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SPECIAL SECTION:

SUBLIMATION REPORT

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DAVID GROSS

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Print shops of all sizes have struggled to find and keep workers, and automation is stepping up to fill the demand, Page 12. Image courtesy **FUJIFILM North America**. Below: This year's *Sublimation Report* is packed with information to take your business to the next level, Page 62. Image courtesy **Aaron Montgomery**.

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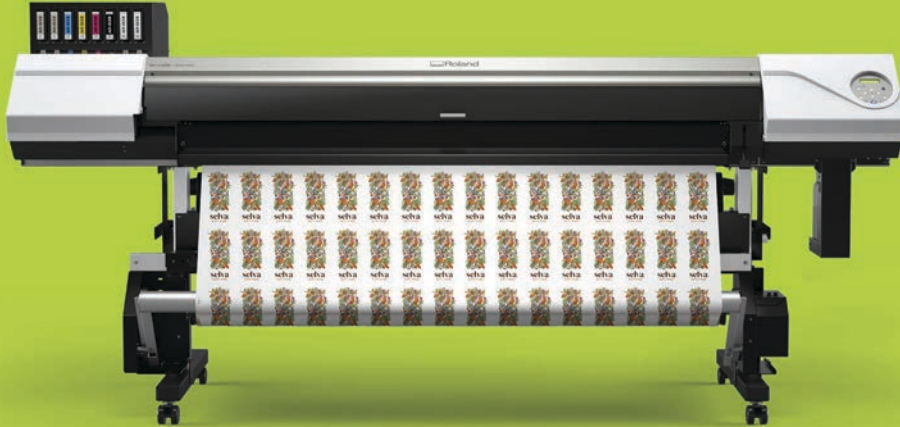
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SHOW, DON'T TELL

Marketing is a big part of your business, whether you feel like you engage in standard marketing practices or not. You may not purchase ad time in your local area, or on Facebook, or do mailers of any kind, but there are so many other ways you market yourself and I hope you understand you are always giving someone an impression of your business.

When someone walks into your shop, they get an immediate impression. From the carpet to the walls to the types of literature you have in your waiting area, or if you even have a waiting area. Those first words out of you or your front-facing employees are incredibly important.

A place you may not consider marketing — the installation site. Sure, you've got your trucks wrapped to make it clear who you are and who is responsible for this amazing work, but there are so many other ways that people are being influenced by what you're doing on the job site.

Many shops may not give it a second thought, but you need to be very careful with those installation photos you post online or in your shop literature. Is your crew up in the air? Then hard hats and safety harnesses are important. Working a CNC router? Eye protection. Even if you're showing off some mid-production channel letters, you want to make sure any photos have that UL sticker visible, just in case.

It's likely none of these things will ever come back to bite you, but the last thing you want is some slap-dash Instagram post coming back to haunt you in ways you couldn't have predicted.

BIDDING FAREWELL

This month's issue marks the final issue for longtime writer Bob Hagel, whose Your Laser at Work column has been a source of terrific engraving information for many years.

"So many people in our industry contributed to our success in the business. I was happy to be able to share ideas and insight into laser engraving and the personalization industry," Hagel says. "As technology and products consistently change, keeping up and educated is important for continual success. Personalizing products for awards, gifts, identification, and recognition will always be in need and desired. This industry has a bright future."

For myself and all the editors Bob worked with who came before me, we wish him a fantastic retirement and will always appreciate the work he's done. You can find Bob's work at <http://gpro.link/bob-hagel>.



WANT TO KNOW MORE? *Feel free to give me a call directly at 720-566-7286 or email me at mdixon@nbm.com.*

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IN THE GAME

In his gruff voice, our beloved Coach Clay bellowed, “Boys, they say football is a contact sport, but that’s wrong. Dancin’ is a contact sport. Football is a collision sport. If you’re going to play on this team, you’d better get out there and hit somebody!”

You had to toughen up to play for Coach Clay. But when you played tough, did your assignment, and really hit someone, his affirmation of a job well done was immediate and enthusiastic. On occasion, he might get right up close, grab your face mask, and yank it a bit, look you straight in the eye and say, “Son, excuses are a dime a dozen. Results are six points apiece! I’m not lookin’ for no danged excuses. I want some points on that board!”

I wasn’t one of his star players. At that point in my life, I was a bit of a runt and was just one of his two backup quarterbacks who seldom got to play as the first-string quarterback was really good, really tough, and seldom left the field. But I liked Coach Clay, and he must have liked me.

I say that because he went out of his way to play me enough to earn that coveted letter jacket at the end of the season. To get that, you had to play about half the quarters of every game, which was very unlikely for a backup quarterback.

“Rick,” he said, “you’ve got good hands and I need someone with good hands to be place holder for extra points and field goals. If you practice, I bet you can do us a great job.” He didn’t have to tell me twice.

My backyard neighbor, Suzy, who was also in our ninth-grade class, was soon drafted to help me after regular practice and before dark. She would center the football to me over and over, and though at first, she was crummy at it, that just made me work harder to grab it from any angle, drop it to the ground quickly and set it exactly how the kicker would need it

to be. Suzy was a lot of help, and within a week or two we were a machine, and my ball handling became fast and automatic.

During that football season, our quarterback and kicker never missed an extra point or field goal, and one particularly tough game down in Center, Texas, we won by just one point, one extra point to be exact. That season, I got my letter jacket just like Coach Clay intended.

I learned several lessons from Coach Clay that season, but the main one was that you don’t have to be the most valuable player to be a success, you just need to be good at something. I think the same is true in life and in business, especially here in



the U.S., because a free and multi-faceted economy like we have, needs a lot of some things and a little bit of everything. And all that’s required to be a success, to live the American dream, is to do whatever it takes to become good at something, something people will pay you money for.

Many years ago, while I was fumbling around just to pay my way through college, I discovered people would pay me to hand letter signs, windows, and trucks. They would also pay me to make signs, install signs, design logos, and produce them and install them. When hand lettering became computer plotted lettering, we bought

software, plotters, and other equipment and learned how to do more work, become more efficient, even more profitable. Later we spun off other ventures, but all connected or supported by a small commercial sign shop here in northeast Texas. Those businesses do other things that people will pay money for, and we have employees whose skills make them valuable even if they know how to do only one thing and do it well.

That’s how the system works. My people are not pro football stars, rock stars, or rocket scientists. They simply know how to do things people will pay money for, and we have invested in the know-how, equipment, and real estate to provide our clients with those services. Our advertising budget wouldn’t feed a large dog, but our customers find us and when they see the quality work we do, they keep coming back.

So, over time, a backup quarterback, who was not big enough or good enough to do more than one thing well, but who knows how to work extremely hard and keep trying, can find a way to succeed in sports, and in the economy of this great country. I’ll bet you have a similar story.

Now, let’s tell our stories and inspire today’s young entrepreneurs with the absolute reality that the American dream won’t reach up and bite them on the rear end, but if they put their rear ends in gear, they will attain their own version of it.

And for some, that will be just the starting point. Have a great month.

—Rick

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

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(Image courtesy Agfa)

Hands-Off Handling

**THE BENEFITS OF
AUTOMATED WORKFLOW
IN WIDE-FORMAT PRINTING**



BY PAULA AVEN
GLADYCH

The wide-format printing industry was already moving toward more automation, but the pandemic and its restrictions moved up the timeline. Print shops of all sizes have struggled to find and keep workers because of COVID, and the pandemic has changed the way many industries do business, with much of it moving from brick-and-mortar storefronts to robust e-commerce sites. To do that, the technology had to advance more rapidly than expected.

Automation was “something we were moving toward way prior to COVID and the pandemic but, like so many various areas of the market, it really sped things up quite a bit,” says Becky McConnell, Fujifilm North America Corp.

From add-ons to existing printing presses to more robust printing and workflow software, the largest manufacturers have had to adapt quickly. Much of this technology was already available in the marketplace, but only the highest production shops were taking advantage of it. Now, printing equipment manufacturers are seeing a trickledown effect to smaller-volume shops.

“There is a drive toward automation,” says Deborah Hutcheson, Agfa Corp. European countries were quick to adopt automation because they were looking to minimize their dependency on people. Now that the U.S. is experiencing labor shortages, it is “driving a lot of people to reconsider automation on their equipment. Also, as brands accelerate their time to market and look at shorter runs, she says that also is driving the need for automation.

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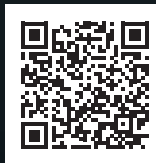
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Industrial Dye Sublimation Printers



Production Heat Presses



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The Acuity Multi-Roll system allows for large-scale production to improve workflow. (Image courtesy FUJIFILM North America)



eProductivity's software allows shops to look at each job, when it needs to be printed, what it is printed on, which device, what substrate and what processes need to come after, like cutting, die cutting, sewing, or adding grommets. (Image courtesy eProductivity Software)

PRINTERS

As printing presses get faster the need for automation increases because operators have a hard time keeping up.

"If you have high-volume production and you want them to keep up at that rate, nobody can feed at the rated speed for eight or 16 hours a day. It is not practical," Hutcheson says. That means shops must move to full automation or partial automation. "The goal of automation is to provide customers options to help them improve productivity but, most importantly, efficiency," she explains. "In today's world, everyone is looking at ways to reduce the total cost of print manufacturing, adding more capital investment upfront with an understanding that there will be an ROI bump in the end."

Efficiencies are more important for higher volume shops, and Agfa offers lower cost machines that also have automation capabilities. Customers of Agfa can purchase machines in manual mode and then add on automatic board feeders or stackers. For roll-to-roll machines, clients can put two 63-inch master rolls on the machine and let it run unattended.

"What that means to customers is they can have one operator manning multiple machines. They are just setting the machine up and letting it run," Hutcheson adds.

Agfa's approach is to give customers the ability to kit out their press to best meet their needs. If down the road they decide their business has grown enough to merit additional automation, they can always add it later.



This automated system with the Inca Onset X3HS can assist with the handling of large boards to speed up productivity. (Image courtesy FUJIFILM North America)

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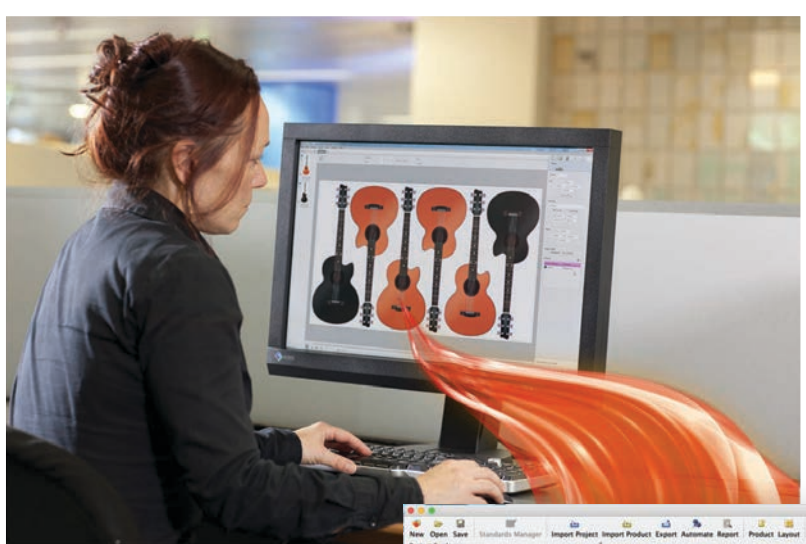
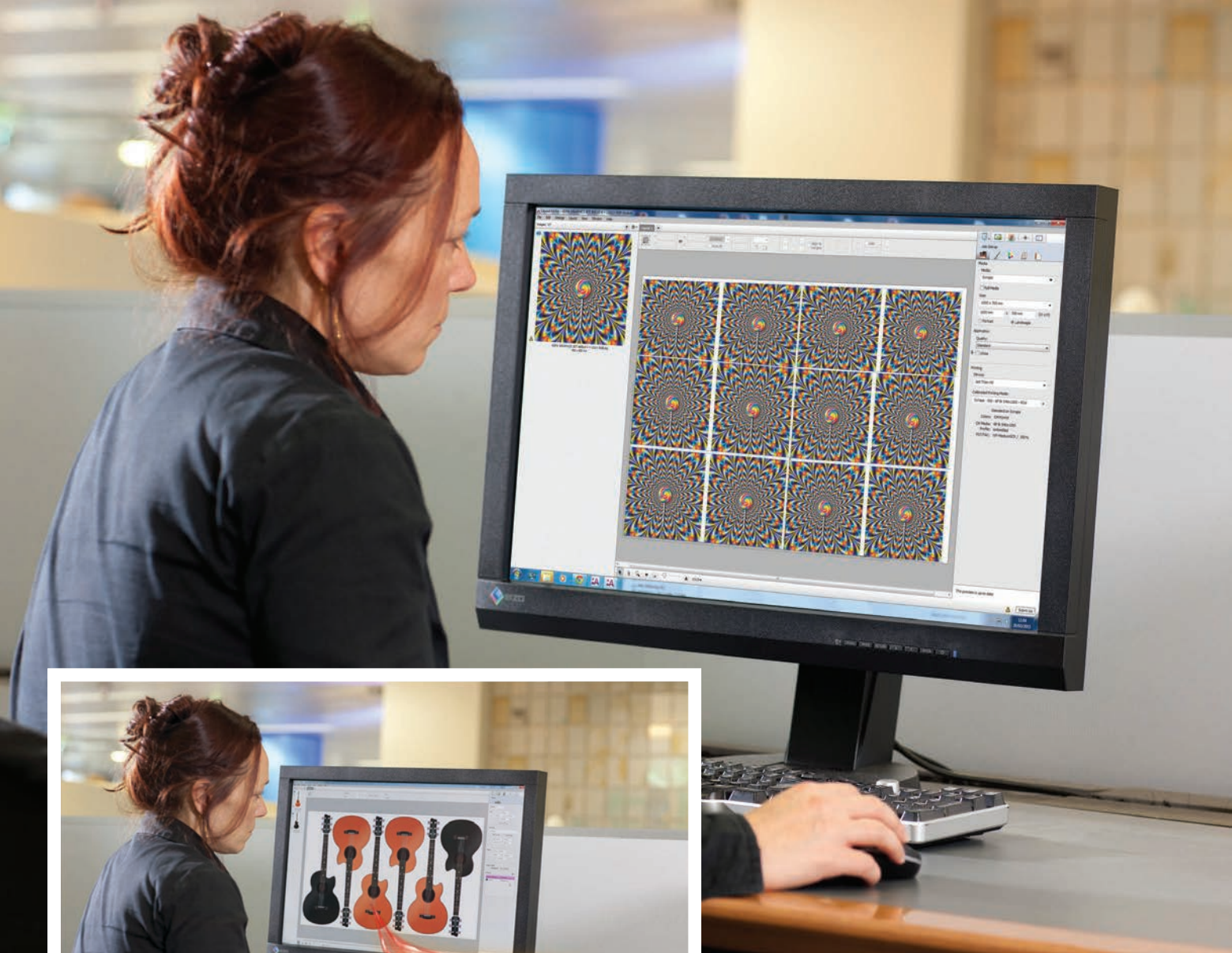


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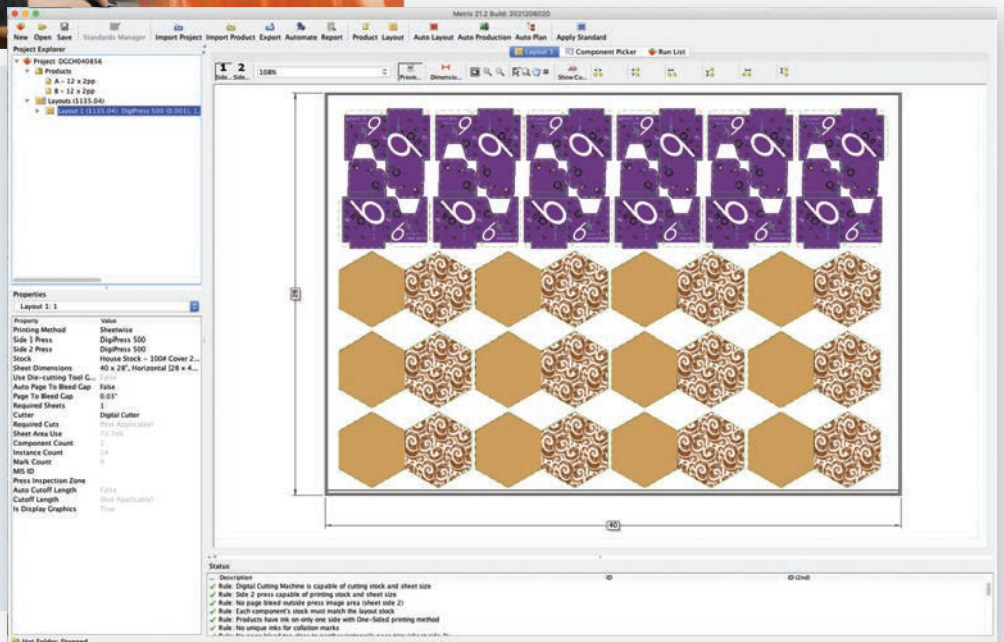
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Above: Agfa's Asanti storefront simplifies the ordering process by automatically moving each job into the production process after customers enter their template into the system. (Images courtesy Agfa) **Right:** Workflow management software makes it easier to optimize jobs by ganging similar ones together to use substrates more effectively. (Image courtesy eProductivity Software)



“As a manufacturer, we’re always looking for ways we can improve that time to market for customers, reduce touchpoints so that you can improve on automation,” Hutcheson says. “Presses just continue to get faster, which adds more and more bottlenecks. A lot of bottlenecks today are on the finishing side. Finishing manufacturers are looking at ways to improve their productivity because as presses get faster, the goal is to get off the press to the next step. You don’t want to lose the time you gained.”

Larry D’Amico, Durst Image Technology U.S., says his company’s one pass technology is highly automated. For companies in the corrugated segment, they are moving corrugated sheets to the press with no

manual intervention, using conveyors. Everything is computerized. The company’s presses can print 3,000-4,000 sheets per hour because of their level of automation.

“We have people moving stacks, flipping stacks, jogging and aerating stacks, moving to the printer and to the cutting device with nobody touching it,” he notes. “It is incredible to see.”

Fujifilm’s high production presses can save job settings, and if a shop has clients that use them on a weekly, monthly, or seasonal basis, the operator can set those jobs up using saved settings, including the type of media used, sheet size and thickness. The machine will call up all that information, which helpful with

the issues of labor shortage and turnover.

Fujifilm’s Onset flatbed printer has a robotic handling system that offloads onto a conveyor belt to take projects to the digital cutting system. It will also flip media when necessary, eliminating the need for an operator to intervene.

Job setup has always taken a lot of time, and Fujifilm has worked on automating just about every part of the printing process, including a vacuum bed that adjusts to reflect the sheet size so there is correct spacing between the sheet and the print head for best image quality. The high production machines are also set up to automatically clean the print heads between jobs, which saves time.

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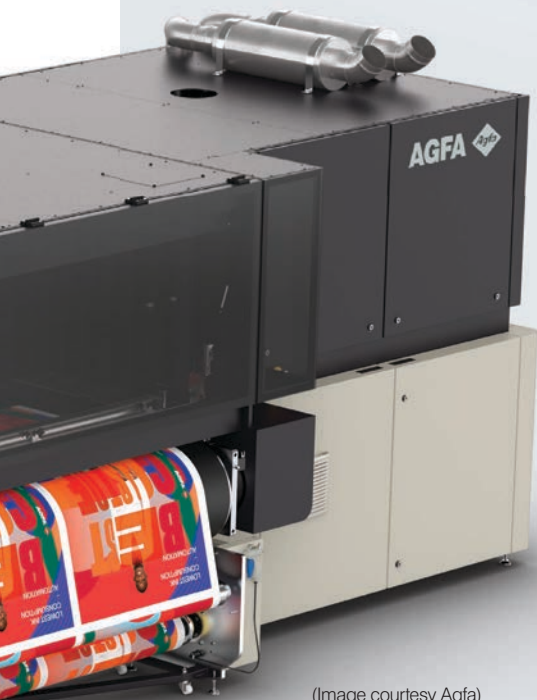
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New software options are making it easier for shops to enter jobs into the print queue ahead of time. (Image courtesy eProductivity Software)





(Image courtesy Agfa)

SOFTWARE

Workflow has improved dramatically and will continue to improve, Hutcheson says. Years ago, shops were set up with a RIP software and a printer. That has changed dramatically. She says when people talk about workflow, they are not talking about RIP software. They are talking about a dynamic process that is trying to streamline and automate as much of the steps leading up to getting a job on the press as possible.

Because everything can be automated upfront, “it helps to catch any type of mistakes upfront,” Hutcheson says. “Talking about cost efficiencies, you want to find out about an error before it hits the press. Anything you can do pre-flighting, prechecking up front helps to avoid costly mistakes.”

D’Amico says the term workflow can encompass so many parts of a printing operation, from automation tools on the equipment itself, like automatic feeding of materials through the machines, to the software that manages each job on the equipment.

New software options are making it easier for shops to enter jobs into the print queue ahead of time. That helps businesses with less experienced operators. A more experienced worker can set everything up to run during the first shift and then all the workers on the second shift need to do is switch out substrates when necessary. Everything else is taken care of, which saves on labor costs.

“What we’re seeing is more of a move to low touch, whether through xml, Hot Folders, spreadsheet imports, there has to be automation for these jobs,” says Nick Benkovich, eProductivity Software. “At the back end, the challenge for a lot of folks in wide format is that substrates are so expensive if you lose square inches here and there, suddenly you’ve lost the profit on it,” he explains. His company’s workflow management software makes it easier to optimize jobs by ganging similar ones together to use substrates more effectively.

He says supply chain disruptions have contributed to substrate cost increases of

20% to 30%, influenced by higher transportation and energy costs, and labor shortages caused by the pandemic.

“The front end, e-commerce portal reduces some sales costs and customer service interaction for more simplistic stuff,” Benkovich explains. For more complex point of purchase systems, companies save more because they can generate layouts and cutting files through the software. The software creates detailed layouts that look a lot like a game of Tetris as it fits as many jobs as possible on a particular substrate. Customers only have to enter all of the jobs they receive, the substrates they will be printed on and when they need to be completed by and the workflow management software makes the schedule and lays out how every job should be accomplished.

If a print shop handles all the window and floor graphics and shelf wobblers for major clients like McDonald’s or Buffalo Wild Wings that have hundreds of locations, eProductivity Software’s workflow solution can keep track of each location’s profile, from the number of windows and doors they have to the size of their footprint. That makes it easy to determine how many window clings

Job Code	Job Description	Customer	Job Status	Job Quantity	Job Due Date	Job Due Time
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138343	Progress Workflow Guide	Corporate Communications	Not Started	40,000	10/12/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 12:27 PM
138344	Gartenmarkt	Johnny's Juice Co.	Not Started	30,000	10/12/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 8:58 AM
138345	GCSE Maths 3.1	Abelake Publishers	Not Started	23,300	10/15/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 10:38 AM
138346	Home Improvement	ABC Publishing	Not Started	10,000	10/16/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 1:53 PM
138347	Math Book	Johnny's Juice Co.	Running	30,000	10/16/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 8:52 AM
138348	SA_Online Brochure 2	Johnny's Juice Co.	Not Started	30,000	10/16/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 9:53 AM
138349	Bevies Catalogue	Johnny's Juice Co.	Not Started	30,000	10/20/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 12:30 PM
138349	Holiday Specials	Johnny's Juice Co.	Running	30,000	10/20/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 10:30 AM
138349	Olived Product	Johnny's Juice Co.	Completed	3,250	11/02/21 10:30 PM	8/4/20 10:19 PM
138349	Beta Magazine	Johnny's Juice Co.	Not Started	30,000	11/02/21 12:00 PM	10/12/21 1:00 AM
138350	Home Improvement	ABC Publishing	Not Started	30,000	11/02/21 12:00 PM	11/02/21 12:12 PM
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138350	BB Katalog	Johnny's Juice Co.	Not Started	30,000	11/05/21 12:00 PM	10/11/21

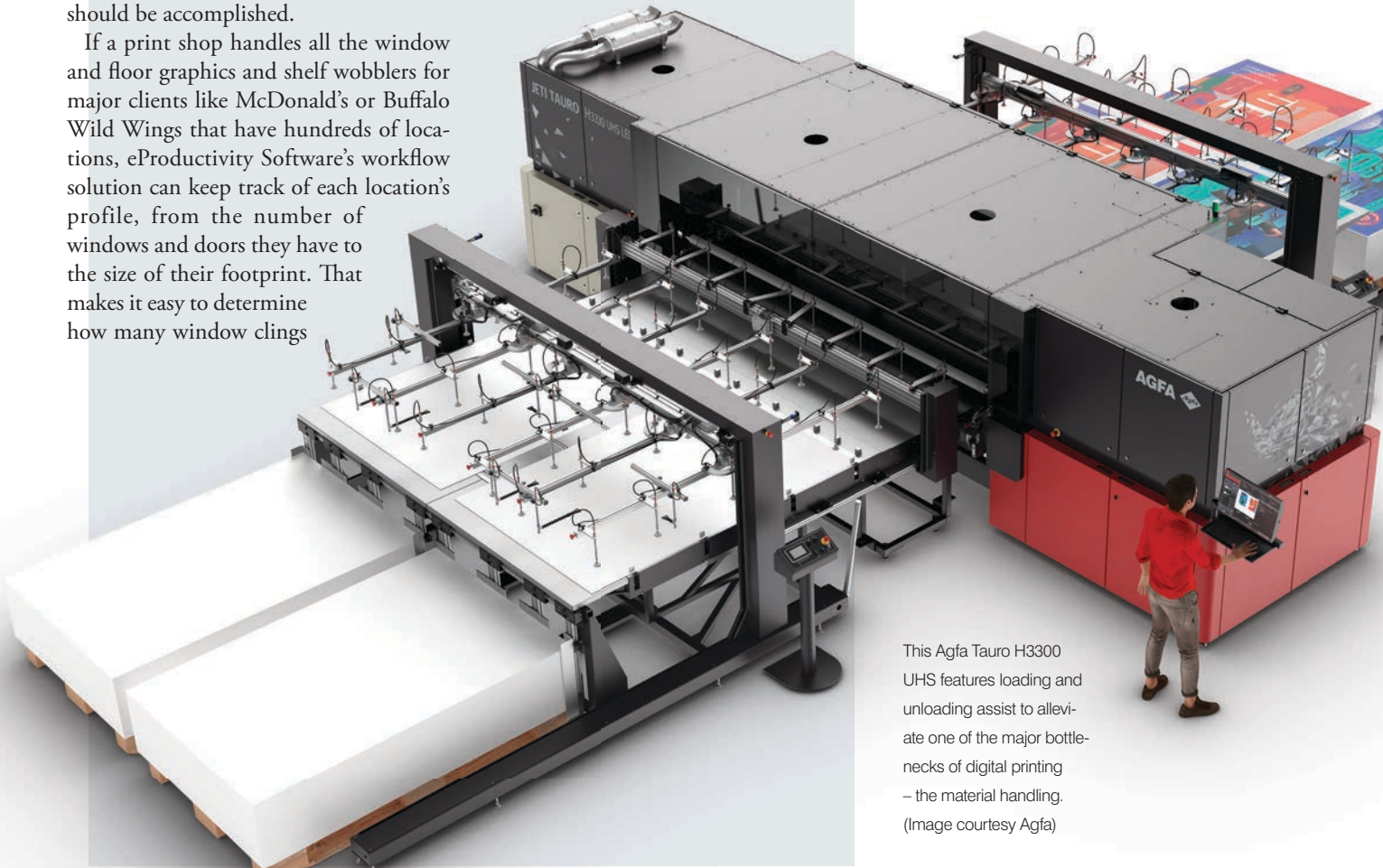
If a print shop handles all the window and floor graphics and shelf wobblers for major clients that have hundreds of locations, eProductivity Software’s workflow solution can keep track of each location’s profile. (Image courtesy eProductivity Software)

or floor graphics to produce when a client decides to change its in-store advertising campaigns.

One of the biggest challenges facing high-volume shops is the number of orders they receive each week, many of them short runs. Managing the schedule of

when jobs should be printed, cut out and grommets added has become fairly tricky.

The company’s software allows shops to look at each job, when it needs to be printed, what it is printed on, which device, what substrate and what processes need to come after, like cutting, die cut-



This Agfa Tauro H3300 UHS features loading and unloading assist to alleviate one of the major bottlenecks of digital printing – the material handling. (Image courtesy Agfa)

ting, sewing, or adding grommets. It will then create a dynamic schedule, sequencing the jobs for them so they can deliver each project on time.

If a schedule is already determined and a handful of additional rush jobs come in, the software will determine when those projects can be inserted into the schedule and help a company decide if a second shift is needed to meet the deadline.

Agfa's e-commerce storefront allows even smaller graphics shops to be open for business 24/7, allowing them to extend their capability without throwing multiple resources at it. Its Asanti storefront simplifies the ordering process by automatically moving each job into the production process after customers enter their template into the system. The system automates delivery of their print files. Instead of having to send them via email or Dropbox, Asanti Print Sphere receives the file that a customer puts in their folder and moves it to the press. The dashboard allows direct feedback from the press.

"When you talk about people dealing with very short timelines or trying to improve margins, our production dashboard tool provides an overview of ink and media consumption and printing time for each job," Hutcheson says. If a couple of boards are kicked out for whatever reason, the dashboard tracks that as well.

Durst's D'Amico says software options include customer interfaces, ones that do all the invoicing and billing, job definition, a whole ERP system and actual workflow does RIP and pagination before a job is output. Color management is another piece of the puzzle.

"If you are used to operating in an analog environment, digital workflows, adjusting files, pre-flighting files, many companies have never done that before and that is an incredibly important element," he says. "If you don't have enough foresight to hire the right people to handle that element, you are missing out." **GP**

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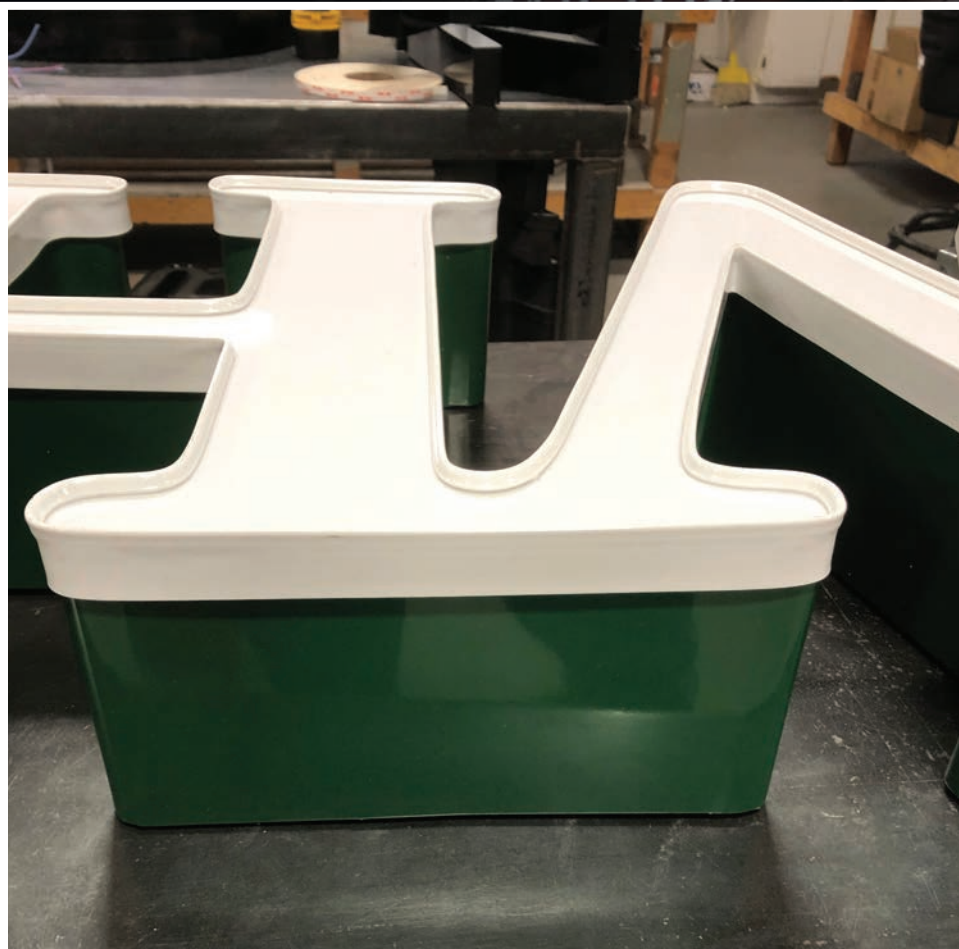
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So You Want to Dabble in Electric Signage?

ASK QUESTIONS BECAUSE THE DETAILS CAN BE OVERWHELMING



BY MATT
CHARBONEAU



If you've ever been sent to a job site without having all the information, then you can relate to why it's important to open up the access panel and look behind the sign band wall to determine what is back there, and how the channel letters are to be mounted. (Images courtesy Matt Charboneau)

Over the years, you've correctly provided your services to your client base, and you have built up a nice, loyal book of clients who trust you and your team to provide solutions to them for their (insert your specific service or product here).

However, you have been considering taking the leap into providing limited, simple, easy electric sign options for some of your clients' marketing needs. We're talking about electric sign projects such as channel letters, wall cabinets, an electronic message board or a small ground sign.

And, if you've done a few of these already, you may have discovered that there are a heck of a lot of details to wrap your brain around, and your designer may be scratching their heads as they page through UL Standards on how a channel letter is installed.

In addition to the mechanical specifications, there are details that must be obtained before anything



Creating a strip mall logo without knowing if they have one already, or even want one is an invitation to a big waste of time. If you ask, and they are open to it, run with it.

can be suggested, let alone designed for presentation to the client. Keep in mind that this is your client, the same client that you have personally stayed late to meet their last-minute deadlines, so that they never have a reason to look elsewhere for the items you provide them. You do not want to screw this up.

If this sounds anywhere close to your scenario, stick around to learn the basics of providing your client with a set of electric channel letters and the details you should look at gathering as part of the process.

You've probably guessed it, I'm back on my soapbox about learning (in detail) the restrictions, options, opportunities, and desires of the following:

- Your clients' ego or obligation to meet a certain expectation
- The landlord or building owner
- The city or county
- The engineer and/or architectural approval committee

These four topics must also mesh with:

- What job must the sign perform?
- The limitations of the materials used
- The distance it's being viewed from

- Outside influencers — neighbors/ architectural committees

The only way to obtain these details is to ask questions, along with old-fashioned investigative research to dig up what is needed for starting the project out with the highest potential for success.

GETTING STARTED

What is the need or what is the problem that needs to be solved?

I hope I haven't lost anyone with this first question, because it's the one question that I see overlooked more than finding out the budget. Yes, the client may ask if you make "signs that are individual metal letters that light up inside," but that in no way indicates why they need them, or what the role of the channel letters is for their business, at that location, for their industry, for matching their identity or brand.

Let's suppose we have a project where the client asks for "new signs" for the shopping center that he is responsible for managing. During the initial meeting, the client mentions, "Just come up with an idea that graphically ties in all of the signs we need, in our colors."

Well, that is a nice statement for your client to make, and it sounds like it might be information that the designer needs to know, but for a designer, it says absolutely nothing. That statement actually carries the same wealth of information as the statement, "I want my signs to be readable" or "I want my signs to be within my budget."

This is the first chance for the salesperson to either ask more probing questions or carry on with their sales call. Are you (the owner of the sign shop) the salesperson? Are you seeing any similarities in you or your salesperson's approach to selling an electric sign and the possible struggles you may have had with the design approval process?

Stop for a minute and think about the big picture of this channel letter project. The landlord is asking for this, not the tenants. That means you already have the agreement of every tenant in the shopping center — by way of the request of the landlord. So, it's already become a huge job with 10 tenants in this local strip mall and at this point, you need to find out who the decision maker is that you need to impress.



Asking the right questions provides you with the information you need to help your sign designer.

If you chose to jump ahead to design and whip up some ideas quickly just to get something to the client fast, you will most likely get an unhappy client. Why is that? Mostly because three key questions were not asked by the salesperson.

Question 1: Why do they feel the need to tie the signs together with common graphics? Is this an ego-driven project, a committee-driven requirement, or a corporate-driven request?

The answer has everything to do with the behind-the-scenes source for the desired look and feel of the signs for this job.

Ego clients can be the most fun and most rewarding to work with provided they realize who's in charge. If it's them, great. If not, you have to carefully manage that personality, so they feel that you are fully grasping and supporting their wants and needs.

The ego "manager" will choose the look they like, and then try to sell it to the committee, or worse yet, to corporate. Nope, it rarely works well as the manager's ego is not reflective of the committee's desires. You will be able to recognize this speed bump immediately upon the first rejection of your quick design packet. The ego-driven manager will try to explain how it wasn't the right look, when in reality the committee didn't like the manager's ideas, so the burden of coming up with a whole new design is on the designer, rather than being on the manager's bad taste in design.

That's when it's important to ask the question: Is there a design standard to follow, or will there be any upfront feedback from the final decision maker (committee or corporate) such as any examples found of other strip malls that feel like a good design fit?

Then they say, "Well yeah, they want a real boring conservative look, but I think it needs a western feel to attract the local residents better — I mean the strip mall is only a ¼ mile from the livestock sale barn but corporate is located in Washington — and they just don't get it."

Amazing how asking just one more question provided a deeper answer that has some real meat to it. Now, you have more light shining on the backstory, who the decision maker is, and why. Asking the right questions provides you with the information you need to help your sign designer. The sign meets the expectations of the decision maker(s) while also addressing the concerns of the local manager.

Question 2: Who is the final decision maker on the design?

So, yah, no matter how creative the manager's ideas are, if you don't find out



who is writing the check and approving the design, you could be spending hours and hours chasing a design for the wrong person.

Question 3: If you like the proposal I create, the price and the designs, what needs to happen in order for me to secure the contract for this project?

You would be surprised to hear how many times the answer is something like this:

“Oh, I’m not sure. Corporate came out last week and asked me to hire a sign company to come up with new sign ideas, but they didn’t say if they wanted to get them made this year or wait until the property is closed on by the new owners in 90 days. Man, I hope I can keep my position here, but yeah, that’s all they wanted. Is that OK?”

This is a huge bit of information that, frankly, you should have already known about by way of staying in the loop on all property transactions in the area. So,

that’s where you remember to always do your research with property records before driving 45 minutes for the appointment.

You could have easily wasted hours of time on a project for a property that isn’t even owned by the person you are speaking with.

Ask questions, ask lots of questions about the property, the management team, the tenants, the ownership group. You never know what bits of information you will come up with that will be the key piece of info that either helps you or kills the opportunity.

Turns out, the current owner of the property wanted to show the new buyer what new signs might look like on the property. Sure, it could end up in a sale, so at this point, you need to be speaking with the new ownership group, not these folks, but you need

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BENEFITS OF RACEWAYS

Channel letters mounted without a raceway require a minimum of four holes to mount the letter, and one hole for the power pass-thru. That is five holes in the sign band PER LETTER. Using a raceway provides three benefits and only one draw-back.

1. Easier to assemble and install as one sign unit
2. Fewer attachment holes and only one power pass-thru hole
3. Assembly in your shop means you can fully test the channel letter before install to troubleshoot any potential issues while it’s still in your shop

The only drawback is the look of the raceway but painting it to match the wall color in both sheen and color will help this element be less noticeable. **GP**



BRING THEM BACK FOR MORE

BUILD YOUR BUSINESS WITH REPEAT CLIENTS



BY CHARITY JACKSON

If your business provides a mediocre product with average customer service, you will constantly be chasing new customers. If you feel like you're continually advertising so you can bring in new jobs, but those projects don't turn into repeat business, then it's time to make some changes. We're in a custom industry that inherently creates repeat business since the customer goes through an initial process to set up their artwork with your company. If you provide good service and an excellent product, then it makes sense that they'll keep coming back.

Repeat customers build a stable foundation for your company by providing a steady income. You'll also find it's easier to manage a business built on established customers; artwork and colors will already be on file, and many projects will repeat a previous job, which speeds up production.

DEFINE YOUR SERVICES

Defining what your business specializes in and advertising those services is essential. When you first start out, it's tempting, and sometimes necessary,



Managing the graphics for multiple fleets of vehicles, from spot graphics to full wraps, is one of our main areas of focus. (All images courtesy Charity Jackson)



to take on anything that comes along. You have to start somewhere, and by tackling different kinds of projects, you can determine what you're good at and what you enjoy doing. Just be careful that you don't take on jobs too far outside your expertise, or that could cost you in the long run.

We have a C45 Contractor's License, and for quite a few years, we offered electrical signs. After a while, we determined that our profit margin was too slim in electrical signs. We didn't enjoy the permit process or the headache of working on-site, and there was too much local competition in that area. So, we stopped offering electrical signs, sold the boom truck we rarely used,

and shifted our focus to areas with a higher profit that we enjoyed doing.

INCOME SOURCES

We specialize in signs, banners, engraving, and wraps/fleets. We run many non-electrical signs through our shop, specializing in aluminum composite signs. For our banners, we outsource them, turning a good profit with minimal labor. Having a reliable wholesale printer for our banners and yard signs, we can do a high volume without impacting the rest of our production.

Engraving has been more of a niche service. We offer both laser and rotary en-

graving specializing in solar tags. This was a service built from customer requests, interest in the engraving industry, and technical knowledge in the area. Like choosing the types of signs we offer, we've done the same with our engraving. Just because we can do all kinds of personalized items, trophies, and plaques doesn't mean we want to. Getting into personalized engraving is a different type of service that we're not really interested in. By focusing on laser engraved solar tags, we streamline the material we need to stock, and we can turn around the products faster.

Since we started our business, we've offered vehicle graphics, and it's always been



Sometimes specialties are completely different from one another. While vehicle graphics are our main focus, laser-engraved solar tags are also a big market for us.



a decent chunk of our sales. When large-format printers came on the market and customers started asking about full-color graphics and wraps, our business quickly narrowed in on that market.

Last year, 49% of our sales were in vehicle lettering, wraps, and installation. 27% were signs and decals, 10% were banners, 5% engraving, and the other 9% were in window graphics, design, and dimensional letters. By knowing where our income is coming from, we can focus our efforts on profitable areas and let go of less profitable services that could be spreading us too thin.

REPEAT BUSINESS

Once you've defined the services you want to offer and determined the areas with the highest income and profit margins, you can start building your business around those areas. The best way to build your business is through repeat business. As I mentioned, repeat business streamlines



No matter what area of the sign industry you focus your efforts on, be sure your workmanship is as top-notch as your customer service.

your advertising efforts, simplifies production, and is an overall more efficient way to do business. There are five general areas that you should focus on to keep customers coming back to you: convenience, expertise, quality materials, workmanship, and pricing.

CONVENIENCE

Making it easy for your customers to do business with you is one of the most critical areas of building up repeat clients. Answering the phone, returning emails, getting quotes out on time, and keeping good records of their jobs will build the customer's confidence in your abilities.

Getting to know the customer and taking an interest in their projects helps



build a repertoire. Two or three of us primarily answer the phones, and when a customer calls in, we try to put the person most familiar with their account on the phone with them.

Building a one-on-one personal relationship ensures we ask the right questions and makes the time on the phone efficient for both the customer and ourselves. Paperwork for repeat clients is also organized in separate folders, making it easy for us to pull and reference for accurate duplication.

Much of our repeat business is the addition of a vehicle to a fleet. We like to see and measure vehicles ahead of time for our partial and full wraps, but we utilize Art Station Vehicle Templates for spot graphics jobs to quickly and accurately proof vehicles. These templates streamline the process, make our design and quote process more efficient, and get the customer's project into production quickly.

No matter what area of the sign industry you specialize in, look for ways to streamline your interactions with the customer. This isn't to rush your time with them, but rather to respect their time and make it easy for them to order from your company.

EXPERTISE

Another benefit of narrowing down the types of signs and graphics your business specializes in is it builds knowledge

in those areas. The more you work with a particular product or service, the more you learn. Passing this knowledge onto the customer through the sales process builds confidence in your ability to handle their project.

This isn't an obnoxious dump of information in a know-it-all-manner; rather, it's a quiet passing of knowledge by an-

swering questions, helping to steer them toward the right fonts, colors, and design elements for their project, and knowing what materials to recommend for a particular application. Subtle salesmanship builds confidence; you've earned a repeat customer when quality products and excellent workmanship back it.

QUALITY MATERIALS

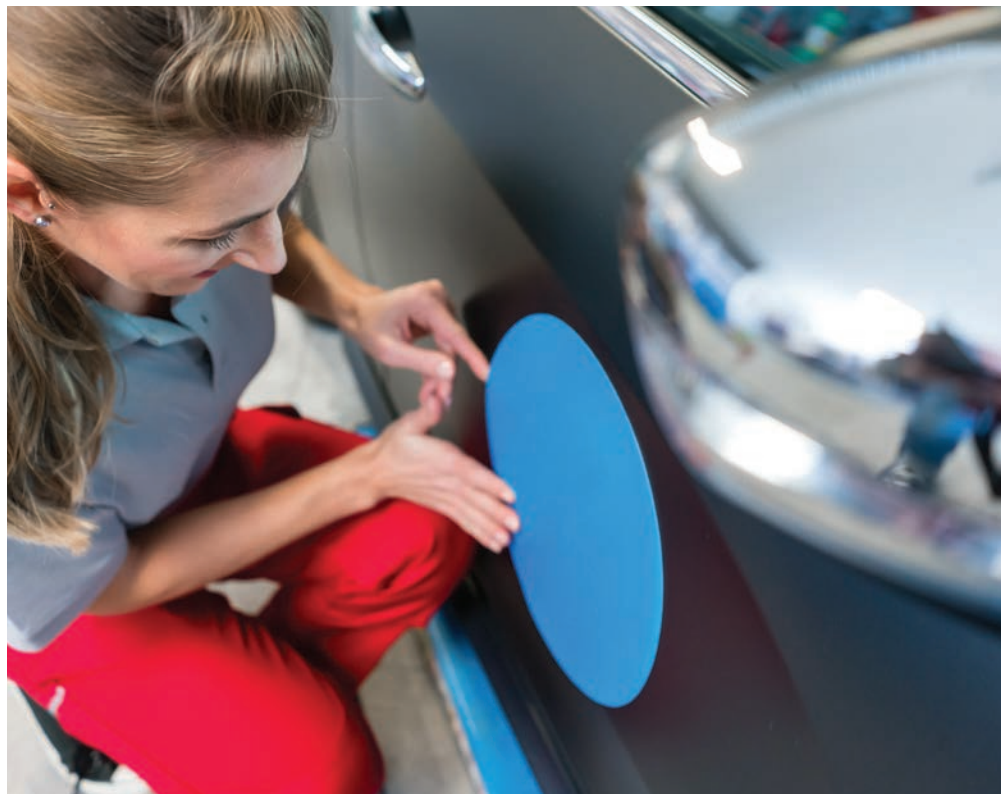
Whether we're selling a flat sign using calendared vinyl or a full wrap requiring premium media, we always use quality materials with proven performance. We've built up an arsenal of media and supplies over the years that we know we can count on to deliver a quality product.

We stick to a handful of materials and laminates to cover all our needs. We don't look for the cheapest material or constantly switch up product types – we stick with what works. We also listen to the customer's needs and ensure that the materials we choose will meet their needs and their budget.

WORKMANSHIP

Not only should the material you use be top quality, but the finish work on the proj-

continued on page 110





REPLACING CONTENT

WHAT'S NEEDED TO SEAMLESSLY CREATE COMPOSITE IMAGES

One of the advantages of using image editing software is its ease of performing seemingly complex tasks. When you think about it, there are so many ways to alter images to tell a specific story; whether to recolor an image to create a certain mood or to apply a filter to turn a photo into a drawing or painting or, most importantly and probably most commonly, to alter the actual physical content of a picture. The tools and techniques are all there so that virtually any effect can be achieved. In the exciting world of digital art, if you can imagine it, you can create it!

SIMPLE CONCEPT

The concept is simple. Combine two or more images into single undetectable

composite. I'm sure you've seen this done in most any media. When experienced, the effect can be stunning. To composite images successfully — seamless to the extreme and no trace of where one image ends and one begins — requires a sharp eye and bit of digital sleight of hand. The sequence of techniques that produces seamless compositing varies depending on the image and the range of values assigned to these techniques. Compositing then depends on your skill as a digital artist, your knowledge of the software, and your acuity of observation.

FUNDAMENTALS

Compositing images can be frustrating if you don't understand what the core

fundamentals are. The goal is to create an image where all of the elements in the composition are in place and the image doesn't appear to have been altered. The three most important considerations when adding or replacing picture content are:

1. The edges of the new content are undetectable
2. The colors perfectly match the existing colors
3. The direction of the light source is similar in both the source and destination images

LIGHT SOURCE

The first two considerations can be easily modified in Photoshop during the



Fig. 1: Sometimes flipping or rotating the source content is necessary so that the light source corresponds to the destination image. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

editing process, but the light source is a bit more difficult to control. Shadows should be cast in similar directions and highlights and reflections should be located on the same sides of objects of both source and destination images. If possible, choose images with similar light sources. A more radical choice is to flip or rotate the source content so that the light source corresponds to the destination image. (Fig. 1)

LAYERS

Composites are layer-based. Separate content resides on individual layers. Layers ensure that content remains isolated and easily selectable. The ability to target and manipulate a component of the image is a critical part of the workflow. Since layers are flexible units, their content can be moved, scaled, rotated, or otherwise transformed and even repositioned forward or backward within the picture plane. Furthermore, many of Photoshop's features are layer dependent — the workflow being non-linear and dynamic. **Heads up:** In the May issue of *GRAPHICS PRO*, DigitalEye will thoroughly examine the power of layers.

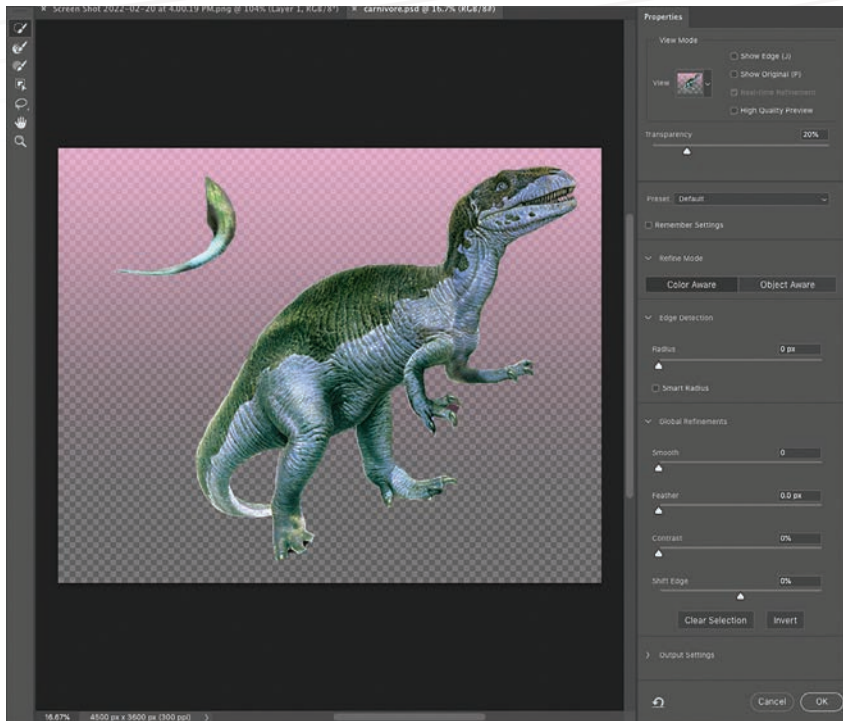
COLLAGE

A composite is created with images from multiple sources. Another word for a composite is a collage. Artists have been making collages since the mid-19th century. Back in the day, collages were made from cutout pieces of paper pasted together to form an image. (Fig. 2) Nowadays, the digital collage workflow is faster and more versatile providing a vast array of extraordinary features that enhance the credibility of the composite.

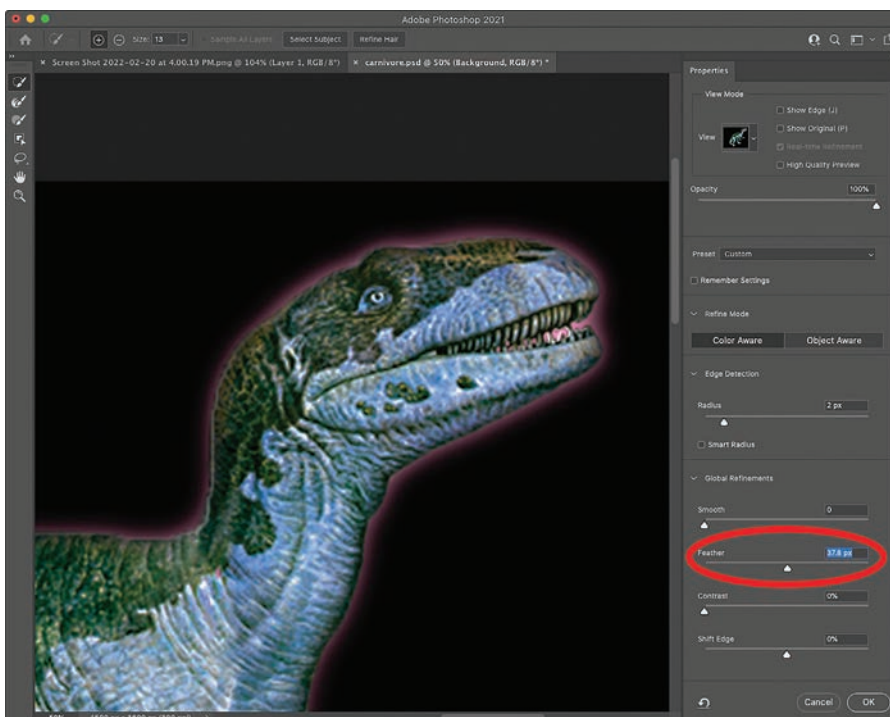


Fig. 2: Back in the day, collages were made from cutout pieces of paper pasted together to form an image. This image is from a surrealist novel called *Une Semaine de Bonte* by Max Ernst (1934).

THE DIGITAL EYE

**EDGES**

One of the most important aspects of the collage workflow is to be able to seamlessly blend the edges of a selection to the destination image where it will be placed. Photoshop has a Select and Mask feature that makes edge manipulation easy and predictable. (Fig. 3) The interface can display the content of the selection in a variety of views. The controls can manipulate the edge by expanding or contracting, feathering, increasing or decreasing contrast, or smoothing. Some of the controls in the Select and Mask interface even help select intricate or ambiguous edges such as fur or hair that contributes to the credibility of the composite. The preview gives a clear picture of what the results will be. With proper manipulation the edge can be made undetectable.

**FEATHERED EDGE**

Feathering the edges of the selected area creates a transition zone. A feather is a group of edge pixels that range from opaque on the inside and gradually become more transparent as they radiate outward over a specific distance. Feathering the edge of a selection softens it so that it blends into the destination background. (Fig. 4)

LAYER MASKS

A layer mask hides portions of a layer revealing the content of the layers below. Masks are quite useful for making composites. They piece together different objects without having to resort to destructive tools like the eraser.

Click the Add Mask icon in the layers panel, then simply start painting with the brush tool set to black to hide or white to reveal parts of a layer. If you've already made a selection from part of the layer, clicking the mask icon will convert the selection to a mask. Alternatively, set the output to Layer Mask in the Select and Mask feature.

Fig. 3 (top): Photoshop has a Select and Mask feature that makes edge manipulation easy and predictable.

Fig. 4 (above): A feathered edge is a group of edge pixels that range from opaque on the inside and gradually become more transparent as they radiate outward over a specific distance.

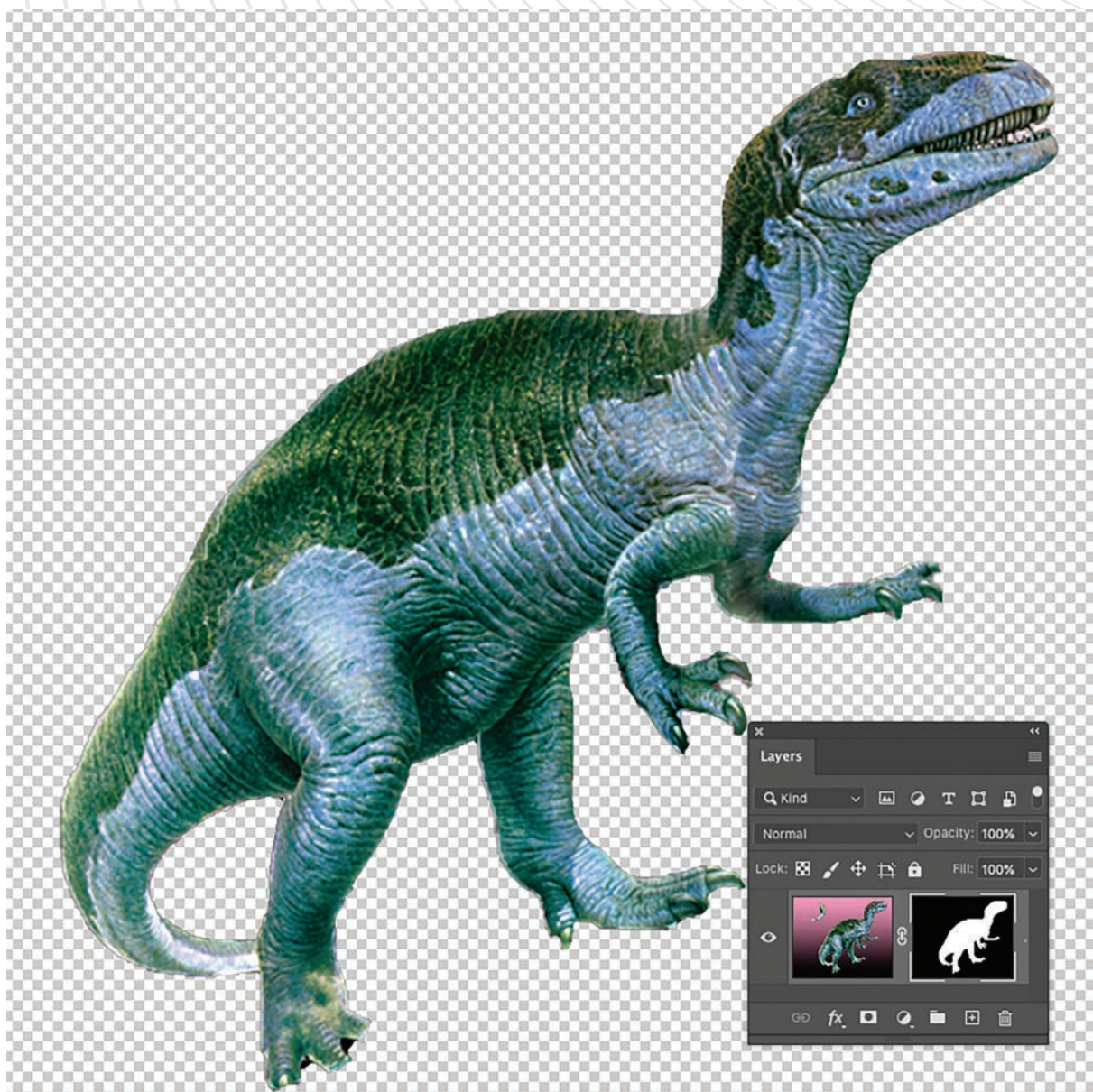


Fig. 5: When you add a mask, a thumbnail appears in the Layers Panel next to the thumbnail that shows the layer's contents.

When you add a mask, a thumbnail appears in the layers panel next to the thumbnail that shows the layer contents. (Fig. 5) If the layer thumbnail is highlighted rather than the mask, painting black will simply add black pixels onto the image. If the Layer Mask thumbnail is selected painting with black conceals and painting with white reveals the content.

COMPOSITING

Now you've isolated the separate elements onto individual layers, you can composite them into a single composition.

Use the Move Tool to position and transform the different elements into a composite. Select the tool and check Auto-Select Layer in the Tool Options. With this option selected, clicking on an element in the Image window will automatically select the layer. Check Show Transform Controls for a bounding box that gives you quick access to transforming options.

There are a few ways to copy different images into one document. Drag them across the image windows with the Move Tool. Other options are to use File > Place Embedded, or simply to copy and paste.

TRANSFORMING ELEMENTS

As you position all the different parts, you'll transform them to rotate and resize Layer content. Right-click while transforming to choose additional transformation options such as warp, skew, and perspective. While resizing, the original image maintains its proportions. To transform its proportions, press the Shift key while dragging.

SMART OBJECTS

A note about resizing: when you make a pixel layer smaller you actually eliminate

THE DIGITAL EYE

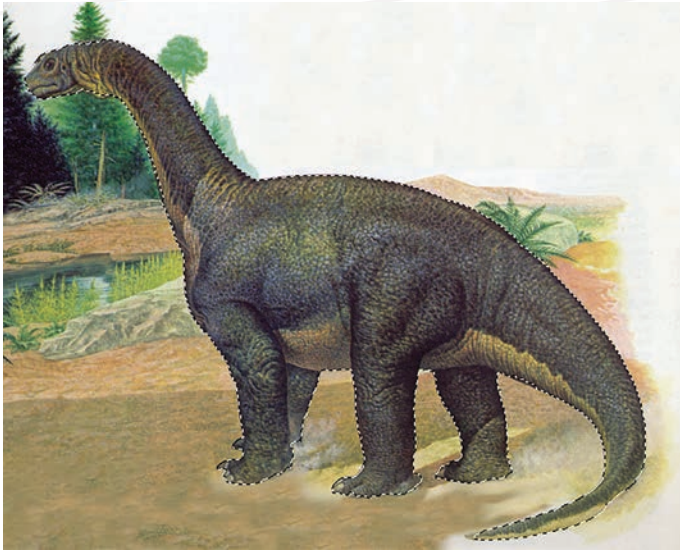


Fig. 6A

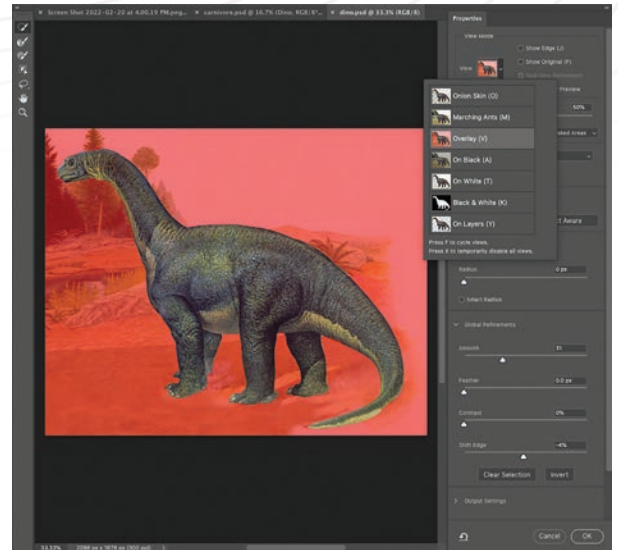


Fig. 6B

some of the pixels from that layer. That's OK if you want to keep it smaller. If you change your mind and want to make it bigger again you will compromise the quality of the element. To prevent this, right-click the layer and choose Convert

to Smart Object. Now you can transform an element as much as you like without a loss in quality — and also use filters non-destructively. To undo the smart object, go to the Layers menu and choose Rasterize > Smart Object.

WORKFLOW

Here is a typical step-by-step workflow for selecting source images and compositing them to a new document.

1. Start by making an accurate selection on the source photo. (Fig. 6A)
2. Choose Select and Mask and then choose appropriate viewing mode from the pull-down menu. (Fig. 6B)
3. Control the edge of the selection by refining its edge using one of the Select and Mask controls. (Fig. 6C)
4. Add a feather radius that will gradually blur the edge into transparency. (Fig. 6D)
5. Set the Output Options to New Layer with Layer Mask. Click OK. (Fig. 6E)
6. Choose the Move tool and drag the content (which is on a new separate layer) to the destination document. Position the new content over the area you want to replace.
7. Scale or rotate or otherwise transform the contents of the layer.
8. If necessary, apply a bit of dodging, burning, cloning, and/or color correction to get the images to look natural. (Fig. 6F)

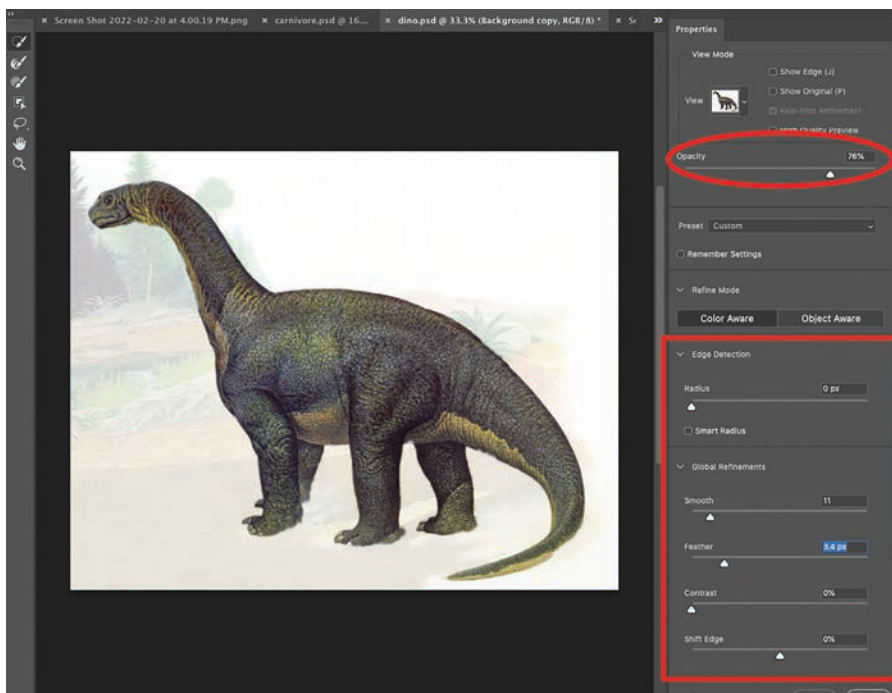


Fig. 6C

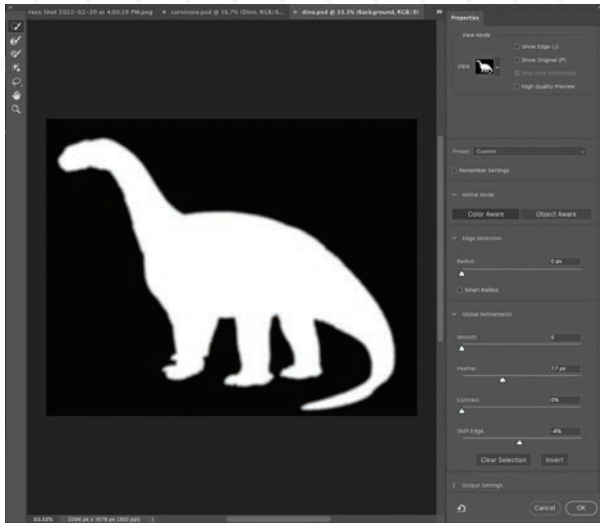


Fig. 6D

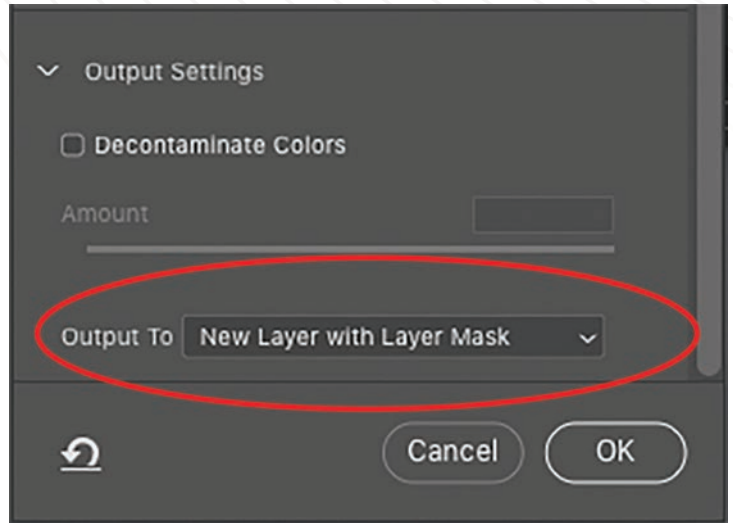


Fig. 6E

NEW REALITIES

Compositing is a powerful way to invent new realities or change existing ones. These techniques are most often a source of creative fun as we stretch our imaginations to invent fanciful images that tell a story. The fact that these images can look so realistic and are so easy to create should be motivation for you to give it a try. When done correctly, the results will boggle your viewer's mind. **GP**

STEPHEN ROMANIELLO is an artist and educator who has taught computer graphics since 1990. He is the founder of the Digital Arts program at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona. Stephen is a certified instructor in Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Premier and the author of numerous books, articles, and media on the creative use of digital graphics software. Stephen is the founder and CEO of GlobalEye systems, a company that offers training and consulting in graphics software and creative imaging.



Fig. 6F



COOL KIDS

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE DIVING INTO THE CHILDRENSWEAR MARKET

BY KRISTINE SHREVE



Pretty much everyone has cooed over the adorable baby in the cute, sublimated onesie, or checked out the fashion forward patches on the teen at Starbucks. There's the blinged out babies, and the appliqued cuties and the little guy in your child's preschool class who always has the most adorable, screen-printed band shirts. Embellished clothing for kids is big business and can be a significant profit center for a garment decoration shop, regardless of the type of decoration done. There are, however, some things to consider before you dive into this market.



(Images courtesy LynniePinnie.com)



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SAFETY FIRST

One issue is safety. We all know there are safety regulations that center on children's clothing and how it is decorated. Choking is one concern. Anything that could be pulled off a garment and swallowed, like a pom-pom, charm, or rhinestone, could be a potential hazard. Decorators who use these sorts of items need to ensure everything is well secured and can't be removed.

Lead can also be another issue, with the total lead content on children's clothing limited to no more than 100 ppm. This can be an issue when it comes to vinyl and crystal rhinestones. Some vinyl is also made with PVC (polyvinyl chloride) which can be toxic to young children.

There is also the issue of flammability. Certain types of fabrics can't be used in children's clothing at all because they burn too easily. Embroidered designs may cause issues if there are loose threads, or if the back of the embroidery scratches or abrades tender skin. Child safety is clearly



Embellished clothing for kids is big business and can be a significant profit center for a garment decoration shop, regardless of the type of decoration done. (Image courtesy Fat Dad Custom Designs)

important, and the Consumer Protection Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) has several regulations related to infant and children's products to make sure kids stay safe.

The good news is that complying with these regulations isn't as difficult as some might want to make it seem. Yes, it may require a bit of research and extra work, but the payoff is safer children and merchandise that can be sold without the worry of a lawsuit in the future.

Let's start with ink. To protect yourself against any issues, make sure the ink you use on children's clothing comes with documentation from the supplier or manufacturer that shows that the ink has been cleared according to CPSIA. Make sure this documentation is kept on file and can be produced regarding any clothing you make for children. Another way to get around this issue is to print with water-based ink, which doesn't have any of the components that cause issues.

Like screen printing ink, CPSIA compliant vinyl can also be purchased for use on children's clothing. As with the ink, you should be able to get documen-

tation from your supplier that the vinyl in question has been tested and meets the necessary requirements.

For embroidery, protecting children may be as simple as covering the back of the embroidery with fusible poly mesh stabilizer, ensuring there will be no abrasion or rubbing. This is a common technique that is often used with infant onesies. Another best practice for embroiderers who deal with childrenswear is to make sure all garments are meticulously trimmed and that any hanging or protruding decorations that could be pulled off are firmly secured.

Decorators that use rhinestones will want to determine the lead content of the stones they use, and the chemical makeup of the glue used to hold the rhinestones to the item being decorated. The glue also needs to be strong enough to hold the stones in place securely, so they can't be removed and swallowed. CPSIA compliant stones are available, so decorators who use rhinestones on childrenswear will want to pursue that option.

CURRENT TRENDS

Now that the safety issue has been discussed, the next question is what are the current trends in kidswear? While Bobby might love his SpongeBob applique shirt and Mikayla may find delight in her prin-



Make sure the ink you use on children's clothing comes with documentation from the supplier or manufacturer that shows that the ink has been cleared according to CPSIA. (Image courtesy Fat Dad Custom Designs)



If you're wondering if decorating children's clothing is worth your time and effort, think about this, the infant apparel market alone is worth \$3 billion and is growing every year. (Image courtesy LynniePinnie.com)



cess themed backpack, trends in kid's clothing do change with the seasons, just as adult fashion does. While the kids might not be aware or care, their parents just might. Here are five trends to watch out for this year:

1. **Oversize and layering** — One of the trends in kidswear for 2022 is an emphasis on comfort. Oversize clothes let kids move more easily. Layering can be adjusted for comfort as weather and temperature dictate.
2. **Mommy (or Daddy) and me** — Dressing the whole family alike or in similar themed garments is a trend that experts say will be seen in 2022. Decorators could capitalize on this by making themed family shirts or jackets.
3. **Cartoons, emojis, applique** — Applique is big on kid's clothes in 2022. Whether it's a cute rabbit or a grinning emoji, appliques are showing up front and center on all kinds of garments. This is great news for embroiderers.

4. **Patches** — With the recycling trend, and the issues with the supply chain and getting new garments, repairing and making do, along with reducing waste and additions to landfills have become more important. Patches are used as accent pieces and decoration and as a way to cover holes or make a piece of clothing last longer.
5. **Organic clothing** — You've heard of organic vegetables, now meet organic clothing. Organic clothing is clothing made from cloth that has been developed from materials that were grown in compliance with the standards of organic agriculture. As people come to care more about what goes into and on their bodies, this trend will only see growth.

MARKET OPPORTUNITY

If you're wondering if decorating childrenswear is worth your time and effort,



One of the trends in kid's clothes for 2022 is an emphasis on comfort. Oversize clothes let kids move more easily. (Images courtesy Fat Dad Custom Designs)

think about this — the infant apparel market alone is worth \$3 billion and is growing every year. New babies are coming into the world every minute, and they all need clothes. According to Statista.com,

the global childrenswear market is forecast to grow to \$239 billion by 2023. A large portion of that market is concentrated in the United States, so there's a lot of money out there waiting to be collected. Trends in personalization and clothing that are unique to the wearer will continue to grow and increase in popularity. This means decorators with flair who enter this market should have a good chance of success.

SELLING SUCCESSFULLY

For those looking to enter the children's clothing market, there are a few things you need to navigate to be sure you're creating and selling properly. The first, mentioned earlier in this article, is safety. Make sure you know what the safety regulations are for whatever decoration technique you're using. Obtain the necessary certifications from vendors and be sure those are filed safely and can be accessed if needed. Be aware of things like choking hazards, toxicity, and other potential safety violations. CPSIA violations can cause fines and other headaches, so make sure your business is doing everything it can to stay in compliance.

Another issue that needs to be addressed, although it shouldn't have to be, is copyright. Every year there are decorators who are fined or even lose their businesses be-



Whether it's a cute rabbit or a grinning emoji, appliques are showing up front and center on all kinds of garments. This is great news for embroiderers. (Image courtesy LynniePinnie.com)

cause they use copyrighted designs in their work. This sort of thing has been justified in a lot of ways. The idea that changing a certain part of the design by a certain percentage is protection, the gamble that your business is too small to be noticed or caught, the hope that buying a design from a certain company gives rights to use that design on materials for sale. The easiest way to avoid this issue is to not use any designs unless you are certain you own the rights to the design. If you purchase a design from another company, make sure you read the license agreement and understand clearly what you can and can't do with the design. Copyright is an important issue and one that decorators often ignore to their peril. It's always better to be safe than sorry, so make sure you understand the issue and are

aware of the rights you have when it comes to using designs you didn't make.

As for where to sell kidswear, the options are really endless. You can help someone who wants to start a kid's fashion line by contracting to print their designs. Craft fairs and bazaars, especially at the holidays, can be great places to sell unique, decorated kidswear. Schools can offer a wide range of opportunities for selling decorated children's apparel for sports teams and clubs. Another fertile venue for sales could be extracurricular activities. From karate to dance to gymnastics to cheer, there are a lot of shirts, backpacks, bags, belts, and other apparel that may need personalization or decoration. Etsy or Amazon can also be good places to sell your work. You could also, of course, set up your own website or

sell through a brick-and-mortar shop. The main thing to remember, wherever you choose to sell, is that safety is very important, and you need to be sure the supplies you use, and the finished garments you sell are compliant with all safety rules and regulations. **GP**

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

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DOLPHINS CHALLENGE CANCER

The Miami Dolphins made off-the-field news when announcing an historic \$75 million commitment to Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center to improve the lives of those impacted by cancer. Dolphins Challenge Cancer (DCC) aligns with Sylvester's mission to fund research that addresses disparities in care for minority communities, supports medically underserved populations, identifies ways to reduce risks for firefighters and promotes preventative care habits, among its many initiatives. It has evolved from a standalone event to a year-round movement to provide increased awareness, funding and the research needed to save more lives in the community. The Dolphins have been involved in the fight against cancer since the inception of the Dolphins Cycling Challenge changed to Dolphins Cancer Challenge in 2010.

The organization has rebranded its effort as the Dolphins Challenge Cancer to reflect its year-round mission beyond the annual cycling event. The DCC will continue to host its signature event, highlighted by its 100-mile ride. Participants have the option to ride, run, or walk on the route of their choosing, or in person at Hard Rock Stadium.

Some of us are weekend warriors. Some of us are serious athletes. Not so sure about a 100-mile ride though. At Primal, they make the clothing and accessories to answer that call should we choose and are in fact a major sponsor for DCC XII.

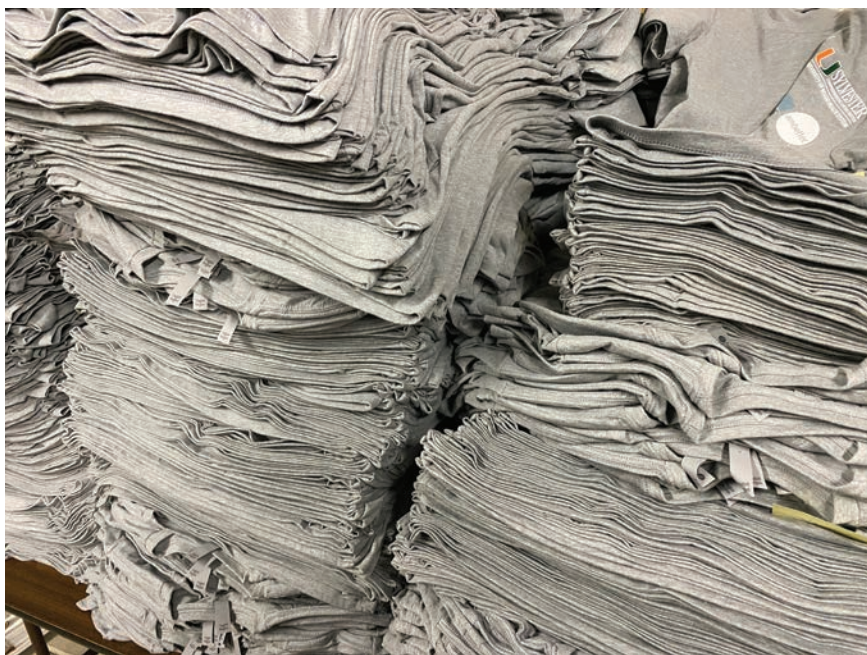
We have been working with Primal 30-plus years now. They are an aggressive bicycle clothing line specializing in dye-sublimated biking apparel. We don't do much of their dye sub work as they source it overseas. We do, however, handle the

screen printed and embroidered merch. Some simple and some not so simple.

As we downloaded the art for DCC XII we found some problems in the files. Primal — which you may recognize from previous articles — has challenged us frequently, particularly with the sponsors on the back. This is common on bike and other runs. A multitude of supporting sponsors' logos fill up the back of the rider shirts.

Sponsor as a noun is defined as a person or organization that provides funds for a project or activity carried out by another, in particular. "The money came from sponsors." The verb means to provide funds for a project or activity or the person carrying it out. "Joe is being sponsored by his church."

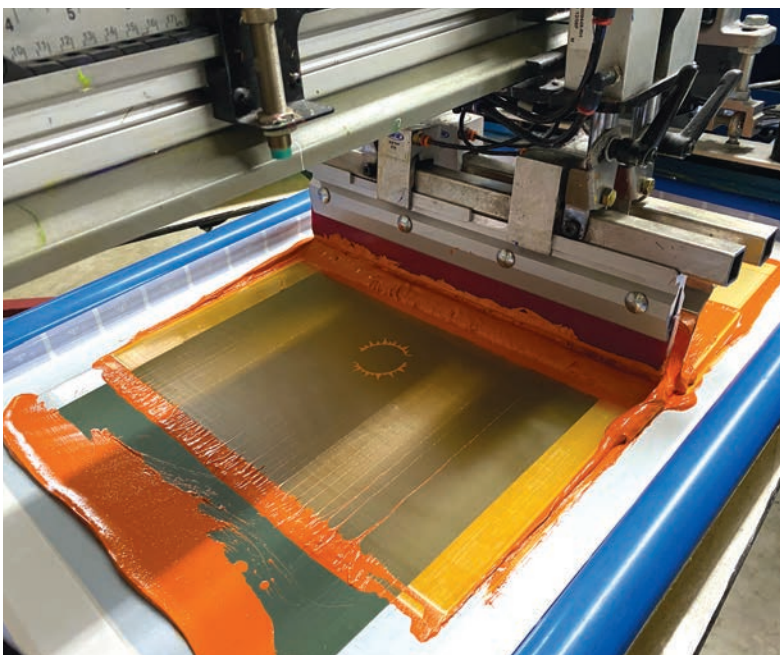
Ugh! In this business, the dreaded sponsor's back for any event may be one



We've been working with Primal 30-plus years now. They are an aggressive bicycle clothing line specializing in dye-sublimated biking apparel. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)



Some logos were vector and some not so much.



While the color department was mixing the Miami Dolphins and University of Miami colors using our mixing system, the screen department prepared our screens.

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



In this business, the dreaded sponsor's back for any event may be one of the most challenging projects we get.



We started with unbased dark blue on a 230. Wanting a clean opaque print on heather, our first down white screen would go on 156 TPI (thread per inch), both stretched to 30 N/cm perpendicular and parallel on work hardened retensionable frames.



In the end, the client was pleased, and we look forward to participating in DCC XIII.

of the most challenging projects we get. While supportive of the causes, particularly DCC XII, we knew we might struggle with what seems simple to the organizers of the events. Always event-based and time-sensitive. Creating, or should we say re-creating the “sponsors” back has challenges. While the files have improved considerably over the years, it’s never easy. In this case, the sponsors individual logos were collected, and a file was sent to us as a PDF to size. This is what we typically ask for from our customers. Not so fast! After opening it in Illustrator, the file had multiple colors with several linked files and low-resolution JPEGS. Some logos were vector and some not so much. Digital version of the bar napkin. 1" X 1" 72 DPI GIFs?

We ran a trace on the less than perfect logos in need of vector conversion. The colors we would keep were identified with spot colors rather than the process colors initially indicated in the file. The selection process allowed the colors to be outputted individually. Selective white printer or underbase and highlight white were necessary as the shirts were heather. We selectively placed certain parts of the logos on the base and removed them from the highlight and vice versa. Some of the small areas didn’t require two whites. We wouldn’t have to fight small points of registration or areas filling in on press. To maintain clarity, we made adjustments by opening very small negative spaces and increasing line weights in tiny positive areas. We also dropped some outlines, increased spacing, and had to blow up many trademarks (™) and circle R’s (®). This all helped us from smearing. With all these sponsors and the DCC XII imagery, this final image would nearly max out on press at 20".

The front was built much better and basically easy enough to set up for seps — same colors as the back but provided ready to place. We placed the EPS files individually into Illustrator onto our registration board. Because of the small scale, we opted to output our halftones at a 55 LPI (lines per inch) at 22.5 on CTS.

While the color department was mixing the Miami Dolphins and University of Miami colors using our mixing system, the screen department would prepare our screens. Print order was a bit creative for minimal smearing, wiping and max production. It would be 5,000 pieces after all. We had better be able to run steady. We started with unbased dark blue on a 230 and since we were going on heather and wanted a clean opaque print our first down white screen would go on 156 TPI (thread per inch), both stretched to 30 N/cm perpendicular and parallel on work hardened retensionable frames. After a flash and smoothing station, the subsequent colors and the highlight white would go on 230s at the same tension. A quick set up on press using our pre-registration system, and we were ready to run. To keep the ink

deposits thin and minimize any smearing, the squeegees were 75/95/75 triple-ply dual-durometer. The 10,000 impressions ran without incident.

After the early wrestling match with the original files, the client was pleased, and we look forward to participating in DCC XIII. The printing not the ride, ha! **GP**

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



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PUT YOUR LOGO TO WORK

Remember the parable about the cobbler's children, and how they often have no shoes? It turns out that apparel decoration professionals are not much better than that cobbler when it comes to using our own logo well, often, and wisely. Yet here we are, waist deep in trying to advise our customers how to use their logos more often and in more ways. It is time to put your logo to work.

Today, we are going to take a good look in the mirror and see how we are using our own logo or company name. Let's explore ways to use our logo more often

and more effectively. Some suggestions will be easy to adopt. Some suggestions will be dismissed outright. Some suggestions may take a minute to settle on you in such a way that it feels like a good idea to try. No matter what happens, at least you will have a better appreciation for the nearly endless possibilities when it comes to putting a logo to work for a business. And that, my friend, will help you advise your customers the next time they ask you for ideas!

There is no doubt that your customer knows about you and your business. Yet, the odds are very high that they are

not the only person that will be wearing all the apparel they purchase from you. They are going to hand out these products to their team, employees, customers, friends, family, and potential customers. None of these people know where the logo'd item came from unless you include or attach your business information to each item in some way.

There are several ways to accomplish this:

- Tuck a business card into the neckline of every shirt
- Tuck a business card into the inner headband of every cap
- Apply a garment care sticker to every apparel item with washing info and your company name and website
- Use a tagging gun and tag every item with a business card that provides care instructions on the reverse side

All of these methods are temporary, meaning the person that receives the product may or may not keep your business card or information. But at least they were exposed to your company name and information, even if briefly. And who knows, they may hang on to that business card, as there is something magical about these little pieces of cardstock that makes them tough to get rid of. I bet that you have a pile of other peoples' business cards tucked away somewhere in your own life.

Alisha Hayes of Hayes Custom Creations does an excellent job making sure that her business information is included in every order that leaves her business. Her business information is on the order paperwork and on her packaging. When she handmakes a product, it has a tag with her logo on it.



Image courtesy Alisha Hayes / Hayes Custom Creations.

There are more aggressive ways to share your company information:

- Add your own label into products
- Heat press your company name on the inside neckline of shirts
- Heat press or embroider your company name on the sleeve, tail, or locker patch area of shirts

Bill Remy of CJL Sports negotiates for permission to print his company information on any order that contains some sort of “sponsors” information. “I offer to print the one-color imprint of the sponsor placement for free if they let me add my company to the list. It is a win-win. My customer sees a lower price, and I get my business name out there

in front of more people,” Remy explains.

Melissa Gobble of SP101 Custom Apparel takes the same approach, stating, “We give the customer a discount for adding our logo to their item. We ask customers that we think would give us the most exposure if they would like to add our logo for a discount.”



Image courtesy Melissa Gobble / SP101 Custom Apparel.

STITCH SOLUTIONS

Do you feel strange about asking your customer for permission to add your logo?

Krissi Dane of KDdid-Designs LLC shares how she does it: “I do often add my logo to items that I do for my customers. Occasionally, we add it on the sleeve, hem of the shirt, or if there is space available in the neck of the shirts where a tag usually goes, I will heat press a logo in there. I always ask permission if it is going to be seen by other people.” Dane continues, “Since I build relationships with my customers, I am pretty aware of which customers are onboard with the idea and which are not, but it never hurts to ask. I always consider if it will be beneficial to both my customer and myself before asking. I don’t want to draw attention away from their own logo or advertise-



Image courtesy Kerry Pogue / TKO Custom Designs.

You can also sponsor special projects, and maximize the exposure of your logo, like **Kerry Pogue of TKO Custom Designs**. After a tornado hit their area, they jumped in to help raise funds by creating custom shirts, caps, and beanies. She put their logo in the bottom corner of the design. Pogue explains, “We sold around a thousand products, donating over \$5,000 to the recovery fund! Multiple companies contacted us to order shirts after seeing these products.”

If you create and sell retail products, you should add your company logo to them! Nike products always sport the Nike swoosh, right?

Jim Heiser of Bullseye Activewear Inc. prints a custom patch which it sews onto their retail products. This creates a distinctive and effective brand identity for his company.

And then there is **DC, Derryl Caldwell, the Mad Hatter**. He takes promoting his logo to an entirely different level! DC belongs to several different organizations in his market and is involved in the membership committees. He donates entire orders of products embroidered or printed with the organization’s name on the front, and his logo on the sleeve or the back to new members and even to the leadership of these organizations. We are talking dozens and dozens of products. People keep telling him he is nuts for his “excessive” donations, as they do not understand the influence and goodwill that he generates. For DC, it is a numbers game. For every \$100 of donated goods, he generates thousands of dollars in new business. “Believe it or not, it is the most effective marketing I do. It brings in the best new customers. Money well spent, in my mind!” he claims.



Image courtesy Derryl Caldwell / DC Mad Hatter.

Your company name and logo are some of your most valuable assets. Your work is all about helping your customers use their logos often and well. Show your customers the power of using their logo on apparel and products by sporting your logo every chance you can. If you struggle with ways to effectively put your logo to work for your business, email me at jennifer@nnep.com, subject: Logo Promotion, and I will send you some ideas to help you amplify your logo's exposure! **GP**



Image courtesy Jim Heiser / Bullseye Activewear Inc.

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@nnep.com.

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The Fight for Sustainability

COMPANIES PUSH FORWARD WITH INITIATIVES TO REDUCE THEIR FOOTPRINT



BY STEFANIE
GALEANO-ZALUTKO

As consumers march toward a more mindful carbon footprint, eco-friendly products have a more prominent role on store shelves – and corporate environmental responsibility is becoming a larger part of the green narrative. Consumers are taking a more holistic view of sustainability, looking beyond the end result to consider distribution, production, and even materials sourcing and worker compensation, says Jay Hertwig, vice president of commercialization at Unifi, a global textile solutions provider and maker of recycled fiber REPREVE.

“Modern consumers are part of a highly-connected world,” he says. “More and more, they understand we have large plastic gyres in our oceans; they understand our natural resources are being depleted and, as a result, they have a heightened awareness of the importance of protecting our environment for future generations. Our customers understand that consumers expect them to be a part of that solution.”

According to the 2021 Global Sustainability Study, approximately 85% of surveyed international consumers said they had altered their purchasing behavior in favor of more sustainable choices during the past five years. The study, which spanned 10,000 people across 17 countries, revealed how these buying behaviors vary by country and generation.

Lane Seven Apparel says on average, one fleece hoodie uses recycled polyester made from nine post-consumer bottles – resulting in 18 million recycled plastic bottles during 2021. (Image courtesy Lane Seven Apparel)



John Schluter and Doug Easthouse founded Easiway in 1980, with a goal to supply the graphic arts industry with screen-cleaning products that are safer for the workplace and environment. (Images courtesy Easiway)

“Younger generations, particularly those which fall into the Millennial and Gen Z categories, are more concerned about environmentalism and sustainability. They’re seeing the impact that fast fashion has on our planet – that it’s not kind to the environment – and are changing their shopping habits,” Hertwig says. “We have to do better and incorporate more eco-friendly ways into everyday life.”

Traditionally, the graphics industry receives poor marks in the area of sustainability. Conventional materials, overproduction, and unrecyclable scrap can strain natural resources, impact carbon emissions, and create massive waste in landfills. As a result, forward-thinking industry leaders are stepping up to find effective ways to balance a commitment to sustainability without stifling creativity or sacrificing quality.

Some mission-oriented companies, like Everywhere Apparel, are fully committed to sourcing 100% recycled materials, which guarantee the lowest environmental impact.

“A lot of companies are working on advanced sustainable technology that really can’t be applied today, or not at scale,” says Everywhere’s Irys Kornbluth, co-CEO. “But we can be more sustainable at scale – and that’s what we’re here to prove. Just by replacing all the [traditional] materials with next-generation options [like 100% recycled cotton], we’re able to be more sustainable and have a massive impact within the existing production structure.”

At other companies like Unifi, Lane Seven Apparel, and Atlantis Caps, sustainability initiatives emerged from a desire to upgrade materials, clean up the supply chain, integrate renewable energy resources, or reduce and recycle superfluous waste sent to landfills.

Whether driven by stewardship and earthly metrics, keen foresight in consumer demand, or a combination of both, company leaders agree sustainability is a spectrum everyone can participate in at some level. The case studies below demonstrate how companies of every size can hold themselves to a higher standard, with seemingly insignificant changes adding up to have rolling impacts, Kornbluth says.



EASIWAY SYSTEMS

John Schluter and Doug Easthouse founded Easiway in 1980, with a goal to supply the graphic arts industry with high-quality, competitively priced screen-cleaning products that are safer for the workplace and environment.

“Easiway is proud to be focusing on choosing safer alternatives and minimizing water consumption before environmental sustainability was even talked about in the industry and mainstream media,” notes Sara Monet Schluter Broghamer, chief operations officer at Easiway Systems. “The products offered over the years were safer before customers knew that is what they wanted.”

Whereas most competitors may turn to less expensive but more dangerous components when formulating their products, she says Easiway steers clear of harmful raw materials altogether to stick to its mission.

The company also pioneered dip tank soaking as a safe and effective way to clean ink and emulsion off screens – a win for water conservation. Other methods may include four or more products, all of which need rinsing. With Easiway, Schluter Broghamer says most of these steps are combined into a single soaking solution that requires one, maybe two, rinses.

However, she insists that the people behind the products truly advance the company’s mission. Easiway holds an edge in research and development, Schluter Broghamer says, pointing to a knowledgeable team keeping up with ever-changing laws, regulations, and restricted substance lists.

“This positions Easiway to have solutions in all areas, whether it is VOC limitations, RSLs, or local municipality requirements,” she explains. “Printers can trust Easiway has a [safer and better] solution or is up for the task to customize one.”

Easiway measures success through traditional means, like customer satisfaction, sales growth, market share expansion, and “being the first choice by many companies that operate with strict environmental regulations, such as Reebok, 3M, Staples, Nike, Rutland, Microsoft, Adidas and Boeing,” Schluter Broghamer says. A host of environmental awards also point to progress, including recognition for sustainable business operations, supply chain management, product development, and service.

Schluter Broghamer believes any company can jumpstart a sustainability program.



When formulating their products, Easiway says it steers clear of harmful raw materials altogether in order to stick to its mission. (Image courtesy Easiway)



In 2018, Atlantis Caps launched its first green product collection.

She advises starting small by researching products that impact environmental and workplace health.

ATLANTIS CAPS

Italian-born Atlantis Caps specializes in designing and manufacturing stylish headwear that lasts. With three million items available in stock and infinite possibilities in customization, President Alessandro Colle Tiz says Atlantis delivers more than 10 million hats worldwide each year.

In 2018, Atlantis launched its first green product collection, with an increased company-wide emphasis on economic, environmental, and social impacts ever since.

“We live in a historical period in which people are rediscovering the pleasure of buying less and buying better,” says Tiz, who pledges to be fully sustainable by 2025.

At Atlantis, sustainability is not an abstract concept but a daily behavior. Tiz says it involves a 360-degree cradle-to-cradle approach, with a substantial focus on sustainable materials and production techniques.

“The difference between a traditional product and a sustainable product is hardly

visible or perceptible to the touch; rather, it is to be sought in the low environmental impact that green materials guarantee in their production phase,” he explains.

For example, recycled polyester (or rPET) is made by breaking down used plastic into small, thin chips, which are processed and eventually turned into yarn. Choosing recycled polyester over virgin polyester means a 45% reduction in energy consumption and 20% reduction in water and CO₂ emissions, Tiz says.

In addition, Atlantis opts for certified organic cotton grown through low environmental impact methods sans pesticides and toxic chemical fertilizers. Similarly, Atlantis prefers recycled cotton, which is a regenerated cotton fiber made from repurposed production scraps pre-consumer.

Tiz says Polylyana fiber is also a low-impact alternative to 100% acrylic and wool fiber used in knitwear.

On the production side, he points to dope dyeing as a responsible technique for coloring synthetic fibers such as acrylic, nylon, or polyester. In dope dyeing, pigments are added to the liquid polymer solution before synthetic fibers are extruded.

“With this approach, dyeing can be done by hot transfer without immersion in water,

reducing CO₂ emissions and water consumption,” he explains.

In addition, Atlantis is spearheading various initiatives to raise awareness and environmental sensitivity within its supply chain. First, Tiz says, sustainable working conditions ensure products are made by workers in an ethical and responsible way. Atlantis also encourages its partners to pursue low-impact practices, to the point it evaluates suppliers based on their ethical-environmental performance.

Sustainability efforts at Atlantis include analyzing product life cycles, too. Tiz says material and production analysis quantify the supply chains’ full environmental impact while helping personnel evaluate future design solutions from an eco-design standpoint. End-of-life management,

“FROM MY POINT OF VIEW, SUSTAINABILITY IS AN OBLIGATION — A STAIRCASE TO CLIMB STEP BY STEP. IT MUST BE DONE BY EVERYONE, CITIZENS AND COMPANIES, BECAUSE WE MUST THINK ABOUT OUR CHILDREN’S FUTURE AND BEYOND,” SAYS ALESSANDRO COLLE TIZ, PRESIDENT AT ATLANTIS CAPS. “IT IS INCONCEIVABLE TO THINK OF PRODUCING IN THE SAME WAY GOING FORWARD.”

like the separation and salvaging of certain waste, is important as well. The intent, Tiz says, is to reduce, recycle and reuse as much as possible to meet the company’s ambitious goals.

Eco-friendly products have grown in size and scope since Atlantis launched its 2018 green collection – representing 20% of new items in 2019, 67% in 2021, and 100% in 2022.

There are better ways to produce responsible, long-lasting products, Tiz says – and it starts with a mindset.

“It is necessary to [cultivate] networking between companies – sharing good practices, ideas and strategies in order to create a system in which companies can develop their business models and obtain the tools to achieve sustainable development goals,” he says. “One company alone cannot change the world, but several companies united by the same objectives can make a difference – giving a strong signal to policymakers and consumers.”



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SANMAR

LANE SEVEN APPAREL

At Lane Seven, “We do basic better,” according to the company. “It starts with better materials and continues with better design. No hoopla. No senseless details. Just better blanks built thoughtfully and designed practically.”

CEO Nabeel Amin says the company is committed to designing sustainable products with more environmentally friendly fibers and processes, from integrating recycled materials to using recycled labels on every product. Moreover, he says the company is advancing its sustainability initiatives without any impact on consumer pricing.

Lane Seven blanks are derived from high-quality ring-spun cotton engineered for supreme printability. Ring-spun yarn is made by twisting and thinning the cotton strands to make a very fine, strong, soft rope of cotton fibers through a refined production process. As a result, ring-spun cotton T-shirts are more durable and last longer compared to traditional cotton.

In addition, Amin says Lane Seven uses recycled polyester in all outerwear products, except for one style. On average, one fleece hoodie uses recycled polyester made from nine post-consumer bottles – resulting in 18 million recycled plastic bottles during 2021.

Top: Nabeel Amin says Lane Seven uses recycled polyester in all outerwear products, except for one style. **Right:** CEO Nabeel Amin says Lane Seven Apparel is committed to designing sustainable products with more environmentally friendly fibers and processes. (Images courtesy Lane Seven Apparel)



Energy conservation is a top priority at Lane Seven, from investing in state-of-the-art dyeing plants to integrating renewable energy solutions. At a macro level, Amin says more efficient dyeing plants use less water and gas to dye the fabrics.

Case in point: the company saved 48 million liters in the past year by introducing water-saving techniques in the dyeing process during production. Today, 80% of the company’s fleece is produced in plants powered by renewable energy, like solar panels. One factory even recycles water, Amin says.

For Lane Seven, sustainability efforts extend to its partnerships as well. “We work with good people and responsible factories not because it’s good for business, but because it’s the right thing to do,” according to the company.

Amin says Lane Seven wants to ensure its present supply chain is actively improving processes to handle production more efficiently – and therefore environmentally friendly. All factories are WRAP certified and evaluated through the company’s own internal code of conduct audit, he adds.

Thus far, Amin says responses to the company’s sustainability initiatives are “overwhelmingly” positive. He stresses the importance for all companies to start somewhere – anywhere.



For Lane Seven, sustainability efforts extend to its partnerships as well. “We work with good people and responsible factories not because it’s good for business, but because it’s the right thing to do,” according to the company. Image courtesy Lane Seven Apparel.

“It’s a very long road, but there has to be a first step ... however small. Breaking down processes and reviewing where improvements can be made is a good starting point.”

UNIFI

In the early 2000s, Unifi started taking a harder look at its sustainability measures. Reducing the manufacturing waste sent to landfills soon evolved into ways to recycle it. In 2007, Unifi introduced REPVEVE – a branded recycled fiber born from 100% recycled materials, including post-consumer plastic bottles and post-industrial waste.

The REPVEVE process starts with consumers who choose to recycle their plastic bottles. The recyclables are collected from material recovery facilities up and down the East Coast of the U.S. and brought to the REPVEVE Bottle Processing Center in Reidsville, North Carolina, where they are sorted, cleaned, and chopped into bottle flake. The latter is melted and extruded into REPVEVE chip, which is spun into

REPVEVE performance recycled yarn. The fiber is either woven or knit into fabric used for everyday items, from apparel, shoes, and socks to home furnishings and automotive seating.

To date, Unifi’s program repurposed more than 30 billion post-consumer plastic bottles into REPVEVE fibers. The company’s new goal is to transform 50 billion plastic bottles into REPVEVE by December 2025, Hertwig says.

Unifi also makes REPVEVE nylon with “pre-consumer” waste.

“Recycling nylon fibers from our own manufacturing saves a lot of energy and makes the best use of resources. Plus, it results in a fiber that’s high quality, certifiably sustainable, and available with performance technologies, too,” he explains.

The company’s third recycled fiber, REPVEVE Our Ocean, is crafted from plastics collected within 31 miles of waterways or coastal areas in developing countries or regions – primarily in the Americas and Asia.

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“Because 80% of ocean plastic comes from land-based sources, and 75% of that is uncollected waste, the company’s approach prevents plastic waste from ever entering the ocean,” Hertwig says.

Today, the company sources, manufactures, and sells REPREVE performance fiber in every major textile-producing region globally. In fact, REPREVE fiber products comprised 37% of consolidated revenues in fiscal 2021, and management expects to achieve a 50% or more composition by fiscal 2025, Hertwig says.

For Unifi, it is not just about the fibers – rather the process. REPREVE production uses less energy and water while also producing fewer greenhouse gas emissions compared to manufacturing virgin synthetic fibers, according to Hertwig.

Recently, the company received its Higg MSI score, which grades a product’s life cycle impact. The study confirmed that REPREVE manufactured in the U.S. reduces global warming potential by 21% compared to conventionally processed, mechanically-recycled polyester – and 45% compared to conventional virgin polyester.



Everywhere is a full stack, 100% recycled company – right down to certified 100% recycled boxes, tagging and product labels. (Image courtesy Everywhere)

In addition, Unifi showcases a greener way to color with Waterwise – a waterless dyeing process. Hertwig says the solution dye becomes part of the fiber as it is being extruded, resulting in rich, brilliant, long-lasting color while conserving water and energy.

“We are now focused on helping to accelerate circularity,” Hertwig says. “Simply put, this is where textiles go back into textiles. In a circular economy, garments and home furnishings are made of reclaimed components, and after a product is discarded, the materials and parts are reused, repaired, or recycled. Unifi has been a pio-

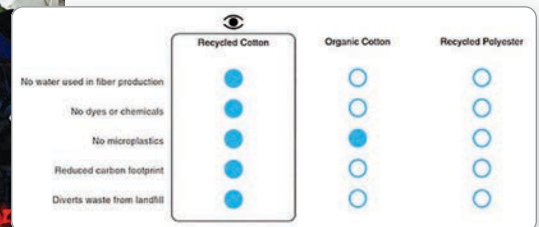
neer of circular textile takeback programs for more than a decade but has plans to increase our efforts.”

EVERYWHERE APPAREL

While some companies develop sustainability programs over time, Kornbluth says mission-oriented Everywhere Apparel was established “specifically to clean the earth through clothing.”

Everywhere is a full-stack, 100% recycled company – right down to certified 100% recycled boxes, tagging, and product labels. Kornbluth classifies the company as new frontier in sustainability, pushing the boundaries of possibilities within the graphics industry.

“Any material that comes out of Everywhere is 100% recycled. We don’t produce anything that isn’t next-generation sustainable technology,” Kornbluth says. “For us, it’s an overarching company philosophy and principle. We’re committed to having the lowest impact we possibly can on the environment through this apparel – that’s the whole reason why we exist.”



(Chart courtesy Everywhere Apparel)

“Any material that comes out of everywhere is 100% recycled. We don’t produce anything that isn’t next-generation sustainable technology,” says everywhere’s Irys Kornbluth. (Images courtesy Everywhere)

continued on page 110

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: ECO-FRIENDLY OPTIONS

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



PULLOVER HOODIE

Royal Apparel offers its Eco Triblend pullover hoodie. The eco fleece is comprised of 50/37/13 rPET recycled polyester/combed ring-spun organic cotton/rayon. The hoodie comes with kangaroo pockets and is available in six heathered colorways.

866-769-2517

royalapparel.net



UV CURABLE DIGITAL INKS

INX International Ink Co. offers its TRIANGLE brand HFB UV curable digital inks. The ink is flexible and a high chemical resistance type of alternative ink, according to the company. It's formulated to reach GRA-CoL standards and G7 targets.

800-631-7956

inxinternational.com



ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SHEET

Rowmark offers its various plastics, which the company says are EU REACH and RoHS compliant. It also says that 99.4% of its material used in manufacturing ends up in the materials that customers use every day.

419-425-8974

rowmark.com



SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT LINE

STORMTECH introduces Pure Earth, the brand's first fully sustainable apparel line. Products are made from recycled polyester and/or BCI cotton. Pure Earth features 18 new styles, ranging from polos and performance Ts to softshell jackets, never re-dyed. All new styles come with hangtags produced from sustainable FSC paper and are packed in eco-conscious materials including oxo-biodegradable bags and FSC certified cartons.

866-407-2222

stormtechperformance.com

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: ECO-FRIENDLY OPTIONS

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



BIODEGRADABLE LASER PRODUCT

Trotec Laser Inc. offers the TroCraft Eco. The environmentally friendly, emissions-free material is made from pure wood fiber. It can be used for interior design, model making, souvenirs, sustainable toys, gift packaging, and more.

844-529-0730
troteclaser.com



FOIL ADHESIVE

MagnaColours introduces the MagnaPrint foil adhesive to its special effects range of inks. The product is a Global Organic Textile Standard approved input and is certified to OEKO-TEX Exo Passport and ZDHC level 3. The company says this product has a smaller, more refined particle size and offers excellent screen runnability.

magnacolours.com



ECOWASH DAD HAT

Kati Sportcap & Bag offers the YP Classics Ecowash Dad Hat, style 6245EC. The 100% ecowash cotton twill cap is unstructured and features a six-panel, low-profile build with a 3 1/8" crown. It also includes a Perma-curv visor and tri-glidge buckle closure and is available in six colors.

713-977-4929
katisportcap.com



LASER ENGRAVER

GCC America Inc. offers the GCC LaserPro S400 laser engraver, which the company says is compliant with the RoHS directive and features the latest SmartFLOW technology. This technology can be used to remove dust and exhaust fumes when performing laser engraving and cutting jobs.

909-718-0248
gccworld.com

BAMBOO AND CORK GIFT SETS

Marco Awards Group offers a new addition to its gift line, the bamboo wine with tools box and two-piece bamboo wine tool set. The bamboo and cork toolboxes and round and square coasters are laser engravable.

800-229-6592

marcoawardsgroup.com



BUCKET HAT

Atlantis Headwear offers a sustainable bucket hat made of 100% certified recycled polyester twill. The hat meets the Global Recycled Standard and features a 3-1/2" crown, 1-7/8" brim, sewn eyelets, and is available in six colors.

atlantisheadwear.us



WATER-BASED DIGITAL MEDIA

Siser offers its S-Print print-and-cut HTV, a water-based digital media offering a smooth print surface. Compatible with eco-solvent and solvent based wide-format printers, S-Print allows printers to create large, full-color graphics for a variety of uses. It applies at 248 degrees F with medium pressure for 10-15 seconds.

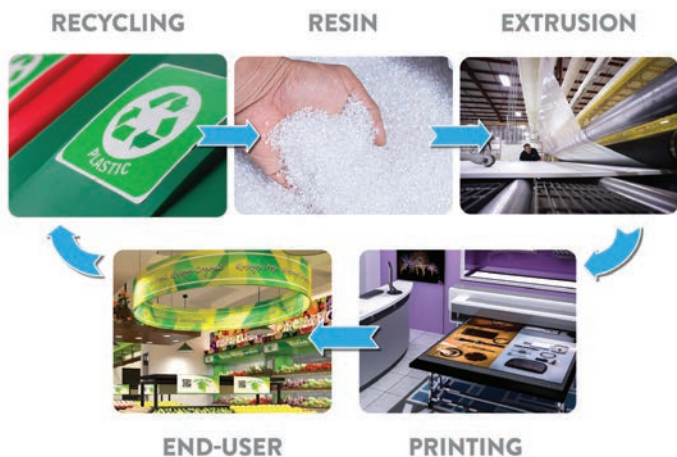
586-201-0853

siserna.com



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: ECO-FRIENDLY OPTIONS

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



RECYCLING PROGRAM

The **Vycom** Recycling Program takes back and recycles printed and unprinted PVC and acrylic sheets, as well as scraps and drops from finishing and fabricating. The program is intended for users of PVC, acrylic and PE products to recycle used signage and scrap, which is returned to company recycling facilities and used to manufacture the company's residential and commercial products. The program works in coordination with authorized distributors for drop-off or collection.

800-235-8320
vycomplastics.com

TRUCKER HAT

Sportsman Cap & Bag offers the Richardson Recycled Trucker, style 112RE. It's an eco-friendly six-panel, mid-profile trucker hat made of 100% sustainable polyester. It features a pre-curved contrast stitch visor and an adjustable snapback closure. It is available in eight color combinations.

913-541-0901
sportsmancaps.com



PLANT-BASED INK

Ricoh's plant-based ink is a derivative of the oil-based ink created for the decor printing sector as part of Ricoh's collaboration with German equipment manufacturer Olbrich. It's developed with rub resistance and set-off performance for corrugated brown and white boards, as well as carton board. The ink is quick drying, odor-free, biodegradable, and supports deinking. No biocides are required to keep the ink usable. The ink is available across EMEA.

ricoh-europe.com

GP

THE Sublimation REPORT 2022



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Go for Big Profits with a Mobile Pop-Up Shop

ROAD TO SUBLIMATION SUCCESS

During the many classes I've taught for GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (formerly THE NBM SHOW), I've explained that it's the business owner's job to maximize the profit potential of their sublimation system. In that context, I would always ask class attendees if they were currently producing a broad mix of imprintable substrates that included older, tried-and-true products as well as newer, trendier products. Unfortunately, the most common response has always been that folks instead pick and choose the items they produce based on their own personal likes and preferences. No curiosity, no experimenting, and no communicating with customers to find something new. To that, my frustrated response will always be, "Don't let your personal opinions get in the way of making money!"

For the past eight years, we've set up

our sublimation kiosk on the show floor so that we could produce an assortment of free personalized products for show attendees right before their eyes. Tremendously popular with the crowd and successful for us, I've often suggested to our clients that they, too, set up their own kiosk at events to sell photo gifts. The most common negative responses have ranged from wanting to maintain the familiarity of their current way of doing business to fearing what some may consider a far more stressful approach. While I understand the desire to avoid stress and risk, you've got to step out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself to learn, grow and try new things!

GO BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

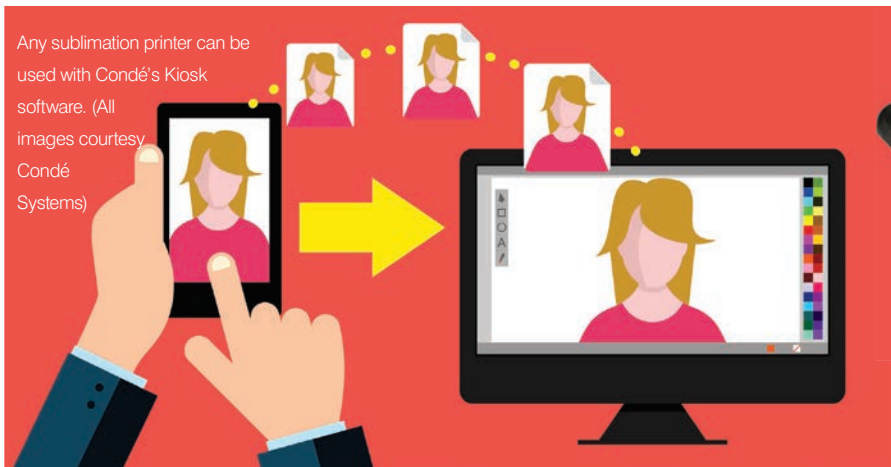
How do you step out of your comfort zone? After all, taking risks is what helps

us grow. I suggest offering a larger variety of unique products to your existing clients and finding new, profitable clients. Introducing your customers to new products not only generates more sales, but it also really shows them the diversity you can provide as a sublimator. Are you an engraver producing wedding items? Offer beverage insulators with full-color, photo quality images on them. Are you a screen printer producing T-shirts for family reunions? Suggest metal photo panels that will turn reunion photos into treasured keepsakes. You will be amazed at the synergy that sublimation provides to your existing business.

The second, far more open-ended way to step out of your comfort



For a sublimation pop-up shop, typically you need about 12-15 amps at 110 volts for the operation of a computer, sublimation printer, and heat press.



Any sublimation printer can be used with Condé's Kiosk software. (All images courtesy Condé Systems)

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EQUIPMENT



SUPPLIES

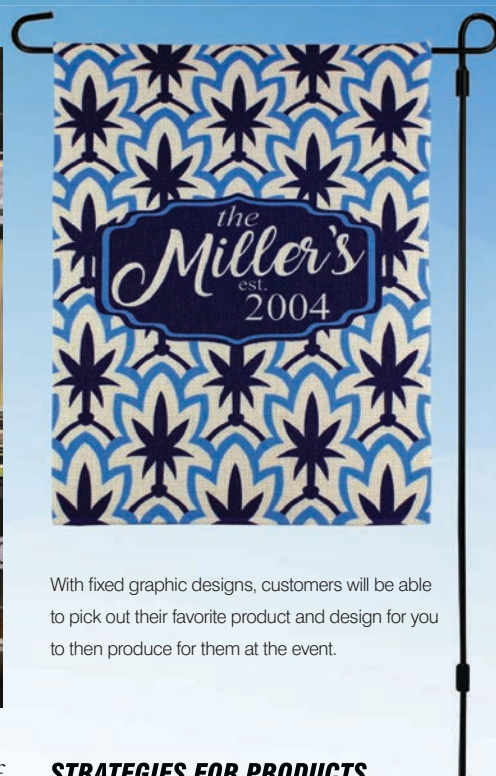


BLANKS





Condé Kiosk allows you to set up shop almost anywhere.



With fixed graphic designs, customers will be able to pick out their favorite product and design for you to then produce for them at the event.

STRATEGIES FOR PRODUCTS & ARTWORK

Planning for an event starts with the selection of a handful of high-value products. I suggest you go through our catalog and select products that fit the event that you'll be working. With such a large assortment to choose from, you'll see that some products are obviously a good fit and others are not. But as I mentioned earlier, don't pick and choose based on your own personal likes and preferences. Try your best to keep an open mind on products and seek the opinions of others if needed. A few of my favorites include phone stands, ColorLyte glass panels, and, of course, Christmas ornaments during the holidays. Some important

zone is to find new clients outside of your everyday business dealings. Some of my favorite ways include wholesale fundraising, partnering with pet groomers, and mobile pop-up shops. While I have previously written about fundraising and pet groomers in some of my TRTSS books (currently available from Condé and Amazon), today I'll be discussing the quick profit opportunities of pop-up shops. Why a pop-up shop? People attending events love to spend money! From craft shows, bridal shows, flower shows, music festivals, sporting events, dog shows, church events, fraternity/sorority events, and Christmas bazaars, there is just no end to the profit opportunities available for those sublimators willing to set up their shop at a remote event.

WHAT IS A POP-UP SHOP?

Pop-up shop is just a cute term for temporarily setting up business at remote events. Typically, a minimal sublimation pop-up shop consists of two tables: one for your sublimation system (i.e., computer, printer, and heat press) and the other for displaying your product samples and a company sign that explains the items you'll be producing at the event. For the sign, I highly recommend making yourself a totally unique chalkboard sign from ChromaLuxe textured metal. The textured surface is easy to write on with standard chalk and wipe clean with a damp cloth. Some folks upgrade their pop-up shop to include a tent for use at outdoor

events and some larger indoor events. If this seems a little much to start with, keep in mind that you can always upgrade your pop-up shop as you go along. Of course, the most essential item for your pop-up shop is electricity. Although printers don't require much power, heat presses require lots. Because of this, you will absolutely have to call ahead to verify outlet availability. Typically, you need about 12-15 amps at 110 volts for the operation of a computer, sublimation printer, and heat press (e.g., Geo Knight DK14S). For outdoor events, you may have the option of using a quiet generator. If you do so, I recommend also getting a UPS (uninterruptible power supply) for everything except the heat press.



The SG500's built-in paper tray supports a maximum paper size of 8.5" X 14".

There is just no end to the profit opportunities available for those sublimators willing to set up their shop at a remote event.



factors to consider when choosing products are length of time to produce, including extra prep time, single-sided vs double-sided, length of time in heat press, and cooling time, plus your own level of skill with any product. In other words, you don't want to learn how to make an unfamiliar product while at an event.

Next, you need to decide on your decorating strategy. Here are four approaches to try:

1 Photo products: In what I consider the default strategy, your customer uploads their favorite photo from their phone to your laptop via Condé Kiosk (outlined below) and then you use that image to decorate their chosen item. One point to remember is that photos are either

portrait or landscape, so you should include substrates for both orientations. I've found that most photos are landscape. This simple, yet effective decorating approach produces beautiful products that focus on your customers' cherished images.

2 Products with event graphics: In this strategy, you'll need to pre-design an event template that can be later combined with the customer's uploaded photo or even a photo that you take yourself. This approach results in a higher-value keepsake that's appropriate for wedding

receptions and larger events like an Oshkosh Fly-In and Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Hybrid strategies include taking customer photos using a prop, backdrop, or green screen.

3 Personalized designs: This strategy also requires you to pre-make product designs, but with a blank space remaining for later adding the customer's name, monogram, or funny saying. A great example is a welcome door sign with your customer's last name imprinted on it. I even made one for my bathroom that says, "It's Gross not to wash your hands!"

PHOTO GIFTS AND AWARDS

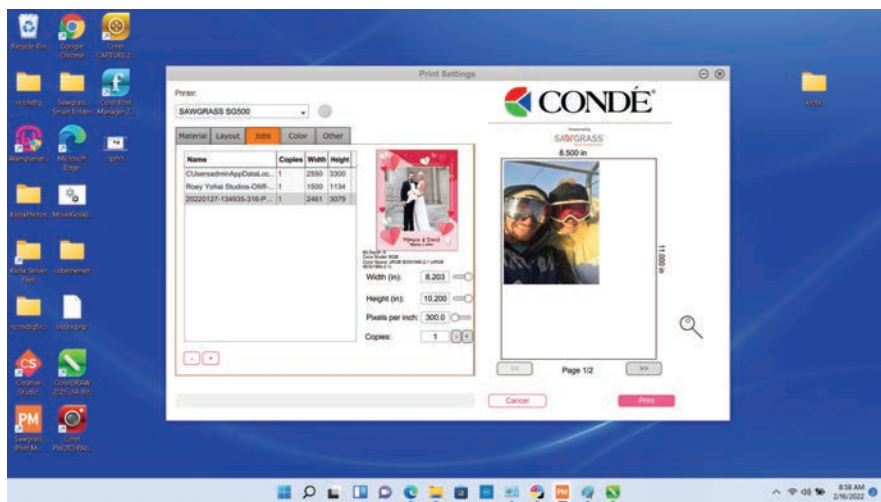
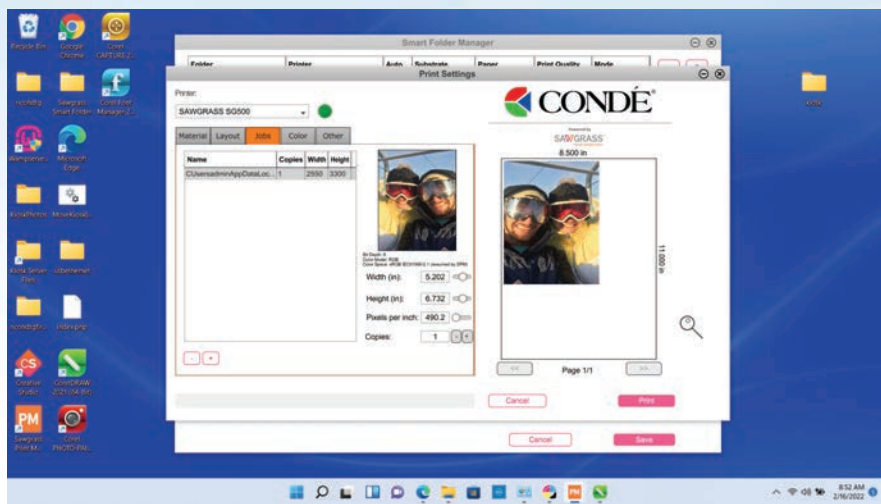
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With this software installed on your laptop and your laptop hooked up to a Wi-Fi router, your customers will be able to walk up, connect to your Wi-Fi network, and upload their favorite photo(s) with just a few clicks.

photo(s) with just a few button clicks. The hardest part is waiting for your customer to pick out the photo they want to use. In most cases, no internet is needed. The one exception is when the desired photograph is in cloud storage instead of on the customer's phone. In this case, they will need to download the photo to their phone before connecting to your kiosk. Important note: unlike emailing or texting a photo, the Condé Kiosk will always receive the full-resolution image.

PROCESSING PHOTOS

Once uploaded, Condé's Kiosk software places the photos into a folder on your laptop. Those images can then be resized by you to fit your customers' selected products. While on your computer screen, show those adjusted images to your customers for approval before printing and pressing. If you are handling lots of orders, a second monitor to face the crowd may help speed the process along. Keep in mind if you are using an event template, you will need to place photos into the event template using graphics software such as Photoshop, Illustrator, or CorelDRAW. For Sawgrass Print Manager (SPM) users, Condé offers a custom version of SPM that includes many bonus features helpful for kiosk printing such as managing multi jobs, resizing images, and multiple hot folders for automatic printing. The Sawgrass Printer Manager allows you to resize images on the fly directly from the kiosk

4 Fixed graphic designs: With this strategy, you'll need to design all your product artwork ahead of time and simply make a few products for displaying on your table(s). Customers will be able to pick out their favorite product and design for you to then produce for them at the event. This brings up the concept of virtual inventory. Typical gift shops buy decorated inventory that may or may not sell. So, at the end of the season it needs to be

liquidated. With virtual inventory, you decorate inventory as needed with the flexibility of adding or changing designs.

CONDÉ KIOSK

Condé Kiosk allows you to set up shop almost anywhere. With this software installed on your laptop and your laptop hooked up to a Wi-Fi router, your customers will be able to walk up, connect to your Wi-Fi network, and upload their favorite

folder. This really makes training a new print operator easy.

SUBLIMATION PRINTERS

Any sublimation printer can be used with Condé's Kiosk software. With that said, I recommend the Sawgrass SG500. The SG500's built-in paper tray supports a maximum paper size of 8.5" X 14", making it qualified to be a pop-up shop workhorse. Further, up to two additional bottom paper feed trays and a bypass tray can be added to provide the media options you need for more efficient, lower cost printing. The larger of the two printers, the Sawgrass SG1000 can print up to 11.75" X 17" paper from the bottom built-in tray and optional bottom paper feed tray and up to 13" X 21" from its optional multi-bypass tray. The 13" X 21" paper size is versatile since it maximizes the transfer area of 16" X 20" heat presses and therefore increases the number of products that can be produced.

PRICING

Perhaps the most difficult task of a digital decorator is to determine the selling price of their decorated products. You may ask yourself if setting up shop at an event allows you to charge a higher price. After all, the customers are getting the products in real time. Sometimes, however, overpricing your products makes them unsellable while underpricing gives the impression that they're cheap. So, what do you do? Condé has put together a free pricing spreadsheet that lets you determine your product costs and experiment with prices to select your desired profit level. It even provides a survey of pricing for most products. This is the same kind of spreadsheet many big companies use to determine the price of their products. Now you can use the same tool yourself without having to create your own. To receive your copy, call your Condé account manager to have them send it to you.

SELLING

Your booth should look professional and



The Sawgrass Printer Manager provides the ability to resize images on the fly directly from the kiosk folder. This really makes training a new print operator easy.

well organized. Use labeled plastic bins under the table for storage, as this makes your area look better as well as setup and teardown go much faster. I recommend you have a dedicated person to greet prospects and help them understand what you are doing. Once they have selected a product, you'll need to help them with selecting a photo and uploading it. For folks that are not tech savvy, you'll find that it's simply easier to do it for them. You'll of course need a cash box for making change and a credit card reader for your phone (also check with local authorities regarding a business license and sales tax). Be wary of offering too many products, as customers may not be able to make up their mind! Be sure to promote your participation ahead of time by posting the event to your Facebook or Instagram page — you could even offer a discount for mentioning your post. And finally, be sure to produce great-looking sublimated name badges for you and your staff.

REFERRAL SYSTEM

Every product you sell should have your company information on it so that the

ultimate end-user will know where to buy more of your great products. For shirts, you can sublimate your information on the bottom tail of the shirt. For others, sublimate the back-side or place a label in an inconspicuous spot. This method can also include a job code to expedite reorders.

TECH SUPPORT

We all know how critically important tech support can be when your printer or heat press stops working properly. Very often the issues are simple but without help, they are literal showstoppers. Most events are held on the weekend, which is a big reason our tech support staff is available seven days a week. Prepare yourself for events the best you can with a backup set of inks, extra paper, waste ink tank collection unit, and a digital pyrometer for your press. When the big problems happen, however, you'll definitely want to talk with an expert.

Although my description of a sublimation pop-up shop may have been a brief one, I hope it has tickled your curiosity enough to go out and try something new. Stepping out of your comfort zone even once makes it easier and more likely that you'll do it again. And if you can keep expanding your comfort zone, you'll open yourself up to growing your sublimation business and expanding your customer base. Feel free to give me a call at 800-826-6332 or email dgross@conde.com with any questions you may have. I'm here to help your sublimation business succeed! **SR**

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



With these tips for success, you can master hard surface sublimation media in no time. (Image courtesy Universal Woods)



BY PEGGY WATTERS

8 Tips for Fine Art Printing and Sublimation

Want to know how to achieve beautiful results with hard surface sublimation media? Here are eight tips for printing success!

1 Always start with a high-resolution image. 300 DPI is the best size for the best quality, to avoid pixelated images in your final print. However, you can reproduce images at 150 DPI with quality results. Refer to the handy size guide below for good and best quality size ranges.

2 Use RGB color mode for all images, including black and white photos.

3 Make sure you have the correct ICC profile for the substrate you're using. ICC color profiles convert RGB colors from your monitor into CMYK colors that your printer uses.

4 You can also purchase RIP software that considers your inks, paper, printer, and substrate for



optimal color reproduction from the original image. With RIP software, you can create your own ICC profiles.

5 Add a small bleed around your image to help line it up with the substrate on your printed transfer before sublimation. The bleed should be enough to accommodate substrate expansion in the heat press and can be between 0.01” and 0.03” (3-8mm) wide, depending on the size of your substrate.

6 Print images in JPEG, EPS, and PDF formats (without compression). For very large media, TIFF images with LZW compression are preferred.

7 For rigid substrates, use lower weight paper (100gsm or less) with minimal surface texture. Use higher weight paper (120-150gsm) for larger format substrates, as it is easier to handle and less likely to tear. Avoid tacky

paper used for fabric sublimation, as it does not work well with most rigid substrates. Look for papers labeled “multi-purpose,” as they function well for most any sublimatable substrate.

8 Ensure that your heat press delivers even pressure and consistent heat. Depending upon the size, hard substrates may require longer press times and lower temperatures for optimum output.

Media size - inches	Media size - mm	Good quality (150 DPI) resolution in pixels	Best quality (300 DPI) resolution in pixels
16" X 20"	406 X 508mm	2400 X 3000	4800 X 6000
20" X 30"	508 X 762mm	3000 X 4500	6000 X 9000
30" X 40"	762 X 1016mm	4500 X 6000	9000 X 12000
40" X 60"	1016 X 1524mm	6000 X 9000	12000 X 18000
48" X 96" full sheet	1220 X 2440mm	7200 X 14400	14400 X 28800

Good quality: You will see no noticeable pixel grain unless you look at the image from a short distance.

Best quality: The human eye should not see any noticeable pixel grain, even from short viewing distances.

Be sure to ask your distributor for assistance if you have any further questions. **SR**



Peggy Waters is a marketing professional with over 20 years of experience, eight of which are in dye-sublimation. Currently, she’s the senior marketing manager for Glantz Sign Supplies. Before joining Glantz, she was the senior communications manager for Universal Woods for almost nine years.



BY HOWARD POTTER



MAKING SUBLIMATION MOVES

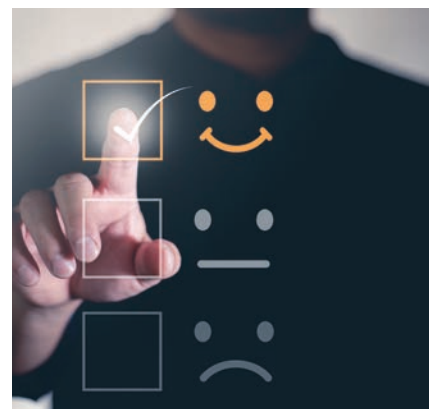
Being Proactive with Equipment Maintenance

SUBLIMATION REPORT 2022



When looking for equipment, many only look at what they can afford now or what they need the equipment for now. Learn to plan for five and 10 years out. (Image courtesy Howard Potter)

In business we need to learn to be proactive and not just reactive when issues or concerns happen with our equipment. This is where it is important to work with great vendors, buy quality equipment, know your techs, have access to multiple sources for supplies, always have a production plan in place, and train your staff on preventative maintenance.



VENDOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

When choosing a vendor, research the size of their company. If they are too small, sometimes they don't have the equipment stock or buying power you need. If they are too large, they tend to have slow or poor customer service. This does not hold true for all but most over my 18 years of experience. A bigger company does not always equal better. Look at their social media presence and see how active they are and what people have to say. Call a sales rep from the company and see how you are



treated. A sales rep can tell you a lot about a company as well. Most reps only sell and do not actually run the equipment, so they can never truly explain everything about the equipment you are buying. Some companies do have sales reps that also know about running the equipment. Those companies have seemed to be the better ones in the long run to work with since they teach all staff as much as possible.

How fast a sales rep gets back to you is also huge. Will the rest of the company be the same way? Remember you are trusting them to not only have what you need, but to be there when you need them. So, it is highly important to not only work with the best but to have someone you can trust. Never be afraid to have more than one vendor for the same process. I learned this years ago when companies either went out of business or they merged, and the merge was not for the better. Have other vendors to fall back on and always work to improve your growth and relationships with your vendors.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT PRICE

When looking for equipment. Many only look at what they can afford now or what they need the equipment for now. Learn to plan for five and 10 years out. Always push to buy the best quality equipment for your needs now and the future. When people buy equipment the number one thing they look at is price up front. We all do. Look past that. Look at how long it can last, what is the maintenance cost on it, power consumption, how many pieces can it average per hour, warranty, and does the manufacturer have their own techs? You also want to know what the average wait time is to speak to a tech on the phone. With most equipment you can simply talk to a tech over the phone and fix 75% of the issues yourself with them. It is important to pick the right company and equipment for your company no matter the price – it is an investment.



MAINTENANCE

Your suppliers and manufacturers typically always have techs to help you troubleshoot equipment or a process with their equipment over the phone. Those techs help you stay up and running. Then you have your techs that come on-site to your company to work on your equipment.

They can solely be there for fixing machines, or you can hire them for preventive maintenance.

We have our screen-printing machine tech come in once a year to look over our automated press and dryers. We bring in our embroidery tech once every three months since that equipment has several

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more moving parts and they are much more expensive per unit if they break. Our vinyl equipment, we have a tech come in once a year to do a simple look over on the printers, and with our sublimation equipment, we can do daily checks.

They are not very complicated machines, so it does not take much to keep up on them. By having these techs come in for preventative maintenance, it is helping the life of your equipment. They can spot check any potential trouble to prevent expensive breakdowns, give you a report on how your staff is taking care of your equipment, and you can learn how to fix your equipment or do spot check for issues to stay up and running longer. The best part? You can work with your tech to choose when the equipment will be worked on instead of you waiting for the machine to be broken down and you waiting for a tech to get there. It is cheaper to plan than to be down and out! Then, you are at a loss. When you take the time to get to know your techs, treat them good and learn from them. Our industry does not have enough good techs to begin with, so when you find

one, treat them like gold. I cannot stress this enough. Learn from them and view them like having insurance.

MULTIPLE SUPPLIERS

Over the years we have used multiple companies for several supply options,

but we would get in the habit of buying the bulk from one source on certain products without having a couple to fall back on. We have learned to spread the wealth on supplies as we have grown and to spend 60% with the main company for buying power and the other





40% with a couple other companies. That way, you build relationships and sales with others too. By doing this, you can tend to pay a little more with some other companies since you do not spend as much, but you are also building a layer of security at the same time in case your larger supplier runs out of stock or closes for good!

DAILY PLANS

Always have a daily production plan. A production plan will not only help you maintain production, but you will be able to start being able to plan for daily, monthly, and quarterly maintenance plans to keep your equipment cleaned and make the time to look it over to fix any minor issues or to spot check it. This now gives you the control to plan on when that will work best for your production line up and your techs. By having control of that, you can plan to be down, limit your down time, and stay ahead on your production. Not planning and having your machine break down and your tech unavailable can lose you a lot of business quickly. Better to maintain control and options.

EDUCATION & UPKEEP

Always teach your staff to do the maintenance on the equipment and explain why to them. It is very simple in the end. If the machine is not running than they are not working, but the flip side to that is the less the equipment produces, the less you can afford to give them the following year.

Teach them what to look out for. With sublimation equipment, they are very low keep. With your printers, you want to do test prints every morning. With heat presses, you want to pay attention to how they are regulating heat consistently and make sure nothing is sticking to the flat surface of the press on the either side. Every week, make sure you dust your printer and all equipment. Most product is white, so it is very easy to ruin product or prints just with dust alone.

Also, reach out to your equipment manufacturer and see what common parts tend to breakdown. Sometimes for \$100-\$200, you can stock some minor parts to be safe. Most parts take less than 15 minutes to install to get you back up and running. Again, look at it as piece of mind

and having insurance. A printer and heat press alone can last you years if you take care of them. We still have our very first heat press from 18 years ago and it still works.

As you can see there are many layers to protecting your equipment and keeping you production moving. Every company has several moving parts. No matter if you have one employee or several, the work still needs to get done and you need to make sure you factor all this in. Simple maintenance alone can make or break your company each year. Make it a priority, or issues will arise at the worst times. **SR**

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.

The Science of Sublimation

3 TOP TIPS FOR SUBLIMATION SUCCESS



BY AARON MONTGOMERY

For anyone that follows my column regularly, you know that mindset and business foundations, like planning, systems, and goal setting, are what I'm passionate about sharing. And while I could write books on the subject (I'm hoping to complete my first book this year), I also know that as business owners and managers, we need the nuts and bolts too, and we need the how-to information to continue improving at our craft. I highly value all the different decorating techniques encompassed under the *GRAPHICS PRO* umbrella and know there is a place for each one. For me, the decorating style I have always been enamored with the most is sublimation. I love the digital nature to go from concept to finished product quickly. I love the full-color capabilities that allow for bright, vibrant designs and even full-color photographs. And I also value how sublimation is exceptionally durable, fade-resistant, and a permanent process. So, this month, I wanted to share some of the top tips I have learned about the process of decorating with sublimation inks. First, let me quickly share with you what sublimation is for those unfamiliar, and then we will get to the tips.

SUBLIMATION EXPLAINED

Sublimation is a process that uses heat and pressure to turn a liquid ink (that has been printed on a carrier — typically paper) into a gas. The dye particles in the gas bond to the polyester molecules of your substrate and become part of the polyester structure. The substrate must be made from polyester or have a polyester coating on it for successful sublimation to take place.

As long as the polyester coating doesn't

come off or the polyester fibers of a soft good stay together, the ink remain the same as the day it was printed. As you will note, I said polyester, not cotton. The inks need an artificial polymer like polyester, which is most widely used. Requiring polyester does limit the abilities of garment decoration, but it will work on some blends. The more polyester content, the brighter the image.



In sublimation printing, the inks are translucent and the blank you are printing on acts as the reflector of its color. (All images courtesy Aaron Montgomery)

When you have a light or white polyester-based substrate, you can print a sublimation transfer and then heat press the transfer and substrate together for around 60 seconds at 400 F.

For example, a 50/50 garment will only be 50% as bright as a 100% poly garment because half the ink is not remaining on the garment.

The other limitation to sublimation compared to some other decorating techniques is the lack of white ink available in the process. Unlike screen printing, direct-to-garment, or other print methods that have white ink, it is impossible to transfer to a substrate where the blank is darker than the ink color. The inks are translucent and use the blank you are printing on as the reflector of its color. If you try to print yellow ink on a blue shirt, your yellow will be green. The brighter the white base, the more vivid and bright your image will be. When you have a light or white polyester-based substrate, you can print a sublimation transfer and then heat press the transfer and substrate together for around 60 seconds at 400 F. This will give you a beautiful image on thousands of different substrates, like socks, arm sleeves, shirts, mugs, mousepads, tumblers, slates, garden flags, ornaments and more. If you can dream it and get it into a heat press, there is likely a substrate out there for you.



DOWN TO A SCIENCE

With that quick overview behind us, let me share my top three tips for making the art of sublimation more of a science.

No. 1

Even heat matters

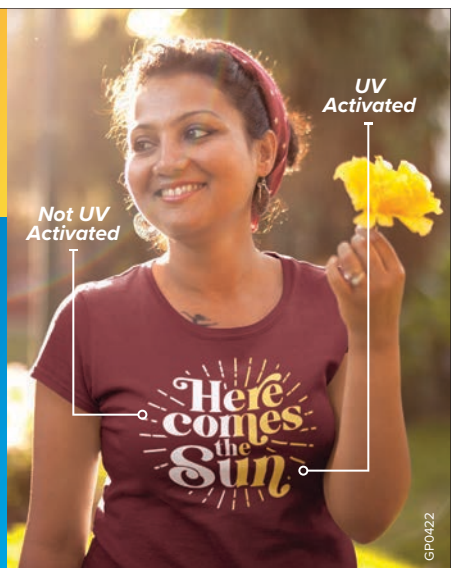
A quality heat press is worth its weight in gold. The sublimation process has many variables, and a heat press can be the biggest. The more even your temperature across your entire heating area and the more even the pressure applied to that substrate, the better your chance for achieving a perfect transfer. Because sublimation is a permanent process, there is no fixing a ruined blank. We can't wash the ink out and try again. The item comes out of the press not looking right because the heat press didn't heat it evenly, or the pressure was different

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from one side to another, that blank goes in the trash, and you have to try again. By making a larger investment in a quality heat press, you will save more money on potentially ruined blanks. Any U.S. manufactured heat presses will fit the bill from one of the many great industry distributors. Skip buying your heat press on Amazon and save yourself the headache.

No. 2 **Mind your time and temp**
I already mentioned that you need to heat the transfer and substrate for about 60 seconds at 400 F, but that is just a generalization and more of a limit in most cases. For several reasons (efficiency, reduced production time, and reduced scorching), you want to be able to press at the lowest heat and time you can. We need the inks to turn into a gas and bond with the polyester for the very best transfer. But after it starts to bond with the polyester, it needs to cool to lock it in place. If the inks are overheated, they will gas back out of the

polyester and make the image fade. All the inks turn to gas at a little different temperature, so you will want to look for signs of the correct time and temperature. A blue hue or tint to your blacks means the transfer was under pressed and a red or brown hue/tint means the transfer was over pressed and the inks gassed back out. To find your proper time and temperature, it is best to start with the manufacturer's suggested time and temperature and then work your way down (or up in sporadic cases) from there. Also, as you adjust, first adjust the time, then reduce temperatures as we always want to press for a shorter period to reduce the time it takes to make each substrate. Document your results!

No. 3 **Perfect your templates**
Having a quality template for your designs is a big part of making repeatable transfers easy to produce. We are mainly going to use a white substrate with sublimation, but often times, we don't need or want a

white background. You need a bleed area. A bleed area is an area that is slightly larger than the actual substrate, which is going to fall off the edge or "bleed" off, so there is no chance of a white edge even if the transfer is not 100% lined up. You will find this bleed area will be a much-welcomed space when lining up your transfers since they will be upside down, and you won't see the actual graphic until it comes off the press. The bleed area on a rigid substrate that is not going to stretch and is sized consistently is typically ¼". For soft goods, like garments, baby onesies, garden flags, or other products that might be hand sewn and are therefore sized a little inconsistently or can stretch, I suggest up to 1" of a bleed area or more on all sides. Perfecting templates to match your production process and needs is a considerable time and money saver. Starting with the manufacturer's template is good, but remember they are not doing production like you, so you need to make sure you have what you need to guide your art preparation quickly and accurately.





From mugs, mousepads, and tumblers to slates, garden flags, face masks, and ornaments, if you can dream it and get it into a heat press, there is likely a substrate out there for you.



Sublimation is a wonderful process with a bit of “art” style from creativity. But as a business, it is your job to turn your art into a science and make it repeatable. What are your top sublimation tips? Email me at success@oursuccessgroup.com to share. **SR**

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 over 25 years of experience with personalized products and small business development and is the co-creator of the “5 Keys of Business Success.” You can also find Aaron co-hosting the decorator’s industry podcast 2 Regular Guys Podcast (www.2regularguys.com). Also, check him out on his podcast channel called Small Business Saturdays (smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com).

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SUBLIMATION EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AND SUBSTRATES



PRINT STITCH EMBLEMS

World Emblem offers its print stitch emblems, which start with a sublimated background that allows for unlimited and PMS-matched colors. The product can be heat-sealed to most fabrics or applied to flat, non-textured surfaces using a pressure-sensitive backing. The size of the product ranges from 1" X 1" to 13" X 8".

800-766-0448
worldemblem.com



PRINTED FLEECE BLANKETS

S&K Print offers printed fleece blankets. The product is available in three sizes: 30" X 40", 50" X 60", and 60" X 80". It can be printed in full color on one or both sides.

888-355-0345
skprint.com

HEAT PRESS

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

562-404-3000
instagraph.com



SUBLIMATION TRANSFER PRINTER

Mimaki USA releases the TS330-1600, the flagship model of its new 330 Series. The TS330-1600 is a sublimation transfer inkjet printer. It features Mimaki Weaving Dot Technology, printing speeds of 69m²/h in draft mode, a V-shape cut function, cloth wiper, and Mimaki Remote Access. Ink sets are available in 4, 6, 7, and 8 colors. It's compatible with RasterLink7 and TxLink4 Lite RIP software.

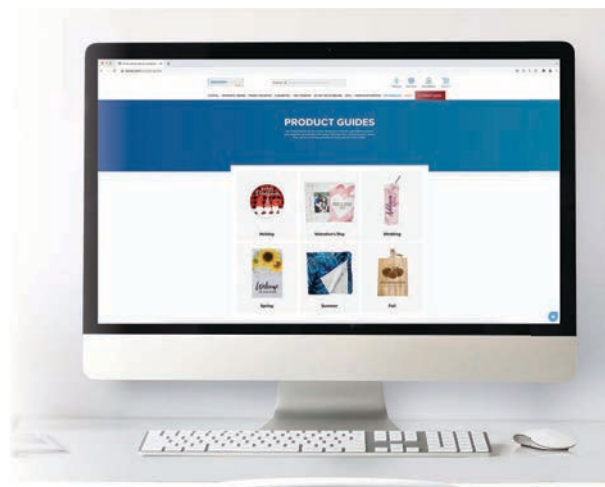
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mimakiusa.com



PRODUCT GUIDES

Johnson Plastics Plus offers its product guides, which aim to help businesses find the right gifts to offer customers. Products can be broken out by category, recipient, or equipment type.

800-869-7800
jplusplus.com



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SUBLIMATION EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AND SUBSTRATES

NATURAL WOOD SUBLIMATION SIGN

LRI offers its ready-to-sublimate natural wood signs, which the company says have a press time of 45 seconds. The signs are 1/4" thick and pre-assembled with two 5/8" wood support bars glued to the back. Custom sizes are available by request.



847-677-8333

laserreproductions.com



TONER PRINTER

Marco Awards Group offers the UNINET i350 full-color toner sublimation printer. The printer uses toner rather than ink, copy paper instead of transfer paper, and the toner cart has a capacity of 7,000 transfers. The transfers require 380 degrees F for application.

800-229-6592

marcoawardsgroup.com



DYE SUBLIMATION PRINTER

Stratojet USA Inc. offers the Piranha XT-1100, which the company says can print at 679 sq. ft. per hour in its speed mode. It can also print 2,400 DPI prints. It prints directly on transfer paper.

562-758-3018

stratojetusa.com



SUBLIMATION PRINTER

Imaging Spectrum offers the Epson SureColor F570 Pro. The 24" printer can be used for printing mugs, awards, small textiles, and more.

214-342-9290

imagingspectrum.com



JOURNALS & SKETCH BOOKS

JDS Industries offers sublimatable journals and sketch books in a white Subli-Tru covering, or in Burlap for a more rustic look. The books have a satin ribbon for place keeping. The sketch books have a plush padded cover and heavy unlined paper, while the journals have lined paper. Choose from 5 1/4" x 8 1/4" or 7" x 9 3/4".

800-843-8853

jdsindustries.com

SR

Sublimation By the Numbers

BY GRAPHICS PRO STAFF

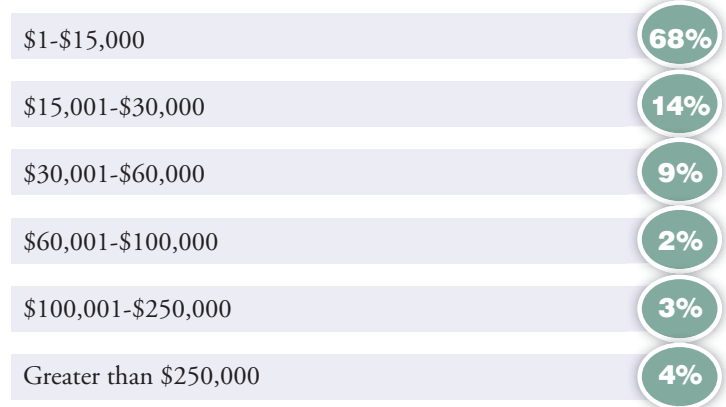
SURVEY FINDINGS ON THE SUBLIMATION INDUSTRY

Our annual survey of the sublimation market will give you a great idea of what your competition is doing out there, and what growth areas you may need to pay attention to. Thanks to those who responded to our survey, we have learned that 65% of respondents are expecting to increase profits from their sublimation business over the next 12 months, and we hope this information can help you be part of that group.

This survey was conducted through electronic mail via SurveyMonkey.com and complied with all CAN-SPAM act laws and NBM's privacy policy, as found here: nbm.com/privacy-statement. Respondents were selected from the GRAPHICS PRO subscriber database and all survey recipients were provided the same version of the survey, which was distributed in January of 2022. Some survey totals equal more than 100% because readers checked all the categories that apply.

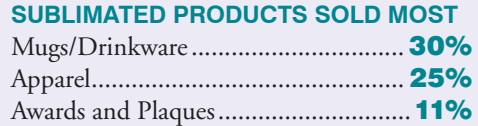
REVENUES AND OUTLOOK

Revenues from sublimation were mostly reported to be under \$30,000 annually. 4% of survey respondents stated revenues from sublimation greater than \$250,000.

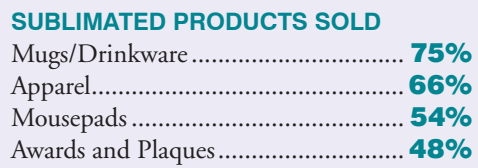


TOP SALES PRODUCTS

When survey respondents were asked which sublimated product they sold the most of, mugs and drinkware (30%) topped the list, followed by apparel at 25%.



Survey respondents reported selling a variety of sublimated products. Top products included mugs/drinkware (75%), apparel (66%), and mousepads (54%).





BIGGEST BUYERS

Shops supplying sublimated products reported selling the most product to corporations and businesses (53%).

WHERE SUBLIMATED PRODUCTS ARE SOLD

Corporations and Businesses	53%
Athletic Associations or Clubs	40%
Retail Outlets	36%
Education Institutions	35%
Government Institutions (police, fire, hospital, etc.)	21%
Photography Market	18%
Other	20%

TOP SALES INFLUENCERS

Survey respondents reported that in-stock availability was the top influencer (79%) for purchasing decisions on substrates, followed by price (75%) and customer service (60%).

TOP INFLUENCERS FOR PURCHASING DECISIONS ON SUBSTRATES

In-Stock Availability	79%
Price	75%
Customer Service	60%
Shipping Costs	56%
Product Knowledge	36%
Supplier Location	30%
Supplier Loyalty	21%
Other	2%

APPAREL TRENDS

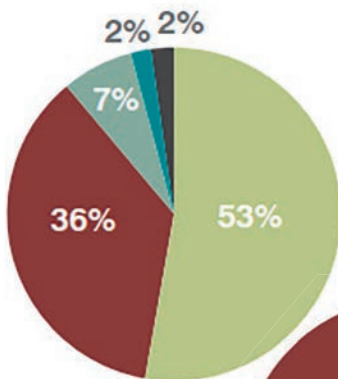
41% of shops that sublimated apparel reported their sublimatable apparel needs had increased in the last 12 months.

67% of shops that sublimated apparel find that inventory is regularly available for their needs.

17% of survey respondents attribute the majority of their sublimated product revenues to apparel.

PERCENTAGE OF SUBLIMATION BUSINESS ATTRIBUTED TO APPAREL

0%—I don't sell sublimated apparel	24%
1-25%	42%
26-50%	17%
51-75%	9%
76-100%	8%



INK USE

The majority of survey respondents reported purchasing ink between 1-5 times per year.

ANNUAL INK PURCHASE

- 1-2 times per year
- 3-5 times per year
- 6-10 times per year
- 11-15 times per year
- More than 15 times per year

The majority of survey respondents reported using new cartridges.

REFILLABLE INK VS. NEW CARTRIDGE

- Refillable ink option
- New cartridges
- Combination of both **SR**



(Image courtesy Conde)

The Current State of Corporate Awards and Recognition

How have awards accommodated to labor strains and changes in the market?

BY JULIA SCHROEDER



The effects of labor market strain and shifts in corporate culture caused by the pandemic leaves many graphics businesses wondering what the future holds. According to our industry experts in the awards and recognition segment, the market is making a comeback.

“The pandemic slammed this industry as it did most others,” says Cathy Garcia, Marco Awards Group. “There is no question we lost many of our customers.” However, moving ahead and away from this pandemic, Garcia sees signs of “light at the end of the tunnel, ‘survival’, ‘gaining strength’ and other points of light that we might not have seen a year ago.”

The awards and recognition markets have been on a roller coaster the past two years, but things are looking up in all areas, says Dan Messerschmidt, JDS Industries.

SUPPLY CHAIN AND LABOR STRAIN

The pandemic led to several supply chain issues. Garcia reports: “For some it was not ordering enough merchandise and now struggling with trying to catch up. For others, enough merchandise was ordered, but due to competitor shortages, they are getting hit hard with potential challenges for the spring rush.”

Additionally, the vendor turnaround for offshore has been a challenge. It is not uncommon these days for many vendors, whether based in the United States or offshore to struggle with “labor force” issues. “Suffice it to say that there is not enough labor, and it is increasingly expensive,” Garcia explains. As a distributor with 31 warehouses, Garcia says Marco experiences labor issues at most of its locations.

With the difficult labor market, more companies understand that to retain employees they must create a culture that not only rewards their employees but also acknowledges them for the work they have accomplished, says Bill Vitto, PDU CAT. “I feel in a tighter labor market companies who give recognition to their employees will fare better than those that don’t. We see this with the growth of corporate awards this past year.”

As the “war for talent” continues, Messerschmidt says companies are realizing that a robust recognition program will help them attract and retain the best employees.

David Gross, Condé Systems, agrees that companies have become more clever in their approach to keeping good talent, possibly because of the large number of employees working remotely. Gross says, "If not already, companies must step out of their comfort zone to recognize employees for meeting their goals. I have heard of employers doing lots of silly stunts to thank employees for their contributions and attendance." With the flux of employment, Gross says recognizing employee efforts is crucial to keeping and growing with them through stressful conditions.

ELEVATED ELEGANCE

The recognition industry has come back strong to pre-covid sales levels, according



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(Top and above: Images courtesy JDS Industries)



Above left: Image courtesy PDU Cat.
Above right and bottom left: Images courtesy Marco Awards Group.

THE SCOOP ON SUBLIMATED AWARDS

Traditional sublimation award plaques are not as popular as they used to be. The 5/8" thick MDF plaque that's long been available in assorted shapes and sizes is often being passed over in favor of newer, more non-traditional alternatives. Sublimation on metal, including stacked metal (two or more pieces stacked on top of each other) and curved metal (curve into a self-standing award after the imaging process) have become increasingly popular due to their unique look and ease of production. Either approach adds value to the metal while producing a display award at little additional cost.

The awards and recognition market also continues to gravitate towards photo products. Photo gifts and awards have elegant qualities that superbly demonstrate the value and desirability of the sublimation transfer process. A full-color, photo quality award will result in a cherished keepsake that is proudly displayed for years to come.

— **DAVID GROSS**
CONDÉ SYSTEMS



The recognition industry has come back strong to pre-covid sales levels. (Image courtesy PDU Cat)

to Vitto. He says his company also see a lot of customers who had previously never been in the corporate awards market now getting a lot of business. As far as awards trends go, Vitto says, “The entire line of awards has been strong although I see more high-end crystal awards moving recently, even with the elevated demand for acrylic and glass awards.”

Whether an awards shop specializes in engravable products such as metal and crystal, or high-quality graphics printed on plaques or the like, there are many growing opportunities for businesses in the recognition segment.

“Based on strong sales to our awards and recognition customers, I would say that business is good,” notes Gross. “However, I can’t say that all the products are necessarily being turned into awards. Since our customers primarily work with sublimation systems, they are not limited to traditional product offerings.” Along with awards, engravers are also producing a unique variety of photo quality wearables, home decor gifts, jewelry, and drinkware, Gross says. “Sublimation transfer allows graphics businesses to diversify and go where the money is, even during tough times.”

Through the pandemic, corporate rec-

ognition fared better than other areas of the awards market, according to Messerschmidt. As schools get back to full swing along with their various sports and activities, Messerschmidt believes the overall need for awards is certainly rebounding.

“In our part of the business, corporate recognition has become the stronger of trophies versus corporate,” says Garcia. “From a product focus perspective, crystal, glass, and plaque style awards are taking precedence versus trophies.”

In sports awards, Garcia continues to see more economical awards such as medals and small resins. Sports awards have



Above and below: The awards and recognition market also continues to gravitate towards photo products. Photo gifts and awards have elegant qualities that superbly demonstrate the value and desirability of the sublimation transfer process. (Images courtesy Conde) **Left:** Image courtesy PDU Cat.





(Images above courtesy Marco Awards Group)



HOW MAIN STREET SHOPS CAN TAKE STEPS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY: <http://gpro.link/sustain>



2022 is lining up to be the best year in awards and recognition since the beginning of the pandemic. Images courtesy JDS Industries.

not picked up as corporate awards have, according to Garcia. “Sports awards have declined, whereas resins seem to be holding their own, and cups remain strong,” she adds. “Corporate (crystal/glass) awards are growing, with a focus on unique and elegant.”

THE FUTURE OF RECOGNITION

In this year to come, the awards industry experts feel enthusiastic. 2022 is lining up to be the best year in awards and recognition since the beginning of the pandemic, Messerschmidt predicts. In a recent market survey JDS Industries conducted, dealers

said they expect their corporate awards to grow in 2022. They said their sport/athletic awards are also expected to grow in 2022.

Garcia says the future of the awards industry is promising and encouraging; however, she remains cautious about COVID variants. As more restrictions are lifted, Vitto believes it will be a good year for the awards industry, and potentially a great year if the port issues are resolved.

“I’m no fortune teller, but I am continually optimistic about the future of the awards and recognition market as well as other markets we serve,” says Gross.

“History has shown me that sublimation transfer truly performs well during a good economy or a bad economy. With weddings, sporting events, church gatherings, business functions, and other in-person events soon returning to some sort of normalcy, I believe the need for awards and recognition products will soar.” **GP**

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



KEY LESSONS I LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

Experience is a great teacher. I learned many lessons along the way — some the hard way. I wanted to share some of these valuable experiences with you.

HOW WILL I MANAGE A COMPLEX LASER?

My laser was a simpler machine than I first thought. Learn how lasers work by going to a trade show or another location where the laser manufacturer has a sales and technical team. Spend time learning how it works before researching laser specifications you think you need.

Understanding how the machine works will help you select the right specifications and understand the importance of them in relation to the use

of your laser. Understand the parts that will wear out and how they will be replaced. Most lasers are well designed and you or someone you know that is mechanically handy can replace most of the parts. You should also know where the closest repair technician is to where your business will be. If you need their services, you will have to pay for travel time and expenses.

MY LASER WENT DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF A JOB

Know which parts are most likely to wear out and create an emergency kit with each one. I remember the panic in the early days when my laser would stop working or have what I consid-

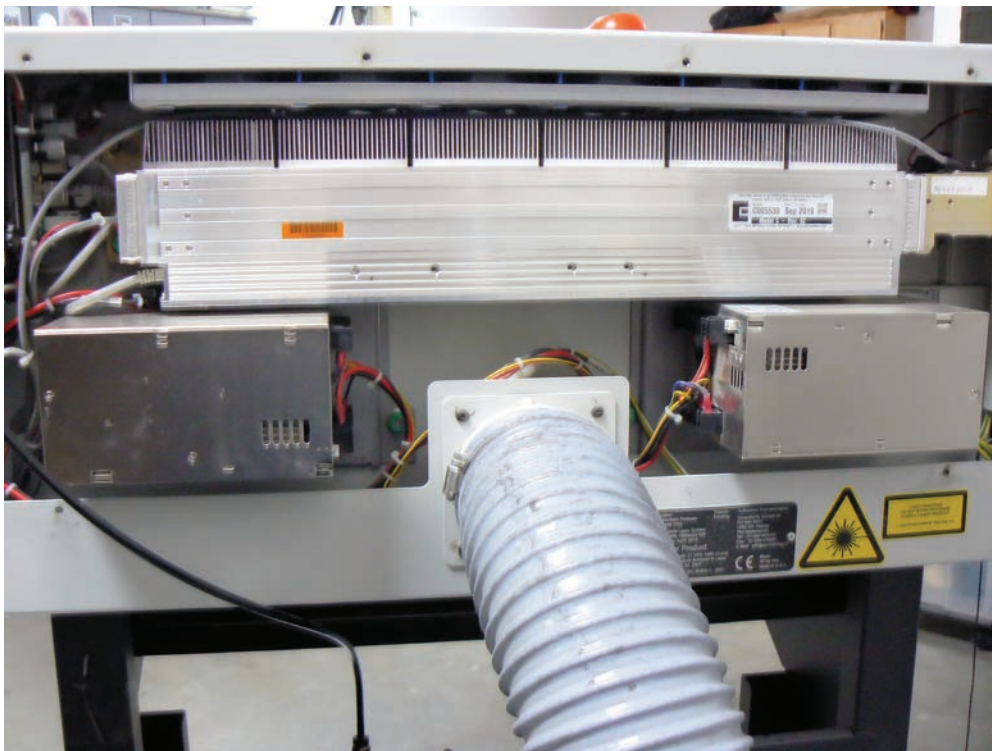
ered a major problem. Anything that would prevent me from delivering a job on time was a major issue. After a few panic sessions I got the idea to create an emergency repair kit. I gained enough experience that I usually knew what was wrong. I almost always had the laser back working after a few hours. Having an emergency repair kit and some great technical support just a phone call away made all the difference. I also avoided the large overnight shipping charges during my emergencies. I could replace parts I used at my leisure and with regular shipping.

INVESTING IN YOUR PRIMARY TOOLS

Look at how much you spend on your primary tools as investments and not expenses. Buy quality. Your laser and cutters and perhaps some other equipment will become workhorses and in use many hours each day. Poor quality and unmaintained equipment can ruin a lasered product. It costs money, frustration and perhaps the loss of a client. There are tools that will be less important or infrequently used that can be of lesser quality. I bought lots of small hand tools at Harbor Freight and never had a problem. The quality is good without the higher cost. However, I would not consider buying my laser or cutting shears there.

NEVER STOP LEARNING ABOUT YOUR CRAFT

Learning new things about engraving, graphics or about materials and products will help keep you focused, enthused,



Lasers look more complex than they are mechanically. (All images courtesy Bob Hagel)

and enjoying your craft and business for a long time. This applies to your laser settings and capabilities, your graphics software and the continuously improving and changing world of materials and products. Make it a goal for your clients to call you an expert and crafts person. I loved trade shows as they gave me the opportunity to talk to experts in many fields. I learned software shortcut keys, techniques, and capabilities I never imagined my software had. This applies to equipment, materials, and products as well. Having time during your busy season will be a constraint. Take 10-minute learning breaks during these times. When you're not busy, schedule at least 30 minutes each day or two to try out something new. Explore and have some fun! Consistent learning will also shorten the time it takes to complete projects. Design, assembly, and problem solving become faster with education and experience.



Smokey was one of many celebrities we had the pleasure of honoring.

LEARN HOW TO TROUBLESHOOT

Your equipment sales teams and technicians are great teachers and willing to share. Again, trade shows are a great place to explore how your equipment works, wears out and breaks down. What are the symptoms that your X motor is wearing out? Your laser just stopped working in the middle of a job, how do I find out what is wrong? Other great sources are YouTube videos, your laser's manual, and other shop owners in your area.

SHEET MATERIALS AREN'T ENGRAVING OR CUTTING PROPERLY

It is possible your laser is not firing properly. Test another material like a metal plate that is flat. If the laser works with that material, then you likely have one of two issues:

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YOUR LASER AT WORK

1. **Your material is warped and not flat across the sheet.** This will cause your material to be in focus in certain areas and out of focus in other areas.
2. **If your material is level, your laser table may not be.** Check your laser table with a level. However, you will first need to check your floor and your laser machine itself and adjust the measurement of your material by how much your floor or laser is off.

DON'T WASTE DOWNTIME

Downtime is very valuable. Ongoing education is important. However, there are lots of other needs begging for attention like machine and routine maintenance and lubricating cutters and other equipment. Plan your larger maintenance tasks around your less busy times.



This sheriff's sergeant will cherish this retirement gift with the photo of those he served with over many years.



Some of the projects we work on end up in unusual places.

Cleaning out is also essential. I found I saved far too many things that were just taking up space. If you haven't used it in a year, you can likely get rid of it without regrets.

Review pricing and customer communication pieces about rules and suggestions. Replace samples with a current product that is clean and without errors. Rearrange and renew your showroom and displays. If your website is a showroom, evaluate how current it looks, the photos used, and the products displayed. I know you can find a dozen other needs that are important to keeping your business looking current and professional.

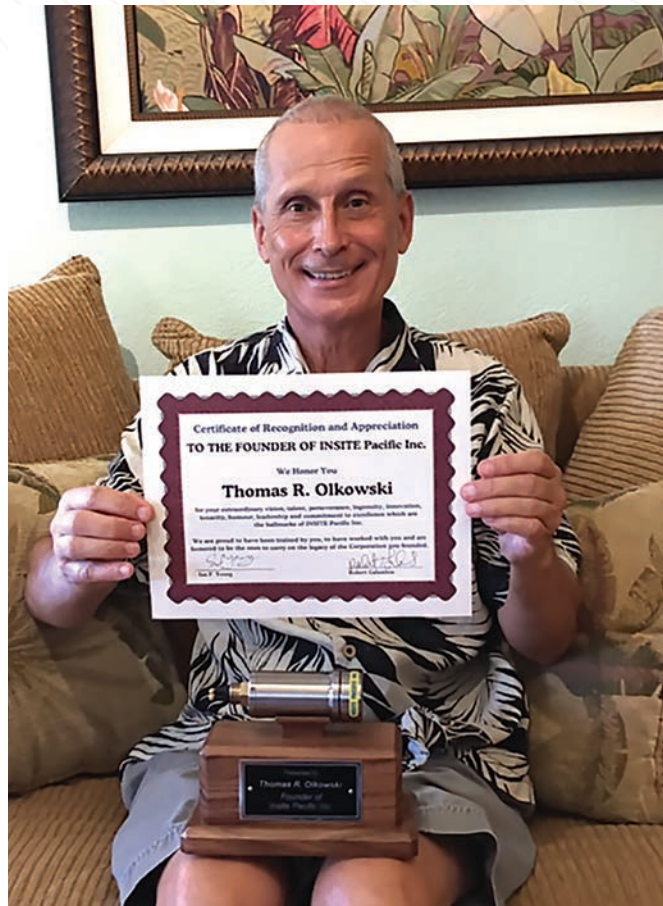
LASER ENGRAVING IS FREE

Using this concept in your pricing and marketing is dangerous to your business and the industry in general. If you are the buyer in a transaction, understand nothing is "free." The cost is included in the price. Using this advertising technique greatly lowers the value placed on your skills and your laser engraver. Customers will assume that if laser engraving is free, it must be easy to do, and the equipment has to be inexpensive. Think of it this way: Your plumber likely charges more than \$100 per hour for their work. A residential plumber has a skill level like a laser engraver – graphic artist. Your laser costs much more than the tools your plumber uses.



Above: Seeing the recipients smile in pride makes our hard work worthwhile. Attending an event you worked on is important to having continuous joy for your business.

Right: A custom base I designed, made by a woodworking partner. Creative projects provide excitement and fun to our jobs.



Why does your plumber charge \$100 per hour of work and you only charge \$45 per hour for engraving time? Our industry has a problem of undervaluing laser engraving time.

Those that have marketed “free” engraving have made this problem worse. Please don’t add to this issue. Be a craft person with a high skill level and make a good living from your craft.

ENGRAVING CUSTOMER PRODUCTS

There are many risks when engraving your customers’ products — whether they purchased them elsewhere or made them. It may be a difficult product to engrave due to shape or the engraving in a small location. The product may be hard to hold in place. Spelling could be wrong, or the customer’s handwriting was more difficult to read than you thought. The quality of the graphic they gave you was poor. Your laser broke down in the middle of the job. There are a host of things that can go wrong.

You may decide not to engrave a product you did not sell. I can’t blame you for this decision. If you do engrave your customers’ products, consider these issues:

1. You are not making any markup on the product to add to your profit margin, and you are not covering your costs of unboxing and reboxing time (handling time).
2. Charge or calculate your laser engraving hourly rate you apply to the job at a higher price than you would charge for engraving products you sell.
3. Have rules in place about who pays for replacing a product if there is a problem or the customer is not happy with the result. This is critical when engraving expensive products, family heirlooms or items of historic value.

PREPARING PERSONALIZED PRODUCTS FOR SHIPPING IS OFTEN COSTLY

Many times, if you are shipping a personalized product to a customer, packaging and shipping boxes must be purchased and

stored. The more assembly required or customization of the product, the more time and materials are needed to ship products without breakage. Always consider the material cost and time it takes when shipping. Also, remember that your cost of the actual shipping is far greater than Amazon, Target or Walmart would pay. You are also paying for the product to be shipped to you. That cost must be considered in your pricing. This is especially true when you are placing a special order for a customer and not including it in a routine weekly or monthly order.

HOW DO YOU STAND OUT FROM YOUR COMPETITION?

Far too many businesses take the shortcut of lowering their prices to stand out from the competition. It’s easy and quick to do.

YOUR LASER AT WORK



Cleaning and renewing your showroom is important to do on a scheduled basis. It helps you look professional and increase sales.



Storing acrylic sheet goods flat greatly reduces warping and lasering problems.

So, if it is easy and quick for you to do, then it is easy and quick for all your competition. There are many other ways to differentiate your business.

Many in our industry have a product or market focus they excel at or have a natural customer base for. I decided to differentiate our business through offering specific service levels others would not offer. I became an accomplished laser graphic artist. Almost every graphic I engraved I used vector art that in many cases I created myself from marginal quality bitmaps.

I maintained a font library of thousands of fonts. I used fonts very creatively matching themes of events, wedding invitations or holidays. I created graphics for events where none existed. I worked very hard at creative layouts, designing ornaments and separators for a client's business or event. Coming up with solutions to make the final receiver of the product or award feel special and therefore make my customer look like a hero.

This was a lofty goal when we started. When we sold our business and retired, our clients let us know we had achieved this goal and it is the main



SSgt Christopher A. Huysman

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to S-3. Your mentoring and rapport led to the successful operations in the S-3, which was greatly appreciated. Fair Winds and Following Seas from the Marines of 1st Maintenance Battalion S-3.

Lasering and working on customer products takes great care and presents challenges that require careful pricing to make a profit.

reason they stayed with us all those years. We were called true craft persons. What is important is that you find a way to differentiate your business without lowering the price. If you don't, your prices will have to continue going lower to constantly beat that new business who wants to beat you on price.

ORDERING INVENTORY

Create an ordering schedule. It may be once a week or once every two weeks or more often. Order on the same day and around the same time. Let your clients know your ordering schedule and a deadline to get orders to you. This will allow you to control your shipping costs. Any additional orders clients and customers need that are not on this schedule will require a special ordering charge. You may want to even post your ordering schedule for everyone to see. You will need to make exceptions when appropriate, but you have

the obligation to yourself to control costs and most everyone will understand this need. Most of your customers will have the same need, but not always the control of when they have to place an order.

Remember, you're in a personalized product business. There are many special needs and schedules you must address. A business that just puts products on the shelf and customers do all the research and selection on their own is a very different business. You will put in a great deal of research time for customers. Your pricing and guidelines you have to follow to make a good living is very different from these other retail stores. There may be times that you need to remind certain customers of this fact. Your pricing will need to reflect the substantial sales and ordering time certain customers will require.

I love this industry because of the customers' challenges, changing product lines, advancing technology and the op-

portunity for creativity. It is never boring; our competitors are helpful friends, and we love our clients. Many became friends for life.

Enjoy your business and help make this a great industry to be a part of. Ask your customers for photos of how they used the product you personalized. When it's possible, attend events where awards and other products you made are presented. It's always great to see your impact. **GP**

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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Corel Trainer 🍎 | <input type="checkbox"/> SanMar |
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TRAINING SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022

10 a.m. — 4 p.m.

- Hirsch Solutions Inc – Join the DTG Revolution!

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

- Epilog Laser - Finding Success in the Laser Engraving Industry: Application Ideas and Tips to Boost Production **START HERE**
- JDS Industries - Starting Sublimation: What Do I Need? **START HERE**
- STAHL'S - Printing Outside of the T-Shirt Box **START HERE**

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- HIX® Corporation - Learning the Sublimation Business
- IKONICS Imaging - Lights, Camera, Action! Become a Sandcarving Star! **START HERE**

1:30-3 p.m.

- Trotec Laser - Skills, Materials, & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment
- Transfer Express - Screen Print with Just a Heat Press **START HERE**

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022 cont.

4-5:30 p.m.

- Transfer Express - Print More than T-Shirts **PRO**
- Corel Trainer - Everyone Can Learn CorelDRAW **START HERE**
- Advertising Specialty Institute - Sell More to Existing Customers **PRO**

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO* - Pricing Strategies: Are you Getting Paid for your Time? with Matt Charboneau **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO* - Wraps Designer Tools & Tips, with Dallas Fowler **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO* - Accelerating your Decorating Techniques, with Lon Winters **PRO**

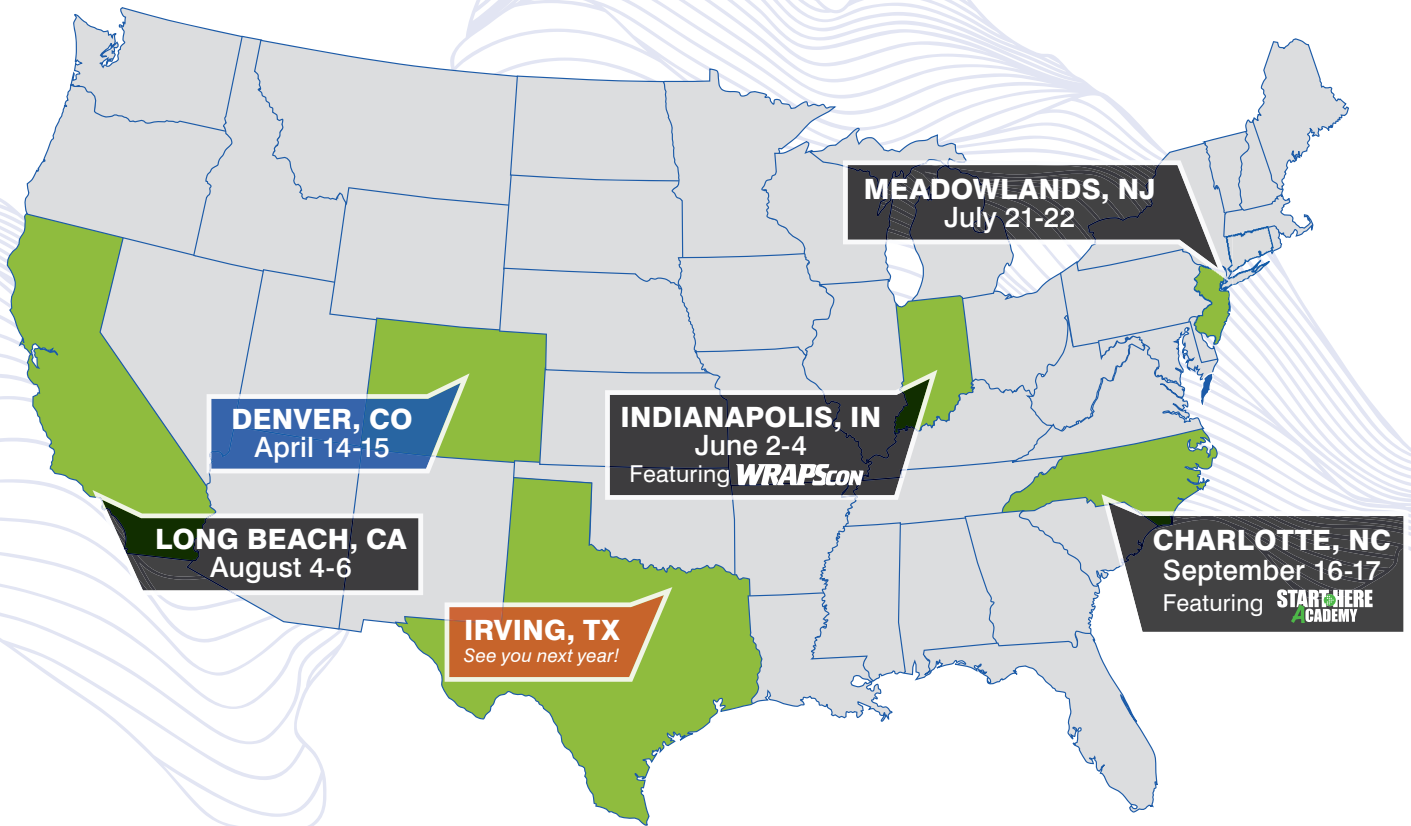
11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO* - Managing the Details of the Sign Creation Process, with Matt Charboneau **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO* - How to Price yourself for Profit, with Matt Richart **PRO**

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USING THE MESH FILL FEATURE

STEPS FOR A FANTASTIC DESIGN IN CORELDRAW

Some time ago, a friend asked me to develop an image she could use to promote a new proposed drama club in print and online. She provided a few possible images for consideration. I then consolidated her suggestions and chose the Mesh Fill feature in CorelDRAW to best reach her desired goal. **Fig. 1** is the result of my efforts.

DRAMA CLUB DESIGN

Here are the steps I took to reach the final image. The first thing was to create a basic shape of the curtain. I used the Bezier tool for that. **Fig. 2** shows my initial shape with the mesh lines indicated by a red dashed line. Note that when the Mesh Fill tool is accessed, the default mesh is two columns and two rows as appears on



Fig. 1: The final drama club design. (All images courtesy Doug Zender)

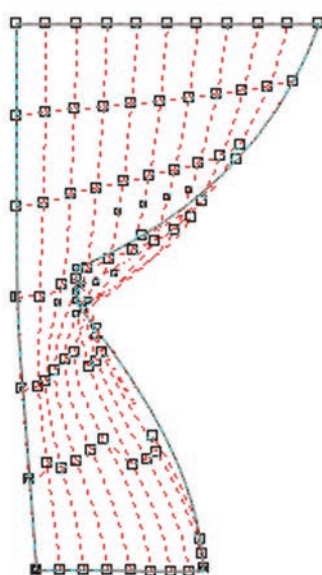


Fig. 2 (left): My initial shape with the mesh lines indicated by a red dashed line. **Fig. 3 (right):** By alternating certain colors, it allowed me to create the appearance of a pleated curtain.

the task bar. I changed it to 10 columns and six rows. It is best to keep the shape of the object as simple as possible. As can be seen, some of the mesh lines fall outside the image. This makes it a little more difficult to choose the proper node to color. The simpler the object is, the better. Next is to begin filling the object with appropriate colors by selecting nodes and clicking on the desired color. For this project, I chose to use four colors: maroon (C:0 M:90 Y:50 K:58), dark red (C:0 M:100 Y:100 K:25), light red (C:0 M:100 Y:95 K:0), pale pink (C:0 M:20 Y:20 K:0). By alternating these colors, it allowed me to create the appearance of a pleated curtain as in **Fig. 3**. I then selected individual edge nodes at the bottom and moved them up slightly to form the ruffled edge. Next, the drawback sash was created by drawing a rectangle, modifying the corners, and adding an envelope to arc it.

It was then skewed into position. After filling it with maroon, I again chose the Mesh Fill tool, this time with four columns and four rows. I then used my same colors to add the necessary highlights. When I was satisfied with the



Fig. 4: This step creates the valance between the curtains. I first drew a rectangle and rounded the bottom corners and used a fountain fill with the same colors as before. It was then duplicated, moved over, then the two were blended to get the pleated look.



Fig. 5: The masks with Mesh Fill applied to each mask, this time with 12 columns and 12 rows.

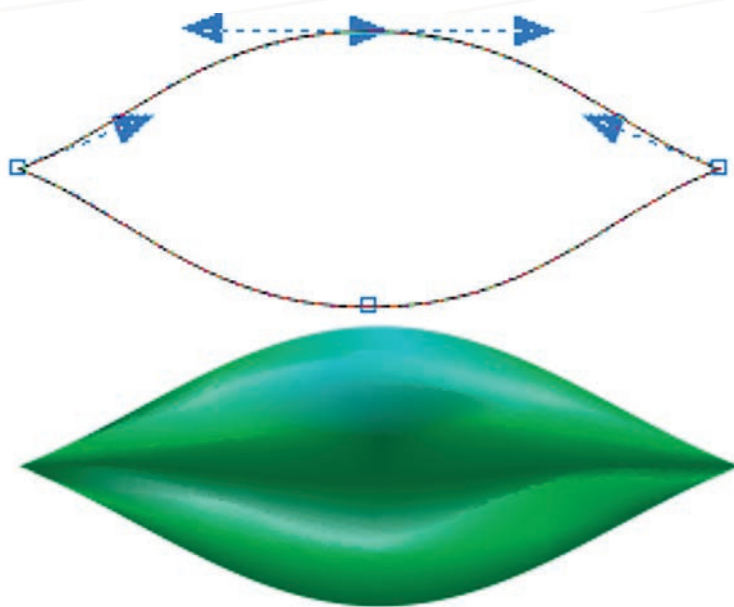
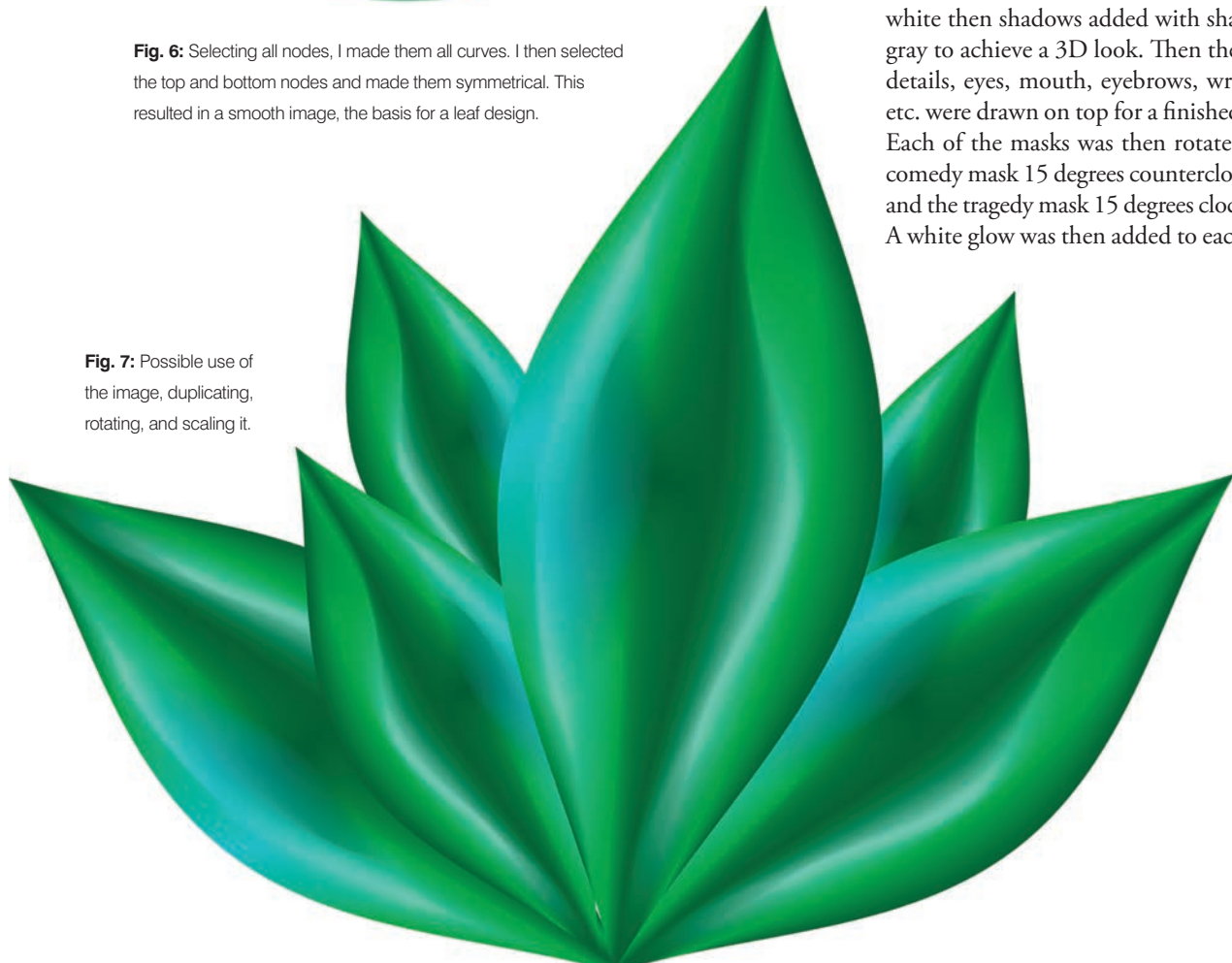


Fig. 6: Selecting all nodes, I made them all curves. I then selected the top and bottom nodes and made them symmetrical. This resulted in a smooth image, the basis for a leaf design.

Fig. 7: Possible use of the image, duplicating, rotating, and scaling it.



results, I grouped the two objects, duplicated, and mirrored the image and moved it to the right side of the “stage.”

My next step was to create the valance between the curtains. I first drew a rectangle and rounded the bottom corners and used a fountain fill with the same colors as before. It was then duplicated, moved over, then the two were blended to get the pleated look in **Fig. 4**. I moved it behind the curtains and aligned it with their top edge. With the stage curtains now completed, I began to work on the comedy and tragedy masks. As with the curtain, a basic shape was necessary for each mask, which were drawn again using the Bezier tool. **Fig. 5** shows the masks with Mesh Fill applied to each mask, this time with 12 columns and 12 rows. Each mask was filled with white then shadows added with shades of gray to achieve a 3D look. Then the facial details, eyes, mouth, eyebrows, wrinkles, etc. were drawn on top for a finished look. Each of the masks was then rotated. The comedy mask 15 degrees counterclockwise and the tragedy mask 15 degrees clockwise. A white glow was then added to each with

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the drop shadow tool. With the completion of the entire image, I selected it all and grouped it. I then drew a rectangle and filled it with a dark blue color. I then power clipped the group into this rectangle. This finished the design. I then added the “Drama Team” lettering on top.

This image was then exported as a PNG file and emailed to my client. She didn't like the gray masks but wanted them to be more gold in color. Rather than recoloring them, I converted each to an RGB bitmap and changed the colors in the Image Adjustment Lab. The final design in **Fig. 1** was acceptable to my client, so we were both happy.

HOW TO USE MESH FILL

Using the Mesh Fill feature in CorelDRAW can prove to be a bit tedious and often a bit frustrating. Nevertheless, it can provide some fairly impressive and dynamic visual results. For those not familiar with this feature, I have offered the following simple example of how to

Fig. 8 (below): Cartoon image of a UFO I began and never finished. I want to draw attention to the canopy over the cockpit. With the ellipse tool, I drew the basic shape and filled it with white, then reshaped it.



create a design and use it to implement some basic functions of the Mesh Fill feature. I first drew a square shape, rotated it 45 degrees to get a diamond shape.

I then stretched it horizontally and converted it to curves. Selecting all nodes, I made them all curves. I then

selected the top and bottom nodes and made them symmetrical. This resulted in a smooth image, the basis for a leaf design, as depicted in **Fig. 6**. On the left is the basic shape, and the right side is the Mesh Fill rendition of the leaf. **Fig. 7** show a possible use of the im-



Above: This finished image employing the Mesh Fill function shows how it can help you achieve your graphic goals.

age, duplicating, rotating, and scaling it. This is a fairly quick and easy exercise to discover the abilities and limitations of the Mesh Fill tool. I urge anyone interested to do something like this to gain the expertise needed to use this powerful feature. There are some other things one needs to know that I've yet to discuss.

THINGS TO KNOW

All edge nodes and intersection nodes on a Mesh Fill can be made a cusp, smooth or symmetrical node with control handles that allow one to modify the fill shape and characteristics. Nodes can be selected individually or several together and moved up, down, left, or right as needed. Sometimes, moving nodes or adjusting control handles

can give unwanted results. One must use discretion in this regard. Fortunately, there is the multiple "undo" feature. One other thing about Mesh Fill is the ability to add percentages of transparency to selected nodes. **Fig. 8** is a cartoon image of a UFO I began and never finished. I want to draw attention to the canopy over the cockpit. With the ellipse tool I drew the basic shape and filled it with white, then reshaped it. With the Mesh Fill tool, I selected random nodes and made them transparent in various degrees of intensity. The result is the appearance of a clear glass or plastic dome over the cockpit. Kinda cool. The Mesh Fill tool is probably not something you'll use every day, but it can prove to be valuable for some projects when needed.

This tool should never be intimidating to any user but is a fun way to do something different. After all, should not our job be fun? As always, I invite questions and/or insights at dezender1@gmail.com. All questions will be answered as soon as possible and will be shared with the magazine editors. **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.

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ELECTRIC SIGNAGE

continued from page 25

them to “hire” you, so the new owners are introduced to you in the most positive light possible. Playing these new cards right could end up with an even bigger sale in the end. Asking the right questions reveals little tidbits like this that can save you time or set the stage for an even larger project with the new owners.

GET THE ANSWERS YOURSELF

Performing certain tasks can verify details that your customer may not be aware of. Spending time to properly survey a site can be your best insurance policy for a smooth sailing project.

SITE SURVEY

I can say that nothing insures a successful job like a well-done presale sign survey. Details are key, and without putting a tape measure on everything, you are basically guessing. A good survey will save you from a second or third visit to obtain details like sign band height and wall construction.

DESIGN

You now know the manager has some specific ideas, and that means you can address the western design idea and the conservative approach so that you have the manager excited about your presentation and ideas. Why wouldn't he be? You are providing ideas that he thinks will work so that he has a fighting chance to convince the approval committee to look at his western ideas, and not the boring conservative idea.

CITY OR COUNTY SIGN CODE RESTRICTIONS

Who knows, right? If your client has looked at the code (100% doubtful), great. If not, then it's up to you to find out what is allowed or not allowed. Can signs extend above the roofline? How is the square footage measured (4-side, 6-side, 8-side box), are raceways or wireways required and why are they required?

Channel letter drawing proposals have been created by simply matching the letter height of the existing letter sets, only to find out the city government imposed a historic relevance designation to the building, which now no longer allows internally illuminated letters, only externally illuminated flat cut out dimensional letters. So, moving forward, as each tenant leaves, the new tenant signs must conform. Yeah, that kind of ruins your day when you show up at the permit desk with the client's deposit and signed agreement in hand. Now, you look like a dummy, and you have to undo all of your work and start from scratch.

The most common response you will hear when stuff like this happens: “Oh, yeah, I remember hearing about that new city ordinance that went into effect last year, I just didn't think it had anything to do with my signs.”

Doing your homework up front will save you hours of embarrassing redraws. Nothing can be built or installed unless it's been approved by the city or county and a permit has been issued. This applies to 99% of most commercial sign situations.

INSTALL LOCATION CONDITIONS - PER THE SIGN SURVEY

Next, you need to know what the building sign band restrictions are for installing electric channel letters. If you've ever been sent to a job site without having all the information, then you can relate to why it's important to open up the access panel and look behind the sign band wall to determine what is back there, and how the channel letters are to be mounted. Focus on the fine art of taking measurements, capturing clear photos, and relaying easy to understand information such as “do the existing signs have raceways, and why or why not?” Perhaps the wall is made of 11" thick preformed concrete? That would certainly force the use of a raceway.

If you are not sure as to why, then it's time to look more into the scope and restrictions of electric sign installation. (*Pro tip:* Raceways are used when limited numbers of sign band or wall penetrations are desired for mounting the letters. A raceway only needs one power-pass through hole, and 4 to 6 wall anchors. Remote wired channel letters (no raceway) have four-plus mounting anchors, plus the electric pass through on every letter).

ARTWORK FOR THE SHOPPING CENTER

Here is where you can add a little pizzazz to your presentation by asking about their current logo or working for the strip mall. If they don't have one, it's your lucky day to sell them a logo design along with the sign package. Creating a strip mall logo without knowing if they have one already, or even want one is an invitation to a big waste of time. If you ask, and they are open, run with it.

TENANT ARTWORK

If we are looking at changing every tenant's sign, you need to obtain artwork for each business. If you are not up to speed on raster versus vector artwork, it's highly advisable that you grasp the differences so you know what you are receiving from your client, and whether or not it's usable for signage.

A VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

Professional independent designers are presented design projects from a variety of sign companies, so they typically take a hands-on approach to requesting the required information whereas an in-house designer may not have that ability to insist on more information. They may be required to simply do their best with the info provided. Independent designers typically won't work on a project until they are confident they understand all the wants, wishes, options and restrictions of the project. Hiring one of these designers

to provide the files, per project, is one way to allow your in-house designer to stay focused on what they do the very best.

WHO'S ELECTRICIAN?

The electrician can make your installation process go smoothly or bring it to a halt. If you have a relationship with an electrician, insist that they are used. If not, it's key to open a conversation with the electrician for the strip mall well before you need them for the installation and learn about what they need from you to make the authorized connection and testing after installation. I do not need to emphasize how important it is to maintain a smooth working relationship with the electrician. Ask questions, learn what they need, and ask them if a 5' whip will be long enough?

Yes, there are a thousand other details that can influence the channel letter project. However, obtaining the details of these key points will provide you with most of the basics that are needed to avoid some of the most common mistakes that occur when details are not asked for or obtained prior to the design process starting. **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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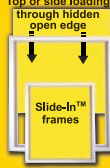
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BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS

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ect should also be of the highest quality, too. We recently had our kitchen cabinets repainted, and we had an excellent experience with the contractor. They had great communication, used quality paint, and did a thorough job papering our floors and masking off the kitchen against overspray. All the little things combined contributed to us having such a good experience. We, of course, turned around and recommended them to multiple people, including online to others in our neighborhood with cabinets of a similar age who might be looking for the same work to be done.

Workmanship isn't necessarily one thing, but a combination of skill and attention to detail that makes all the difference. Workmanship is customer service in disguise.

PRICING

While pricing is part of the sales process and is an essential factor, it's not the most critical element to earning repeat business. Most of our repeat fleet customers don't even ask us for a price before we do another vehicle. We've proven over time that our pricing is competitive. We will offer them an estimate when we have to adjust our pricing due to material price increases, otherwise we keep our pricing consistent.

Pricing is more important early in the process of building a new repeat client as you educate the customer and explain what they can expect for the price. Once the customer realizes that the product they're getting for the price is high-quality, with solid workmanship, and backed by excellent customer service, then they're confident that you're taking care of them.

GP

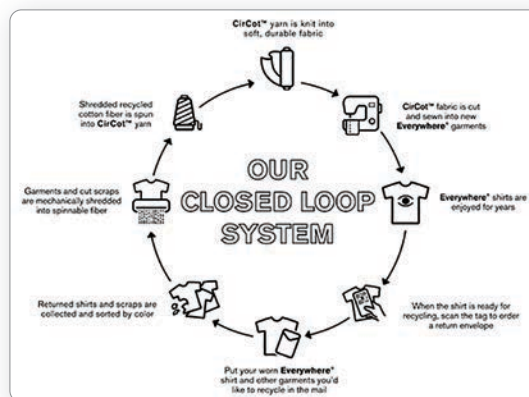
CHARITY JACKSON is co-owner of Visual Horizons Custom Signs based in Modesto, California. She has been in business since 1995 and has worked in the sign industry for nearly 30 years. You can visit her website at www.vhsigns.com.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

continued from page 56

At Everywhere, sustainability begins at the fiber level. "The materials are the foundation of what we do, why we do it, and how we see design and product development," she says. "What makes our product special is the materials."

Kornbluth says Everywhere upends the obsolete take, make, waste apparel industry standard by producing clothing from 100% GRS-certified recycled cotton that would otherwise be headed for the landfill.



Everywhere designs its garments to be recycled through its closed-loop system. (Image courtesy Everywhere Apparel)

"There's this misconception that organic cotton is sustainable, but when you really dig into the environmental impacts, there's actually a lot of big impacts," she explains. "Very, very few companies, if any, are using certified 100% GSR recycled cotton garments. That's our core product – it's the most sustainable and differentiates us."

Recycled polyester may be better than some traditional and more wasteful methods, but Kornbluth feels the material is imperfect. Every time a cotton-poly or polyester shirt is washed, she says, tiny plastic pieces called microplastics are released, contaminating the environment and peoples' bodies. She points to Everywhere's 100% recycled cotton CirCot as a solution.

Everywhere continues to innovate on the

materials side and the finished garment side. "In particular, we have a new patent on a fully-recycled yarn blend, which solves some problems around microplastics pollution," Kornbluth says. "Everywhere launched this product in January to the promotional products space, and we've just had a huge reception to what we're doing. The market is a perfect area to do this sort of innovation because there is so much turnover, production – and overproduction with misprints – so more recycling is really needed."

Kornbluth reaffirms sustainability programs are not out of reach for anyone, encouraging businesses to start small and make the easy changes first.

Companies like Everywhere offer a recycling program through their closed-loop system. Adopt a "consume less" mentality and slowly begin swapping traditional garments for more sustainable options, Kornbluth suggests. Targeting

marketing departments with employee apparel needs is a productive place to start – and then layer deeper, she says. Sustainable options, like PVC and water-based inks, make a difference and impact the environment less. Another option, she says, is to look into partnership arrangements with companies that use renewable energy sources.

Kornbluth says the average person would be surprised how a few seemingly small changes in a year can have a large-scale impact. "There is so much knowledge to be gained around conventional processes," she says. "Sub in where you can and do better. Encourage each other to do better." **GP**

STEFANIE GALEANO-ZALUTKO is the president/CEO of Zalutko Business Services Inc., a marketing agency based in Central Florida. She can be reached at szalutko@zalutkobusiness.com.

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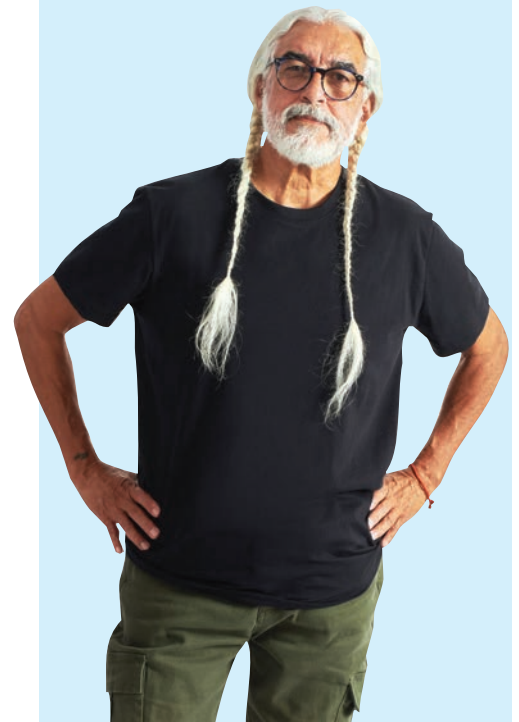


Sean Tomlin, president of Designer Wraps & Signs (Image courtesy Sean Tomlin)



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Elsie Acevedo and Chris Slivar of Deluxe Screen Printing (Image courtesy Deluxe Screen Printing)

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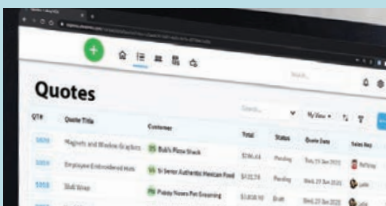
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Marco

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The #1 Leader in Award Products

1-800-229-6592

"EVERY AWARD COMPONENT UNDER THE STARS"



30 oz.



20 oz.



16 oz.



Premium Lid Included



Premiere Packaging



32 oz. Water Bottles
19 Colors

Tumblers
3 Sizes
17 Colors

2 Sublimation
Versions
(20/30oz.)



It's Tahoe
Time!

The Newest Premium Line
from Marco Awards Group



6 oz. Flasks
15 Colors



Beverage
Holders
19 Colors





SPEED TO SUPPORT YOUR GROWING BUSINESS

- Up to 165 IPS engraving speed
- Finish engraving in minutes
- Industrial quality parts
- Holds items up to 12" thick
- Engrave awards, mugs and more
- Engineered, designed and built in USA

