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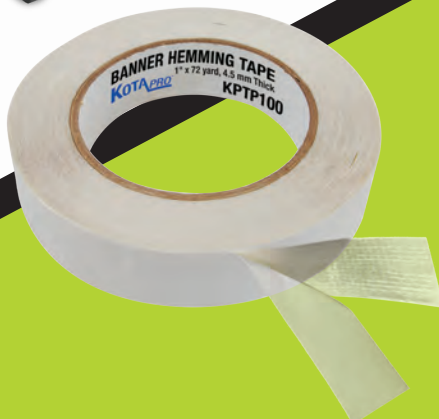
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(Image courtesy Citadel Brands)

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EDITORIAL INTERN

NATHAN STROMBERG nstromberg@nbm.com

BUSINESS MINEFIELD

Maybe this sounds a little dramatic, but business is a minefield. During a sale, there are hundreds of ways to step on one of these mines and botch the job, most of which you won't even realize you hit because you never see that client again, and then they leave a negative comment online.

If your customer service is perfect, but your product isn't, there's a chance to lose business. If the opposite is true, same thing. If your customer service and product are perfect, but you're late with delivery, there's another one. If you've nailed the service, product, and delivery but come in at a higher-than-expected price point, well, you get the picture.

With all these variables needing to be perfect to guarantee repeat business, it's good that your competition is also human and will be going through that same minefield. All you have to do is hit on all the right marks more often than your competition. No sweat.

It's hard to put a finger on the most important part of reeling in repeat business, but if I had to guess, I'd say customer service. These days, people don't want hassle. They don't want drama. And there's nothing easier in the world than a customer moving on from doing business with a company that made them feel underappreciated.

You can fix a messed-up order. You can fix a defective product. But there are libraries dedicated to trying to fix broken relationships, so that's probably where you really need to watch your step.

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SIGNING OFF

This publication has certainly evolved over the years. “GRAPHICS PRO” is the current configuration, but that was not where it all started.

It started out as “Sign Business Magazine”, the brainchild of NBM Inc. owner Bob Wieber. Bob and I go way back, more years that we might want to consider, and I was given the opportunity to be involved from the very beginning.

The beginning, at least officially, was back in October 1986. Sign Business Magazine first appeared as a color tabloid, not a glossy magazine. And in that initial issue was the first “In the Trenches” column, and even a “Shop Talk” column or two.

“Writer? Me?” That should have been my take on things. I was simply running a small commercial sign shop down in Longview, Texas, which did not make me an expert on anything. But, it was possible for me to write about the day-to-day struggles of a small scale sign business, and share insights and sometimes hard-learned lessons with my readers.

That was 36 years and over 400 “Trenches” articles ago. Working way more than full-time, and then writing articles every month meant a lot of my writing was done when I should have been sleeping. How much better a writer I might have been if I had done the work during my waking hours!

But, though it was a big commitment, the work was also fun. Getting to share so much of my life and career with the readers over the years, getting feedback from many of them, and making friends like Dan from Wisconsin, who still sends me cheese from his great state at Christmas.

Within two or three years, NBM Inc. moved into the trade show business, and it was determined that I should be an instructor

in the education program at the shows. Oh boy, now that was a stretch!

I recall the first class I ever taught, given to a packed room in Atlantic City, and attended by some of the best sign guys in the business. My knees were shaking so hard it was a wonder I could stand, and a few filmed with video cameras to add to the pressure. I survived this stressful initiation somehow, then went on to teach for about 20 years. I even learned to enjoy it.

I enjoyed meeting folks like Maryellen, who had a very small sign shop in the farm country of central Ohio. She was a student in an all-day workshop, and by the end of the day had adopted my 12-year-old son, Sloan, and took him home with her for the next few days. We became good friends and have stayed in touch with the whole family over the years.

The trade shows give everyone even more opportunities to network and share information, view new equipment and technology, and get to know fellow signmakers from all over the country. Also, at least for me, becoming at home in cities like Charlotte, Indianapolis, and Long Beach has been a bonus, too.

Though I’ve certainly been an attendee, I haven’t taught at the trade shows for a few years, but have continued to contribute articles monthly. But, after way more than three decades, I think the time has come to step down from this podium and let others, younger and more qualified than I am, step into my shoes.

I would like to thank Bob, Matt, Regan, and the NBM Inc., staff for giving me all the opportunities they have, and especially thank my readers, students and friends who have been so encouraging to me over the years.

At least for now, I will sign off from here in the Trenches. I hope you have a good month and a really great year.

Rick



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BY JULIA SCHROEDER

The most important thing anyone can do when working with special effect transfers is to have an accurate heat press that provides consistent pressure across the platen. (Image courtesy STAHL'S)



A puff special effect has seen an increase in popularity. (Image courtesy Transfer Express)



If you are looking for a shine, shimmer, raised 3D effect, glow, or foil, Romano says you'll need to switch over to a vinyl or screen-printed heat transfer option. (Image courtesy Transfer Express)

As the heat-applied graphics industry evolves, so do the unique decoration applications that a shop can offer its customers. Heat-applied graphics can allow for a shop to offer a variety of special effects.

“Special effect heat printed graphics puts you in another realm when it comes to creativity, speed of delivery, and the ability to print just one piece,” says Josh Ellsworth, STAHL’S. Heat printing offers flexibility, quality results, and profitability when executed correctly.

Since special effects are a unique offering, you can charge a premium price, where your costs stay the same, increasing your profits, says Michael Romano, Transfer Express. While special effects may only be a small percentage of orders, offering them typically comes at no extra cost or work, and offers your customers a good experience. Romano points out that you can become a one-stop shop when you offer special effect transfers, such as glitter, glow-in-the-dark, puff, metallic, reflective, foil, distress, patterns, and full color.

Adam McCauley, Sandlot Sports, agrees there are several advantages for a shop to offer special effects. “From a customer perspective, they have a decoration partner that is staying up to date on current trends and decoration styles,” McCauley explains. This allows a shop to build a reputation as a company that doesn’t stick to one thing.

The main benefit, according to Jeremy Picker, AMB3R Creative, is the versatility of different applications and the minimal startup costs compared to other decoration methods. “A lot of shops already have heat presses for custom numbering, name drops, or specialty garments, so bringing in new heat transfer styles is a quick add-on that doesn’t take much on the education side,” Picker says. “The transfer companies already provide recommended heat, pressure, and time, so it’s a matter of helping your client choose the right looks and education of what is possible for their merchandise.”

WHAT’S TRENDING

What are the current special effect trends in heat-applied graphics?

- **UV-Reactive Vinyl:** One of the most popular new special effects trends this year is color-changing heat transfer vinyl. Ellsworth explains that UV-reactive vinyl is a sun-changing heat transfer vinyl material that looks white when indoors and changes color when exposed to UV light.

- **Patches:** The fastest growing trend, particularly in the sports world, is heat-applied patches and flex style patches. “They are detailed, textured, holographic, flat, or 3D,” says McCauley. Hats are the most popular products that Picker sees utilizing



One of the most popular new special effects trends this year is color-changing heat transfer vinyl. (Image courtesy STAHL'S)



UV-reactive vinyl is a sun-changing heat transfer vinyl material that looks white when indoors and changes color when exposed to UV light. (Image courtesy STAHL'S)



Heat-applied graphics can allow for a shop to offer a variety of special effects. (Image courtesy Sandlot Sports)

this style of heat-applied graphics. “These flex style patches allow some shops to keep lower inventory while allowing for quick turn times for production,” Picker says. “These patches also lend a diverse product mix of hat styles, and it can be applied to multiple locations on the hat.”

- **Puff:** A puff special effect has seen an increase in popularity, according to Romano. Designs using a puff ink or vinyl have a raised 3D area in the design, so it pops off the apparel more, with a more defined edge. Decorators can also combine this puff special effect with dyed garments.

- **Full Color:** While one- or two-color designs are still the main trend, full color designs are being seen more, according to Romano. Even if the design is not “full color,” with shading and gradients, designs with many spot colors are increasing in popularity. Neon colors are also back again. Ellsworth predicts you will see a lot of neon in garment decoration in the coming months.

- **Other Timeless Options:** While it is not new by any means, distressed images are still a staple, making designs look vintage, Romano says. While rhinestones are not a current hot trend, Romano says you can still offer a faux rhinestone look with metallic dots of ink. This can be done using a screen-printed transfer and a glitter, pearl, or metallic ink type. Animal prints also remain strong contenders, Ellsworth adds.

LATEST ADVANCEMENTS

Decorators can create different effects based on the heat-applied method. “When it comes to special effect transfers, there are several avenues you can try,” says Romano. “Each has their pros and cons, along with a time and place for each decoration method.” More options are available due to advancements in technology, including heat transfer vinyl, direct-to-film (DTF), sublimation, and screen printing.

- **Direct-to-Film:** Direct-to-film (DTF) transfers can be applied on different types of materials, such as polyester, cotton, and spandex apparel. This makes it an ideal process for reoccurring corporate or sport online stores. DTF transfers are also economical for low runs. “If a customer comes to you wanting a full color graphic in a low quantity, your customer won’t leave with sticker shock,” says Romano. “You’ll be able to fulfill the order and still make a healthy margin for yourself.” (*Be sure to visit GRAPHIC PRO’s July 2022 issue for a full rundown on DTF at <https://gpro.link/july>*)

- **Sublimation:** Sublimation is an ideal decoration technique for printing on 100% polyester pieces. “The sky is the limit

Must-Have Heat Printing Accessories

BY JOSH ELLSWORTH, STAHL'S

with sublimation,” says McCauley. Many uniforms and jerseys are produced using sublimation because you can decorate the entire garment with vibrant colors. However, like DTF, you won't be getting any specialty finishes with sublimation, Romano adds, unless combined with another method.

• **Screen Printing:** Screen-printed transfers will still get you a quality special effect at a reasonable price, according to Romano. “There will be less work involved and you can get a detailed, intricate design. Screen-printed transfers make special effects, like distress, a breeze.”

• **Heat Transfer Vinyl:** Heat transfer vinyl (HTV) is usually designed as a simple logo in one color, McCauley explains. “The material is usually a thicker material that holds up well over time.” Advances in HTV come in the form of improved adhesives or a new special effect, according to Ellsworth. “An improved adhesive would mean a thermal-activated adhesive, which is more durable, applies at a lower temperature, has less of a carbon footprint or any combination of these attributes,” he says. “Special effects for heat transfer vinyl could be just about anything, such as puff, color reflective, color changing, and neon metallic.”

- Teflon pillows can be essential to the success of some printing jobs. You can use a pillow to even out the printing surface when there are zippers or seams. However, always make sure you follow manufacturer's instructions because some transfers cannot be applied using a cover sheet.
- Other transfers require a cover sheet. Cover sheets can also be used to change the finish of a transfer.
- Some people use a laser alignment system to position graphics. Others have layout templates or use T-square rulers. Some transfers have grids printed on the back of the paper on which they are printed. It all depends on your level of experience and your confidence in positioning.
- There are also many other accessories associated with the heat transfer vinyl process, including weeding tools, weeding tables, and heat erasers.

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The fastest growing trend Adam McCauley of Sandlot Sports sees, particularly in the sports world, is heat-applied patches and flex style patches. (Image courtesy Sandlot Sports)

The best innovations are a combination of everything the heat printer is looking for to fill a need, Ellsworth says. “There are quite a few options when it comes to heat transfers, including the screen-printed transfer, die-cut numbers and letters, inkjet transfers, and other digital transfers,” he says. “In the long run, it all comes down (to) the type of artwork you have (number of colors, complexity, detail, etc.), the number of pieces you need printed, the fabric you are printing upon, and the type of finish you want to achieve.”

For example, he says you may not find neon colors available for DTF transfers. Decorators would have to use a screen-printed transfer or heat transfer vinyl. Additionally, direct-to-film and sublimation transfers work great for full color graphics, Romano says. But if you are



As the heat-applied graphics industry evolves, so do the unique decoration applications that a shop can offer its customers. (Image courtesy Sandlot Sports)



(Image courtesy Transfer Express)

Good Design Practices for Special Effects

BY MICHAEL ROMANO, TRANSFER EXPRESS

Like with any apparel decoration method, designs with “open spaces” will be your friend. This is no different with special effect transfers. Negative spaces that let the shirt show through will help keep the decoration area light to the feel and touch while being worn.

This will also allow a special effect transfer like Puff to be more visible with lots of raised areas along with low areas, to accentuate the effect. Speaking of puff, adding a standard ink, or vinyl, along with the puff will also add another way to have contrast in dimension on the print.

Don’t get too detailed with special effect transfers. Special effects like puff, glitter, and foil don’t do as well with small, detailed areas. The area has to “hold” to the shirt when applied and keep any show-through areas from closing due to small detail. Some special effect transfers like glow-in-the-dark and glitter will do better with larger areas of ink, so the special effect can be seen, which may not be as visible with small line weights.

It comes down to knowing the special effect options and thinking about what will help it be seen more and work with the materials. Good design practices are always helpful to keep in mind. A good design for the desired special effect will go a long way.

looking for a shine, shimmer, raised 3D effect, glow, or foil, you'll need to switch over to a vinyl or screen-printed heat transfer option.

EXTRA TOOLS AND TIPS

The most important thing anyone can do when working with special effect transfers is to have an accurate heat press that provides consistent pressure across the platen. A successful heat transfer application — no matter the type of transfer — requires accurate time, temperature, and pressure. If you are applying a new heat transfer on a new type of fabric for the first time, Ellsworth advises to make sure the fabric can withstand the application temperature.

“Test, test, test is my call to action for this,” Picker says. “Not all transfers will work on all fabric types, so be sure to test for your client before you accept the order.”

As some special effects are difficult to produce and sometimes reproduce, McCauley says not to overdo it and know your strengths. “If you are in a production setting, think about the time and energy you are putting into each of your pieces,” he says. “Make sure the juice is worth the squeeze and make sure the customers know you are adding value.”

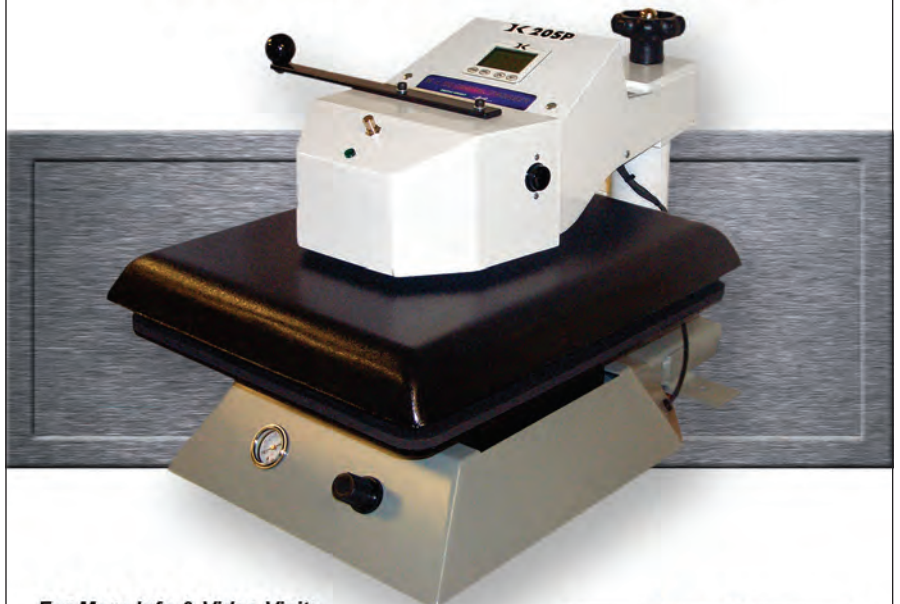
You can push the technique by pushing the creative design behind it, Picker says. “Don’t just stick with the logo slap or a design that was created for a website or print. Sometimes that fits, but I suggest you really design for the medium, whether you do it in house or you work with an experienced apparel designer.”

Overall, decorators can achieve several different special effects finishes and looks for apparel, accessories, and more, all with the same equipment and setup. **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.

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Siser North America offers the DigiBrick, which is 750-micron, printable digital media. The product has a smooth, matte finish and is compatible with eco-solvent and solvent-based printers/cutters.

866-301-9409
siserna.com

DTF PRINTER

CoIdesi Inc. offers the four-head DTF-24H4, which prints at 145-155 linear feet of full-color film printing per hour. It has an integrated roll-fed film printer, hot melt applicator, and belt dryer.

877-793-3278
coldesi.com



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS

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



PUFF HTV

Econotransfer Company Inc. offers the EconoPuff heat transfer vinyl. The heat causes the product to rise and puff up, which provides a 3D-like effect and screen printing-like texture. It's offered in a variety of colors.

302-365-6664
econotransfer.com



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PSST ... ANYTHING GOES

BY CARLY HOLLMAN

While we all love the ease of summertime and the activities that come along with the needed break in our daily lives, a vast majority of the population looks forward to the day the air begins to turn crisp, and they can break out their most comforting fleece. But with the last few years of increased athleisure, it's likely that a few new additions need to be added to the closet. Fortunately, this staple is becoming increasingly acceptable in the workplace, so brands are continuing to expand and evolve this segment of the market. I spoke with a few of these companies to get a better idea of what we can expect to see in this category.

STYLE SUGGESTIONS

"It's a new world, we're seeing the huge trend of fusing work-at-home and casual office," says Michael Johnson, HanesBrands Printwear. With that, he expands to add, two things are true: People don't want to look sloppy, yet people want to wear sweats. Knowing this, we are starting to see more elevated, yet restrained, fleece designs and an increase in sets. According to Milissa Clark, Lane Seven, this translates to joggers and fleece tops that can be worn to the office, on camera meetings, and to drinks after work.



(Image courtesy Lane Seven Apparel)



In contrast to the neutral and earth-toned styles, bright jewel hues are also popular. (Image courtesy ComfortWash)

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More elevated fleece looks, like letterman styles, make layering easier and office appropriate.
(Image courtesy Citadel Brands)



(Image courtesy Citadel Brands)

Silhouettes are trending toward both the traditional and modern with a juxtaposition of looser silhouettes in heavier fabrics and lighter, more structured designs. Greg Brown, Citadel, notes that he has seen crewneck cuts grow exponentially over the last few years. This is not to say that hoodies have lost their Millennial appeal. And for the more casual days, cropped styles continue to show up in the market. For those returning to the office but still looking for the comforts of their work from home apparel, quarter-zips are a great alternative that have seen an increase in sales according to Johnson, who also speculates that full-zip styles are being increasingly embraced as they can easily be layered with items such as blazers and button ups. Another option, says Brown, is the classic letterman style jacket in a fleece finish, which offers a clean appeal.

With these simple designs subtle details also help to make fleece feel more professional and versatile, says Kristen Vincent, Fruit of the Loom. This comes in the form of cordless hoodies, paneling, and stripes in every silhouette.

SUBTLE & BOLD

Because of the ease of the trending garments' design, color has become a primary driving factor in today's modern looks. "Allowing color to make the statement is a great way to refresh a classic style," says Vincent. This translates to earth tones, according to Brown that goes to the other end of the spectrum with bright jewel tones and what Johnson refers to as restorative pastels – the most muted version of a color – which have the lightest touch of color possible. To bring insight to this divide, Vincent suggests it is due to both an increase in outdoorsy lifestyles and earth consciousness as well as a want to "pop" on screen, focusing on the multiple layers of our complex lifestyles.

Neutral hues are having a moment.
(Image courtesy Alternative Apparel)



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With the relaxed silhouettes of fleece entering the workplace, subtle details such as stripes and piping help to elevate the humble fleece. (Image courtesy Fruit of the Loom)

An additional trend is a shift being driven by generational demand and price. “As we see the effects of inflation ripple throughout the market [we] are seeing a trend away from the standard fashion brands into newer markets that are bridging the divide,” says Milissa Clark, Lane Seven.

But pricing should always reflect how much time that’s been invested based on the amount of time and skill set. According to HanesBrands’ Michael Johnson, “In the end, it comes to what someone is willing to pay for it, garment quality, and is it made for decoration, so I don’t create costly waste?”



Updated crewneck styles are trending because of their vintage appeal. (Image courtesy Citadel Brands)

DECORATION NATION

When it comes to decoration, there is again a divide on what is currently catching the attention of the masses. Clark asserts that transfers are gaining popularity due to their lower price point and ease of application. Embroidery, as always, is a popular decoration for fleece as it helps elevate both the price point and perception of the product’s quality.

As for the style of the decorations, it’s pretty much anything goes. Placements can be anything from traditional chest and back designs to more subtle sleeve and shoulder pieces. However, one thing is certain when it comes to these designs. The ’90s are back and influencing what we wear. According to Taryn Rosen, Fruit of the Loom, this has shown an increase in small center front placements, which proves to be both fresh and timeless at the same time.

Regardless of the chosen method, Clark suggests decorators remember the W’s — who, what, where and why. “The answers to the [best method] along with budget should be the driving factors in the decoration and garment selection process. Getting the client and their audience into the right garment will help drive future business and lead to increased profits.”



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With the relaxed attitude towards dressing during the pandemic, sets are increasingly popular. (Images courtesy Lane Seven Apparel)

When decorating, it's important to remember that this thick, fluffy, and oftentimes more costly product does take some special considerations. Johnson stresses that the surface of the substrate matters. No matter how skilled the decorator, inconsistent fabric treatments and identifying the right saturation points are things that can make your job harder." Because of this, Brown notes that heat is a crucial part of a fleece print as it can scorch or dry out leaving mediocre results.

Overall, it appears that with our favorite comfort piece, its plausible to go to two extremes in terms of fabric weight, color, and decoration. Therefore, the most important part of fleece, is how it makes the wearer feel. Because we can all use a little comfort these days, whatever that means. **GP**

Carly Hollman is the former editor of Printwear magazine with over nine years of experience covering the decorated apparel industry. She currently works as a freelance writer and artist based in Denver, Colorado. She can be reached at carly.hollman@gmail.com.



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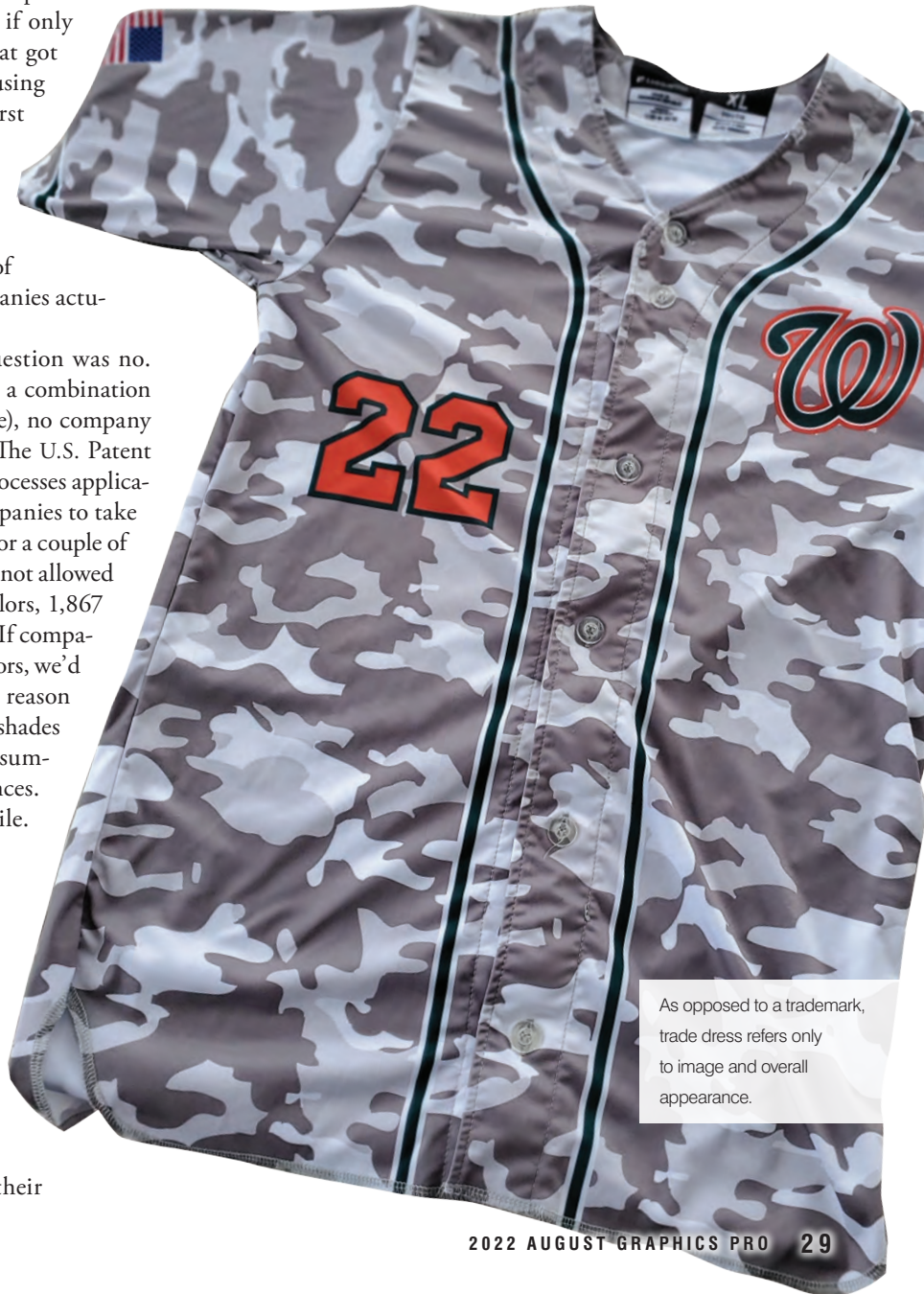
BY KRISTINE SHREVE

Anyone who works in garment decoration or promotional products probably knows a story, if only third- or fourth-hand, of a company that got hit with a massive fine or shut down entirely for using “trademarked” colors of a sports team. The first question many people ask is this: Can you really trademark a color? When you think about it, there are certain colors that seem closely aligned with certain companies. Seeing Tiffany Blue or UPS Brown or Louboutin Red makes you think of a certain company or product, but can the companies actually own or trademark their signature colors?

For quite a long time, the answer to that question was no. While companies had successfully trademarked a combination of colors (Campbell’s soup labels are an example), no company had been allowed to trademark a single color. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which is the office that processes applications and awards trademarks, did not allow companies to take ownership of a single shade of a particular color for a couple of reasons. One reason single color trademarks were not allowed was because there are only a finite number of colors, 1,867 at last count of the Pantone solid color swatches. If companies were allowed to start trademarking single colors, we’d eventually run out of colors to be used. Another reason was the shade confusion theory. Given that some shades of a color vary only slightly from each other, consumers would have difficulty identifying the differences. Those arguments prevailed for a very long while. Until pink home insulation came along.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Owens-Corning had been making insulation since the 1950s, and in the beginning, it was tan, like all insulation was back then. To differentiate their product, they dyed it pink, created marketing campaigns emphasizing the pink color and ultimately spent millions of dollars selling the idea that pink was the color to have when it came to insulation. Eventually, after a five-year legal battle waged to protect their



As opposed to a trademark, trade dress refers only to image and overall appearance.



Since 1985, several companies and institutions have trademarked single colors for use in their particular industry.

There is no changing something just enough to avoid infringement.

investment and the money spent on it, Owens-Corning was the first company in history to successfully trademark a single color.

Since that ruling in 1985, several companies and institutions have trademarked single colors for use in their particular industry. In addition to the companies mentioned earlier in this article, Fiskars has a trademark on the orange used in their scissor handles. T-Mobile's signature magenta is protected by their parent company.

The Wiffle Ball Inc. has a trademark on the yellow used for their bats. The use of single-color trademarks also extends beyond the business world, with organizations like universities trademarking single colors as well. Keep in mind that this is a different thing than trademarking a color that might be used in a logo, the companies in these examples have literally trademarked swatches of color. It should be noted, however, that the trademark only is viable in the particular industry or particular good or service within which the company does business.



This uniform was created by The Zone Sporting Goods in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. They created the design for the hat, jersey, pants, and socks. (All images courtesy The Zone at Scottsbluff Screen Printing)

TEAM COLORS

So, we've talked about shoes and scissors and home insulation, but what does this all mean when it comes to team colors? Well, first, we've established that single colors and combinations of colors can be trademarked. When it comes to the colors that sports teams use, the term to know is "trade dress." Trade dress is concerned with the visual appearance of a product or its packaging that identifies this product to consumers. As opposed to a trademark, trade dress refers only to image and overall appearance. In determining whether trade dress is relevant and has been infringed, courts use the Louboutin test. Under this test, which is used to determine whether a design feature is nonfunctional and thus entitled to protection, courts determine three things:

- 1 Is the design feature "essential to the use or purpose" of the product?
- 2 Does the design feature "affect the cost or quality" of the product?
- 3 Does the design feature have a significant effect on the competition?

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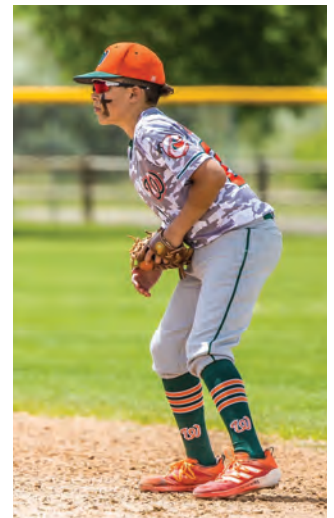
If a color passes all these tests, then it is eligible for trade dress. Team colors generally have aced the Louboutin test.

To make this all a little more confusing and complicated, the case law in this area keeps evolving. In April of 2020, the Federal Circuit Court overturned a decision made by the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board which stated that a color mark cannot be inherently distinctive. A color mark can be obtained when a color 1) identifies or distinguishes a particular good or service, 2) does not have to do with how a product functions, and 3) has a secondary meaning and has acquired distinctiveness in the mind of consumers. The Trademark Trial and Appeal Board held that a color mark can't be inherently distinctive if it did not appear within a "well defined peripheral shape or border." The Federal Circuit Court, in the case *In Re: Forney Indus. Inc.* determined that the TTAB was incorrect. What this means is that more companies and organizations may be going for color mark protection and that more single colors may be trademarked in the future.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR SHOPS

All this case law and theory can be interesting, but what, ultimately, does this mean for shops who offer team apparel? The first takeaway from this information is that companies invest a lot of time and effort into creating their images, and they are equally willing to spend time, effort, and money on protecting what they've built.

Owners of smaller shops may think they're small enough to escape notice, or that whatever money they make will be so insignificant that a large company or organization wouldn't waste time coming after them, but that's often not the case. Owens-Corning spent five years pursuing the trademark on pink insulation, and probably tons of effort and money, but given what they'd spent to create



There's no line you can walk where you trade just enough on a team's trade dress to get team fans to buy your products but are different enough to avoid the team suing your shop for infringement. So be sure to express that creativity.

It's wise to do your research before you venture into anything related to team colors.



Resources for Team Colors and Licensing

MLB Licensing

<https://www.mlb.com/official-information/about-mlb>

NHL Player Licensing

<https://www.nhlpa.com/the-pa/business-affairs/licensing>

NFL Licensing

<https://www.nfl.info/NFLConsProd/Welcome/cpAgreement.htm>

NFL Player Licensing

<https://nflpa.com/partners/licensing>

NBA Licensing

<http://global.nba.com/nba-license-application/>

Team Color Codes (College and Professional)

<https://teamcolorcodes.com/>

Coalition to Advance the Protection of Sports Logos

<http://www.capsinfo.com/>

the association with pink insulation and their company in the mind of consumers, it was worth it to them. Don't underestimate the value companies place on their image, and how integral colors can be to that image. The best rule to follow is this: if you don't have the rights to use specific colors that you know are identified with a specific company, organization, school, or team, don't use them.

The second thing you should take away from this discussion is that there is no changing something just enough to avoid infringement. That's the argument that is often made, although it's probably cited more in copyright discussions than color mark or trade dress discussions. Whatever sort of protection is being discussed, the theory goes that there is a mythical percentage, 20% or 35% or whatever it is, by which you can change a design or color combo so you're not infringing on a company or organization's trade dress or color mark. There's no line you can walk where you trade just enough on a team's trade dress to get team fans to buy your products but are different enough to avoid the team suing your shop for infringement.

The problem is that team colors have acquired "secondary meaning" in the minds of consumers. When we see red and gold, we think Kansas City Chiefs. Speed blue and gray brings the Indianapolis Colts to mind. The colors are so closely connected to the teams that we may think products are associated with them simply because they use the same or similar colors. So, unless you are licensed to use the team colors and logos, stay away from doing so. There is no percentage by which you can change things to make such usage safe.

The third thing that can be learned from this study of color marks and trade dress is that it's wise to do your research before you venture into anything related to team colors. The first thing to have on hand is information about what colors sports teams use. Keep in mind that it's not only professional teams you need to study. Colleges and universities protect their

colors quite stringently as well. There are sites you can visit to find out what colors professional and college teams use.

Finally, the easiest way to avoid any possibility of being sued or infringing on anyone's trademark is either to become licensed or to use transfers or sell products obtained from licensed vendors. Pretty much every team has licensees who are allowed to use their colors and logos to create products. The licensees may sell the products they make to other vendors who will in turn sell those products to consumers. Going this route is the easiest and safest way to sell or create team apparel and is the method that will allow you to do so without risk of being sued and potentially losing all your stock and possibly your money or your business. **GP**

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



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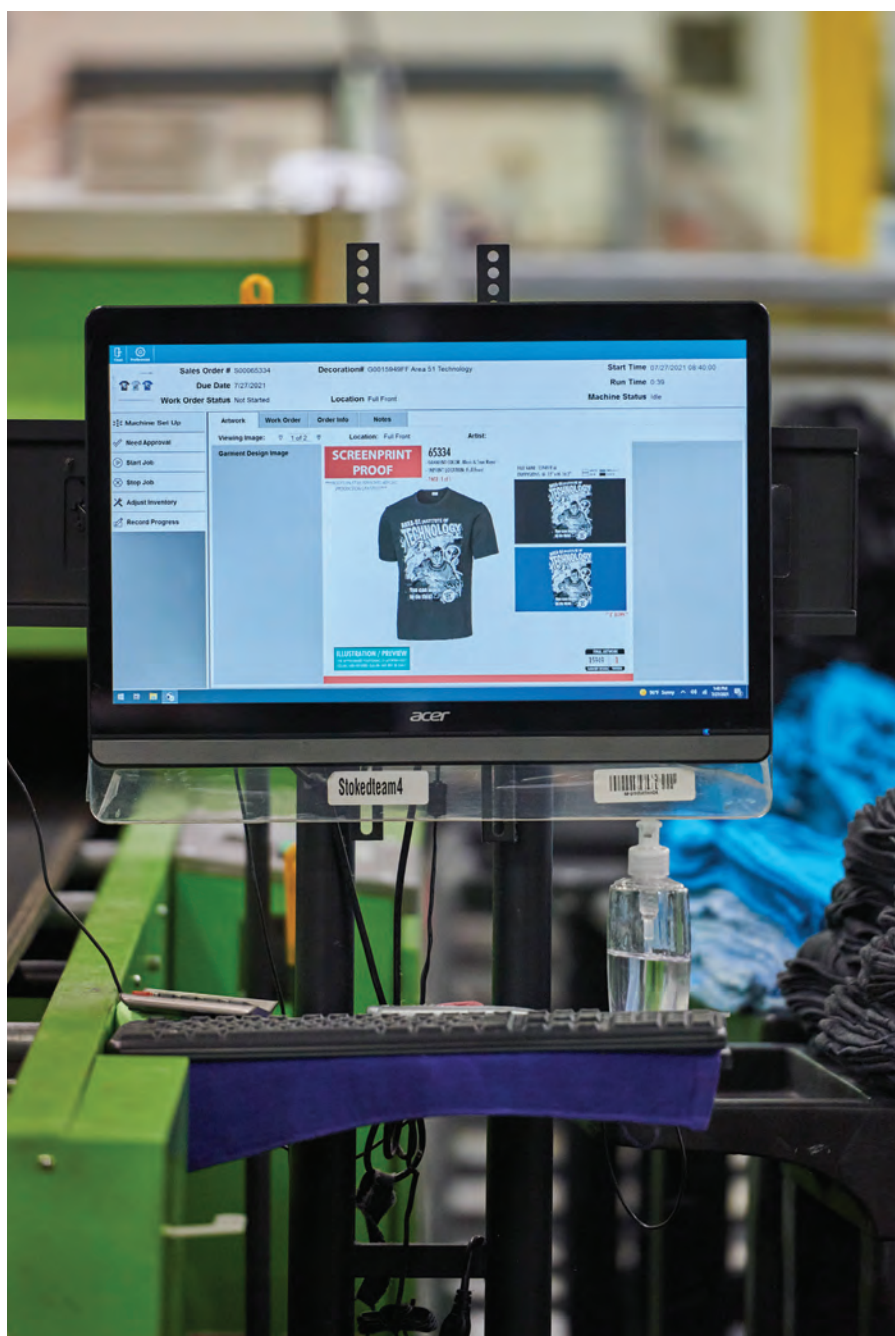
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Taking it Online



SETTING UP YOUR ONLINE TEAM STORE FOR SUCCESS

BY MIKE CLARK



Online stores are the most efficient way to tap into the team apparel and spiritwear market. (All images courtesy InkSoft/Stoked On Printing)

Online stores are the most efficient way to tap into the team apparel and spiritwear market. Online storefronts reduce the headache usually associated with collecting orders and money. And they reduce the challenges of delivering the printed products to students.

Today's shoppers want easy, seamless ways to order their goods, which couldn't be more applicable than a category like team sports. With web stores, printers and apparel decorators have a powerful tool that helps their customers sell faster and easier. Those stores also present a win-win situation since more sales for schools and teams means more print jobs for the shop.

The best part about using online stores is that regardless of whether you're a three-person shop or an industrial printer, it's a professional way to market and sell custom-printed merchandise and deliver goods on time. That professional image speaks volumes for your reputation as a business, and it helps grow your customer base far outside just the team sports market.

GETTING STARTED

Before pitching schools or teams online stores, it's a good idea to do some preliminary research to make sure you're offering them what they need. School coaches and administrators who head up sales and fundraisers are often very short on time and budget, so they need something convenient and appealing to their efforts. Gretchen Rath, InkSoft, says shops should first find out if the school is currently purchasing through pop-up stores from big brands like Nike and Under Armour.

"In many cases, coaches will be offered premiums to use these stores and will be difficult to pull them to another vendor,"



Having an online system eliminates the age-old issue of tracking how many sizes and quantities a team will need for its decorated apparel.

Rath says. “If there is a way to go around coaches to administrators or parents that are running booster clubs, this may be a better method.”

Rath also points out that connecting with the right person for a school’s online store varies depending on the type of products offered. School uniforms typically need approval from administration, though shops may be able to discuss details with office staff currently tasked with managing the sales of the uniforms. Meanwhile, sports uniforms are decided upon by coaches unless the school uses a single vendor. Some school districts will require vendors to register and be approved, so shops should verify this information first. Spiritwear, on the other hand, typically goes through a booster club run by parents. This information is usually available on a school’s website or by attending a sporting event and inquiring to speak with the booster club.

PRESENTING A SOLUTION & OFFERING PRODUCTS

Once you’ve narrowed down who you need to speak with, it’s time to let the visuals do the talking. Some school administrators or parents might not be as tech-savvy. So, it’s not always easy to convince customers that an online store is an easy way to sell team apparel and spiritwear. Decorators should take the time to prepare a mockup store in advance. They can add the team’s logo to give them a better idea of what the actual product will look

Today’s shoppers want easy, seamless ways to order their goods.



In addition to shirts and hoodies, teams can sell matching accessories like headwear in their online stores.



Since some coaches and team contacts aren't tech-savvy and might get overwhelmed with the idea of using an online store, decorators should take the time to prepare a mockup store in advance.

like. It's also important to explain to schools how online stores address some of their most significant pain points. Three major pain points you'll address offering them stores include:

ORDER COLLECTION & PAYMENT

Coaches and administrators won't have to gather paper forms from students' parents. Plus, if they use an online store, there's no risk of someone's order getting lost because the paper form didn't make it into the file folder.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

Depending on the team or school group, orders may only be placed once or twice a year. Having a simple, fast online store lets those coaches and administrators focus on their teams instead of worrying about getting orders in on time. Parents and students simply hop online to submit their orders.

SIZES & QUANTITIES

Having an online system eliminates the age-old issue of tracking how many sizes and quantities a team will need for its decorated apparel.

Depending on your shop's equipment and printing capabilities, you can also offer schools other products in addition to decorated apparel. Some popular products for school sports teams and their parents include:

- Personalized duffle bags or backpacks: Depending on the material, some bags can be heat-printed to easily add logos and names
- Water bottles: A necessity for any sporting event and team training
- Insulated tumblers: Perfect for post-game and for parents to show their support

- Car magnets and decals: An easy add-on for teams trying to add a few extra dollars to their apparel sales

SETTING STORES UP

How you set up online stores will hinge primarily on what kind of shop you decide to run. Rath says shops can set up one central hub and split it up between sports stores if they have the capacity.

"Creating one store for the school with custom categories for each sport or activity allows parents to purchase for multiple children in one check-out," she explains. "This is the most professional-looking and easiest to navigate."

If a shop isn't equipped to print on demand or needs to set up a store for pre-orders, setting up an individual store makes more sense. Even in this case, the sports stores can be presented through a hub with links to each sport's store as they bring more stores online. Similarly, booster clubs and fanwear stores can be added to that same main site so both athletes and parents or other team fans can purchase their gear all from the same central place.

"The big benefit of each sport being its own store is reporting purposes – it's a lot easier to track sales, orders, work on purchasing and production when you can easily filter and see all the orders from North High School Soccer versus one store for a dozen sports," says Maddie Hack, InkSoft. "The customer could easily clone the sporting stores to speed up the process of store creation for all the sports."

STYLES & ARTWORK

One of the most challenging aspects for coaches and team contacts is their overwhelming choices when setting up an online store. The trick is to keep the choices as slimmed down as possible when it comes to style and artwork.



From a Shop's Perspective

Zach Lawson from Your Image Works, an Indiana-based printer, shares some thoughts on running an online store for teams.

What kind of options would you recommend for getting team orders delivered to individuals?

We have two options available. We will sort and polybag each order and have a pickup option or ship it to a home for a fee.

Suppose the store is being set up primarily as a fundraiser. Is there a percentage markup you recommend on merchandise that will go to the team?

Typically, we give them pricing, and if they want to do a fundraiser, we recommend adding a dollar amount to our price. In the end, we cut them a check. I usually suggest \$5.

How do shops calculate shipping for online order fulfillment?

We figure the fulfillment into the cost of goods so the client doesn't have to pay out of pocket. If they choose the shipping option, we have a flat rate fee option that the end-user must pay for.

Can the additional shipping and handling charges provide a barrier for some to buying?

People don't like to pay for shipping, but we have found they are more likely to pay it now since it's quick, easy, and delivered to their homes. Otherwise, they can always choose the pickup option.

"My biggest feedback here is that the business owner knows best – they know what styles are popular, what will look good," says Hack. "I frequently see business owners railroaded by the coach into offering 50-plus styles, 10 different designs, and this becomes a nightmare for purchasing and production."

Sticking to a uniform number like 12 styles and two to three designs will help keep the process simple for end customers, the print shop, and the school selling the products. Printers can tee up the conversation with a Google Form. Coaches can fill in crucial information about what they want in a store, like how long it'll stay open, allowing design upload, and shipping/pickup options. Shops can also create a simple PDF featuring 15-20 styles and ask the coach to pick their 12 favorites for the store.

MARKETING THE STORES

Even with a well-built online store, successful sales aren't guaranteed. Teams need to market their store just like any other retailer would, and printers can help them with this strategy. Outside of ensuring parents, teams, and coaches all have the correct link to the store, driving home the idea that the storefront is a "limited time" offer helps drive urgency for buyers who haven't picked up their custom-printed shirt or hat yet. The open and close date of the store should go out with any communications the school or shop sends to remind parents and students about the items for sale as well.

And speaking of communications, marketing online team stores is a two-part effort. Printers can set up the store and get the team's products online, but that team also needs to market the store and products. Coaches and team contact can promote the store with:

- Email blasts 2-3 times a week until the store closes
- Regular social posts linking to the store
- Handing out flyers at school events and to students
- Sending out a final push within 24 hours of the store's close to remind customers to order

In addition to all these tools, good old-fashioned in-person promotion is also essential. Anytime coaches or team contacts meet with the team, staff, or parents, a brief reminder about the store keeps it fresh in everyone's mind.

The best part about running online stores for schools is that print shops will grow their customer base in other markets with successful campaigns. Fundraisers, local charities, youth groups, and alumni events also need online stores for their products. If a shop has a great reputation with the local school, that's a doorway into dozens of other local organizations and businesses. **GP**

Mike Clark serves as a copywriter for InkSoft and also freelances. He's written for newspapers, online publications, and print magazines and has covered decorated apparel industry topics for the past six years.



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

MORE SPECIAL PROGRAMS

START HERE ACADEMY

Based on the START HERE-level classes at each GPX event, but in a focused 101-level, night-school style educational conference the evening before GPX Charlotte.

GPX THEATER

GPX Theater, located inside the exhibit hall, features live interviews with outstanding shops from various market segments as they share best practices and their perspectives on the state of the graphics market.

MORE NETWORKING



Drink @ GPX: Take a break toward the end of the day at the *GRAPHICS PRO* booth in the expo hall for beer and soft drinks in Charlotte.

Learn more at [GRAPHICS-PRO-EXPO.COM](https://www.graphics-pro-expo.com)

TIME FOR TRAINING: Tips for Training New Employees (AND YOURSELF)

FOSTER EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND ESTABLISH QUALITY IN YOUR PRODUCTION PROCESSES



BY JOSH KICE

Busy season has blanketed the printing industry. Hopefully, everyone is keeping up with your shop or studio, orders, and releases or whatever it is that you make and where you make it. Busy season, as great as it can be, can also create challenges. I want to cover one of those challenges in particular today: hiring/training employees.

Whether you just hired someone on, a team member got promoted, or a spouse is stepping in to help with an increased production schedule, it is so important to have the right tools to train someone in the printing industry.

MAKING MISTAKES

This is a hands-on industry. Get your new hires (Joe, we'll call him), or promoted employees (Kate, as we'll call her), hands on as early as you can and as often as you can! There will be mistakes made. Allow mistakes to happen and react to them calmly.

How you react when someone is training will dictate how they react to every mistake they make after that. If you can approach mistakes as a chance to learn something and get better, it instills that same mindset in someone who is starting something new.

We know, from our own experience, to expect a higher misprint percentage with a new printer compared to a long-term employee. Order a couple extra garments more than you normally would and tell them that they have four (or close to) shirts to test with before their production run starts. This will help get them started with less pressure, and if they nail the first four shirts, you can save the same amount out of the production run (unprinted) for the next order and now they have the same buffer without needing to order extras again.

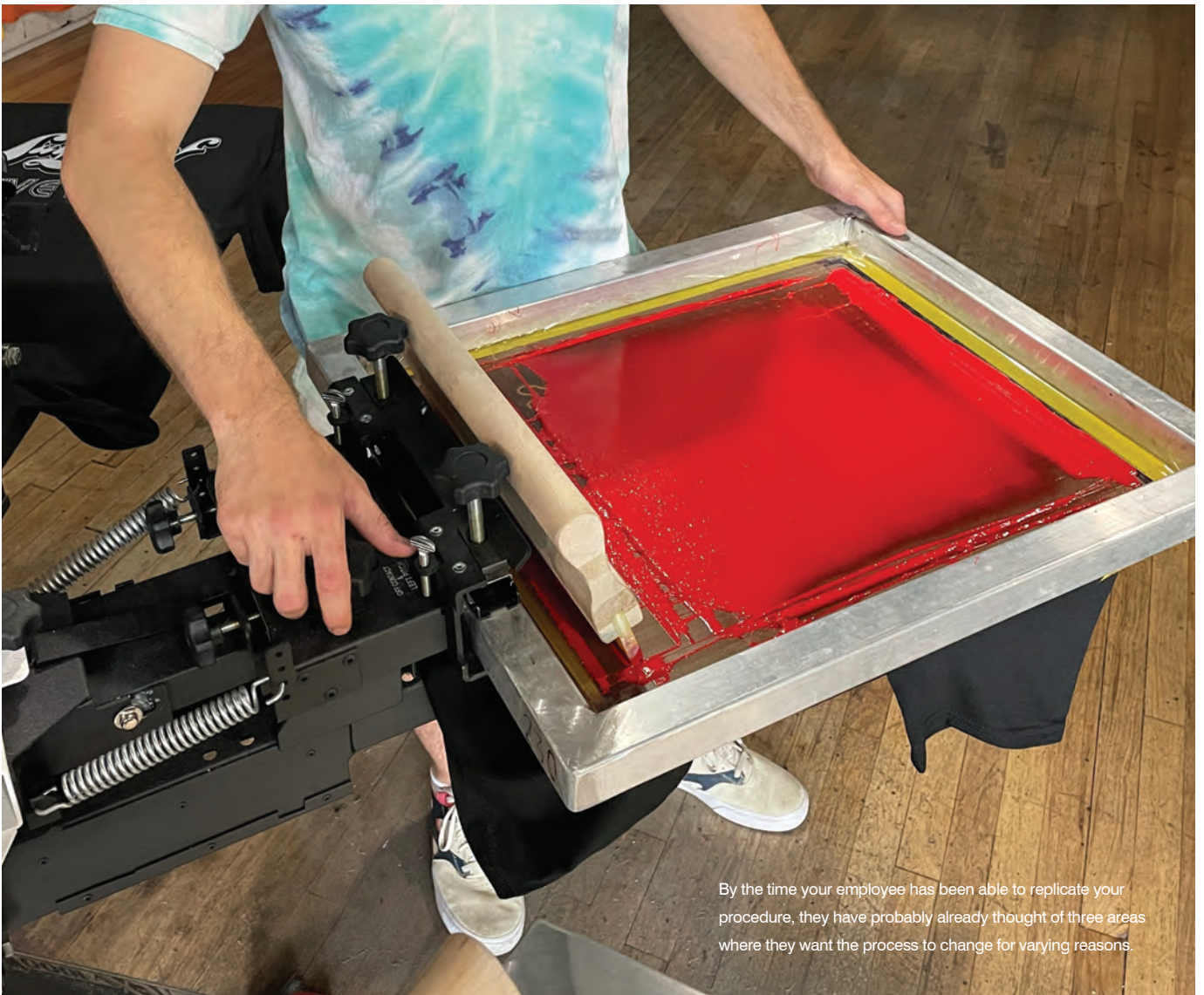
REPEAT & RETHINK

You need to paint a very clear picture of Point A, Point B, and any steps in between, that you feel are an absolute "do-as-I-do." Ideally, we have our new team members, Joe and Kate, mimicking what we are doing, exactly, until they can repeat all the steps

You need to paint a very clear picture of Point A, Point B, and any steps in between, that you feel are an absolute "do-as-I-do." (All images courtesy Josh Kice)



This is a hands-on industry. Get your new hires or promoted employees hands on as early as you can and as often as you can.



By the time your employee has been able to replicate your procedure, they have probably already thought of three areas where they want the process to change for varying reasons.



To help new hires get used to printing, order a couple extra garments more than you normally would and tell them they have four or so shirts to test with before their production run starts.

consistently without questioning them or missing them.

We have to recognize, as the trainer or owner or system writer, that not everyone thinks exactly how we do. By the time Joe or Kate has been able to replicate our procedure, they have probably already thought of three areas where they want the process to change for varying reasons. We must encourage this mindset, but we must encourage it at the right time and in the right way.

We explain to Kate and Joe that they are proficient in repeating these steps as they have been taught, and we encourage them to use them without our constant supervision now. We must also tell them, now that they know our process, they have the right to make it their own – to put some Kate Care into it, or some Joe Flow.

We need to state that when they want to test a system, they must provide their own additional garments to do the testing on to initiate a production run; that same extra 4-5 we were providing for them before is now on them to provide to test their own systems. This puts additional ownership into their hands for their own systems.

It also forces Joe and Kate to reality check some of their ideas a little bit harder before trying them, hoping to avoid the employee who will gladly just sit around and challenge what you have in place and “freelance” their own methods nonstop “because it’s more fun to do it differently every time.”

TEST DAYS

We, as the trainer/owner/supervisor also want to be there for them while they test their ideas. This is so essential that I highly recommend scheduling a “test day” when they share a new idea with you. Here’s the kicker: make it soon, and *do not cancel* on them! Make their idea a priority; otherwise, you’ve just blown smoke to them and don’t back up your words.

Why do training members need to be there? Joe and Kate have what they feel is a great idea, but likely don’t have the skill or knowledge to implement it. You can be there to direct their discoveries along the



Not everyone has the same learning style. We should grant ourselves the time to develop our lessons in several ways, including written, spoken, enacted, and directed/guided.

way, answer questions on how this new technique might be best implemented and learn more about your new hire.

WAYS TO TRAIN

Something we can do as trainers for these positions is to train ourselves. We have our personal learning style, and we likely teach to match our own learning style. Not everyone has the same learning style. We should grant ourselves the time to develop our lessons in several ways, like written, spoken, enacted, and directed/guided.

Written lessons work great via a handbook with step-by-step processes you implement in your shop. Spoken lessons might be verbally explaining everything in your written step-by-step.

Enacted would be lessons where you are hands-on and showing trainees the elements you want them to learn. Spoken and enacted could both be made into a video that can be used over and over without taking time away from your schedule! Lastly, directed/guided lessons would be explaining every step while your trainee is acting out what you're teaching them, in the moment.

The sooner we can have each of these teaching methods ready to go, the easier time we will have onboarding any type of learner, making them so much more likely to be retained as an employee for a healthy amount of time.

REEVALUATE YOUR SYSTEMS

We need to make sure we take the time to test our systems. There is function in redeveloping company procedures. Feel free to take input or ask assistance from active employees and especially people who have been trained on the more recent side of things. They will have the most vigor toward helping and will have the freshest memory and input to what your system is like. Remember, we told everyone to create their own system within ours.

Also remember that you were new once. The five Ps to this are as follows: Patience, Practice, Persistence, Practicality, Patience.

Ideally, you have a chance to bring someone on board in preparation for an increase in production. That would allow time to be picky about your hire and time to train without things being needed yesterday. When do things ever go to plan though? **GP**

Josh Kice is a 10-year screen-printing vet out of Denver, Colorado. He has worked in small to mid-sized shops throughout that time, learning most facets of the screen-printing industry. In his 10 years of printing and designing, Josh volunteered as a firefighter in Golden, Colorado, for a brief stint where he developed his business idea and model for Ink & Drink, a DIY screen-printing bar based in Denver's Santa Fe Art District.



EMBROIDERY FOR A CHANGE ...

A ROUNDUP OF EMBROIDERED LOGOS



When figuring out our color schemes for a particular shirt, for example, we would do a sew out of the Team Oxy-Gen logo. (All images courtesy Lon Winters)



On the other side of the shirt from Purina we placed the Professional's Choice logo.

As many of you know, we have been writing our Software to Substrate column for at least two decades. You also know we typically tell a monthly story about an experience involving decorated apparel, screen printed apparel, with a mention here and there of other decorating disciplines. Been in the biz for 35 years. We tell folks it's all we know how to do, so we had better get good at it. We're gonna change it up this month. While screen printing is our life, we have been in the embroidery business for 25 years or so and have had some unique learning experiences there too.

Brittany Pozzi Tonozzi is an American professional rodeo cowgirl who specializes in barrel racing. She is a two-time Women's Professional Rodeo Association Barrel Racing World Champion at National Finals Rodeo (NFR) in Vegas. Tonozzi, a member of the Women's Professional Rodeo Association, additionally won the NFR Average title twice, qualified for the NFR over 15 times, and for the Ram National Circuit Finals Rodeo twice. Most recently, Tonozzi won the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show and Rodeo in Texas. She won the Evergreen Rodeo, was the Elizabeth Stampede co-winner, won the Kit Carson County Pro Rodeo all in her home state of Colorado. She won the Canby Rodeo in Oregon and won her fourth title at the San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo in San Angelo, Texas. Tonozzi also finished second at four other rodeos. Now that is some success! CNBC recognized Tonozzi as one of their "Blue Collar Millionaires" for her hard work in breeding and training horses as well as barrel racing.

SPONSOR LOGOS

For many years we have been adding sponsors logos to the western shirts she wears to these events. We aren't talking about a left chest logo. Have you ever seen the shirts these championship riders wear for events? We are talking up to 15 logos on like nine tiny shirts all different colors and patterns. Did we mention, Brittany is very small. Embroidery is our best and perhaps only solution. Brittany has always been looking for a high-quality, classic look, and embroidery would be our preferred decoration method to get us there.

Each shirt pattern and color forced us to adjust sizes, colors, and locations. As with any decorating process, embroidery mishaps have ensued. We have learned that this minimum quantity can be offset by a hefty setup fee. All the logos would be altered to look good on the individual garment. The sizes of the images themselves had to be adjusted to fit on or above pockets, around seams and sometimes even over them.



Because these woven women's-style shirts had a slight stretch to them, we used cutaway backing for all the logos.

All the logos would be altered to look good on the individual garment. The sizes of the images themselves had to be adjusted to fit on or above pockets, around seams and sometimes even over them.

Right: Purina would go on the pocket, just below where the tip of the flap lands, so it didn't cover the logo.



SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE

There was one more logo to sew above the Roper logo, and we sewed it at an inch and a quarter higher than the Stetson logo, so the two primary logos still lined up visually on the garments. On the sleeves, we wanted the two primary logos (Stetson and Roper) to measure the same distance down from the shoulder seam about 4".



Any logos on the sleeves were going to be the same color used as the main color unless otherwise directed. The main color was the lightest of the three, used mostly for text as that was the focal point of most of the logos. Lastly, the accent color was used to complement the color of the shirt.

We chose thread over ink on this one. Once all our logos were digitized, we sewed them all out on similar fabric in the sponsors colors, cut them out, and placed them on a shirt to simulate a proof. Once Brittany approved placements, we started with the logos where the thread colors wouldn't change. When figuring out placements, we started on the right side of the shirt. Purina would go on the pocket, just below where the tip of the flap lands, so it didn't cover the logo. The logos that were placed above the pocket were a ¼" above the top edge of the pocket to the bottom of the logo. Same went for logos directly below the pocket at ¼" below the bottom edge of the pocket to the top of the logo. The additional logos below that were placed the same distance that was between the two logos above at about ¾". Same went for the logos on the left side of the shirt. On the sleeves, we wanted the two primary logos, Stetson and Roper, to measure the same distance down from the shoulder seam about four inches. But Brittany had one more logo to sew above the Roper logo, and we sewed it at an inch and a quarter higher than the Stetson logo, so the two primary logos still lined up visually on the garments.

RUNNING THE JOB

When dialing in color schemes for the rest of the logos, it was important to remember two important things. They would need to be visible from a distance but also complement the colors of the shirt. Most of the logos had three colors. The background or fill color, the main color, and an accent color. The background color was typically a neutral color or in some cases a color like that of the shirt. The main color was the lightest of the three, used mostly for text as that was the focal point of most of the logos. Lastly, the accent color was used to complement the color of the shirt. When figuring out our color schemes for a particular shirt, for example, we would do a sew out of the Team Oxy-Gen logo. We might do this because this logo had two different areas of text that were different colors. Oxy-Gen was the main color and Team was the accent color. So, it was important to pick the accent color that was light enough to be visible from a distance, without drawing too much attention away from the main color. Any logos on the sleeves were going to be the same color used as the main color unless otherwise directed.

Because these woven women's-style shirts had a slight stretch to them, we used cutaway backing for all the logos. We chose magnetic hoops for the front logos and had to run glue and clips on sleeve hoops for sleeves. And a clamping hoop for the collar locations. #75/11 needles were suitable for this task at a bit slower pace and changed as needed.

For Brittany, we were appealing to one of our customers' sponsors, most primary needs: recognition. That shirt we embroidered says, "This is who I am." Catering to that need is what this business is about. **GP**



Most of the logos had three colors. The background or fill color, the main color, and an accent color.

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.



ONE-COLOR PRESS

TABLETOP SCREEN-PRINTING PRESS OFFERS VALUABLE TRAINING EXPERIENCE



A one-color/one-platen press is a highly underrated piece of equipment that carries a ton of value for any size shop. (All images courtesy Howard Potter)

Personally, I think no matter the size of your shop, if you screen print then you should own a one-color/one-platen press. It is a highly underrated piece of equipment that carries a ton of value for any size shop.

IT'S GOOD FOR TRAINING

Even if you do not produce with this piece of equipment, simply using it as a training tool is priceless. We use the Workhorse tabletop press and all our new hires start out on that press. It even has micro registration for the print head. This press allows the new hire to learn all of the basics from registering a positive along with off contact. By using this press, they also can take the time to master loading a shirt onto the platen to make sure their prints are positioned correctly.

From there, they learn about what squeegee to use and the amount of pressure to use, which can vary based on ink, screen mesh, and design style they are looking for. A press like this really builds an employee's knowledge about screen printing along with endurance of manually screen printing without throwing them into the deep end too quickly. We will typically have a new hire work with this press for a month to get them warmed up and prepped before they move to our 6-color/4-platen press. Lastly, we introduce them to our automated press. This whole training can take three to six months depending on our workflow along with how well the new hire is able to pick up the skill set.

IT'S GOOD FOR REPRINTS

Do you own several larger manual or automated presses? Why would you want a tabletop press in the first place? For most shops, over 60% of their work is simply a



Even if you do not produce with a one-color/one-platen press, simply using it as a training tool is priceless.



one-color design. How many of you are running back-to-back jobs and cannot afford to leave the screen registered on the press when a misprint occurs or you find an issue with the order you just printed, so you have to wait to reset when the replacement apparel shipment comes in?

You're shutting a larger press down long enough to reprint smaller quantities, which can cost you a minimum of 30 minutes to one hour on average – and depending on the manual or automated press you own, you could have printed a minimum of 40 to 150 shirts in an hour versus a smaller quantity of reprints.

I suggest at least having this tabletop press locked and loaded with the reprint screen in it, so you can focus on keeping production moving. So, when your shipment comes in, you simply get it running right away without stopping your other presses. Say this happens at least twice a week for 52 weeks a year and costs you one hour a week. If you use the tabletop press instead, you have now made your larger press more profitable. You just gained 50 hours more that year on your press at a minimum of 40 shirts an hour, which gained you a minimum of 2,080 more shirts printed. Now say you charge \$6 at minimum for each shirt, and that equals \$12,480 more dollars in revenue by not wasting the time to set up your larger presses for a one-color reprint shirt. Now imagine the number and profit made from an automated press that puts out many more shirts per hour.

RUN THE NUMBERS

Most shops never look at a single-color/single platen press for production. Our company has always owned at least one at all times. These size presses pack a punch for production. They usually never take up more than nine square feet of production space. Think about that production footprint. You can print on average no less than 40 pieces per hour and some products you can print upward of 100 pieces or more per hour. Run the math!

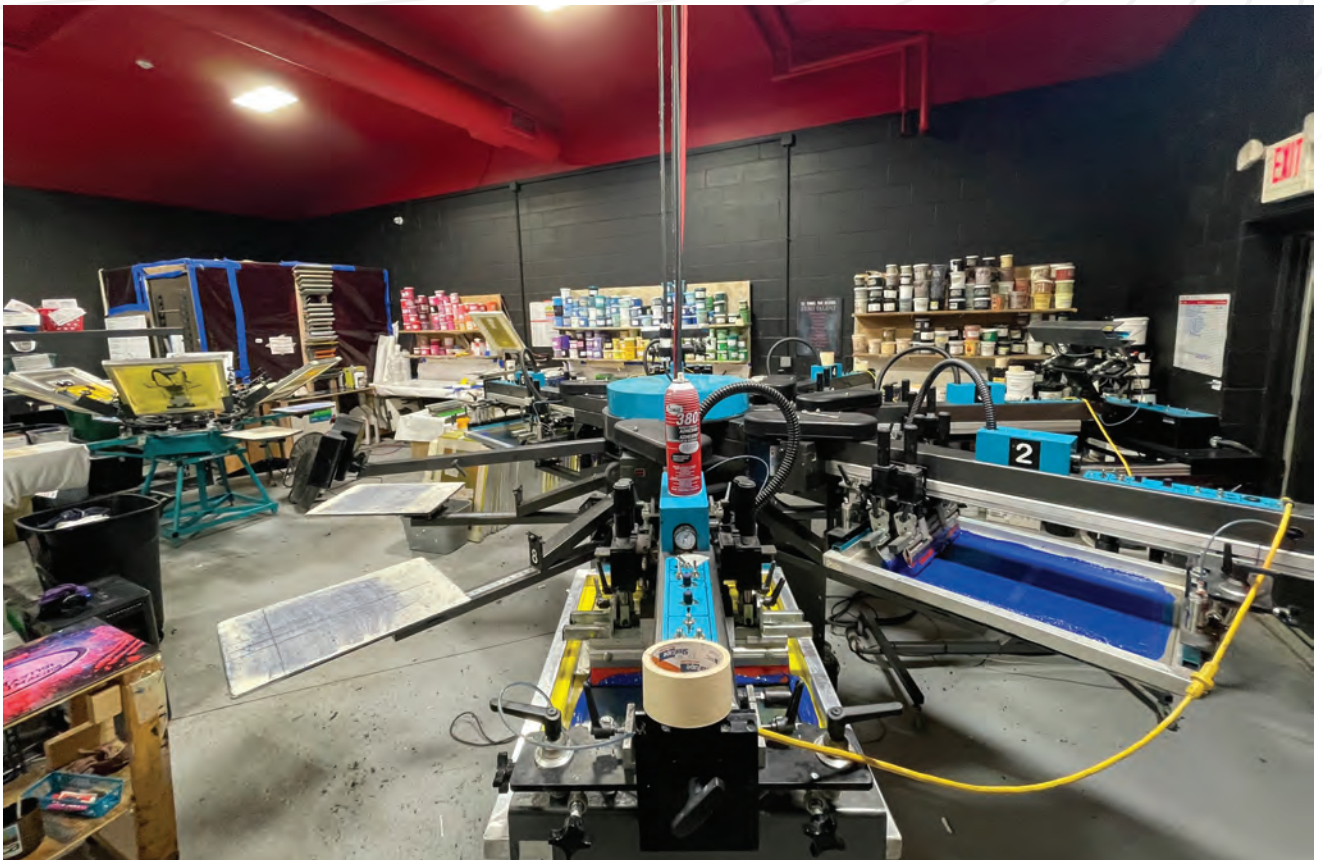
$$40 \text{ pieces per hour} \times \$6 \text{ per piece} = \$240 \text{ per hour} \times 40 \text{ hours per week} = \$9,600 \text{ per week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$499,200$$

$$100 \text{ pieces per hour} \times \$6 \text{ per piece} = \$600 \text{ per hour} \times 40 \text{ hours per week} = \$24,000 \text{ per week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$1,248,000$$

No matter if you are a new shop or large shop you can see the value in these presses. Your average screen-printing employee will earn \$14 to \$20 per hour. The lower their error rate and how much they can run per hour is what you should look at to pay them a fair rate.

As a business owner, I have always been fascinated by production and square footage and figuring out ways to maximize the value or floor plan to net the highest profit margin per square foot. Tabletop presses are not as valued as much as they should

MAKING SHOP MOVES



By using a tabletop press to reprint screens, you can keep your higher-production machines moving.



Have your tabletop press locked and loaded with a reprint screen in it, so you can focus on keeping production moving.



be. Every piece of equipment can serve a purpose to every size of shop. Never look at any piece of equipment with only one purpose. Take a step back and think outside the box on how a press like this could help your company become more profitable. After how hard the past three years have been on every company, we must work harder than ever to keep an open mind and to keep track of every penny being invested. You never know when you might just need it! **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 mastery-ourimage.com.

PRODUCT REVIEW

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



WOMEN'S CROP T

Royal Apparel offers its 14011 Women's Premium Crop T-Shirt. It is made of 100% combed ring-spun cotton, has a 3/4 set on rib collar, double-needle sleeve and bottom hems, and a tear-away collar. It is also side seamed.

866-769-2517
royalapparel.net



PLASTISOL INK

Lawson Screen & Digital Products announces the new Dynamic Ink (DI) series of its ready-for-use plastisol ink. The soft-hand, fast-flashing, low-cure ink prints well on cotton, 50/50, tri-blends, and polyester garments.

314-382-9300
golawson.com

CRYSTAL STARS

Marco Awards Group introduces a family of three self-standing stars in 5.25", 6", and 6.75" sizes. The 3/8 clear crystal, five-point stars can be sandblasted and laser engraved. Each star includes a crystal base and an individual Styrofoam cocoon and box.

800-229-6592
marcoawardsgroup.com



TIE-DYE HOODIE

J. America Wholesale Blanks offers the Tie-Dye Fleece Hoodie (style #8861), which is unisex and available in seven colors. It is made of 55/45 cotton/polyester and has white drawcords and a front pouch pocket.

517-521-1105
jamericablanks.com



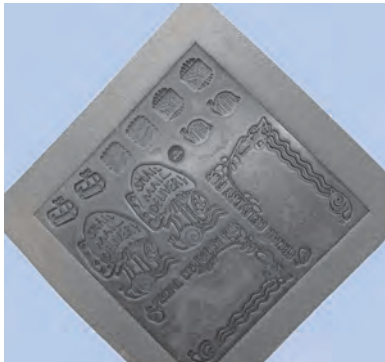
ACRYLIC SHEET

Rowmark announces six new additions to its FlexiBrass acrylic product line. These additions are available in three cap colors, including brushed red, brushed blue, and brushed black, all with a white or brass core.

419-425-8974
rowmark.com

PRODUCT REVIEW

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



RUBBER STAMP MOLDING

Jackson Marking Products offers Compressed Powder Matrix, replacing the discontinued Bakelite Matrix Board. When heated, CPM softens and allows for better penetration of magnesium and photopolymer master plates. The material ranges from .230" to .240" overall with .135" floor to accommodate standard etch and deep etch master plates.

800-782-6722

rubberstampmaterials.com



FLEECE HOODIE

Atlantic Coast Cotton offers the JHY001 fleece, available in a variety of colors. It is made of 100% ring-spun cotton and has twin-needle stitching, a double fabric hood, and a front pouch pocket with a hidden opening for earphone feeding.

703-753-7000

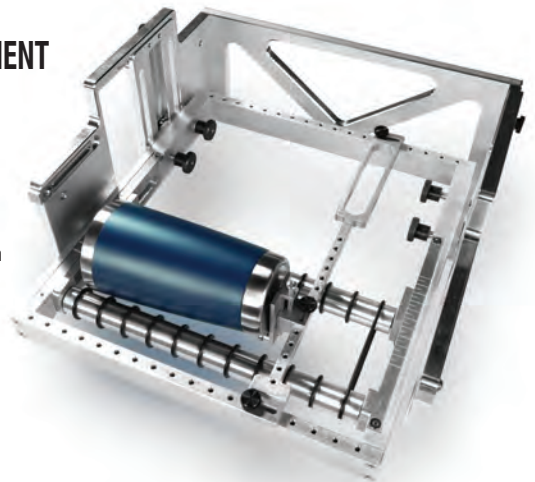
orderacc.com

FLATBED PRINTER ATTACHMENT

Roland DGA introduces the Rotary Rack, an attachment that fits inside its VersaUV LEF series benchtop UV printers. The device is meant to make printing onto cylindrical objects easier. The Rotary Rack can help users print on cylindrical items ranging from .25" to 3.75" thick.

800-542-2307

rolanddga.com



DIRECT-TO-VINYL PRINTER

Siser North America offers the Siser EasyColor DTV printer, which is designed for desktop inkjet printer compatibility. At 100 microns, it is lightweight enough for polyester applications.

586-201-0853

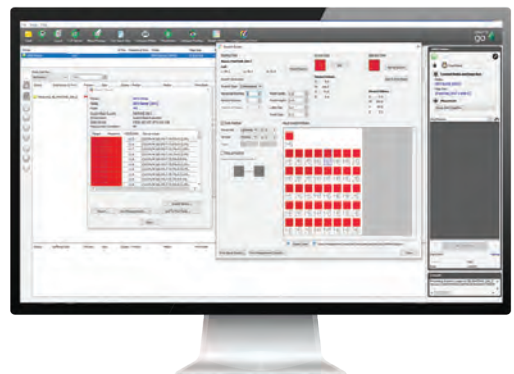
siserna.com

RIP SOFTWARE SUBSCRIPTION

ONYX Graphics Inc. announces a prepaid option for ONYX Go, the company's RIP software. Outside of the no-contract monthly subscription, customers can opt for one-, three-, and five-year subscription options through authorized ONYX resellers. ONYX Go prepaid is available for ONYX Go Lite and ONYX Go Plus product tiers.

800-828-0723

onyxgfx.com



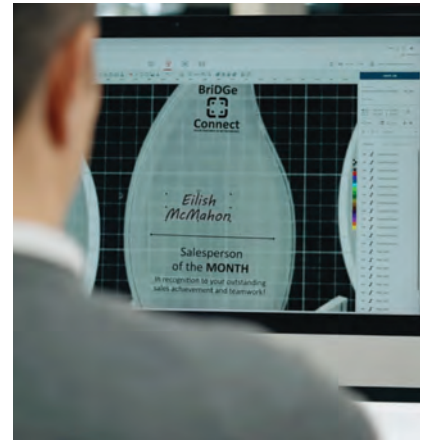
PRODUCT REVIEW

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

MANUAL HEAT PRESS

HIX Corporation introduces the HIX SideKick20 manual heat press. It can provide 1,200 lbs. of force and allow users to work continuously with two stations. The company says it offers the convenience of a twin platen and the reliability of its top-down linkage system.

800-835-0606
hixcorp.com



LASER ENGRAVER POSITIONING

Trotec Laser Inc. offers the Vision Design & Position system, which comes with the company's Speedy 400 and 360 laser engravers. It has a 12-megapixel camera, which can help users position their work onto their workpiece.

866-226-8505
troteclaser.com

FALL SPORTS AWARDS

JDS Industries

Inc. offers a variety of awards for the upcoming fall sports season. The company has soccer, football, and cheer resins, medals, ribbons, plaques, and traditional trophies.

800-843-8853
jdsindustries.com



FLEECE BEANIE

Atlantis Headwear offers the BIRK, a straight-cut polar fleece beanie made of 100% certified recycled polyester. It meets the Global Recycled Standard. The product is available in royal, black, navy, and dark gray.

718-522-5575
atlantisheadwear.us



LASER MACHINE

AP Lazer introduces its entry-level laser machine, the AP Lazer SN2616LR. It features a low rider carriage cart and can engrave furniture and home decor, floors and pavements, doors and windows, and more. It comes with 60-watt CO₂ laser power and a 26" x 16" cutting and engraving area.

800-585-8617
aplazer.com



PRODUCTREVIEW

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



DTG PRINTER

DTG Connection LLC announces the Model X DTG printer, built on the Ricoh print engine. It has an auto height adjustment table and comes with a range of platen sizes. It is also paired with the company's TurboRIP software.

888-833-4484

dtgconnection.com

CUSTOM CAST MEDALS

Catania Medallic Specialty Inc. offers Custom Cast Sports Medals, which can be modified with color fill, spinners, ribbons, keychains, and more.

800-633-2586

cataniainc.com

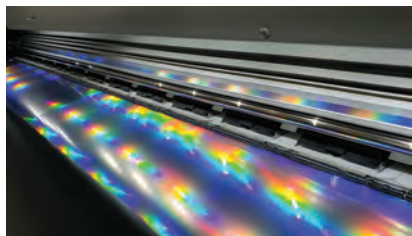


WOMEN'S HOODIE

Carolina Made carries Next Level's Laguna Sueded Raw Edge Crop Hoodie, a women's hoodie made from 60/40 combed ring-spun cotton/polyester. It is a relaxed fit with a tear-away label, available in eight colors, and ranges from sizes XS-2X.

704-821-6425

carolinamade.com



HOLOGRAPHIC FILM

FDC Graphic Films Inc. introduces the Lumina by FDC 3400 holographic film, ideal for general-purpose graphics, short-term signage/graphics, decals, labels, and lettering. It is a 6.0-mil gloss film offered in 007-Unicorn and coated with a permanent acrylic pressure-sensitive adhesive. It has a 90# layflat liner and is available in roll sizes of 10" to 30" widths and 5- to 50-yard lengths, or 12" x 12" sheets.

800-634-7523

fdcfilms.com



LARGE-FORMAT PRINTER

Durst Group introduces the P5 500 LED printer, which is a width of 5.25m. The product uses Ricoh print heads, and on top of having CMYK color channels, it has four additional color channels available.

durst-group.com

PRODUCT REVIEW

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



PULLOVER HOODIE

Independent Trading Co. offers the PRM4500TD Unisex Tie Dye Hooded Pullover. It is made with 9-oz. 80/20 ring-spun cotton/polyester blend fleece with 100% cotton 30-singles face yarn. The product is made with sewn eyelets, 1 × 1 ribbing at the cuffs and waistband, split-stitch double-needle sewing on all seams, a twill-taped neck, and a jersey-lined hood. It comes in four tie-dye shades and ranges from sizes XS-4X.

877-366-9911
independenttradingco.com



RAINBOW HOLOGRAPHIC FILM

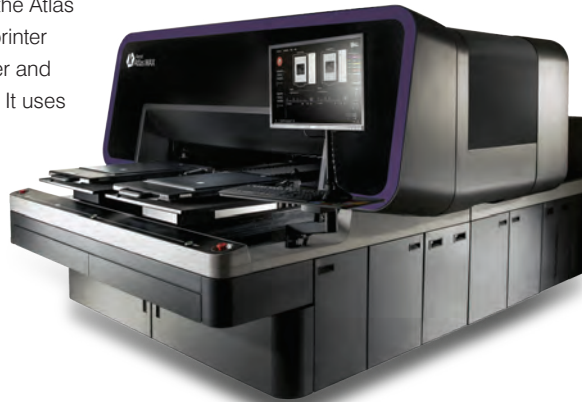
General Formulations introduces the GF 765 Rainbow Holographic Film. It is 6-mil thick, has a permanent adhesive, and it is compatible with solvent, latex, and UV curable inks.

800-253-3664
generalformulations.com

DTG POLYESTER PRINTER

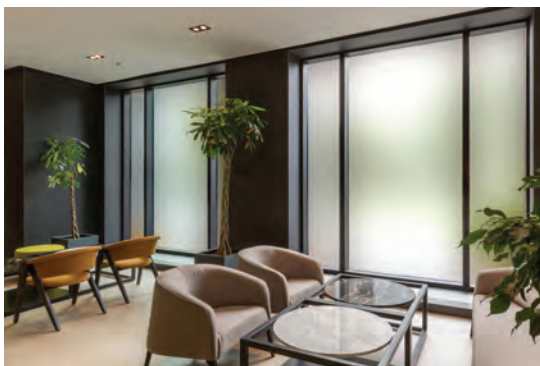
Kornit Digital introduces the Atlas MAX Poly system, a DTG printer that can print onto polyester and polyester-blended apparel. It uses Kornit's MAX technology and XD_i decorative applications. It is also compatible with mesh and plain fabrics.

888-456-7648
kornit.com



DECORATIVE WINDOW FILM

Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions introduces the Dusted Crystal architectural decorative window film. It is available in a matte and luster finish and provides a translucent



light effect for indoor environments. The product features a wet-apply quick-release adhesive that allows the product to be repositioned during installation.

440-534-6000
averydennison.com

SMOG FILTER

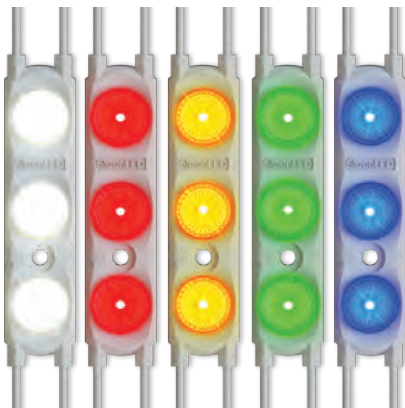
Weller Tools offers the Replacement Main Filter for its Zero Smog 4V product for soldering, laser, and gluing applications. The filter is made using a HEPA class H13 particle filter and granulated media. It contains 2.2kg of granular media composed of 50/50 activated carbon/KMnO₄. The product includes a small silicone hose and connector.

800-548-8883
weller-tools.com



PRODUCTREVIEW

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



CHANNEL LETTER LIGHTING

SloanLED launches the SloanLED Prism12. It can be used in channel letter and sign box applications 3-8" deep. The LEDs deliver up to 135 lumens per watt, and the product has an increased loading capacity of 20% compared to the previous generation.

805-941-8140
sloanled.com



EMBROIDERY MACHINES

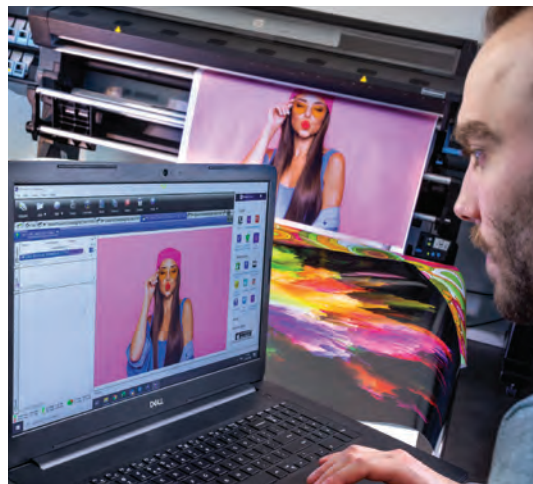
ColDesi announces the addition of Highland Embroidery machines to its avance-emb.com website. This includes the JC601C Compact six-color Chenille Machine and the CX1201C machine. Both machines come with a five-year warranty.

877-793-3278
coldesi.com

SIGN MAKING SOFTWARE

SA International announces the launch of the Flexi 22 sign making software. It is an all-in-one design, print, and cut software for sign and print providers. The software also has DTF and DTG applications.

800-229-9066
thinksai.com



SCREEN-PRINTING JOB CART

Vastex International Inc. offers the SR-23-JC model of its Screen-Printing Job Cart, which can keep supplies ready for users during set up, printing, and clean up. The frame stores up to eleven 23" x 31" screens and is mounted on locking casters. The cart also contains six squeegee rests.

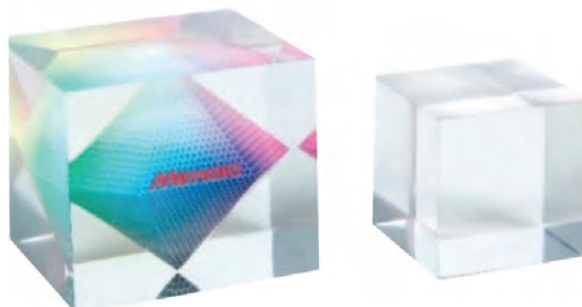
610-625-2702
vastex.com



CLEAR 3D PRINTING INK

Mimaki USA announces the release of its MH-110PCL Pure Clear ink. The company says it negates the yellowish tint seen in the MH-100CL. It can be combined with color inks and will be available in 4.8L capacity ink bottles.

888-404-2795
mimakiusa.com



PRODUCT REVIEW

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

APPAREL COLLECTION

SanMar Corporation

introduces Mercer+Mettle, a 30-piece apparel collection that has professional and casual looks. It features 25 clothing styles and five bag designs.

800-426-6399

sanmar.com



SOLVENT INKJET INK

Nazdar launches the Nazdar 205 Series inks, which are designed specifically for use in Roland TrueVIS SG2 and VG2 Series wide-format digital printers running Roland TrueVIS TR2 inks. The product is available in CMYK as well as light cyan, light magenta, and light black.

913-422-1888

nazdar.com



GP

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Worktable Workhorses

FUNCTIONS AND FEATURES OF TODAY'S SIGN SHOP STAPLE



BY PAULA AVEN
GLADYCH

Worktables have evolved so much in the past few years that it is rare to enter a print or graphics shop and see a table that acts as just a table. More modern versions of this print shop staple function as light tables, a place to cut, laminate and mount graphics. The devices help shops streamline their workflow by allowing one person to handle jobs that used to take more than one person to do.

EFFICIENCY & PRODUCTIVITY

Dawn Bent, co-owner of a Signarama franchise in Huntington Station, New York, purchased a ROLL-X Multipurpose Applicator table from ROLLSROLLER a year ago.

“After 33 years of traditional hand application or using a laminator, I broke down after trying it out at a trade show and knew it would be a game changer,” she says. “And it has been.”

The learning curve was steep at first with “a lot of failure and recurring and reprinting of vinyl

materials,” Bent says. But once her employees got the hang of it, she says the amount of waste produced in the shop has gone down tenfold.

“From that point of view right there, the thing pays for itself as far as I’m concerned. I don’t have to yell at anyone when I see things in the garbage,” she says with a laugh.

Dawn and her brother Mike Ziccardi started the franchise in 1988 as a 1,100-square-foot vinyl shop that has since expanded into a 24,000-square-foot building that offers full manufacturing of electrical and architectural signs, sign products, channel letters and vehicle graphics.

Before buying the ROLL-X worktable, Bent and Ziccardi insisted their staff “should know how to do this the old-fashioned way,” she says, “and then we gave up.”

Signarama’s employees use the table to mount masked vinyl and digital prints onto various substrates.



Dawn Bent and brother Mike Ziccardi started their franchise in 1988 in a 1,100-square-foot vinyl shop that has since expanded into a 24,000-square-foot building that offers full manufacturing of electrical and architectural signs, sign products, channel letters and vehicle graphics. (Image courtesy Signarama Huntington Station)



Dawn Bent and brother Mike Ziccardi co-own Signarama Huntington Station in New York. (Image courtesy Signarama Huntington Station)

“If we need to laminate, we don’t need to unload a lamination machine. We cut the sheet off for what we need and apply it to one project,” she says. “That’s another time saver and material saver for us.”

The table is 5' x 11.5' — wide enough to allow for a 54" digital print.

“Our old table was a 4' x 8' plywood table and prints were always hanging off the sides. Now the whole print fits on the table. It is positioned in the middle of our production room with a laminator on one end of it.”

Signarama makes a lot of its signs on HDU materials. After they come out of the paint prep room, staff use the table to apply paint mask material, protective covering to put on the CNC router. “We used to do it by hand, too,” she says.

The worktable has an adjustable height feature that works great if employees are different heights. They can raise or lower the table to fit their own ergonomic needs. Employees also like that the table is illuminated, which “helps them weed on white vinyl because they can see the cut marks better. If they are doing an overlay on multiple colors, it helps you see through the substrate,” Bent explains. “It definitely has contributed to the overall efficiency or productivity in the workplace.”

SIZE & SPACE

Raum Divarco, general manager of CUTWORX USA, maker of CWT flatbed applicator tables, says that ROLLSROLLER worktables are very popular because they come in oversized versions.

“We stop at 15 feet. They have an inventor series and that one is custom built. For certain applications, that one has its place in the top suppliers because nobody else goes that big,” he says.



“Our old table was a 4' x 8' plywood table and prints were always hanging off the sides,” says Dawn Bent. “Now the whole print fits on the table. It is positioned in the middle of our production room with a laminator on one end of it.” (Image courtesy Signarama Huntington Station)

ROLLSROLLER was also one of the first companies to develop an application table. CWT Worktools tables came from the same group from an invention standpoint, he says. “The team that made both of these machines, the original models, were brothers. That’s what makes us and them the top two competitors because the same group of people created them and still do today.”

CUTWORX sells smaller table sizes, entry level options to get people started, Divarco says. If a shop makes traffic signs, for instance, they wouldn’t need a 10’ table if they are only mounting blanks for smaller road signs. If they are doing fleet graphics or highway signs, they will need longer tables to pre-mask blanks.

One of the biggest considerations is space. The company’s more high-end worktables have lift kits, lights, a heat-assisted roller, and cost nearly \$35,000, so a shop wants to make sure they have room for it so it can be used properly and not just end up “as a table collecting boxes,” Divarco adds. “That can happen in the blink of an eye. You get busy and it becomes a collection tray, and you damage it.”

Price isn’t as much of a consideration because there are so many platforms offering so many sizes it is easy to find the table size a shop needs for a good price that will fit the space, he adds.

Shops that have the luxury of extra liquidity might want to opt for a machine with a higher price tag because it “generally means you will get more premium rubber, which is pretty important when using it for a pinch roller for lamination,” Divarco argues.

He adds that clients do come in with size and space restrictions thinking they will want a lower end model but will leave with a

more expensive one after seeing a hands-on demonstration and realizing it will alleviate workflow bottlenecks.

Visual Horizons Custom Signs is a full-service commercial sign company based in Modesto, California, which has been in business for more than 25 years, offering non-illuminated signs, banners, engraving and vehicle wraps. The company also chose a 5’ x 12’ ROLL-X worktable to help increase efficiency of its production space.

The company chose the table because it “fit in our workspace and was larger than the widest material we print on,” says owner Charity Jackson, “so it accommodates all printed graphics and signs we run through production.”

The key features the shop looked for in a worktable were size, the clearance of the application roller for different substrate thicknesses, the height controls so it could be raised and lowered as needed, the backlit work surface, and the extra storage and cutting tool.

“Since we’re a busy shop with few employees, it’s important for us to be able to quickly apply signs with as few people as possible,” says Jackson.

The table includes a roll holder glide beam that is used for applying masking tape. The company orders 54”-wide rolls of application tape and mounts them on this bar. “One person can mask graphics 52” wide x 12’ long in seconds, with even pressure,” she says.

The height control under the roll beam is very important. In the past, when the company used its laminator to apply graphics



Signarama’s employees use the table to mount masked vinyl and digital prints onto various substrates. (Image courtesy Signarama Huntington Station)



After seeing the worktable at a trade show, Dawn Bent knew it would be a game changer for her shop that had been using traditional methods for 33 years. (Image courtesy Signarama Huntington Station)

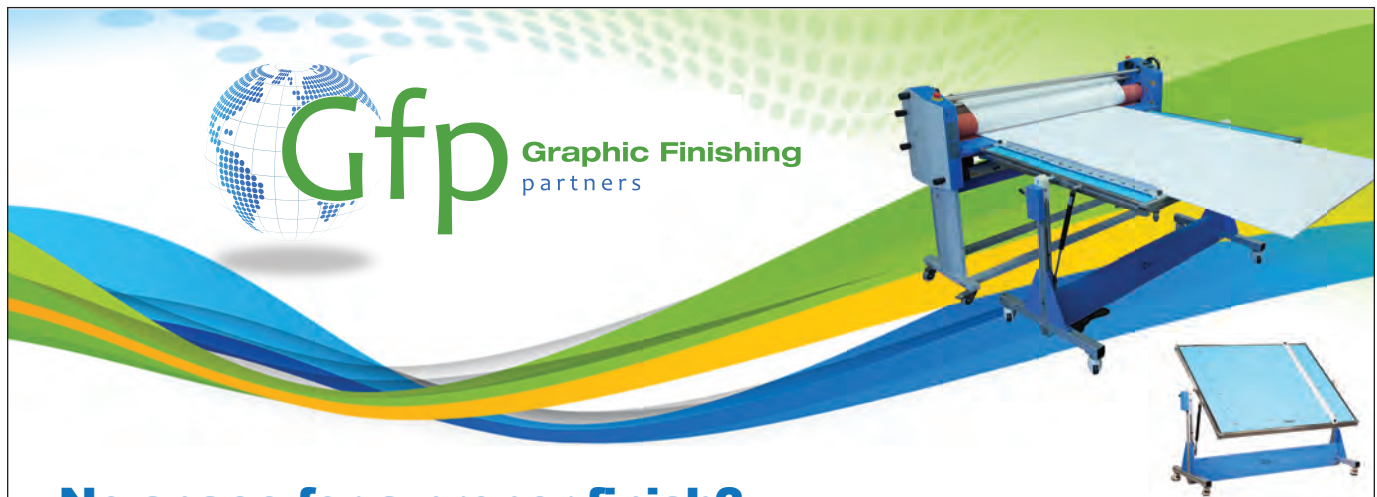
to substrates “we were sometimes limited by the space available under the roller,” Jackson says. “The application table has plenty of clearance under the roller, allowing us to place nearly any substrate thickness on the table and apply graphics.”

The table itself also can be lowered to 33", allowing a person to sit in a chair to work at the table, or raised up to 42", giving taller workers a more ergonomic work surface. When the table is lowered all the way down, the wheels make contact with the floor, allowing the table to be wheeled around the production floor as needed. **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.



Visual Horizons chose its table because it worked for its space and accommodated all printed graphics and signs it runs through production. (Image courtesy Visual Horizons Custom Signs)



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COMPETING IN THE WORLD OF BANNERS

DON'T FALL BEHIND IN THIS FAST-MOVING MARKET



BY STEFANIE
GALEANO-ZALUTKO

Suppliers and proprietors across the graphics, signage, and promotional products industries say they continue to face heavyweight pressure from modern consumers with sky-high expectations. Even a staple product category like banners is beginning to show some wear and tear.

Banners offer clientele an effective and economical way to promote their brand or amplify a specific message. The segment enjoyed a big boom in recent years, thanks to new material and vinyl developments advancing usage and customization opportunities. However, industry professionals agree increased commoditization driven by a consumer appetite for low-cost solutions and rapid production is having an impact.

OVERSATURATION OF THE MARKET

Nonna Kofman, owner of Signarama in Ormond Beach, Florida, points to the sheer quantity of printing sources oversaturating the market. She says banners constituted a much larger revenue stream seven years ago when her franchise initially opened for business. Today, however, anyone can produce a basic graphic with the help of elementary software and mediocre direct-to-print providers – the latter of which, she says, are popping up like whack-a-mole. As amateurs displace professionals, she sees a noticeable decline in cost, quality, and customer satisfaction.

In addition, e-commerce, specifically the Amazon business model, is making it difficult



Banners offer clientele an effective and economical way to promote their brand or amplify a specific message. (Image courtesy Orbus Exhibit & Display Group)



A banner stretched over a light box to create a backlit presentation. (Image courtesy Orbus Exhibit & Display Group)



Technological advancements and fine-tuned production methods ensure manufacturers can hone efficiencies while providing customers with variety. (Image courtesy Orbus Exhibit & Display Group)

for manufacturers to compete.

“From a production standpoint, all end users see is an Amazon product ordered via Prime and delivered the next day. So, when a customer comes to us with a request for 500 flags as giveaways at an event the following week, they don’t understand why we can’t turn them around in 2-3 days-time. It becomes a classic, “Their crisis is now our emergency’ scenario – and it happens a lot,” admits Brandon Westmoreland of National Banner Company, a Texas-based manufacturer of stock and custom imprinted promotional signage since 1952.

“If we want to capture the sale and take good care of the customer, which we do, then it becomes our job to figure it out. We’ve shored up production times wherever we can – adding new equipment, a second shift and more staff,” Westmoreland adds. “Customer expectations may have changed but at the end of the day, you can only adjust production so much to make things quicker.”

Kofman agrees shops can only bend so much. Additionally, she sees a tipping point ahead. As consumers become increasingly frustrated with the inferior quality and poor customer service of print-on-demand providers, she expects these customers will turn to experienced shops like hers.

CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

Regardless, the banner market must continue to evolve alongside heightened consumer expectations, says Josh Robertson, JDS Sign Supply. He confirms suppliers are up to the challenge, continuously finding better ways to ensure longer-lasting banners at an attainable price point, thanks to advancements in printing technology.

“With the right material, you can print a high-quality image on a banner that can be enjoyed up close,” he says. “Banner finishing is improving, too. The days of



In addition to providing a clean and soft finished look, fabric banners can present vibrant images with low glare. (Image courtesy Orbus Exhibit & Display Group)

needing to sew a hem are no longer necessary for most applications.”

He singles out Banner Ups by Budnick for its great line of banner tapes and adhesive grommet tabs that make production fast, simple, and effective. They also improve the strength of the banner, which Robertson says is key to protecting outdoor signage from wind damage or improper installation.

“You won’t have grommets tearing out, and you can do quick repairs to a damaged banner without removing it,” he says. “When we demonstrate how these products work, jaws drop every time.”

SEG fabric frames continue to dominate the indoor banner space, emerging as a popular sight in retail environments, airports, museums, and convention centers. In addition to providing a clean and soft finished look, fabric banners can present vibrant images with low glare. Robertson says the widespread adoption of these SEG (silicone edge graphics) fabric prints has dramatically improved shipping and installation. Fabric is lightweight but durable, resisting unsightly creases and crinkles, plus



SEG fabric frames continue to dominate the indoor banner space, emerging as a popular sight in retail environments, airports, museums, and convention centers. (Image courtesy Gyford)



A banner printed on a Roland TrueVIS VG2-540. (Image courtesy Roland DGA)

it can be installed by one person with little-to-no prior experience.

Kofman says the market is not only expanding in materials and finishes but also configurations and availability. She points to new retractable banner stands as a notable upgrade, featuring smooth, high-end vinyl or matte finishes.

The year ahead presents valuable opportunities for print service providers to enhance productivity, improve profitability, and strengthen customer relationships, according to Canon. Designers believe an expanded

range of quality product materials, as well as significant technological investments in enhanced digital printing methods, will play an essential role in the successes of many operations – strengthening print’s value in an increasingly web-based world.

LET’S GET TECHNICAL

All industry professionals preferred to keep specific technological upgrades under their caps; however, Mark Jaroszewski says SOARDISTUSA just invested in significantly larger digital printers, resulting in near-triple capacity.

“Quality and speed are of huge importance to our customers,” he says. “The new equipment gives customers more choices, while using less material and requiring less finishing work on our end. Now, we can print faster without sacrificing the integrity of the quality.”

Westmoreland says National Banner Company is investing in its future as well by purchasing pivotal equipment as finances allow. A recent upgrade, for example, elevated printing capacity from a couple hundred square feet per hour to more than 1,000 square feet per hour.

Sometimes, in-house technological investments do not make economic sense and businesses must think outside the box. With retractable banners climbing in demand at Signarama, Kofman is strategically partnering with suppliers who offer the necessary equipment. Doing so allows her business to continue serving customer requests without making a big-ticket purchase of her own.

As customer expectations creep higher and technology evolves to meet growing demand, automated workflows become increasingly important. Customers can easily place orders, submit jobs, monitor work status, and control branding, plus better manage spending as a result. Canon reminds print service providers: those who invest in enhancing customers’ overall service experience build stronger client relationships that are less likely threatened by price competition.

SOARDISTUSA recently implemented its own form of automation – a new client relationship management system. The comprehensive software effectively links various facets of the business, from inventory management and accounting to its formal CRM tool. Jaroszewski points to an increase in employee productivity and efficiency due to the investment. He says taking steps out of

“As consumers become increasingly frustrated with the inferior quality and poor customer service of print-on-demand providers, I expect these customers will turn to experienced shops.”

—NONNA KOFMAN, SIGNARAMA

these processes equals a reduction in miscommunication, redundancies and, ultimately, human error.

Quality materials and technological advancement aside, Jaroszewski credits factory ownership as a large-scale differentiator.

“There is no bait and switch. We’re not partnered with anyone, so the factory – and its production – is ours,” he says, citing the level of autonomy it creates. “There is no middle broker. We quality control everything to our high standards. Not to mention, we have an owner who is there every single day, watching and making sure everything comes off the line perfectly. It makes a difference.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Technological advancements and fine-tuned production methods ensure manufacturers can hone efficiencies, while providing customers with variety.

“As we come out on the other side of this pandemic, we see a lot of companies rebranding and trying to make a splash,” Jaroszewski says. “Whereas this same person may have purchased a tent or flag before COVID, now they want it all post COVID. So, we created kit pricing to bundle the tent and add on banner, flag, back-wall, etc. based on their needs.”

As such, he plans to expand the company’s banner and flag category in the next year, offering more shapes, sizes, and finishes.

Easily accessible with a quick turnaround, Kofman says temporary banners traditionally offer customers an immediate form of communication at an affordable price. During COVID, Kofman says small, standard-sized banners in 13-oz. vinyl were a primary request, especially for direct-to-print competitors. Post COVID, however, Kofman sees temporary banner sales declining alongside an uptick in other areas: retractable and oversized banners.

While retractable banner sales all but disappeared during COVID, the Ormond Beach shop owner says the product is making a resurgence.

She also points to oversized banners as a comeback story and area of increased

opportunity, noting she recently completed three 10' × 30' oversized banners that were repurposed as a billboard advertisement.

“People expect more mileage and value out of anything they purchase,” Kofman says, emphasizing consumers want to pick one product to transition from a temporary advertisement to a quasi-permanent sign.

For example, a restaurant preparing to open its doors to patrons may opt for a company-branded banner with the ability to hang and swap out various messages from complementary grommet attachments or decals. “Opening Soon” easily becomes “Now Open.”

Looking ahead, Robertson expects to see greater consumer demand for eco-friendly materials and more advancements in technology and online marketing.

“The world has made some major advancements in how we get a message in front of people digitally, which has impacted marketing and the use of (physical) signage,” he says. “However, there are still a lot of ways we need to communicate once someone is onsite to make a purchase or engage in an experience, such as building identification, entrances, reaffirming messaging, product locations, etc. As a human race, we are still conditioned to look for a sign to tell us where to go or confirm that we are in the right place. For that reason, I don’t see banner material going away any time soon.” GP

Stefanie Galeano-Zalutko is the president/CEO of Zalutko Business Services of Central Florida. She can be reached at szalutko@zalutkobusiness.com.

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GETTING HELP ON CHANNEL LETTERS

EARNING THAT BUSINESS EVEN IF IT'S NOT YOUR SPECIALTY

“Hey Jimmy, our landlord says we need to get a new channel letter sign for our retail storefront, you can do those, right?”

And just like that, there it was, a question asked by his best, longest-lasting customer. This is Jimmy’s chance to finally put on a different hat than he normally wears — an opportunity that could change the depth and scope of the services he provides his customers. Jimmy’s successful little T-shirt and trophy shop was about to dip its big toe into the vast, scary, over-chlorinated swimming pool called “The World of Electric Signs.”

Fortunately for Jimmy, he was wise enough to plan for this very day months ago and has already set up working relationships with the various companies and individuals who will help him ensure this project runs smoothly from day one.

So, are you that Jimmy person? Perhaps you are a “Jennie” who is a textile printing shop owner, who has always thought, “It can’t be that difficult to provide a set of channel letters to my client.” Well, it’s not impossible, but it does take a bit of know-how and a working relationship with the various professionals you will need to help you along the way.

So, grab yourself a cup of coffee or a smoothie and just sit back and let me show you how it’s done.

10 STEPS FOR CHANNEL LETTERS

First, let’s look at the whole process, step by step. I’ll expand on each step, so you understand not only what to do, but why you are doing it.



You may have helped your cousin prep and paint his 1972 Datsun B210 back in 1979, but if you haven’t been up to speed on the latest in sign paint, aluminum preparation, clear coats, and UV inhibitors, then it’s best to leave those details to the in-shop painter. (All images courtesy Matt Charboneau)



Equipment alone is reason enough to embrace the wholesale fabricator. The owner has the same need as you do to keep work flowing through their shop. They are invested in making you look good.

Step 1: Establish working relationships with a sign company (fabricator), a sign engineer, your local sign code department and possibly a project manager

Step 2: The survey process for electric channel letters

Step 3: Collecting your client's artwork, colors, co-op info, logos, branding documents, etc.

Step 4: Contracting a qualified sign designer — your best investment for a smooth project

Step 5: Code conformance — client wants, city permit allows, landlord desires, and how to manage all three

Step 6: The design process — options, ideas, or collecting an upfront design deposit

Step 7: Estimating, cost management, proposal writing

Step 8: Approvals, authorizations, engineering notes, permit application process

Step 9: Who is your PM? (What is a PM?)

Step 10: Installation day — final electrical hookup, city permit inspection, party time!

So, there you have it. The 10 steps to channel letter paradise. Now, before you decide to jump into the deep end with both feet, keep in mind this list is intended to point you in the right direction and highlight the key parts of the process, not necessarily to cover every detail that might present itself. Here are each of the steps explained in more detail.



The final steps involving the city inspection and approvals will make you realize just how important it was to establish an upfront working relationship and assign the tasks that needed to be completed before the sign job became a sign job.



Planning for router time can make or break a project's budget. Your fabricator will know these details, so you don't have to.

BUILDING TRUST

To develop a good working relationship with a fabricator, you must earn their trust in the same way you did with your client. Sincerity, honesty, transparency, and a mindset that reflects your willingness to step back, and observe, assist, and learn.

And please realize you may not make a dime on the first or second or even third sign job. But in exchange for money, you are securing peace of mind and the ability to sleep at night knowing that someone with a deeper understanding of the job is at the helm making sure it all goes as planned (so you look good in the eyes of your client)!

STEP 1: RELATIONSHIPS

Assemble your advisory/fulfillment team — 90 days ago. Contact local sign fabricators and installers and find out who is willing to work with you on future job opportunities. Who is open to helping you secure sign opportunities? What type of control are they willing to hand over to you? Are they willing to work with you? Are they willing to keep you in the loop so you can learn from the opportunity?

Assign duties, roles, and responsibilities. There is more to it than simply finding a shop willing to give you a price, there are details to cover that affect sales, estimating and production. Decisions must be made on who will handle the sales, permits, design, presentation, and collecting of the deposit, to say the least.

Who maintains the communication with the client? Is it a joint call together over Zoom, or in person? Who handles permitting, color approvals and alike? Who will take the role as the project manager? Who's on first?

Working out the details before you have a project in hand changes the entire way you are viewed by all the outside team players you will be talking with. When you sit down to discuss

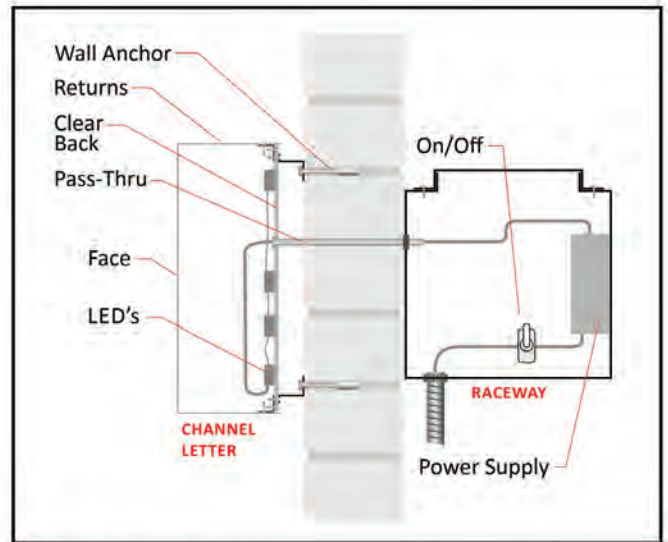
the working relationship, you are discussing roles and duties “of the future” without the pressure of a deadline looming in the shadows.

Beg, borrow, and win the favor of a sign engineer. This may be your greatest challenge, as well as your greatest asset. Establishing a relationship where an engineer allows you to run a drawing past them for quick review is a wonderful thing. You may need to work on this one a bit, but it is possible. There may be needs the engineer has for their office, or their hobby, so tap into this and provide them a reason to notice you and your requests to visit about pricing. In this way, you each have something the other needs. The point is a relationship built on trust, common needs, and mutual benefits are tough to make happen overnight. Start on this one immediately.

STEP 2: PRE-SALE SIGN SURVEY PROCESS

It will be important for you to learn about the details obtained at the installation site. Photos, measurements, artwork from the client — there are a plethora of things that can help an electric channel letter job go south. Fortunately, there is a book available that outlines the steps of the electric sign survey.

You will find that most designers care very much about the quality of the details and measurements they are provided. Understanding this process will make your working relationship much more productive. You can learn more about this book by going to <https://www.learnsigndesign.com/>.



Halo Lit Channel Letter Remote Wired

The designer you hire will most likely have their own set of section views, clip arts and other various graphic components. You can learn a lot by observing, reviewing, and asking questions of the designer you hire.



How well do you know channel letter fabrication? Well enough to speak it, build it, and even draw it? Listen and learn as your fabricator may very much welcome your shadowing.

STEP 3: COLLECTING CLIENT ARTWORK

They won't have a clue about what you need ... your clients, that's who. They won't know about fonts, colors, graphics, icons, logos, and the like, and just like the artwork you gather now, you will need to gather these little gems of low-res rasterization from the customer for use in a drawing that will illustrate how the channel letters will look on the building.

STEP 4: YOU NEED AN EXPERIENCED SIGN DESIGNER

The designer you choose is critical. Absolutely critical. Why? Because they are the bridge that is connecting the sales relationship to fabrication.

Make sure your designer has references and can provide you examples of similar completed projects, as well as references from the fabricators who actually used their shop files to build electric signs, primarily channel letters.

STEP 5: SIGN CODE CONFORMANCE

This involves your customer, the landlord, and the city's sign code. This is one step that takes a bit of finesse to find out what is possible, and what is not. The customer's wishes, the landlord's requirements, and the city sign code must all be on the same page. City code is the end-all law of the land.

STEP 6: THE DESIGN PROCESS

One of the little-known secrets about human nature, emotions, logic and buying choices is that visually stimulating "eye candy" type night views can tip a buyer your direction, even if your price is higher. Find a designer who has experience working with multiple sign companies, and who has examples of shop files that have become actual signs. Speaking with the shops who built their sign designs will provide you a wealth of information on how the designer handles details, notes, spelling, and dimensions. Small details that can make or break your project.

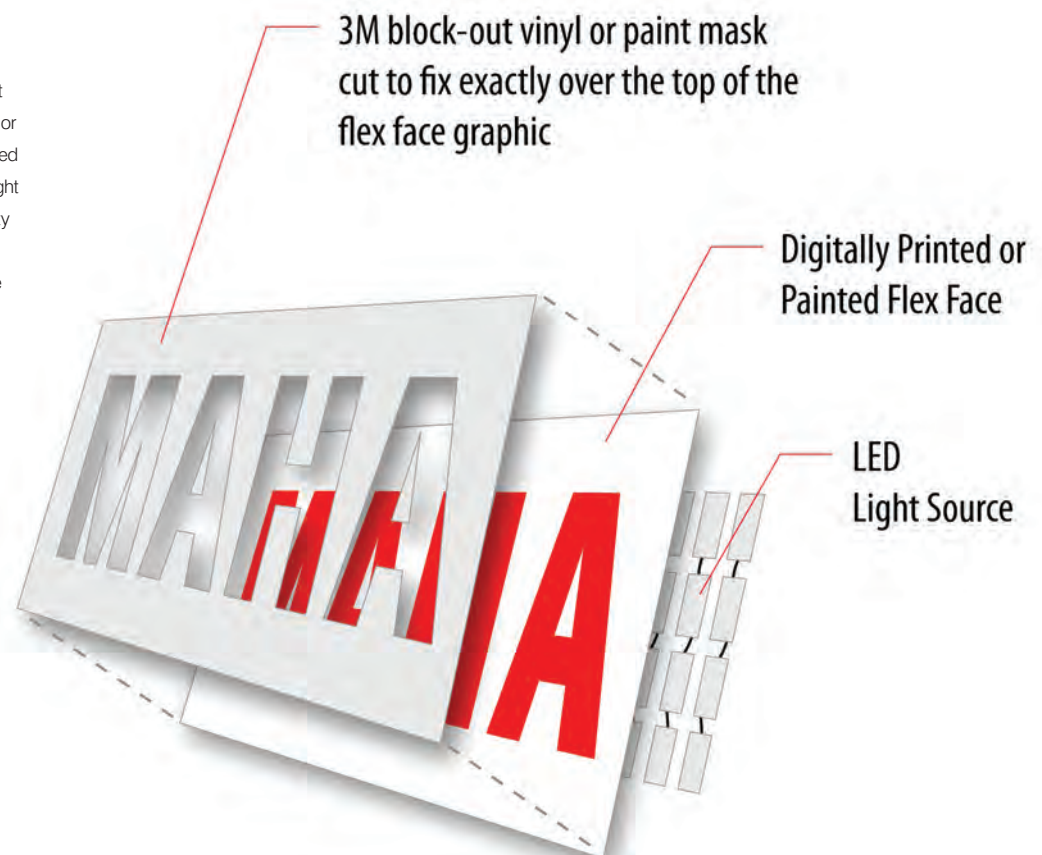
STEP 7: ESTIMATING, COST MANAGEMENT, PROPOSAL WRITING

All part of the sales process, and your working relationship with your fabricator will come in handy at this point. They can most likely help you with the agreement, deposit and how to fill out the paperwork for applying for the permit.

STEP 8: APPROVALS, AUTHORIZATIONS, PERMITTING

Has your client signed the drawing? Has the landlord signed the drawing? Has the permit been issued or is it at the city, waiting to be picked up? Lessons learned at this stage belong to those who assume too much and end up eating a set of channel

Your designer will know ways to help channel letters do more than just light up. There are techniques where part, or all, of the channel letter face is "blocked out" with special vinyl that prevents light from passing through. These specialty techniques are only available from designers who have been around the block a few times. Interview several!





The pre-sale sign survey is critical to obtaining a plethora of data. Taking time to capture straight-on photos is important for providing a clear, focused image for the sign designer to use on the drawing.

"The temptation is always there to move forward with the production of a set of channel letters before the city permit is in hand, or before the landlord signs off on it. Don't do it. Avoid the nightmare by memorizing this mantra: "Production starts ONLY AFTER all of the approvals are in hand."

letters the landlord refuses to approve, or that the city says is too large for the square footage allowance.

Follow these rules like your life depends on it, because your profit certainly does:

Rule #1. Do not start fabrication until the permit from the city is in your hand.

Rule #2. Do not start fabrication until the landlord's approval is in your hand.

Rule #3. Do not start fabrication until you have a signed, approved drawing and deposit from your client.

STEP 9: WHO IS YOUR PM?

That stands for project manager. If you have never managed an electric sign project before, then that means you are not the PM. This is a role best managed by someone who fully understands every step of the process, the clients' expectations, and your desires to make the customer happy, hopefully make a profit, and provide a sign that your client can be proud of. You will not accomplish this if you try to manage the first few jobs yourself. Bury that ego now and pass that baton to the sign company helping you. Learn from them, watch what they do, study, observe and memorize. You will know when you are ready to project manage your own projects, but until then, accept the fact that the sign company helping you is making a nice profit, and you may not be making much at all. That is OK for now.

You are exchanging the little bit of profit for wisdom. And with wisdom, you can make all the profits you wish.

STEP 10: INSTALL DAY, FINAL INSPECTIONS, ELECTRICAL HOOKUPS

And on that final day, when the sign arrives at your client's storefront, and the bucket truck lifts the letter set into place, remember one thing: You were able to sleep well knowing someone else managed all the details and they took all the risk.

The final inspection and electrical hookup will take place at the request of the install company, or the salesperson for the fabricator. If something is not right, they get to deal with it, not you.

Once the sign is up and running and approved by the city inspector, and the client has paid, it's time to sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of a satisfied customer, a smooth process, your upfront efforts to arrange the team, and lots of smiling faces all around. **GP**

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

PRIME REAL ESTATE:

Manhattan Signs Takes On 5th Ave.

INSTALLATION ALLOWS REAL ESTATE AGENT TO MAKE THE MOST OF AN EMPTY STOREFRONT



BY MEGAN HOOPES

Street view of the window perf wrapping both sides of the façade.



Manhattan Signs began as a small sign shop in 1983 and has evolved into an established company with a vast range of expertise and an extensive portfolio of award-winning design products. Our production facility is 25,000 square feet with three state-of-the-art, 4-color process printers that allow us to have broad-based expertise in all aspects of promotional signage. We have a plethora of media and material options, including an almost limitless color palette to make any concept a reality. The variety of Manhattan Signs' fabrication and installation capabilities encompass the full spectrum of visual communication, including corporate identity signage, interior and exterior comprehensive wayfinding packages, signs, awnings, decorative construction bridges, barricades, LED message boards, digitally imaged graphics, custom-designed flags, and oversized special event banners.

Manhattan Signs' expertise in the industry, practical field experience, site analysis skills, layout and shop drawing capabilities, fabrication expertise, and extensive on-site installation experience enable us to accomplish client objectives, providing quality products economically and on time.

We value each of our projects as well as our clients. Our client list reflects long-term, loyal relationships comprised of regional and national corporations, advertising and public relations firms, graphic designers and architects, banks, real estate developers, brokers and management companies, parking garage systems, large retail accounts, and trade show organizers and participants.

PROJECT DETAILS

Manhattan Signs was delegated this project because we are a long-time trusted vendor of RFR Realty. Our 28-year long client Sheldon Werdiger was the close contact throughout the entire project, which facilitated communication throughout the process. This specific project was located at 522 Fifth Avenue in New York City, a double-height ground floor space. The initial steps of this project involved conducting a site survey and creating shop drawings with detailed measurements. This was an integral part of the design process because every detail of the facade, like the slant of the sidewalk, and the width of the mullions and doorways had to be taken into consideration when planning for the production and installation process. It was necessary to work from installation backward to have a smooth transition from concept to installation.

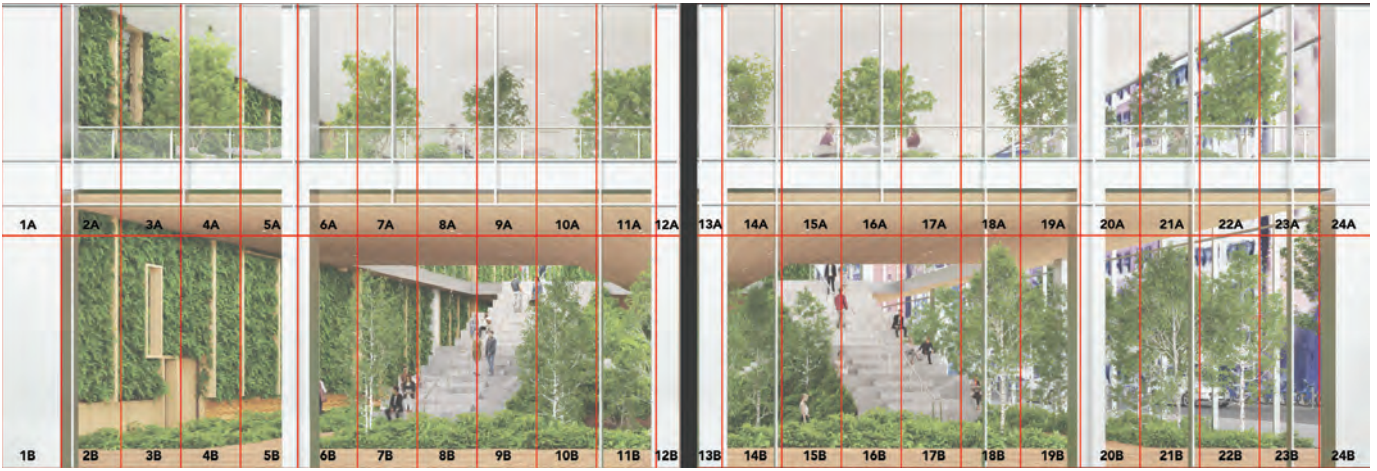
After sending dimensions and details, we received files from



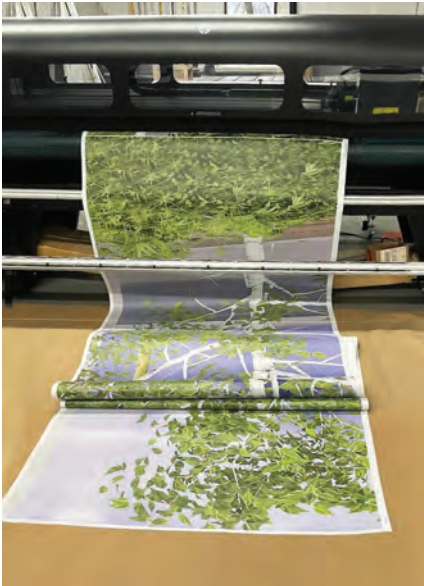
Graphics flanking the entrance.

Williams New York the marketing agency, who we were in constant communication with to improve the layouts. Manhattan Signs designer Valeria Cantillo led the communication with John White, designer of William New York. They discussed how to go about setting up the design files and improved dimensions and schematics to make our client's vision come to life. This project had many minor architectural details that had to be worked out meticulously. Manhattan Signs CEO Anthony DeCrescenzo collaborated with our team to ensure the project was executed successfully.

One of the biggest challenges the design team faced was mullion placement in the final rendering. The design was made so that the printed mullions would align with the existing ones of the building. One small mistake in the design department could have initiated a dreadful domino effect in the fabrication



Print and fabrication schematics for 5th Avenue.



Printing the window perf on an HP printer.



Preparing prints to trim.



Rolls of printed window perf.



Our shop workers measuring material to trim.

Below: The final installation on 522 Fifth Avenue advertising for our client, RFR Realty. (All images courtesy Manhattan Signs)



“When two parties know what they want and the fabricator knows how to accomplish it, it can happen very quickly.”

—ANTHONY DECRESCENZO

through installation phase, so we had to ensure every detail was accounted for.

Once the design layouts were finalized and approved, the project transitioned into the print production phase. The height of the ground floor space is 37.5' tall, so for fabrication and install purposes, print files were set up so that each panel was split in half, facilitating the process.

The graphics were printed onto 14,000 square feet of window perf that wrapped the two sides of the façade and flanked the entrance. With print and fabrication schematics provided by our design department, the process from production to installation ran smoothly, and took six business days to install.

“When two parties know what they want and the fabricator

knows how to accomplish it, it can happen very quickly,” states CEO Anthony DeCrescenzo. After many meetings and collaborative efforts throughout all departments, Manhattan Signs was confident everything would fall into place. The final product effectively created a massive impact on pedestrian and motor traffic to advertise ground floor space. **GP**

Megan Hoopes graduated with a bachelor's degree in business management with minors in both psychology and visual communication from William Paterson University. She's an intern at Manhattan Signs, gaining experience in both the business and design field.





ROTATE, EXTRUDE, REVOLVE

3D EFFECTS WITH VECTOR SOFTWARE

Let's chat about the dimensions of the universe. As humans we experience the world in four dimensions. A non-dimensional object is simply a point that can be somewhere in space. It has no form but has a location. If the object is one dimensional, it has length and appears as a line. A two-dimensional object has height and width and appears as a flat shape. A three-dimensional object appears as a solid object that can be rotated to observe all sides. (Fig. 1) The fourth dimension adds duration to the scene so that the object can be observed over time. Beyond the fourth dimension, reality warps into parallel universes. Some physicists claim that there are 11 dimensions. All very well and good! Eleven dimensions goes well beyond the parameters of this article where we will concern ourselves exclusively with three dimensions.

As I'm sure you are aware, there are dedicated professional

software programs that produce astoundingly realistic three-dimensional animation and special effects that we see in movies. All these sophisticated technologies have evolved over time and have worked their way into the mainstream media. In this article however, I'd like to focus on 3D features that are relatively simple to use and are available in software that you probably own.

VECTOR BENDING

3D modeling in vector-based software is relatively straightforward. The features that apply to vector objects – rotations, extrusions, bevels, and revolutions – are available in Adobe Illustrator and CorelDRAW. While the techniques in these programs are slightly different, the outcomes are essentially identical.

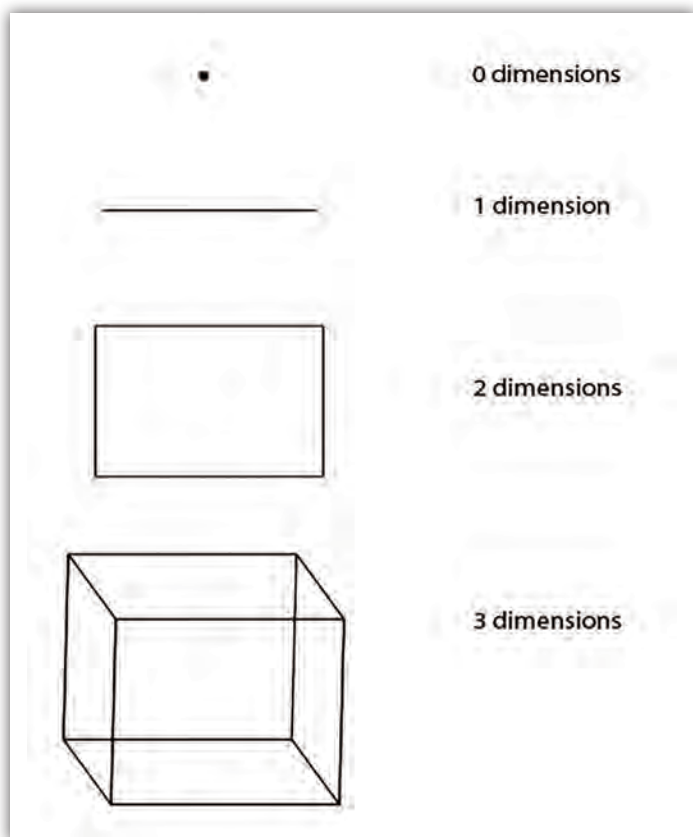


Fig. 1: A 3D object appears as a solid object whose sides can be rotated and observed. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)

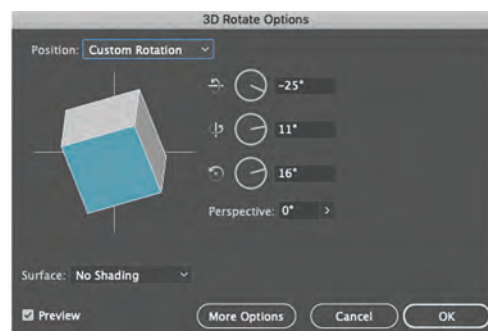
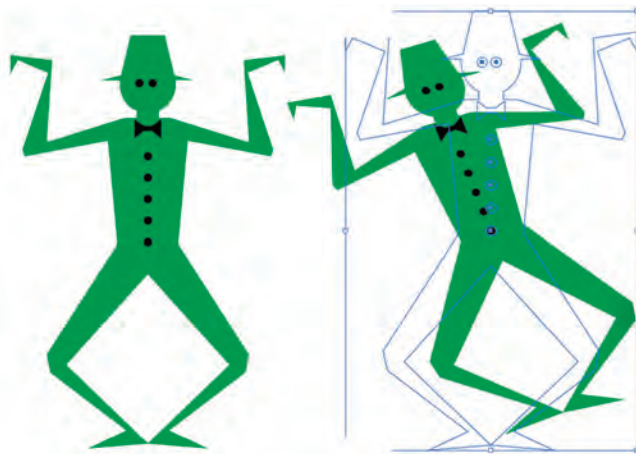


Fig. 2: The Rotate dialog box has controls that alter the angle of the X (horizontal), Y (vertical) and Z (frontal) axis.

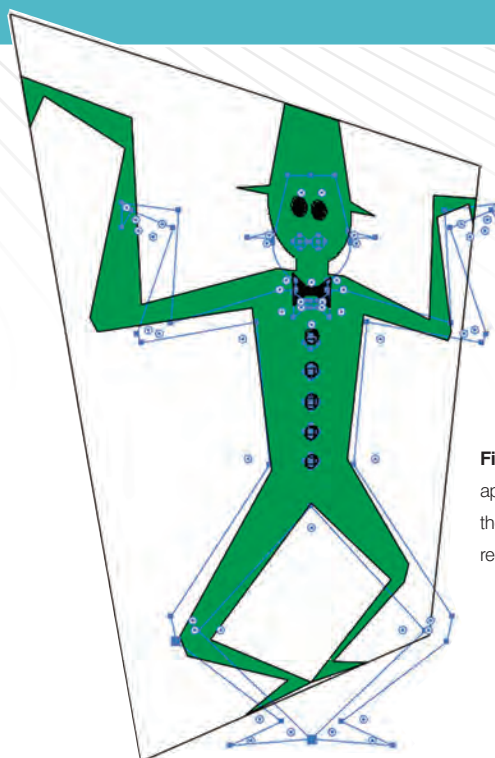
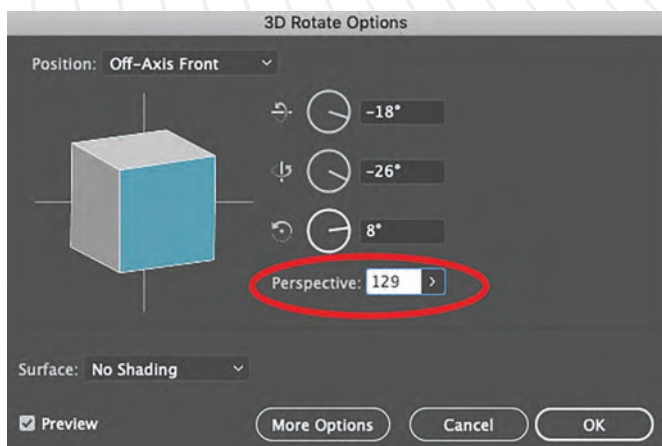


Fig. 3. The Perspective field applies distortion that gives the appearance of the object receding in space.

ROTATE

Both software programs begin the process by having you draw one or more open or closed paths. FYI, I'm using Adobe Illustrator CC to demonstrate these concepts. When you choose Effects > 3D Rotate, the dialog box displays controls that alter the angle of the X (horizontal), Y (vertical) and Z (frontal) axes. (Fig. 2) A cube that represents the position of the object is manually rotated in any direction. As an alternative method, numerical values in degrees can be entered in the X, Y and Z fields. Alternatively, a menu of position presets at the top of the dialog box applies specific angular settings.

The perspective field applies distortion that gives the appearance of the object receding in space as in Fig. 3. When rotating the cube, check the preview box to see the real-time results on the pasteboard.

EXTRUDE

The top section of the Extrude & Bevel command is similar to the rotate dialog box, but the bottom section contains specific extrusion controls. Below the rotation field, the Extrude Depth slider literally pushes the object forward beyond its original plane. Distinct sides are added to the form that add depth and dimension.

The extrusion happens when you choose 3D > Extrude & Bevel from the Effects menu. The dialog box presents a series of specifications that control the extrusion.

The depth slider controls the size of the extrusion and is measured in points. (Fig. 4) When the object is a compound path as in Fig. 4, the

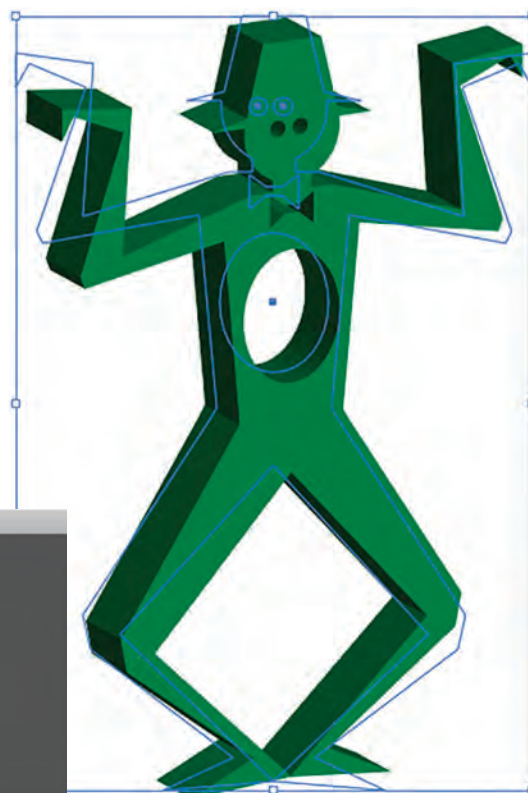
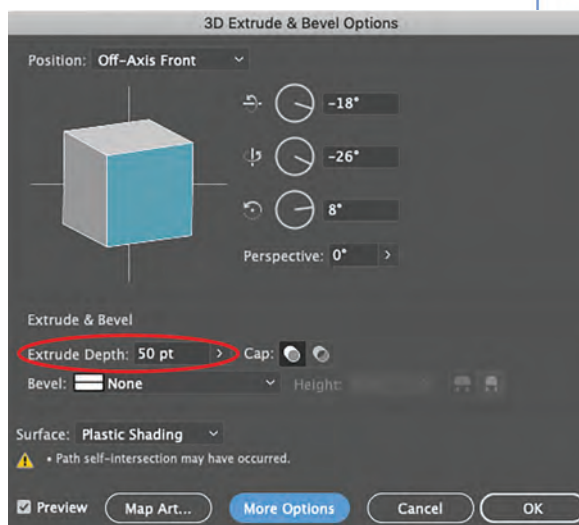
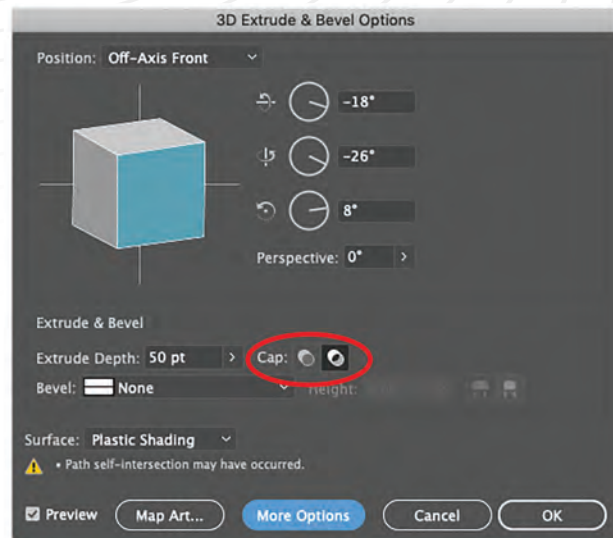


Fig. 4. The depth slider controls the size of the extrusion and is measured in points. When the object is a compound path, the extrusion is applied to all the paths.

THE DIGITAL EYE



Fig. 5: The Cap option denotes how the extrusion is applied, either as a solid or as a hollow extrusion.



extrusion is applied to all edges of the paths. The cap option denotes how the extrusion is applied, either as a solid or as a hollow extrusion. (Fig. 5)

BEVEL

The bevel controls provide any of 11 bevel options to the edges of the object. (Fig. 6) When a bevel is applied, its width can be adjusted, however be careful here. If the bevel exceeds the boundaries of the path, then the edges may intersect producing undesirable results.

REVOLVE

The dialog boxes for all three 3D options, Rotate, Extrude, and Bevel and Revolve are similar. Revolve is the most advanced providing the ability to create height, width, and depth effects to an “in-the-round” object. 3D Revolve, when used properly, can be quite useful in creating realistic in-the-round objects for signage, large-format prints, or any other application. Furthermore, when saved in the appropriate format, the object can be 3D printed.

DIGITAL LATHE

I like to think of this feature as a digital lathe. The concept starts by creating a profile of the object as an open or closed path. 3D Revolve wraps the object around its center axis. (Fig. 7) The direction around the axis can be selected either left or right which produces quite different results. (Fig. 8) Be aware that if the object has a stroke applied, the rotation will take on the color of the stroke.

MULTIPLE OBJECTS

If a rotation is applied to multiple revolved objects, they swivel around their individual axes. To assure they share the same axis, group the objects together first (Object > Group). When revolved and rotated, the grouped objects share the topmost object's axis assuring they remain in alignment. (Fig. 9)

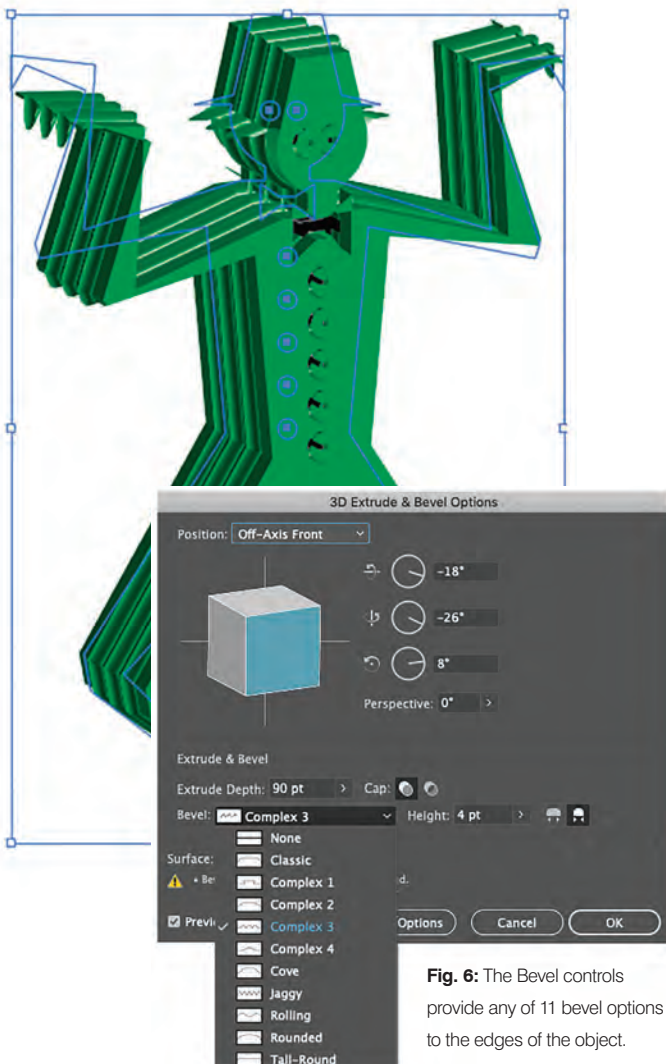


Fig. 6: The Bevel controls provide any of 11 bevel options to the edges of the object.

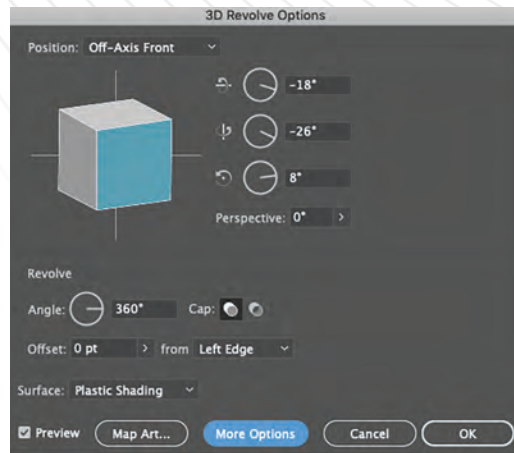


Fig. 7: 3D Revolve wraps the object around its center axis.

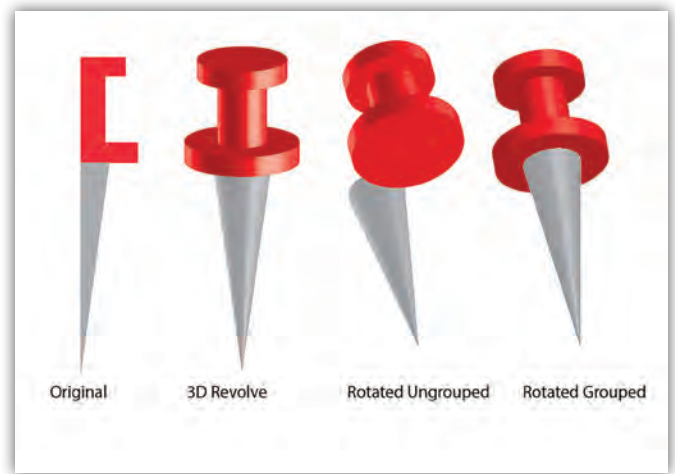
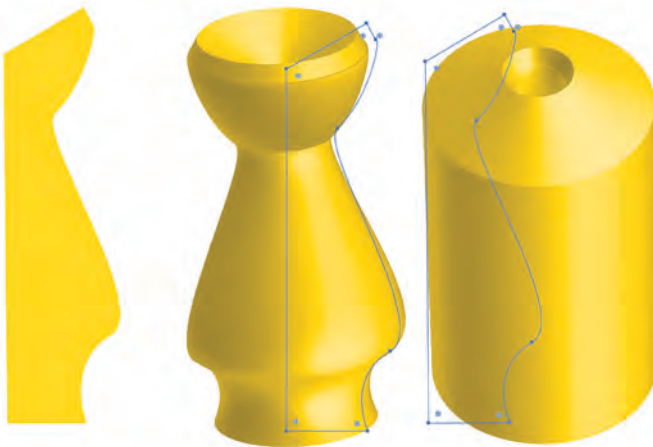


Fig. 8: The direction around the axis can be selected either left or right, which produces quite different results.

Fig. 9: When revolved and rotated, grouped objects share the topmost object's axis, assuring they are in alignment.

LIGHTING

Specific lighting and color can be applied to enhance the object. (Fig. 10) Click the More Options button to expand the dialog box and display the lighting controls. These features determine the position and strength of the lighting effect. The dot on the sphere indicates the position of the light shining on the object. Additional lights and shadows can be added or subtracted and repositioned by dragging them on the surface of the sphere. The light sliders to the right of the sphere control the intensity and quality of the surface and ambient light that illuminates the object.

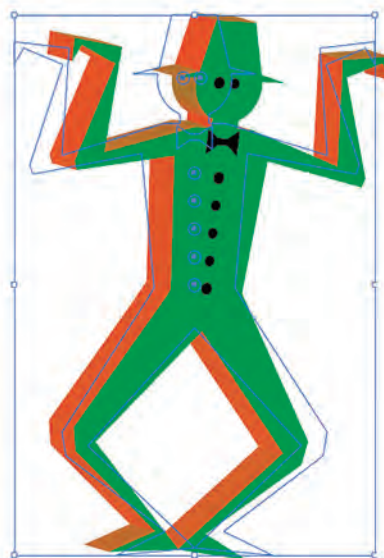


Fig. 10: Specific lighting and color can be applied to enhance the object.



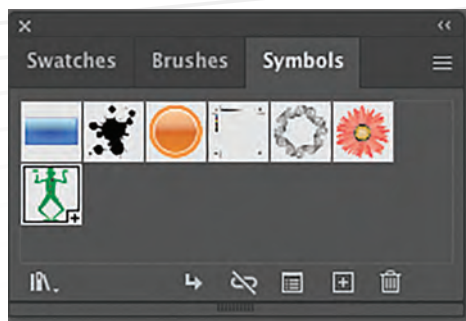


Fig. 11: The graphic to be mapped is dragged to the Symbols panel.

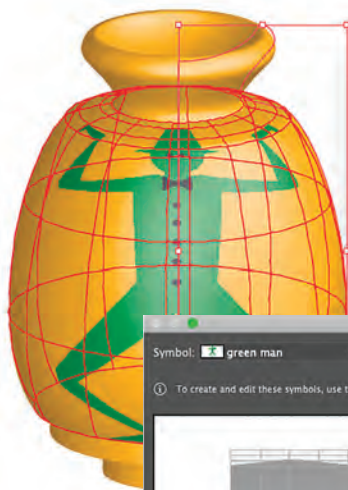


Fig. 12: The graphics appear mapped to the surface in real time if the preview box is checked.

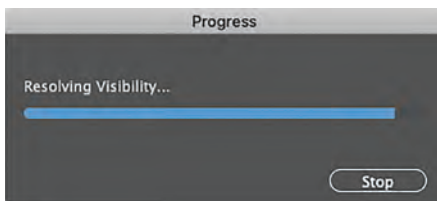
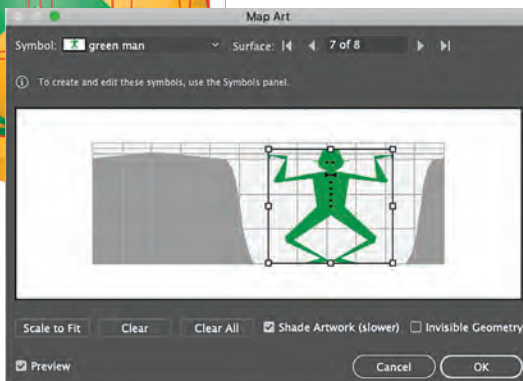


Fig. 13: A progress gauge may appear that indicates the object is being rendered, which can slow down your workflow.

MAP ART

Here is a feature that will wrap an image around an extruded or revolved surface. The graphic to be mapped is dragged to the Symbols panel. (**Fig. 11**) Click the Map Art button and choose the surface where you want to apply it. Choose the desired symbol from the pull-down menu and drag and size the symbol into position on the map that is displayed. The graphic appears mapped to the surface in real time if the preview box is checked. (**Fig. 12**) Click the Shade Artwork button to apply the lighting features that you configured.

EDITING

3D objects are easily edited. Simply drag their anchor points to change their shape or apply fill and stroke colors as you would any two-dimensional object. Certain other options from the Effects menu also change their appearance.

SLOW GOING

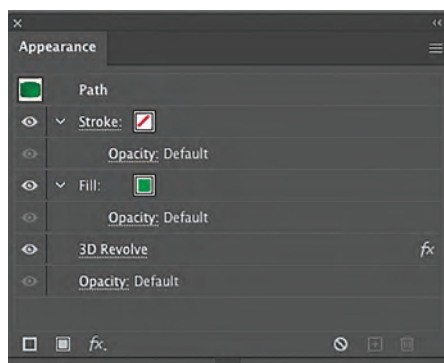
The Extrude & Bevel and Revolve features requires quite a bit of memory to perform their magic, especially after an effect has been applied and when a document is refreshing on screen. Depending on the complexity of the object, a progress gauge may appear that indicates the object is being rendered. The processing can take quite a while so be patient. (**Fig. 13**)

If changes need to be made after 3D Rotate, 3D Extrude & Bevel, or 3D Revolve have been applied, always access these features from the Appearance panel (**Fig. 14**), never from the Effects menu. My experience has been that when the effect is reapplied from the Effects menu, Illustrator gets befuddled and a long wait for processing can ensue. Even worse, the software will crash. Clicking on these 3D controls in the Appearance panel displays the dialog box smoothly without delay for further editing.

EXPERIMENT

Now that you know how to transform straw to gold, or two-dimensional into three-dimensional objects, I hereby ordain you “Digital Alchemist!” This form of wizardry transports you into a magic realm of graphic technology. Though relatively simple to use, 3D effects render flat shapes into solid objects with highlights, shadows, and dimensions. In partnership with other techniques such as additional effects, gradients, textures, distortions etc., your artwork will take on new life. Of course, it’s essential to experiment with these features to see what their limits are. Don’t hesitate to push the envelope of your creativity by trying out these dynamic effects. **GP**

Fig. 14: If changes need to be made after 3D effects have been applied, always access these features from the Appearance panel.



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.

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Profitable Personalization

SUMMER IS THE PERFECT TIME TO GIVE YOUR PERSONALIZATION OFFERINGS A REFRESH



BY DAVE HAAN



(All images courtesy JDS Industries)



If you find yourself in the rut of offering the same products and personalization options to your customers, summer is the perfect time to try something new. Here are suggestions for five popular activities your personalization business can capitalize on while the weather is still warm.

VACATION MEMENTOS

If there is one thing everyone brings back from vacation, it's pictures. Sublimate or UV print images onto any of these products and your customer will relive happy memories every time they pick them up.

- Journals, sketchbooks, or portfolios
- Wooden wall decor, like framed photo panels or paddles
- Drawstring bags, backpacks, and reusable shopping bags made of canvas or burlap

WEDDING FAVORS

Is your customer planning a wedding? Pitch these ideas for bridal party gifts.

Bridesmaids

- Leatherette compact mirrors or travel jewelry boxes that can be laser engraved
- Rosewood wine boxes with lids that can be sublimated, engraved, or UV printed
- Wallets with wrist straps

Groomsmen

- Laserable whiskey stone sets, flask gift sets, or bottle openers
- Laser engravable power banks and phone charging mats or bifold wallets with ID flip
- Personalized executive golf gift sets, golf bag tags, or sublimatable ball markers

SUMMER GET-TOGETHERS

Help your customers make their summertime social events successful with these items.

- Stemless wine tumblers, pilsner tumblers, or slim and regular-sized beverage can holders that can be laser engraved, sublimated, or UV direct printed



- Serve beverages from a 64-oz. stainless steel or powder-coated growler
- Sublimatable coasters are available in a variety of shapes and sizes — cork, slate, bamboo, and silicone coasters can be laser engraved
- Does your customer like to grill? Help the chef look their best with laser engraved or sublimatable barbecue tools or gift sets

FUNDRAISER FUN

Event walks and races hit their stride during the summer months. Help your customers go beyond ribbons, medals, and trophies by showing them these options.

- Banners and yard signs to promote the event and highlight the route during the race
- Commemorative race shirts decorated with either sublimation or heat transfer material
- Laserable silicone bracelets for participants to remember the cause long after the event is over



SPIRITWEAR PERSONALIZATION

It's never too soon to talk with customers about their back-to-school needs because the end of summer will be here before you know it!

- Sublimatable lanyards, T-shirts, and glitter socks are great options
- So are shirts, hats, bags, and stadium chairs decorated with heat transfer vinyl
- Water bottles are both sublimatable and laser engravable
- Decals, yard signs, and pole banners are great ways to show support at school, work, and home

Start sharing these occasion-based ideas with your customers and you'll see the results before summer ends. **GP**



Dave Haan is the business development manager for JDS Industries and JDS Sign Supply. He has 25 years of experience in marketing. Dave joined JDS in 2018. His primary focus has been improving how JDS communicates with current and future customers through marketing campaigns and in-person trade shows. Before joining JDS, Dave worked in TV news at an advertising agency. He is a graduate of South Dakota State University.



Tapeless Sandblast Ports

TWO CREATIVE APPROACHES TO UTILIZING TAPELESS SANDBLAST PORTS

Typically, decorative sandcarvers apply masking tape beyond the edges of the photoresist mask to protect their substrate during etching. The application and removal of that masking tape is time-consuming and especially onerous during high-volume production runs. So, savvy operators use tapeless sandblast ports to eliminate tedious taping.

I'll share two creative approaches: cut rubber and molded silicone. Both materials can be reused indefinitely since they are resistant to the grit and pressures used in decorative sandblasting. While both approaches work with many types of substrates, I'll refer to glassware in this article.

OPTION 1: RUBBER MEMBRANE

The rubber option is versatile since the same rubber membrane can be used to mask multiple substrates. The flexible rubber is also the optimum port for light glassware.

To use the rubber membrane tapeless port option, follow these simple steps:

- 1. Cut hole:** Place the surface to be etched on the rubber membrane. Trace the edges of the glassware onto the membrane to ensure the right size window for your glassware. Cut the shape out of the rubber with a sharp razor blade.
- 2. Mounting:** Stretch the rubber membrane over the pegs of the retention frame. Secure the corners of the membrane to the frame with wing nuts. Finally, mount the retention frame itself to the tapeless sandblast port frame.
- 3. Sandcarving:** Reach around the back of the retention frame and press the glassware into the rubber membrane so that only the imaged photoresist mask is showing. The flexed rubber will provide a seal that protects the unmasked portions of the glassware. Voila, no masking tape required!

Cut Rubber: Steps 1-3



(All images courtesy IKONICS Imaging)



Silicone Mold: Steps 1-9

OPTION 2: SILICONE MOLD

Another clever approach that works quite well is the silicone mold. The tightest fits are achieved with silicone molds.

- 1. Size it up:** Apply your photoresist mask accurately to the glassware prior to creating a silicone mold. Be sure to choose the appropriate size mold box for your glassware.
- 2. Install spacers:** Prepare the mold box with rubber spacers within the intended zone of the sandcarving window. These spacers elevate the glassware from the wall of the mold box, ensuring sufficient room for the silicone. Spacing them evenly will ensure the glassware remains stable during mold creation.
- 3. Activate silicone:** Quickly knead together equal amounts by weight or volume of components A & B. In this case, part A is purple and part B is white. It will take you one minute of kneading to blend the two colors into one uniform color. The silicone continues to harden until completely hard in about 20 minutes.
- 4. Add magnets:** Place small pieces of silicone on each of the four screws. Place one magnet over each of the four pieces of silicone.
- 5. Add all silicone:** Place remaining silicone into the mold box pressing it down to get complete coverage over the magnets and flattening out to get even with a small block of wood.
- 6. Imprint substrate:** Press glassware into the silicone until it reaches the rubber spacers. Leave the glassware in the mold while the silicone hardens. In 20 minutes, the mold will have hardened completely. You can then remove the glass.
- 7. Remove silicone:** Loosen the four screws from the back of the mold box. Remove the back of the mold box from the mold body. The silicone mold should then come free of the mold housing.
- 8. Cut window:** Cut away the window with a cheese knife. Be sure that the window is just large enough, so as not to cover any of the sandblast image.
- 9. Sandcarving:** The magnetized mold will quickly secure the completed mold to the back of a metal window port within the sandblast cabinet. The operator simply places the glassware into the perfect fit of the silicone mold with only the imaged photoresist mask showing. Shazam, no masking tape! Again, these techniques work great with a wide variety of substrates beyond glassware, including wine bottles and ceramic mugs, as well as awards. You can be creative and make your own tapeless sandblast port, or you can source one of these turn-key solutions. Either way, you'll work faster and earn more on your next large-volume order by going tapeless. **GP**

Brian Mirsch, marketing director at Ikonics Corporation, has 20+ years' experience promoting screen print and engraving solutions. Most of his career has concentrated on developing export markets for Ikonics' U.S.-based manufacturing.



The tightest fits are achieved with silicone molds.



3 WAYS TO USE THE DISTORTION TOOL

HOW TO USE THE PUSH & PULL, ZIPPER, AND TWISTER OPTIONS



Fig. 1: The main tool bar with the icon for the distortion tool circled in red. (All images courtesy Doug Zender)



Fig. 2: There are three options to choose from on the top task bar.



Fig. 3: The Push & Pull feature – on the left side is Push, dragging from the center of the image from right to left.

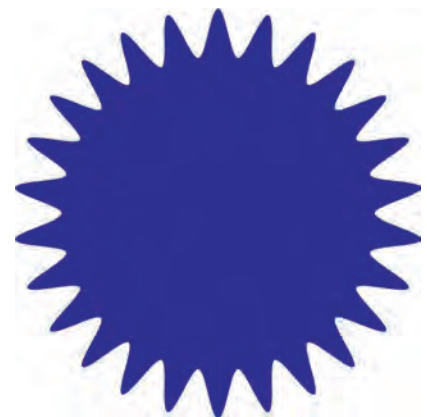


Fig. 4: The Zipper distortion, again beginning as a centered circle.

The Distortion tool was first introduced to the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite with version nine and remained unchanged up to and including version 2019. That is 13 versions of the program that retained this effect. The 2020 version of the program saw some major changes to the interface and some additional Distortion features.

I want first to look at the classic interface. **Fig. 1** shows the main tool bar with the icon for the distortion tool circled in red. It's kind of an irregular shaped icon. With an image drawn, when the distortion tool is accessed, there are three options from which to choose on the top task bar, as seen in **Fig. 2**. From left to right, they are respectively Push & Pull, Zipper, and Twister. In the accompanying examples, I began by drawing a circle in the center of the page and then added the distortion to it.

PUSH & PULL

With each of these, the task bar changes to display different adjustment options. The first example in **Fig. 3** is the Push & Pull feature. On the left side is Push, dragging from the center of the image from right to left. The right side is an additional Pull from left to right. The presets can result in different visual results. This effect can easily produce some interesting designs of objects that may prove usable in a particular project.

ZIPPER

My next example is the Zipper distortion, again beginning as a centered circle and depicted in **Fig. 4**. There are several choices displayed on the task bar including randomize, smooth and local. Each can produce differing results. I recommend you explore the various options to determine what is best for your purposes.

The randomize option creates a pattern that makes the spikes at differing intensity. The smooth option tends to round distortion details and the localize choice is an option that moves the distortion to a particular part of the image. They are all best visualized in use, and many of these details are only obvious in use.

TWISTER

Lastly is the Twister option. It is only four rotations but could involve more as one chooses. **Fig. 5** is an image of that. I have included **Fig. 6** as a possible use of the distorted image.

I first created a swirl distortion, then stretched it down. I then quickly drew an imaginary planet with some 3D effects and placed it over the distorted image giving a look of the planet floating above a cloud or some kind of space phenomenon. This kind of thing could easily be the beginning of a logo or marketing design for a customer and is easily and quickly rendered.

It is worth mentioning that all examples above are all rendered as vector images that can easily be altered or edited in CorelDRAW as needed. That's part of the program's intuitive nature, or at least used to be.

NEW VS. OLD INTERFACE

So far, we have looked at the classic interface that many have grown accustomed to over time and use, including myself. I guess it's time to look more intently at the new interface.

Beginning with the 2020 version, the distortion tool is no longer accessed by an icon on the tool bar. You must go to Effects > Distort and a menu box (**Fig. 7**) appears to indicate a choice of 11 different distortion options from which to choose.



Fig. 5: The Twister option. It is only four rotations but could involve more as one chooses.

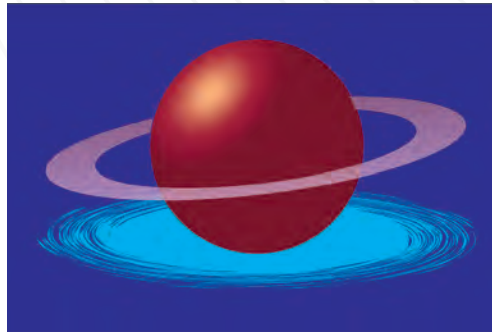


Fig. 6: Example of use of the distorted image.



Fig. 7: Beginning with the 2020 version, the distortion tool is no longer accessed by an icon on the tool bar. You must go to Effects > Distort.

Corel’s claim is that the new interface is “more intuitive” — a claim that I personally find to be a bit dubious, especially since I have used the previous versions for years and do not want to go through a whole new learning curve.

I recommend that you explore each of the new distort options to determine if any are appropriate to include in any new project. Most of these new effects are rendered as bitmaps instead of vector objects, which can then be difficult to modify. Instead of the interactive aspects of previous versions, it seems that the programmers have now favored dialog windows with adjustment sliders over the classic vector images. Bitmap renderings are more difficult to modify without using PHOTO-PAINT and can be problematic.

I have explored many of the newer options and have found that the newer versions offer little more to be desired for my purposes. Personally, I prefer what the older versions offer as far as interactive content. Though more choices exist, they don’t seem to be as usable and fluid as the previous versions.

I received a question from a *GRAPHICS PRO* reader who purchased the 2021 version of CorelDRAW. He was having difficulty opening a Pantone color palette in the workspace. Since I had not yet procured the newer versions, I installed both the 2020 and 2021 trial versions and spent about two weeks exploring the programs. The first thing I tried to do was open a Pantone palette and found it to be a major

challenge and an exercise in frustration. The whole process is not as straightforward and “intuitive” as previous versions. All in all, I am personally disappointed in these newer versions. Maybe subsequent versions will return more to the classic interface that I have enjoyed using for years? At this point, I find it difficult to justify the cost of upgrading to a new version when my older ones do everything I need. I will, however, continue to familiarize myself with the newer versions. As always, I urge comments, questions, and insights at dezender1@gmail.com. **GP**



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

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START-UP MENTALITY IS A MUST

THE RIGHT MENTALITY TO LAUNCH AND THEN CONTINUE TO GROW IS VITAL

I'm incredibly excited about the upcoming Start Here Academy as an opportunity to be around many great people with a start-up mentality. This event is happening on Sept. 15, 2022, in Charlotte, North Carolina. This event is in conjunction with the *GRAPHICS PRO EXPO*, and I will be there all weekend having amazing conversations. Before Start Here Academy, let's discuss the start-up mentality and why I am so excited about it? This mentality is a must for success whether you are starting up or not. The right mentality to launch and then continue to grow is vital. It all starts with our mindset.

MINDSET MATTERS

As a business owner, I was shocked to realize that 90% of the challenges business owners face have nothing to do with the nuts and bolts of running a business. I knew this deep down, but it never really clicked. Since starting Our Success Group, I have been able to mentor many other business owners, and my gut was right. It is not accounting, production, or even marketing. It is the mindset. As entrepreneurs, we need to cultivate a different mindset than we were taught in traditional schools. Being a business owner is about having a mindset and willingness to sacrifice for a few years that most people won't, so you can spend the rest of your life living like most people can't.

Yes, the Facebook groups are littered with the nuts-and-bolts questions. But I cringe because most business owners only use that external resource. There is no depth, and people are looking for a quick fix. What they put out there are

not real challenges. It all started clicking for me once I had the opportunity to dig down to the core of the OSG community's difficulties and found that it was way more emotional and about mindset.


As I made these discoveries, they started to make more sense. The nuts and bolts are covered with the information we can all find at our fingertips with these 3-by-5 computers we carry in our pockets. You can discover hundreds of different strategies for your accounting, equipment, marketing campaign, and the day-to-day how-tos. Heck, many times, the suggestion you can find can be the opposite of the guru you listened to yesterday on YouTube.

The reality is that as business owners, we have all the resources we need to overcome external challenges right at our fingertips. But the challenge is that we are not sure of our core and foundation, so all that information is hard to implement.

For example, what if your challenge is growing your business, and you can't decide if you should go all-in on social media or focus on some other strategy. Then one day, you find details about the fantastic success of Dollar Shave Club with social media, and you decide you need to go all-in too. Six months later, you are frustrated and exhausted by trying to keep up with all the tweets, tiks, hearts, and #Blesslife posts. You then happen on details about Lush, who decided to shut down all of their social media channels and avoid it altogether. Ugh, what are you to do?

The good news is that you already have the answer. You only need a mindset shift. You need to understand your foundation





The reality is that as business owners, we have all the resources we need to overcome external challenges right at our fingertips.

POSSIBLE

and who you are as a company, and then you can determine quickly if social media is for you or not and, if so, at what level.

As a business owner, no matter the stage, you have passion for what you are doing, and there is a vision even if it is unclear or at least not clear any longer. If not, you would not have even dreamt of starting your own business. With the right mindset and foundation, you can stoke that passion, learn to build momentum, and throw some extra fuel on the fire of success. The businesses who spend their research time developing and honing their mindset and foundation are successful. And that is whom I get to hang out with, highlight, have discussions with, and enjoy their company at the Start Here Academy and beyond in Charlotte next month.

3 MINDSET SHIFTS TO TRY

To close out, let me give you three key things you can do to enhance your start-up mentality. And again, you don't have to be a start-up to take advantage of this valuable mindset shift. When you improve these three areas, you will be shocked how these simple mindset shifts will change the trajectory of your business but only if you are willing to give it a chance. Act as if you can and have the start-up business owner's mindset.

In the first shift, you must identify your target, but then make sure that you are shooting for something that will be worth the time and effort. Michelangelo said it best, "The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark." This shift is to focus on goal setting and then believing in your heart that it is possible. The mindset shift is not just setting a big future goal but setting concrete goals along the way with details of how much and by when. Many people don't realize their big future goal is just a wish. The process is a series of continuous goals and milestones where you assume it is possible each time. You enter the next goal with high intentions of the possible results and leave with extremely low attachment to the results. Focusing on what you can control, acknowledging what you are grateful for, and affirming you can do it!

The next mindset shift is to get a handle on your fears. You must conquer fear so that you step out of your comfort zone. As business owners, there are always things that we know we need to do, but our comfort zone keeps us from acting. You have to expand your comfort zone to accomplish those goals. You also need the self-confidence to continue believing it is possible. The only way to build self-confidence is by surviving a risk. Serving that risk and getting outside of the comfort zone requires reframing fear

and finding techniques to overcome anything holding you back. It could be deep-rooted and take some soul searching and uncomfortable work. Conquering that puts you where success is — right outside your comfort zone!

The last mindset shift is to focus on becoming an action taker. You have to take action and keep moving forward in the face of all sorts of situations — the days you don't feel like it, where things are drawing you away from your goals. The more effort, the faster you get there, but don't mistake what I'm saying for the much-talked-about hustle culture. Grinding yourself to death is not the answer. When I say action taker, it is about momentum and using your internal GPS (joy) to tell you what to do next. Act even when you are unsure what action to take so you stay in a constant state of momentum. It's the stopping and starting that kills most business owners' success. Use the movement to give you feedback on what to do next but stay in motion so it can get easier each time.

As I said, spend time focusing on those three mindset shifts, and you will be surprised how quickly you will see results. The challenge for me as a coach is that these actions don't pay off immediately. But I have been able to watch struggling, floundering businesses that have the JOB mindset where they are obsessed with the nuts and bolts, waiting for someone else to give them the magic bullet. I supported those business owners in finding their start-up mindset and followed their progress daily as they took action. That action leads to self-confidence, trying new things, and setting bigger and bigger goals. Seeing this has been like watching a fast-motion movie of a tree growing from a seed out of the ground. And the best part is that those business owners now seem like success is effortless, yet they keep cultivating their start-up mentality.

I'd love to hear how you found your start-up mindset. I can't wait to discuss these concepts and more with you in Charlotte. Tag me on social media and use the hashtag #SHA22. **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).



5 WAYS TO FIND NEW CUSTOMERS

THINK LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR

How to find customers (aka marketing) is the second most discussed subject we cover with NNEP members and apparel decoration business owners daily. Many embroiderers and apparel decorators are not sure where or how to find customers. Many new business owners guess about what kinds of marketing will work for them, or even worse, do no marketing at all, yet they hope for the best that their business will take off. Today I will cover ways to market your business that 1) you can do; 2) you can afford; and 3) that work!

YOU'RE AN ENTREPRENEUR

My goal today is to help you make the mental shift, if necessary, from thinking of yourself as an embroiderer or apparel decorator to thinking of yourself as an entrepreneur, a business owner. This is important because our industry is populated by three kinds of people: producers, sellers, and entrepreneurs. And the entrepreneurs are the ones that are profitable. I want you to be in the third group! And getting into that last group, the entrepreneurs, is totally within your abilities and your control.

- Do you want a business that makes no income?
- Do you want a business that makes a little bit of income?
- Do you want a business that replaces an existing income?
- Do you want a business that makes a lot of income? How much is a lot? \$25,000? \$100,000? A million? What is your “big sexy number?” Write this number down somewhere where you will see it every single day. “I want my business to bring in \$_____!”

As it has often been said, when you fail to plan, you plan to fail. That is especially true for independent business owners. We get so busy doing the “work” filling orders that we overlook the importance of building a solid foundation for our business. Today, we are going to think about exactly that – the foundation upon which we are building our dream businesses. We need to set aside time to work *on* our businesses, not just *in* them.

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

Without a plan, a big picture view of our company, it is really challenging to achieve that objective! I have learned, after helping literally thousands of business owners, that success is possible when you step back, fly high and look at your business from an angle and from a higher elevation. To see the terrain of your business and where you want to go, you

need to view it from 40,000 feet and see what is going on within your company, your market, and within this industry. Then you need to take what you see and build that into a marketing plan that will take you where you want to go. This plan becomes your roadmap. Without a map, how do you know where you are going? More importantly, how do you know when and if you get there?

I’m going to give you marketing strategies that you can begin using immediately. They are not expensive. They are not tricky. They are not easy either. Doing any of these strategies will require that you think and then you must act, you need to actually do something to benefit from them.

It all starts with marketing because marketing is the first step that leads to sales. Marketing produces contacts. Contacts become prospects and finally, prospects become customers.

MARKETING EXPLAINED

I am giving you some homework – yep, assignments to help you define where you want to go and then how to get there. I bet that you’ve heard some of the ideas that I’m going to share before. But what you may not know is that only 25% of independent business owners actually do intentional marketing. The ones that do the work succeed! Because you are here, reading this magazine, taking the time to learn how to grow your business, you have already dramatically increased your chances of realizing your dream business.

Marketing is one of those “fuzzy” words – even for me, and I have training and years of experience in it. What does it actually mean? Marketing is the action or business of promoting and selling products or services. How to bring your marketing plan to life – that is where things get interesting. Think about your marketing objectives as real conversations that have a life cycle of their own. Once you know the flow of these conversations, and what to do at each stage of the conversation, you will move forward.

As apparel decorators and embroiderers, we are doing so much more than providing products with logos and designs on them.

- You’re a key part of your customer’s marketing team
- You’re part of their branding
- You’re a problem solver and solution provider
- You help them build community
- You help them create unity



• And you do all of this through the logoed apparel and products you provide

So, are you beginning to see what I mean about changing how you think about marketing, and your role as an entrepreneur? When you think like this, that you are a branding partner, you are thinking like an entrepreneur. When you think that you need to make 48 shirts today, you are thinking like a producer, a do-er.

Both kinds of thinking are necessary in your business, especially if you are an “army of one.”

The key to your success lies in the fact that you have to take active control over your time and determine how you make the most money. And then you must make sure that at least 50% of your working time, every week, is spent on that task. And there are only two ways you make money as an apparel decorator – your jaw is moving up and down as you are communicating with customers or your machine’s needles are going up and down as you produce orders!

5 WAYS TO FIND NEW CUSTOMERS

I promised you real strategies that you can execute to grow your business. Here are five strategies that I think you could do this year and have dramatic results. It does not matter if you have a storefront, operate from your home, or have a huge commercial operation. Do these things, and you will see growth. Remember when you plan to work on your business and not just in it, you will see growth. Your goal is to get specific and transform these ideas into actions.

1 Do Your Homework!

“Marketing research” is a meaningless phrase to many business owners. Or people assume that only big companies do market research. Let’s make it relevant to your business with three simple questions:

- What is the average dollar amount of your orders?
- How much do your customers spend with you annually, on average?
- How often do your customers place an order with you?

With the answers to these three simple questions, you can then determine the dollar value of every customer and every sale. If your average order from a trades business owner (plumber, builder, painter, electrician) is \$250, and they place orders three times a year, it makes sense that each of these kinds of customers is worth \$750/year. If your “onesie” and gift customers spend about \$50 once a year, clearly these customers are worth \$50/year each.

Which group of customers do you want to get more of, gift and onesie customers or trades people? Go back through your past years’ sales. Take the time to do the “market research” to understand your customers. What groups become evident? What are their average sales? How often did they place an order? Do you see any spikes in activity based around something you did – such as a mailing, a networking event, or a show? You will see patterns emerge that will help you target more customers like the ones that are making you the best income. Once you know who they are, it becomes much easier to find more like them.

By looking back over the past several months of orders, patterns will emerge that will help you know where to invest your marketing time, money, and effort so that you can attract more customers like your best groups of customers. High turnover industries = ideal customers, where garments are hard used or employees turn often, like restaurants, labor, construction, and landscapers.

2 Replicate Your Top Five

Grab your pen right now and write down the name of your top five customers, jobs, or orders. If you are struggling to name five, you may be new or a small business and that is OK! Write down at least one person or job. My question to you is this: Would you like 5, 10, 20, 50 more just like them? First, why did you write them down? Are they nice? Are they easy to work with? Do they pay on time? Does their design sew well? Was that order profitable, or really profitable? What is it about them or that order that made them “top five” worthy? Ideally, you picked a customer or job that provided a healthy profit for you.

Now evaluate these top customers. What industry are they in? What was the order size? How can you connect with other customers that have some similarities to these top five? Market to companies and customers that have parallels to your top five customers, and you will bring more top five type work to your business. Why market to people that are like your “worst nightmare” customers? Stop marketing to them, completely! If they walk in, sure take the work. But 100% of your marketing messages, efforts, and money should be going out toward top-five candidates!

3 Identify Your B-E-L

Look at your “Before Embroidery (or other decoration process) Life” to see if you have hidden opportunities. What are you interested in? With what groups are you connected, maybe even have some sway? Example – I should not sell to horse farms,

STITCH SOLUTIONS

as I know nothing about horses. Sell to groups where you are involved — that means you have knowledge!

4 Business Cards

Dollar for dollar, this is the best money you can spend to share the key basics about your business with anyone, anytime and anywhere. Always include your full phone number, including the area and your postal zip code. On the back of the card add a coupon, add lines for notes, or even your favorite quote.

5 Sexy Sells!

The machines we use to put logos and designs on products are sexy — they are fun to watch in action. Showing a machine going is one of our greatest marketing assets. When people see the machine running, they often become enchanted enough to buy something that was done on it. Harness that power, as it is likely they will continue to buy from you well after the initial event.

Shoot 20-30 seconds of video of an order being created. Include this video as an attachment the next time you email that customer or when you send them their invoice. It is highly likely that they will share that video with the people they work with, their family, and their friends. You can also post these short videos on your Facebook page and YouTube.

Good marketing is essential for every company. It can make a company with a mediocre product successful, but poor marketing can send a good company out of business. Yet even business-to-business marketing is often seen as a soft creative field instead of the engine that drives company revenue.

Here's the real secret that successful companies know and live by: Creating a clear marketing strategy is not what companies do after they get big — it is what small companies do to grow and get bigger in the first place. Doing anything is

better than doing nothing, no matter how small or infrequent.

What is one marketing thing you can do today and do every day to move a single step forward? When you have a clear target, clear message, and a plan, use this to guide your small day to day decisions. Ask yourself, "How will doing X help me reach goal Y?"

Your greatest limitation is you, and what you believe to be true and the decisions you make based on your beliefs.

- "They won't pay that ..."
- "They don't need that ..."
- "They won't like this ..."
- "It is not good enough ..."

They are not saying these things, only you are — stop it! They are not walking into your business naked — they need more than a shirt to wear with some colorful threads, ink, or vinyl on it. Learn to discover their "what" or "why," and you will never have any real competition!

No matter what approach you take to build your business and attract new customers, keep in mind that you should fine tune each effort on a small scale before investing in that effort on a larger scale. Also remember to let each effort have a fair shot at working before you abandon it. And most important of all, remember that unless the person has need for your decorated apparel at that exact moment that they are seeing your message, it doesn't matter anyway. So, keep your company visible and accessible so that when the customer does have a need, you are already in place in their mind. **GP**

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

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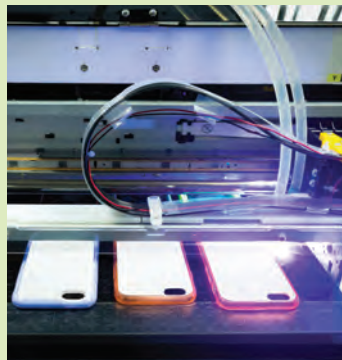
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