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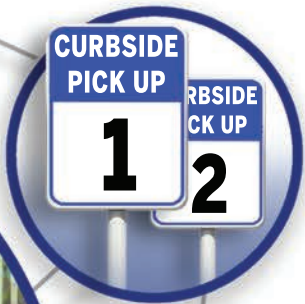
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The focus of your business will determine what kind of heat press you should have, page 12. Image courtesy **Hotronix**. Bottom right: This golf award is the perfect incentive to get into the swing of spring, page 88. Image courtesy **Ruth Dobbins**.

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THE DIFFICULTY OF FOCUSING

There are a lot of medical treatments these days to help people maintain their focus, but unfortunately none of them do much to help you decide where you should focus your business. A dilemma most companies face is if they want to focus on one facet of the industry or become a jack-of-all-trades.

There's no easy path. By focusing on one aspect, you can be the best there is in that area, but you run the risk of saying no to clients when they ask for expanded products or services. Or even worse, you risk having to send them to the competition to complete their orders and expose them to other businesses that can provide similar services.

On the other hand, going the other route and offering everything your client desires means never having to say no, but also means you must learn far more, produce more, and take on more bills to have the necessary tools, talent, and space to provide those services.

The list of pros and cons for picking one side or the other is longer than people want to admit. And often a pro to one person might be a con to another. For example, creative time. For some, the creative process might be the best part of the job and to be able to spread that wealth to a large variety of products and services might be perfect for them. For others, that creative time might represent lost sales opportunities or production time.

That means you can't just borrow someone else's list of pros and cons. This is as personal as borrowing someone else's underwear. Fun, right?

Here are a couple of resources that can give a little perspective to a decision that can affect your business far more than you know:



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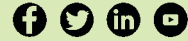
ADDING A HEAT PRESS TO YOUR SHOP

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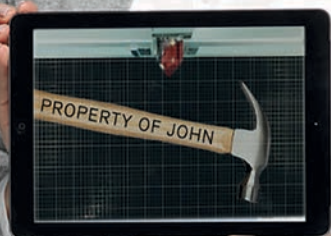
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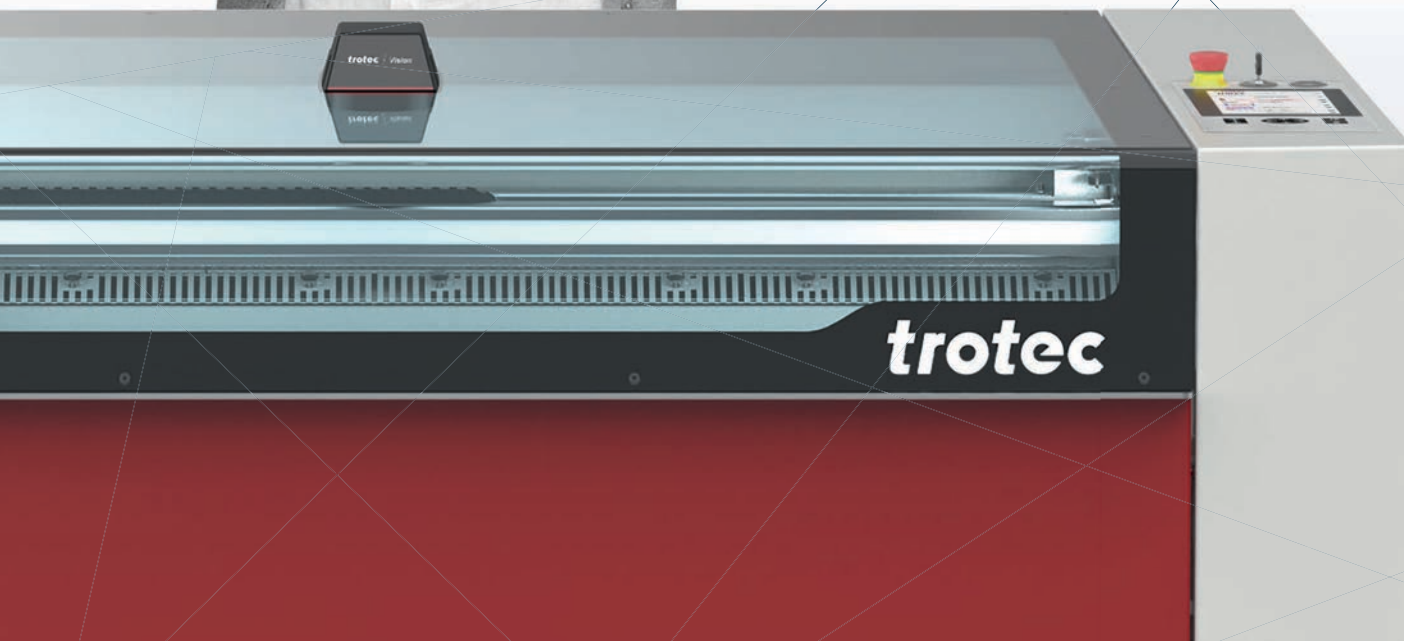
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FLIGHT OF FRIENDSHIP

I had been working at our quiet little fabrication and screen printing shop, and my undisturbed thoughts turned to my good friend, Kim, a Louisiana petroleum engineer and small sign shop owner. I knew he'd been sick, from complications of Type 2 diabetes poorly dealt with. Dropping everything for a moment, I gave him a call before I let work distract me again.

The bold and energetic Kim seemed much less so, and admitted he'd had a rough time of it, spending several weeks in the hospital while doctors tweaked medications to get his kidneys and heart to function at a survivable level. They succeeded, this time, but he'd gotten so weak from his stay in the hospital, he was still in a wheelchair. On top of his health problems, his wife had divorced him the previous year, possibly because she had no desire to be nurse to a man who never tried to take care of himself.

A few months later, Kim placed an order for several hundred laminated hazmat decals. He needed us to help him meet a deadline, as the young lady who ran his little sign shop had too much to do and Kim wasn't much help. We were glad to do the work for him, and when they were ready, I started to have Heather just ship them his way, but then thought better of it. I knew Kim had improved after leaving the hospital. He had kicked the wheelchair and was walking again, though slowly. But I also knew his prognosis was not that great. I decided I would personally deliver his order and take some time for a long overdue visit.

My son and I are both pilots, and share the ownership of an older Piper Cherokee, so I strapped the box of decals in the back seat and arranged for Kim to

meet me at a small county airport about 15 minutes from his shop. Before taking off, I noticed Slade had removed the GPS from the plane and loaned it to a friend. Oh well, I would just have to navigate the old way — by compass.

And that's how I got lost over heavily wooded terrain, that all looked much the same, in rural northwest Louisiana. Dang it! I knew I was close to that airport, and Kim would be expecting me soon. Now what? I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket, went to maps, and put in the name of the airport. Very quickly it told me which road to take, then which to turn on, and drew out a map. I tried to locate the road, but then just pointed the plane in roughly the right direction and watched the moving dot. In five minutes or so, I spotted the little airport and made a beeline for it.

Kim had a driver bring him out, but he walked up to meet me and greeted me warmly. It was so good to see him, and once we got to his rural farm home sign shop, he gave me as much of a tour as he could. The last time I'd visited him, he was operating from a very nice location he built on the outskirts of Shreveport. But I really liked his new place. There were two houses on it, one for him and one for the family of his manager, acres of land, plus a very nice shop well suited to the work they did, primarily signs that went into the oilfields of northern Louisiana.

We had a great visit, swapped a few stories about our younger days, and rekindled a friendship in-person that we'd shared for over 25 years. Later, on the drive back to the airport, the conversation grew more serious, and trended toward just how fast time had flown by, and

we even shared the belief that no matter what time was left, being ready to retire to a better place was the most important thing we could do. Normal retirement wasn't likely for either of us, but we both admitted that at some point, a forced retirement was not going to be avoided.

To my great disappointment, that retirement was a lot closer for Kim than either of us thought. Five or six months after my visit, I received a call from his sign shop manager and adopted daughter, and I was afraid it was bad news as soon as she told me who she was. In the end, diabetes did not take his life, but weakened by it, COVID did the job in less than a week.

Once again, my "tough guy" friend didn't take things that seriously, but when his oxygen level dropped significantly, his damaged heart decided it was time to retire and so, he did too — to a better place, where time is not fast paced, friendships are forever, and no one has diabetes.

And I am so glad I made that delivery flight, spent some time with my friend, and had a chance to appreciate our friendship before it was too late. This story is just a reminder that we all need to be careful about passing up opportunities, as we just don't know which ones simply can't be repeated.

—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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Choosing the right heat press for your business depends on what applications you are using your press for. Presses come in all shapes and sizes, including clam-shell presses that open vertically, swing-away presses that open horizontally, presses that print on hats or mugs, low-cost or analog presses, more expensive digital presses, desktop and large-format presses.

“Heat presses are must-have items for any business that specializes in custom apparel and promotional products,” according to Ricoma in its heat press buying guide.

“Heat presses are used together with different transfer materials to create beautiful custom apparel and products. For example, you can use a heat press with digitally printed heat transfer paper, heat transfer vinyl, sublimation prints, embroidered patches, and much more.”

Henri Coëme, global sales manager at HIX Corp., says it is important to keep a shop’s ultimate goal in mind when choosing a heat press. For instance, if a shop is just getting started with small heat press projects, they may be looking for a good all-around, low-budget but quality press.

Or if they have a specific larger project in mind that requires a good number of shirts and that project may lead to similar business in the future, they might want to upgrade to a slightly larger press.

Some businesses may be looking to add another press to their setup that can handle daily and continuous textile printing production, or others may want to start off with textile printing and evolve into heat transfers for other products as well, such as metal plates, awards, coasters, or drinkware.

“Each of these projects require a different approach and equipment,” Coëme says.

(Image courtesy Hotronix)



UNDER PRESSURE

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES WHEN ADDING A NEW HEAT PRESS TO YOUR SHOP

BY PAULA AVEN GLADYCH



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WHAT MAKES A GOOD HEAT PRESS?

“The heat press must provide accurate reproducible heat, consistent pressure, and reliable, durable performance,” according to Coëme.

Aaron Knight, vice president for Geo Knight & Co. Inc., says “The most important choice is quality and support. A low-cost import press from Amazon may help get a user’s feet wet, but the lack of quality in components, no longevity or equipment, and non-existent support makes for a very short-term investment and difficult to overcome quality issues in output.”

He recommends getting a well-built press made in the United States by a reputable manufacturer so that when there is a problem, you can get same-day response and support and a press that “will actually keep your business going for years, and sometimes decades based on the manufacturer.”

The heating element is the “heart of the press and looking for the most coil and edge-to-edge coverage of heat is key,” he says. “Good digital industrial controls with long warranties is crucial too.”

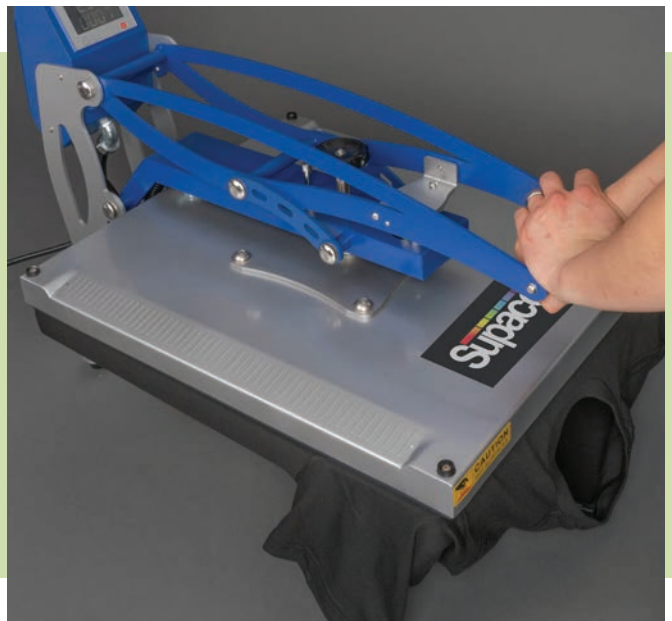


Left: Aaron Knight, VP of Geo Knight & Co. Inc., says the most important features when choosing a heat press are quality and support. (Image courtesy Geo Knight & Co.) **Top right:** “Most times either the swing-away or clamshell presses will accommodate (the) most common imprintables, says Aaron Knight, VP of Geo Knight & Co. (Image courtesy Geo Knight & Co.) **Bottom right:** The press must be at least 1” larger on all sides than the image that is being transferred to the surface of the substrate to work correctly. (Image courtesy Geo Knight & Co.)

A good heat press should be able to provide up to 400 F on a consistent and accurate basis, says Coëme. “Even more importantly than accurate temperature is the availability of evenly divided heat. This

requires a heat platen without ‘cold spots’ or locations that are significantly cooler.”

The best presses will have the heating rod embedded into the surface of the heat casing rather than attached to it, Coëme says.



The size of the press will determine what types of jobs a shop takes on. (Images courtesy Supacolor)



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Companies that are getting into sublimating more than just fabric should consider a swing-away press. (Image courtesy Geo Knight & Co.)

Ricoma has a selection of cap heat presses that come with a powerful clamp to make sure there is end-to-end pressure and heating. (Image courtesy Ricoma)



Multifunction heat presses include a coated heat platen and a mug, plate, and cap press attachment. (Image courtesy Ricoma)



Pressure is also important. Higher end digital heat presses should have adjustable pressure controls and be able to deliver up to 80 PSI/equivalent line pressure force in case the press is used for projects such as plastisol prints, hot or cold peel transfers, foils, flock, or rhinestone transfers, Coëme says.

“Manual presses have no air pressure gauge but should have a lever or knob to allow increasing or decreasing the pressure. A digital readout on manual presses is helpful to indicate the level of pressure applied,” he adds.

It is important to apply even pressure to a transfer as well. “The secret of even pressure lies in a proper construction of the press’s mechanism, with both platens evenly closing over the entire surface. It also lies in a proper finishing of the heat

casting, being perfectly flat, even at high temperatures,” he continues.

The lower pad must be in good shape. If it is low quality, torn or has weaknesses on or below the surface, it will result in lower or lost pressure, causing the print quality to be lost.

Most heat presses have a built-in timer. Air-automatic, semi-automatic or auto-release presses have mechanical or magnetic release mechanisms that automatically open when the set time has elapsed. Analog presses may not have an integrated timer, temperature or pressure read-out but may include stick-on timers.

PRESS SIZES

The size of the press will determine what types of jobs a shop takes on. The press must be at least 1" larger on all sides than

the image that is being transferred to the surface of the substrate to work correctly. That means that if a shop means to print on 11" X 14" Chromaluxe plates and 13" X 13" polyester bags, a 15" X 15" press will do. Larger presses, up to 4' X 8' work well for oversize transfers and larger non-textile substrates. Additionally, heat presses can only handle substrates thinner than the maximum clearance between the top and bottom platens.

“Most times either the swing-away or clamshell presses will accommodate most common imprintables. Swing-away presses are preferred if a large amount of clearance is needed for thicker items, whereas clamshells are great for fabric items but not thicker awards, tiles, plaques, and thick rigid substrates,” says Knight. Companies that are getting into sublimation onto



Larger presses, up to 4' X 8', work well for oversize transfers and larger non-textile substrates. (Image courtesy HIX Corporation)



(Images courtesy Ricoma)



“which not only adds to the safety but also allows you to save time on high-volume printing tasks.”

When sublimating on shirts, hoodies, jackets, bags, or other two-sided textile products, it is important that only the printed side of the garment is exposed to the heat and pressure.

“Laying an entire garment on top of the lower platen risks that sublimation inks will migrate, not just to the top of the substrate but also to the inside and even the back side,” says Coëme. If there isn’t enough clearance below the press’s base to pull any garment or bag over and around this base, the operator can insert a Teflon sheet, cushion, or brown craft paper between the fabric layers. This takes a bit of extra time.

Presses with a cantilever construction allow “full clearance below the machine’s

base, a safe and clean space for the back of the garment, away from heat, pressure and errant sublimation gasses,” he says.

Ricoma also has a selection of cap heat presses that come with a powerful clamp to make sure there is end-to-end pressure and heating so transfers come out perfect every time. The press also has a quick heating feature that allows a shop to start pressing caps immediately instead of having to wait for it to heat up.

Multifunction heat presses, like those offered by Ricoma, include a coated heat platen and a mug, plate, and cap press attachment. **GP**

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

more than just fabric should consider a swing-away press.

Ricoma flat heat presses offer a slide-out platen that allows an operator to place a garment outside of the heating element and then slide it back into place inside the press to prevent hand or arm burns and prevent damage to the garment.

Most presses in use are manual, but if a shop starts using its heat press more frequently to the tune of several hours per day, it makes sense to buy an automatic press “to reduce operator fatigue, increase output, and have better control from one user to the next of exact repeatable pressure,” Knight says.

EASE OF USE

Heat presses are usually simple to use. Set your temperature and time and correct pressure and start pressing.

“The only significant learning curve is with manual presses, learning to clamp and lock the press with an appropriate amount of pressure,” Knight says. “The two-handed clamping/locking ‘feel’ is never forgotten once experienced.”

It is important to find a heat press that is easy to open and close. Ricoma’s heat presses include an auto-open feature

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If you have ever been in the room with DC the Mad Hatter, you would know it. This larger-than-life embroidery professional has been making his presence known in Chicago for the last 26 years. Let me paint a picture of DC for you. Huge smile, gigantic personality, warmth, and friendliness pouring off of him, all topped off with either a wacky big bold hat or a white or purple velvet “pimp” suit, depending on the situation. While many people make the mistake of seeing him only as his fun appearance and happy-go-lucky, fun-loving personality, I happen to know that underneath this public personality is the mind and heart of a very savvy and determined business owner.

One indicator of DC’s grit is the fact that he stayed in business at Navy Pier

for 17 years. While you may think that Navy Pier is an amazing retail location, DC describes his time there as, “Retail dog years. The hours are a challenge, as you have to be open 363 days a year, for at least 12 hours a day.” He went on to explain that he put in 40 hours just on Friday through Sunday working 10 a.m. to midnight, and then he still had 12-hour days to cover Monday through Thursday. Every. Single. Week. For 17 years.

Traffic was a challenge, as it was often so crowded that you could not talk with customers fast enough, or it was a ghost town, yet you had to remain open. The weather was a challenge, staying open no matter what the lake or weather was doing. Staffing was a challenge, as finding

people willing to work those hours and deal with the public in that unique setting was difficult.

“The one thing that I learned working on the Pier is that it pays to laugh and talk crazy. It brings the people to you,” DC notes. “Laughter erases all the ‘isms,’ race, gender, age, religion, politics. It helps you connect, just as people.” He discovered the power of being the Mad Hatter early in his career on the Pier and works hard at being “on” when he is working, even though his business is no longer located on Navy Pier.

DC then went on to let me in on a little-known secret. He admitted that his “Mad Hatter” personality is not really who he is. That in fact, he is serious and straightforward, no frills, no thrills,



Left: DC the Mad Hatter with Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. (All images courtesy DC the Mad Hatter) **Right:** Some of the vests Mad Hatter made for Gov. JB Pritzker and Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton.

a black and white kind of guy whenever he is not working. He has a degree in aviation flight maintenance and management that he earned while in the National Guard. He also has an executive MBA in small business management.

He now runs his business out of the building where the Spiegel's catalogs were printed. He has a four-head and two single-head embroidery machines and a cap heat press. Because DC does not have a retail location, he continues to use his "Mad Hatter" personality and skills to pave the way for his business. He is involved in

several organizations serving the construction industry in the Chicago area. When he attends meetings or events, he is the Mad Hatter, bringing samples and freebies, or as he describes them, "in-kind donations, the cheapest marketing I could ever do!"

When the organizations host an event, DC offers to make shirts for the staff for free, if he can put his company logo on the back of the shirts. When a new member joins the organization, they receive a Carhartt vest with the association's name on the front, and the Mad Hatter logo on the back. DC just chuckles when people

tell him that he cannot afford to give away such nice products. He knows that when that contractor needs to order some apparel with their company name on it, they will know exactly who to call — him!

DC learned early on that he needed to find his own way to excel in life. His learning disabilities made school challenging for him. "I wanted to be on the stage with the rest of the kids, getting awards and being recognized. I knew that I could not do it with my English or math or science grades. There was one award that I could get, and it was perfect attendance. So that is how

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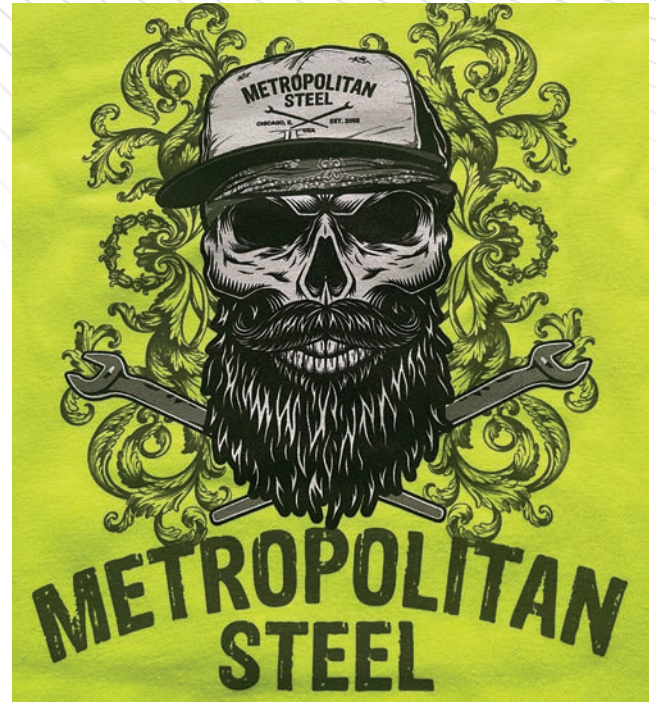
I got myself on that stage with the other kids. Instead of being upset with myself and wishing I could be on that stage, I found a way to get myself on that stage.”

This ability to identify what he wants and then figuring out a way to make it happen is one of DC’s superpowers. His favorite business book is “Blue Ocean Strategy” by Renée Mauborgne, and this is no surprise. He is a perpetual learner. He seeks out mentors to guide him when he wants to learn a new skill or tackle a project that is outside his wheelhouse. He is not afraid to ask for help or try new things.

“The worst that can happen is that someone tells you no. I come up with Plan B. Then when they see me figure it out, without them, they always say, ‘I said no, yet here you are?’ and they are surprised to see me with what I wanted from them.” He attributes his mom with giving him the perspective that you can have anything you want, as long as you find a way to make it happen.

“One thing I am really proud of is my work with the Rainbow Push Coalition. A long time ago, I got their first logo and started making stuff and giving it to them. Before you know it, I am doing all of their apparel merchandising. People just assume

DC the Mad Hatter works with a four-head and two single-head embroidery machines and a cap heat press.



that large projects are organized. Once you pull back the curtain, you may find that the wizard running the show has on gloves that are falling apart.”

One of the things that DC recently made happen for himself and his business is to become the selected apparel decorator for the Obama Library. He worked through the connections he’s built in the construction industry to eventually meet with the group in charge of the library project.

DC explains, “I’m in such a sweet spot in my life right now that it is almost scary. People just write me off as the guy that walks around with a goofy hat and wants attention. They do not understand or even believe that I am their apparel decoration manufacturer. I am the one running the machines, making their logos.”

“I go to a professional event, and I wear the pimp suit. Those who know me expect me to wear the pimp suit. Those who don’t know me think I’m crazy and think I don’t belong. They’re talking about me and dogging me out to my friends that are customers. My customers laugh and say, ‘Oh you don’t know the Mad Hatter! Just watch him. Usually, people have to go work the room. Not so with the Mad Hatter, the room works him!’”

The best advice he can offer to any apparel decoration professional is to build a solid team around you. He sees his suppliers as key players on his team. He sees his digitizer as a key player. He sees his graphics guy as a key player. He sees his screen printer as a key player. Without all these team members, he cannot make the orders happen.

DC’s final bit of advice is to pay attention to how you present your finished goods to your customers. “Paying your supplier for branded hangers for jackets is worth every penny. The hanger stays with the customer. The customer is reminded of you and your business every single time they get the coat off that hanger and then put that coat back on that hanger.” **GP**

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



MAKING BUSINESS MOVES DURING WAR

All images courtesy Howard Potter

So much has happened over the past two years, and we have all learned so much about how being shut down or others being shut down can affect us, but it is not over! With the latest on Russia invading Ukraine, that too is something for us to pay attention to that can affect us all in our line of work.

When we look at something like COVID over the past couple of years, many companies in our industry were forced to shut down unless deemed essential. For those of us that were open, our companies had to work double-time to either keep our staff busy or work to keep up with demand, source stock, learn more about technology on the fly to meet with customers, alter how we sell from in person to online, pivot to sell new products,

reduce how many could come into a store or set up a curbside pickup, and deliver if needed. Along with all of that happening was the major issues with the stock market jumping up and down with no one knowing what would happen next.

HOW CRISES CAN AFFECT BUSINESS

With Russia invading Ukraine, many listen to the news. But as business owners in our line of work, are we really paying attention and absorbing not only what is happening, but how it can affect us? Think about it! Two countries going to war. We obviously do not want to see anyone hurt first and foremost, but on the flip side we all have companies to run and staff to protect along with our own families. From the outside looking in, these two countries produce several

products or have several natural resources that not only our country uses, but other countries that supply the mills that manufacture products we either sell blank or that we customize.

As business owners, we need to pay attention to several things during this. Who is making money? Meaning, who is doing well during these times, no different than during COVID? What do both countries offer? Are people who are losing in the stock market buying, selling, or going back to work? How are your suppliers doing? How are companies in your line of work doing overall? Are you willing to pivot?

Why is it important to know who is making money? If you do not pay attention to this, just like during COVID, you are going to spend or waste resources promoting to companies or customers who are not buying right now. From there, your competitors will snatch up more of the orders first, but more importantly, they will have dibs on creating a business relationship before you do. Also, by knowing who is staying busy and in what markets, you can redirect your marketing efforts to be more productive and create a more direct marketing strategy that can help yield more clients faster with less risk than normal.

Over the past two years, our company was working double-time to pay attention to who was open. Why were they allowed to stay open? What products or services did they offer? So, it is not only important to know who is making money, but how they are able to do so. You the business owner need to think outside the box of normalcy to stay moving.

Is it fair? No, but this is our new way of life in business moving forward. It will make you smarter and stronger as



Why is it important to know who is making money? If you do not pay attention to this, just like during COVID, you are going to spend or waste resources promoting to companies or customers who are not buying right now.



You the business owner need to think outside the box of normalcy to stay moving.

a company if you can learn to adapt. This information allows you to study the needs of these companies. During the time when many other companies were shut down or did not research what was going on, our company was naturally being reached out to by word of mouth at first since we were very fortunate to be on the local news, but also interviewed nationally for what we were doing and why — which, for us, was priceless marketing to help our company stay afloat and healthy. During COVID we learned a lot about the word pivot.

Five business days after furloughing 14 of our 20 staff, my wife and I had to figure out who was buying what and how to sell it to them. Also, in those five days we sourced the products and suppliers needed and my wife built an online store to sell the products. By the end of that day, we sold an online order for \$162,000 to our coun-

ty. That following week, we went one step further and started producing face shields in-house using all USA-made parts. By my wife and I doing nonstop research before many others that week, that allowed us to stay ahead of many others and to gain new clients we never had before. That year we increased sales by 19%, and our normal growth is 15% annually.

With everything happening in the Ukraine with Russia, it can or will be a lot like COVID with supply issues. During COVID, everyone felt the backorder issues with all types of clothing, vinyl supplies, screen printing ink supplies, and more. Most shops only produce one to three processes, which can be good and bad at the same time. Meaning if you need to buy more supplies to stay ahead, it is not as costly to do, but you have fewer processes to pivot with along with fewer products

you can offer. In our case, we have six processes in-house, so we had to stock up on supplies to insure we could keep up with demand. At any given time, we could be spending a minimum of \$2,000 to \$5,000 more in a week buying supplies to stay ahead of the curve on stock. Then, on top of that, trying to create the space needed to store it too.

Just like with COVID, we are already researching supplies and what products come from where to prepare again. Yes, it is never good having to buy supplies well before you need them, but there are several plus sides to this method. Go to your suppliers and ask them how much of each item purchased for the year. Once you know those numbers and what you can afford, you can purchase in bulk. For example, we normally purchase two to four aluminum sign boards per week since



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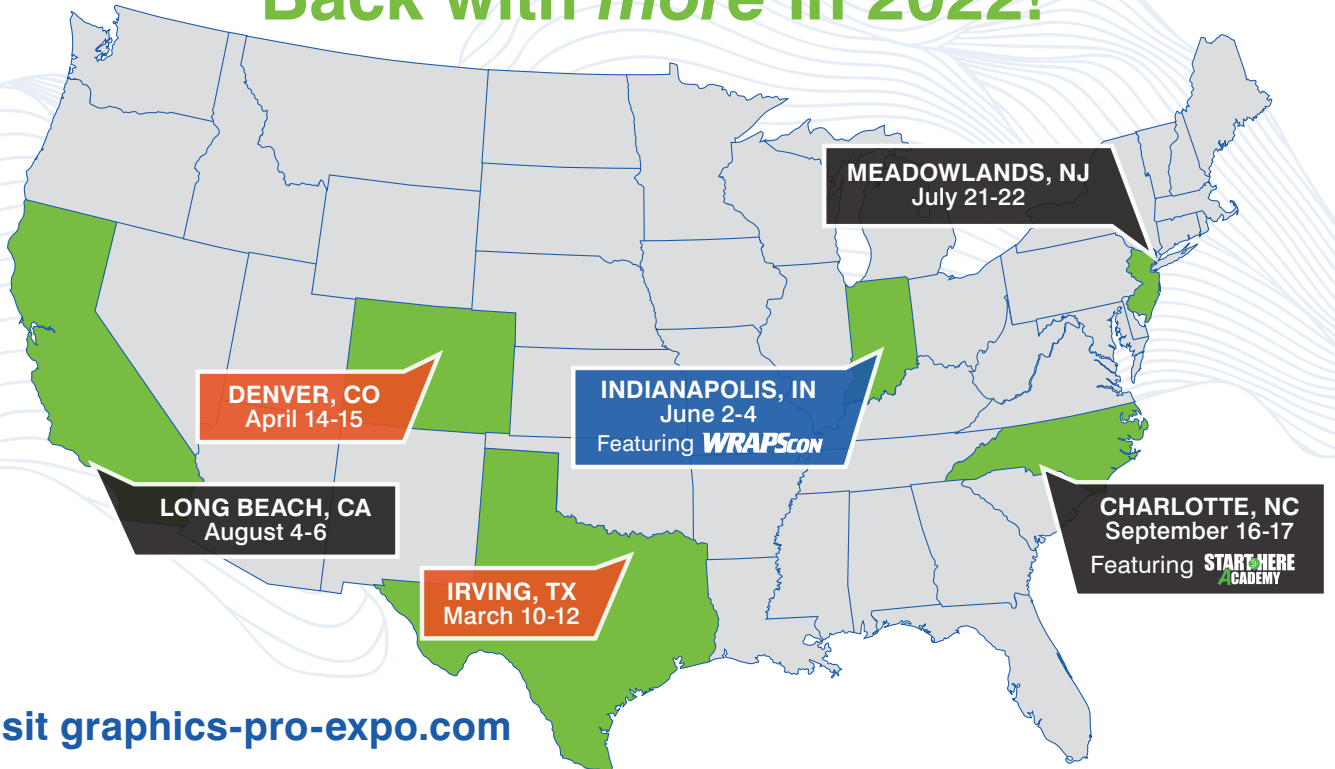
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MAKING SUBLIMATION MOVES



If COVID taught us anything, it is to keep your eyes open and to think ahead. Always keep your business on a swivel and never take anything for granted.

we do not have a ton of extra storage space. Last year, we went through a minimum of 50 sheets. If we purchase 50 sheets up front, we will pay \$8 less per board, which is 13% less per board. Since we have such a strong buying and payment history with our supplier, they are going to give us net 60 terms on this purchase. To make the deal even better, I already know I only need to sell eight boards wrapped to cover the cost of all 50 sheets, so I will not have to come out of pocket for any additional cash to cover the purchase on the net 60 terms. Another savings we have that most do not look at is the time wasted weekly ordering the boards to the time wasted receiving them in each week. Now we can get what we use in a year in one shot and be done with it and save money at the same time along with beating out any stock issues. By doing this, it is not a gamble. For one, you already did the research and know what you went through. And two, the pricing on the supplies is only going to go up, so you are helping your company net a little bit more money on each sale, ensuring you can take the rush orders as they come too!

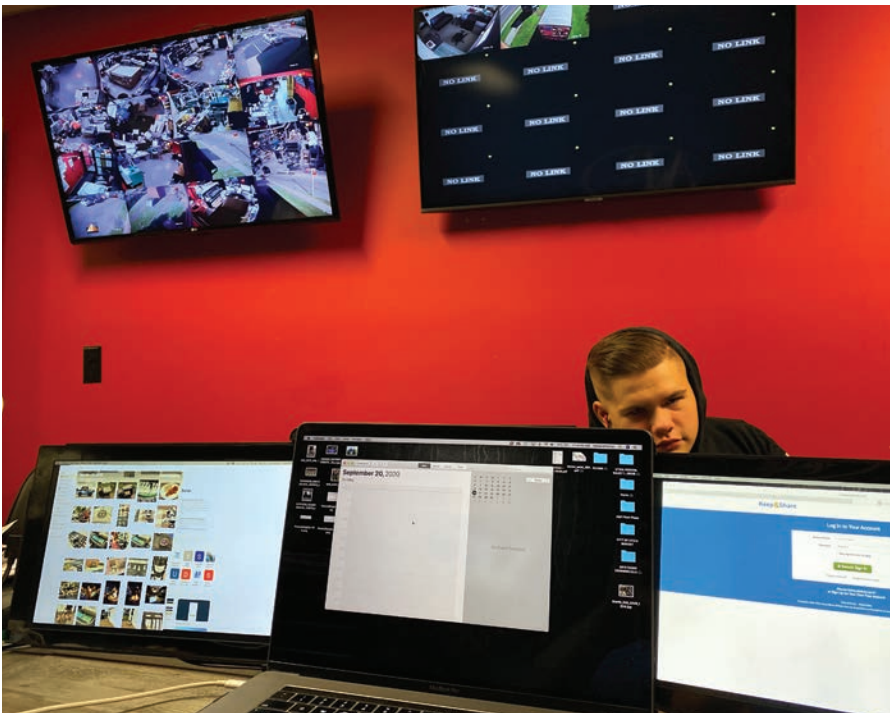
If COVID taught us anything, it is to keep your eyes open and to think ahead. Always keep your business on a swivel and never take anything for granted. As people, our hearts all go out to Ukraine and we all hope the fighting stops, but at the same time we need to protect our companies and our staff from any harm that could come by way of supply shortages. Remember, take just 30 minutes a day and just research anything that could help keep your company ahead. You will thank yourself later on in life! **GP**



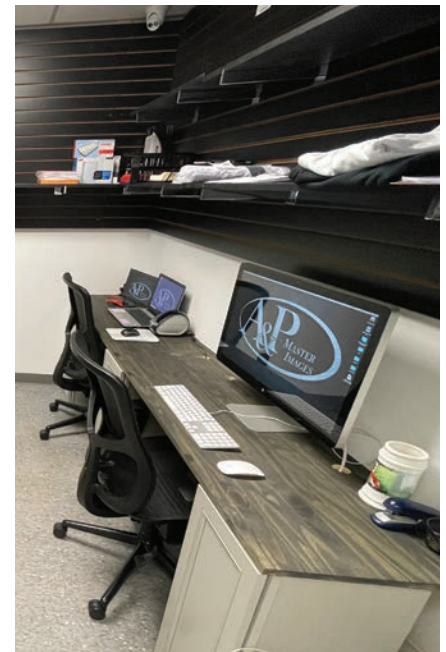
HOWARD POTTER has worked in the promotional industry for 17 years, from designing to building brands and a family-owned business. He is the co-owner and CEO of A&P Master Images LLC with his wife, Amanda. Their company offers graphic design, screen printing, embroidery, sublimation, vinyl graphics, and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



Most shops only produce one to three processes, which can be good and bad. If you need to buy more supplies to stay ahead, it is not as costly to do, but you have fewer processes to pivot with along with fewer products you can offer.



Make it a habit to take just 30 minutes a day and research anything that could help keep your company ahead.



Just like with COVID, we are already researching supplies and what products come from where to prepare again.



EVERYTHING IS BIG IN TEXAS

FOURTH ITERATION OF THIS SHOW DEMO WAS THE BEST YET

We write this month's column on the way to GPX Irving, Texas (GRAPHICS PRO EXPO). We paused a bit to send out emails and texts to hook up with friends and clients in the area for a cold beverage or three, and to remind them of the upcoming show. As we reflect on this month's Software to Substrate, it seems as though we have been here before. That's because we have. In fact, this is the fourth version of this crowd-pleasing, showstopping demo piece. The client's needs remained simple and straightforward. The demo is on a six-color manual press, vintage, classic and distressed, black and navy shirts and as much bang for the buck as possible. "Oh, and one more thing — it needs to say, no it must scream Texas." It always does.



We used a canned tiff distressed pattern from our archives library and positioned it over the image. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)



ALL ABOUT TEXAS

Where to begin? Subject matter: Texas. We started with a Google search for inspiration of just that. Texas. You might imagine what comes up. High in the search, of course, was the Texas state flag. Ahhh. This would be our subject matter. We know, we know. Been there, done that ... three times at least. Pretty boring. But we would jazz things up a bit and turn this passe subject into a legacy and consistent print. Let's face it. What says Texas better than the Texas state flag? The folks down there think Texas is its own country, ya know?

Through some additional research online we came across a great piece that would be our inspiration on the original over a decade ago. Simply, a torn up, tattered American flag with type above it on a black



Complete demo for the GRAPHICS PRO EXPO in Irving, Texas.

"It needs to say, no it must scream Texas."



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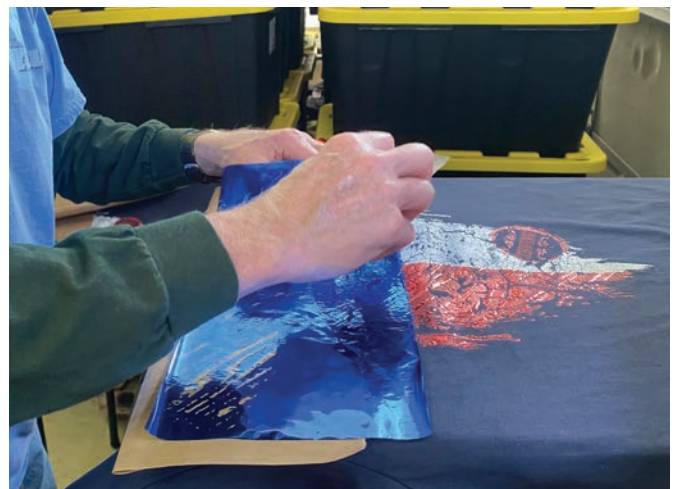
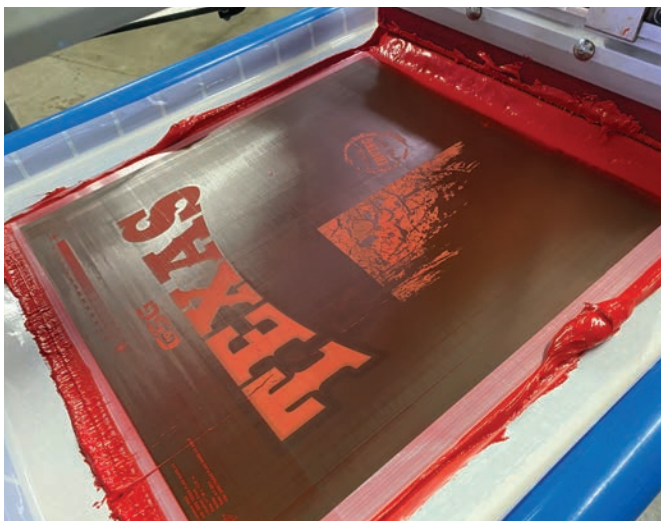
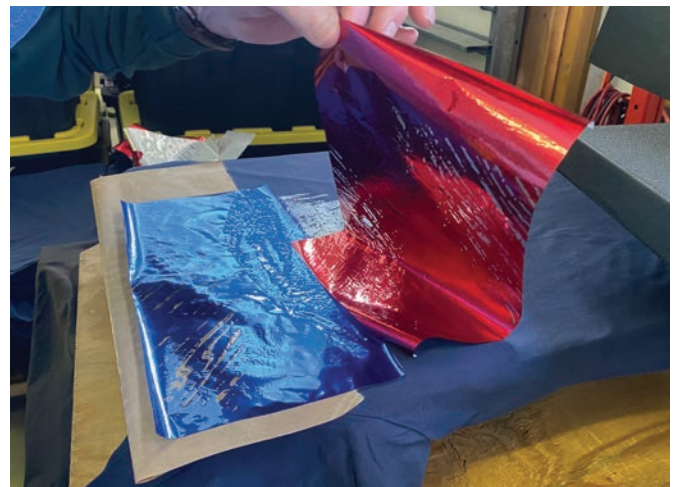
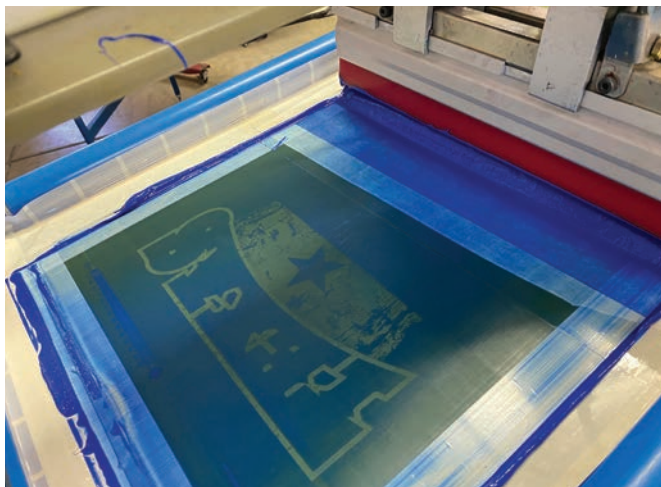
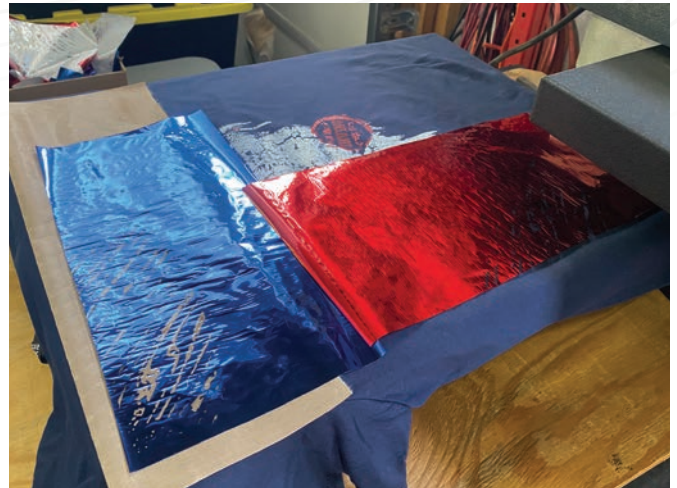
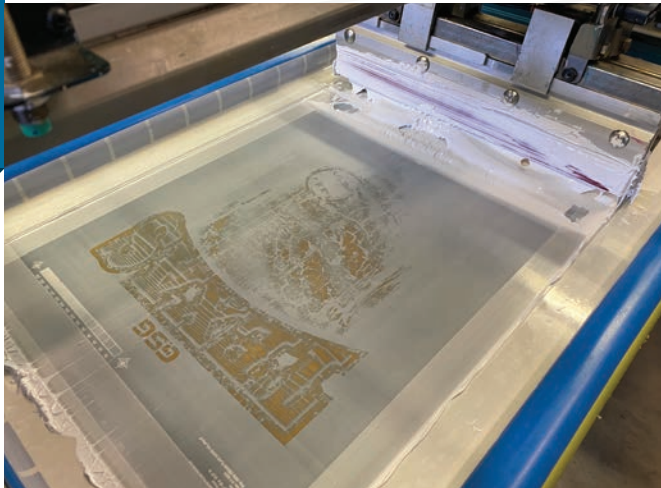
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SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



Separation was fairly simple. Red, blue, and white areas would remain just that. The white printer or underbase was a bit of a trick.

We had to add a trick foil treatment at the end by simply adding an additional flash and printing an HD clear through an N-102 with a 400u (micron) stencil on top of the blue and red areas.

substrate. It served as a perfect template. We would use the red, white, and blue flag with type above it, but this is where the similarities would end. The final image would be completely different.

We started in Photoshop and built a basic Texas flag shape. Rectangular in overall composition like a flag would be. Red on one side, white on the other. Finally, a triangle at the top with a big star in the center. A few reiterations later we learned that the triangular shape made this almost resemble a Puerto Rican flag. Oops! Big gaff there, but nobody noticed for two shows in Texas some 10 or 12 years ago. That would be fixed! We hand drew the tattered flag shape and scanned it into Illustrator and reversed it out of a rectangular flag using Pathfinder. We placed the shape into Photoshop, merged the layers in correct placement as a Smart Object. We

then used a canned tiff distressed pattern from our archives library and positioned it over the image. We brought the transparency back to 100% on the layers pallet. In the color range with the dialog box selected, we chose the darkest object and adjusted for fuzziness. That's a technical term. Ha! While the marching ants were still a marchin' we clicked on our target layer, the flag shape in the background, and deleted it to drop out the pattern. After deselecting and changing the background layer to a color we were able to see our texture, we added a drop shadow and a small stroke to set the image off the background a bit more. To add the type, we used styles from our saved layer styles and a brush from the smudge tool. We pushed the straight lines of the flag colors to follow some of the patterns left by the distressing. After creating some additional outlines, we merged our layers together after adding the wood texture to the type.

Separation was fairly simple. Red, blue, and white areas would remain just that. The white printer or underbase was a bit of a trick. We only wanted some portions of the white areas as well as just some small areas of the red and blue to pop to set on top of the white for the bright areas. We took the composite and added stroke after stroke to white choke it back. Output was originally to film, but this time CTS (computer-to-screen). The angle and dot shape remain our standard 22.5 degrees and round, but for some

crazy texture, the original LPI was set at a huge 10 LPI (lines per inch). This time, we went with 45 LPI. Illustrative, yet our wood grain would remain pretty tight.



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All screens were high tension, work hardened mesh at 45 N/cm. The first white down was exposed on a N-166 TPI (threads per inch) for some opacity, while the red, blue and high white would be on N-272s. The white was a good cotton white ink and was printed using a 65/90/65 triple-ply dual-durometer squeegee. We flashed the white for a few seconds and added the remaining colors

wet-on-wet with the same squeegees. Since royal is a bit too light and navy seems a little dark, we mixed them 50/50 to get a perfect flag blue. We had to add a trick foil treatment at the end by simply adding an additional flash and printing an HD clear through an N-102 with a 400u (micron) stencil on top of the blue and red areas. We printed a few hundred at home on an auto and then the demo on a manual at the show in Irving. The foil was added using a transfer machine with no pressure for the bulk and applied by hand on press on the road.

The customer remains thrilled with this fourth and best version. The attendees continue to fight over request sizes at the end of the belt during the shows. What is this? Burger King? We don't think we will retire this one just yet. **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.

Better Embroidery Results with Conversion Software

**FOR STITCH CONVERSION,
ALL VECTOR FILES ARE
NOT CREATED EQUAL**

BY DENNIS DUNNING

All images courtesy Dennis Dunning



Creating embroidery files by converting vector art into stitches using conversion software is gaining popularity, in part, because it can rival the quality of files created by digitizing and does so more efficiently. That said, some vector files are constructed in a way that allow the software to produce better results. To illustrate this, I used DRAWings PRO XI software and an image of an Athena helmet on a shield (**Fig. 1**). The Athena helmet was composed of armor and a headdress on top of the armor. The shield had an inline as an accent.

I created a vector file from a bitmap of the image using graphic design software frequently used in the apparel decoration industry. The vector file had 15 objects that were black and 4 that were gold (**Fig. 2**). I imported the vector file into the conversion software, the preview of which appeared to produce a pleasing arrangement of stitches that would embroider well (**Fig. 3**). The armor was comprised of fill stitches while the headdress and gold inline of the shield were satin stitches. However, a closer examination revealed something else. The software sequenced the stitches for the gold part of the headdress first, the black center of the shield next and then the black objects of the



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

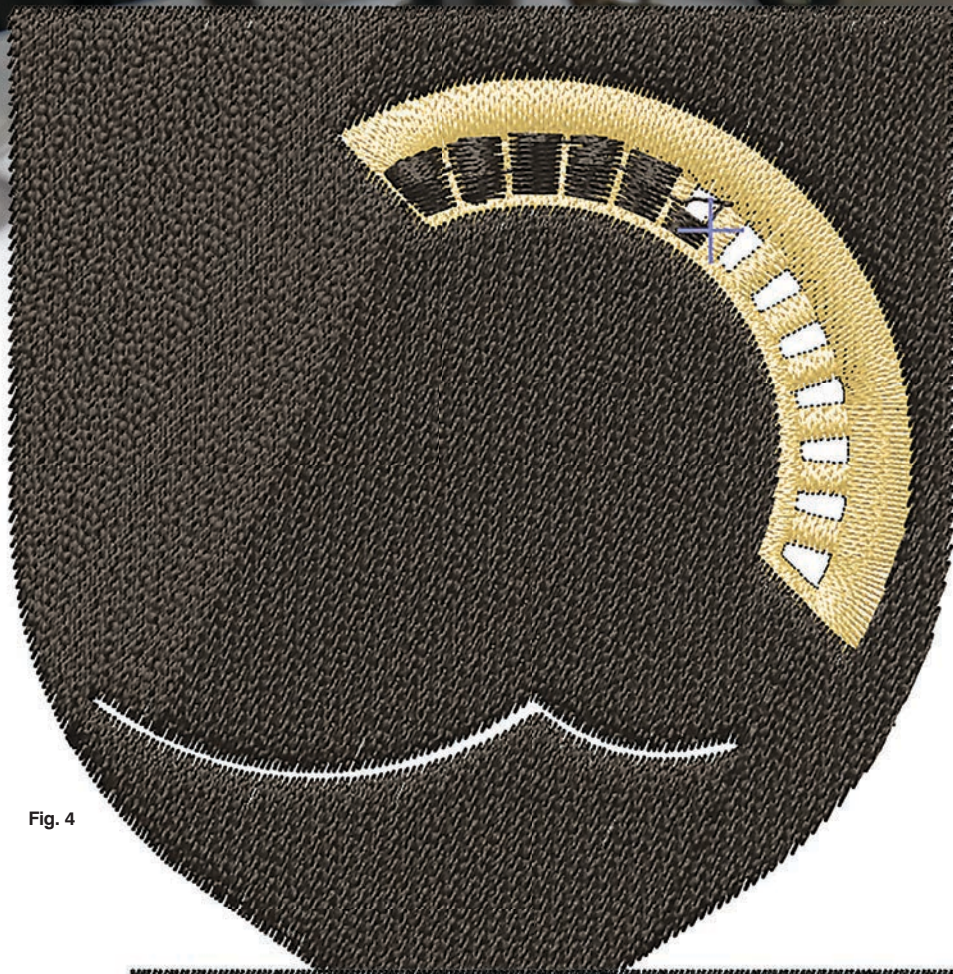


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



headdress (Fig. 4). This would result in either a running stitch connecting each of the 13 black headdress objects if there were no trims between objects or, if a setting was adjusted to trim between each black object, the embroidery would have to start and stop 13 times, creating a tie-in and tie-off for each part. Although small running stitches might be visually acceptable, it would be preferable to have no running stitches. However, starting and stopping the embroidery process is not very efficient and increases the likelihood of a thread break. The software also created the shield as two parts: a center part and a satin outline around it, with a gap between them, and removed stitches in the shield below the armor, neither of which was likely to improve the quality of the embroidery (Fig. 5).

As an alternative, I replaced the 15 black objects with a solid black shield behind the gold objects. After importing this alternative into the conversion software, the preview of stitches appeared to produce an arrangement of stitches that looked like the one produced from the original vector file. However, the software sequenced stitches much better and removed overlapping stitches more appropriately. The shield and the black objects of the headdress were sequenced first (Fig. 6). So, instead of the running stitches between the black objects of the headdress being visible when the design was embroidered, they would be covered when the gold part of the headdress was stitched. The software also removed the unnecessary stitches in the black shield underneath the helmet armor and gold part of the headdress but not under the gold inline (Fig. 7). As a result, this design would run more

efficiently, require fewer stitches, and look nicer. A final observation about this design is the shield was composed of fill stitches. If a satin border was considered desirable to finish off the design, one of any width or distance from the shield could readily be created using the conversion software.

My simple examples demonstrate that the construction of a vector file can strongly affect how conversion software creates stitches from a vector file. This is important for anyone who plans to create a vector file (by assembling vector objects or by converting a raster image) and then convert it into stitches using conversion software.



LOOKING TO BRING A UNIQUE TWIST TO YOUR EMBROIDERY PRODUCTS? ED LEVY, HIRSCH SOLUTIONS, SHARES 5 WAYS EMBROIDERERS CAN CREATE EYE-CATCHING ARTWORK AT <https://gpro.link/embroideryart>.

As a rule of thumb, the simpler the vector art, the better. It is also important for anyone who would like to convert stock vector files into stitches. If a stock vector file does not convert well, it may be due to a poorly constructed

file and not a deficiency of the conversion software. My experience with stock vector designs is that they are not all created equal and those with multiple overlapping objects and objects that have an excess of nodes, are more likely to cause problems. That said, should this deter you from trying to convert vector art into stitches using conversion software? My answer is a resounding “no.” **GP**

DENNIS DUNNING works with his wife, Vicki, who founded their small apparel decoration business in 1993. Dennis is adept at using digitizing software and software designed principally to convert vector artwork into stitches. He is a proponent of using new technology. Dennis can be reached at dennis@embroideryd.com.

Areas Where Excess Ink Loss Adds Up

*RETHINK THE RECLAIM PROCESS
AND SAVE ON SCREEN PRINTING INK*

BY FRANK VENTIMIGLIA

There are four areas where excess ink loss can rear its ugly head and add up to a lot of lost revenue. Most people think the reclaim process in screen printing starts at the washout booth, dip tank, or machine. In reality, the press is where the money pit starts.

Most reclaiming processes start like this: A printer finishes printing, and it is time to remove the squeegee and/or flood bar from the press. They then scrape the ink off these items, but they end up leaving a lot behind.

Then, they head over to the trash bucket, peel the tape loaded with ink off and roll it right into the bucket. This makes removing ink from the screen a lot less messy and a whole lot easier, but again lost ink adds up to more costs. I have seen it, you have seen it, and we have both done it.

The next way to lose even more excess

ink is one that I have never understood and makes no logical sense to do. Whatever ink is left in the screen gets scraped right back into a perfectly clean, zero ink, image area.

If you scrape the ink back into the image area, the lower the mesh count, the more ink you take to the washout booth, dip tank, or an automatic reclaim machine. I get a heap of troubling phone calls from people asking why there are ink stains in the image area. What you are seeing is not an ink stain; it is actually ink and thick ink at that.

Yet another waste area is if excess ink is not recaptured at the press and the screen moves to the final step of reclaim, be that a washout booth, dip tank, or machine. All the excess ink is just scraped off and placed in a bucket, with all the colors mixed and no way of recapturing it. You



also have to pay to get rid of it. So, in reality, it is excess ink you paid for twice with zero value. Plus, the particular time and effort that goes into this add to the costly outcome.

All inks have a yield factor. How many widgets can I get out of a gallon of ink? By applying the yield factor at the start in the ink room and only using the amount of ink that is needed at the press, you start to create a series of process controls, which you can develop for any step of the entire printing process.

I'm sure you have process controls in place for exposure times, flash times, belt speeds, etc. Why not make them for the reclaim process? I know it takes time and money, but there is no fuzzy math involved in this.

Let's take a shop that reclaims 30 screens a day, for example. If you can recapture just



one ounce of excess ink off each screen, the monetary return outweighs any labor costs. (Note: Ink is sold by weight.)

- 1 ounce per screen at 30 screens per day X 5 days in a week = 150 ounces
- If you take that number X 50 weeks = 7,500 ounces or 469 pounds of ink!

With whites coming in at 12-14 pounds per “gallon container” and most colors at 9-13 pounds, it comes to almost 35 gallons of waste ink per year. I will lowball the per-gallon cost at \$50, for a savings of \$1,750 per year!

Further, the added cost benefits that are free equal faster reclaim times, cleaner screens, and less reclaim products used in the process. **GP**

FRANK VENTIMIGLIA is the East Coast senior regional sales manager for Easiway Systems.



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Print More Than T-Shirts with Your Heat Press

ADD HOODIES, SOCKS, METAL AND WOOD BLANKS, AND MORE

BY GREG FARMER



So you've got yourself a heat press, and you've figured out how much business you can generate by using transfers to decorate T-shirts. That's fantastic! And some of you are happy to continue running your custom T-shirt business and generating income that way. Others might say, "OK, what's next?"

Here is the good news: You can print more than just T-shirts with your heat press. In this article, we'll review a few of the additional items we'd recommend try-

ing out. Remember, any time you are using a new substrate, we recommend going through the testing process again to ensure you have the correct heat and pressure. You may also want to use different types of transfers for different substrates.

HOODIES AND JACKETS

Hoodies and jackets are easy add-ons to your T-shirt business. Printing these items, depending on the material, can be very similar to printing a T-shirt. One thing

to keep in mind with printing thicker garments is that you need a heat press with proper clearance. If you are looking to print in higher volumes, we recommend graduating to an automatic machine.

BAGS

Accessories like bags are always in demand with consumers and being able to customize them will give you a leg up over your competition. Sports bags, school bags, travel bags, fashion bags — the list goes on. When printing the different materials found in bags, it is imperative to do proper testing and ensure you have the best type of transfer for the job. It is also key to choose a press that allows space for the undecorated portion of the bag to hang down out of the way. For larger transfers, a swing-away design provides the space needed to properly prepare the bag and transfer for application.

SOCKS

Who doesn't love unique, custom-printed socks?! Socks are a fun way to make a fashion statement and express yourself, so it's no wonder consumers are demanding special designs. Since socks are relatively small compared to items like T-shirts and hoodies, you can often fit multiple pairs at once on your press. This will help you crank out the volume when needed.



Once you've mastered T-shirts, there is a whole world of products to move on to. (Image courtesy Insta Graphic Systems)



WOOD AND METAL ITEMS

You may not have known this, but you can print onto materials like wood, marble, and metal with your heat press. It's especially important to get testing done for these types of substrates, and it's also important to ensure your heat press has enough clearance to evenly print on thicker items.

Sheets of metal or pieces of wood can be printed on to create wall hangings, artwork, or custom plaques. This business can be high margin if you find the right niche and create a quality product. For printing on large metal, marble, or wood surfaces, we recommend a large-format machine.

Are you ready to take your customization business to the next level? Once

you've mastered T-shirts, there is a whole world of products to move on to. **GP**

GREG FARMER has 10 years of experience in the apparel and accessories industry. He handles machine sales for Insta Graphic Systems in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and is based in the greater Dallas, Texas area.

How Direct-to-Film Transfers Stack Up Against Other Transfer Types

A PRACTICAL GUIDE ON WHAT HEAT TRANSFER TO USE WHEN

If you own a custom apparel business, you're making hundreds of decisions on a daily basis. To be successful, owners and operators need to have the right systems and processes in place. Having systems in place not only leads to efficiency but also the ability to delegate

and grow. Today, many businesses are using heat transfers as a custom decorating solution for more orders than ever.

WHY USE HEAT TRANSFERS?

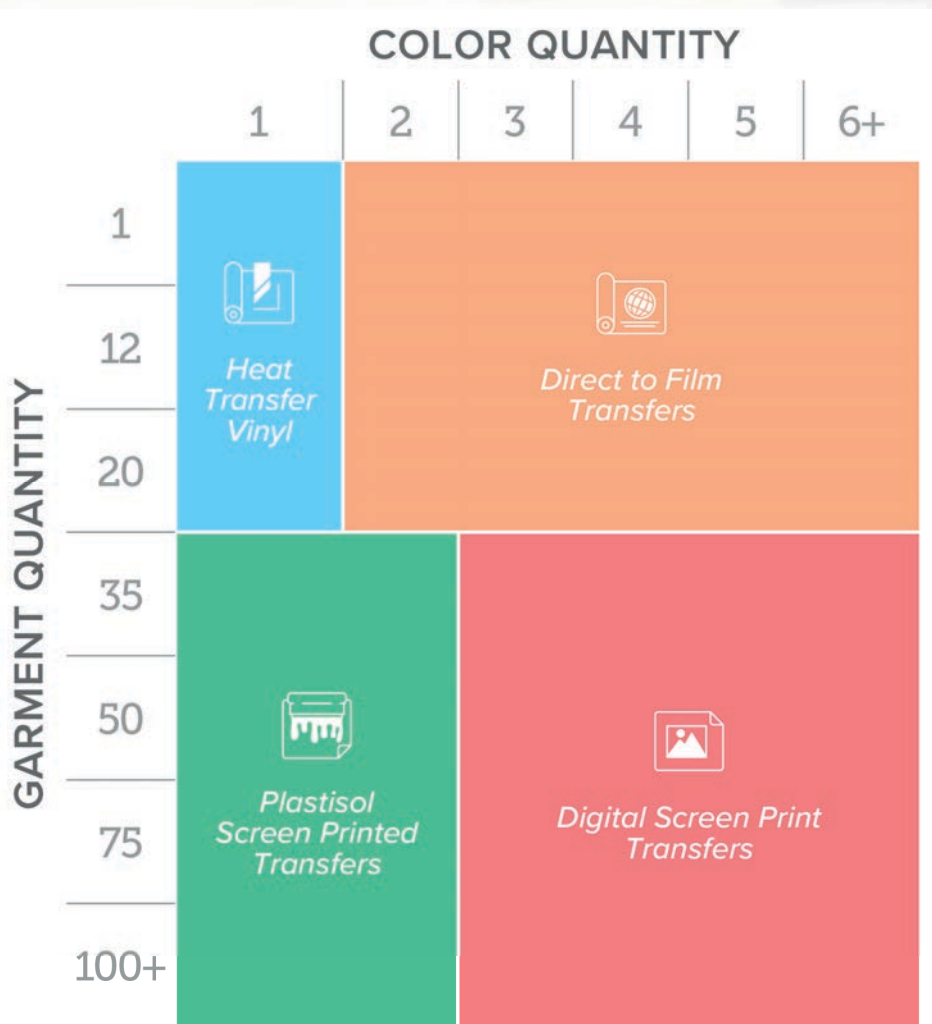
No matter what type of transfer you use,

heat transfers have a myriad of benefits. This includes ease of use, the great cost to profitability ratios, the ability to print multicolor logos cost-efficiently, the ability to print on any garment location, and the fact that a transfer type for every fabric exists.



BY BRETT STAHL





Please note: For special effect finishes, explore choices available in all technologies for any print quantity.

If you're outsourcing the production of your custom transfers, use this guide to help you decide on the right one. (Chart courtesy Stahls')

With the growth of heat press transfers, businesses are seeking advice on what transfers to use when. One way to make decisions easier is to understand the options and the economics.

TRANSFER TECHNOLOGY TYPES

Transfer technology can be grouped into five major buckets. They are:

- Plastisol screen-printed transfers
- Digital screen-printed transfers
- Vinyl cut transfers

- Print/cut digital transfers
- Direct-to-film (DTF) transfers — the newest member of the transfer scene

Vinyl transfers and print/cut transfers remain a great technology for producing in-house with a quick turnaround and for achieving special effects or special functions like dye blocking. However, when it comes to standard finish and functions, the other three technologies provide the solutions needed from an outsourced perspective.

WHY OUTSOURCE?

Outsourcing the production of your custom transfers is a viable method to scale a business, especially as the labor is tougher to find and retain. Heat press operators can be easily trained and press logos to garments with just a few hours of training. With that in mind, this helpful guide can help you decide easier.

USING THE GUIDE

- How many colors are in your artwork? Find the corresponding number of colors on the x-axis.
- How many transfers do you need to order for the job? Find the corresponding number on the y-axis.
- Intersect the lines on the grid to get to the recommended transfer type.

Once you land on a transfer type, you can explore the choices available in that transfer technology. In most cases, there are a variety of product solutions within the transfer type. These choices span the next points of transfer choice like the look, feel, and finish.

You may find that you prefer some products for your clients over others. It is not uncommon for decorators to pay more for a transfer to drive simplicity and standardization into their business. Often, this simplification will save money and time when it comes to quoting, presenting your client choices, and running the product through production. It's always a good idea to order some samples from each transfer type to evaluate them for your business.

WHERE DTF COMES IN

DTF, or direct-to-film, is a new technology that allows users to print designs onto special clear films using digital inks and a powder adhesive coating, which requires



curing. After curing, you can then heat press the transfer design directly onto your garment.

COMPARING DTF TO OTHER TRANSFER TYPES

When comparing DTF transfers to other transfer types, there are many differences. For example, DTF is different from using heat transfer vinyl because you don't need to cut and weed your images. When compared to other types of digital transfers, DTF is usually more cost-effective. From a quality standpoint, DTF transfers have crisp, defined edges and you can print floating text and fine lines without a problem. They are a great option for small quantity orders and can be extremely user-friendly.

Many businesses are choosing direct-to-film for their multicolor logos as well as one- or two-color jobs. While the technology is in its infancy for systems, it is quite developed as a transfer service. Being able to reduce the complexity of choice that is driven by product limitations has opened up new opportunities for businesses.

DTF offers unlimited colors, fine detail, no outlines, and a low-temperature application, which makes DTF a promising, versatile technology that can solve a lot of logo needs.

You can print unlimited colors at no additional cost. They are perfect for gradients and shading, as well as extremely fine details with no outline. In addition, they can be heat pressed at lower temperatures, meaning you eliminate the dreaded

scorch mark when heat pressing. You get a lightweight, soft hand result that adds no additional weight to the garment.

It is important to note that all DTF transfers are not created equal. There is quite a bit of variability in the market with feel, finish, and durability, so it is recommended that apparel decorators consider sampling from transfer suppliers to find the right fit. **GP**

As the Chief Innovation Officer and Vice Chairman for GroupeSTAHL North America, **BRETT STAHL** has his fingers on the pulse of new heat printing technology. For the past 35 years, he has worked in a wide variety of roles at Stahls', including general manager and senior VP of Stahls', product development and software development.

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Images courtesy
Avery Dennison
Graphics Solutions



Create Custom, Dimensional Photography Gifts

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS



Whether you've been sublimating ChromaLuxe photography panels for years, or you're just getting started, we've got a terrific way to elevate the panels into a stunning, dimensional home decor piece your customers will love.

By layering a few ChromaLuxe panels together, you can create a unique way for customers to show off their special memories. The best part is that if you're already doing sublimation, you won't need any additional pieces of equipment.

ChromaLuxe panels are engineered to provide brilliant, full-color image reproduction, making them perfect for photographs and highly detailed graphics for the home, offices, and retail environments. They come in a variety of sizes in matte, semi-gloss, and gloss finishes and are moisture, scratch, and fade resistant.

Here are the steps to easily create this beautiful ChromaLuxe photography display with sublimation:

1 Before starting, make sure you're using images that are high resolution. This will ensure you get the best colors and highest image detail for your finished project.

2 Size your print to be just a little bit larger than the panel size. We recommend adding at least 1/8" bleed (extra space) when sizing your photo. So, if you're transferring to an 8" X 10" panel, you would want to size your art to be 8.125" X 10.125". This step makes it much easier to align your transfer to your panel and allows you to take full advantage of the unique, edge-to-edge ChromaLuxe panel design.

3 Print your photo on Johnson Plastics Plus sublimation paper from your sublimation printer, like the Sawgrass SG500 or SG1000 or Epson F570 or F6370.

4 Most ChromaLuxe products come with a clear masking to protect them during shipment. Be sure to check to see if your panel has the masking and remove the protective masking before transferring.

5 Tape your printed transfer to your three flat panels. For the large back piece, we used a 15" X 18" White Gloss ChromaLuxe panel (Item #UN4020). For the smaller attached pieces, we used 6" X 6" White Gloss ChromaLuxe panels (Item #UN4066).

6 Now you're ready to press. Set your press temperature to 400 F. Use moderate/heavy pressure (it should require some effort to close your press). Set your time for 60-80 seconds. Lay your product with the transfer paper face up and cover it with blowout paper to protect your platen.

7 Once finished, open your press slowly, and in one swift motion remove the transfer paper.

8 We used the Simply Standoff kit (Item #OEMK-050MG) to attach the smaller panels to the larger panel. If you have a drill or drill press, you can put a hole in the larger panel to attach the standoffs. Since the standoffs in our piece are not being used as load bearing mounts and just holding the smaller panels to the larger one, we used a heavy-duty superglue and glued the standoffs in place. Using this method, you won't need to use the screw that comes in the kit. Glue the front "cap" on the top of the panel, and the longer "barrel" piece between your back panel and smaller front one.

Now you have a finished piece that would make a great gift for a wedding, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, anniversary, or "just because." Adding the extra pieces gives your finished project a unique touch of dimension without a lot of additional cost. However, you'll be able to sell your finished project for a premium and put more money in your pocket. **INT**



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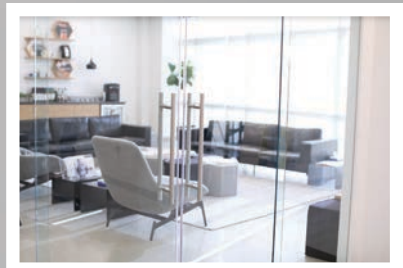


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Images courtesy Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions



Decorative Film Brings Flexibility to Workspace

COURTESY OF AVERY DENNISON GRAPHICS SOLUTIONS

Located in Avery Dennison’s Label and Graphic Materials Division headquarters, the I.Lab provides customers with opportunities to interact with RFID-enabled products. The I.Lab consists of the lab itself and a meeting area connected through a wide bank of glass. This glass was intended to allow a seamless light flow between the spaces. However, the transparency prevented both spaces from being used simultaneously. A simple yet effective solution was needed to provide privacy. At the time, Avery Dennison was preparing to launch a decorative architectural window film called Dusted Crystal, and the I.Lab provided a setting to test the new product in a real-world commercial application.

QUICK-RELEASE ADHESIVE

The Dusted Crystal architectural window film features a frosted effect that allows for privacy while still transmitting plenty of light to a space. What sets this new offering apart is its ease of use. Its wet-apply quick-release clean adhesive allows the film to be repositioned during installation or removed easily after drying while leaving virtually no residue on the glass. The adhesive also doesn’t permanently stick to itself, potentially saving the installer a lot of

time and grief when removing the film from its liner.

INSTALLER IMPRESSIONS

The I.Lab installation was managed by Rachel Schabroni of Solar Solutions in Mentor, Ohio. Schabroni was impressed with the new product from the start. “The Avery Dennison Dusted Crystal is a lot less stretchy than similar products from competitors. It’s not as ‘vinyl-ly,’” she noted. “The liner is easy to pull off, and the adhesive is super simple to work with.”

When asked about the product’s look, she added, “How would I describe the color? It’s not as white as a white frost, and it actually looks a little bit classier. It just gives a nice opaque look to the window.”

The I.Lab project also provided a chance to test the quick-release clean adhesive. A dulled blade caused a small tear in the film during installation. Schabroni would typically replace damaged film immediately. Instead, she decided to leave the film on the glass, let it dry for several weeks, then return to remove it. “The film came off like butter,” she said. “We just grabbed both sides from the top and pulled it down as tight to the glass as we possibly could. It only ripped in the spot where it had torn, and that came off in a single, separate piece. I was shocked at how well it came off!”

DESIGN FLEXIBILITY

“Dusted Crystal allows for ultimate design flexibility,” adds Cassandra Yu, product/segment manager, Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions. “We know many business owners are adopting a hybrid model, in which their spaces need to be flexible based on who is in the office.” Yu says quick-release adhesive allows users to quickly take down the film when there’s no longer a need for it. Yu continues, “The new film also addresses many companies’ recognition of the need to elevate their workplace environment for comfort, health, and wellness. The design flexibility helps companies create a more appealing space and make better use of natural light while still enabling the privacy that may be desired.”

And what about the I.Lab? Jay Wittmann, business process manager, Avery Dennison Smartrac, says the space has a great look and the architectural film did exactly what the team hoped. It provides privacy between spaces, ensuring the spaces still feel inviting. “It looks like frosted glass, but it has the removability. It’s nice to have that type of flexibility built in,” Wittmann points out. Visit <https://graphics.averydennison.com/dustedcrystal> for more information. **INT**



Out with the old. In with the new.

Avery Dennison® Dusted Crystal Film creates new spaces

Interiors are transformed when new spaces are created with Avery Dennison Dusted Crystal decorative window film. Dusted Crystal is a frosted film with a first-to-market, wet-apply quick-release adhesive that allows the film to be repositioned during installation. Providing design flexibility, especially for rooms transitioning from public to private or private to public, the film can be removed easily after drying with virtually no residue left on the glass. Dusted Crystal is available in a matte and luster finish.

Experience the difference of Dusted Crystal, visit graphics.averydennison.com/dustedcrystal





Jump into Spring with **FLOOR MEDIA**

COURTESY OF MACTAC



Images courtesy Mactac

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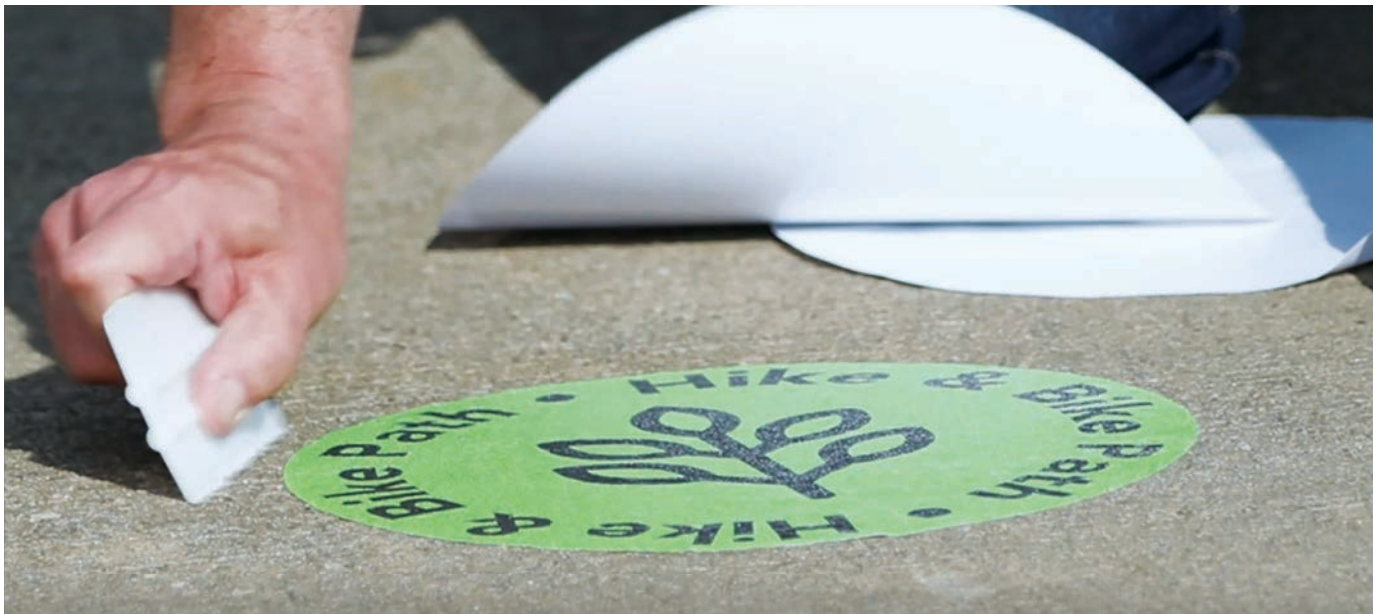
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aggregate, it delivers clean lines, sharp images, and slip resistance/high traction, including ANSI A326.3 anti-slip compliance.

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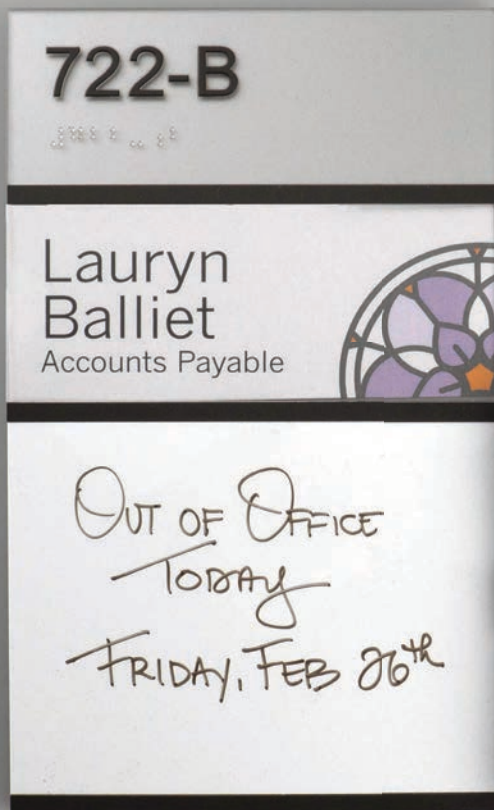


Top 10

Benefits of

OUTSOURCING

COURTESY OF CLARKE SYSTEMS



1 Get access to skilled expertise. Would you go to a family doctor to handle brain surgery? Of course not! Experts say companies that make too many promises may often be cutting corners somewhere in the process.

2 Focus on core competencies. The quality of your core competencies will suffer as your business grows if your workload increases with additional tasks that are non-skill set functions.

3 Better risk management. By outsourcing to a competent outsourcing partner, you reduce the risk involved in having the same task done in-house by staff that may not be as competent in that field.

4 Increase in-house efficiency. Develop your internal task force and use them more efficiently.

5 Improve customer service. With on-time deliveries and high-quality services your customers will be delighted. Outsourcing can help you benefit from increased customer satisfaction, thus creating a stream of loyal customers.

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

7 Give your business a competitive edge. Through strategic outsourcing to a partner, you not only provide your customers with best-of-breed

Images courtesy
Clarke Systems

services but increase your productivity while managing your in-house resources intelligently. Outsourcing can help you surpass competitors who have not yet realized its benefits.

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

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

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



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Personalization Ideas for WEDDINGS

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS



Weddings are big business, with the average cost of a wedding now topping out at nearly \$25,000. All told, Americans spend more than \$55 billion on weddings each year.

If you're not tapping into the wedding market by offering personalized items for wedding parties, receptions, or as gifts for the happy couple, now is the perfect time to get started. If you sublimates, heat transfer, laser engrave, UV-LED print, or use vinyl, there are a wide range of products available that you can offer your customers to celebrate this momentous occasion.

FOR THE SPECIAL DAY

Offering up personalized items for the ceremony and reception is a great way to let your customers add a unique touch to their big day. For the church or ceremony location, it's easy for you to personalize a sublimatable sign that greets guests upon arrival with the wedding colors or theme incorporated.

Mixed media is another fantastic way to create a unique sign, such as applying laser-cut plastic letters to a wood round or backing piece. This lets you choose from thousands of fonts, including one that can match the wedding invitation or programs, and can really tie together the ceremony space.

At the reception, the customization possibilities are endless. From laser-cut table numbers using metallic plastic to custom-cut cake toppers and sublimated favors and wedding party gifts, this is place where your ability to offer personalized items can really set you apart from run-of-the-mill big box retailers and party stores.

From elegant to rustic, there's no limitation to the customized decoration options you can offer your customers for rehearsal dinners, wedding ceremonies, and receptions.

FOR THE HAPPY COUPLE

Personalized wedding items don't have



to be just for decoration. From full-color sublimated photo panels to engraved items with the newlywed's names or monogram, there are thousands of potential gift items you can offer your customers specifically for engagements and weddings.

One of the hottest categories for personalization is drinkware. With hundreds of different options available for sublimation, engraving, heat transfer, vinyl, or UV-LED printing, customized drinkware with a couple's initials or new last name is a fantastic gift option for your customers. Offer a set of personalized coasters to go with the drinkware for a truly one-of-a-kind gift.

For a couple that's traveling for their honeymoon, something as simple as a

personalized luggage tag can make for a nice add-on wedding gift. Pair that with some of our other travel accessories, such as a personalized travel bag or small portfolio, and your customers can give the bride and groom a great gift they'll use now and in the future.

HELP YOUR CUSTOMERS SAY, "I DO!" TO PERSONALIZATION

From the bridal shower to the bachelor/bachelorette parties to the ceremony and reception, there are countless ways for you to offer customers personalized items to make the day extra special. With the excellent photo reproduction offered by sublimation and heat transfer and the one-of-a-kind items you can create with engraving, vinyl, and UV-LED, the sky is the limit when it comes to wedding items you can add to your shop regardless of your fabrication method of choice.

Johnson Plastics Plus has thousands of items ready for you to personalize. If you're looking for inspiration to start offering wedding-themed items in your shop, check out our **Wedding Product Guide** (<https://www.jpplus.com/product-guides/wedding>). It's filled with hundreds of products hand-curated for bridal and wedding gifts, signs, and more. **INT**



Images courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus

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Walls Come to Life with **DIGITALLY PRINTABLE FILMS**

Images courtesy
Avery Dennison
Graphics Solutions

COURTESY OF AVERY DENNISON GRAPHICS SOLUTIONS

When businesses and individual consumers want to enhance their retail or personal interior space, they may consider paint as a solution. However, there are other customizable options for showing off a fresh color or an exciting mural. Digitally printable vinyl films can transform interior spaces with elegant graphic designs or even photographs. Digitally printed wall wraps can provide inspiration to a company, a branding opportunity for an upstart business, and even a window into the past.

BRINGING THE BREWERY TO THE PUBLIC

Walter Farris, manager of Signs Now in Moses Lake, Washington, recently completed a project for Ten Pin Brewing in the Pacific Northwest. The company asked Signs Now to bring the feeling of the warehouse, with its newly built equipment and quadrupled capacity, into the public tap house. Using Avery Dennison MPI 2611 Wall Film, Signs Now covered one wall of the tap house with a life size black and white photo of the new equipment from imaging specialists Lucid Concepts.

“We received a ton of praise, and the brewery was so overwhelmingly pleased with the wrap,” Farris notes. “We had samples printed on multiple types of film, and everyone involved thought that the Avery Dennison film properly captured

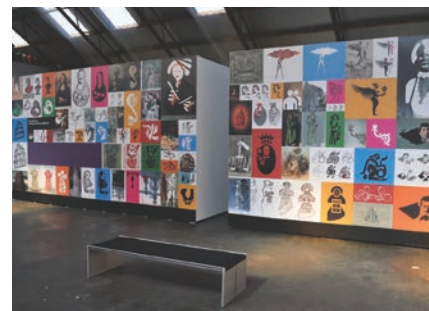
the brewery’s vision.”

Farris used vinyl film on a large wall to inspire an appreciation in customers for how much Ten Pin Brewery has grown.

THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT

John Lawson of USA Image based in Louisville, Kentucky, was tasked with capturing the history of a recently repurposed mill. The Germantown Mill Lofts, a residential project that converted an old mill in Louisville into lofts, now features large, mural-style photographs from when the mill was in operation.

Lawson used printed Avery Dennison MPI 2105 vinyl film to showcase pictures of mill workers on 12 walls throughout the space. MPI 2105 vinyl film, along with DOL 2080 Matte Overlaminates, allowed him to transform forgotten photographs



into a living, breathing homage to the building’s humble beginnings. Though the exposed brick interior and refurbished facade preserve the look of the mill, the interior decor of the lofts now literally provides a look back in time.

“I chose Avery Dennison film for this project because I know it will last,” Lawson says. “MPI 2105, specifically, is a great choice for more permanent graphics.”

These projects show that Avery Dennison wall films are not limited to one type of space — wall films can be used to create a more captivating space in modern, industrial, and rustic environments.

THE VALUE OF LASTING COLOR

Digitally printable films are ideal for wide-format printers using eco-solvent, solvent, and latex inks. When creating unique visual experiences for a variety of different spaces, it is important to acknowledge the importance of color. This recent pop-art installation (shown above) demonstrates how color can transform a warehouse space into a rich gallery of imagery and wonder. The big burst of color was achieved using MPI 2900 series vinyl film. For inspiration and more information on Avery Dennison films for walls, floors, and windows, as well as their colorful cut vinyl portfolio of films, visit <https://graphics.averydennison.com/> **INT**



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Signarama custom makes low-voltage LED backlit signs with options in shapes, sizes, and colors to add light effects to the sign face. (Image courtesy Signarama)



Putting a Shine on Branding

BACKLIT SIGNAGE OFFERS MANY OPTIONS FOR GRAPHIC ILLUMINATION

BY SHELLEY WIDHALM

Backlit signage is an eye-catching way to attract attention to a brand or image through something as simple as illumination.

Philadelphia-based Color Reflections Inc., a nationwide digital imaging and printing solutions company best known for its work in large-format printing, offers a long list of products that includes backlit signage. A backlit sign gets its illumination from a posterior light source and not from the lettering, interior of the sign, or separate spotlights on something like an awning. Instead, the illumination comes from a rear lightbox that lights up

the text and graphics, adding depth and drama to the backlit look.

“It stands out more than front-lit,” says Eric Berger, president and owner of Color Reflections Inc., which has six locations in Houston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Fort Lauderdale, and Orlando. “It can be lit at night, and it shows very well.”

COLOR REFLECTIONS’ ORIGINS

Color Reflections had its start more than 50 years ago as a blueprint company called Arrow Graphics in Houston, founded by



Carl and Florence Magaziner to provide architectural drawings. The Magaziners’ son, Paul, took over the business in 1989 and expanded it into color reproductions, later renaming the company to fit his mission.

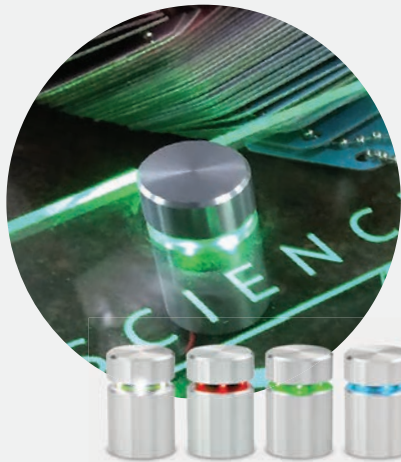
The company initially utilized the Cruse Camera, a large computer-driven analog camera, and Type R printing paper to provide quick turnaround direct color reproduction that traditional photo labs couldn’t do. The equipment could easily enlarge or reduce prints, revolutionizing the color reprographic business.

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Backlit

SIGNAGE

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LED Standoffs



LED Light Up Base



ColorHues® EFX Sheet



Right: Backlit signage stands out more than front-lit signage and can be lit at night. (Image courtesy Signarama) **Below:** Because these signs light up, they're more visible. That visibility is what can grow a brand. (Image courtesy Signarama)



“We were the first one in the U.S. to use it,” Berger says about the Cruse Camera, an invention of Hermann Cruse of Germany, adding that Color Reflections soon became a distributor for the camera, selling it to its competitors. “That’s what started Color Reflections — that piece of equipment.”

The company evolved into a photo lab, able to do photography and reductions in one step, compared with photo labs that took two to three steps to do the same work. Advancing even more, the company became an early adopter in the digital world with an end CAD color plotter at a time when Macs and PCs didn’t communicate.

“From there, we found digital printing devices,” Berger says. “Right now, we have 16-foot plotters and flatbeds, cutters, and latex printers, all different style of devices that have their strengths and weaknesses.”

Color Reflections became the first to use the Durst Lambda, a roll-to-roll, single-beam exposure system that uses three laser beams in green, red, and blue to print digital files direct to photographic paper. “That was revolutionary as well,” Berger says.

The next revolutionary replacement was a move to inkjet printers away from photographic chemicals, using UV or water-based ink to do the printing.

“Now we print to paper with similar qualities of a photo,” Berger says. “We keep buying new equipment that’s bigger, faster, and better. We keep improving. We are on the bleeding edge of the printing world.”



Attention-grabbing grand-format backlit displays are great for highly congested areas. (Image courtesy Novus Imaging Inc.)

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The company serves as a beta site for large manufacturers of the newest iterations of printing equipment, such as the EFI VUTEk h5 hybrid flatbed machine and the HP latex printer. The iterations helped the company expand its offerings—now, the company designs, prints, and installs large-format digital graphics for banners, window clings, posters, vehicle wraps, wall and elevator wraps, floor graphics, banner stands, billboards, and

trade show booths. The large-format color printing can include large-scale graphics and is considered grand when printing materials are at least 70" X 100" wide.

MOVING INTO BACKLIT SIGNAGE

The company entered the backlit signage industry at its start in 1989. Initially, the company used a photographic DuraTrans, an invention of Eastman Kodak Co., to light signs from the back. As the technol-

ogy changed, the company added inkjet printing to a translucent film for the lighting effect.

"There are a number of different ways to getting to a backlit image," Berger says. "There are different machines that run different inks."

The company now does backlighting on three or four different products depending on the final size and use. It prints to 16-foot vinyl backlit using an EFI 5R UV



Backlit signs can be manufactured with a variety of faces, including acrylic, vinyl, polycarbonate, aluminum, metal or Panaflex — a 3M product. (Image courtesy Signarama)



Options for the base material includes aluminum, steel, acrylic, polycarbonate and translucent or digitally printed vinyl. (Image courtesy Signarama)

printer, HP latex to adhesive backlit or film, or a fabric backlit that goes into SEG (silicon edge graphics) frames with lights. These are produced using dye-sublimation inks on an EFI FabriVu printer.

“Backlit is all over the place. It can be a bunch of things. It’s a very unique type of business,” Berger says.

The sign face products for Color Reflections’ backlit signs can be clear or milk Plexiglas, fabric, or vinyl. “Then we can put white ink on it as well to add density,” Berger notes. “You need to have density because you’re lighting it from behind. White diffuses the light, that’s why it’s a good color.”

SIGNARAMA’S BACKLIT OFFERINGS

Signarama is another sign and graphics company that offers backlit signage among its many products that include banners, decals, yard signs and trade show displays. The company, which has more than 400 franchises nationwide, originally opened as a small banner shop in 1986 in Farmingdale, New York, before moving its corporate headquarters to South Florida in 1989.

Signarama custom makes low-voltage LED backlit signs with options in shapes, sizes, and colors to add light effects to the sign face. The colors for the illumination

can be changed by placing RGB modules and controllers inside the sign.

“The biggest thing about them is because they light up, they have more visibility, (which is) a huge benefit toward making people see the brand,” says Roberto Hiller, franchise owner of Signarama New Tampa in Tampa, Florida. “You can see them at night and in bad weather, and you can get creative with the colors.”

Signarama New Tampa opened in 2010 with two employees and has since grown to a staff of 37, expanding from digital printing into electrical and backlit signs. Backlit signs can be manufactured with a variety of faces, including acrylic, vinyl, polycarbonate, aluminum, metal or Panaflex (a 3M product). Options for the base material include aluminum, steel, acrylic, polycarbonate and translucent or digitally printed vinyl.

“If you get more creative, you can have channel letters that have faces that light up, which can be different colors,” Hiller says.

The channel letters consist of a can, which can be shaped like a company logo for example. The box is made from aluminum with a lid in a matching acrylic face. A trim cap piece of plastic is added to make the edges of the lid — the edges are used to secure the face to the can.

“So the can and lid fit and close up, and now you have a letter that lights up,” Hiller says.

Another option for the branding is push-through lettering, created by routing thick matching acrylic and pushing it through the aluminum face with the same cutout shapes. Essentially, the words are cut out of a sheet of aluminum and separately matching letters are cut out individually, then placed into the cutouts so they can push through the face.

“It’s like a puzzle that sticks out and gives a dimensional look,” Hiller says. “What lights up is the acrylic. The aluminum blocks the light other than what’s being pushed through because it’s solid.”

Backlit signs have other advantages, such as an extensive life and being energy efficient, says AJ Titus, president of Signarama.

“Every business is trying to get noticed,” Titus says. “Any type of advertising they can do to make that happen is worth the money.” **GP**

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



An example of using textured backgrounds and dimensional signage to create a warm and inviting environment while promoting a company's image. (All images courtesy JD Hamilton)

Reimagining Workspaces in a Post-Pandemic World

Getting back to normal is not going to happen after COVID. There I said it. The corporate work environment is going to change and there will be a new normal. In this article, we are going to look at the new designs and layouts of corporate spaces as companies attempt to entice the workforce back and provide a healthier space after the lessons learned from the pandemic. Much of these changes will include a variety of unique wall covering graphics and branded corporate signage.

ARE CUBICAL FARMS THE NEW FAX MACHINES?

Going back to corporate will not resemble Jim and Pam's workplace in "The Office." Corporations are being creative in designing new welcoming and comfortable spaces. Going forward is a unique moment in history. Every corporation and business needs to rethink what it means to work — the way we perform that work, where that work is done, and what it will look like in the future.

Corporate traditional spaces may be a thing of the past, but new ideas of design will begin to be invented. The old routine of going to the office 9-5 every day will likely

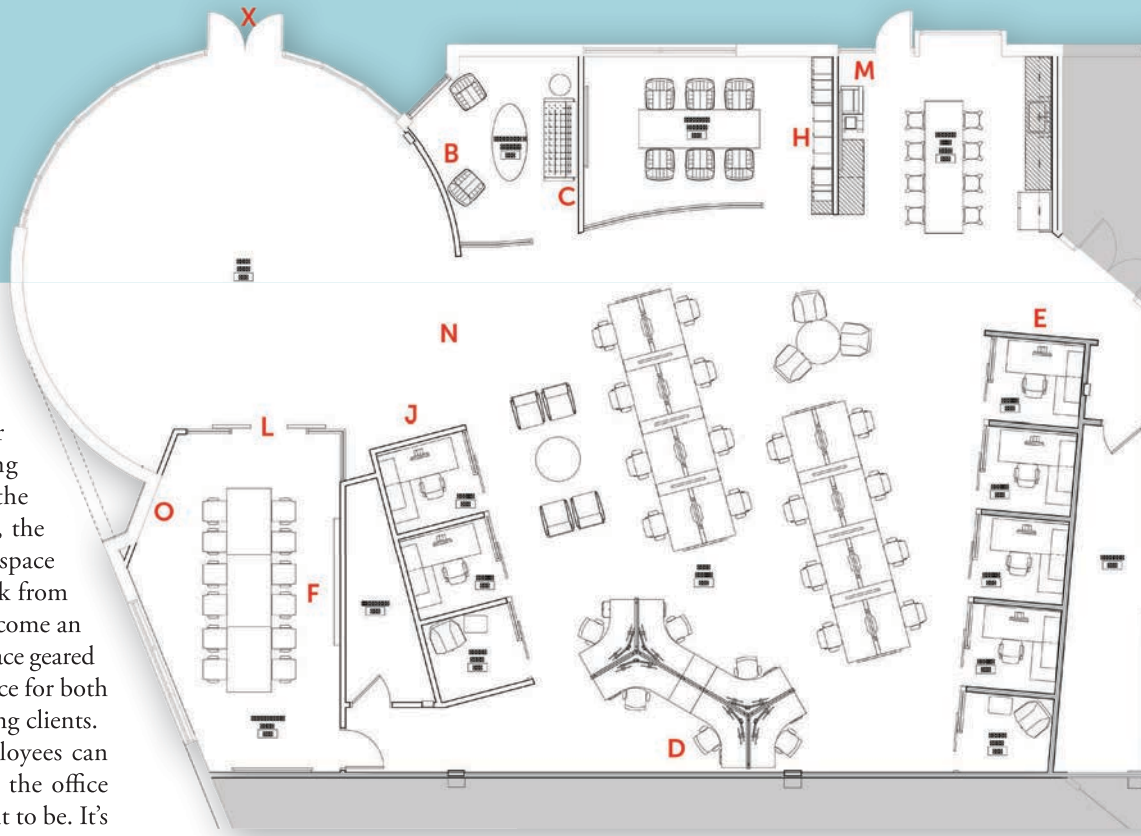


HOW CORPORATE WORKSPACES WILL CHANGE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND BRANDED GRAPHICS

BY JD HAMILTON

change. Now the corporate headquarters or main office will be the new destination for collaboration and connecting with co-workers. Instead of the old school individual cubicles, the emerging designs of the workspace will focus on a motivated break from working from home. It will become an enticing and open gathering place geared to create a welcoming experience for both returning employees and visiting clients.

While a lot of current employees can work remote from anywhere, the office will become the place they want to be. It's human nature to want personal interaction and value those encounters that come with it. To bring people to the office, corporations are developing creative destination-worthy workplaces. Even though many



Above: Open and more inviting areas, as seen in this layout, show the growing trend in workspace environments. Large, open areas with rooms designed for team collaboration as well as some closed and semi-closed work areas. **Below:** Drawings and renderings of environmental, branded, and themed wall covering graphics and signage. These are power images and quotes meant to inspire and the logo is utilized to promote the brand.

SIGNAGE SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensional Letters

Material: P95 Acrylic, second surface painted, cut to shape.
Thickness: 1/4"
Letter Style: Per client artwork
Background Color: White and black
Mounting Method: VHB tape to wall

Rendering



DATE: August 24, 2018
 DRAWN BY: JC
 REVISION: Original

modulex

SIGN TYPE

B

CLIENT: Badger Sports
 PROJECT: Badger Sports

FUNCTION OF SIGN: Wall Graphic
 SCALE: 1/16" = 1'

* Colors shown in this drawing are for presentation purposes only. For actual colors, refer to color match sample. * Modulex does not check for errors in production artwork provided by client, including logos. Clients are responsible for any production errors as a result of artwork discrepancies or mistakes. ** Scale shown on this drawing is for presentation purposes only. Actual signs are to have Grafik 2 Scale which is the same color as the background of the sign.
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Branding is not the only possibility for printing and signage. These illustrate the use of cool graphics to make an office area inspirational and comforting.

businesses were already offering blended work from home options before the pandemic, COVID assured us that with the technology available today a person's workspace can be wherever you can set up a laptop. Knowing this, corporations realize work-from-anywhere spaces need to be considered in workplace design and that wow-factors that offer advantages and benefits are needed to attract employees to work on site.

In the new workspace of the future, open space, color, form, texture and yes signage and graphics will create an atmosphere that is unique to the corporation. When all these elements come together, it will create a destination where employees want to work, and clients want to visit.

A PLACE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND BRANDED GRAPHICS

I had the opportunity to talk to John Elvington (owner) and Brent Cobb (senior corporate business developer) with Modulex Carolinas about trends they are seeing in the corporate world for signage and graphics.

Modulex Carolinas is a large architectural signage firm that specializes in interior and exterior signage programs for multi-family, school, and corporate facilities.

Charlotte, North Carolina, is a progressive, growing, and evolving city that has many national corporate headquarters that were hit hard during the pandemic and these corporations are working creatively to attract workers back to the office after working mostly remote for the last couple years.

"Corporate management of the businesses is trying to instill their brand to not only employees, but to visitors as well. They want to promote an inspirational tagline to display. That is often with graphics. Getting employees back not only reminds them where they're working and what their core values are, but it also gives them some incentive. While at the workplace they see these branded graphics on the wall, it reminds them and reinforces the company image and philosophy," Cobb mentions.

"There is also a movement for more icons and visual cues," Elvington adds. "Not

necessarily tied to branding, you're just creating these cool looking graphics that define the area, whether it's a break room, a cafeteria or sitting area. Different looks in those environments are what they're looking for. It's not necessarily tied to the logos or branding. It's just a graphic element."

It was pointed out that the graphics portion of the new corporate world will depend on if the home offices are in a standalone location or a shared tenant building. In multi-tenant situations, you can't have one brand overwhelming the other tenants. However, these areas still have great graphic potential; but more of an environmental graphics theme as compared to a standalone headquarters where branding stands loud and proud. Here you will find new areas of shared collaboration. Wall coverings provide neutral yet inviting graphics. The use of new digital directories that not only direct visitors to their destination but would allow employees to find the closest places to catch lunch. You will also find more inviting cafeteria areas that offer coffee, snacks, and soft drinks so employees will feel comfortable to



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CAN USE TO CHANGE
THE WORLD

NELSON MANDELA



take a break in-house rather than battling traffic for lunch or that mid-morning and mid-afternoon reset time.

Elvington further explains, “What’s happened the past couple years is that people are used to the flexibility and kind of the safety and comfortability of working out of their home. Some may like it; some don’t, based on their personality. But the question you have to ask is what a corporation or business owner can do to their space to make it so that an employee looks forward to going back to the office. Some may have a 15-minute to a 45-minute commute to the office. So, once they show up, they want that same level of comfort as much or more than home. They want to be with people again so the look and feel of the new work environment needs to fulfill those expectations. You can have a great team of people, a new work environment with signage and graphics, but some employers are having

to go a bit further with coffee machines, soda machines or some sparkling water machines. For convenience, people don’t want to leave their office space to go down to the store, they want to be able to do what they did back when they worked out of the house; walk to their fridge, walk to the coffeemaker, get their stuff, go back and work and they want the flexibility to do their work when they want to do it. That is the challenge of the new workplace going forward. A redesign of workspaces and branded and environmental graphics/signage can play a key role.”

THE GREAT RESIGNATION AND FILLING THE VOID

This double whammy of the COVID pandemic and the recent trend of people looking at doing something new and different creates a unique challenge for corporations and businesses to not only

get existing employees back; but also, to attract new people to their organization. This has never been seen before so we are entering uncharted waters.

Interior designers have rethought the workplace and have come up with plans to make the new work environment inviting, comfortable and productive. The “hi-ho, hi-ho, it’s off to work we go” will change to a place you want to go to work. These new environments will offer great opportunities for the signage and graphic industries to help make that vision a reality. Be part of the change. **GP**

JAMES DEAN HAMILTON has been writing for NBM since 1995. After a decade sabbatical from writing, he is back in the saddle. With over 30 years of experience, he has a vast knowledge of everything signage, marketing, and workflow management.



BE THE TUGBOAT

GUIDING A CUSTOMER WHEN THEY INSIST ON BAD SIGN DESIGN

- “The customer is always right.”
- “If they are telling you what they want, give it to them.”
- “The customer wants to feel like they are part of the design process.”

I know I have heard these old sayings a hundred or more times, and I've never quite bought into the idea that the customer knows more about what they need than I do. “Wow ... Mr. Charboneau needs to have his ego checked at the door” is what some of you may be saying, but please be the caboose to my train of thought as I explain how I handle this delicate yet totally winnable tight-rope walk. It may be time to put on your consultative hat and help them understand why their idea won't give them the right results. Oh, you say you've tried that, and they won't listen? Well, perhaps this method might be helpful.

What kind of utopian fantasy world was envisioned when the idiom “The customer is always right” was originally

thought of, and put into play as truth or fact? The only thing that applies to is the customer's own inner voice that is ultimately controlled by their ego. That means we are dealing not with facts but with feelings and perceptions that their ego-bathing idea is actually going to create a working advertising tool.

6 STEPS TO GUIDING A CUSTOMER

The customer wanted this idea for their new sign (see **Fig. 1**) and obviously, it wasn't going to do the client any good if I simply gave them what they asked for. This is the magic moment when you are considering the client's design idea, and you know full well it won't work, so in my opinion, the next steps you take, the words you use will set the course for how receptive your client is to consider your approach to the problem.

Step 1: Remind your client why they are talking to you – reconfirm trust. If you have a long-term relationship with your client, this process may seem silly,

but when you remind your client of your background, skill sets, and experience level it's like a reset of their perception of you. Create a graphic, a sales piece with bullet points of all your accomplishments, wins, awards, etc. Here is something similar to what I have provided to my clients when this has been needed. You must overcome the previous times when you were not able to convince them to listen to your ideas.

If your relationship with your new customer is in its beginning stages, then you are sitting exactly where you want to be for this first step of teaching your customer how to work with you.

Step 2: Remind the customer of the job, role, or task that the sign will perform. What type of sign is it? Identification – Information – Regulatory – Safety or Warning – Advertising – Directional? Chances are if the client has gotten involved with the design it has something to do with their ego, or their business or both. Identifying the job that the sign must perform helps



Fig. 1: What the client insisted on seeing. (All images courtesy Matt Charboneau)



The correct way to announce the event details from Fig. 1.

to reset the customer's perception of what they wanted and forces them to address the role of the sign, and this is the first point at which the customer may start to see the cracks that exist in their sign idea.

Step 3: Exploring a better idea – your idea! Over the years, I have straddled both sides of this fence and have bent my better judgement ruler more than once in illustrating why the customer's sign layout idea simply won't work. However, I also provide their idea right next to my better idea, so that the customer can see for themselves why their idea won't work. But it's more involved than just showing your design. You must prove why your design works better, and to do that, you must share with your customer some of the basics of sign design 101.

Step 4: Identify and demonstrate why your design is the best option for them. Start with an open dialog by identifying and restating who the viewer of the sign will be, why they are looking at it, from what distance is it being viewed, how do the colors and layout help with readability and finally to identify the pri-

mary message or thought that needs to be conveyed and how your design meets all of the criteria. Their idea, not so much!

Step 5: Put your money where your mouth is. When you do it in such a way as to demonstrate why your idea addresses that function better than their design idea, then you are on your way to changing your customer's viewpoint of their sign project and their ego design.

Remember that you are building trust, maintaining trust, and standing behind your idea so that your customer trusts you. Trust is the word for the day every day. That is what you are building, not a sign, not a banner or a print. You are building a relationship of trust, and if your customer doesn't trust you by allowing you to use your design idea, then you know you must go back to square one and work on that aspect.

Standing behind your ideas might mean that you have to "guarantee" that your design will work the best by offering to reprint, redo, remake the sign if your idea doesn't "bring more customers into the store," or "provide a better read from the 400' distance where it's

viewed from." Make sure that if you are taking a stand on your ideas performance, make sure it's notable, documentable, and trackable. Vague statements like "bring in more customers" needs to be stated like this: "The sign needs to increase foot traffic in the store by 20%." This will be tracked using sales receipts in addition to a door count, every time that door opens and closes, it counts as a customer walking in the door. In this way, it's trackable and defined, and if you do your homework right, that business' door will be opening a lot as the new sign will naturally generate a renewed interest in what the business has to offer amongst the current clientele, and new customers who are now seeing the sign. Does this idea and process make sense to you?

Step 6: Going beyond the sign, not hiding behind it. How elated do you get when you convince your customer to use your design over their idea? Are you all giddy over your new sale, just like Chris Farley was in the movie "Tommy Boy" when he "smashed his little sale into pieces?" Well, in this case, you can pat yourself on the back for only leaving 75% of the sale on the table for the next sign person to walk in and take over where you left off. What do I mean by this? It's about approaching your client from the start with a "solutions provider" approach, rather than filling an order.

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CASE STUDY: COLORADO CUSTOM FURNITURE

I was called by the owner of this business to discuss a banner for his building. Just a banner. A simple banner to advertise who they are and what they offer as a custom furniture company. He handed me a piece of scrap paper with a sketch on it of a banner, with his phone number, business name, address, fax number – it went on and on. I looked at this piece of paper and said to myself, “This is nothing more than a banner sale, right?”

I should have simply gone in there, got the info, presented a design, sold it, made the banner, and delivered it. End of story. But nope, not me. I looked so far beyond the customer’s wants, and with the right questions being asked, I was able to determine that he had no logo, he had no marketing identity, and he also didn’t have a sign out front on the building. Holy cow Batman, this was a business so ripe for an identity that all I had to do was ask the right questions (to create a sense of urgency and to point out his needs) and I did that by observing the shop, this owner I was visiting with, the car the owner drove, the condition of the shop, the level of dust and dirt inside



of his office, and outside of his office, and how he was dressed. Slightly disheveled and covered in saw dust. This guy was elbows deep into his craft, and he didn’t have the desire to delegate the time or labor to give the other areas the proper attention it needed. And observing details like that are key to earning this prospect’s trust. He’s hard working — like the kind of hard-working furniture maker who is typically missing a digit, or they are sporting some unique disfigurement because of an early mishap with a band saw while learning their craft.

What do all these observations mean? It means know your audience. What kind of psychological jungle gym is going on inside of this owner’s head when he isn’t even taking the time to clean the sawdust that accumulated in his office or on him?

I was the tugboat for this project. I guided them down a path of consultative selling. I could have simply given them what they asked for, but that was not what they needed. They needed their thought process mapped out. Detail transference can occur for the viewers after the sign has gotten their attention.

Is he really too busy to be paying attention to things like that or are they just not important to him? Probably, and if he has ignored all these other areas of his life that support his image, then he’s most certainly ignored the details of his marketing and graphic identity. What about his car? Is it spotless inside? Is it cluttered like his office? Observing your prospects idiosyncrasies will help you relate to their struggles.

During our initial meeting, I mentioned how much I love the smell of woodworking, and I mentioned my new table saw. I also mentioned that I too struggle with dust collection in

my garage at home, and asked if there was any solution out there? With a smirky smile on my face, he knew I knew his office was a mess. That comment opened his storybook on how nuts it’s been trying to find parts for his filter system that stopped working last week when a squirrel got stuck inside and so on and so forth. That is where he began to trust me, and I simply offered up solutions to problems he wasn’t aware of yet.

How many prospects do you know of in your market that might fit into this category in any number of labor-craft-service focused businesses?

I walked out of that banner sales call with a deposit check for \$5,000 for a new logo, new sign, new banners, new truck graphics

continued on page 110

Workflow That Works

EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY WITH A GOOD SYSTEM

BY CHARITY JACKSON



Our sign supply delivery drivers often come in looking exhausted; hauling around heavy media rolls all day will do that. But they're also in a hurry, because they have a lot of products to deliver to many shops. The industry is busy right now!

Every year for the last five years our sales have grown. We're almost 100% business-to-business, so the companies we work for are busy too. The only downfall has been the lack of qualified people willing to work, so much of the extra work is falling on the same crew to complete.

I've mentioned before that we're a small shop, with only four of us running the day-to-day operations, although we're actively trying to hire. Every month this year, we've averaged over 30 vehicles, with the installs being anything from spot graphics to full wraps. Only half of our monthly sales can be attributed to vehicles, so that means on top of all those vehicles, we're still running an equivalent amount through the shop on signs, banners, and engravings.

The only way we can make this work is by having a sound workflow system in place. Having a process that keeps jobs from falling through the cracks and keeps everyone on the same page makes our shop efficient and profitable.

SYSTEM

When we started our business, whoever went to the front counter would pretty much handle the job from start to finish. There were a lot of issues with this process – jobs fell through the cracks, jobs would

pile up on desks without a clear working order, when a customer called to check on their order it was difficult to track down their paperwork, and output and production weren't efficient.

Once we started hiring employees to help with the workload, the problems seemed to increase since we had more people handling projects without a system. By creating a clear process from start to finish, we've eliminated these issues.

Our system starts at the front counter or initial email from a customer and continues through production. The system is a series of steps, software, and tools we've put in place that make the process both efficient and profitable. That's the important part – we're in business to turn a profit, so creating a system that streamlines jobs means you can handle more work with fewer employees and fewer problems.

We use a custom work pad to take notes on all new jobs. They're at the front counter and each desk. It looks professional and allows us to gather initial notes on the job. We also use Art Station Vehicle Templates to record measurements and sketch initial design ideas for vehicle projects. Custom vehicle checklists also help streamline the process for wrap jobs.

A good invoicing computer program is also a necessity. We switched from a dedicated point-of-sale program to QuickBooks to streamline our invoicing and accounting. It's been a good fit for us as we can write estimates and invoices from any computer while limiting employee access

to only pertinent parts of the software at the front counter.

TRACKING

Once the job is started and moves into production, we needed a way to track it along the way. Tracking is a two-part system for us that allows anyone to find a job quickly.

Our jobs go into a numbered, legal-sized folder stored in a counter-top filing rack. We separate the jobs by tabs that designate where they are in the process – proof, waiting for approval, output, CNC/engraving, outside order, and on hold.

The numbered folder system is the first part of the system, and the second part is an online program called Toodledo that we customized to correspond with our folder system. We enter the number from each folder into Toodledo along with the customer's name and where it is in the process.

Usually, the job will start in the proof folder, but for customers just needing a reprint of a previous job, it might go straight to the output or outside orders folder if we're ordering from an outside source. As we work on a job, it moves through the process, and we update Toodledo. If a customer calls to check on their job, you can check its status with just a few clicks.

OUTPUT

Output is one of the steps significantly streamlined with this process. Since all jobs run through the same process, when a job is approved, it's moved to output. Often, we'll get multiple approvals in a short



From spot graphics to full wraps, these are just a few of the installs that were completed in one month. Good workflow means we can handle a heavier workload. (All images courtesy Charity Jackson)

amount of time, so there will be more than one job in output at a time. This allows us to group the printing by material types to streamline the loading and unloading of media.

All vehicle graphic jobs needing to be printed on premium wrap media can be grouped and printed together, followed by calendared sign jobs, reflective, perforated view thru, or other media types. Printing jobs in batches also speeds lamination since we can run larger rolls at a time without multiple small rolls needing to be loaded and unloaded.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

With the current media shortages, we've had to change our materials just a bit. Pre-

viously, we would laminate our premium vinyl graphics with 3M 8548 non-PVC laminate. We use the non-PVC laminate to avoid browning issues, and by having one primary premium laminate, we don't have to stock multiple media types.

With the shortages, we've had a hard time keeping enough stock of 3M 8548, so now we also stock 8518. It's still a premium, quality laminate but will brown quicker on horizontal surfaces than the 8548, so we limit it to vertical spot graphics. We've also started using Arlon's 3310 non-PVC laminate and Avery Dennison's 6540 non-PVC laminate. They're all quality products and give us more options, but it means we're stocking a lot more media than we were before.

To avoid issues, the laminate that should be used is written on the corner of the printed graphics so they can be grouped for laminating. We also engraved a couple of magnets to stick on the back of the printer to designate if premium or calendared is loaded because the backing paper for 3M IJ180 and 3M IJ40 looks the same.

Writing the laminate on the media and labeling the media loaded on the printer are just a couple of tools we utilize to streamline the process. We also have stamps for marking completed jobs, billed invoices, and received payments, and we use labels and storage racks to organize our media options. Its small steps or tools that often keep the process on track.



The tools we implement to create efficiency in our shop aren't fancy – they're small ideas that keep things running smooth. Simply having a system that says, 'This is where finished paperwork goes, this is who was called on a finished job,' or having your media clearly labeled speeds the process. All those little shortcuts add up to bigger profits due to increased workflow.



PRODUCTION

When jobs are waiting for a proof, approval, or to be outputted, they're in a central rack by the production desks. Once a job has been printed, engraved, or routed, it's moved into production for finishing. The job box itself is also moved into production.

It's crucial for efficiency that job folders are organized in the area closest to who is working on them. In the same way, we stock our print vinyl by the printers and our laminates by the laminator.

We have two wall racks in production – one for the jobs being worked on and the second rack for jobs waiting for installation. We also have two dry erase tracking boards – again, one for the production jobs and one for installations.



The production board lists the folder number, job name, and notes with a brief description of the job and any substrates that will need to be cut so they can be grouped and cut at the same time. It also has a five-day calendar where we list the installs for each day of the current week. It's nice to have an at-a-glance list of installs coming in to make sure graphics and signs are ready ahead of time.

We also use Google Calendar to track our installs. An online calendar can be accessed from any desk, making it easy to quickly schedule new installs and see the entire calendar.

COMPLETED

When signs or graphics are completed, the process continues. The customer must be

called for pick up, and then the job needs to be stored somewhere it won't get damaged.

We break down the job folder, put the empty folder back in the desktop rack, and the paperwork is attached to the invoice and placed with the job. We have a custom stamp at the front counter that we stamp on the pink copy of our invoice. On it, we write the date, initials of the person who called the customer, and who we talked to, or if a message was left. There are three sections in case you need to call again to remind the customer their order is ready.

We have two racks near the front counter for organizing finished jobs, and larger signs we lean against a wall. In Toodledo, we update the job to a pickup section and note where it's placed.

We have a key rack attached to a small

dry erase board for our installs. We write the customer's name on the board, and their keys hang beneath. There are also two clips attached to the wall beneath the board. When we finish an installation, we break down the job box, organize the paperwork, stamp the invoice, and call the customer for pick up. We hang the invoice from the wall clips by the keys, so everything is already together when the customer picks up their vehicle. **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.

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WORKING WITH LAYERS

THE BEST WAY TO ORGANIZE AND MANIPULATE CONTENT

Layers are critical to the graphic software's workflow. Layers perform so many tasks that it's hard to imagine working without them. Layers affect the depth of elements in the picture plane and the opacity of pixels. They control color and contrast adjustments. They function as masks, and they apply solids, gradients, and patterns to an image. They are also key to the creation of type, and they even control the application of filters. Layers keep the editing process flexible and dynamic and enhance the ability to be creative with the program.

As usual, I'll be using Adobe Photoshop to demonstrate layers for this article but other image editing software packages offer similar features. There are several different types of layers that control many

aspects of the image editing process including: content layers, fill layers, adjustment layers, shape layers, type layers, and smart objects. Additionally, there are 3D and video layers. Each type of layer has its own unique set of properties and controls.

ADD TO IT

Several additional features are dependent on layers including layer and vector masks, clipping masks, blending modes, layer styles and blending options. All these features work in harmony with layers to extend the capabilities of the program when preparing images for printing or publishing.

Because there are so many processes that involve layers, in this article I will mainly focus on layer basics plus a few of

the layer features that are most relevant to preparing files for output and working in a non-linear environment.

CONTROL IT

The layers panel (Fig. 1) is the control center where the layer functions are performed. Layers are stacked in a specific order. The back-most content in the picture plane being on the bottom and the front-most being on the top. Visually, each layer is separated from the one directly below it or above it by a thin black line. Each layer contains a thumbnail of the layer's contents. The layer's name appears to the right of the thumbnail. Layer styles, masks, or locks are indicated by specific icons. In the far-left column is a little eye symbol that controls layer visibility.



Fig. 1: The layers panel is the control center from where many of the layer functions are performed. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

Fig. 2: Layer content is surrounded by a gray and white checkerboard indicating transparency.



Fig. 3: When multiple layers are selected, their content can simultaneously be transformed.

THE BACKGROUND

When you scan or import an image and open it, the layers panel displays one thumbnail labeled background. A background is the default layer. Unlike a layer, the background is opaque and does not support transparency. The background is always at the bottom of the stack and cannot be dragged to a higher position. By default, the background is locked. To move its contents horizontally, vertically, or diagonally on the picture plane, adjust its opacity, or reposition it in the layers stack, it must be converted to a layer. To convert it,

double click on the word background. When the new layer dialog box appears, name the layer and click OK.

STACK IT

Layers are stacked from bottom to top. The background contains the elements that are furthest back in the picture plane. If the document contains more than one layer, the topmost layer usually reveals the elements that are closest to the picture plane. The stacking order of layers can be rearranged by clicking on the layer and dragging it up or down into another position in the stack.

NAME IT

Photoshop supports an infinite number of layers (depending on the amount of available memory on the computer) and therefore, managing them can present problems. It's therefore important to identify a layer by naming it. The default numbers that Photoshop assigns to new layers can become quite anonymous when their content is too small to be recognized on the thumbnail or when there are several dozen of them in the document. Naming each layer with a descriptive title is a fast way to organize the components of an image for easy identification. The

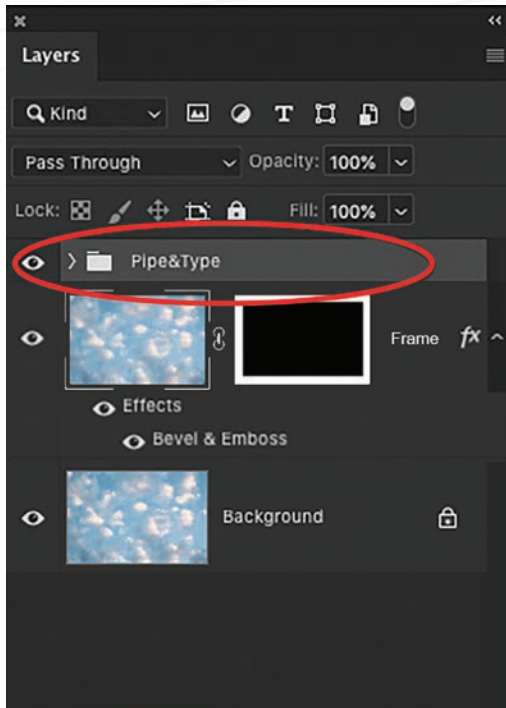


Fig. 4: A layer group is indicated in the layers panel by a folder icon. To see its contents, click the little arrow to the left of the folder.

best way to name a layer is to double-click the current name next to the thumbnail in the layers panel. A box will appear around it. Then type the descriptive name.

SEE IT

The contents of a layer can be concealed or revealed by clicking the visibility icon (the little eye) in the first column of the layers panel. Before a command to affect the contents of a layer can be applied, it must first be highlighted. A highlighted layer is targeted and ready to be edited. Click anywhere on the layer. A colored highlight will appear that indicates the layer is targeted and ready for editing.

REVEAL/CONCEAL IT

If the layer content doesn't occupy the entire layer it is surrounded by a gray and white checkerboard (Fig. 2) that indicates transparency. Content can be made semi-transparent by degrees by dragging the opacity slider from 0% (completely transparent) to 100% (completely opaque) or any percentage in between. This provides the ability to see through the layer to the content below it.

MULTIPLY IT

Some techniques can be simultaneously applied to two or more selected layers. When multiple layers are selected their content can be simultaneously



Fig. 5: The color relationships between the two consecutive layers are affected by a blend mode.



Fig. 6: Multiple identical layers are stacked, and blend modes are applied to the topmost layer or to multiple layers to increase saturation and tonal depth.

transformed — scaled, rotated, distorted, etc. (Fig. 3). They can also be simultaneously repositioned in the stack, merged, aligned, locked, and grouped. To highlight two or more layers in the layers panel, Shift click each layer to select a range of contiguous layers, or Cmnd (Mac) or Cntrl (Win) click to select noncontiguous layers.

GROUP IT

As previously stated, a document can support an unlimited number of layers. Such a document can be difficult to handle. It helps to organize layers into groups to better manage them. A layer group is simply a folder in the stack that contains multiple layers. To see its contents, click the little arrow to the left of the folder. (Fig. 4) Usually the components of the content layers in the group are related and contiguous. To create a group, select

multiple layers in the stack. Then choose new group from the layers panel options menu. A group can be repositioned in the stack by dragging it to a new location. Layers can be added or eliminated from the group by dragging them out of the folder. Transparency can be globally applied to the entire group.

BLEND IT

Blending modes are preprogrammed formulas that affect the color relationships between aligned pixels on two consecutive layers. When layers are blended, interesting color relationships can be created that darken, bleach, invert, or saturate blended layer content.

A layer can be highlighted, and a blending mode can be selected from the menu at the top of the layers panel. The color relationships between the two consecutive

layers will be affected. (Fig. 5) Transparency can then be applied to the layer to precisely mitigate the effect.

Here is a cool technique: Blend layers with similar content to increase saturation and tonal depth as in Fig. 6. Multiple identical layers are stacked, and blend modes are applied to the topmost layer or to multiple layers. The strength of the effect can be globally controlled with the opacity slider or more specifically with a layer mask.

STYLE IT

Layer styles are special effects that add pizzazz to images. Layer styles can be highly realistic and seamless and can be just the right enhancement that thrusts your picture into the “pop zone.” When layer styles are combined an infinite number of effects can be achieved.



The layer styles dialog box is the control center where special effects can be applied. (Fig. 7) The highlighted layer's content should be surrounded by transparency because most of the layer styles affect the content's edge. To get there, double-click the target layer. When the dialog box is displayed choose a default effect by clicking on the check box next to its name. To display extensive controls for each style, click the name itself. The live preview in the image window displays the results.

When a layer has been affected by a style, an fx icon appears in the layers panel to the right of the layer's name. A list of the styles appears under the layer's thumbnail. Double-clicking any of the styles displays the layer styles dialog box and the controls where it can be edited. Each layer style provides a unique and potentially complex set of options.

ADJUST IT

Images usually need some color adjustment and correction after scanning and

before printing. To get the image to really "pop," apply an adjustment feature like levels, curves, or hue saturation directly to selected image content. When these adjustments are directly applied from the Image > Adjustments menu, they are in Photoshop parlance, "destructive"—the pixel information is affected and cannot be restored if the image is saved and closed. Adjustment layers (Fig. 8) produce the same effect and can at any time be readjusted or eliminated.

The beauty of adjustment layers is that they keep the editing process dynamic but also enable the application of the other layer features like opacity, blend modes, and layer styles. The layer mask that accompanies the adjustment layer can precisely control a specific region of the image where the adjustment is applied.

MASK IT

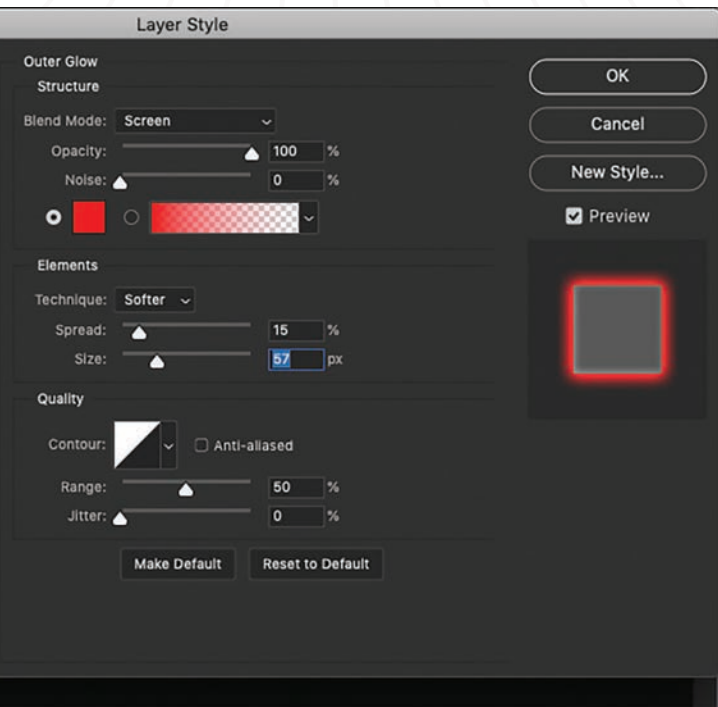
The opacity slider on the layers panel is an adjustment that globally controls the transparency of the all the pixels on a layer. A layer mask controls the transpar-

ency of a specific region of a layer. Layer masks reside in the layers panel next to the thumbnail of the layer. When an adjustment is applied, a layer mask is automatically generated. To create a layer mask for content layers, click the mask icon at the bottom of the layers panel. When the layer mask is selected in the layers panel, painting on the image with 100% black conceals areas on the layer, painting with gray partially conceals, and painting with white reveals content.

CONSOLIDATE IT

During the editing process, you may accumulate quite a few layers. With each new layer, the size of the file increases depending on the amount of information the layer contains. To work more efficiently, periodically merge layers. Merging layers combines the content of two or more layers into a single layer.

There are several ways to merge layers all of which can be selected from the layers menu or the layers panel options menu:



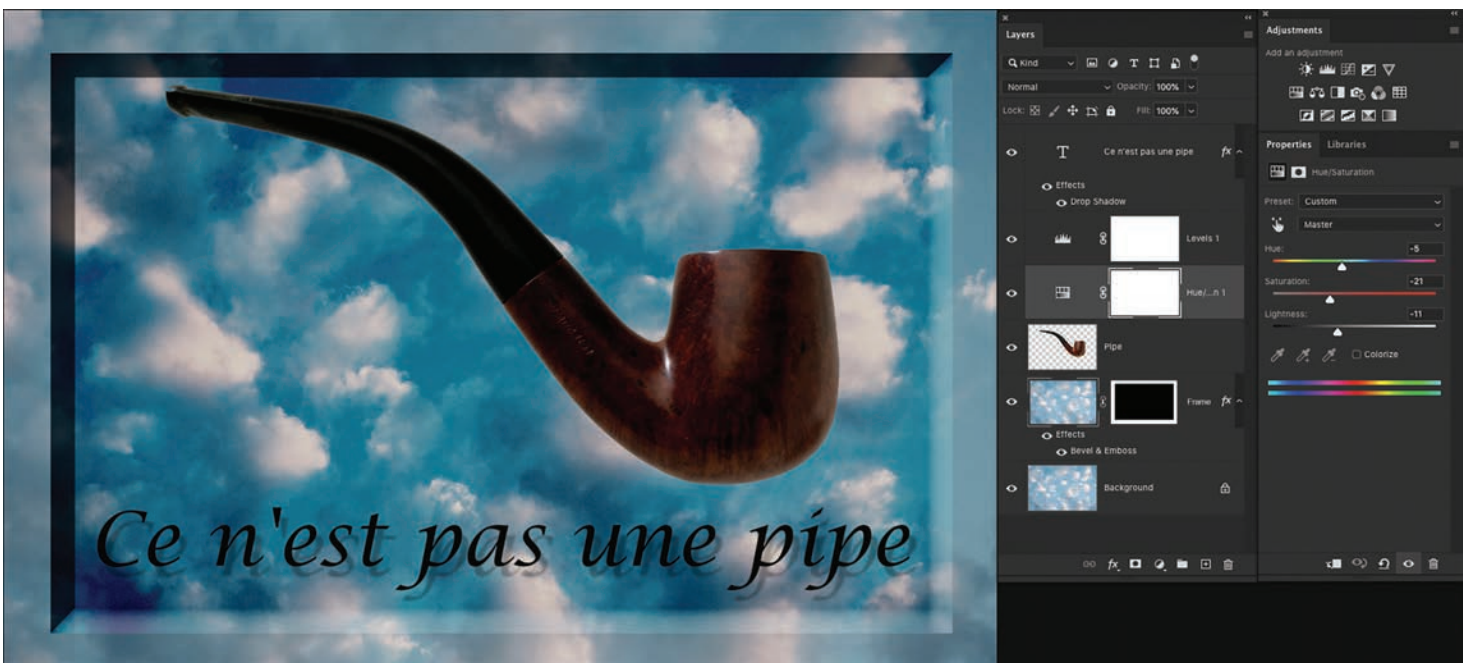
- **Merge visible** merges the content of all the visible layers into one layer.
- **Merge layers** merges all highlighted layers into one layer. The layer retains the name of the topmost highlighted layer.
- **Merge down** merges the content of the targeted layer and the layer immediately below it into one layer. The layer retains the name of the highlighted layer.
- **Flatten image** consolidates all layers into a background.

EXPLORE IT

Layers are an important tool that enable a non-linear workflow when editing images. In this article, the basic layer operations have been presented, but believe me, there is a lot more to be discovered. Generating shapes, gradients, patterns, type, filters, vector masks, 3D objects and video are all processes that are dependent on layers or are enhanced when layers are employed. It certainly is within your interest to explore these capabilities for the sake of efficiency and precision. As you begin to master layer techniques, you will find that working with layers is the only way to go. **GP**

Fig. 7 (above): The layer styles dialog box is the control center where special effects can be applied. **Fig. 8 (below):** Adjustment layers apply color and contrast adjustment and can be readjusted or eliminated at any time.

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FOCUSING ON DETAILS

PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON A HOT GRAPHIC

Some time back I had decorated a Mustang for an acquaintance with a racing stripe graphic. When she traded up to a newer model, she asked me to create a unique graphic for her “new car.” I began the project by locating and importing the appropriate template for the make and model, again a Mustang. **Fig. 1** is the blank template used in CorelDRAW. I want to focus more on the details added to the template rather than on the graphic itself.

Fig. 2 is the result of using a combination of blends, contours, and fountain fills. The car was given a fountain fill from 5% black at the top to 20% at the bottom. The belt line is made up of a white hairline blended to a 40% hairline, giving the appearance of a highlight and shadow.

Details were then added to the door handle, headlights and top. The tires were enhanced by duplicating the shape, shrinking it, and combining the two together. Then a contour to the center was added to get a reasonable 3D look.

A fountain fill was added to the wheels. The wheel well flares were enhanced using a fountain fill then an inside contour to the center. You can add as many or few details as needed to get a somewhat realistic appearance. Color transitions should, for the main part, be kept subtle to be as realistic as possible. Note: In working with templates, I have found they often have open objects that cannot be filled with a color, so you must use the Auto Close or Extend to Close feature to get a fillable object.

Fig. 3 is a rear view of the car. Again, details were added for a somewhat realistic appearance. After detailing all views of the car, I used a clipart image included with a previous version of CorelDRAW to develop the graphic. It was optimized to be cut from high performance vinyl. Installation was a bit of a challenge due to the compound curves of the rear bumper cover. If I had to do it again, I would probably simplify the design. Wrapping the spoiler had the same issue.

This kind of detail is probably not necessary for every job, but in some cases may be the difference between selling the job or not. Most folks are inclined to see their project better in a realistic rendering.

Now, looking at **Fig. 4**, this company had a small fleet of service vehicles with markings that made them visible in the community. I did the graphics on all their vans. They wanted a print to use in a trade show booth. At first, a life-size print, then realizing how awkward it would be to set it up in a booth that may not be large enough for a full-size image, they settled to do a 1/4 size print of their service van. The image was printed on quality vinyl, then adhered to a rigid substrate. It was then hand cut to shape with a jig saw. Again, I began with a template of their van and added details, using blends, contours, and fountain fills to get a somewhat realistic look, then added all the markings to emulate the actual vehicles.

I want to look closely at the phone number and the shadow added. The

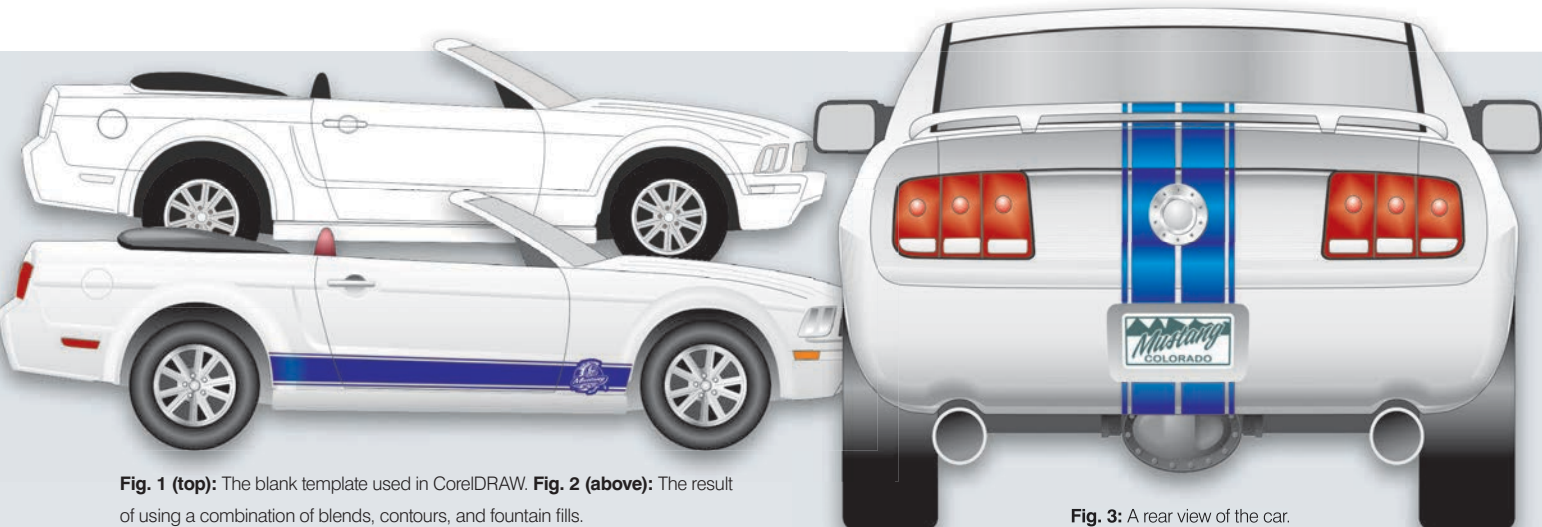


Fig. 1 (top): The blank template used in CorelDRAW. **Fig. 2 (above):** The result of using a combination of blends, contours, and fountain fills.

Fig. 3: A rear view of the car.

shadow could easily be added with the Drop Shadow tool, but if the image must be cut out, it would be difficult to create the cut line. The best alternative I've found is using a contour and blend as follows:

1. Create the text.
2. Add an outside contour and break it apart.
3. Select the contour and give it a 70% black then duplicate it in white and nudge the duplicate over and down.
4. Blend the two together in a 10- to 20-step bend.

This achieves the desired effect. Then you can select the blend group and create a boundary to develop the outside cut line. If there are inside contours that need to be included in the cut, each can be filled with the Smart Fill tool and combined with the boundary. Then give it your cut line color.

Fig. 5 shows this phone number with the shadow and cut line. Fortunately, most fleet vehicles are white, so these colors work well. If your vehicle is a

different color, you'll have to modify the blend colors accordingly, which may necessitate some experimentation. If you're working with a dark colored vehicle, it may be best to use no shadow at all.

The use of shadows is intended to enhance a three-dimensional look for visual impact. When colors are used that are unnatural to the eye, they tend to distract rather than enhance. Just because I can create an effect doesn't mean I should. I have seen some stuff out there that has no regard for visual balance nor consistency of color.

Fig. 6 is another image of using blends, contours, and fountain fills to achieve a relatively realistic image. A local recreational center had several battery-powered boats that required periodic recharging of the batteries. There existed a breaker panel and an outlet box about 50 feet away. This drawing was intended to help the workers to easily identify which breaker powered which outlet. It had been a problem before, so this drawing was of great benefit.

We never know in advance what kind of project we may be asked to do, so it is good to know as much about the program as possible to get the job done.

No matter the design challenge, CorelDRAW has a solution. Some versions exceed others in detail, but somewhere, in almost all versions, there is the thing needed for the moment. I am aware this article may lack some detailed information, so I invite questions and/or comments at dezender1@gmail.com. I will be as prompt as possible with a response. As needed, your comments and questions 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.



Fig. 4 (above): A small fleet of service vehicles with markings that made them visible in the community. Fig. 5 (right): The phone number with the shadow and cut line.

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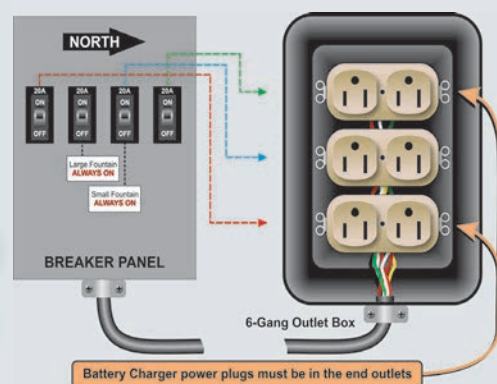


Fig. 6: Using blends, contours, and fountain fills to achieve a relatively realistic image.

Crystal and Glass Awards

THE CLEAR CHOICE FOR RECOGNIZING SPECIAL OCCASIONS



BY KRISTINE SHREVE

When people think about glass and crystal and the promo products industry, the first place their minds most likely go is awards. Getting recognized for your work or your contribution is a powerful thing, and the significance of that piece of crystal or glass sitting on your shelf or mantelpiece can be far larger than the size of the actual award. Recognition programs are powerful tools for companies and organizations, and the award is the symbol of that power. Whether the person receiving the award is a volunteer, an employee, or a celebrity or other notable figure, awards can help make the recipient

more motivated, satisfied, and engaged. That's a lot for a relatively small piece of glass or crystal to accomplish.

TYPES OF GLASS

When working with awards made of glass or crystal, one thing to consider is what kind of glass is being used. All kinds are not created equal. As a general rule, there are three types of glass used in making awards or gifts, actual glass, crystal and optic crystal. Of the three, actual glass is the least expensive and least clear of the three options. Glass awards are made from silica sand and are most commonly

offered as jade glass or crystal clear glass. If you've ever seen an award that has a green or blueish green tint when you look at the edge of the glass, that's jade glass. This type of glass has a higher percentage of iron ore which imparts the jade tint to it. Crystal clear glass, as the name implies, is a type of glass that is closest in appearance to crystal. Jade glass is the least expensive of these two options.

The other option for glass gifts and awards is lead crystal or optical crystal. Lead crystal, as the name implies, has lead oxide as an added element, which softens the glass and gives it added sparkle. Optical crystal, which is short for ophthalmic



Images courtesy Scrappy Dappy Doo

crystal, is basically the glass used in lenses. When optical crystal is manufactured it gets heated to a very high temperature and then cools very slowly, which eliminates imperfections or bubbles in the glass. The result is a glass which is extremely hard and much clearer than leaded crystal or standard glass.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

For those that are interested in working with and selling glass or crystal, don't forget that there are more options than awards when it comes to using this material. As Angela Holley from Creations by

All Stitched Up notes, "With laser engravers becoming more readily available, I see growth in engraving for anything glass. The ability to personalize glass has endless possibilities."

Glass or crystal can be used in flutes for wedding toasts, decanters for alcohol, containers for food or spices or baking materials. Decorative pieces can be made out of glass, and even memorial plaques to commemorate lost loved ones. Vases can be engraved. Personalized mason jars have become a popular gift item. If awards aren't your thing, there are other niches where glass and crystal can also

be used, and these niches can be very profitable.

One niche that can be especially fertile for decorators is the food and beverage industry. Melanie Ryder from Ryder Digital Works says, "The majority of the etched/engraved glassware we have seen has been through the wedding and restaurant industries." From engraved wedding flutes commemorating a wedding or anniversary to engraved bar glasses or liquor decanters to personalized glass mugs for a restaurant or coffeehouse, engraved or etched beverage containers can offer a lot of promise and profit for decorators.

THE BEST FOR THE BEST

AWARDS TO CHERISH FOR A LIFETIME



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PERSONALIZATION

What makes glass and crystal profitable, as is the case with most promo products, is personalization. When it comes to this media, there are three main methods of personalization that are commonly used. The first is sandcarving or sandblasting. This method forces a stream of abrasive through the nozzle of a hose using compressed air, etching a design onto the glass or crystal to be decorated. Sandcarving is a versatile process, and generally is considered to provide a superior result. Using this method will also allow for the creation of three dimensional and photoresist effects. For those who invest

in the equipment to sandblast, they can work with almost any type of glass, as well as stone, marble, granite, tile, and ceramic. This method comes with a lot of options and capabilities.

The next method is mechanical engraving, also called rotary engraving. As the name implies, this is a machine method, which requires a faceted rotary diamond cutter, a burnishing adapter which allows the cutter to “float” over the glass, and a system for cooling. Mechanical engraving works well for personalization involving text. It is perhaps not the best option for more custom graphics like complex logos or photos.

The third method for engraving glass or crystal is laser engraving. Most glass engravers use CO₂ lasers, because the wavelength of the laser’s energy is absorbed into the glass, allowing a mark to be created. Other kinds of lasers won’t work to engrave glass as the beam shines completely through the material to be engraved. Because the only thing touching the item to be engraved is a beam of light, this method is fairly simple, no need for clamps or using water to make sure the glass stays cool

as is necessary with mechanical engraving. There is also no need for a mask or stencil as there might be with sandcarving. The one issue with laser engraving is that it will have a different look from the other two methods. Lasers interact with glass differently, so the result has a different appearance. Still, if you find the right glass, have an experienced operator, and are willing to spend a little time on experimentation, you can create engraved glass that will be sure to please your customers.

Keep in mind that glass can also be etched, which is another method of adding personalization. The difference between etching and engraving is mostly in the process. Engraving is a physical process, using some sort of tool to cut lines into the surface of the glass, as described above. Etching, by contrast, is a chemical process. It requires the use of acid to burn lines into the surface of the glass. Both techniques have their unique strengths and weaknesses, and either can turn out a superb, finished product.

If engraving isn’t your thing, or you’re shop isn’t quite ready to invest in the equipment needed, another option for decorating glass is sublimation. There are two types of glass options when using sublimation as your decoration method, clear and frosted. Both types involve a coating, which allows the sublimation ink to adhere to the glass. The difference is in the background behind the print. With clear glass, all you see is the ink on the glass and the print may be less brilliant and a little harder to see. With the frosted glass option, the frosting shows up as a semitransparent white on the glass, and the ink is bolder and more colorful. Sublimation can be a terrific option for decorating glass items, but there are a few things to consider when using this method. The first is that heat and pressure can crack glass if misapplied, so you may need to invest in a heat press specifically for cups or tumblers. Second, depending on whether the glass is frosted or not, the print on the glass may be see through and more dull than you might wish.

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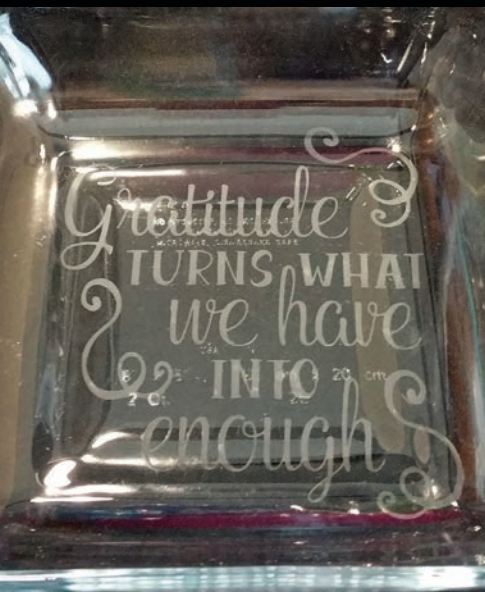


ISSUES MAY ARISE

Regardless of the decorating method used, glass and crystal do come with some challenges. One big challenge is the fragility of the material. It can chip, crack and shatter easily, and the cause of the damage could be pressure or heat.



Images courtesy Ryder Digital Works



As more and more glass and glass like materials become available, the range of things that can be done with glass and crystal continues to expand. To get started working in this market, figure out which method of decoration works for you, and pick the niche or niches you'd like to occupy. Like anything else, working with glass is an acquired talent, and your skillset will build over time. (Images courtesy Auntie Pat Crafts)

Engravers can fail to remove all the material needed to engrave fully, leaving an uneven surface or a chipped appearance. Often polishing the engraved area with a rougher cloth will help remove the chips and smooth the finished design.

Another issue can be getting good photographs of engraved glass. “The biggest challenge for me is photography,” notes

Holley. “It is extremely hard to photograph glass and get the details to show.” Since it’s clear, you must find the perfect surface on which to put the item. Something that reflects the personalization added to the glass without overwhelming the picture and stealing focus or changing the look of the item too much. Another issue with photographs is eliminating glare and reflections. Good lighting management is a must when photographing glass.

Being aware of the types, possibilities, and potential challenges of glass and crystal will ensure a smoother personalization process. **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 2006-2020.



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Etch Masters

The Making of The Primo Cup Golf Award



BY RUTH DOBBINS

All images courtesy Ruth Dobbins



The chosen trophy blank.

Now that spring is in full effect, the urge is there to hit the greens to play a round of golf as soon as possible, weather permitting. Unless, of course, you happen to live in a geographic zone where this is possible year-round. Maybe you have been watching the pro tournaments on TV and imagined yourself participating in one of those, but really, dream on. There are smaller tournaments in many places, but if you can't participate in one of them either, you could do the next best thing, as my graphic artist Damian did, and create your very own. This is how the Primo Cup Award was born. Being a member of a Hispanic family, the cup name came naturally. If you know some Spanish, you will know that primos are cousins. Not being a golfer myself, I am not sure on what criteria the tournament is based, but I do know they have a lot of fun playing together.

Golf is a very popular sport and offers plenty of opportunities for glass etchers to contact golf clubs to see if you can create awards for them. There are so many different blanks particular to golf that can be purchased, so you should check out the ones your preferred supplier has to offer. They can range from elaborate brilliant cut cups to



Trophy cradled on a shop towel with a stencil adjacent.

medium sized awards incorporating glass golf balls to smaller, inexpensive blanks.

The Primos chose a nicely shaped blown glass cup, almost a pitcher with an incorporated base. In our case, the blank was obtained from IKONICS and came with a passable presentation box; nothing fancy, but adequate.

When working on a piece like this, great caution is necessary. The glass is a blown glass vessel of various thicknesses and because of the curvature is prone to break quite easily if hit on a hard surface. Additionally, the same characteristics make it prone to rolling on a table surface when in the horizontal position. This vessel has a handle, which will stop a rolling motion, but still, it is best to cradle the glass piece in a towel or a bean bag to prevent it from doing that.

APPLYING THE STENCIL

The curvature is challenge enough when it comes to applying a stencil. Before creating any stencil, it is advisable to check for the straightest part of the vessel and measure the absolute maximum area a stencil could take up. Should it be necessary to have text go into the curved area, you may have to scan the curvature to have the text conform to the curve so that it will appear straight and not make a “smiley face” or “frowny face” curve. Even if the text area is fairly straight you will need to cut some pleats into the stencil to be able to apply it. By that, I mean a couple of diagonal cuts at each corner. When applying a stencil to a curved surface it is best to adhere it at the center of the image first and then slowly work out towards each corner. It is pretty obvious that a squeegee is of no use trying to smooth the stencil on such a surface and your fingers will do a better job. When applying the stencil parts closest to the pleats, it is important to make sure that one part does not overlap on another, otherwise you will bury the coversheet of one area under the top one and won't be able to remove it without tearing or wrinkling the top layer. Try to avoid air bubbles under the stencil



Applying the stencil with the cut pleats, peeling the cover sheet, and folding down the stencils at the pleats.

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Left: Application of the base stencil with the names and peeling the cover sheet. **Center and right:** Taping the gap on the base stencil and the pleats.

as this could be a spot where the abrasive will easily penetrate the stencil and create a blasted spot where none was intended. We call that snowing through. Tiny bubbles are less of a hazard than big ones. Should you incur a larger bubble you can prick it with a stencil knife but then you will have to place a piece of tape over that spot. Also, to play it safe, it is best to tape over any pleats that were cut into the stencil.

FINAL PREPARATION BEFORE BLASTING

Once the stencils are in place, you want to make sure the vessel will be protected dur-

ing the blasting process. We have found that common stretch wrap used in the kitchen is an excellent material for protection. This is protection from swirling abrasive in the cabinet but not a resist should you point the blast nozzle directly at the material. Knowing that, we wrap the whole piece except for the stencil areas, of course, and then apply a double layer of tape around the stencils. This secures the stretch wrap and will hopefully protect the glass enough to go through the blasting process. When applying the tape, make sure it's really firmly adhered to the object, otherwise it may lift off during the blasting process.

GETTING PREPARED FOR BLASTING

Since we blast many different objects in our studio, we must make sure to set up the blasting equipment properly for the job at hand. If you only do glassware and gift items, it is not quite so important since you'll be blasting more or less at the same pressure. You must use your own judgment somewhat in setting the pressure for your blaster since only you can determine your experience level. It is a good idea to always stay on the lower end of pressure if you have little experience. In this case, it means blasting at 20 pounds of pressure. If you know what you are doing, you can



Wrapping the whole trophy with stretch wrap and taping.



Blasting the piece.



The completed blasted vessel ready for cleanup.



blast at 35-40 pounds of pressure, making sure you keep a good distance of at least 6" away from the surface while blasting. Only you can decide on the depth for the project, which will largely depend on how thick the glass is. On a curved surface like this vessel, it is advisable not to go too deep to avoid breaking the piece either in the blasting process or later while cleaning and handling it. As always, the blasting process is the shortest time in production; most of the time is spent in preparation and cleanup.

CLEANUP

This is also a relatively short process enabled by the use of the stretch wrap. The wrap peels off very easy, but you should be careful not to have loose abrasive fall

BRIAN MIRSCHE, IKONICS IMAGING, SAYS TAPELESS SANDBLAST PORTS ARE A MUST-HAVE SANDCARVING ACCESSORY. SEE WHAT THEY'RE ALL ABOUT AT <https://gpro.link/sandblasting>.

into the vessel during cleanup, otherwise you just created more work for yourself. If you usually soak the glass piece in water to remove the stencil, be careful not to have water get into the vessel, unless you want to wash the whole piece and carefully dry it afterward. I would not recommend putting it in a dishwasher for cleanup for fear of it falling over during the wash process, but you can decide for yourself. We spray

the stencils with warm water and then remove them before cleaning the outside of the award.

The Primos have been playing in their tournament for nine years now, so next year they are celebrating their 10th anniversary. Wonder whose name will go on the trophy then? You better up your game! **GP**



The finished piece illuminated with white and blue light.



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

Overcoming IMPOSTER SYNDROME

DON'T UNNECESSARILY HOLD YOURSELF BACK FROM SUCCESS

You might have heard the saying, “April showers bring May flowers.” As we head into May, you’ve probably been working hard to improve your business, as that is the typical first-quarter activity for many small businesses. And maybe all that hard work leads to your May flowers or the fruits of that hard work. But I know many people who reach this point and then self-sabotage by putting

off the launch. Or maybe they don’t share as loudly as possible because they feel it is not perfect enough to put out to the world. This behavior is a result of something called imposter syndrome. Pauline Clance, Ph.D., a clinician at Oberlin College, initially coined the phrase. Imposter syndrome is a feeling of doubt in your abilities and worries that you are unqualified or undeserving. You hypothesize you will surely be “found out.” It is not an actual mental ailment but a dominating feeling that makes you downplay your achievements. Imposter syndrome is just a limiting belief that, as decorators, we need to move past to let those May flowers grow and bear fruit!



BY AARON
MONTGOMERY

THE EXPERT, SOLOIST & PERFECTIONIST

In my many years in this industry, the people out there who share, believe in themselves, take risks, and make things happen with a willingness to hear feedback are successful decorators. The reality is that we all have some level of imposter syndrome inside us, which is a good thing as it keeps us striving for more. When it cripples us from being action takers, our business will suffer. Imposter syndrome shows up in a few different forms, but the main challenges are wanting to become an expert, being a soloist, and perfectionism. Let me explain those three categories briefly, then we can understand them better and can implement some strategies to overcome imposter syndrome.

Expert: This is the person dealing with imposter syndrome who is on a quest to find knowledge and collect magic bullets. They listen to podcasts, watch YouTube videos, comment on Facebook Lives, but never put any of that knowledge into action.

Soloist: This person deals with imposter syndrome by isolating themselves, never asking for help, and never really putting anything out into the world for fear of being found out. They don’t want to seem weak or incompetent, so they will sit in the corner and hope not to be called.

Perfectionist: This person deals with imposter syndrome by con-



Image courtesy Aaron Montgomery



tinuously tweaking things, always working on improvements but never launching or offering anything. They are never satisfied with their work and only focus on their flaws.

Do any of those sound like you at times? For me personally, I have fit into all those categories at one time or another. But why is imposter syndrome so common for graphics professionals like us? One of the reasons is the low barrier of entry into our space. Comparatively to other industries, you can start from a corner room of your house, make a much smaller investment, and don't have any required proof to show you are the expert. You just have to get customers to believe in you. Also, as a small business owner, you must wear many hats, and that requires learning new technical skills and tackling things outside of your comfort zone. If you started as an artist who wanted to create, you were unaware of the marketing needed, accounting requirements, etc. Lastly, there

is no such thing as an overnight success. You have to grow, build your business slowly and take a few bumps along the way. Yet, from the outside looking in, you see other decorators who seem to be crushing it. You didn't see the 10,000 hours they put in, the sleepless nights, and the struggles to find their way.

4 STEPS TO OVERCOME IMPOSTER SYNDROME

With all this information, your burning question is, "How do I overcome this syndrome?" Let's break it down into four steps to quickly work through them as you recognize imposter syndrome showing up in your business.

1. As I mentioned initially, imposter syndrome is not an actual mental ailment but a dominating feeling getting the best of us. So first, we need to learn to recognize those feelings

continued on page 110

PRODUCTREVIEW

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



HEAT TRANSFER GANG SHEETS

Supacolor introduces the Supagang, an 11.7" X 16.5" heat transfer sheet that can hold several of the same design or many different designs on one sheet. Previously, Supacolor was only sold as a single image per sheet. It is available in wearable, blocker, and softshell blocker.

844-973-2862
supacolor.com



DIGITAL ALBUM FOR ENGRAVERS

VeScribe announces its new private digital album technology for engravers using its service. Customers can create digital albums using photos and videos already on their devices and create keys to these albums through QR codes that can be engraved. The albums will be stored on the company's VeChain blockchain.

850-405-7494
vescribe.com

SIGN DESIGN PROGRAM FOR MAC

SA International

announces that its FlexiDESIGN program is now available for macOS. Some of its features include a native 64-bit application, the ability to send to remote Windows

production manager, variable data, user data backup, vector erase tool, and more.

801-478-1900

thinksai.com



ARTIFICIAL TURF

Fisher Textiles has added artificial turf to its lineup of materials for trade show and retail advertising environments. The product is made in the USA and is available in three weights and pile heights. Roll sizes are 15' wide X 100' long.

800-554-8886
fishertextiles.com

WOVEN TAGS

World Emblem introduces woven tags, which are custom-made labels that can be heat-sealed in the neck of a T-shirt or any other location. There are 66 thread colors available, and the product is available in sizes ranging from 0.5" X 0.5" to 7.48" X 7.48".

800-766-0448
worldemblem.com





RELAXED FIT SHORT SLEEVE T

Royal Apparel offers its women's relaxed short sleeve shirt, which is made of 100% combed ring-spun cotton. The grey version is 90/10 cotton/polyester. It has a set on rib collar, double-needle sleeve hem, double-needle bottom hem, and a tear-away label.

866-769-2517
royalapparel.net

BLACK BACK PRINT FABRIC

Serge Ferrari North America introduces the Seemee Select Blackback Premium fabric. It is a 7.6-oz. opaque fabric with a whiter print surface and better scratch resistance on the black back side, according to the company. The company says the product is fire retardant to NFPA 701 and B1 and is locally stocked in 125.9" and 199" wide rolls. It's ideal for backdrops, pop-ups, frames, exhibit and retail displays.

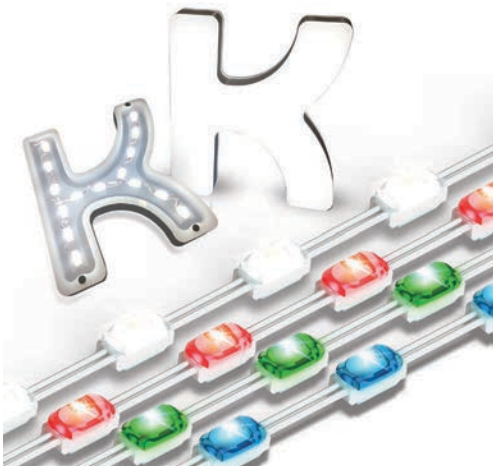
954-942-3600
sergeferrari.com



CHANNEL LETTER LIGHTING

SloanLED introduces the SloanLED Prism12 Nano+, a 12 VDC LED channel letter lighting solution. The product is available in white, red, green, and blue, and the company says the new model has improved elliptical optics and more modules per driver with 250 white modules per 60W power supply.

888-747-4533
sloanled.com



HYBRID PRINTER

MUTOH announces the ValueJet 1628MH hybrid printer, which offers the flexibility of printing on roll or rigid media using MP31 multipurpose inks in up to eight colors. It also has a new built-in circulation system for white and magenta inks. The product uses MUTOH's VerteLith RIP software.

800-996-8864
mutoh.com



SUSTAINABLE SPRING STYLES

SanMar announces its spring 2022 new arrivals, including the company's newest brand, Mercer + Mettle, a 30-piece collection. Notable highlights of the spring launch include products from TravisMathew, Nike, Eddie Bauer, Sport-Tek, and OGIO.

800-426-6399
sanmar.com

PRODUCTREVIEW

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



FUME EXTRACTION ARM

Weller Tools introduces its extraction arms and accessories meant for extracting dust, smoke, and fumes. The company offers various products, such as the Kit 1S WF funnel nozzle, which has an Easy-Click 60 one-joint aluminum extraction arm with funnel nozzle and stop valve. The company has a selection of articulated rigid arms as well as flexible arms.

weller-tools.com



TIE-DYE DAD CAP

Carolina Made Inc., offers the Sportsman tie-dyed dad cap. The product is a 100% cotton, unstructured, six-panel, low-profile cap with a pre-curved visor and a tri-glide buckle closure. It is available in nine colors.

800-222-1409

carolinamade.com

LARGE-FORMAT PRINTER/CUTTERS

Roland DGA launches the TrueVIS VG3 and SG3 series large-format printer/cutters. The products use the company's FlexFire print heads and GREENGUARD Gold certified TR2 inks. The devices are equipped with a new 7" LCD touch-panel screen. The VG3 family includes the 64" VG3-640 and the 54" VG3-540. The SG3 family includes the 54" SG3-540 and the 30" SG3-300. The products can be used for signs and banners, window graphics, labels, decals, and more.

800-542-2307

rolanddga.com



DTF TRANSFER PRINTER

DTG Digital announces the launch of its new flagship direct-to-film transfer printer, the Q1T Series. It is a dedicated roll-to-roll DTF transfer printing system for indirect fabric decoration. It prints transfers onto a translucent PET film before passing through an in-line powder glue station and curing unit. The color configuration is CMYK + white + flush liquid with inks available in user

replaceable 1-liter bags. The device measures 1330mm x 1250mm x 2100mm.

dtgdigital.com

ARTWORK PREP SOFTWARE

Inkcups announces the launch of ArtPrep, its automated artwork preparation software for digital printing. The software integrates with all Inkcups digital printers and workflows and accepts PNG files directly through users' art departments or automatically through an API connection. Inkcups offers ArtPrep and ArtPrep PRO.

978-646-8980

inkcups.com





GLITTERY DIGITAL MEDIA

Siser North America introduces SparklePrint, a digital media embedded with silver specks of glitter to create smooth surfaces. The company says it is compatible with eco-solvent, solvent, and latex-based printers/cutters. The product is approximately 190 microns/7.48 mils and a PU composition.

866-301-9409

siserna.com



DTF PRINTER

ColDesi announces the launch of the DigitalHeat FX DTF-24H4 high-volume direct-to-film printer. It is a 24" device with four print heads and can print at 145-155 linear feet of full-color film printing per hour.

877-793-3278

coldesi.com

REVERSE LIGHT BLOCKERS

Rowmark offers the LaserMax reverse light blockers. The product can be used to make custom color combinations using its standard range of colors and customer choices of acrylic paint. The company says this product works for applications that require images to be protected subsurface.

419-425-8974

rowmark.com



ROTARY PRESSES

Practix Mfg. announces the release of its new rotary presses, the OK-16 CP (pictured here) and the OK-16 RTR. They are continuous heat transfer rotary presses, and they feature a 16" diameter oil-filled, steel-encased drum. They are also made to provide 240 degrees of heat contact and can produce 230 linear feet per hour. The products are available in 66", 88", 104", and 128" wide printable widths.

770-974-1480

practix-usa.com



LIGHT-UP PHOTO BLOCK

Johnson Plastics Plus offers its light-up photo block, which can light up a space while highlighting a sign, photo, or graphic. The boxes measure 11.3" X 7.8" X 1.88" and come with a metal insert to personalize with sublimation or vinyl.

800-869-7800

jplusplus.com

GP

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EXHIBITING COMPANIES

Exhibitor list and class schedule as of April 2022, please visit g-p-x.com/in for the most up-to-date list.

Plan your show visit by checking off the Exhibitors you'd like to see!

★ Indicates Featured Exhibitors

🍏 Indicates Training in the Classroom

- 3M Commercial Solutions 🍏🍏👤
- Advertising Specialty Inst/ASI 🍏
- All American Print Supply Co
- Apex
- Bayside Made in America
- Big Systems LLC
- Brown Mfg Group Inc
- BRUXSAFOL Folien GmbH
- Budget Inks
- CADlink Technology Corp
- Canon Solutions America
- CIT
- Corel Trainer 🍏
- Digital EFX Wraps
- Don't Drive Naked 🍏
- Easiway Systems
- Epilog Laser ★🍏
- FlexiShield 🍏👤
- Franmar Chemical Inc
- Fusion Tools 🍏
- General Formulations Inc 🍏👤
- Geneva Capital LLC
- Graphic Elephants
- GRAPHICS PRO 🍏
- GSG
- Hanesbrands
- Heat Transfer Solutions
- Hirsch Solutions Inc 🍏
- HIX® Corporation ★🍏
- Howard Custom Transfers Inc
- IBOW Training
- Ikonart
- IKONICS Imaging 🍏
- IT Supplies
- ITNH Inc
- JDS Industries Inc ★🍏
- JDS Sign Supply 🍏👤
- Lawson Screen & Digital Products
- Leister Technologies/Weldy
- LogoJET

🍏 Indicates Training Stop

👤 Indicates WRAPSCON Sponsor

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- TheMagicTouch USA
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START HERE

These classes are geared toward people who are brand new to a discipline or have some graphics experience but are looking to learn the fundamental techniques and/or add new profit centers in related markets.

PRO

Considered "higher learning," these classes will take a deep dive into advanced techniques and/or the business aspect of running a graphics shop as it applies to the type of shop being run, i.e., apparel decoration, sign making or personalized product production.

Classes are offered the day before the show starts, and throughout the show, in all-day and 90-minute sessions.



TRAINING IN THE HALL

Select exhibitors will present 15-30 minute in-booth demonstrations throughout each day of the expo in the exhibit hall.

TRAINING IN THE CLASSROOM SCHEDULE

Please visit g-p-x.com/in for class descriptions.

Check off the classes you'd like to attend or plan to take to help you prepare!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1

10 a.m. — 4 p.m.

- Hirsch Solutions Inc** - Join the DTG Revolution!

THURSDAY, JUNE 2

8-9:30 a.m.

- WRAPScnnect** - Panel Discussion, Sponsored by: 3M Commercial Solutions
- 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**
- Transfer Express** - Screen Print with Just a Heat Press **START HERE**

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- HIX® Corporation** - Learning the Sublimation Business
- PDS Equipment** - Energize your Business with UV Print **START HERE**

1:30-3 p.m.

- STAHL'S** - Printing Outside of the T-Shirt Box **START HERE**
- Rayzist Photomask Inc** - Learn Sandcarving with Rayzist Photomask **START HERE**

4-5:30 p.m.

- Corel Trainer** - Everyone Can Learn CorelDRAW **START HERE**

FRIDAY, JUNE 3

8-9:30 a.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - Battle of the Brands - Panel Discussion
- ORAFOL Americas** - Master Wall Wrap & Graphic Applications: Overcoming Challenges **START HERE**
- IKONICS Imaging** - Lights, Camera, Action! Become a Sandcarving Star! **START HERE**

FRIDAY, JUNE 3 cont.

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- Transfer Express** - Print More than T-Shirts **PRO**
- Don't Drive Naked Vehicle Wraps** - Let's Get "NAKED" About Marketing **PRO**
- Advertising Specialty Institute** - Sell More to Existing Customers **PRO**

1:30-3 p.m.

- Trotec Laser** - Skills, Materials & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment
- Melco** - Patch Seminar

4-5:30 p.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - How to Price yourself for Profit, with Matt Richart **PRO**

SATURDAY, JUNE 4

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** - From the Gargantuan to the Itsy-Bitsy: A Pro's Guide to Holding & Engraving the Ridiculous, with Lori Champagne **PRO**

1:30-3 p.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - Making the Most of your Production Time and Energy in Small Business, with Lori Champagne **PRO**



Special Events at **GRAPHICS|PRO|EXPO** *Indianapolis*

In addition to a robust expo hall, new products, free training, giveaways, and professional networking, GPX Indianapolis features the following special events and programming:



GPX THEATER

Find out what makes the most successful graphics shops tick at GPX Theater in the expo hall. Stop by for live interviews with outstanding shops as they discuss their struggles and successes, the state of the industry, and trends they're preparing for and responding to. Check the website for updates on who's being interviewed and when (g-p-x.com/in).



WRAPSCON

WRAPSCON is pulling out all the stops in 2022, kicking off with an in-depth panel discussion featuring the world's top graphics installers. This year, in addition to the annual WRAP Olympics competition, there's also a competition for designers (WRAPSCON Designer Throwdown), Meet the Master Happy Hour at Chef JJ's Downtown, and tons of free training in the classroom, the hall, and in GPX Theater. Go to g-p-x.com/wrapsccon for all the details.



It's a post-show networking event you won't want to miss. Enjoy drinks and hors d'oeuvres at Elements Financial Club @ Victory Field, just around the corner from the Indiana Convention Center. Sponsored by CIT, The Mixer is Friday evening, June 3, after the expo hall closes, 5-6:30 p.m.



We'll see you in Indy!

FEATURED EXHIBITORS

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www.epiloglaser.com

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Make sure to stop by Booth 501 and check out the latest additions to Epilog Laser's product line! We'll be showcasing our Fusion Pro and Fusion Edge series, which have the fastest engraving speeds and the popular IRIS Camera System for quick and easy artwork placement. Whether you're getting your first laser or adding one to your personalization business, Epilog has the right machine for your application.



HIX® CORPORATION

800-835-0606
www.hixcorp.com

New EVO PRO S-650 Heat Press

Our new EVO Series of heat presses combine an all-metal housing with our new full-color LCD touchscreen controller, as well as a new high-performance pad. The EVO PRO S Series semi-automatic clamshell adds a mechanical auto open feature without the need for an air compressor. This reduces operator fatigue by eliminating half of the manual effort. It also reduces the chance of scorched t-shirts and is helpful with longer transfer times such as sublimation on textile and non-textile substrates.



Register for our class: Learning the Sublimation Business
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800-843-8853
www.jdsindustries.com

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jdsindustries.com



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Wrap Olympics:

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WRAPSCON Designer Throwdown:

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General FORMULATIONS

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PMF

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Hood wrapping contest and prizes!

The Wraps Event, For Wrappers, By Wrappers!

WRAPSCON will once again be the single-largest gathering of wraps professionals under one roof at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, June 2-4, in conjunction with **GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (GPX)**.

As we celebrate our seventh annual event, the best minds in the industry will be at the show sharing their advice, install tips, and business suggestions, all while presenting live demonstrations. Don't miss this opportunity to interact with top-notch installers, manufacturers and your peers, in support of the ever-growing world of wraps.

WRAPSCON 2022 will feature classroom education geared toward wraps professionals, contests for pros and novices alike, more hands-on opportunities for installers and designers of all ability levels, and more vendors featuring today's top tools, templates, wide-format printers and films.

WRAPSCON will take over an entire section of the exhibit hall. In years past, our exhibitors have delivered demonstrations on floor and wall graphics, window tint and paint protection, as well as auto, boat and plane wrap installations.

Highlights of this year's WRAPSCON include:


WRAPScnnect: A Q&A panel discussion with the world's elite wrappers, Thursday, June 2 at 8 a.m.

Wrap Olympics: This one-of-a-kind wraps contest will test the wrap skills and mental toughness of 32 two-person teams as they battle through a Decathlon of ten grueling stages of competition. Do you have what it takes? Grab your partner and register today.

Meet the Masters Happy Hour: An intimate affair for wrappers only on Thursday night.

WRAPSCON Designer Throwdown: A contest focused on designers to highlight your skills and show the market what you do best!




Join industry influencers like Jim Miller, John Duever, Kevin Kempf and Adam Sumner as we bring it back to INDY! Come see live demos from our sponsors: 3M, FlexiShield, Mutoh America, ORAFOL, JDS Sign Supply, KPMF, The Wrap Institute, General Formulations, PROSERIES and Wensco Sign Supply.



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The Wrap Institute is excited to be part of Wrapscon once again! In addition, we are very happy to be teaming up with Miller Decals who will be fueling all the live demonstrations with their professional install skills and knowledge. Stop by our booth to participate & for a chance to win prizes!



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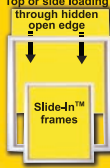
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SIGN DESIGN

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and a cool business card setup. I helped him visualize in his mind's eye an entire identity package that featured a new logo and graphic look that would give his company that cool, visual flow that helped his prospects remember his name and logo over his competition.

In fact, it was a few years later when I was at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and this customer motioned for me to come over to meet some of his associates. As I approached, he put his hand on my shoulder and the first thing out of his mouth was: "This is Charboneau, and I asked him to stop by to talk about a banner for the shop, and before I know it, he ends up redesigning my company's entire identity. Here. Look. This is the business card he made me, too."

I not only provided solutions to his needs, I built a level of trust with a client that led to many more large signage projects down the road. And his associates put my card in their files as "the guy to call when they need signs" and over the next few years, they did. I didn't sell him what he asked for; I used his bad design as a steppingstone to open up the conversation to his real needs. I provided a solution to a problem he was not aware he had.

I described to him how good it would feel to get that part of his company's identity handled, and in place doing its job, and he agreed.

Build trust, and your clients will allow you to create the design that works best for them without the confrontational arguments. You are handling it for them, they need to remember that. Don't sell them a design. Instead, work to gain their trust. **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.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

continued from page 93

and accept them. Maybe you feel the need to justify your prices to others constantly? Perhaps it is continuously watching all the "experts" in the field, taking their advice, and never taking action? Do you feel overwhelmed because you don't know how to tackle the project a new customer brought you, but don't ask anyone for help? You just burn a ton of money trying to figure it out yourself? Recognize those situations and pause for a moment to ask why. Why do I need to justify my pricing? Maybe you need to work to feel more confident in your numbers? Why do you spend your whole day watching and listening to others but never implementing? Why do you avoid asking for help? Maybe you need to find a safe space where you won't get attacked like most Facebook Groups out there?

2. After recognizing how imposter syndrome shows up for you, the next step is finding some acceptance in that realization. Your previous 'why' questions should help you accept it, but we all need a solution for real acceptance. Find a safe group that can help you with your pricing. Schedule a time to try a new technique you hear about on a YouTube video. Then, make samples and ask for feedback on those samples. Reach out to someone who could be your mentor. This decorating community is chock-full of people who have been where you are at and are happy to share. I'm a prime example and am delighted to help in any way I can.
3. Next, we need to change our mindset regarding the feedback we get. That feedback can come in many forms, like customers being upset or happy, no sales, direct feedback from potential customers, and more. But all the feedback is valuable, even the stuff that feels like a failure, and harnessing this to make better decisions, try new things and take better actions is

just like having a GPS for your business success. You must go into every activity in your business with high intentions — a strong belief in winning the order, for example. But then you must leave with low attachment to the outcome. "I didn't win the order, oh well, what did I learn? Next!" Don't compare your sales, stats, or results to anyone else. Your results are exactly what you should be getting right now, and it is up to you to focus on your business to change them if they are not what you want.

4. Lastly, you can take new risks and really start enjoying the process with your new and improved mindset. Once you start enjoying the process, you will build the self-confidence to continue taking new risks. What we put out into the world should be something we are proud of, not something that is perfect. For example, the latest job you do for a customer might, upon extreme inspection, not be perfect. But if you put your heart and soul into it and are proud of what you did, those minor flaws don't mean anything. Your customers won't care, and they will be proud to own something made with such passion and pride. Try new things from time to time, do your best, put it out into the world, reap the benefits and learn from the experience. Then you will be enjoying the process of mastering your business, and imposter syndrome will be a thing of the past. **GP**

AARON MONTGOMERY is certified by New York Times best-selling author Jack Canfield as a Success Principles Trainer and is the co-founder of OurSuccessGroup.com. Aaron has 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).

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