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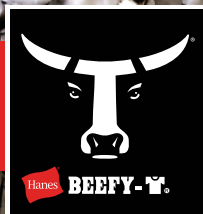


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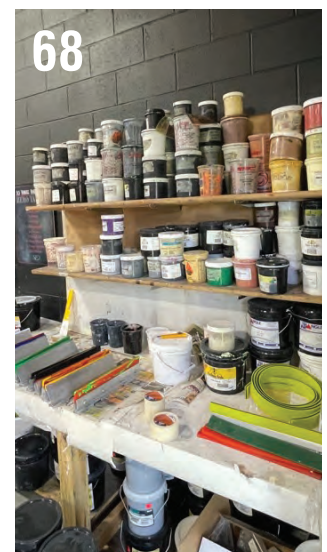
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ON OUR COVER Graphics at the Rohrerstown, Pennsylvania, location highlights Stauffer's of Kissel Hill's commitment to community enrichment, page 32. Image courtesy Cassel Team. Below right: Looking for that perfect gift for any occasion? Check out this year's Custom Gift Annual, page 70. Image courtesy AP Lazer.

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AISLES OF OPPORTUNITY

With trade shows back in full force and halls filled once again, we're finding a common theme among attendees: They aren't the same businesspeople they were before COVID. For some of us, 2020 never really went away, and that year has simply had a Part 2 and Part 3. But for many others, it's been a constant dance of changing tunes and tempos all to stay ahead of the competition or just stay above water.

There are a lot of gizmos, gadgets, and dynamic new equipment to look at to get you caught up on what's happened behind the scenes these last few years. One of the more prominent developments has been the growth of direct-to-film printing, which you can read about starting on page 42 of this month's magazine.

Like any printing system, this might not be the be-all-end-all for your shop, but it does have its advantages whether you are looking to jump into a new market or just complement your other production techniques to avoid outsourcing.

What we also see are some returning attendees finding options to get around supply chain issues. The aisles are filled with options for alternatives to allow you to fulfill your customers'

orders. Options you can hold, feel, and often sample to make sure you aren't ordering online based on a thumbnail image while hoping for the best.

When I was in Indianapolis recently for GRAPHICS PRO EXPO, I took in the opportunity to experiment with sandcarving. It took me about 10 minutes to get the rundown and reminded me of my first job using a spray nozzle to wash dishes in a restaurant ... and it was a million times less gross. Not sure how my co-workers would take it if I turned my cubicle into a staging area for a new sandcarving side hustle. They'd probably accept it pretty quickly after seeing GRAPHICS PRO-branded pilsner glasses I'd make for them.

Also not sure how the corner office would look upon that, but it's their own fault for sending me to trade shows where business opportunities are abundant down every aisle.

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CALIFORNIA WONDER

It was way back in the '80s. My young family and I drove to Big D and crashed at Sharon's aunt's house. We had gotten there in time for a visit, but I went to bed early because the next day would be a big one for me. I was going to California, and I had never been there before. It would be a whirlwind trip starting way before the crack of dawn: driving to DFW, getting in the skies about breakfast time and on the West Coast by lunch. For a very young sign maker from East Texas, this was an adventure, and I was going there to see something truly amazing and unheard of in the history of sign making.

Still dark, I kissed my wife awake, said my goodbye, and headed to the airport. It was magic to me just to be flying in the reliable Boeing 727 fresh from the factory. What a bird! I noticed in the back of the seat in front of me was a telephone. I asked the attendant, "You mean for five bucks you can call anywhere in the country while zooming along at 500 miles an hour at this altitude?" She answered, "Yes, sir. You sure can."

I decided right then to call my grandfather and let him know he had relatives in high places, and he barely believed me when I told him where I was calling from.

"Yep, Pepaw, I'm headed to California. But, from 40,000 feet we're still connected." Amazing how communication had changed in my grandfather's lifetime. By contrast, the sign business (at least how lettering was done) had not changed since the pyramids.

We landed in Ontario mid-morning, and not too long after that, I had a rental car and hit the road. It was green in the winter in California, beautifully green

and lush. I loved those freeways — in the middle of the morning, anyway. Even without GPS, I had little trouble navigating my way all the way across LA, barely missed a turn, and knew exactly where I wanted to go and could not believe how quickly I got there.

The destination was the Disneyland Hotel, another special place near the Magic Kingdom, and magic was in the air.



I had to go through registration, get the badge and the whole routine, then headed to see what everyone was talking about.

I wanted to see where the special wizardry was being shown, but people were surrounding the area. Eventually I inched my way through and made it to where the little humming noises were coming from. Humming noises and the sign business — now that was new. And amid all the commotion, the representatives from this new company were taking order after order for their unique invention.

It was a small blue box with a small basic plotter and a keyboard which connected to a computer inside the box. This little piece of "wonder" was a way to make perfect vinyl letters up to about a foot tall, but once you were done with what you plotted out, you would erase everything to start the next job.

This was a computer/plotter with no memory, no screen, and one font built in. This little magic box was not cheap, and at \$300 a piece per font, an actual font library could cost as much as a new car.

But, like everyone else, I placed my order for the venerable Gerber Scientific 4B, the blue box with a brain but no memory... about like me today!

Then I drove out to the Pacific Ocean and found a place to eat right on the water. The freeways whizzed along, until I headed back across town around 4:30 or 5 p.m., and then everything stopped.

By the skin of my teeth, I made my flight and was soon rushing across the sky, against the sun, going east to Texas. In the early morning, still dark, I made it to my sleeping wife. Twenty hours after leaving, I kissed her awake and said, "I bought the magic box — the little blue wonder. It's everything they said it was, and it will be here next week."

And as I slipped into the covers, I knew, we all knew, the sign and graphics world would never ever be the same.

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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Making Room for Routing

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE ADDING CNC TO YOUR SHOP

BY PAULA AVEN GLADYCH



Buying a router takes planning and foresight. First, you need to figure out the projects and signage the machine will take on. Then, determine the best one for the job. (All images courtesy Signarama Twin Cities)

Before buying the Signarama franchise in Roseville, Minnesota, in 2019, Ederick Lokpez was a marketing executive and director of strategy for a U.S. bank. He got laid off in 2018 and was offered a job with Accenture, which would have required him to travel four days a week and be away from his family. Sitting in the bleachers of his son's hockey game, he decided he couldn't do that anymore and decided to start his own business.

He began researching what would be better, buying a business that was already up and running or starting one from scratch. He decided it would be easier to run a business that already had a history and clientele. He chose Signarama Twin Cities, a small Signarama franchise in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul area with only three employees that specialized in vinyl work and fleet graphics. When COVID hit, the shop wasn't prepared to make PPE or items to separate cubicles like many other sign shops were doing. Most of the work that didn't pertain to vinyl was outsourced, so the company was not being competitive, he says.

Lokpez tapped into Signarama's network of franchisees to see what they suggested for how to grow the business and most recommended buying a CNC router. At the time COVID hit, 45% of his business stemmed from vehicle graphics. During COVID, that work dried up. He decided to buy a CNC router and put it in the 2,400-square-foot bay that was used to do vehicle wrap installations.

"It has transformed my shop," he says. Now, only 15% of the shop's revenue comes from vehicle wraps, while "routed products are 40% of our net revenue and it has opened a whole different perspective, different outcome for how we run the business."

The shop now has six employees and, even with COVID, his business grew 38% in 2021, which was the "best year the shop has ever had since 1994," Lokpez notes. "A lot of that has to do with all of the router products, all of the things we were outsourcing."

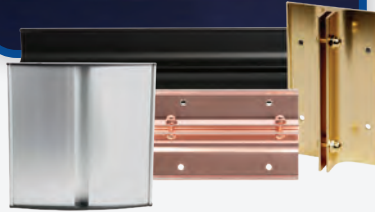
Cody Smith, CAMaster, says "most customers know they are giving away margin by outsourcing." Sign shops that do a lot of aluminum 3D letters, but have it outsourced because they only do digital finishing, simple cutting and vinyl, are "giving away so much profit margin. If you brought that task in the building, that task will help pay for the machine on top of the other tasks you are able to do."

But buying a router isn't just something you can do overnight. It takes planning and foresight. The first step is to figure out what

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"When you get the actual measurements for the machine you are considering, plan for at least a two-foot perimeter around the machine," says Cody Smith of CAMaster. "We do totally understand that is not always possible. Sometimes you have to put one side of the machine against a wall but, ideally, a two-foot perimeter is minimum."



types of projects and signage your shop wants to use a router for and then determine the best machine for the job.

Lokpez bought a Laguna Tools router because of the price. Because his shop had lost a lot of business related to vehicle wraps during the pandemic, he couldn't afford to spend \$70,000 for a top-of-the-line CNC. After consulting with other franchisees, he determined that Laguna Tools had a good reputation. He was able to get an SBA loan to buy the CNC.

POWER NEEDS & COST TO SET UP

The next step was to make changes to the shop to accommodate the new machine. Because Signarama is in a commercial area, it wasn't hooked up to 220 electrical so Lokpez had to change the electrical to accommodate it.

"In addition, because I was in a small commercial space, the electrical fuse box was already maxed out," he says. "The dollar number was starting to add up. The landlord says, 'That is not my problem. If you want it, I'm not paying for a commercial setup.'"

It cost \$3,000 to update the electrical circuit and \$2,800 to add 220-volt power to the bay area of his shop.

The only CNC routers that don't take 220 single-phase electricity

are smaller beginner desktop machines or hobby machines, Smith says. He points out that even if these smaller machines can run on 110 volts, they are "not something you want to rely on for a business."

Some of the smaller routers require 20 amps of power, which is what everyone has in their house, but some larger machines require 60 amps and require the help of an electrician.

Smith recommends that shops that are outsourcing a high volume of CNC work should consider a three-phase industrial machine that can go up to 70 amps. Smaller shops that are doing more custom work can get by with a single-phase machine. Many commercial sign and graphics shops are in light commercial areas, so they don't have access to those higher levels of power.

"Most shops will have at least 100-amp or 200-amp service. The bigger single-phase machines will take 60 amps of that," he says.

Another thing to consider when it comes to power is the addition of an air compressor, which will require 10 to 20 amps, and a vacuum hold down, which holds medium to the table while it is being processed. That will take about 30 to 60 amps, "depending on how crazy you want to get with the vacuum," Smith says.

Another vacuum is necessary to extract chips and the material

“BUYING A ROUTER ISN'T JUST SOMETHING YOU CAN DO OVERNIGHT. IT TAKES PLANNING AND FORESIGHT. THE FIRST STEP IS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS AND SIGNAGE YOUR SHOP WANTS TO USE A ROUTER FOR AND THEN DETERMINE THE BEST MACHINE FOR THE JOB.”

that was just cut so it doesn't leave a mess in the shop. Dust collection systems require between 10 and 20 amps of power, which adds up quickly.

Lokpez bought a 5' x 10' table that came with two vacuums. He says he didn't account for that and had to build shelves in the space to elevate them for more efficient airflow. He also didn't account for the size of the machine and needing a forklift to get it into the building.

“I didn't know I needed a license to use a forklift,” Lokpez says. Luckily one of his employees' husbands had a forklift license and he ended up hiring him for a day to bring the table in and put it where it needed to go.

Lokpez paid Laguna Tools to train his staff on how to run the router once it was installed. He recommends buying lots of scrap materials so employees can learn how to route effectively at different thicknesses. He says each type of material needs a different speed and spin to get the right cuts and curves.

“I accounted for that in my PML (probable maximum loss) for the first year. I accounted for 20% excess spoilage.” In the end,

his shop only used 15% but “it was a smart thing to do. It is very easy to damage substrates if you are not taking care of the CNC or paying attention to the CNC,” Lokpez argues.

The downside of putting the CNC in Signarama's back bay is that the shop lost its bay for vehicle wraps. However, Lokpez says it's been a wonderful change. “It saved our business. Without the router in COVID, we would have had to close. We were not equipped to handle COVID. We still do vinyl, but we don't actively pursue vinyl.”

Since adding the CNC, Lokpez's shop has started working with property managers and construction companies to create customized wayfinding signs. “We creatively design signs in unique formats to fit their needs. The router brings an extra layer of creativity we can do to sell to customers,” he says.

His shop is out of space in its current configuration, but in the fall, Lokpez says he plans to knock down a wall and reduce the size of his showroom so he can add a laser engraver and a small ADA router so the “big router and ADA don't compete against each other for business.”

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Since adding the CNC, Lokpez's shop has started working with property managers and construction companies to create customized wayfinding signs. With the router, he says his team can get creative with sign design.

The shop is also taking in routing work from another Signarama franchise and a nearby FastSigns business for wholesale work. "It is not the most profitable work, but it keeps the router running when regular projects are not coming in," he says.

Signarama also spent about \$2,500 on spindles and tools and \$6,000 on an arm attachment to place the braille beads into ADA signage. However, Lokpez stopped using it because it always missed beads. Now, his employees place the beads by hand.

SPACE

Adding a CNC, dust collector, vacuum and air compressor to a shop means they all need somewhere to go. If a machine says it has a 4' x 4' cutting area, you are not planning for a 4' x 4' machine. It will be more like 6' x 7' in your shop and then you

also need space to work around it and load material, Smith says.

"When you get the actual measurements for the machine you are considering, plan for at least a two-foot perimeter around the machine. We do totally understand that is not always possible. Sometimes you have to put one side of the machine against a wall but, ideally, a two-foot perimeter is minimum," Smith says.

Space is also needed for the machine's controller or interface and some place to keep router bits.

Most commercial shops will buy 4' x 8' or 5' x 10' CNCs. The difference between those two machines isn't so much about the size but the "speed with which it can do jobs that makes a difference," he adds.

Another thing shops may overlook is that they must get the CNC into their building, which means they need a large enough

door to bring it in. Most shops will have a rollup door, but shops with typical 6' double doors may struggle to bring in bigger equipment.

Routers are heavy as well so the shop owner will need to contract with a rigging company to help them or rent a forklift to bring the machine into the shop, which is an additional cost.

Purchasing the right software to run a CNC router is an important step. Most shops already use Adobe, CorelDRAW, or Flexi. All of those will interface with CAMaster's CNC router, lightening the learning curve for new shops, Smith says.

"CNCs are all capable of the same things. Every CNC router can cut the same materials and do the same things. The quality with which they do it and the speed is what separates different machines in the industry," he says. "I tell everybody, look for a product made in America so you can call a person on the phone to source components."

After that, he says, shops should look at what is realistic. Many shops have an idea of what they want to spend, but sometimes what they want to spend and their reality aren't the same thing. Just don't waste money on a machine that is too small or can't handle the work you've already got.

HIGH DEMAND & SUPPLY CHAIN PROBLEMS

As a manufacturer of CNC routers, CAMaster has been surprised by the increase in demand for its products since COVID hit.

"Demand has been crazy, and it has been for 2.5 years. Before COVID started, we were pretty busy with lead times of seven to 10 weeks," Smith says. Recently, lead times have gotten longer, between 16 and 20 weeks because it has been "hard to keep up and source the components we need. It is an industry-wide challenge. Those chips go in a lot of things."

He added that CAMaster's sourcing team spends most of its time sourcing alternative vendors to complete its products.



Looking for specialty items you can make with your CNC router?

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CAMaster builds everything in Cartersville, Georgia, except for variable frequency drives — the things that regulate power in your machine, and there has been a shortage of those, making it a challenge.

"Now we have to find alternates, but then we have to make sure the alternates work to the same ability as the originals did, more testing and more time. It is a whole different animal," Smith says. **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.

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In today's inkjet market, print service providers (PSPs) are looking to invest in different types of printers and inks that offer more options for various applications. While certain printers were not as affordable in the past due to the nature of the technology and the complexity to operate, this has improved significantly.

Piezo-based inkjet is a unique technology that allows for various types of ink to flow through a similar print head and ink system, but produces dramatically different applications, offering versatility and a wide range of different applications PSPs can produce. PSPs are expanding into the types of ink and printers ideal for specific applications, and this is the driving force behind the ink type and printer selected, followed closely by cost and reliability.

As manufacturers continue to improve printer and ink technology, more cost-effective solutions are provided to PSPs looking to expand business offerings and applications and attract new customers.

BENEFITS OF INKJET

Inkjet printing offers affordability, high quality, ease of maintenance, and durability for customers. Solvent, resin, UV, and aqueous-based inkjet ink offer a variety of benefits for a wide range of applications.

Solvent ink offers durability for outdoor prints, flexibility for wraps, vibrancy to match specific brand colors, and is best optimized for vinyl applications and outdoor signage uses.

Resin ink, while producing similar applications to solvent, also delivers high quality prints while making a printer's job easier, as it's fast and easy to finish a print and has a more versatile list of applications and media types that can be printed.

UV ink provides high quality prints with a very opaque white ink for various signage and display applications, including acrylic. It offers extreme durability on rigid surfaces and the ability to print on a significant number of materials.



BY REED HECHT



A sample printed by an Epson SureColor R5070 resin printer.
(All images courtesy Epson)



Outdoor signage printed on the Epson SureColor V7000 UV flatbed printer.

Aqueous ink and various paper, canvas, and signage media provides extreme quality, a wide color gamut, and durability so images can stand the test of time in indoor applications, like photo or standard photographic signage.

Manufacturers are always working with customers to determine the most valuable features of each type of ink and optimize them for customer applications. Developing and manufacturing ink in-house provides us with the expertise, economies of scale, and technology to keep expanding offerings and pushing technology forward, proving the best solutions for customers.

BEST USES FOR INKJET INK

Solvent ink: Solvent print head technology has improved, leading to reliable, long lasting print heads, which help the advanced printers of today deliver high quality output that can reproduce an extensive range of colors – all at a low total cost of ownership – ideal for vehicle wraps, outdoor signage, canvas reproductions, and stickers and decals. Some can achieve 98.2% of the Pantone color library¹, making it easier to print specific spot colors. This ability to produce specific brand colors accurately and consistently over multiple jobs is key in today's competitive digital print market, and essential for PSPs to print on a variety of applications and media.

In the industrial print space, routine maintenance is essential to keep a printer operating at its peak performance.

Resin ink: Unlike solvent ink, resin ink does not require an off-gassing period before lamination. Its ability to instantly dry allows for immediate lamination and quicker project turnaround times. From fabrics and wallpapers to uncoated papers and adhesive vinyl, resin ink can cure on an incredibly wide range of media types. Digitally printed wallpaper, which has become a popular trend among designers recently, tends to work especially well with resin ink due to the ink's long-term durability and low odor. Designed to meet evolving trends, resin printers can help print shops further expand applications and provide customers with high quality and consistent output.

UV ink: One of the main advantages of UV ink is the ability to print on a variety of different rigid and flexible substrates. Gamut expanding inks, such as red and gray ink in addition to standard colors, help ensure that brand colors are accurate and vibrant. In addition, white ink is included in many UV printers for use on wood, glass, and metal, and offers unique applications

when the white ink is opaque enough to effectively block the light. Varnish is an option for added texture, shine, or special effects and is a great way for PSPs to help offer unique and differentiated signs.

Aqueous ink: The biggest draw of aqueous-based printers is the incredible color gamut ideal for professional photography, graphic art, proofing, and fine art, and long-lasting print permanence with certain aqueous pigment inks. Advanced aqueous pigment ink is consistent and repeatable, which is especially important for commercial proofing environments where there are minimal tolerances and high expectations for consistent color and quality. Because aqueous-based prints are also optimized for indoor signage and short-term signage and aqueous printers are considerably easier to operate, they are easy additions to sign shops for both print job proofing and short-term signage.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ACHIEVING QUALITY RESULTS

In the industrial print space, routine maintenance is essential to keep a printer operating at its peak performance. Print shops should do a nozzle check every day the printer operates and repeat selective cleanings as required. Advanced printers today

Wrapped car printed on the Epson SureColor S-Series solvent printer by SkinzWraps.





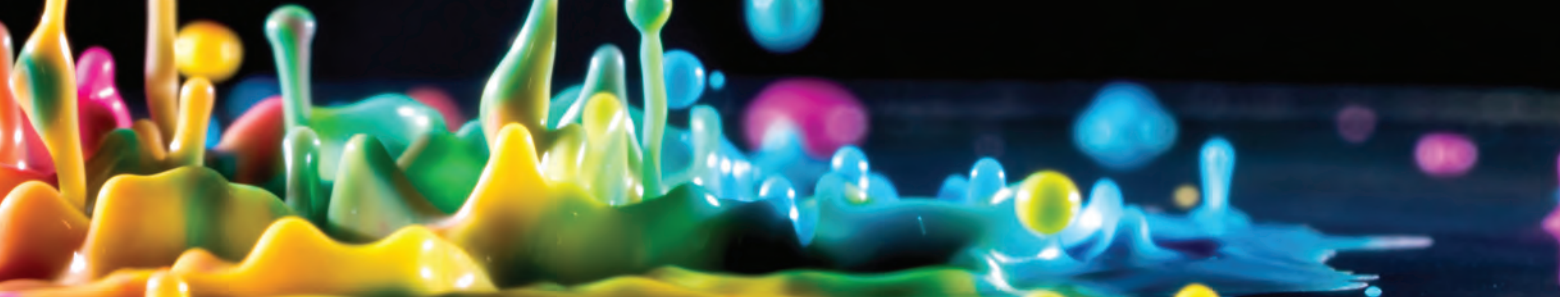
Retail signage printed on the Epson SureColor V7000 UV flatbed printer.





Photos printed with the SureColor P7570 on Legacy Fibre paper using aqueous ink.





incorporate unique maintenance functions and technologies such as fans, filters, fabric wipers, and special caps to simplify maintenance and ensure consistent operations. These advancements make the PSP's job of maintaining the printer dramatically easier, allowing them to primarily focus on the production of the print job.

The most distressing thing that can impact a print shop is a printer that stops working when the shop is on a deadline. Having an extended service plan is a valuable way to get support if there are any unforeseen issues or questions that require fast and reliable on-site service. Make sure that all the recommended maintenance is done on time and consistently, which will help keep the printer in great working order. Overall life expectancy will depend on how often the printer is used and how well it's maintained.

LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Leveraging advanced and latest generation inkjet ink technologies enables PSPs to bolster existing business and help improve costs on existing production. Faster printers, improved print quality and colors, more reliable operations – these are all factors that will make PSP jobs easier and allow them to offer new, unique, and differentiated applications to their customers. **GP**

1 The Epson SureColor S80600L offers 98.2% coverage of PANTONE PLUS FORMULA GUIDE solid-coated palette on adhesive vinyl media. PANTONE coverage may vary when printed under other conditions.

Reed Hecht is group product manager in Epson America's Professional Imaging Division, responsible for signage and textile printing products. With over two decades of product development and product marketing experience in the printing and digital imaging industry, Hecht has extensive experience with color management workflows and a wide range of digital print technologies.



Epson SureColor R5070 resin sample.

“Make sure that all the recommended maintenance is done on time and consistently, which will help keep the printer in great working order. Overall life expectancy will depend on how often the printer is used and how well it's maintained.”



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AMAZING IMAGE EFFECTS WITH FILTERS

LEARN THE BASICS OF PHOTOSHOP FILTERING

When an image really makes your eyes pop, chances are good that filters were involved. Like many other techniques, filters have their origin in the analog world of photography. Photographers use filters to correct or enhance lighting and to create or adjust anomalies of perspective. Digital filters take on these tasks and expand them far beyond the colored circular frames of glass that filter light as it enters the lens.

Digital filters adjust focus, eliminate unwanted artifacts, alter or create complex selection masks, breathe life into less-than-perfect scans, and apply a dazzling range of effects previously unavailable to the traditional photographer. Filters also have the capability to destroy anything recognizable in an image and turn it into a swirling mass of pixels gone wild.

FILTER BASICS

Filters are simply mathematical formulas that alter the numerical values of pixels in specified ways. Certain characteristics of an individual pixel can be modified including

its hue, saturation and brightness and its position in relation to other pixels. When these effects are applied to a group of pixels, great variations can be achieved over a specified range, following specific constraints. Some filters work subtly; others can be brash and flamboyant. Some effects gain strength when used gently and reapplied; sometimes a filter can be mitigated or softened by fading. The application of filters can be non-linear so that modifications can be made at any time.

FILTER TYPES

If you look in Photoshop's Filter menu, you'll see 17 different categories. Within each of these submenus are numerous filter effects. (Fig. 1) Rather than go through the list filter by filter, let's divide them up by what they can do.

CONSTRUCTIVE FILTERS

Constructive filters are those that are used to modify and enhance images for printing or screen display. This list includes filters that blur, sharpen, alter color, reduce noise, or otherwise enhance pixel configurations. Four groups of filters provide tools to help improve

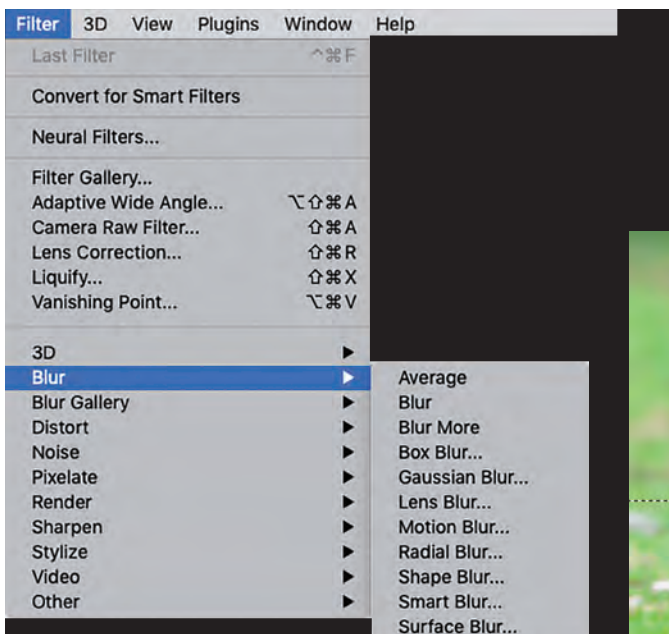


Fig. 1: If you look in Photoshop's Filter menu, you'll see 17 different categories, each with an array of filter options. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

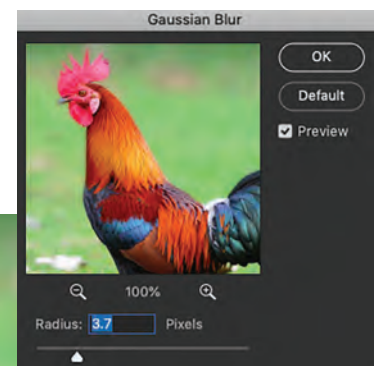
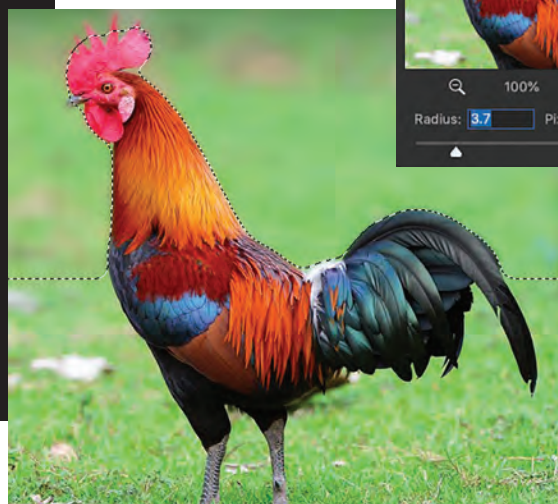


Fig. 2: The effect of the Gaussian Blur filter used to soften the focus of a selected background.

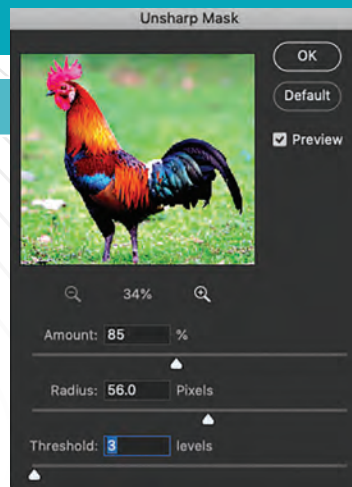


Fig. 3: The application of the sharpen filters increase the contrast of the edge pixels to provide a crisp, more focused appearance.

image quality by changing the focus, or by smoothing transitions within an image. Constructive filters are the bread and butter of Photoshop filtering, the workhorses that are put to frequent, day-to-day use. **Fig. 2** shows the effect of the Gaussian Blur filter used to soften the focus of a selected background. While the blur filters soften the contrast between pixels, the application of the sharpen filters do the opposite. They increase the contrast of the edge pixels to provide a crisp more focused appearance. (**Fig. 3**) The Dust and Scratches filter, a primary retouching tool, globally finds a balance between abrasions and surface textures to clean up unwanted debris on an image. (**Fig. 4**)

DESTRUCTIVE FILTERS

Now that the constructive filters have displayed their image-correcting prowess, it's time for a little fun. Destructive filters are an entirely different animal. Their purpose is to displace pixels, radically redistributing image elements or colors. The special effects in the Distort, Pixelate, and Stylize submenus for example, take your precious pixels and shove them about with wild impunity. With these filters, you can turn images inside out, explode and reassemble them, or boil the life out of them, leaving you with an indigestible goo. Used with care, they can be useful friends; used unwisely, they'll turn on you viciously. These filters are undoubtedly the cool members of the gang; they look good and offer a fun night out, but ultimately, they're not quite as responsible as the constructive filters.

The Pinch filter is a typical example of the power of destructive filtering. (**Fig. 5**) Its interface is like those of its eight other siblings found in the Distort submenu: Displace, Polar Coordinates, Ripple, Shear, Spherize, Twirl, Wave, and ZigZag. These filters present a dialog box that displays a preview of the results of the application of the filter in real time as the controls are manipulated. Unfortunately, the results are not displayed in the Image window. The preview display in the dialog box, however, is usually sufficient to gauge the effect.



Fig. 4: The Dust and Scratches filter finds a balance between abrasions and surface textures to clean up unwanted debris on an image.

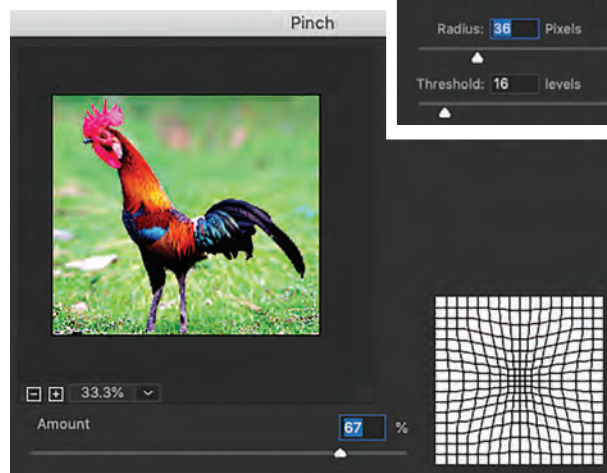
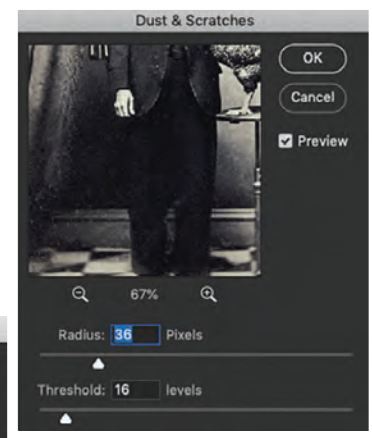


Fig. 5: The Pinch filter is a typical example of the power of destructive filtering.

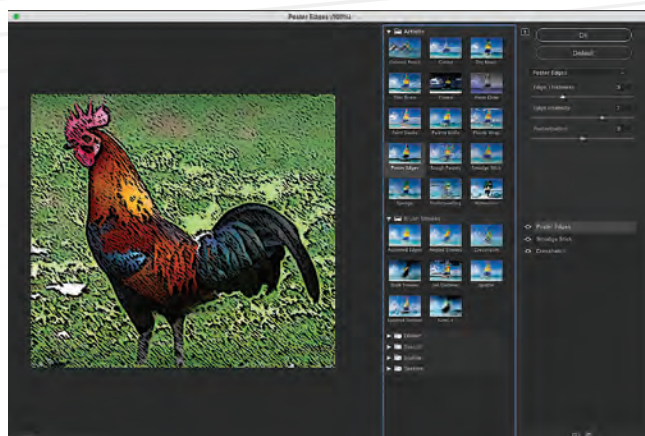


Fig. 6: The Filter Gallery is an entire interface — a veritable software program unto itself.



Fig. 7: The Clouds filter produces a soft combination of the foreground and background colors into cloud-like formations.



Fig. 8: The Flame filter dialog box displays controls that manipulate the size and intensity of the flames that are distributed along the path.

FILTER GALLERY

Other filters provide textures, painterly techniques, and fine-art effects. The potential is vast when considering that multiple artistic effects can be combined. The Filter Gallery is an entire interface, like a software program unto itself. (Fig. 6) Within these controls are a huge variety of submenus that open the doors to dozens of specific image-altering filters. The categories include Artistic, Brush Strokes, Distort, Sketch, Stylize, and Texture. Inside each one of these folders is a plethora of specific effects whose characteristic is modified with the sliders in the Control panel.

If that weren't enough, these filters can be combined so that any combination of filters can be applied in various strengths. The preview window displays the results in real time.

RENDER

The Render submenu contains an interesting mix of lighting and texture effects, object creation filters, plus the 3D Transform filter. These features take image editing to a whole new level by creating new image elements that can be applied within a specific range and distance.

Clouds and Difference Clouds both reside in the Render submenu. To apply either of these filters simply choose the command. (Fig. 7) A hazy mixture of foreground and background colors fills your selection. Choose the filter again, and the cloud pattern changes. Every time you choose this filter, the cloud patterns shift. If you hold down the Option (Mac) or Alt (Win) key while choosing, the colors create a more pronounced effect.

FLAMES AND TREES

Fairly new to the Render arsenal are filters that apply objects to an active path. First draw a vector path with the Pen tool. Then choose Filter > Render > Flames. The dialog box displays controls that manipulate the size and intensity of the flames that are distributed along the path (Fig. 8) You can create a small flicker or set the entire picture on fire.

Similarly, you can apply trees in the same fashion. A menu of different types of trees is presented and their characteristics are controlled with the sliders.



Fig. 9: Several of the Stylize filters don't have controls and apply their effects instantly by finding and coloring edges of the content.

PIXELATE AND STYLIZE

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Pixelate and Stylize in an article about filters. In general, these two submenus offer filters that break up and rearrange your image into variously shaped groups of pixels. They divide it into either geometric or organic pixel configurations by faceting or dividing the content into a myriad of dots, crystal-shaped elements, or even mosaic tiles. Several of the Stylize filters don't have controls and apply their effects quickly by finding and coloring edges of the content thereby transforming a photograph into a colored contour drawing. (Fig. 9)

One of the Stylize filters that is of particular interest is the Oil Paint filter that renders brush strokes from photographic content. (Fig. 10) Bristle density, stroke weight and detail can all be controlled. Light direction and surface shine can also be manipulated. With the Oil Paint filter, it's oodles of fun transforming ordinary photos into spectacular works of art.

SMART FILTERS

As we've seen, the application of filters is an easy way to dramatically alter the appearance of an image. This can be problematic if you change your mind about the filter or want to mitigate the effect. That's why it is advisable to apply the effect as a Smart Filter.

Any filter applied to a smart object becomes a smart filter, so the first step is to convert the content layer to a Smart Object. Scroll down to *Convert To Smart Object* in the Options menu in the Layers panel. Then choose the filter from the Filter menu.

Once applied, the smart filter's name appears in the Layers panel below the smart object layer to which it is applied. (Fig. 11) Because you can adjust, remove, or hide Smart Filters, they are nondestructive. To make alterations to the filter, click on its name and the filter's dialog box will be displayed for additional editing.

You can apply any Photoshop filter except for Lens Blur, Flame, Picture Frame, Trees, and Vanishing Point as a Smart Filter.

EXPERIMENT

This article has presented the basics of Photoshop filtering. If you look at the Filter menu, you'll notice that I've barely scratched the surface of what filters have to offer. There are dozens of filters that produce an infinite number of effects. I therefore encourage you to play and experiment with filter combinations to discover for yourself their immense potential. Keep in mind that when you're working with standard, automated special effects such as filters, they are available to every person who uses the software. Some of those effects, if applied generically, are immediately recognizable by anyone who's ever used them and can compromise the "magic" of the image. It's a good idea to apply these filters or combinations in unique, unusual, or not-so-obvious ways. Sometimes the most effective special effect is the one that remains elusive. Practice will indicate which techniques have the best range of possibility, staying power and visual pizzazz. Let your creative instincts guide you. **GP**

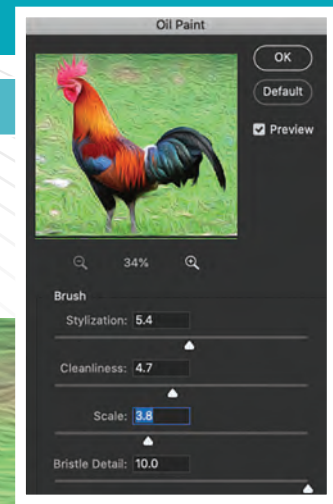


Fig. 10: The Oil Paint filter renders brush strokes from photographic content.

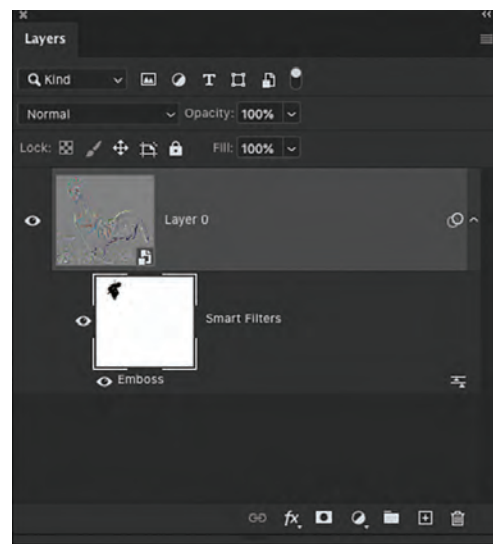


Fig. 11: Because they are non-destructive, it is advisable to apply a filter effect as a Smart Filter.

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

Switching It Up

EXPLORING FILM OPTIONS TO MEET YOUR NEEDS



BY CHARITY JACKSON

Over the years, we've developed our go-to arsenal of vinyl films and laminates for the different types of signs and vehicle projects we do. We stock an intermediate vinyl, a cast wrap vinyl, a perforated view-thru film, transit media for our fleet bus account, and specialty films like a printable silver metallic and printable reflective films for both flat surfaces and wraps. We pair all the vinyl films with a coordinating protective overlamine.

Keeping these set films on hand creates consistency in our jobs. The white point on the media is the same, and we're more likely to match the colors on reorders. It's also easier to have a limited number of films because it eliminates confusion during printing and helps avoid mistakes.

With the material shortages we've been experiencing over the last year while incredibly busy, we've had to be a bit more flexible in our film choices. So how do you do this while still meeting the specific needs of an application?

BROWNING

We switched to 3M 8548 overlamine years ago because it's a non-PVC laminate that doesn't brown as quickly as 8518 gloss laminate. In our area of California, browning on horizontal surfaces is a real problem, and we couldn't compromise on our materials.

When the inventory of 8548 was exhausted from our usual suppliers, we had to find an alternative laminate. After much research and crucial help from our sales reps, we found two additional sources for cast non-PVC overlamine.

Both are from reputable manufacturers, so we felt confident that we still provided our customers with a quality product. The first laminate we brought in was Avery Dennison's DOL 6460, followed by Arlon's 3310 laminate, giving us three sources for non-PVC laminates for our wraps.

FEATURES

Carrying our consistency over as much as possible, even though we're bringing in more manufacturers and media options, is an important consideration. We look for material characteristics that will ensure that we never compromise on the quality of both the materials used and the workmanship of the installation.

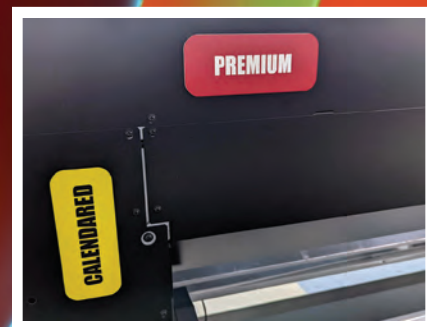
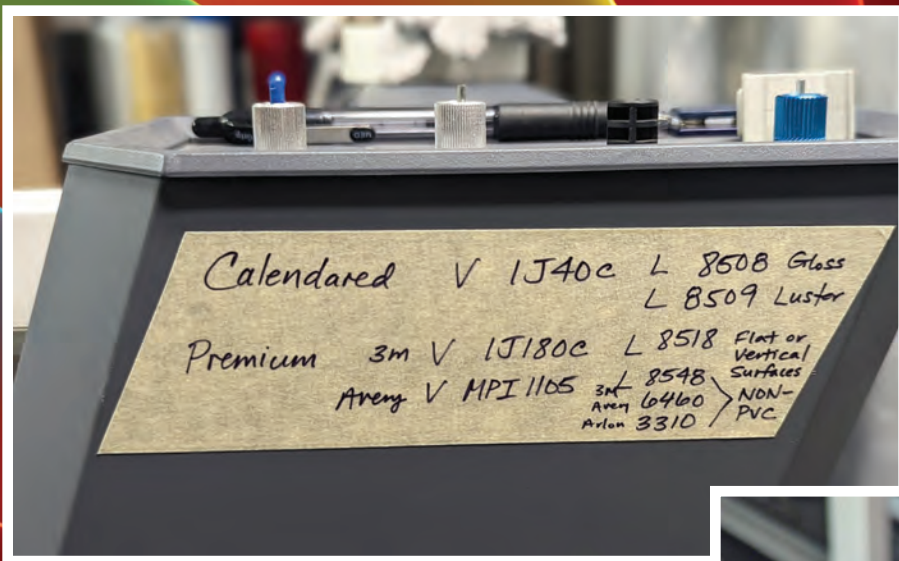
With the wrap laminate, we specifically looked for non-PVC options. We look at the air-release, flexibility, and adhesive features for our cast wrap media to choose a film that will meet our needs.

Media manufacturers provide plenty of product bulletins that can help you narrow down your options. Consider the characteristics of the film, its recommended uses, and the warranty included for the film.

Sometimes small changes like choosing a luster film instead of a gloss finish will allow you to bring in an otherwise



Overstocking materials when they come available has been crucial to staying on top of our inventory. (All images courtesy Charity Jackson)



Having to expand into new manufacturers and media types can get a bit confusing. Simple labeling helps us decipher which roll is which to avoid mix-ups.

manufacturer's label. When the roll is loaded on the printer, you can't see this label, so we use a couple of engraved magnets to identify which roll is loaded on the machine.

Another critical step is to document in the customer's file the vinyl and laminate combination used on their project. It's important to be able to check a customer's paperwork on reorders to see what material was used.

SPECIALTY

We have a couple of specialty films that have rotated into our arsenal over the years. One of the films is 3M IJ180mC-120, a printable silver metallic. It's a wrap film that gives you the option of a metallic wrap in unlimited colors.

unavailable material. Be sure you review options with your customer and bring them in on the decision. Material shortages affect every industry, so explaining options to a customer assures them that you're working to find materials that will still accommodate them.

STOCK

We've printed and installed 10 full wraps and eight spot graphic/partial wraps in the last three-week period. This is a light workload for some shops with bigger crews; for our four-man shop, this is a pretty busy schedule. We print, laminate, contour cut, finish, and install constantly. We simply can't run out of media, so it's an ongoing process of keeping on top of supplies and options and bringing in what we can.

We've had an easier time lately keeping stock of our IJ180 wrap media, and the last time we were able to get a hold of Arlon's 3310 laminate rolls, we went ahead and brought in a pallet. Carrying a larger inventory means more outlay of cash at a time, but it ensures we don't run out of materials in the middle of a project.

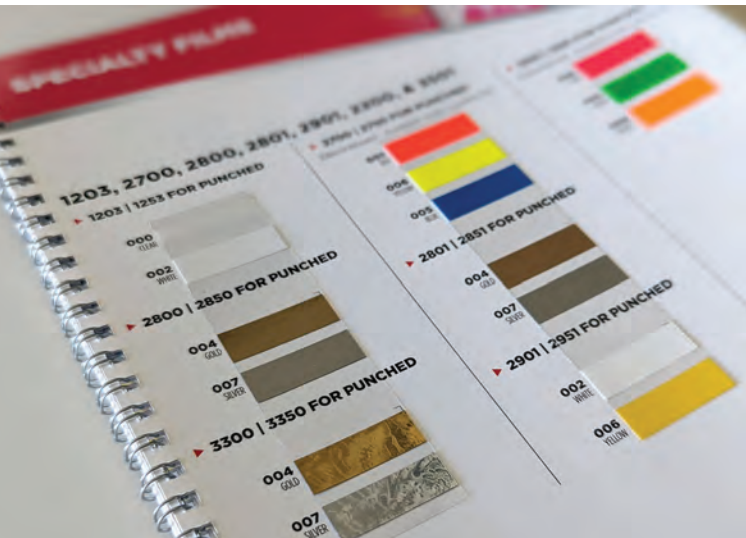
DOCUMENT

Sometimes it sounds like we're talking in a foreign language around the shop. "Is this IJ180 or IJ40 on the printer?" "Which lam is 3310 again?" "What's 8509?" "These are vertical door graphics; can we use 8518 to conserve the 8548?"

We've all gotten pretty good at memorizing material numbers, but it's still a good idea to document and make notes to help keep it clear. The last thing you want to do is laminate a big roll of premium wrap media with a calendared overlamine because you confused the rolls.

Our cutter is in a central location between the printers and the laminator. We stuck a piece of tape to the cutter with all the different material types on it and their identifying numbers. When a printed roll of media comes off the printer, we write the corresponding laminate number in the corner of the backing paper, so it's easy to group rolls together.

Since the backing paper of both IJ180 and IJ40 look the same, you would have to see the inside of the tube to check the



Special projects require specialty films. Check product bulletins to find the right media for your needs.

A few of our customers have picked this film for their vehicle graphics because of its unique look. When material shortages started affecting our industry, we were unable to get this film for a couple of months, and unfortunately, there are no other comparable options. Fortunately, one of our customers who ordered during this time frame was able to wait for us to receive more stock, and the other chose to switch to a regular white cast film on their order.

Another film that we stock is 3M 780mC-10R, a printable wrap reflective vinyl. It's a great, flexible option for full-color reflective graphics that's easy to apply. Due to the extra cost, most of our reflective wraps are limited to the rear of a vehicle (ambulances and fire trucks), side-stripes, and contour-cut graphics.

For flat full-color reflective projects, we use Avery Dennison's T-6500 film. This gives us the same flexibility of offering full-color graphics on a reflective film, but the features of the film work best on flat signage vs. wraps.

The customer wanted to update their signs using a black and gold color scheme on a recent sign project. We created routed-to-shape wood panels layered and overlaid in premium black and gold metallic.

The customer wanted a gold-leaf look that matches their other locations and has an old-timey look for the windows. We usually use Sign Gold 22 karat gold leaf vinyl in the Florentine pattern. Unfortunately, this product wasn't available, so we had to look for alternatives. With the help of one of our favorite sales reps, we tracked down a new-to-us film that worked great.

The film is a 3300 series Lumina Imitation Leaf vinyl made by FDC Graphics Films Inc. The cast film is available in gold or silver and has a three-dimensional pattern that looks like gold leaf. The best part of the film is that we can print to it on our eco-solvent printers, so we didn't have to cut both black and gold leaf; we were able to print the black directly onto the gold. Since the design contains small details and elements that would have been difficult to cut, this was a great solution.

Be familiar with these specialty films and others on the market and incorporate them into the material options you offer. These films are a great way to upsell a project and find a unique option that best meets your customer's needs. **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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Wrapsesh, aka, Vinyl Vixen Wraps, Episode 9

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Graphic Elephants, Episode 14



GRAPHICS | PRO

Graphic Films at WORK

**FAMILY-OWNED GRAPHIC DESIGN AND APPLICATION
COMPANY CASSEL OFFERS SOLUTIONS**



BY NATHAN STROMBERG

HIGHLIGHTING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Stauffer's of Kissel Hill is a family-owned grocery store chain in Pennsylvania. The chain teamed up with Cassel, a family-owned design, printing, and graphics company specializing in commercial installations, to design and apply new graphics to its stores and its fleet of vehicles.

The Cassel team mainly worked with the Lititz, Mount Joy, and Rohrerstown locations of Stauffer's of Kissel Hill to update window graphics, food case decals, and large wall graphics. The chain's goal with the new design was to show its commitment to customer service and enriching the local community, so the designs were bold while also set up to make it easy for customers to navigate the store.

Stauffer's provided Cassel with files from its marketing department, and Cassel set those up to print. Cassel offers design help and support, but its clients often provide the files. In this case, Stauffer's of Kissel Hill knew the artistic direction, and Cassel was prepared to help the business fulfill its goals.

Cassel used Avery Dennison MPI 1105 Easy Apply RS high-gloss cast film to complete this project. Cassel paired the film with a gloss laminate and printed the graphics using a ColorPainter M-64s printer.

Jenna Erb, Cassel's client success coordinator, says there weren't any challenges in making and applying these designs. Between a good client to work with and an easy material to use, Cassel completed this project with ease.

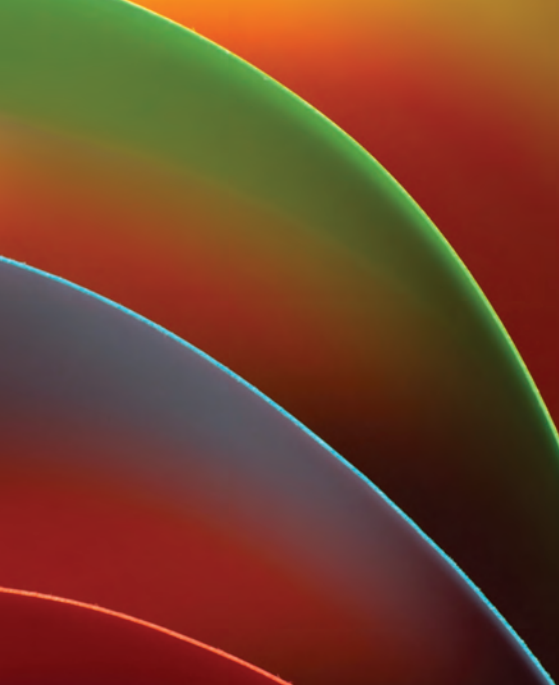
Cassel went to work to put up the new graphics in the various Stauffer's locations. After it was all done, the team said the grocery store chain was excited to see what would come next as their business would grow. Thanks to Cassel's hard work, Stauffer's of Kissel Hill can further focus on its commitment to quality and customer service.



One of the new graphics at the Rohrerstown location highlights Stauffer's of Kissel Hill's commitment to community enrichment.



The newly applied design to the store's exterior offers information to customers about online shopping. (All images courtesy Cassel Team)



A member of the Cassel team installing Simply Events' new logo.

BROADENING BUSINESS HORIZONS

Simply Events' Founder and Owner Deborah Erb felt it was time to modernize her company's logo to reach her target demographic better. Though this was a difficult task from the get-go, she got help from Cassel's design team, who helped her rebrand her business. After that, Deborah asked Cassel to install window graphic decals on her office doors at Rock Lititz in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The inspiration for the design came from Deborah wanting to refresh her prior logo with something more contemporary. Knowing this, Cassel was able to offer a variety of options for her and wanted to make Simply Events stand out while still maintaining the simplicity of the business. The old logo gave an elegant look for weddings, and Cassel helped redesign it to show how the company serves not only weddings but gives strong service in the realms of corporate and venue management.

The graphics were printed on Avery Dennison MPI 1105 Easy Apply RS high-gloss cast film using a ColorPainter M-64s printer. Cassel opted for a matte laminate to finish the custom graphics.

Jenna Erb, Cassel's client success coordinator, says the material was easy to work with, and after helping Deborah design her new logo and having a good set of materials to work with, Cassel was able to complete this project with no hassle.

As the project wrapped up and the new logo was placed in the Simply Events office space, Deborah was ecstatic about the results. She can now grow her business

even larger than it already is, thanks to the efficiency of the Cassel team. **GP**



Nathan Stromberg is an editorial/content intern at National Business Media. He is a senior at the University of Northern Colorado, working toward a double major in communication studies and journalism, with an emphasis in public relations. You can reach him at nstromberg@nbm.com.



The finished and newly applied design of Simply Events' revamped logo.

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CHECK YOUR EGO

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOUBLE-CHECKING YOUR WORK

Make no mistake about it, your creative drive is driven by your self-confidence, which is part of your ego. And a well-managed, balanced ego is critical to the success of every creative.

I don't mean "ego" in a bad way. I am referring to the drive, passion, and confidence in what we do that is reinforced by customers who continue to share our work with their friends, who are calling for the same type of work. The ego is reinforced by positive feedback from happy customers that fuels the levels of inner creative self-confidence.

How could you not come away with an elevated ego when your work solicits such accolades?

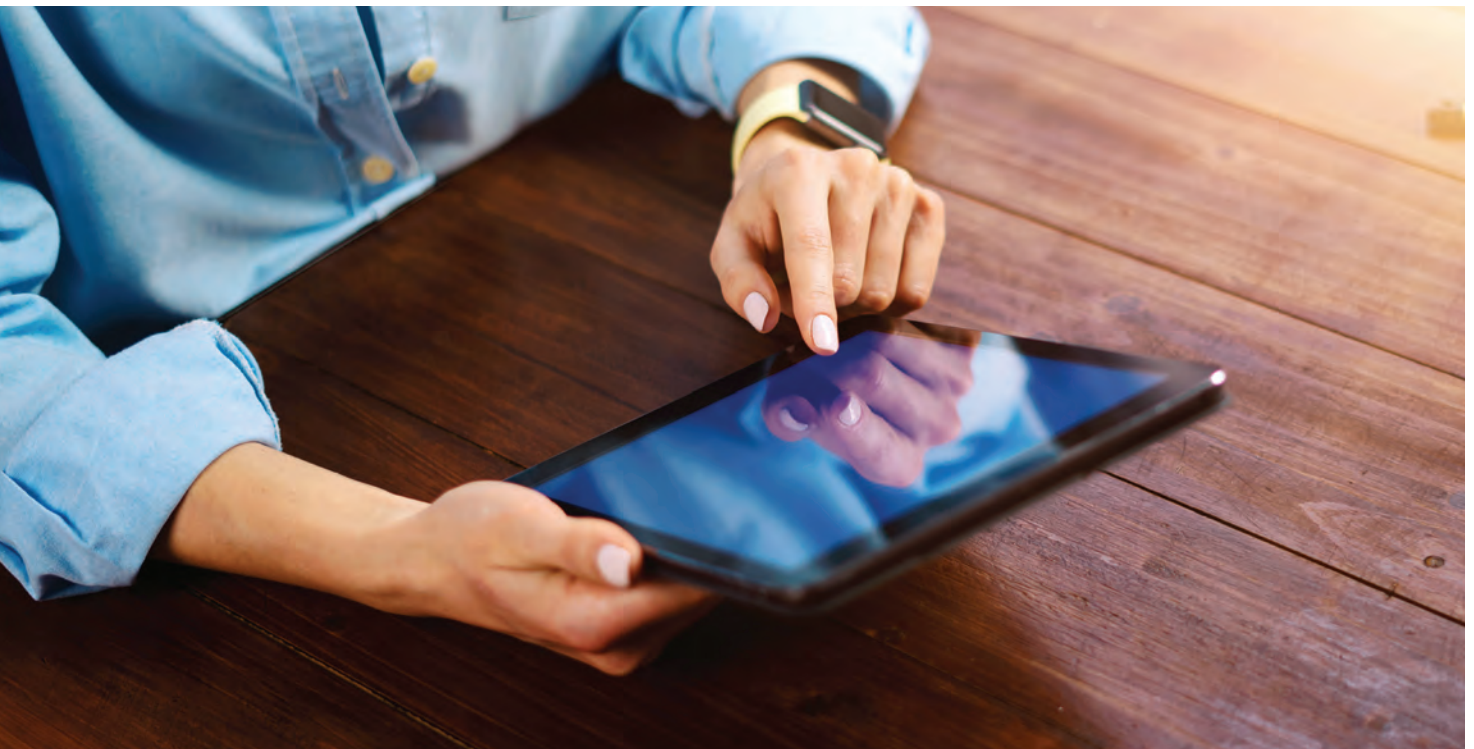
However, you are overlooking things (and it's not a good reflection on the company). Simple mistakes are being missed, while other mistakes are burned into the brain like a red-hot cattle brand. With every new project, you are reminded of

what was missed the last time, yet you find the process falling back into the same pattern of "not paying attention" and simple mistakes are overlooked, again and again.

Why is that? So, what is it about some of the lessons learned on double-checking your work that stick better than others? Why can't we find our mistakes?

MANAGEMENT VS MANAGMENT

Yes, that is the word that tripped me up like a major league baseball bat upside my head. It forced me to look at my own process and analyze the reasons why I missed such a basic spelling error on the cover of the brochure. This hurt my ego, my pride, my self-confidence in a huge way that changed my quality checking process, and I had to learn to put my ego back in the box and accept the fact that I am only human, and I can't catch everything. I'm not perfect and I had to



If you happen to be one of the few who are absolutely accurate 100% of the time, then the least you can do is to offer to proof your associate's work. Helping another creative double-check their work (with the inference that they will help you out similarly in the future) is one of the best ways to share your skills and knowledge with those who may really appreciate the help and guidance.



Over and over and over we make the same errors — some are motor-memory, like hitting the caps lock key rather than the shift key. That's a minor one. It's bad when your fingers transpose numbers. I ask my client questions while I type out an email with the notes they mention. I then send the email to them and ask that they review it and approve it. In this way, the client confirms my notes and spelling errors.

start using the watchful, critical eye of another designer who I trust to have my back on things.

I had to personally take the ultimate level of absolute, undeniable ownership of my mistakes, which meant that at the end of the day, regardless of how proud I am of my other accomplishments, the mistakes made and missed were “all on me.”

STRANGLE YOUR EGO; EMBRACE A LITTLE HUMILITY

Your ego is what drives your passions. Your inner design dragon can't fly without the proverbial “your client likes you” feedback of the emotional paycheck we creatives all live for. Getting a grip on your ego means you recognize its limitations and can still provide it the positive feedback it needs without allowing it to creep back into the monster it can sometimes become.

I had to come up with a better way to check my work, and spelling is just one of the pet-peeves that I believe every creative person deals with, regardless of the grammar software that one may be using. I incorporated several steps to my process that also included sharing the file with another designer for additional feedback.

TIPS FOR ACCURATENESS

Here are the steps that I incorporated that I felt helped me be more accurate and correct in more than just spelling:

1 Send the file to another designer who understands what is needed for feedback.

You may also get great feedback and some corrective suggestions to make your ideas work even better. This step requires upfront planning and a relationship with a designer whom you also provide the same service for, so that it's a mutually rewarding process.

Pro tip: Find a designer that has more experience than you do! In this way, they will most likely also provide you with valuable feedback on design, style, layout, and colors. Take those constructive criticisms for what they are worth — pure gold!

2 Put your ego back in the box, and listen, learn, self-critique and analyze the feedback you get as it relates to your brain's creative direction.

This can be one of the most rewarding and beneficial steps in the process, yet it sometimes takes more than just a desire

for Real Estate Professionals



New Ownership
New Management
New Direction

I have covered up the names and company logos to protect my customer's identity, as this was super embarrassing for everyone, mostly me. Lesson learned, and fortunately, I was able to catch it before the second run, so I changed the file, and all was good moving forward. Some words simply hide behind their commonality and usage. We are tired and overworked. What are the chances you would miss this error also? It's easier than you think. (Image courtesy Matt Charboneau)

to be better. If you are not looking at your own work with a very critical eye, you are simply not growing your skill sets.

3 Expanded my note-taking during the information gathering process.

You would be amazed at how many spelling errors originate from the initial creative request process. Weird spellings of locations or materials usually get overlooked by a statement such as "Oh, I'll get you the spelling for that name later," and once the design process is finally in full swing, that little note on the proper spelling of that word will simply be overlooked. That's where your notes come in to play — what needs to happen to that weirdly spelled street name or last name?

4 Leave all text as live fonts until the design is completely finalized.

I cannot pound this one into the brain deep enough. Leaving all the text as live fonts for as long as the design process takes will benefit you in the long run when the client decides at the last minute to change the content. Once you convert your text to curves or outlines, you lose all of the text editing software benefits. If your client wants to change their copy, and the few words you drop in and substitute into the converted text, there is no way to know if it really helped or hurt your editing process as the context of the writing is gone — the graphics left will not tell you that "managment" is spelled wrong.

5 Read every line backward. This forces you to look at each word, spelling one at a time.

Ugh, this is time consuming, but it's the only way to override your brain's nasty habit of seeing things that aren't there. Your brain will assume that "managment" is spelled correctly because it thinks it recognized it. It's a nasty brain trick that everyone struggles with.

6 Follow what outside spell checkers and grammar monitors suggest.

When did you get your degree in literature? Yeah, if you think your spell checker and grammar guide is wrong, then you have a bigger issue than this article can fix.

7 Document all customer feedback on a special page to verify the revisions were made.

That means detailing your note-taking to a whole new level, like I had to. I made every detail of every request by the customer a big deal. So many times, when I have simply nodded my head, agreed with the customer, and made the revision only to realize that they told me something that was incorrect, I incorporated it,

and then had to undo all of it because the HOA or the corporate branding managers refuse the design. Your detailed records provide you the facts that will possibly allow you to charge for the changes, and more importantly, if what the customer told you to change happens to be a misspelling, you have the documentation to prove it.

8 Break the piece into several smaller pieces and tackle them one at a time.

This is a no-brainer, yet it's one that even I forget sometimes. Don't we all just grab the document and jump right in to find where the mistakes are at. The primary problem with this is nothing has been done to change the outcome. By breaking up the piece into several smaller sections, you can more confidently and quickly review the piece.

9 Walk away from it, for at least an hour to clear your head, then review.

Again, yet another great way to assure a successful review of a piece yet it's the hardest to do when you have been working hard to finish the project and the client is waiting for it. One hour can seem like nothing, or it can make the project so late that it doesn't get counted. Seriously, have you ever tried to just walk away from a design piece for the sole purpose of clearing out your mind? Seriously, give it a try and see for yourself just how much faster, easier and accurate you will be in your review.

Why this works so well is that your brain needs to be washed clean of the focus it's had placed upon it with one

job. By giving it a break, it allows other imagery, items, thoughts, and ideas to erase the project details like shaking an Etch A Sketch.

Now, when you return to review the project, you will be amazed at how truly different it looks, how many more errors you will find, and how much more accurate you are in your proofing and reviewing. Distance makes the heart grow fonder, but I like to modify this to say: "Distance makes the eye look deeper" and placing time between you and your work is really the No. 1 way to validate the accuracy of your work. The only way I can prove this to you is for you to try it for yourself.

Next time, instead of following the typical process you have followed (which results in errors being overlooked) try incorporating the steps I describe, most importantly allow some time to go by between you and your work. Take a walk, work on something completely different, go to lunch, or whatever it takes to get your brain out of the project for a while. You cannot replace the value of a fresh look at your own work. **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. Contact him at Matt@stormmountainsigns.com; www.learnsigndesign.com; and 970-481-4151.





PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: **AMERICAN MADE**

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



COLORED WOODS

Rowmark offers ColorShop Woods, wood products with colors infused into the grain. The product is laser and rotary engravable. It can be used for signage, point-of-purchase displays, name badges, custom 3D product displays, and more. There are 20 colors available.

419-425-8974
rowmark.com



CNC ROUTER/ENGRAVER

Vision Engraving & Routing Systems offers the 2550 CNC router/engraver. It features the company's Vision Series 5 controller with V-Touch pendant and Vision software. It can be used for sign applications, including ADA Braille signs, print-to-cut, dimensional letters, and more.

602-439-0600
visionengravers.com

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: AMERICAN MADE

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



SUBLIMATION BLANKS

Johnson Plastics Plus offers a variety of Unisub product blanks, including photo panels, keychains, ornaments, and more. Customers can create personalized gifts with these products.

800-869-7800

jplusplus.com



WRAP FILM

Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions offers the MPI 1105 wrapping film, a high-gloss cast film with 3D conformability for complex surfaces with curves and recesses, according to the company. This product has a range of applications, including fleet branding and signage.

800-282-8379

averydennison.com

EMBROIDERY EQUIPMENT

Melco International offers the Melco BRAVO, an embroidery system with 16 needles, Acti-Feed auto-tensioning, a thread trimming system, and the company's BRAVO operating system. This system allows customers to embroider caps, bags, and a variety of textiles.

800-799-8313

melco.com



DAD CAPS

Carolina Made offers USA-made Dad Caps by Classic Caps. The product features 100% cotton, garment-washed twill, six panels, a pre-curved visor, performance sweatband, and snapback closure. The low-profile, unstructured cap is available in five colors, or 10 colors in the trucker style.

800-222-1409

carolinamade.com

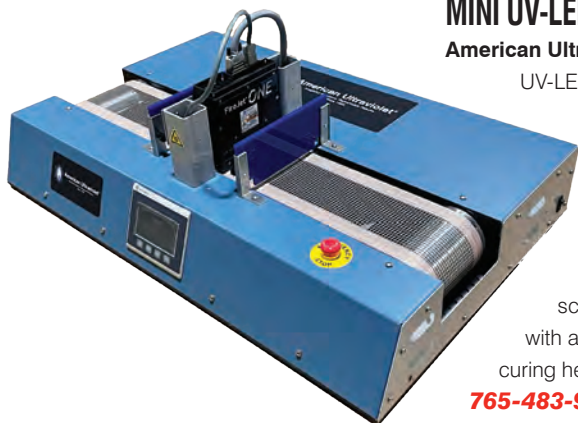
MINI UV-LED CONVEYOR

American Ultraviolet introduces its mini UV-LED conveyor system for curing inks, coatings, and adhesives, including heat-sensitive films. It cures by using 365, 375, 395, and/or 405nm wavelengths.

The product has touch-screen controls and is available with a 3" or 6"-wide Phoseon LED curing head.

765-483-9514

americanultraviolet.com



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: AMERICAN MADE

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



WRAP FILM

JDS Sign Supply offers the SW900 film with Avery Dennison's Easy Apply RS technology. It can be used for full vehicle and partial wraps and long-term decals or graphics. The company says it is conformable, repositionable, and comes with a long-term removable adhesive.

855-661-2388

jdssignsupply.com

LAMINATE

Trotec Laser Inc. offers the TroLase, which is meant for engraving and cutting at high speeds according to the company. The UV-resistant and acrylic-based laminate can be used for a variety of signage applications such as interior, exterior, and industrial signage, in addition to badges and nameplates.

844-529-0730

troteclaser.com



CONTEMPORARY FIT T

Royal Apparel's 17030W Women's 50/50 Blend V-Neck offers a soft, superior surface for printing, according to the company. The contemporary fit T features 50/50 combed, ring-spun cotton/polyester, a set on rib collar, double-needle sleeve and bottom hem, shoulder-to-shoulder tape, side seams, and a tear-away label. It's available in eight colors.

866-769-2517

royalapparel.net



ROUTER TABLES

Computerized Cutters Inc. offers its Accu-Cut KR and Accu-Cut XP/XPS router tables, which are built on welded bases and hand-assembled in Dallas, Texas.

800-310-2887

computerizedcutters.com

CUSTOM SPIN CAST AWARDS

Catania Medallic Specialty Inc. offers custom spin cast awards. The company offers a range of custom cast products, such as medals, keychains, belt buckles, and lapel pins. The items have no setup or die charges, according to the company.

800-633-2586

cataniainc.com



GP



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Breaking Down DTF's Versatility



BY JULIA
SCHROEDER

HOW DIRECT-TO-FILM WORKS, POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS, SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS



DTF equipment, including the printer and the shaker/curing oven unit, as well as included processing software allows existing or startup businesses to employ this technology in relatively small spaces. (Image courtesy Axiom America)

Direct-to-film (DTF) printing is a marriage of several existing technologies put together in a new and productive way, according to Don Copeland, ColDesi. He explains that a commercial DTF printer setup is a large-format printer that uses inks like DTG inks.

The design gets printed onto PET film, like films used for screen-printed transfers. Then, the film is coated with powder and cured in a belt dryer, like those used by screen printers.

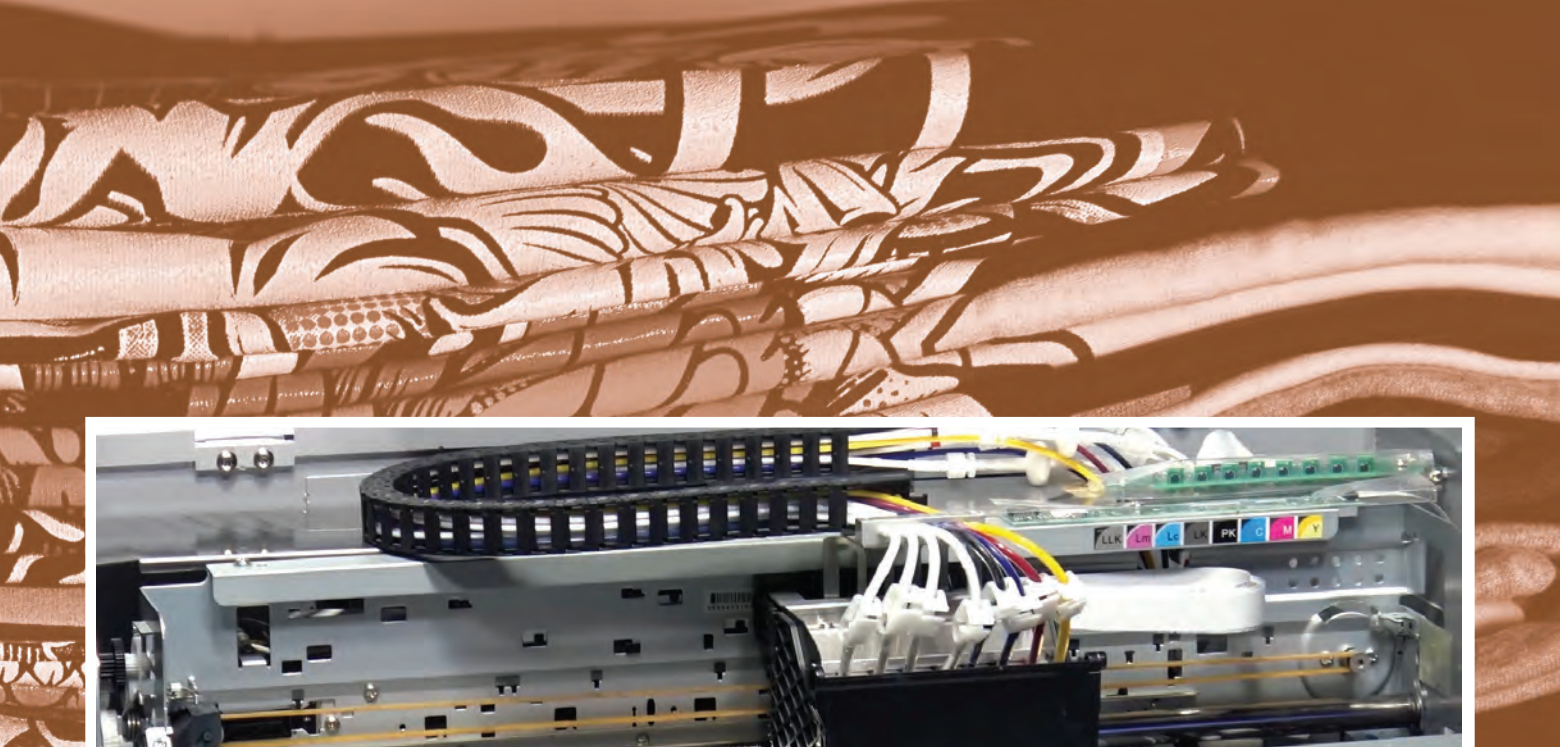
The coated PET film is manufactured to withstand high temperatures and pressures from a heat press. Curt Fischer, STS Inks, adds, "Having the correct adhesive powder can make all the difference in this process."

Because DTF uses an adhesive powder that creates a vapor when heated, personal protective equipment, such as a respirator, should be used by anyone applying the powder during the process. Moreover, the room should be properly ventilated.

See the article in the June issue of *GRAPHICS PRO*, "Risks of Improper Air Filtration When Laser Engraving," (<https://gpro.link/fumes>) for more information about the use of a filtering fume extractor. Though the article discusses fume extraction for laser engraving, the concept is the same: ridding the air of potentially hazardous particles from your workspace.

Once cured, the sheet is then placed onto the garment and pressed using a heat press. Post-press, the sheet is peeled off leaving a vibrant, long-lasting print.

Fischer notes that DTF works equally well on white and dark textiles and allows users to choose either a matte or glossy finish. One of the key advantages, Fischer says, is "DTF does not require cutting or weeding, it creates crisp and defined edges and images, it does not require advanced technical printing knowledge."



Press times are short – typically 10 seconds followed by a five-second finishing press. (Image courtesy OmniPrint International)

The variety of substrates you can use this method on include a wide selection of garment types, styles, and placements. DTF can be used on cotton, polyester, blends, nylon, treated leather, wood, and more, says Lana Bianco, OmniPrint International. “DTF is an affordable option for apparel decorating, that allows for versatility and ease of use.”

The process allows garment decorators to “print full-color, high-quality digital prints onto a special film and transfer the images onto garments, fabrics, and other substrates using a heat press mechanism,” explains Chris Alley, Axiom America.

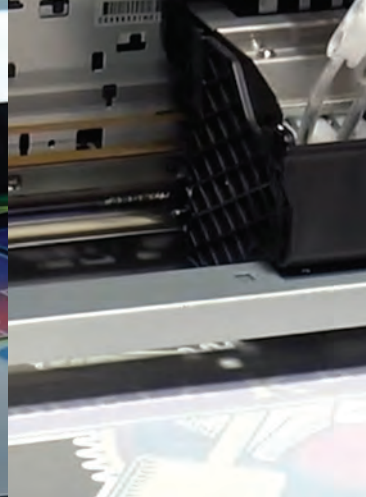
Products that may have been turned down or outsourced in the past, can now be produced in-house, says Chris Breazeale, CobraFlex. DTF can be used on koozies, backpacks, and to even create custom tagging on apparel, to list a few of many possibilities.

DTF COMPARED TO OTHER METHODS

“Within the digital transfer world, you will always be required to use a heat press to adhere the graphic onto the garment,” says Bianco. That’s one of the main similarities of DTF and sublimation.



DTF printing provides many opportunities and advanced capabilities for graphics shops. (Image courtesy Axiom America)



Artwork generation for most print production methods is also similar. The main difference in preparation for DTF versus sublimation, for instance, is that designs need a transparent background as this is what the RIP software uses to generate the white ink layer, according to Copeland.

Sublimation is like DTF in the sense that you print onto a sheet and then transfer the image to the garment, Bianco explains. However, the process varies with how the sublimation toner is printed onto a sheet and is pressed.

“While curing, the ink embeds into the fabric through the sublimation process, which means printed toner moves from a solid state. Once heated into a gaseous state, it becomes one with the garment. Once cooled, the ink is trapped within the garment. Also, sublimation only works on polyester or mostly poly garments that are white or light in color,” she says.

“Since it (DTF) is digital, it allows for variable data and sizes without any special set up – much like DTG printing. Press times are short – typically 10 seconds followed by a five-second finishing press.” says Copeland. “With a transfer, there is no ‘commitment’ to the garment until it is sold.”

For designs that are reordered on a regular basis (such as school

logos, curated art, stock designs, etc.) shops can keep an inventory of transfers printed and ready to go on demand.

Other than expanded apparel range offerings (more fabrics, more customization, lower minimums), a DTF printer can lend the opportunity for a business to sell wholesale transfers.

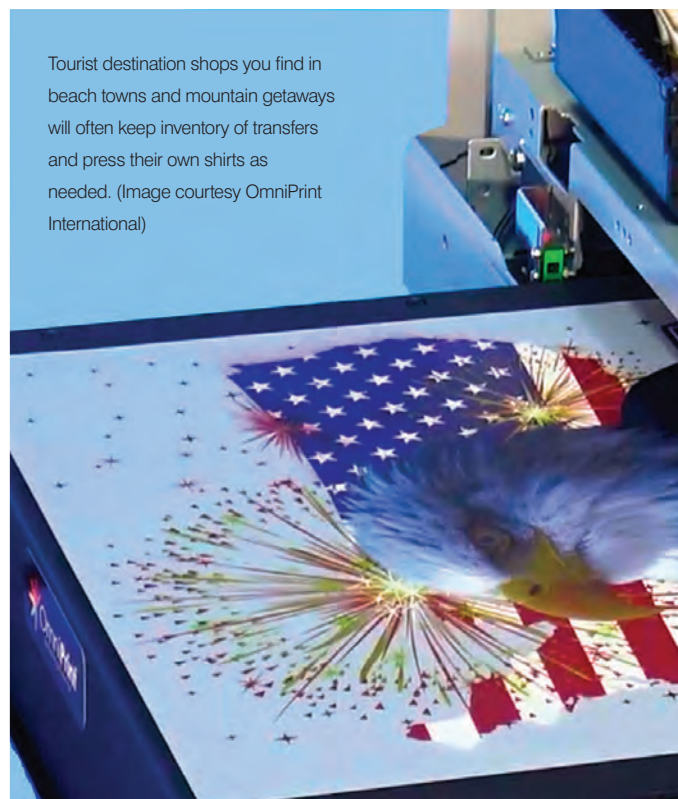
“Many screen printers need short run prints for reorders, variable-size prints, and customization work (names/numbers, etc.). Tourist destination shops like you find in beach towns, mountain getaways and the like will often keep inventory of transfers and press their own shirts as needed,” Copeland elaborates. “On top of these you can also press transfers to bags, caps, patches, and more.”

The addition of DTF technology allows a business to diversify their product portfolio without the need for substantial initial investment, says Fischer.

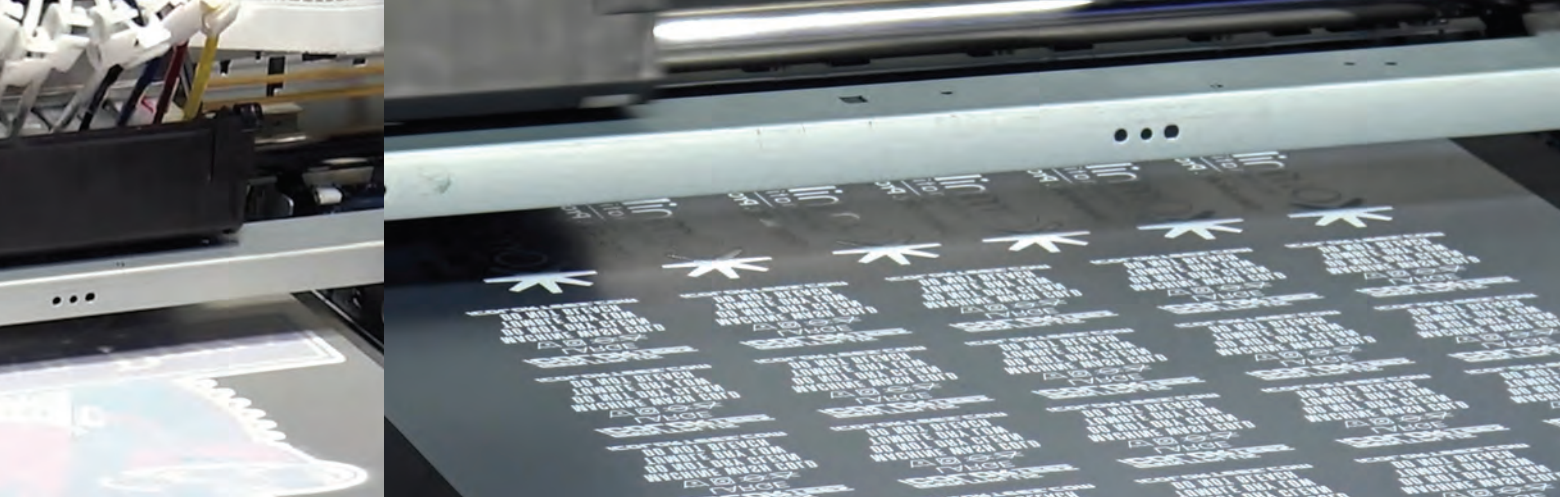
MAKING THE INVESTMENT

Copeland says that good commercial solutions will range from the mid-\$20,000 to mid-\$30,000 range. The price mostly depends on the quality, size, and speed of the equipment.

Depending on the dealer, the investment typically includes:



Tourist destination shops you find in beach towns and mountain getaways will often keep inventory of transfers and press their own shirts as needed. (Image courtesy OmniPrint International)



- 1) DTF printer (or a compatible DTG printer) with basic software
- 2) A shaker/curing oven machine with appropriate fume extraction/filtration
- 3) Heat press
- 4) PET film
- 5) Hot melt adhesive powder
- 6) Personal protective equipment like a respirator for working with the powder
- 7) Specially formulated DTF inks
- 8) Shipping, installation, and training on the machine
- 9) And, potentially, additional processing software and computer equipment

“With proper training, new buyers could expect to be up and comfortably running in less than a week,” says Alley.

As far as the initial investment, Fischer says to start with the printer and go from there, depending on your expected production capacity. He adds, “Once you determine that, you simply compare pricing, output, technical support, OEM viability and history etc., then weigh those options to determine the correct fit.”

SPACE & EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

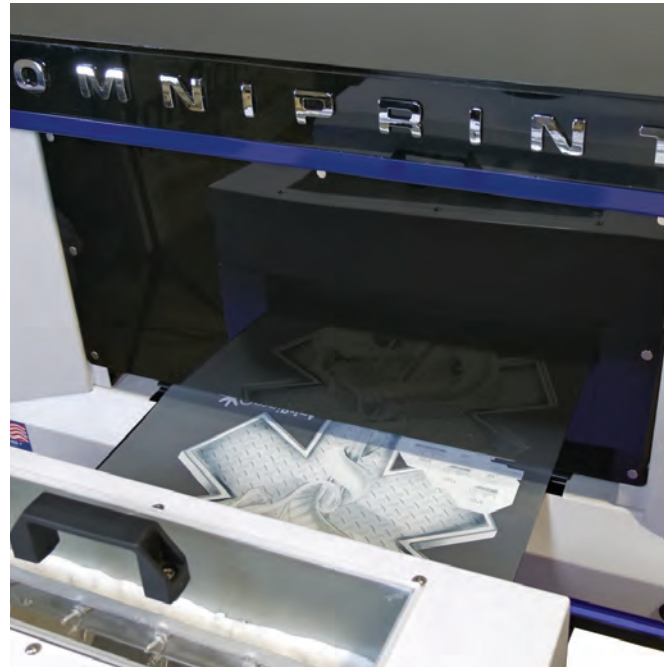
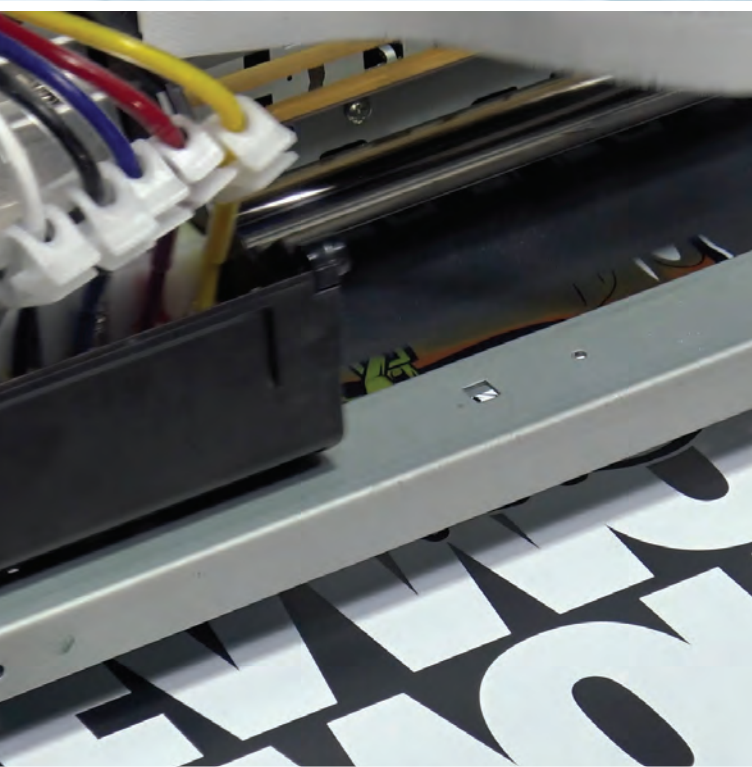
Before a shop decides to make the investment, there are some space and equipment requirements to keep in mind to ensure success.

“If you’re in California, for example, everyone would say the ‘cost per square foot.’ What size is that machinery and how much real estate will it take up in my business?” poses Breazeale. “How much money can I make with that square footage in my place?” In California and many other locations with tight spaces, business owners count every square foot in their shop. With space considerations in mind, Breazeale believes DTF should be a good profit for shops that get into it.

DTF equipment, including the printer and the shaker/curing oven unit, as well as included processing software allows existing or startup businesses to employ this technology in relatively small spaces, according to Alley.

“The footprint of DTF equipment varies depending upon the maximum size of images to be produced,” Alley explains. For the most part, he says printers print graphics from 12-14” and large-format printers provide a maximum width of 24” for images. The footprint of the printers can vary from 3.5’ x 8’ up to 5’ x





10' and typically require one or multiple 220 single-phase outlets for power.

When setting the equipment up, shops must also consider a method of venting the shaker dryer. Copeland recommends either ducting to exhaust outside or a fume extractor if outdoor ducting is not an option.

Once the equipment is installed and printing on the regular, daily maintenance is very important

“You want to keep it running,” Breazeale says. “What ends up happening is somebody gets the machine, start converting every job, and they lose track of the maintenance. When it breaks down, they realize right away why they need to do the maintenance.”

Proper maintenance includes cleaning the heads and making sure the capping stations are clean throughout the day as the machine is printing. Breazeale also says to do a nightly wet cap, which entails soaking the machine equipment in water overnight.

All in all, DTF provides many opportunities and advanced capabilities for graphics shops. Breazeale considers DTF to be an “industry disrupter,” concluding, “there’s so much change with DTF, and even more being done to advance it faster. This is the beginning stage of DTF, the upswing is going to be gigantic for many years. The business is out there.” **GP**

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

DTF works equally well on white and dark textiles and allows users to choose either a matte or glossy finish. (Images courtesy OmniPrint International)



MARKET SUCCESS STORIES: STINGRAY GRAPHICS

At the turn of the new year, Stingray Graphics got its first DTF printer installed at its shop inside the Asheville Mall in North Carolina. Over the past six months, Stingray Graphics has been able to achieve more vibrant and versatile orders. Russ Ridenour, the store manager and machine operator at Stingray Graphics, was drawn to DTF due to the vibrancy of the prints.

Ridenour first got into the T-shirt business around 2007 and has worked with various printing and production methods over the years. While he always loved the products, there was something he couldn't quite nail down, particularly when working with dark garments. With DTF, the print comes out the same every time and is not dependent on the fabric or color.

"We've got return clients we've been dealing with for years, and they love the new process," says Ridenour.

Previously, the shop often had inquiries on hat orders that it was unable to fulfill, as it didn't have an embroidery machine. With the DTF machine, and the recent addition of a hat press, Stingray Graphics can now easily, and quickly, fulfill hat orders. Ridenour also no longer feels the need to persuade clients on certain garments and colors because there are no limitations with DTF.

"My day-to-day operations are so much easier now," says Ridenour. "Knowing that every print is going to come out the same."

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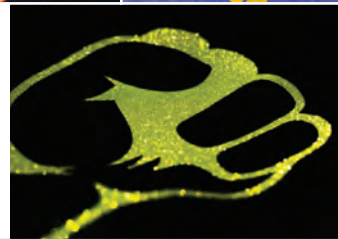
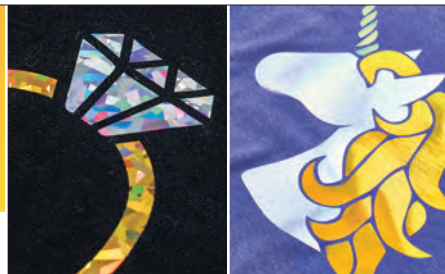
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BY SHELLEY WIDHALM



Poly-blocker printed HTV for the Red Dragons sports team.

When the pandemic shuttered businesses, Todd Downing realized he didn't need a retail storefront for his printing solutions business, Fat Dad Custom Designs. While considering the future of his business, Downing also knew he was ready to pivot into the direct-to-film (DTF) market, which prints designs onto a polyester film using water-based inks and is then cured and pressed onto a garment using a heat press.

The implementation of these two major changes meant Downing could downsize, so he moved his operation to his Moline, Illinois, home where he had 1,100 square feet he could dedicate to his shop.

"We get a lot more done in a lot less time now being home-based," says Downing, who's been in business since 2006.

Fat Dad focuses on two product lines, wholesale printing for his trade clients, who are distributors or resellers, and printing finished goods for his retail customers, which include signs, banners, decals, garments, bags, and other products using DTF, heat transfer vinyl (HTV), eco-solvent, and screen printing methods.

"We try to be a one-stop solution to be able to print on any style garment with any type of decoration," Downing adds.

TAKING ON DTF

Initially, Downing employed HTV and screen printing to decorate products, but HTV had "a heavy-handed feel" and is limited by color availability, the reproduction of fine details like small numbers and letters and the labor involved in weeding.

Downing learned about DTF in the summer of 2020 after the pandemic shut-downs. That fall, he invested in an Epson

Business stickers for the Crystal Ninja master artisan and rhinestone suppliers at crystalninja.com. (All images courtesy Fat Dad Custom Designs)



P600 converted desktop printer that cost \$3,500. After spending another \$1,000 on supplies and a few months learning how the system worked, he purchased additional printers, finally partnering with DTF2U, a supplier of DTF equipment and supplies, to purchase a commercial-size setup in January 2022.

“When it comes to garments and transfers, the quality of the heat press used is essential. If there are quality-control issues, look at the press first to make sure the temperature is correct across the entire platen,” Downing explains. “Investing in high-quality equipment may seem like a big investment at first, but it will save you time over the years. It will pay for itself.”

Heat transfers have many additional advantages over screen printing and HTV options. DTF can be used on most materials, and it can be quickly applied. “You are not limited by colors and gradients or by the size of the order,” Downing says. “You have a wide color range to print.”

Alternatively, screen printing is generally limited to large orders to be cost effective. Downing knew DTF was the perfect solution because order size doesn’t matter. “You’re not limited by quantity. If someone wants just one, we’re able to do it.”

Adopting DTF allowed Downing to continue to grow his customer base nationally as he added to his service offerings. He now provides DTF transfers to screen printing companies, focusing on small and medium-sized businesses, and some larger printing businesses who don’t want to deal with the added hassle of adding DTF to their own product line.

“It provides a good solution for people who don’t want to turn away business,” Downing says. “They send a quote to us, and we send them transfers ready to press.”

Additional market share also comes by way of team sports and fundraising campaigns, where Downing sets up ordering platforms of 10 curated products or less featuring the team’s or organization’s logo or images. He has offered this service using the Ecwid.com e-commerce solution for more than five years.

“Cut the check, and we take care of it all,” Downing says. “It gives the organization the incentive to push more people to their webstore.”

FAT DAD’S GROWTH

He originally started Fat Dad when he and four of his friends needed decals for their race cars. He had taken graphic design



Stickers and labels with the company logo.



Business swag for a customer consisting of T-shirts with designs using direct-to-film transfers.



Fundraiser T-shirts with screen-printed transfers, HTV, and printed HTV transfers.

job involved managing the service department for an HVAC company. Through word of mouth, he started creating finished apparel for local sports teams and other customers and soon had a full-time apparel decoration business.

In 2017, Downing grew his business and moved into a 400-square-foot retail space, then moved to a 3,500-square-foot storefront a year later in a mall location. The location didn't get a lot of foot traffic, so a year later he moved to an even larger 8,500-square-foot space in the main corridor of the mall.

By 2020, Downing wasn't sure if he needed to continue operating out of a retail space. Then the pandemic happened. By moving out of retail, he could focus less on customer traffic and more on production. He also found he didn't have to be tied to a location and could focus on why he entered the business in the first place, which is creating his products.

"Not being at a storefront really increased my level of happiness. That was worth more than anything else," Downing says.

Prior to the pandemic, most of Downing's business was in retail sales from individual customers coming through his store. During the pandemic, he began selling banners for retailers wanting to let their customers know they were open and to provide guidance on social distancing with floor decals and other signage. His retail business dropped significantly

classes in high school and that experience led him to learn about the versatility of HTV and the purchase of his first heat press, which he still has at his shop. The name for his business came from his son, who was six at the time and told him he was "fat" and his "dad," so Downing took on the name. "It's great because I don't have to lose weight. It's part of the branding," Downing adds.

He started working part-time to earn fun and vacation money. His full-time



**Soft Edges and DTF:
How to Make Them Work for You**
<https://gpro.link/softedge>

because customers ordering items for their teams and fundraisers canceled events and activities. Plus, walk-in sales of individual items took a hit. “Those sales dried up overnight,” Downing says. “I had to pivot what I offered.”

Eighty-five percent of Downing’s business now is through wholesale trade and the remainder through retail printing. He’s learned a few lessons along the way, like pricing his product for profit, something he’s seen other print shops fail to do. “You just have to value your time and what you do,” Downing argues.

His management experience ensured his systems processes were working and that he didn’t scale too fast, which is a mistake many businesses make. “Growing too quickly can be bad,” Downing adds. “You need processes, systems, and people in place. It’s cheaper to work with your current customers and keep them happy. The most important thing is knowing your numbers and how to price your product for profit.”

Downing is adding to his online presence in July via an online tutorial channel called *Crafting to Cash*, which will provide crafters and artists with tips and other business advice. “A lot of people love crafting and want to see if it can be a full-time job, but they have no clue what’s involved in running a business, the cost to produce products, or how to price them for their market. Ultimately, if it’s worth it to sell at that price,” Downing explains. “Have the numbers behind you to support being able to do it.” **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.



A demonstration of the detail of DTF transfers by comparing them to a dime.



Finished shirt using DTF transfers.



Printable glitter HTV.



Finished shirt using DTF transfers.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: DIRECT-TO-FILM EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

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



DTF PRINTER

ColDesi Inc. offers the DTF-24H4 direct-to-film printer, which has four heads and a dryer that will print an average of 145 linear feet per hour. The company says it has power-reducing components, low-touch print management, and an auger-driven hotmelt powder delivery and recycling system.

877-793-3278
coldesi-dtf.com



DTF FILM

Lawson Screen & Digital Products offers DTF sheets and adhesive powder. The products come in a variety of sizes and quantities.

314-982-9300
golawson.com

DTF INKS

STS Inks announces the release of its light magenta and light cyan inks for DTF printing. The colors allow for more true-to-life images, according to the company.

561-999-8818
stsinks.com



DTF FUME EXTRACTORS

PAT Technology Systems Inc. introduces Filtrabox's DTF series fume extractors for direct-to-film printers. It captures the fog generated during the curing of printing transfers, according to the company. The extractors feature reinforced filters, liquid reservoirs, and protected electronics. The product is available in two sizes: micro-DTF and the CompactX-DTF.

888-655-8455
filtrabox.com



DTF SYSTEM

Axiom America offers the Pioneer direct-to-film system, which allows businesses the ability to meet DTG and screen printing needs, according to the company. It utilizes Epson I3200 print heads.

336-882-8729
axiomamerica.com





DTF SOFTWARE

CobraFlex Printers LLC offers the Cobra-Flexi software for all its DTF no-powder printers. The new software automatically makes two layers, inserts priming lines, and aids in color management, according to the company.

602-930-1858

cobraflexprinters.com



DTF MACHINE

OmniPrint International introduces the OmniDTF, a DTF-exclusive machine. It features dual-print heads and one-pass technology. Print transfers up to 14.5" wide at resolutions up to 720 X 3,600 DPI. It also includes a curing dryer.

855-373-3538

omniprintonline.com

GP



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STARFEST 2022: THE FINAL FRONTIER

CONCEPT AND DESIGN FOR COMIC CONVENTION WEARABLES



The completed design, ready for StarFest.

What is the StarFest? Since 1977, StarFest has been Colorado's homegrown celebration of multimedia science fiction entertainment. StarFest is a combination of several unique conventions rolled into one big event that takes place over three days. What was different this year is that it would be the last. StarFest was more than a comic convention. StarFest is an entire weekend of science fiction entertainment. This is where we met friends old and new, saw great costumes, browsed collectibles, attended live performances, presentations, panels, autograph and photo sessions, talent contests and most importantly, talked face to face with actors, directors, producers, writers, illustrators, scientists, special effects artists and more. People, remarkably, just like us! At StarFest, we could learn to fight like a Klingon or Jedi, played games with designers, and spoke and learned from actual astrophysicists. We met comic artists, designers and creators and even added to our collection. We learned from stunt coordinators, writers, producers, and directors and spoke with popular authors. There were hundreds of activities that made up our StarFest weekend.

Sadly, this will be the last StarFest (Denver). The lovely folks that have put it on for five decades will be retiring. We have been the exclusive provider of wearables for StarFest since before the turn of the millennium. As you know, we have written about several sci-fi projects including StarFest. We printed an image of the original Star Ship Enterprise and then for the 50th anniversary of Star Trek, the new USS Enterprise. Of course, the Star Wars crew has been featured several times since the '77 debut. Stargate, Deep Space Nine and others were featured over the years. For 42 years of StarFest,



Special shirts for the event staff.

we featured the characters from A Hitchhiker's Guide. Finally, after a two-year hiatus because of the pandemic, we finally got to showcase baby Yoda that we started in early 2020 and The Mandalorian. In short, it's complicated but this is the premise. Beginning five years after the events of Return of the Jedi and the fall of the Galactic Empire, The Mandalorian follows Din Djarin, a lone Mandalorian bounty hunter in the outer reaches of the galaxy. He is hired by remnant Imperial forces to retrieve the child Grogu, but instead goes on the run to protect the infant. While looking to reunite Grogu with his kind, they are pursued by Moff Gideon, who wants to use Grogu's connection to the Force.



We controlled this project from the get-go. We love pushing the limits of design and print as often as we can, though in hindsight, this was a lot of imagery to bring together, time consuming, and a challenging separation process.

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



With each screen, the image comes to life.



CONCEPT & DESIGN

Like anything, it began with a concept. We put together a pencil drawing for a clear idea. As you know, we always love working on black substrates to take advantage of shadow tones of color. We made one color many, which was why the white printer or base plate was so important. Once the character elements were arranged, we painted using the light and shadow values. We took the most obvious contrasts and increased the densities to maintain image details. Our goal was multiple effects with lighting. We also took the values from the reference materials and first deconstructed and then reconstructed the image using bright and bold colors. We controlled everything from the start at 300 DPI resolution building in channels. Primary and secondary colors were blended to make variations. The larger elements to the collage required more time than the smaller ones, but all icons were done the same way. Textures were used, like Spherize, under the Distort Options in the Filter menu. We also added the Oil Paint filter and Dry Brush to smooth out some areas.

The most labor-intensive character was Mando. The biggest element to boot. Since he was center stage, we needed full color range and larger elements allowed for more detail. The shadows were built of deep tones. The approach was to remove some or all the base. Using inks directly on fabric, we created shadows. Removing the base sets up darkness. The ink densities were transparent, as to not get muddy.

We set the text in Illustrator and then moved it to Photoshop for effects. In the Layers palette, we used Layers Effects. The combinations of colors were used for brightness and shadow without base and even a few areas where we removed opacities of the colors themselves.

We output from Illustrator after placing onto our template. Halftone frequency was 65 LPI at a 22.5-degree angle to the CTS. All told, 11 screens.

We generally print darker colors first followed by mid-tones and then lighter colors. Most coverage to least. The screens were all N272 to N380 TPI except for the white printer or base plate where we chose N205. All were 45 N/cm. Stencil thickness was at 20% on the white printer and 15% emulsion over mesh (EOM). The off-contact distance was 80/1000ths of an inch. The press was in plane from platen-to-platen to head-to-head for the quality consistent results.

Upon first strike we decided to push some imagery back and bring some forward. We went to our separations and with the white printer channel open, we selected areas and pushed them all back 10-50%. At the end of the print order, we ran two different highlight whites and opacities to help the transitions stay smooth and get punch in the opaque white areas. We only flashed

once after the white printer. The balance of the screens ran wet on wet.

We printed staff shirts and embroidered golf shirts and hats to go with the event shirts. The client grossly underestimated event sales, and we will be setting up for another run next week. **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.



Embroidery for StarFest featuring Gru.
(All images courtesy Lon Winters)



The Constant Need for Memorial Products

PROPERLY HANDLING A TOUGH BUT NECESSARY SALE



BY KRISTINE SHREVE

While memorial products are probably not the first thing that come to mind when a decoration or promo company thinks of goods to offer, the memorial products market is big business. In 2020, the pet care and product industry reached almost \$100 billion in sales, with a portion of that being devoted to pet cremation and memorial products. Depending on where you look, statistics vary for what humans spend on burying and memorializing their dead, with numbers ranging from \$12 billion to \$16 billion a year. Whichever number you accept as the right one, there certainly appears to be a large market for products to help us remember and memorialize loved ones, human or animal. It's a market not everyone will find attractive or comfortable, but for those who are interested, whether carved or engraved plaques and markers, or handmade embroidered memory bears or pillows, memorial products can be profitable.

PRODUCTS & DECORATION

First, we should talk about what products might be good options if your company elects to enter the memorial market. For those who do sublimation, there are a variety of products which can be sold. Things like urns and grave markers can be decorated with a photo and the birth and death dates of the deceased. Casket cap panels, which go inside the casket, can display pictures and birth and death dates as well, or a quote or saying significant to the deceased or to the family. There are also things like photo frames, keepsake boxes and memory blankets, which can be sublimated with pictures of the lost loved one. Don't forget that sympathy gifts for those who have lost loved ones are also something that fits in this category. You should also remember that many of



In Loving Memory
Your Presence We Miss
Your Memory We Treasure,
Loving You Always,
Forgetting You Never

Image courtesy
The Rowmark Group



Image courtesy Creative Gifts International



the items suitable for humans would also work for pet memorials as well.

Engravers can also find quite a large profit center in the memorial market. Depending on the type of laser engraver you have, it might be possible to engrave caskets directly, or at the very least, engrave a plaque to go on or in a casket. Engraving memorial markers is another option. Engraved urns for cremated remains could be a best seller. Pet memorials can be a way to help a family remember a lost furry or fluffy family member. Engraving is durable and since it can be done on glass or metal, it may also be a better option for memorials, which will be outside in the weather.

For those who work in vinyl and rhinestones, there are also options for memorial products. “In loving memory of” vinyl decals for car, business, or home windows can be a good seller. Memorial jewelry is also a big seller, with necklaces designed to hold a small amount of a loved one’s ashes being a particular favorite. These can be sublimated or embellished with rhinestones, and allow someone who has been bereaved to, both literally and symbolically, carry a piece of their lost loved one with them. As with sublimated memorial items, these items may also be suitable for sale to some pet owners.

Unlike those who do sublimation, those who embroider have an opportunity to create soft goods that will comfort those who are bereaved, both physically and spiritually. Memory quilts and blankets generally include items that hold significant memories of the deceased



Image courtesy JDS Industries



Image courtesy Ryder Digital Designs

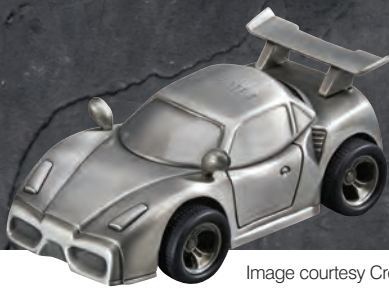


Image courtesy Creative Gifts International



Image courtesy Ryder Digital Designs

and may include photos or clothes the deceased wore. Memory quilts may also be embroidered with scenes or quotes that had meaning to the deceased or bring that person to the mind for family members. Memory bears are generally stuffed animals, usually in a bear shape, as the name implies, that are made from clothing the deceased wore often. Memorial stuffed animals can also be made from the available embroiderable stuffed animal options, with the name of the person who has passed and their birth and death dates, and possibly a meaningful quote, embroidered on them. Most of these soft goods are designed to be items of comfort, something people can hug and hold when feeling sad.

Once you decide to enter the memorial market, and what products you wish to offer, the next thing to do is to find your customers, and to make some sales. Remember, this is a unique market, and comes with perhaps more emotion and possible pitfalls than some other market segments. It's entirely possible you'll be dealing with people at a sensitive and painful time in their lives, so being caring and aware is key. The memorial market can be a profitable one, but it does need to be approached with care and sensitivity. With that in mind, here are some tips on how to find customers, sell sensitively, and do that little something extra that preserves a memory and comforts someone who may still be grieving.

TIPS FOR SALES

TIP #1 Start with funeral homes. It sounds obvious, but many decoration companies that want to sell memorial products forget this step. Most towns have at least one funeral home, and many have more than one. Contact the owner or director and ask if you can display items in their showroom or ask if they have a directory of funeral related services to which you can be added. If you sell products online, reach

Forever in our hearts
Grandma's
Garden



Images courtesy The Rowmark Group



Image courtesy Tanya Doyscher at The Visual Identity Vault



Images courtesy The Rowmark Group



Image courtesy Ryder Digital Designs

Home of the Free Because of the Brave



Jason Williams 1998-2021

Images courtesy The Rowmark Group



out to one of the larger funeral home chains with locations in multiple states. You can also work with funeral homes to bundle your products as part of a memorial or funeral service package. Just make sure to do your research on the funeral home first so you can be secure you are working with a reputable establishment.

TIP #2 Be sensitive and caring. Having a loved one pass is never an easy thing, and it is obviously an emotional and sensitive time for those who are making arrangements for a memorial. Be aware that the customer you're talking to may be emotional and may take longer to decide. Also be cognizant for the fact that the selection of products to memorialize a lost loved one is a significant decision and will hold weight. So be patient and be prepared for tears, possibly anger, and indecision. You should also remember that these behaviors may also occur if the customer in question is buying a memorial product for a pet. While it might be tempting to minimize grief over the loss of what might be considered "just" a pet, treat the situation the same as you would if it were a human.

TIP #3 Don't always push the most expensive option. It's kind of a rotten sales tactic, but some sellers of funeral or memorial services use it, pushing the idea that memorializing a loved one is only valid if it's expensive and top of the line. Make sure you have a variety of attractive options in a range of prices, so that you meet the budget of your customer and leave them feeling satisfied. It's not nice or fair to imply that a bereaved person is letting a loved one down if they don't spend to the maximum or even over what their budget can afford, so don't be that sort of seller.

TIP #4 Focus on the life, not the death. Yes, you're creating a product to help remember someone who is no longer with us, but that product will be so much better if you understand who that person was. Take a little time to hear a few stories or anecdotes about the person who died. Treat any items that were owned by the deceased or pictures you might be given as though they were extremely valuable and be sure to return anything (with the exceptions of items to be made into memory quilts or bears) in the same condition in which it was received. Remember that you are creating a product that is designed to preserve someone's memory and treat the life that is being remembered with respect.

TIP #5 Put yourself in the customer's shoes. If it was your grandmother, or husband, or best friend who died, how would you want to be treated? Granted people are different, so the "treat others as you'd want to be treated" option may not be your best bet here, but it's at least a place to start. Putting yourself, at least in your imagination, in your customer's shoes, gives you a baseline set of behaviors to work from. Then be guided by the customer. If they're brisk, follow their lead. If they need to cry, offer a tissue.

While the memorial market is profitable, it isn't a market in which everyone will feel comfortable, nor is it a market which should be entered into lightly. People who have been bereaved and who may be emotional and in pain are trusting you to help them remember and celebrate their lost loved one, and that's a trust that should not be abused. Treat their grief sensitively, support their wish to remember their loved one appropriately and offer a wide range of options so you can suit almost any budget, and you can do well in this market. **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 director of marketing and outreach for Applique Getaway. Kristine was the director of marketing for Ensign Emblem and EnMart from 2006-2020.

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A Shocking Design



A LOGO FOR A SHOCK ABSORBER PROTECTION PRODUCT

BY DOUG ZENDER



Fig. 1: A company that creates shock absorber protectors to resist sand damage needed a whimsical logo to help with marketing. (All images courtesy Doug Zender)



Fig. 2:
Original drawing.

Some time back a couple of young men asked me if I could create a design they could use to promote and market their product. These guys were heavily involved in the sand dune racing community. One of the problems they encountered was that the abrasion of the sand on shock absorber shafts caused premature failure of the shock absorbers, which had to be changed frequently at a substantial cost. To minimize the abrasive damage of the sand, they developed an add-on device that would repel the sand and they hoped to sell their product to other racers.

I created the final image, seen in **Fig. 1**. These guys wanted a somewhat whimsical image. Here are some of the steps I used to get to the final design.

LOGO DESIGN

I first drew the basic shape of a shock absorber using the rectangle tool and added a fountain fill to get a faded appearance, then added other details for realism. Attaching hardware, grommets, and such. The eyes and mouth were added to enhance the trauma of the devastation of sand intrusion on the shafts.

Fig. 2 is my original drawing of the image created in CorelDRAW. Each of the components was drawn separately with various tools. The coil spring was started with a rectangle and corners rounded. I gave it a contour to the center to create a highlight, then duplicated it, moved it down and blended the two together and grouped the blend. Next, I added an envelope to arc it slightly and skewed it. When it was to my satisfaction, I duplicated it, mirrored it, moved it to the back and aligned it with the front coils. As **Fig. 3** shows, this gives the appearance of the coil spring encircling the center shaft.

With the shock absorber drawing finished, I wanted to add an envelope to the entire image, but simply doing that would distort the elements of the drawing in an unwanted manner. To overcome the problem, I selected the entire image and exported it as an EMF (Enhanced Meta File), then imported the EMF file back into CorelDRAW. The EMF separates all the fountain fills into multiple vector objects and keeps all the objects in proper relation to one another. I was able then to add an envelope to the image as seen in **Fig. 4** and all the distortions serve to enhance the whimsical cartoon look.

When I was content with my drawing, I added the appropriate text to the image. In some cases, it involved the Fit Text to Path feature to get the final design and flow with the shape of the ellipse created earlier. This kind of design often requires the use of various and many of the tools provided within CorelDRAW.

Another example of using the EMF file type to alter an image is **Fig. 5**. The top lettering was created in CorelDRAW, and an outside black contour added. It was then exported to EMF and the EMF file imported back into CorelDRAW. It comes in as a group of objects. I first added perspective to the image, then an envelope to arc the lettering. Notice that the gradient fill now follows the arc of the lettering. I then ungrouped the objects and selected only the black contour. I duplicated it, nudged it over and down, and blended the duplicate with the original contour. I then broke the contour group apart and welded it. This creates an impressive outline and shadow in a single vector object. It is probably good to select all the nodes on the shadow with the shape tool and reduce nodes.

For anyone looking to thrive with the

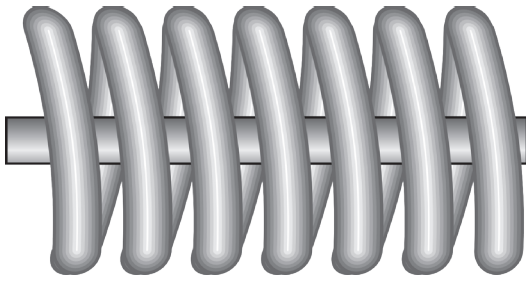


Fig. 3: The coil spring encircling the shaft.

Racing Racing

Fig. 5: An example of using the EMF file type to alter an image.

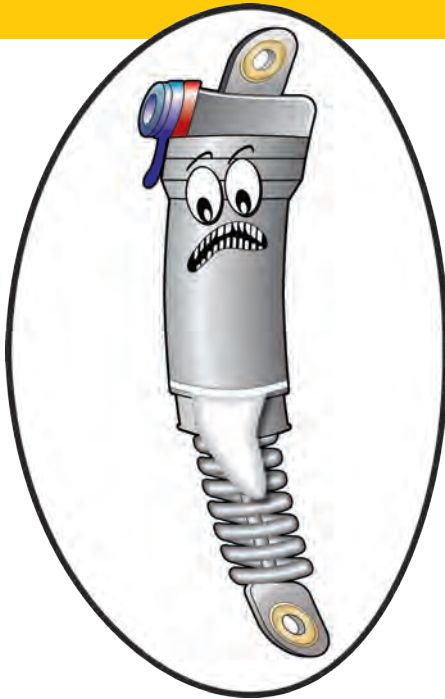


Fig. 4: The distortions serve to enhance the whimsical cartoon look.

in multiple versions of CorelDRAW. The earliest version used was the X3 version, which was released 20 years ago. I encourage questions, insights, and comments at dezender1@gmail.com. I will respond as quickly as I possibly can. As appropriate, I will share questions and comments 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.

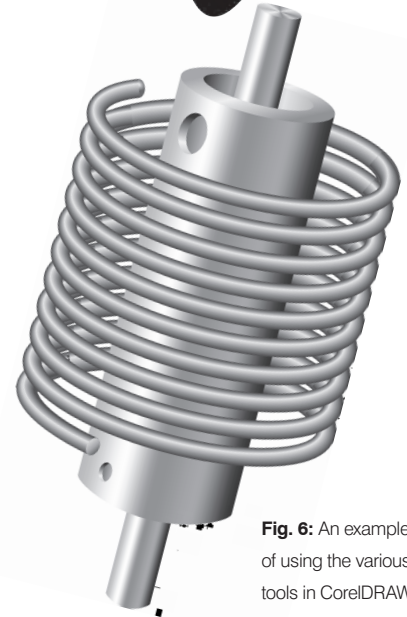


Fig. 6: An example of using the various tools in CorelDRAW to create a drawing.

program, I urge you to explore and experiment with the concept to gain the knowledge of the processes necessary to make it all work. In my experience, when I learn a new concept, it is usually not long until I have a project that requires its use. I have included Fig. 6 as an example of using the various tools in CorelDRAW to create a drawing. I did this for my own amusement to once again draw a coil spring wrapped around a central object. The process to render the spring was very much the same as described earlier. I would encourage anyone to experiment with this kind of drawing as time permits. It could surely sharpen one's skills with the various tools available.

It may be worthwhile to note that all the images included here were created in early versions of the program. All the basic drawing tools used here have been available

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4

Easy Ways to Grab Attention

**MAKE YOUR MARKETING
MORE MEMORABLE**

Do you have a florist in your hometown? The odds are high that you do indeed have a florist in your community. Even many smaller communities have one. Can you recall the name of that business? If not the name, do you know where it is located?

Florists have some interesting similarities to embroidery and apparel decoration businesses. You do not shop there frequently. You shop at a florist only when you have a specific need. The needs that cause you to spend money with the florist are often

caused by external or infrequent events, things over which you have little or no control.

Now, back to my original question: What is the name of your local florist? If you do know what it is, why is that? If you do not know what it is, what could they do about that?

If you do recall the name of the business, it may be because they are following one of the key pillars of good marketing, don't be boring — ever!

Here are some ways to make your marketing more memorable, so that when folks in your community have a need for a personalized, customized, or logo'd product, your business is the one that comes to mind!

NO. 1: BE MEMORABLE

When you are out and about in your own community, one of the ways to make a strong, memorable, and positive impression is to wear amazing stuff that you have created. Spend the time to sew out that gazillion stitch design on the back of a shirt, down the leg of your jeans, or on the back of a jacket. No, it is not likely that a customer will want to order or pay for such an elaborate design, but that is not why you are wearing it. You want the people that see you to connect you with the service you offer. Stand out embroidery and apparel decoration is so very visual, colorful and attention worthy. Why not amplify that by making sure you bop around town with something awesome at every opportunity?

If going big and bold is not your style, then at least wear your own logo. Play with your logo, make it big, drop it in a unique location, go for a standout



Images courtesy A Cup of Joe Media

color, add some bling, drop in a funky cool fabric, and turn it into an appliqué. The whole point is to get someone to look at you and say, “Wow, that is something! Where did you get it?” That opens the door so that you can hand them your business card, and maybe even get one from them.

NO. 2: BE VISIBLE

If you have a retail location that has frontage, make it attention worthy. If you have a display window, dress it with a few boldly colored products. If you do not have a display window, consider getting some eyebrow banners in a few different colors that you can put out when your business is open. If you have only one banner, and it is out all the time, it becomes invisible to the people that pass by. Can you hang any products outside to flap in the breeze? Can you add some unexpected or oversized prop to your window to draw attention? Can you hang or arrange a panel of boldly colored fabric to create an attention-grabbing backdrop in your retail space?

If you do not have a retail location, or a display window to dress, I have an option for you — social media! Any business can turn a Facebook business page into their retail/display space. People are on Facebook every day. Why not take advantage of that, and create attention-grabbing posts for the world to see, like, share, and comment upon?

NO. 3: LET THEM PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

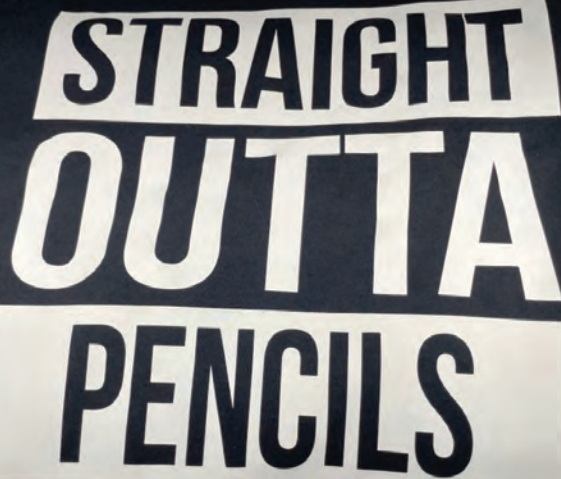
People are fascinated by the embroidery machines and the process of apparel decoration. Try to shoot a 30 second video of whatever order you are working on and post it to your social media with a quick caption, even if it is something simple like, “Can’t wait to see their faces when they get their new shirts!”

Doing this even just once a week will increase awareness about what you do and the variety of products you offer, without you ever having to say, “Buy my stuff.”

NO. 4: BE YOURSELF

People do business with *you*. Yes, they are doing business with your company, but they are working with you. When you inject yourself into your marketing, it helps your community feel like they know you. If you always say, “Hiya,” include that in your emails. If you are into a particular hobby, find ways to bring some of that into your business. It will help like-minded people find you and you will resonate with them, making it more likely that they will become your customers.

The world as we know it has been forever changed by the pandemic. Now is a perfect opportunity to look at your business with fresh eyes. What can you reframe, tweak, refresh or update so that it catches the attention of your community? Is your sign in need of a fresh coat of paint or a power wash? Can you add a pop of color to your building, sign, or vehicle to draw attention? Have you updated your website lately with any new images? Can



**STRAIGHT
OUTTA
PENCILS**

“I MARKET MY SERVICES UTILIZING THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA. A CUP OF JOE MEDIA BREWS EYE-CATCHING AND ENGAGING GRAPHICS FOR POSTING ON MY FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM. AND BELIEVE ME, IT TOTALLY WORKS. I’M ALWAYS RECEIVING DMS ASKING FOR PRICE QUOTES THAT WIND UP BECOMING JOBS AND USUALLY TURN INTO REPEAT CUSTOMERS.”

— VALARIE EHRHARDT O’CONNELL
IMAGING CUSTOM EMBROIDERY & PRINTING

you add a tag line that sounds like you, and helps people understand what you offer?

As you review all the ways you market your business, I want you to ask yourself these questions:

Does your marketing look, sound, and feel like you? Does it help your community know who you really are?

Does your marketing reflect your values, what you believe in, and what you stand for?

Don’t offer a snooze fest when it comes to marketing your business. What is one thing that you can do this week to spice up your messaging? How can you add more *you* in your business?

If you are unsure where or how to begin marketing your business, email me at jennifer@nnep.com and I will send you a list of marketing ideas that are all less than \$100, and have proven to be effective for apparel decoration professionals. Include this as the subject line: **Marketing Ideas Under \$100**. I’d love to help you get some marketing in place for your business. **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@nnep.com.

The Rising Tide of Business

Hold Yourself Accountable

AS A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER, ARE YOU A CONTENDER OR PRETENDER?

If you know me, you know I love small business owners. All the qualities you possess are attractive to me; industrious, hard-working, ambitious, resourceful, and most importantly, accountable. So, when I heard someone make a pretty frank comment about small business owners, I was a little taken aback. He said, “Everyone deserves to start a business. Not everyone deserves to stay in business.” How dare he claim that not everyone deserves to stay in business. But once I let this frank comment sink in a bit, I realized he might be right. Quickly my problem-solving side jumped out, and I began thinking about what some small business owners do that gets them into the “deserve” camp? What allows them to grow and thrive? We know we have challenges to overcome, so what do the contenders do differently from the pretenders?

I realized that we must hold up the proverbial mirror and ask ourselves the tricky questions that lead to; “Am I doing *everything* I need to do?”

DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

I believe in the good of everyone and have worked hard to surround myself with positive people. I even speak up when I feel like those around me are not being as positive as they could. They are attracting exactly what they don’t want into their lives. I’m left out of the industry’s good ole boy network because I don’t complain enough. Many friends from the 20+ years I have spent in this industry think I’m nuts for trying to teach business foundation, mindset, and success principles. They know the turnover rate our industry struggles with and is honestly the dirty little secret no one tells the new people. Most of the training in the industry comes from the people selling equipment and supplies, and it is their job to get you excited about the latest and greatest. But the equipment

and supplies do not determine success or failure. Otherwise, only the people who spent the money on the high-end products would be successful. Anyone who used third-party ink and bought cheap presses would always fail. But we know that is not true. People with huge budgets have gone out of business. Other businesses started with less than \$500 and are very successful.

The fact of the matter is our industry has so many new companies coming into the market that they never had to worry about creating good businesspeople. They only have to get people excited about the potential.

What is the difference between someone who is making it work and someone who is struggling? I know it is not the capital they have, the support they get, or even where they live. I hear those three “excuses” all the time, and I can’t buy them. I have seen people do more with less.

Out of the love I have for small businesses, I will ask you to hold yourself accountable. So here is what I see separating the contenders from the pretenders.

HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Check your emails. Like it or not, email is an essential business tool. Many people are wearing the “10,000 unread email notifications” as a badge of honor and are missing tremendous opportunities. You need to learn how to utilize email. Start by figuring out what is going to your spam folder. Then figure out how to safelist what you need for your business success and unsubscribe from everything else. You will find gold in your email only once you embrace it and use it how it is designed to be used.

Use a calendar. I can’t tell you how many times a day I hear, “oh, yeah, I forgot about that.” You are a business owner, a single mom, or perhaps you have a day

job. You have many other responsibilities, so use a calendar to keep track of your life. Be religious about getting appointments, training, standing events, family time, work time, and other things in your calendar. Then, review the whole schedule weekly and daily to make sure you are prepared for what’s to come. For a business owner to be a contender, you need to be proficient in using a calendar, then email, and then spreadsheets.

Uphold your commitments. Business is about building trust. And not only the trust of your customers but the other people involved with your business, your support team, your mastermind group, your mentors, and your vendors. Do what you say you are going to do. Start with delivering orders on time. Then look at all the other commitments you are making. Look in the mirror and figure out what things are serving you and what things are just done to be a people pleaser. Once you can discern the two, learn to say no gracefully and keep your commitments.

Get active in the communities that matter. I see many people who will post a funny picture, share some random quiz, or even jump into the fray when it comes to politics or religion on social media. Awesome! You do you! But what makes you a pretender is that you don’t share nearly enough about your business in those same spaces. And if sharing your business there doesn’t seem appropriate, should you be spending that time in that space? Look at the communities online or otherwise that you are active in. Are those groups overly moderated, about the latest copyright art someone stole, or honestly more for chit-chat? Spend your valuable time having helpful conversations, not just consuming algorithm feeds. Get engaged in the discussions if it serves all parties involved or get out.

Know your numbers. What does it



BY AARON MONTGOMERY

“ The moment you no longer have excuses and instead take 100% responsibility for your business, start taking action, asking for help, and investing in yourself is the day you “deserve” to be successful. ”

cost you to open your doors? Don't know with a level of certainty? If not, stop what you are doing and go figure it out. Once you know that number, then what is your average order size? Then on average, what is your profit margin? When you know those numbers, you can reverse engineer what you need to do to reach your idea of success. I overheard someone complaining about her Etsy store and that she gets excellent reviews. Still, FedEx, UPS, and the post office are why her store is not more successful. If she knew her numbers, she could determine how many orders would have an issue with the shipping company. Then she could try to fix those shipping issues and add the needed profit to the pricing to cover those issues. Her excuses would instead become the reason she has the best reviews.

Charge what you are worth. Once you know your numbers, it is almost laughable how easy it becomes to charge what you are worth. As graphics professionals, we are in a unique space. We take something manufactured by others (a consumable) and add value to it. Even the low-price leaders must add value, which is why we lose so many small businesses each year. They don't have enough confidence to ask for what they are worth, yet will buy the latest and greatest toy, scratch and claw, and do everything else but charge what they are worth.

STOP creating excuses. If there is some reason that you are not successful, which is anything but looking directly in the mirror, then someone else will always be in control of your success. I know this is hard to hear, and many of you have dealt

with some complex challenges. But I'm here to tell you that each one of you deserves to stay in business as long as you stop blaming someone or something else.

Take your power back and look at every situation from “How could I respond differently to get to the outcome I desire eventually?”

DITCH THE EXCUSES

Here is a breakdown of those excuses I mentioned earlier and why I can't buy them.

My town won't pay that price. If this is true, can you move? It's like the weather. We complain about it because we know there is better weather elsewhere. Can't move? Why? Maybe you love your town or family or some other potential excuse. If you change your viewpoint from finding an excuse to finding a solution, you will find a way to get enough people in your town (or online) to pay what you need to charge. Someone in your town owns a designer handbag or a pair of Nike shoes. Therefore, someone in your town is willing to pay a premium for a product they perceive as worth that price. Your job becomes solving the perceived value issue or finding a new market.

Not enough resources. What are the resources that you need? Then, try to figure out how to get those resources. Can you start charging more, ask for help, write a business plan and ask for money, get a partner, or find some creative solution to gain the resources you need? It is not a lack of resources you are struggling with but rather a lack of belief in yourself and understanding that there is plenty to

go around. You must go get it, embrace it, grab the opportunities, and create the resources you need.

Not enough support. Like resources, what support do you need? Have you asked more than one person for it? Have you asked more than 100 people for the help you need? Maybe your spouse is not supporting you as you would like? Do they know the reality of what that is doing to you? How important is their support? How important is your business to you and them? Are you supporting yourself enough? Do you get up in the morning and affirm to yourself that you will reach your goals? Do you look at yourself in the mirror and let your soul know you believe in yourself? Does it all sound a bit “out there?” What if it does work, and you were too focused on your excuses, getting left behind in the contender camp? According to Wikipedia, Warren Buffet (The third richest person in the world) said, “I always knew I was going to be rich. I don't think I ever doubted it for a minute.”

The moment you no longer have excuses and instead take 100% responsibility for your business, start taking action, asking for help, and investing in yourself is the day you “deserve” to be successful. Are you willing to look hard enough in the mirror to make that happen? **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).

Making Sublimation Moves

Buy Product and Supplies with Net Profit in Mind

SMART CREDIT DECISIONS ON INVENTORY CAN BOOST YOUR BOTTOM LINE

When in business, we tend to focus on the obvious due to it being right in front of us, and it typically requires our undivided attention, more often than not. Many shops do not make the time to research how they are buying their products and supplies. Let's take a moment and go over some ways that improving this can help your company in many ways!

1 Look at all of your vendors and see who accepts American Express and does not charge a credit card fee. Right away you are thinking, "Why?" If they accept American Express, you can pay your net 30 terms with the Amex, which give you 30 more days of zero interest if you pay the balance off in full every month. So, if your team is taking a little longer on an order or a customer is running behind on a payment, you do not have to worry. You have given yourself a 60-day buffer. That's not all! You get something in return, which is American Express points, which can be used for several things like buying things for your company along with covering the cost of travel. So, this turns your net 30 into a net 60 for free and helps you make money from the money you already have to spend. That is a win, win. Also, some companies may tell you they charge a credit card fee, but I have negotiated zero credit card fees with some companies, so it is possible to do. Explain to them your volume of business and your growth patterns. Them investing 3-4% into paying the credit card processing fee is a small drop in the bucket for gaining thousands a year in business.

2 In our company, we order product every day for customer orders. When we first started up, we would hold and order every other day, but now that we are larger, we can order every day and earn free shipping with the majority of our vendors. We also pay attention to what time of the day we are ordering and

closing out by. Why is that? Cut off to have your orders in for most companies is 4-5 p.m. but that does not mean your order is guaranteed to ship, so we adjusted our team to start ordering by noon and close out by 3 p.m. to ensure we have a 99% chance of our orders getting packed up and shipped out the same day.

While ordering, our product is a four- or five-day ship to our location. We normally will upgrade it to a three-day ship, which gives our team an extra day or two to fit it in to production to gain time. Any advantage you can give your team not only helps you, but also helps your customer in return. Nothing better than under promising and over delivering on a due date to a customer. If you have a rush emergency, you do not just want to order it and walk away thinking it is fine. Take the extra step of emailing your rep with the order info and then follow up with a phone call to make sure they are following the order for you. Your inside sales rep is an extension of your team, and you need to utilize them as much as possible. They will create another layer of protection for your orders, which protects your customers.

3 Around four years ago, we started stocking certain blank products like T-shirts, for example. We reached out to our vendors to see what the yearly total was, colors, and quantity per sizes purchased. From there, I determined the top-five color choices along with the average quantity per size. This helped me to determine how many per month I needed to keep in stock.

We also worked out a pricing structure deal with our vendor based on our buying history as well. So, they knew we would be guaranteed to buy a minimum if we locked in a price with them, which also helped them determine stock on their side as well. Keeping stock in house helps in several ways. You are not having to wait for your daily delivery to start an order. You can take rush orders and produce them at a much quicker rate. If your team runs across a defective piece or has a misprinted shirt, they can pull another from stock without losing time. This all helps your company to produce faster and net a better profit if managed well. Every day when our team is ordering they will check our internal stock and notify a manager if they are getting low so they can always backfill any stock needed on the fly.

4 Buying supplies is always interesting in the ways to purchase them. Every Wednesday, we order supplies for the following week. Since we have a production schedule and each order tells us roughly what is needed, our managers can check that against our stock to ensure we not only have enough but extra just in case. Each manager will fill out a supply sheet that



We order embroidery backers in bulk.



BY HOWARD
POTTER



This year, I worked a deal on 4' x 8' aluminum sign boards. (All images courtesy Howard Potter)

I double-check. When I am spot checking it, I am checking to make sure we are not overordering and staying in our budget range weekly and monthly.

If there is a spike in sales, then we should be seeing a spike typically in supplies needed. Another thing we do is apply the same method of gaining solid pricing year-round on certain supplies like we did with our T-shirts. We know the guaranteed base minimum we will order and lock in a deal for a set price. So, certain products we will buy, say five to 10 gallons of ink, and certain sprays by the cases. This is one less item my team has to order weekly, and we save over the year on the extra freight since some manufacturers give you free shipping if you spend over a certain dollar amount. Recently this year, I worked a deal on 4' x 8' aluminum sign boards. I looked up that we sold a minimum of 50 sheets and normally we produce a minimum of four per month, so I worked out a deal to purchase the 50 sheets up front and the wholesaler gave me a net 60 terms on the purchase. I knew if I only sold eight boards in two months it would cover the purchase, so I pay for the boards using our Amex to gain the points and turn the purchase into a net 90 and gain the points, but that is not all! I got the boards for \$8 less per board, so now I gained an additional \$400 in net profit for simply buying something in bulk that I know is guaranteed to sell. In this deal I was able to not only make our credit work for us, but gain a better margin in profit, and gain backend points. It is not how much you have, but what you do with it!

We are all busy and we are all strapped for time each day but try to take an hour or two a week and examine what I have explained and work it to apply to every process and as many products as you can. It will not only help you become more efficient, help your production team, and sales team but help you net a better return on your investment for your company in the end. A win, win for all! **GP**

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



We know the guaranteed base minimum we will order and lock in a deal for a set price. So, certain products we will buy by the cases, like ink and certain sprays.



Laserable cups are popular, so we have no issues ordering them in bulk.



Ordering digital printing ink in bulk can cut down on shipping costs.



Around four years ago, we started stocking certain blank products like these T-shirts, for example.

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Why Bamboo Cutting Boards Are Great for Personalization

COURTESY OF JDS INDUSTRIES INC.

Bamboo cutting boards are popular, with many styles available. What makes bamboo the material of choice? Here are a few things to consider:

1. Eco-friendly!
2. Durable — properly cared-for boards will last for years!
3. Beautiful — lasered to a natural contrast or color filled for a bold contrast, it fits with any kitchen decor.
4. Economical — the price point is much lower than genuine wood boards of comparable size.
5. Provides a strong, dense cutting surface, and it's easy on knives.
6. Easy to clean!
7. Bamboo cutting boards make a great personalized gift for any occasion.



Images courtesy JDS Industries Inc.

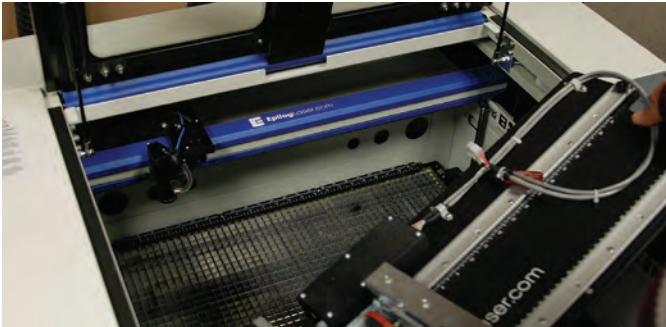




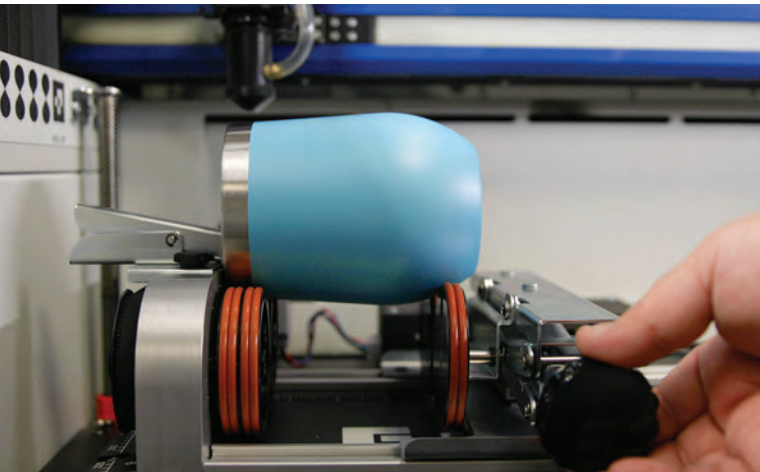
How to Laser Engrave Wine Tumblers

COURTESY OF EPILOG LASER

Images courtesy Epilog Laser



Step 1: Measure the tumblers and customize your artwork.



Step 2: Lower the table enough to make room for your rotary attachment, then power off your machine. Place the rotary in the upper left corner of the table, plug it in and power your laser back on.

Kee your vino at just the right temperature with these powder-coated wine tumblers! Your customers will love these wine tumblers for their next festive event or even just a night in with friends. They also make great gifts!

Follow these four steps for successful laser engraving:



Step 3: Insert the tumbler and send the job to the laser.



Step 4: Wipe away any residue, and you're all set!





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Economical Glass Awards

COURTESY OF CRYSTAL BY DESIGN

Glass and crystal awards are usually associated with high-end and high-cost and catered towards those that have a large budget to spend on their recognition programs.

However, people aren't aware that glass can be quite economical as well, depending on the style chosen and the decorating method. There are three features that will help cut down on cost, including:

1. Glass that is not too thick
2. Awards that use a cheaper material for the base, like a small wood or metal stand
3. Molded items instead of hand-cut — this will result in an award that has the elegance of glass but doesn't break the bank



Images courtesy Crystal by Design



CGA

THE BEST FOR THE BEST



Winners are the best because of all their hard work and effort, so why not give them the best? Our awards and gifts are all handmade by the most experienced crafters with unique designs conceived at our US office. Contact us for a free catalog!

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info@crystalbydesign.com

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Sublimate Vacuum-Insulated Drinkware

COURTESY OF JDS INDUSTRIES INC.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

1. Substrate
2. Transfer
3. Scratch paper
4. Heat tape

SETTINGS:

1. Temperature: 380 F
2. Dwell time: 1:00-1:15
3. Pressure: Light to medium

STEPS:

1. Cut transfer larger than the substrate and tape it.
2. Wrap a piece of scratch paper around it and tape it.
3. Center the drinkware item in the mug press and close it.
4. Remove the item carefully.
5. Remove the transfer and scratch paper.

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PRO TIP:

A double mug press cuts production time in half and can sublimate a water bottle!

Images courtesy JDS Industries Inc.



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Engrave Silicone Tumbler Wraps

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS



Images courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus

Offer your customers personalized drinkware without needing a rotary attachment for your laser! Tumblers with removable silicone sleeves can be easily customized in any laser, and here are the simple steps you need to follow to make that happen.

1. Place the silicone sleeve in the laser.
2. Use tape or a jig to hold it flat. You can also use a custom jig to position and hold the sleeve flat.
3. Adjust the focus of the laser to the surface of the sleeve.
4. Position the artwork and engrave using the suggested settings for your laser. **Power:** 40% **Speed:** 80% **Resolution:** 600 DPI for a 60W laser
5. When finished, remove the sleeve and clean it with soap and water.

You can find artwork templates for the sleeves at <https://www.jpplus.com/silicone-sleeve-tumbler>

Don't miss the how-to video on the JPPlus YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/wp9YOUUF3SY>

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Customize Mini Plant Boxes with Your Laser

COURTESY OF EPILOG LASER

Bring the outdoors in with these customized wooden planter boxes! Whether you're in a warm or cool climate, these little cubes make it easy to create a custom garden you can enjoy year-round!

Step 1: Customize your artwork as necessary. You can use the files we provide or come up with your own graphics or phrases.

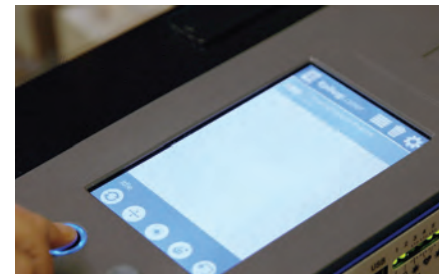
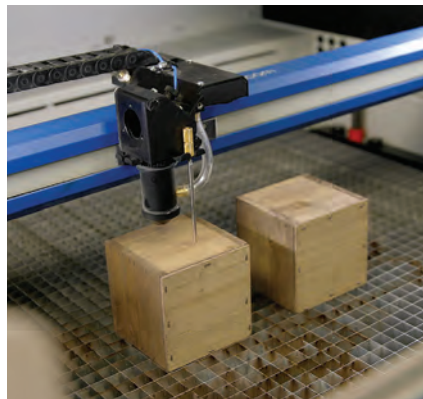
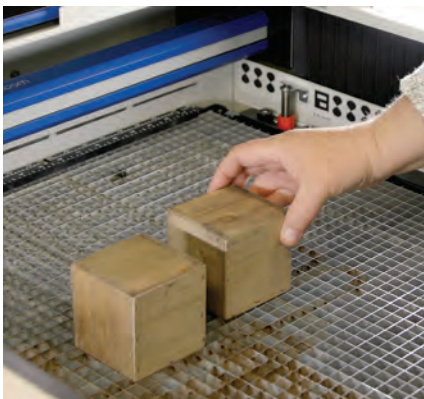
Step 2: Use the bottom of the box to test different speed/power/frequency settings for your planter boxes.

Step 3: Place your planter boxes on the laser bed, focus the table, close the lid, and run the job.

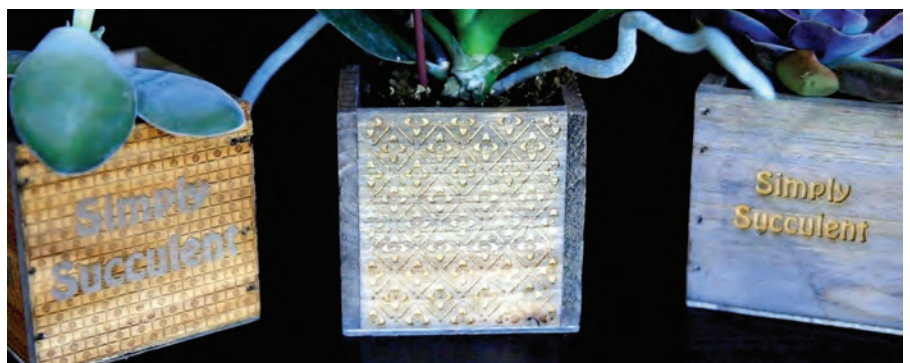
Step 4: Place your favorite plant in the custom engraved box and enjoy!



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Images courtesy Epilog Laser





Top 10 Products for the Summer

COURTESY OF JOHNSON PLASTICS PLUS

It's time for summer fun, and there are hundreds of items available to personalize for your customers during the warm weather. Here's a look at the 10 best-selling items for summer fun!

1. Personalize items, like tumblers, with sublimation, vinyl, or heat transfer printing.
2. Add a touch of sublimated summer fun to any garden or yard!
3. Saddle Collection items are laserable and offer a rich, leather-like look and feel.
4. Great for company picnics or graduation parties, sublimatable insulators can be personalized for any occasion.
5. Cutting boards can be personalized with a laser, UV-LED printer, vinyl, or heat transfer.
6. Sublimatable burlap totes are perfect for a day at the beach!
7. Any outdoorsperson will love a stunning and functional curved handle knife.
8. Personalize flip flops with sublimation for the perfect amount of summer fun!
9. Get ready for some international adventures with a laserable leather-like passport holder.
10. Laser and rotary engravable or UV-LED printable, 12-oz. stemless wine glasses are perfect for summer. **CGA**



Images courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus





Big Engravings = Big Profits

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Personalization can increase the value of your products up to 400%. So why not go bigger? From tumblers to granite monuments, a laser engraving or cutting machine with an open-architecture design allows for no weight or size restrictions. Here are five ideas for this type of laser:

- 1. Bar stools:** Grab a \$20 stool from Walmart and transform it into a unique treasure. Depending on artwork and customization, stools like this go for \$100 and up.
- 2. Signage:** Producing large-scale signs for local businesses can be a lucrative opportunity.
- 3. Wine barrels:** Large barrels are a unique commodity and can even be quite expensive. Because of this, you'll make your money back after you add a custom engraving.
- 4. Flooring:** AP Lazer's design makes it possible to remove the laser top and place it directly onto a surface, like flooring.
- 5. Granite memorials:** From wooden and metal caskets to granite memorials and musical instruments, open-architecture machines can provide a unique life celebration through personalization.

CGA



Images courtesy AP Lazer

2

1



3



4



5

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★ Indicates Featured Exhibitors 🍏 Indicates Training in the Classroom 🛑 Indicates Training Stop

- 4U Media & Displays LLC
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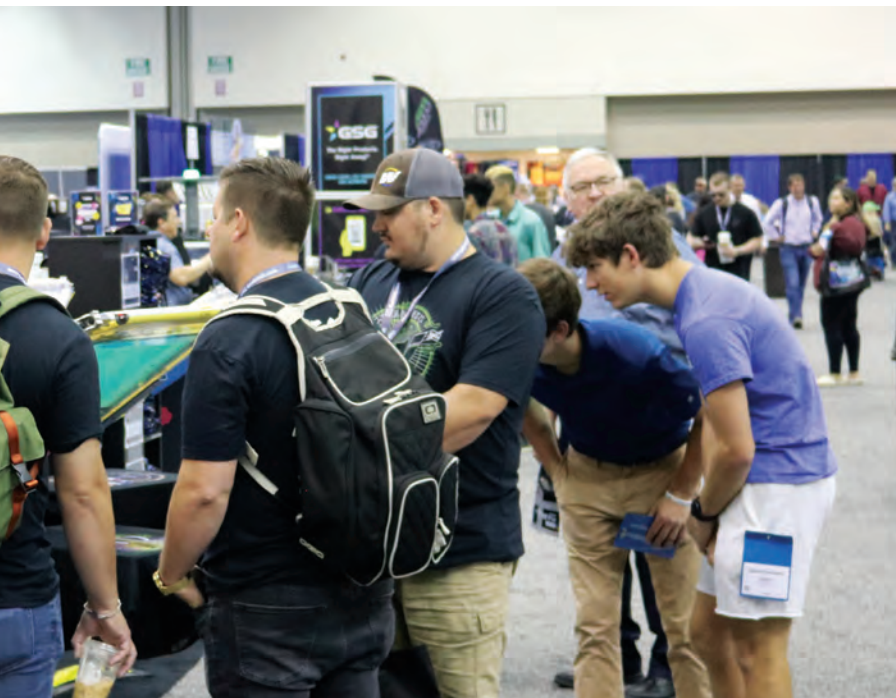


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TRAINING SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2022

10 a.m. — 4 p.m.

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

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

- Epilog Laser** - Finding Success in the Laser Engraving Industry: Application Ideas and Tips to Boost Production **START HERE**
- JDS Industries** - Starting Sublimation: What Do I Need? **START HERE**

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- IKONICS Imaging** - Lights, Camera, Action! Become a Sandcarving Star! **START HERE**

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2022 cont.

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m. cont.

- Transfer Express** - Screen Print with Just a Heat Press **START HERE**
- PDS Equipment** - Energize your Business with UV Print **START HERE**

1:30-3 p.m.

- HIX® Corporation** - Learning the Sublimation Business

4-5:30 p.m.

- Advertising Specialty Institute** - Sell More to Existing Customers **PRO**
- Corel Trainer** - Everyone Can Learn CorelDRAW **START HERE**

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TRAINING SCHEDULE cont.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

- Transfer Express** - Print More than T-Shirts **PRO**

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- Rayzist Photomask Inc** - Learn Sandcarving with Rayzist Photomask **START HERE**
- STAHL'S** - Printing Outside of the T-Shirt Box **START HERE**
- General Formulations** - Which Glue is Right for you? **START HERE**

1:30-3 p.m.

- Trotec Laser** - Skills, Materials & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment
- OmniPrint Intl.** - DTF is Here to Stay: Leveraging Direct to Film Printing to Scale your Business!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - Pricing Strategies: Are you Getting Paid for your Time? with Matt Charboneau **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO** - Accelerating your Screen-Printed Apparel Decorating Techniques, with Lon Winters **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO** - From the Gargantuan to the Itsy-Bitsy: A Pro's Guide to Holding & Engraving the Ridiculous, with Lori Champagne **PRO**

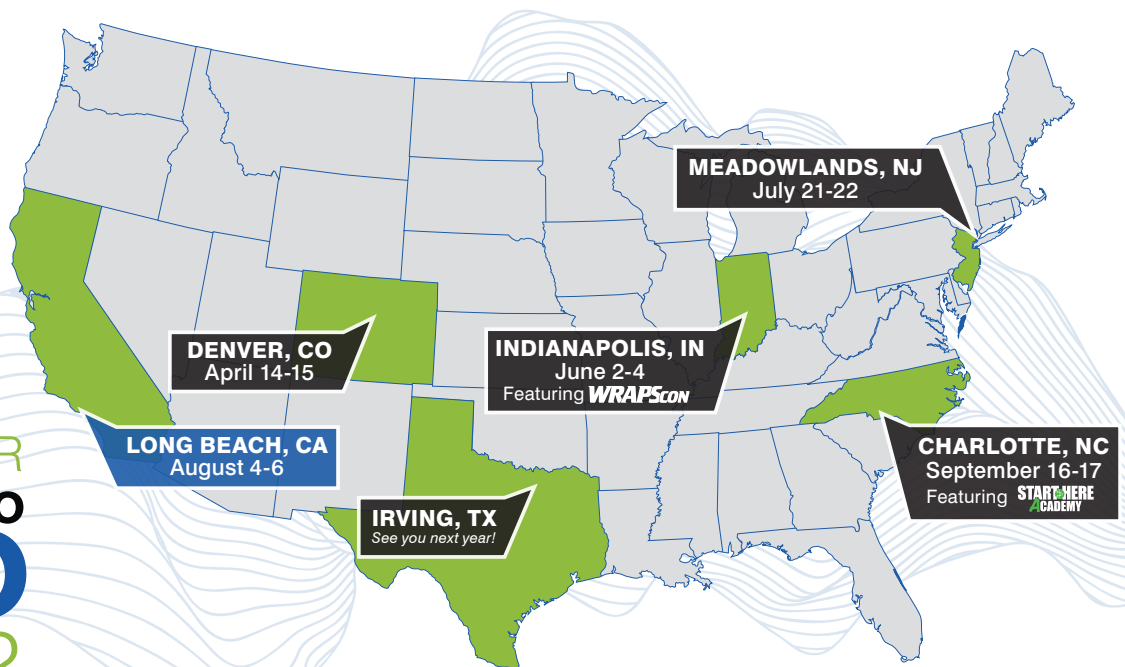
11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - Managing the Details of the Sign Creation Process, with Matt Charboneau **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO** - Making the Most of your Production Time and Energy in Small Business, with Lori Champagne **PRO**



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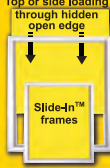

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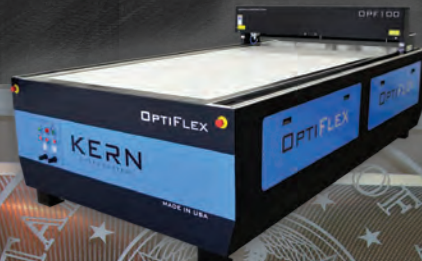
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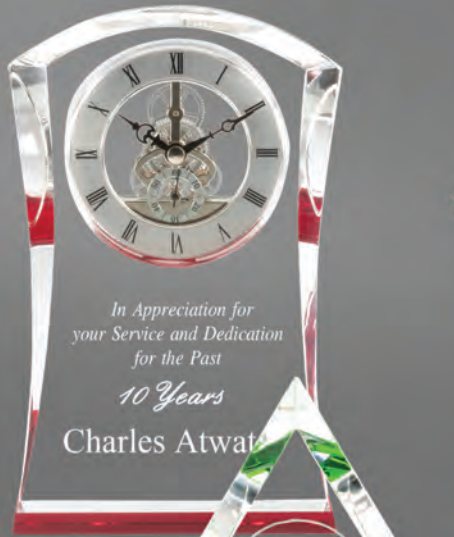
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