon on the task bar in the beginning, it will flow in a clockwise direction instead.

3D LOOK

It is possible to add a 3-dimensional look using the Extrude tool as seen in **Fig. 4**. For this, I selected all the wedges and grouped them. With this group selected, I chose the Extrude tool and dragged out a visually fitting extrude then broke the extrude group apart. Then, I selected one of the extruded results and ungrouped them. Note that they are no longer live extrude objects but are individual vector objects. Then, I chose each of them and, holding down the CTRL key, clicked three or four times on white in the color palette. This is a fun feature as each click adds 10% of that color to the selected object. This lightened each one but could have been darkened if I'd chosen black instead. The concept works with any color you choose in any open palette.

BUILDING A BAR CHART

Up to now, we have looked at how to create a pie chart in CorelDRAW, but what if we need to make something like a bar chart? We'll explore that next. Since bar charts can have many configurations, we'll look only at one possibility. Let's assume we are trying to compare product sales differences in three different regions: east, central, and west.

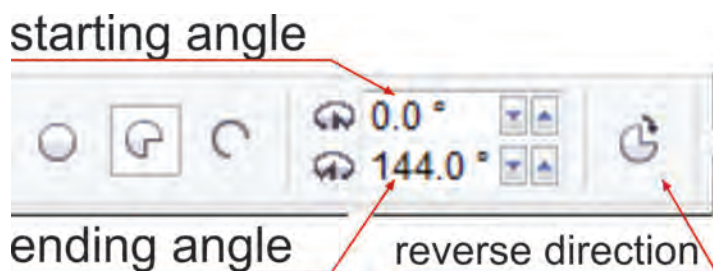


Fig. 1: Final image of a completed pie chart. (All images courtesy Doug Zender)

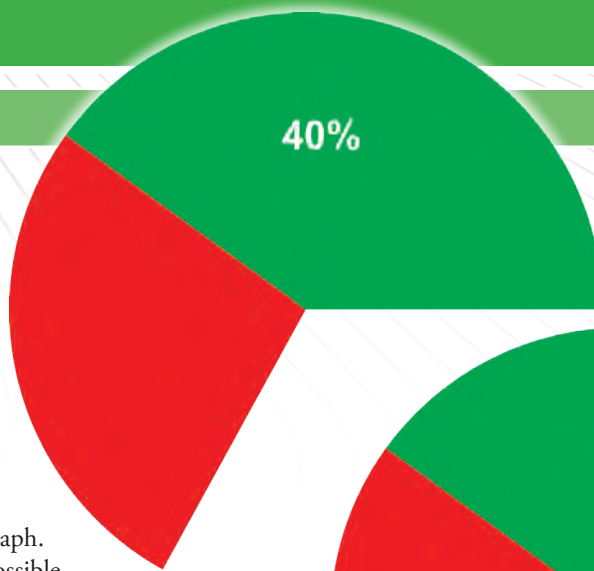


Fig. 2: Entering the information to create wedges.

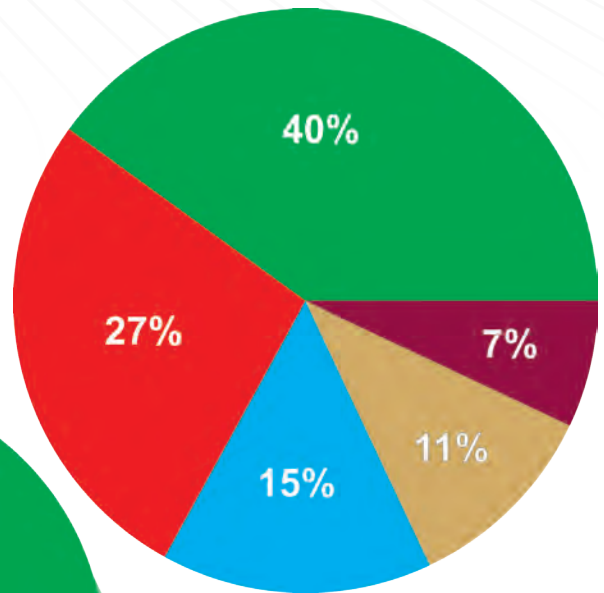


Fig. 3: Completed 2D pie chart.

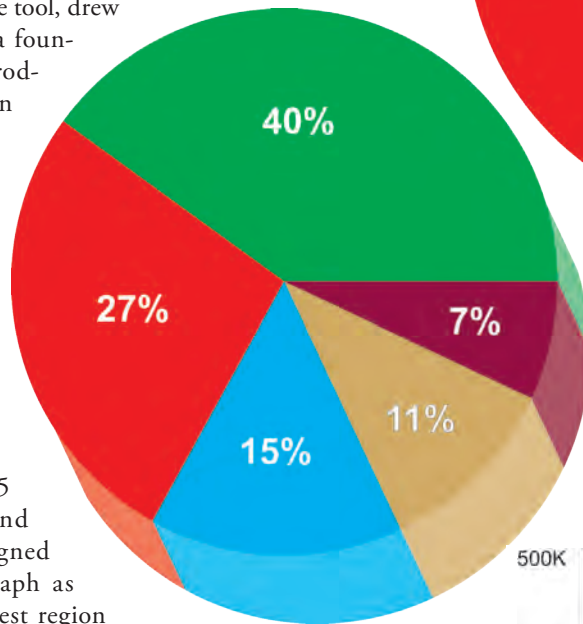


Fig. 4: It is possible to add a 3-dimensional look using the Extrude tool.

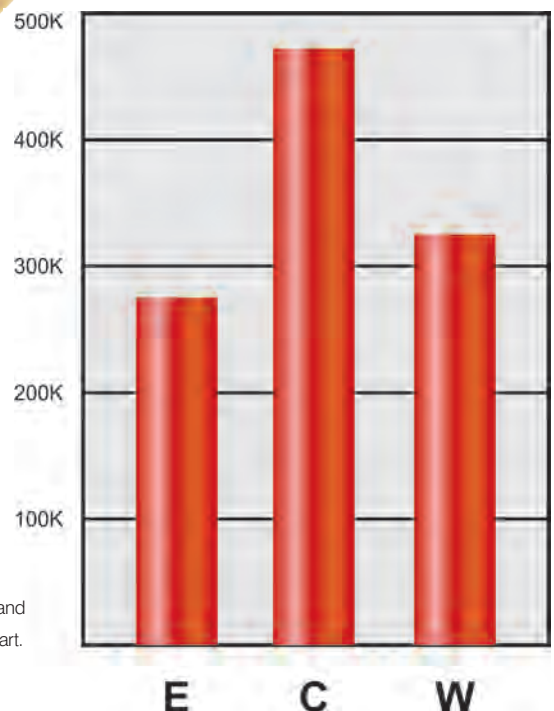


Fig. 5: A grid and possible bar chart.

Our first task is to create the base grid or graph. In **Fig. 5**, I created a grid and depicted a possible bar chart. I did some creative calculations on this image to get to this final drawing. Assuming that 1" equals 100,000 sales, I drew my graph accordingly. Then, with the rectangle tool, drew my first object and gave it a fountain fill. In the east, the product sold 275,000 units, so in the object size box on the task bar, I typed 2.75 and pressed enter. It is important to ensure that the ratio tab is unlocked. I then selected the object and shift selected the graph and pressed B to align it with the bottom of the graph. The central region sold 47,250 units, so, with that one selected, I typed 4.725 in the object size box and pressed enter. Again, I aligned it to the bottom of the graph as described previously. The west region sold 325,000 units, so in a similar manner, I entered 3.25 in the size field on the task bar, again aligning it to the graph, to finish the task. This is the kind of chart that may indicate where we need to increase our marketing efforts. All-in-all, we have seen that CorelDRAW can calculate some simple mathematical equations using the task bar. I am fairly certain that we have only begun to explore the abilities of the program here. As always, I encourage comments, questions and/or insights at dezender1@gmail.com. I will respond at my earliest convenience. **GP**

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

Laminating

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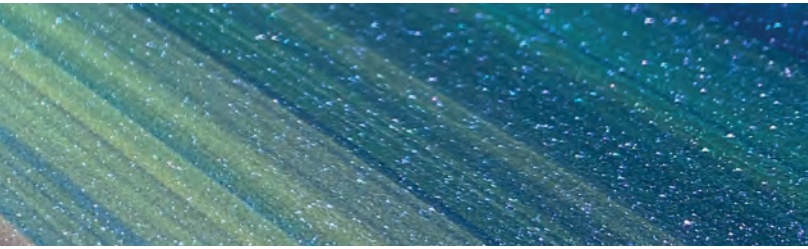


BY PAULA AVEN GLADYCH



It's important to install laminate in the proper environment. If it's too cold, it's more rigid overall and harder to get down without issues. If it's too warm, the base adhesive will be a lot tackier and harder to work with in certain applications. (Images courtesy KPMF)





Lamination isn't a very good topic to bring up at parties. To the outsider, lamination is something that comes up when you joke around about fake IDs. It just isn't something most people think about unless they are in advertising or the printing and digital graphics industry.

But those who are in the know are aware that lamination can make or break a project.

"The most common use for lamination is to protect your output from the elements – such as UV degradation – and enhance outdoor durability," says Amanda Brown, Drytac. But over the years, lamination has evolved into much more than just a clear coating to protect a print. Now laminates come in gloss, luster, or matte textures to add dimension. Other laminates are used to protect prints from graffiti or to add slip resistance to floor graphics.

Laminates can also be used to add body and thickness to a print, particularly if it is printed on thinner material, says Brown.

"The extra layer will stop the graphic stretching and simplify the installation process."





"People expect laminates to continue to extend the life of their graphics. We like to think of them as the sunscreen of wrap," says KPMF's Ryan Scislowicz. (Images courtesy KPMF)



Laminates come in film and liquid varieties. Film laminate is used on paper, cardboard, aluminum foil, and biofilm in the packaging and paper industries. It also is used for vehicle wraps.

Liquid laminate adds a UV coating to things like textured vinyl, signs, and menus to protect them from damaging UV rays and enhance the colors of the ink. Liquid laminate is poured and pressed onto a print and cured with UV light to help protect a graphic from scratches, fading, moisture, and fingerprints. Film laminate is a better fit for products that need to be creased or folded because liquid laminate will crack.

DOES EVERY PRINT REQUIRE LAMINATION?

"When it comes to UV protection, lamination is a must for long-term applications if they are to stand the test of time," Brown says.

If the goal is to protect a graphic's ink, lamination is a must for both indoor and outdoor applications, especially if it is placed in a high-traffic location, such as hallways.

Lamination for finishing effects is only necessary for some instances as most print media comes in different finishes, she adds. "Newer print hardware even allows for gloss and matte output from the get-go through their ink setup."

Alan Miller, an application engineer at 3M, says current trends in laminates include textured laminates, giving printed and colored-base films the feel of carbon fiber, brushed, wood grain, or plaster.

"This allows graphic manufacturers to create custom-colored vehicle wrap films," he says. "New coatings and stabilizers on and in laminates result in better cleaning and long-term non-vertical/horizontal warranties. Laminates range from very thin and conformable to very thick and gouge-resistant, and some are now available with sustainability advantages without sacrificing any important properties."

Ryan Scislowicz, KPMF USA, says liquid laminates aren't typically used for vehicle wraps because wraps need the flexibility of film, which retains its properties even when it is stretched and heated.

"People expect laminates to continue to extend the life of their graphics. We like to think of them as the sunscreen of wrap," he says, adding that OEM-rated inks are warranted for a year or two unlaminated, but lamination will extend the life of the inks and the product giving customers a better return on their investment.

In the past, laminates only came in gloss and low gloss finishes, but now they come in satin and metallic finishes, which give the end user additional options to set their product apart from the competition.

"There is a laminate for just about every customer expectation," Miller says, "but there are still trade-offs to be made when choosing a laminate. No one laminate can do everything."

TOP LAMINATION MISTAKES

One of the biggest mistakes a shop can make is laminating a print before it has had time to outgas.

"We recommend, depending on the saturation of the inks, 24 to 72 hours of outgassing before you laminate," Scislowicz says. "If you don't, the outgassing process cannot happen, and it is either going to brown out the surface of the laminate, or it could migrate down into the surface of the clear coat or paint, which is not a positive thing when you remove a wrap."

Even on latex, some manufacturers recommend an hour or two wait before laminating.





Film laminate, applied with a roll lamination machine, is primarily used on paper, cardboard, aluminum foil, and biofilm in the packaging and paper industries. It also is used for vehicle wraps. (Image courtesy 3M Commercial Graphics)



Using the correct laminate for a base film is important.



"There is a laminate for just about every customer expectation," says 3M's Alan Miller. "But there are still trade-offs to be made when choosing a laminate. No one laminate can do everything." (Image courtesy 3M Commercial Graphics)

Laminates come in film and liquid varieties.

It's also very important to use the correct laminate with the correct base film, he says.

"If you are spending money on cast printable film, don't laminate it with calendared films because it won't last as long; there is a different shrinkage factor," he says. "The opposite is always fine."

Substrate shortages have tempted many people to buy less expensive laminate, so it is important that shops use the better material on the top section, he added.

Another mistake is laminating short-term applications, Brown says. "In most short-term applications, you can eliminate the need for laminating by choosing a thicker print media with an easy install or removable adhesive solution. These materials will do the job wonderfully and avoid the added cost and labor of lamination," she says.

When cleaning, it is important that disinfectant chemicals don't cause damage to signage and displays.

"Museums, photo studios, retailers, schools, and many more sites will have a range of graphics materials installed that will need to remain safely intact and in a good visual condition after cleaning," Brown says. "Wall murals, decals, floor graphics, window displays, and signage may all need cleaning, but how to approach

this will depend on the graphics material, especially that of its overlamine product."

Drytac's range of overlamine films withstands cleaning with everyday commercially available cleaning products, she says, but for more intense cleaning, it is important to check the film's chemical resistance. Most customers use PVC, polyester, or polypropylene films, which all have different levels of chemical resistance.

Other mistakes include overstressing the laminate during the lamination process, using insufficient heating of the base film when laminating UV printed graphics, and not getting the end customer's color approval after applying the laminate to the graphic, says 3M's Miller.

Silvering is a common problem. It is "caused by tiny bubbles of air getting trapped under the lamination, creating the appearance of hazy or silver reflective lines," Brown says, which may not be noticeable on lighter graphics but will really stand out on darker colors.

Silvering can be caused by several things, including not applying the right amount of roller pressure, laminating too fast, or using a substrate with an uneven surface, such as paper with fibers.

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Floor graphic lamination has its own set of rules it needs to abide by. This FDC 7061 is a slip-resistant floor graphic laminating film. (Image courtesy ASLAN)

When it comes to UV protection, lamination is a must for long-term applications.



Laminates can protect from more than just UV rays. Some options come with anti-graffiti protection to repel spray paint and stickers. (Image courtesy ASLAN)

“If you are a user of UV inks, it is possible to avoid the issue of silvering by using an overlamine product with a heavier than standard coat weight as its adhesive can fill in the areas of uneven inks,” Brown says.

Sometimes a laminate won’t adhere to UV inks, so it is important to perform tests on it for adhesion, peeling, and silvering. If silvering is still an issue, Brown recommends using a matte overlamine, which helps mask the silvering.

INSTALLATION TIPS TO AVOID COSTLY REDOS

Miller says it is important that installers color match with the laminate already applied to the top of the printed graphic because lamination can cause slight to large color shifts, especially on light colors.

“Users should also inspect colors from the graphics’ intended viewing distance,” he says.

Using the correct laminate for a base film is important. Otherwise, it can cause lifting, excessive shrinkage, or edge curling, he says.

Base films and laminates can be composed of different materials, such as vinyl, polyester, and urethane, and be either cast or calendared, so it is critical to refer to manufacturers’ product bulletins to check for compatibility, Miller says.

It is also important to use the correct application tools or techniques when applying laminate. Using the incorrect tools, such as unprotected squeegees, can scratch or damage the laminate surface.

Scislowicz adds that it is important to install laminate in the proper environment. If it is too cold, it is more rigid overall and harder to get down without issues. If it is too warm, the base adhesive will be a lot tackier and harder to work with in certain applications. **GP**



Graphic Lamination: Yes or No?
<https://gpro.link/lamination>



Paula Aven Gladych is a writer based in Denver, Colorado, who has been covering the graphics industry since 2014. She can be reached at pgladych@gmail.com.



END DESIGN REVISIONS

3 STEPS TO AVOIDING THE REVISION ROLLER COASTER

The design revision is a time and profit killer. But you want to please your client, and you don't mind making the changes because deep down inside, you want to help this client out, and it's really just a couple of minor revisions, right? But by doing this, are you unknowingly telling your prospect, "Please, let me be your free designer. I am here to serve you over and over and over again until you are happy."

The mindset of the client and how they perceive your services is key to how your working relationship will be. Ignoring this step of the process might/could/will land you smack dab in the middle of "design revision hell."

Here are three steps you can take upfront to eliminate the customer's perception of what is and isn't going to happen during the design process.

1 MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE SALES MEETING

It's tempting with some customers to just let them do all the talking, which is good to a point; however, if they are allowed to run the meeting, you may have significant issues trying to put the brakes on their requests to "see it in purple this time."

I like to ask a couple of bombshell questions upfront:

"Have you ever purchased a sign/display/wrap/wall graphic/etc. like this in the past?" If they say yes, ask them this question next:

"Can you tell me about it and how was the experience for you?"

So, think about this for a minute. If the process went smoothly for the prospect, and they now need a new sign

for their newest location, then why wouldn't they be working with that company instead of trying to establish a whole new working relationship with a different company? What happened? Did the job not go smoothly?

If they disliked the sign company or the experience, they might share that with you, or they may say something like, "We felt it was time to seek new resources for our ___ needs, and your company came highly recommended."

With the "highly recommended" kicker on that, it's almost a shoo-in that you have a better-than-average chance of closing the sale.

If they say, "We wanted to verify pricing of our last vendor," then that is a huge red flag to run like the wind. They are basically asking for free design work disguised as an RFP.

2 REMIND THEM THAT YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL

And tell them that you will be designing the product/service to be the most effective for their stated need and purpose.

The design will be created to catch the eye, mood, and attention of the ideal customer. In the case of signage, a sign has a job to do — a role to play, and if it isn't doing that, then it's not a sign. It's just a pretty image. The sign must be designed to attract the right market share, or it will not be effective in the job it must perform.

You have to get them to agree to this reality check so that when you present the designs, they already know you are going to tell them which option will work best for them. If they agree with you but don't happen to like a color or font choice, you can change it if it doesn't affect the sign's role negatively. Keep it limited, and don't give in.

3 SHOW THEM WHAT WILL WORK BEST

Have at least one illustration done up right, with superimposed images of your product either in place or in use, so they can get a better feel for the flow of your idea within its most likely viewing or use environment.

For me, I've noticed that the more complete the presentation is, the less likely that any changes or revisions are requested. The more "like a sketch" it appears, the more the prospect feels compelled to help you out, so it's what they want to see.

Keeping your prospect in their lane will make you come across like you are a professional at this. And this helps





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Image courtesy Matt Charboneau

START OFF IN GRAYSCALE

In this example, I explained to the client up front that the design ideas would be presented in grayscale. This allows the logo's strengths to shine through – and it avoids any color preferences that may sway the viewers likes or dislikes of the design. Rarely ever does a client envision a design in grayscale. Most people who are not graphically trained cannot do this. This announcement is like wiping their creative slate clean and that is exactly what you want to happen at this point.

Sometimes, as it happened with this client, the fact that the logo was in grayscale helped them visualize a completely grayscale graphics theme. If they wanted to add color, I would be able to do so with confidence as they have already approved the design in grayscale. This method eliminates revision requests because the first step and first round of designs were created and presented on my terms, within my constructed mental arena, so that I can take them to each new realization of how contrast, font, and layout work together to create a specific look and feel.

It eliminates the “dart throwing to see what sticks” method, which almost always turns into a dead-end street of endless revisions. Each option shown here addresses and embraces different aspects of the graphic and font combination. The dark background helped the client decide on which option would work the best and which would be most easily duplicated and incorporated into a memorable graphic identity.

If a request to “see the design with purple” is presented, it is actually part of a step that is part of the process. Because you followed a logical process for creating the design, adding color is a process that you direct, not a random collection of “let’s see how this looks.”

Maintaining design control means that going backward to a previous step is easy and makes the whole process trackable and logical.

to eliminate the question that is already in the prospect’s mind; “Yeah, it’s a nice design or idea, but how will it look on a black shirt, or on a box van, a coffee cup, or on a building storefront?”

Putting it together upfront also lets the prospect know that you have thought these ideas through and have looked at how they will look when used in the environments they will be viewed within.

HOW DO YOU LEARN ABOUT THE PROSPECTS’ CUSTOMERS?

It’s easy, just grab your brick phone, jump in your ’72 Pinto, and head on down to the public library, where you can research your little heart out! Fortunately, you can do the research needed anywhere, anytime, from your cell phone. The prospect may share that info with you if you ask them the right questions. Understanding their customer upfront is one way to show the prospect you are a professional, that your time and theirs is important, and

that you don't want to waste any efforts going in the wrong direction.

Get online and do some research to find out how and in which environment the prospect might use your product or service to attract customers. "Trending colors for blah, blah, blah," or "This year's favorite font" are just some of the search phrases that will take you places where you can find not only inspiration but validation for your design directions.

If it's a coffee shop or restaurant, or any business where retail customers visit, it's easy to park your car in their lot and watch who visits their store on any given busy day. Seeing the types of cars they drive makes all the difference in categorizing their possible spending habits, likes, dislikes, and personal tastes. It's not an official product user survey, but it's enough to get the conversation started on this subject.

When you can use research and facts to validate your design choices, it's powerful stuff, and suddenly your claim to professionalism is validated by your presentation and creative work as a whole. That's what separates a professional from a beginner. It also puts you in the driver's seat for the sale, so that revisions really don't exist, and prospects turn into customers.

GIVE THIS A TRY

An additional way to ensure fewer revisions is by taking it to the next level with the upfront design deposit and agreement. This is perfect for the chronic revisionist who must jump in and be way over-involved in the design process. When you have this type of prospect, the best way to handle them is to pull out the "upfront design agreement and deposit." This usually clears the fog from the room and clarifies what is acceptable and what is not. The design agreement can be written any way you feel it will do its best to get the point across that they are paying for the entire design process.

One way to sell this idea is to say that "it's customary when clients like them need specialized attention with our designers."

The prospect will own the designs created and will have the option to go to any other shop to get similar pricing to complete that job, and 99% of the time, they won't go anywhere else. They will stay with you and your company because they are already deep into the project with your designer. It's human nature – once they pay you the \$500 fee and sign an agreement, they are your customer.

So, minimizing or eliminating revisions has less to do with "designing it to their liking" as much as it has to do with setting the stage and course of accountability on how the design relationship will be handled, who is in charge, and how many revisions are permitted for the upfront fee, and how much each subsequent revision will cost.

In this way, you are working on their dime, and they are spending money with

you. They are paying for your designer's time.

Consider not doing design work for an open book of a potential sale that may not happen. It's better to walk away and find a prospect that will work within your terms than to be tooled by a keen prospect who "revises" your creative side to death and then decides to go with the competition with no explanation why. Be in control of the process. **GP**

Matt Charboneau started his career in the sign industry in 1985 as Charboneau Signs, later changing it to Storm Mountain Signs. In 2017, he published the Pre-Sale Sign Survey Field Guide and provides sign design training at his site: LearnSignDesign.com. Contact him at Matt@stormmountainsigns.com, www.learnsigndesign.com, and 970-481-4151.

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A WINNING WORKFLOW

KEY ELEMENTS OF A TYPICAL WORKFLOW FROM CONCEPT TO PUBLICATION

When a new job enters the workflow, like a raft on a river, it heads downstream with the current to its ultimate destination: completion and customer satisfaction. There are many “ports” along the way that can aid in a successful outcome, and a few key practices can be observed to ensure the job is completed to the highest standards and with maximum efficiency.

PLAN AHEAD

A smooth workflow in the digital graphics workplace is a lot about planning. The job begins well before entering the print shop. During the creative phase, the purpose of the piece and its production standards are initially determined by the art director and/or a design team in discussions with the client.

The overall picture is envisioned, and the important elements are ironed out. With the purpose of the piece firmly established, the development of a concept begins.

CREATIVITY

Let’s talk a bit about the creative process in the workflow.

This subject is often neglected in the glamor of razzle-dazzle, instant-gratification technology. Believe you me, nothing is more important to communicating an idea than a conceptually interesting, meticulously constructed, and beautifully presented work of art. And yes, graphic design is a high art form that has permeated our everyday lives in countless ways.

A design begins as a seed in the mind of a designer after discussions with the client. Once a concept is established, research is required to establish the many characteristics of the piece. Does it reflect a specific era, ethnicity, or gender? Who is the target audience? What are we trying to say or sell?

MULTIPLE VERSIONS

The designer develops multiple rough layouts that support the concept using appropriate images and graphics with dummy text blocks to indicate areas of copy. (Fig. 1) These layouts are sometimes presented to a design team that critiques and further refines them. During brainstorming sessions, the design team will present ideas about key factors such as aesthetic and narrative considerations, subject matter, dimensions, color schemes, graphic styles, atmosphere, etc. Most of the ideas will be discarded, but the ones that remain will constitute the direction of the project. At this time, dramatic changes to the original concept, layout, copy, and graphics can occur.

The purpose of these sessions is to uncover the best, most appropriate approach to visually communicating the concept. The designer can then further refine the layout based on the refinements of the design team and, along with the art director, present them to the client for approval.

COMPOSITE

The approved roughs are composed into a “composite” with the final copy, high-resolution images, and graphic elements assembled into a specific composition. A hard copy proof is run to be sure all the elements are correct and in place. Not to be neglected,

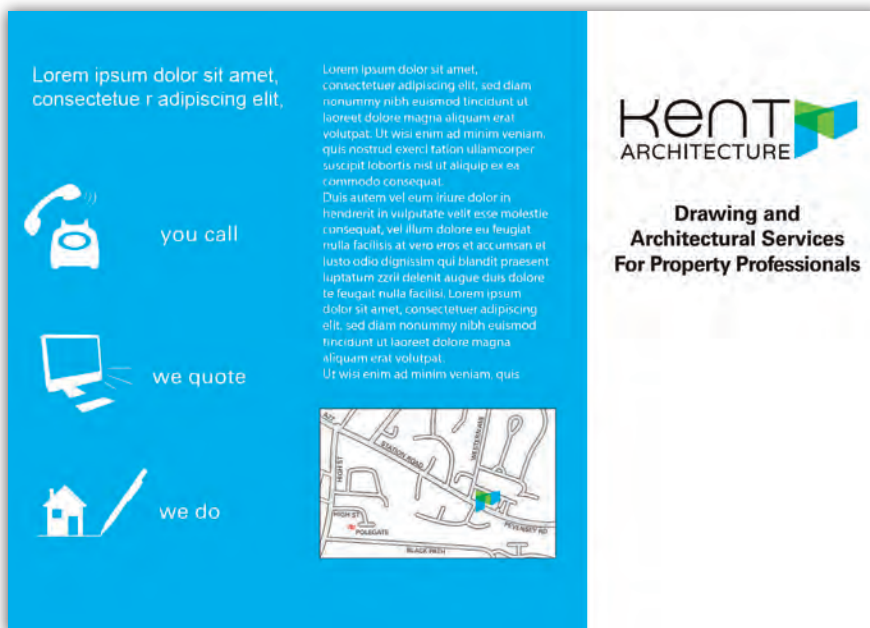


Fig. 1: The designer develops rough layouts with dummy text blocks to indicate areas of copy. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

multiple readers proof this hard copy again for errors. Final tweaks and edits are performed to ensure that all is perfect.

YAY TEAM!

The design team may consist of a photographer, illustrator, graphic designer, copywriter, and production artist who contribute specific aspects of the piece and the art director who orchestrates the whole process into a cohesive whole.

The creative phase of a graphics project can also be tightly integrated with the production phase. At one time, the job divisions of graphic production were quite specifically carried out by individuals with unique skills who were assigned specific tasks, such as graphic design, typesetting, negative stripping, and production photography. It is more likely nowadays for many of the processes to overlap and be performed by a single individual. For example, a graphic designer or digital artist will set type, configure a layout, choose design elements and colors, and prepare images for print or other media. The integration of tasks is primarily due to the accessibility and compatibility of the various software programs that are utilized in the workflow.

SOFTWARE

There are several features in mainstream graphics software that neatly combine and integrate the information that constitutes published artwork. Much of the software in the Adobe Creative Suite is an integral part of a scheme to prepare complex files with many formats for ultimate output. Graphic arts software like Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, Acrobat and Bridge or Corel products such as CorelDRAW and PaintshopPro function in a *non-linear* workflow, which allows image elements to be independently accessed and altered or converted back to former states with little effort and without affecting other elements. There are features in all these programs that support a dynamic workflow.

SYNCING COLOR

Interestingly, the first step in the dynamic production workflow consists of a form of insurance. An environment must be

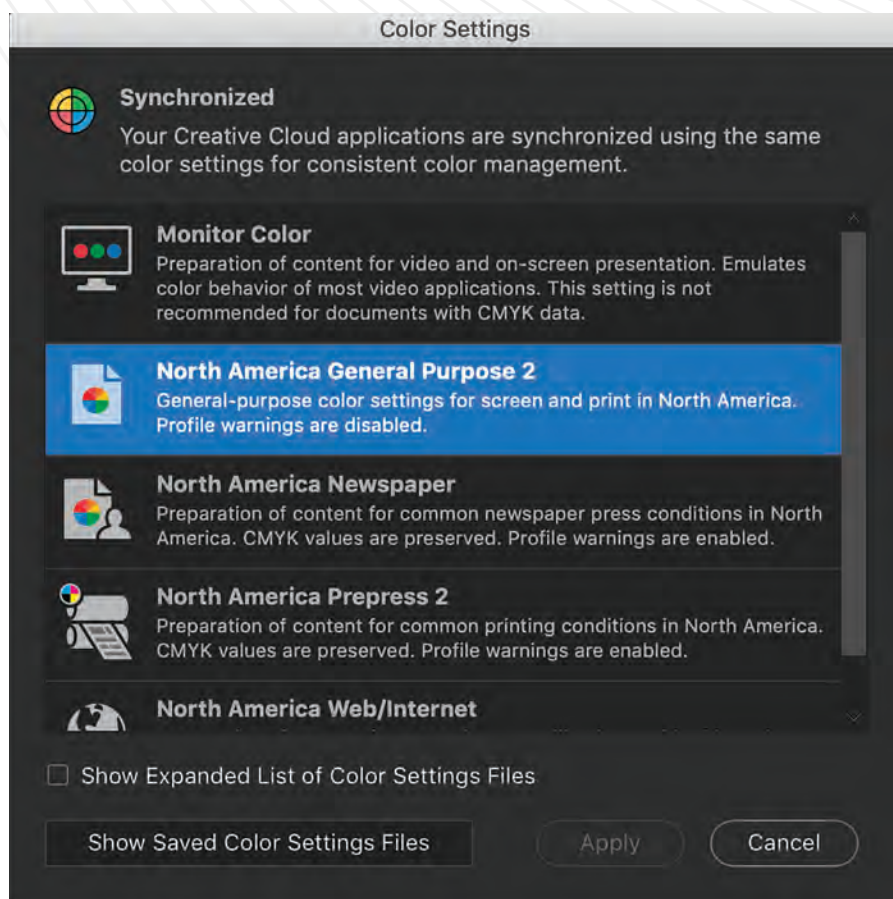


Fig. 2: Synchronization is simply a matter of ensuring the color working spaces of all the software are the same.

established where colors are consistently predictable on all equipment. This includes image capture devices such as the scanner or digital camera, monitor, and printer. The system of calibration is called Color Management (CM) and is a feature in all graphics software. If multiple programs are part of the workflow, it is important to synchronize CM in each of the programs so that the image content enters the same “color working space” in every phase of its production. Synchronization is simply a matter of ensuring the color working spaces of all the software are the same. To synchronize all Adobe products to the same working space, launch Adobe Bridge and choose Edit > Color Settings (Fig. 2).

Synchronization doesn’t automatically convert files to the current working space as they are opened or pasted into another program. Color Management Policies in the Color Settings dialog boxes of each program determine how the files are processed when opened (Fig. 3). By default, the document’s embedded color profiles will be preserved, but there are options for automatically converting files to the current color working space or, even more useful, programming a dialog box to appear that offers choices to convert or not convert when opening or pasting images with mismatched or missing profiles.

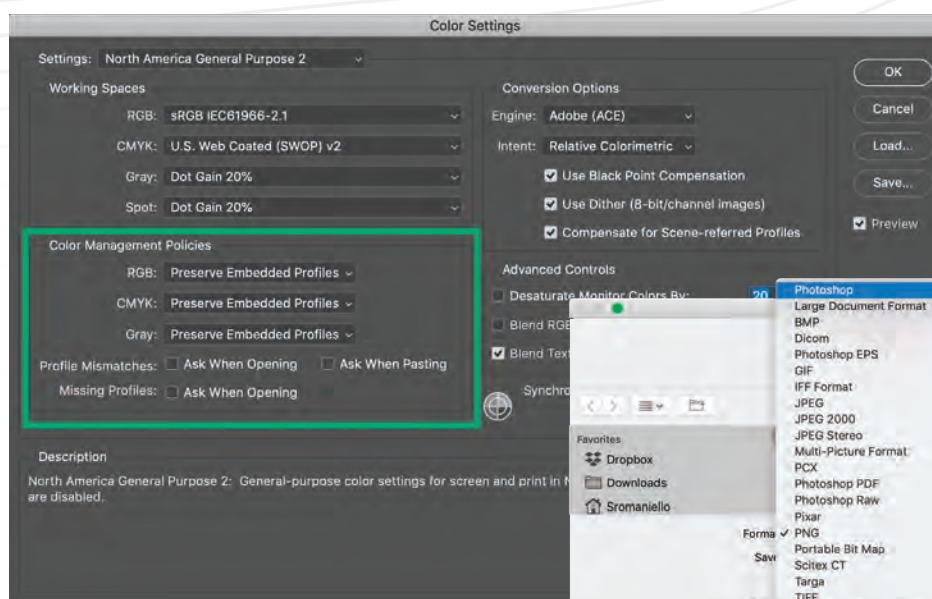


Fig. 4: The Save As dialog box can determine an image's file format when saved.

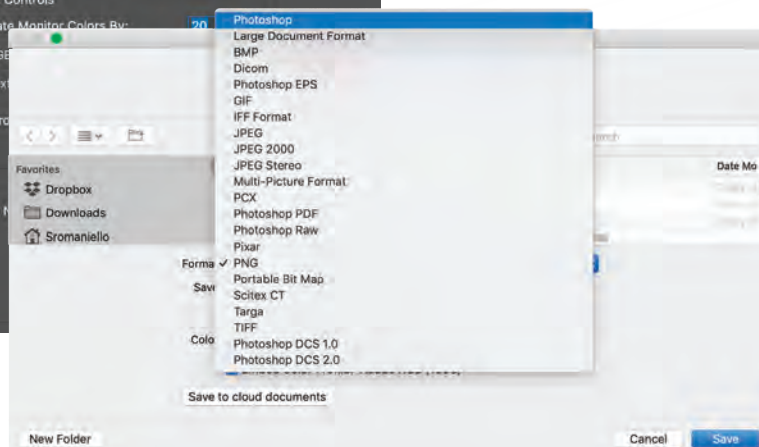


Fig. 3: Color Management Policies in the Color Settings dialog boxes of each program in the suite determine how the files are processed when opened.

FORMATS THAT MOVE

An image format consists of a configuration of data that supports its placement in a software program. Among the 40 that Photoshop opens and the 21 formats that it saves to are the most common and versatile formats specifically designed for preparation for printing and publishing environments. Because of this versatility, Photoshop can be quite useful for opening and converting files for placement into specific editing environments.

SAVE AS

The Save As dialog box enables file conversion on the fly. An image can be opened and saved as a different format by choosing a specific format from the pull-down menu, as shown in **Fig. 4**. When a format is selected, the dialog box presents checkboxes with the individual characteristics of the document that the format supports.

For example, the TIFF format supports layers, but the Layers box will only be checked if the document contains layers; otherwise, it will be grayed out. To flatten the image when saving the file, uncheck the Layers checkbox. When the box is unchecked, the file name will automatically add the word “Copy” to prevent discarding the original layered file. Flattening an image destined for print is recommended to reduce processing time.

OUTPUT

At this point, we've covered the key design and production essentials of the workflow. But what about the final steps – printing multimedia and web publishing? Of course, these steps depend on how the piece is going to ultimately be used. Is it going to be distributed in a magazine, a brochure, a poster, a

billboard, or exclusively online? Hopefully, the destination of the piece was determined at the initial stages of the workflow because production is inevitably dependent on numerous factors specific to the type of output. Frequently, during the production phase, multiple versions of the layout are developed simultaneously that account for the specific characteristics of individual media, including size, resolution, color management, quality, and distribution.

BOTTOM LINE

Ultimately the successful integration of type and images generated from multiple software programs and combined into a single publishable document relies on the knowledge of the artist or technician on how best to unite the images, text, and graphics into a cohesive whole. Brilliant design concepts can only be realized if the big picture is taken into account from the start, researching and developing a concept into a tangible composite and engineering documents whose color is synchronized and whose formats are compatible. The realization of the many elements of a quality media piece is a combination of aesthetic and technical skills that are acquired through education, practice, and experience. **GP**

Stephen Romaniello is an artist and educator who has taught computer graphics since 1990. He's a certified instructor in Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe Premier and the author of various works on the creative use of graphics software. Stephen is the founder and CEO of GlobalEye Systems, a company that offers training and consulting in graphics software and creative imaging.

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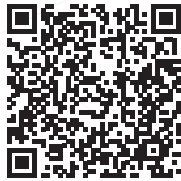
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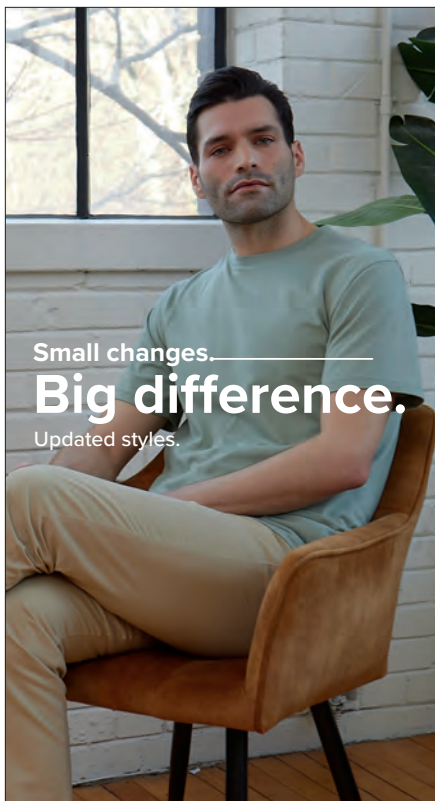
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It's Time to Repair Your Three-Legged Stool

BUSINESSES ARE BUILT ON A SOLID FOUNDATION



BY PAUL INGLE

When building your business, think of it as a three-legged stool. Technically, it's already there.

Why? Because a three-legged stool is sturdier than a four-legged one. It can navigate uneven ground better (and who has even ground in their sign shop every day, especially in the current world in which we live?)

WHO CAME UP WITH THE WEIRD STOOL IDEA IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Ironically, it originated with financial planners years ago with the ideal way to retirement freedom: personal savings, Social Security, and employee pensions. I was born during the Eisenhower administration, and I've never had a pension so that's probably not working out for you either.

Yes, you've heard of different variations of this analogy over the years. The legs can represent team, service/product, and distribution. Or, when talking about total quality management (TQM), made famous by Shewhart and Juran, to hasten Japanese economic recovery after World War II. But William Edwards Deming took it to a whole new level in the 1970s and '80s as he fine-tuned the philosophy and methods. The legs became processes, measures, and people.

Your younger employees are probably coveting the stool for sustainability; the three pillars being social, economic, and environmental. If you are a larger firm, your big clients are probably asking about your company culture and how you go to market with renewal products, no- or low-VOC paint, and other ways to lessen environmental impact. All these examples are important to how you run your business.

I would have you go get the materials for a simple pine stool. I like the way pine smells. Or you can think of bamboo if you are in the previous sustainable group.

The stool that served us best during almost 12 years of ups and downs had these legs and they were stout without any knots. Well maybe some knot heads. Our favorite was customers, employees, and vendors.

The first two categories are no-brainers (and finding and keeping talented or even alive employees) has become an art form in recent years as you compete with the government, generational issues, the lack of work ethic, bad parenting, and a waning emphasis on personal pride. These traits were somehow inoculated in my generation probably in our polio vaccine in grade school in the 1960s. They were enforced by our parents, clergy, and teachers.

WHY VENDORS MATTER MOST

This month, I'd like to shake things up and tell you which leg is the most important. Some obviously would say customers. Today, you'd say employees. Few of you would acknowledge vendors was even a viable leg with the supply chain we're enduring. So, which is the most important? All three! Or it wouldn't be a stable stool, remember?

However, in my humble experience growing a multimillion-dollar sign company, I cannot stress enough how your future success is fundamentally tied to your vendors.

In our industry we buy aluminum, acrylic, finished goods, paint, electronic signs, textiles, promotional products, digital printers, ink, thread, vinyl, etc., from a handful of the same vendors. I've grown up with some of these partners (I even know two and three generations) and many have regional offices for distribution around the country. I may not have met you, but the chances are high we use the same vendors and know many of the same people. They are active in our local chapters and state and/or national industry organizations. In fact, these nonprofits owe their sustainability (added



CUSTOMERS

VENDORS

EMPLOYEES

for millennials) to our vendors financial support, some over many generations of involvement. We owe them a lot.

When we bought our sign company in 2006, we had great timing, and the country went into a recession the next month. Who knew? I can tell you horror stories of defunct 401Ks and other personal investments. Remember the financial planning three-legged stool? Ours was balsa wood. I've not yet drawn Social Security so I will let you know how that works out. If it's there when I start.

My initial thoughts were to buy the items we needed to produce signs, banners, window/vehicle graphics, ADA plaques, imprinted promo items, decorated apparel, and screen-printing equipment/supplies from the cheapest source. After all, they were the same brands at various suppliers so why not pay the least amount? More profit, right? Wrong.

Cheapest is not always the best value. That should be in today's school curriculum. That is still my biggest challenge in educating customers and new salespeople. They always want it fast, with great quality and the cheapest price. Sorry, Mr. Customer, pick two of three. Wrong. They want all three.

After the "lovely" financially challenged years of 2008-2010, we learned that cheap could also mean late shipments, wrong material delivered (even if you had it correct and in writing) and my favorite, "We showed it was in stock when you ordered it but the actual in the warehouse didn't match my computer." So, you're late on the order and you must sell it all over again to keep your best customer — and work overtime to get it done. It seemed like we were not-for-profit.

We also learned the lesson of 'lost opportunity.' There is a financial and associated time cost when you must remake a job twice or can't produce it in time when the materials are late. Or you mess up the installation by rushing instead of thinking it through. It eats at your margin like a cancer. And let me interject an axiom that changed how we made financial decisions after these challenges. This was an epiphany given to us by a CPA in Wichita Falls, Texas, who was a valued confidant, mentor, and friend. He had an uncanny way of explaining complex financial theory and tax code so us mortals got it easily. It was his superpower. He said, "Make every major decision in the context of what it will do (or if it will impact in a positive way) the day you sell your company." That makes you live in the future. You will think totally different about the "here and now" afterward. But I digress.

We began to talk to other vendors. We found some that used sophisticated means to track their inventory. Other suppliers had different cultures that we wanted to emulate. They actually understood branding. And isn't that the business we're all in? Their order accuracy was way better. And their pricing was higher than what we paid previously. But guess what happened?

As we made a leap of faith and changed vendors, the cancer went into remission. In some areas, it disappeared faster than our 401K. And even if these suppliers had more aggressive payment terms, we started to thrive. The relationships strengthened, especially when our salesperson would drive two hours to bring us one small sheet of polycarbonate. They were not just talk; they were different. And the 5% increase we paid changed to a 15% increase to our bottom line.

As years flew by, these relationships with key vendors became stronger. We interviewed vendors like potential employees. We asked a lot of questions. We went on many tours of their facilities. But our business grew and so did theirs. They helped us in strategic ways that changed the trajectory of our company's growth. They mentored us. One even put into motion events that ultimately led to our sale in 2017 to our current employer. And that was very good for all parties. That transaction helped propel us forward with big resources to grow in a way we could not. And we'll always be grateful we aligned ourselves with like-minded vendors and changed the way we viewed purchasing forever.

So, get working on the vendor leg of your three-legged stool. You will one day look back and realize how important that block of wood became. Your stool is one of the many decisions that will positively impact the day you sell your company. Then you will have enough money to buy a recliner. **GP**

Paul Ingle started selling signs in 1985, having worked with local, national, and global accounts with custom, architectural, and production manufacturing firms. Since 1973, he's held roles in sales, sales management, and marketing. From 2006-17, he and his wife Nita owned Design Center Signs in Tyler, Texas (now a Comet Signs company). DCS provided various branding solutions. Paul is a past president of the Texas Sign Association and its regional chapter the Greater DFW Sign Association. Contact him at paul.ingle@cometsigns.com.



MAKING MOVES, BUILDING MORALE

KEEPING YOUR WORK FAMILY ENGAGED AND PRODUCTIVE

How many business owners actually think about the morale of their business or how it can play a serious role within their work environment? I know working for others and growing up the way I did, I never paid much attention to it, nor did it really bother me. In those days, it was do what your boss asked and get the job done or help stay until it is. When you look at it from the outside, it can seem silly, but in reality, we are with our employees or coworkers more in a day than we are home with our families, so why not make the best of it?

I have been a business owner for 19 years with my wife. The earlier years when my wife was not working in the business full time just yet, it was all on my shoulders to hire, train, and run the overall company when we were much smaller, but you feel the pressure all the same. I remember I always would take the time to train someone properly, but have very little tolerance for someone being lazy, not making it to work on time, not paying attention, etc. I think many of us, when we are building something from the ground up and all the risk is on our shoulders, we have those moments of weakness where we can tend to be very direct with people more than we would

if we did not carry the financial risk. Many people from the outside will judge you as mean or not caring at all no matter how nice of an employer you are.

So, over the years learning from past staff, my wife, paying attention to social media, and just listening to others in and out of our company, we have really worked to do a 180 in our company with morale. As you get older in business and make mistakes or employees in your company make mistakes, they are all learning lessons that can help you both grow whether you know it at the time or not.

EMPLOYEE HEALTHCARE

Over 11 years ago, one of the most important things we wanted for our team was healthcare and a retirement plan. With healthcare, our company covers up to 50% of the monthly cost. It normally costs our employees around \$1.25 an hour to have medical and prescription coverage. We also cover one free eye exam, and we worked out a deal with a customer who is an eye doctor – 25% discount on glasses. On the dental side, if they bring us their receipt, we will cover one free cleaning per year. We as a company want our team healthy not only for us, but for their family members. The other part of that is the retirement plan. We offer a simple IRA plan where we match up to 3% dollar for dollar. Making sure our crew had a way to invest in themselves and us help with that is important to us. It allows them to double their money out the gate.

VACATION & PERSONAL TIME

From there, we worked on setting up paid vacation time. Since we are a smaller company, we had to really look at how we could offer this. After one year, you get three vacation days. I know three does not sound like a lot, but many of our staff work four ten-hour days and they get three-day weekends, so between holidays/using the vacation time they can get a decent amount of time off per year to recoup. At two years, they get a week, and at five years they get two



We are with our employees or coworkers more in a day than we are home with our families, so why not make the best of it? (All images courtesy Howard Potter)



Making sure your team has an ergonomic workspace is huge to limit the wasted steps.



We are also big on always buying quality computers and equipment for our team, which can easily lower stress for all out the gate.

MAKING SHOP MOVES



Morale is more than just making your staff happy and spending money. It is about building a healthy work environment that can prosper for all.



weeks off. Vacation time is a huge morale booster for many staff, to get that down time with family or friends.

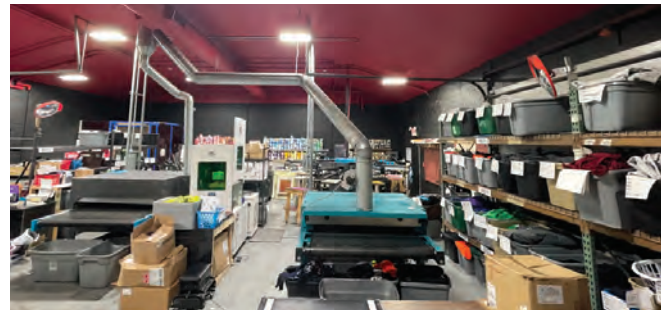
Over the past two years we introduced paid personal time off up to 40 hours, which was a New York State law for employers to offer. An employee can earn 1.2 hours of paid personal time for every 40 hours they work, but it cannot exceed the 40 hours. So, this benefit can complement their need for sick time, appointments, or if needing some extra time off. This one benefit cost our company around \$15,000 to provide for our team, which they appreciated.

Earlier this year, it was our goal to add paid holidays, which we take a total of seven off and for Thanksgiving we make sure we are closed from Thursday to Sunday to give our team the much-needed rest since we are extremely busy during the fall, but it does come with rules. If you want to be paid for the holiday, you must work your scheduled day before and after to earn the paid time unless you have vacation time scheduled. We have seen in the past where people like to call in the day of or day after, so we needed to set rules in place.

ERGONOMIC WORKSPACE

Making sure your team has an ergonomic workspace is huge to limit the wasted steps. We are also big on always buying quality computers and equipment for our team, which can easily lower stress for all out the gate. These are tools to make their day better, which flows back to you the owner in less complaints and time wasted.

With these benefits I have spoken about – yes, they cost money. Yes, they are not cheap, but neither is paying to search for staff, paying to train them, paying for production to run slower due to turnover rates. Years back I looked at this all blindly and never really dove into it since I was used to working 60-80 hours per week to survive. Do I really want my team to



struggle the way I did? Do I really want them to miss out on very important time with family? I missed out on the first five years of my 19-year-old daughter's life, which I would do it all again, but can I make it a little bit easier at work to succeed if they meet us in the middle? Yes!

About four months ago I noticed my team's morale dropped big time due to the increased volume of work and some of our structure breaking down due to the sheer volume, so my wife and I had a meeting. She took over customer service 100%, and I took over production 100%. She restructured her team, and I did the same. I went to each production team and worked with them for at least two weeks to see where the cracks were in our system and what training we may have failed to provide due to just trying to keep production running on time. Right now, we are up 52% in production/sales for the year and our team is extremely happy every day. We are an average of three to five days ahead of completing each order before their due date.

Morale is more than just making your staff happy and spending money. It is about building a healthy work environment that can prosper for all. Yes, we carry all the risk, but imagine if you groom your team to help take on some of the stress as a team! You will never make everyone happy that is for sure, but if you can set a goal of 95% or higher, that will be the driving force behind the long-term success for your company! **GP**

Howard Potter has worked 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.



KNOW THY BUSINESS SELF

5 PERSONALITY TRAITS TO IMPLEMENT AND CULTIVATE

I believe that everyone who has the guts to start their own business is capable of as much success as they desire. Being capable is one thing and achieving another, so you must be willing to cultivate the traits and characteristics needed for success. Finding the right mindset, doing the work, and owning who you are tend to not be natural and are not typically things we were taught in school. I have learned that to develop these mindsets and characteristics, the best method is to ask yourself questions until you can get to the root of the answer. Once you can start answering these questions about yourself, you need to start acting to set a new mindset and stay determined to achieve your desired result.

To get you started, I want to share five personality traits or characteristics you must implement and cultivate. In each of these characteristics, I also have some questions to ask yourself as a starting point but don't stop there, go deeper. Albert Einstein once said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes." Spend the time finding good questions to ask yourself, and then allow yourself the time to contemplate and answer sincerely.

1 MAKE YOUR CHALLENGES YOUR VICTORIES

All the stress, hardships, or challenges you have faced, were just opportunities to grow. It is like working out. You have to strain and tear the muscles for them to grow and then become stronger. Many times, what is holding us back is just hiding in plain sight. Here are some questions to ask yourself to find the ways to identify what might be holding you back so you can continue to turn your challenges into victories.

- 1.) Why am I currently not at the level of success that I want?
- 2.) How have I been holding myself back?
- 3.) What beliefs have I created due to past experiences that might not be true?
- 4.) How has a challenge or adversity possibly given me an advantage?

You can put this into action by writing down how you have grown due to adversity and how you can use that growth as a superpower. Further, describe your future as that superhero, and share your story with someone you trust. To help people get beyond their limiting beliefs, we host monthly workshops to help you unlock your potential.

2 CLARIFY YOUR REASONS

Once we can start pursuing things that live in alignment with our why or purpose, your world will open as you never knew before. Before I started Our Success Group, I had plenty of good things going for me, but I never felt like I was successful. Discovering my mission has made all the difference in finally feeling successful and aligned with my purpose. Here are some questions to find your purpose and clarify your reasons for doing what you were meant to do.

- 1.) What do I love to do so much that I lose all track of time?
- 2.) What do others tell me I am good at?
- 3.) How would you like your obituary to read?
- 4.) What difference do you want to make deep down in your soul?

You can put this into action by writing your obituary as you would live to be remembered. Everything in life and business is more about the journey and learning and letting go of attachment to the results. The end of our life is the true "completion," so this action gives you perspective.

3 DETECT YOUR FUEL SOURCE

We need some fuel to push us through the roadblocks we are inevitably going to encounter. For example, Thomas Edison was motivated because he was told he would never amount to anything as a boy and young man. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team, which fueled him to become one of the fierce competitors on the basketball court, which led him to being the greatest basketball player of all time. Here is a quote from him: "Some want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen." Here are some questions to ask yourself to help detect your fuel so you can break through future roadblocks.

- 1.) What can you turn into fuel from your past?
- 2.) What passions get you excited to chase?
- 3.) What failures do you never want to experience again?

To put this into action, create a list of three goals you want to achieve in the next 12 months, and then write out the fuel you will use to achieve those goals. Remember to write down why they are important to you.

4 DEVELOP STRONG FEELINGS

We must stop with the characteristic that was pushed on us when we were kids — being a people pleaser. Most people think that being a people pleaser is somehow being nice,



but it is the opposite. I would argue that it is selfish. You are taking the easy way out by trying to be all things to everyone. You have to take 100% responsibility for your results. You need to learn to say no. Stop saying sorry if you didn't make a mistake worthy of being sorry for. Stop making excuses. Stop complaining. Stop commiserating and start looking in the mirror and finding the answers inside yourself. Here are some questions to ask yourself to develop those strong feelings and take 100% responsibility for yourself.

- 1.) What things make you mad that you bottle up inside and wish you would do something about?
- 2.) What have you told yourself or others you would do but didn't follow through on?
- 3.) What messes and incompletes do you have in your life or business that you need to stop allowing to take up space and energy?

To implement this, create a messes and incomplete list and then commit to completing one small task per month (or better yet per week) to clear off the list. The momentum forward will help you understand you do have the power to change your path.

5 TAKE ACTION DAILY

As I said at the beginning, everyone deserves the success they desire if they are willing to do the work to develop daily. Rory Vaden, the author of the books "Take the Stairs" and "Procrastinate on Purpose," said, "Success is rented, not owned, and the rent is due every day."

You must strive to push for more and not just settle based on the incremental wins. Yes, you must celebrate every victory, but the celebrations should be the source of more energy to do even more. To stack victory upon victory, you can only do that with

daily action. Here are some questions to ask yourself to ensure you can take daily action to reach your idea of success.

- 1.) How committed am I to achieving the success I desire?
- 2.) What actions have I not taken that I know I need to take?
- 3.) What habits have I developed that stand in the way of achieving the next level?

By committing to daily action and then making that commitment public, you will, much sooner than you realize, experience notable improvements. I believe so strongly in this that I created a tool to help people at <https://oursuccessgroup.com/goal-getter/>.

As you can see, developing the characteristics needed to reach your idea of success is possible for you but requires the right mindset, action, and openness to inquire within. You can start acting on your new perspective and action steps by answering the questions in each area, which will help you stay determined to achieve your desired results. **GP**

Aaron Montgomery is 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 25+ years of experience with personalized products and small business development and is the co-creator of the "5 Keys of Business Success." Find Aaron co-hosting the 2 Regular Guys Podcast (2regularguys.com), and check him out on his podcast channel called Small Business Saturdays (smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com).



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BY KRISTINE SHREVE


DEALING WITH Ageism IN OUR Industry

**CONFRONTING BIAS WHEN
DEALING WITH EMPLOYMENT**

When we talk about prejudices, we tend to talk about things like racism or sexism the most. Ageism gets mentioned, but it's kind of an afterthought, a sort of, "Oh yeah, there is prejudice against certain age groups too," but it's probably not a prejudice most people think they have, or one they're working to change or combat. Although ageism can occur against younger people, it primarily impacts older people, which makes sense because our culture is youth oriented. We have tons of lists showcasing the 30 under 30 or the Fiercest Entrepreneurs Under 40, but we don't see a lot of lists showcasing the Six Over 60 or the Eight Best Entrepreneurs Over 80. The assumption seems to be that the best days, and the days in which we can contribute the most and make the most impact, occur when we're young, but that isn't necessarily true, and may actually be an assumption that's shortchanging our businesses.

AGEISM EXPLAINED

To start this examination of ageism and how it may be hurting our industry, we first need to define our terms. Let's begin with what exactly ageism is. Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or ourselves based on age.



82% of older Americans reported experiencing ageism regularly.

There are many ways to experience ageism, but three of the most common are:

- 1.) Institutional ageism when a company or institution perpetuates ageism through its policies and actions
- 2.) Interpersonal ageism, which occurs when people interact socially
- 3.) Internalized ageism, which is when a person applies ageist beliefs to themselves

Hostile ageism, which would be something like believing that all teenagers are violent and dangerous, and benevolent ageism, which would involve beliefs like all adults over 80 are childlike and incapable of taking care of themselves, are also parts of the spectrum of ageist beliefs. While most people tend to believe that ageism is a problem that only impacts older adults, it can impact anyone at any age. Believing that younger workers will be less productive or less responsible is just as ageist and harmful as believing older workers are out of touch and unable to keep up with the latest techniques or technology.

So now, you might be wondering, exactly how prevalent is ageism, especially when it comes to older people? In the 2020 National Poll on Healthy Aging done by the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation, it was found that 82% of older Americans reported experiencing ageism regularly; 65% had seen ageist messages in the media; 45% had experienced interpersonal ageism; and 36% had internalized ageism. Whether the ageism is explicit, meaning the person with ageist views is aware of those views, or implicit, meaning someone acts on ageist views but may not be aware of what's motivating their actions, it's clear that ageism is an issue, and one that impacts virtually our entire population of older people.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Obviously, most people know that age discrimination, one side effect of ageism, is illegal at any stage of employment, whether it involves hiring someone, promoting someone, giving a person a raise, or laying people off. Laws also prohibit workplace harassment because of age. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) is still the prevailing law when it comes to how workers 40 and up are legally supposed to be treated, but the rules created by the law, and how those rules should be interpreted and followed aren't always clear.

For instance, most people think that it is illegal for prospective employers to ask your age or your graduation date from high school or college, but it isn't. You can try to deflect the question if it makes you uncomfortable, but the interviewer has the right to ask it. Things are also made more difficult by a 2009 Supreme Court ruling (*Gross v. FBL Financial Services*), which makes it harder for older workers who have experienced discrimination to get justice in a court. The Supreme Court said that plaintiffs must meet a higher standard of proof for age discrimination than for other types of discrimination. Being held to a higher standard makes it more difficult to prove discrimination happened and to pursue relief.

Prevailing attitudes about gender can also cause problems when it comes to ageism. 72% of women between 45 and 74 say they think people face age discrimination at work, while only 57% of men have the same view. The combination of age prejudice and gender prejudice is called gendered ageism, and it impacts many older women in the workplace. As they age, and start to show signs of aging, women are more likely to be perceived as less competent, less valuable, and even irrelevant. These perceptions and

1

Check Yourself

2

Train Yourself
and Your
Employees
(If You Have Them)

3

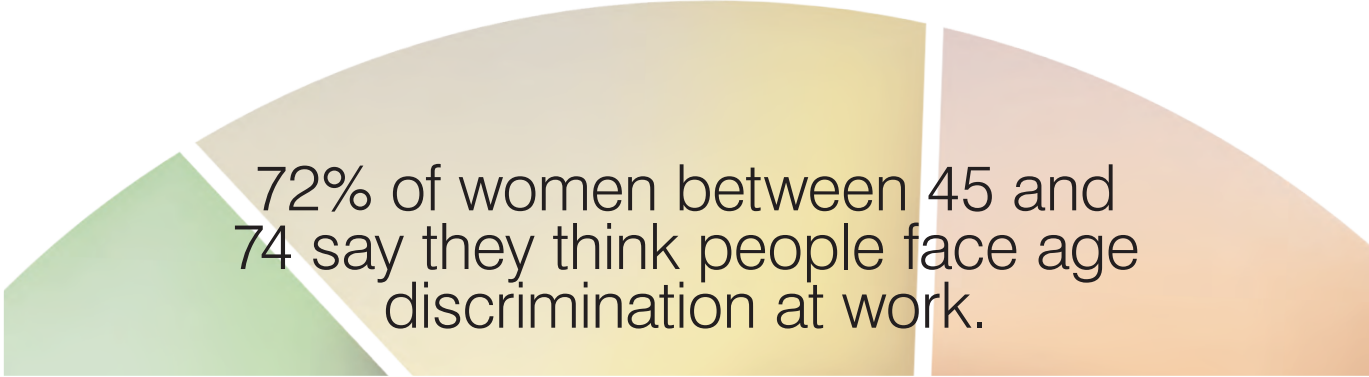
Actively Pursue
Diversity

4

Don't Make
Assumptions
Based on
Appearance

5

Watch for
Social Cues



72% of women between 45 and 74 say they think people face age discrimination at work.

attitudes begin to affect women's job security, opportunities for promotion, and earning potential. DEI (Diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives may help combat some of these issues, but ageism and the problems that accompany it, are often lower on the priority scale than other forms of diversity programming.

5 WAYS TO COMBAT AGEISM

Now that it has been established that ageism is a problem and that it can impact certain age groups adversely, the next question we face is how to combat this problem. There are various theories about how ageism should be handled and what can be done to eliminate or reduce ageism in the workplace and our society. Here are some of the most common suggested solutions.

1 Check Yourself – There are stereotypes about a number of age groups that are prevalent in our society and in our media. All teenagers are lazy and rude. Older people are baffled by even the simplest technology. The list could go on and on. If we see and hear these stereotypes repeatedly, some of them may stick in our minds and our beliefs without us even being consciously aware. So, the first step in combating ageism is to check your belief system and root out any beliefs that may perpetuate stereotypes or cause you to act a certain way toward people of a certain age. Doing this will help you see where you might be carrying an unwitting prejudice that could be influencing your choices and behavior without your awareness.

2 Train Yourself and Your Employees (If You Have Them) – Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training should be a part of every business these days. Part of this type of training is helping people see unconscious biases they may be carrying of which they may not be aware. Make sure the training is more than just a list of what you “shouldn’t” believe or do, provide real world examples of how such stereotypes and prejudices can negatively impact the workplace and the people within it.

3 Actively Pursue Diversity – Make an active effort to hire a diverse workforce. People who hire tend to hire people like themselves because those are the people with whom they feel most comfortable. To ensure a more diverse workforce, a company may have to do things like vet job opening advertisements for ageist language, offer flexible scheduling, and make sure that advertisements for job openings are posted in as many places as possible, while actively seeking out diverse groups in which to

post. The more connections a company can make with diverse groups, and the more confident those groups feel that the company in question is a welcoming and supportive place to work, the more likely it is that your workforce will be diverse.

4 Don't Make Assumptions Based on Appearance – As someone who's hair went gray in her mid-30s, I've been dealing with people assuming I'm far older than I actually am for years. The same thing may also go for people who spent a lot of time outside and thus have sun damage or excessive wrinkles on their face. People may be far older or younger than their appearance may suggest, so try to avoid making assumptions about their age based on their physical appearance, how they dress, or how they move. As we all know, appearances can be deceiving.

5 Watch for Social Cues – Do managers joke about someone having a “senior moment.” Do company birthday cards talk about aging as though it's something to be deplored? If a new technology is introduced is the automatic assumption that older employees will need more assistance? All these things may be evidence of an underlying bias that can impact how older workers are treated. If an age discrimination suit were to happen, all these events could be used as evidence. Being aware of bias and the risks that can come with expressing those biases can help make a more diverse and welcoming environment and a more protected company.

At the end of the day, the first step in combating ageism is acknowledging that it exists and can negatively impact people who are in your workplace. After that, it's just a matter of deciding to take steps to combat the problem and working to be aware of your biases and the stereotypes that exist. Ultimately, combating all forms of prejudice, including ageism, makes for a better and more productive workplace, where everyone uses their talents to benefit themselves and the company, and isn't that the thing for which every business owner strives? **GP**

Kristine Shreve is the founder and CEO of Kristine Shreve Consulting, offering writing, marketing, and business development services. Visit www.kristineshreve.com for more info. 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 2006-2020.

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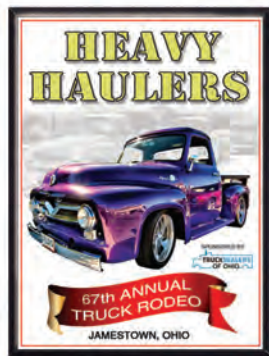
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