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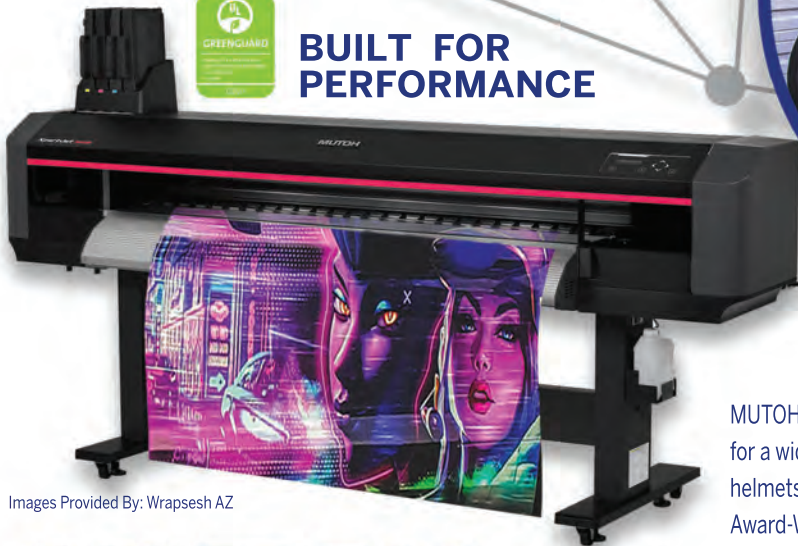
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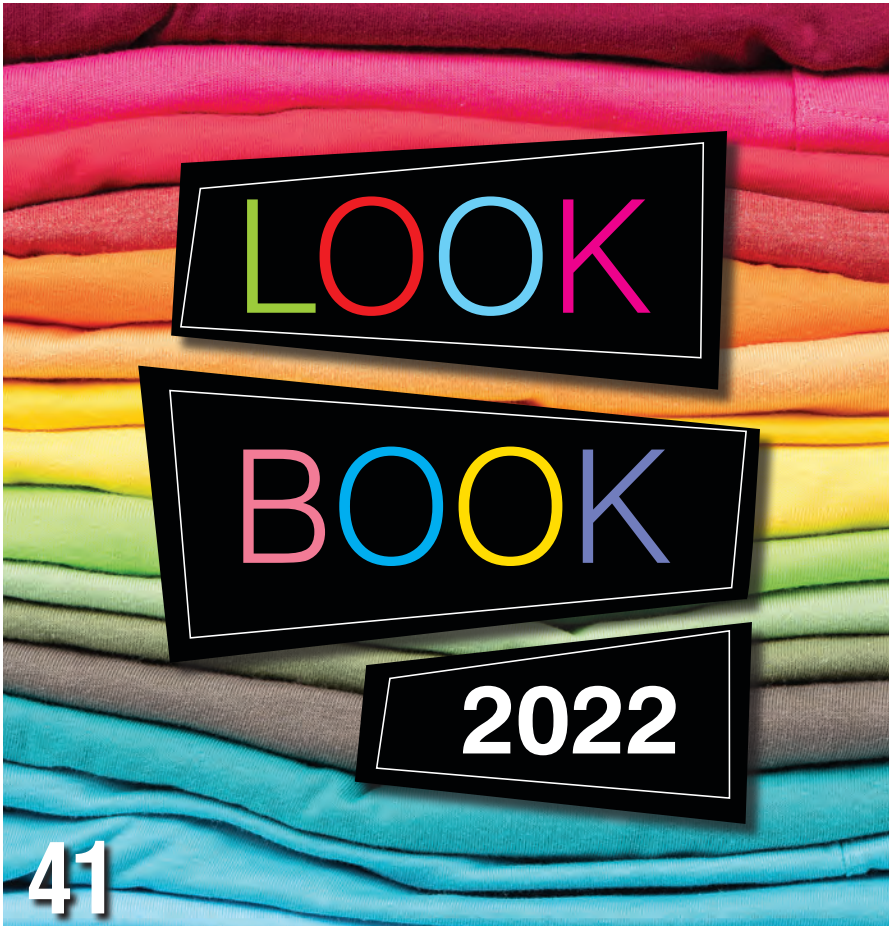
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Featured in this month's issue is our special section, **The LookBook** on page 41.

The LookBook is a sponsored section that puts the spotlight on the latest apparel trends in the industry.

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The Unisex Malibu Hoodie from Next Level Apparel. Check out the latest styles from top apparel suppliers in this year's LookBook, page 41. Image courtesy Next Level Apparel. Right: The Seklema mat is just one of the many underrated tools that can make a big difference for your shop, page 10. Image courtesy JDS Industries.

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PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

The kids these days have a saying that's meant to try to keep people from getting the wrong impression from first appearances or to not be negative even though they know the situation looks bad: "Don't judge."

It's well-meaning, but being human and all, withholding judgement is downright impossible. We judge everything, all the time, by first impressions, appearances, sounds, smells, and even association. Sometimes it puts you in a hole right away because you've truly gotten the wrong first impression, but over time you realize that you aren't so much being "judgy" as you are using your experience to look at a situation and determine common factors to past results.

As a business, you are on the receiving end of this all the time. Your website. Your storefront. Your shop vehicles. The way you answer your phone or reply to emails. More judgments than a daytime TV lineup.

In the graphics industry, it's important to remember that your website, shop vehicle, storefront, or reception area has a tremendous impact on the people who see them. You will be judged based on those things, mainly because they will assume you are going to put that same kind of effort into the project or print job they are approaching you about.

This is why it's important to make your branding and shop marketing your top priority. You wouldn't dress haphazardly and sloppily for a job interview, so don't give your potential customers a similar first impression by having anything less than a perfect resume on display for them to see. It's hard to convince someone you're the right person for the job when evidence to the contrary is staring potential clients right in the face.

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CORRECTION: In the August issue of GRAPHICS PRO, our story Competing in the World of Banners listed the incorrect location of Nonna Kofman's shop. Her Signarama is located in Grayslake, Illinois.



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

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TOOLS

BY SHELLEY WIDHALM

to Complement Your Talent

STARTING A GRAPHIC BUSINESS? BE SELECTIVE WITH EQUIPMENT



With screen printing, each color that's printed needs a separate screen, which is how the ink is applied to the garment. (Image courtesy Lawson Screen & Digital Products)

What's your favorite shop tool?

“Turnabout to keep ink mixing all the time. UniKote to coat screens perfectly each time. Douthitt direct-to-screen Waxjet unit.”

— Steven Farag,
CEO, Campus Ink

Starting a graphics business might require significant startup expenses, but there are ways small shops can get entry-level equipment and still produce high-quality products while not breaking the bank.

Graphics covers several areas from digital printing for signs to engraving signs, plaques and the like, and printing custom apparel, and each area requires different tools and equipment. What should shops be on the lookout for when making their first purchases? And are there extras they should consider that will make the job easier?

DIGITAL PRINTING FOR SIGNAGE

Signs that are digitally printed – one of the most common signage technologies – are designed and created by using computer graphics for small items like menus and sale signs up to something as large as a banner that can cover the side of a building.

Digital signs can be printed on most surfaces like plastic, vinyl, metal, glass, paper, and wood using large-format digital printing. An image from a digital file or a media-based image is printed onto the selected surface, requiring less setup and overhead than traditional printing methods like offset printing.

“The most important thing is to save you time and to make your job easier,” says Ernesto Macias, “The Duke” of Yellotools in Stanton, California., e.g., the unofficial chief executive officer of USA operations.

Yellotools offers a starter kit for sign making, plus more than 1,000 tools for signage businesses. The starter kit comes with the basics like a squeegee to apply vinyl, a cutter or retractable knife with clippings inside, a buffer pad that goes on the squeegee to protect vinyl from scratches, and a weeder, a type of knife that can be used to cut out the insides of shapes and letters. There's also a sign tweezer with a fine pointed end to pick up flecks of material that might get stuck to the back of the vinyl, magnets that serve as an alternative to graphic masking tape, and a gecko patch that has tiny suction cups that can adhere to smooth surfaces.



What's your favorite shop tool?

“*“F570 sublimation printer. It allowed me to do larger and more prints at the same time.”*

— Ervin Richards,
Richards Sportingwear



The Epson GO Transfer Mate DTF/DTG Kit features an eco-solvent printer for direct-to-film and direct-to-garment printing jobs. (Image courtesy Graphics One)

“You can pop it onto a window and put the graphic there, even though it’s not metal,” Macias adds. “It allows you to align the sign on the window, so when you install it, you don’t expose the sticky part of the vinyl. That creates a lot of static when you release the lining on the back of the vinyl, which can drag over particles in the air. If you can control the vinyl; it makes the release job much easier.”

Yellotools offers additional tools to ease the signage production process, such as 84 different squeegees in eight different shapes and a variety of sizes and flexibility ratings. The TimberMaxx Floor Flexi is a squeegee made from wood that’s larger in size than the typical squeegee and can include the addition of an extension pole attachment for floor installs.

One of Yellotools’ biggest sellers is the SpeedClip, a C-shaped plastic clip that replaces tape or rubber bands to hold rolls of vinyl in place.

“It’s so basic and so perfect as long as it’s made with a nice quality plastic,” Macias says, explaining that other clips will break if bent too far. “An inexpensive tool is the most expensive tool you’ll use over time. ... (The clip) is a tool you’ll never have to buy again.”

Another helpful tool is a cutting mat, a better surface for cutting out vinyl graphics than glass or wood since it will not get



A cutting mat that provides a smooth, clean surface for cutting vinyl graphics. (Image courtesy Yellotools)



(Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

One of Yellotools’ biggest sellers is Speedclips, C-shaped plastic clips that help hold vinyl rolls in place. (Image courtesy Yellotools)





The conveyor dryer available from Lawson Screen & Digital Products is used to dry a garment after printing. (Image courtesy Lawson Screen & Digital Products)

What's your favorite shop tool?

“I cannot imagine running our embroidery operation without a hooping station. It ensures that we get the designs straight on the garments and in the correct location for that particular design and size of the product.”

— Jennifer Cox,
National Network of
Embroidery Professionals

indentations or memory cuts. Wood becomes covered in small cuts over time, which may catch the blade, while glass has a high surface tension that slowly dulls knives, he points out.

Yellotools also offers tools for storage, including units for storing vinyl rolls with different sized platforms and wheels underneath.

“A lot of the tools we sell come from customer frustration,” Macias explains, recommending researching the quality of tools and equipment before making a purchase. “Nowadays, I’ve noticed more and more, a lot of our tools get copied, which is sad.”

He says the customer ends up buying something that’s not high quality and more likely to break more quickly. “They become discouraged from wanting to buy another tool,” he adds. “Do your due diligence and check the quality of that tool.”

PRINTING CUSTOM APPAREL

More and more sign companies are moving into printing custom apparel using direct-to-film (DTF), direct-to-garment (DTG), or dye sublimation, capturing an audience that needs signs but also apparel to market its products and services.

These companies might opt for a boutique-style business or a 100 to 1,000-plus piece order service. The equipment will vary depending on the type of job.

For high-volume orders, the tried-and-true screen-printing method will prove to be the most efficient and profitable, and DTF printers are making inroads. But for custom or smaller orders, sublimation, heat transfer, or a DTG printer may be the better solution.

“The target market is starting to become one and the same,” says Dan Barefoot, vice president of Graphics One in Sunnyvale,



A conveyor dryer eases the screen-printing process. (Image courtesy Lawson Screen & Digital Products)



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The Epson GO Sublimation DS-2400 24" printer bundle can handle various types of garment printing jobs. (Image courtesy Graphics One)

What's your favorite shop tool?

“

“My favorite shop tool is our custom software we had designed to manage our company. It allows us to work with our customers and our team from anywhere in the world! It is truly a game changer!”

— Howard Potter,
A&P Master Images LLC

”



Depending on type, tabletop shears offer quick and clean cutting of metal and plastic. (Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

California, a seller of digital imaging products for the apparel industry that includes printers, presses, and accessories.

Graphics One offers an eco-solvent printer, 24" to 64", as a basic tool to get started in apparel. Raster image processing (RIP) software sends images to the printer and drives the cutters to cut out the images. The data typically is too large for a regular printer, so the printer has specific drivers to ensure the image data and colors are correct.

“You need a PC or Mac to house graphic software to drive the printer or cutter,” Barefoot notes.

From there, the tools can differ depending on the printing option. Dye sublimation, which involves printing to paper and then using heat to transfer the image to the garment, requires a desktop-sized or large-format printer, RIP software, and a heat press.

DTG is a process of using pigment ink to print directly to garments and requires a special DTG printer, RIP software, a pre-treat device, and a heat press.

DTF involves a special powder applied to ink, which is then cured, and the image is transferred to the garment. The tools and equipment include a desktop printer, ink, film, powder, and most often a heat press.

The different printing options all include the heat press – a piece of machinery that uses heat to apply graphics onto various substrates using pressure applied from the upper platen onto the lower platen. For dye sublimation, the graphic is printed on paper that is then placed on top of the garment, and the heat press is used to press the paper onto the garment. Alternatively, with DTG, where the ink is printed directly onto the garment, the press is used to cure the ink.

What's your favorite shop tool?

“

“The favorite production tool(s) added recently, are our Highland embroidery machines – and we loved the first one so much, we added a second one six months later. The lasers will always be our first love, but the variety of items and how it has exponentially expanded our services has proven invaluable!”

— Deanna Ramm, Centex Laser
Engraving & Embroidery

”



The handheld braille pen shown below makes installing braille onto various substrates efficient. (Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

For screen printing, you need screens to do the printing. The essential equipment is a printing press to print the ink onto the garment, a dryer to dry the ink, and an exposure unit to expose the color screens. The press is designed to enhance and control ultraviolet light waves so that the screen is quickly burned with the image.

“That is what puts the image into your screen with the emulsion and film positives,” says Taylor Landesman, vice president of Lawson Screen & Digital Products in St. Louis, Missouri.

Each color that’s printed needs a separate screen, which is how the ink is applied to the garment. Screens are used for the colors, and printing is done screen by screen and color by color to get to the final design, Landesman explains.

“You need a good exposure unit, a good press, and a good dryer. Without that, you produce bad shirts. The color fades or is out of register, or the colors don’t line up.”

The final piece of equipment is a washout booth to clean the screens. “When you power wash, you do that in a washout booth,” Landesman adds. “It helps contain all the mess.”

Beyond the four essentials, there are other tools and equipment that help make the job easier, such as a screen rack to store, organize, and dry screens. Another tool is a film-positive printer that’s used to make screens for screen printing by putting emulsion onto each screen and then exposing them to UV light.

“You expose the screen with emulsion on it, then you tape the film positive to it, then that thing gets exposed to UV light,” Landesman says. “You’re basically printing a transparency when you make your film positive. It shows where the ink goes through the screen.”

Screens can be made without the printer, but “it’s hard and complicated and very old-fashioned,” Landesman notes.

What’s your favorite shop tool?

“

“Our favorite tool we’ve added, hands down, is a solvent parts washer. It’s used with press wash that allows you to soak squeegees, spatulas, etc.”

— Chris Slivar, Deluxe Screen Printing Inc.

”

What’s your favorite shop tool?

“

“Our best purchase in recent years would be our upgrade from a high-end CTS (computer-to-screen) system that used dyes to a new LTS (laser-to-screen) exposure system. We have seen dramatic increases in both quality and setup times.”

— Nathan Belz, Impress Designs

”



Seklema Mats are handy items to make engraving a variety of materials efficient. (Image courtesy JDS Industries)

(Image courtesy Johnson Plastics Plus)

What's your favorite shop tool?

“

“It's my floor padding. Living in a cold-weather climate, the floor of my workshop tends to get very cold in the winter. I have installed in my primary working areas 3/4" foam squares. It is soft on my feet to walk on, yet firm enough to let carts roll over the top.”

— Lori Champagne,
Champagne Engraving

”

ENGRAVING

To start an engraving business, most shops require a laser engraver that uses lasers to engrave objects, a tool that is versatile and user-friendly, says Josh Robertson, market development manager of JDS Sign Supply, a division of JDS Industries in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

“One thing many people overlook are ancillary products that can make your life even easier when working with laser engravers,” Robertson says. “Seklema Mats and Rack Stars are very handy items to make engraving a variety of materials efficient and achieve a higher success rate.”

The two products are placed inside the laser to hold difficult items or to organize a job so that multiple pieces can be engraved at once.

Other tools like table sheers, corner rounders, and punches also are important when working with engraving materials, Robertson adds. Some materials may be difficult or impossible to cut using a laser, so having the mechanical tools on hand can help with the desired profile.

As for other tools, a good cleaning solution that is safe to use on materials that are engraved helps remove unwanted items from the cut pieces. Certain colors or finishes can redeposit unwanted material into finished areas, causing buildup or faint discoloring.

“A proper cleaning solution will quickly wipe away these unwanted items and get you moving on to the next piece,” Robertson points out.

When purchasing entry-level equipment and machinery, he recommends checking if they work with the design software in use and what kind of training is needed to operate them.

“Be up front about what you'll be using your equipment for and be sure the manufacturer or distributor acknowledges that the equipment in question will handle the job,” Robertson says. “How far is the service tech away from your facility? When things break, you want to have fast, responsive service.”

Other questions to ask include how long the manufacturer of the equipment has been around and how old the technology is. Do you really want to be a pioneer for a new product or technology and be starting a new business?

For ancillary gear, Robertson urges researching the product and checking for quality.

“Everyone wants to save money, but quality products can go a long way,” Robertson urges. “Don't always be concerned with getting the job out the door. Make sure it doesn't come back through the door in the form of a failure or complaint.”

He suggests being open to “new ideas, tips, and tricks to make your life easier,” and says, “Not every add-on or product advertised to make your life easier will be successful.” GP

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

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CREATING A PACKAGING POWERHOUSE

**ARKANSAS-BASED RAPID BECOMES
PREMIER PACKAGE SHOP**



BY PAULA AVEN GLADYCH



Kyle Jack, owner of Rapid in Bentonville, Arkansas.
(All images courtesy Rapid)

Rapid got its start in Bentonville, Arkansas, the home turf of Walmart. It was started by a group of guys who needed a quick and efficient way to produce packaging and display samples for presentation to Walmart buyers. Many of Walmart's top suppliers make Bentonville their home, but there were limited resources in the city for producing prototypes of packaging and displays, says Kyle Jack, owner of Rapid.

Jack was friends with the group that started the company. "I wasn't in the retail sector and didn't know anything about Walmart per se or packaging, but I did come from a commercial printing background," he says. The group came to him asking how to produce some of these different projects.

"I had ink in my blood for sure. I'd always known I had that entrepreneurial spirit, a desire to own my own business and serve clients. I knew I didn't want to work for someone else long-term," Jack says. One of the key requirements Jack put

down when he agreed to work for Rapid was that he would have the opportunity to buy the company.

"They were agreeable to that. They didn't want to own the business; they just needed the service to be here in Bentonville. That's why they started it. They were happy to launch my career, if you will, and launch this business and go from there," he says.

Jack was 23 years old when he started working with Rapid. He came on board to manage the business for a couple of years before he and his wife, Kelly, bought the company in 2005. Initially, the business was called Rapid Prototypes, but it was recently rebranded to better encompass a wider range of printing specialties.

In the beginning, the company was very focused on prototyping for corrugated displays, "any of the palette displays and trays you see on shelves is almost exclusively what we were doing and packaging in small quantities," Jack says.

As the need grew, the company got into the primary packaging side of the business, including flexible packaging but on a

small prototype basis. At that time, Rapid used only small roll-fed printers. In 2006, the company purchased its first flatbed printer and then didn't upgrade again until 2015, when it installed its first "workhorse flatbed printer from Durst," he says. Everything kept expanding, and orders changed from five to 10 prototypes at a time to orders of 500 to 1,000.

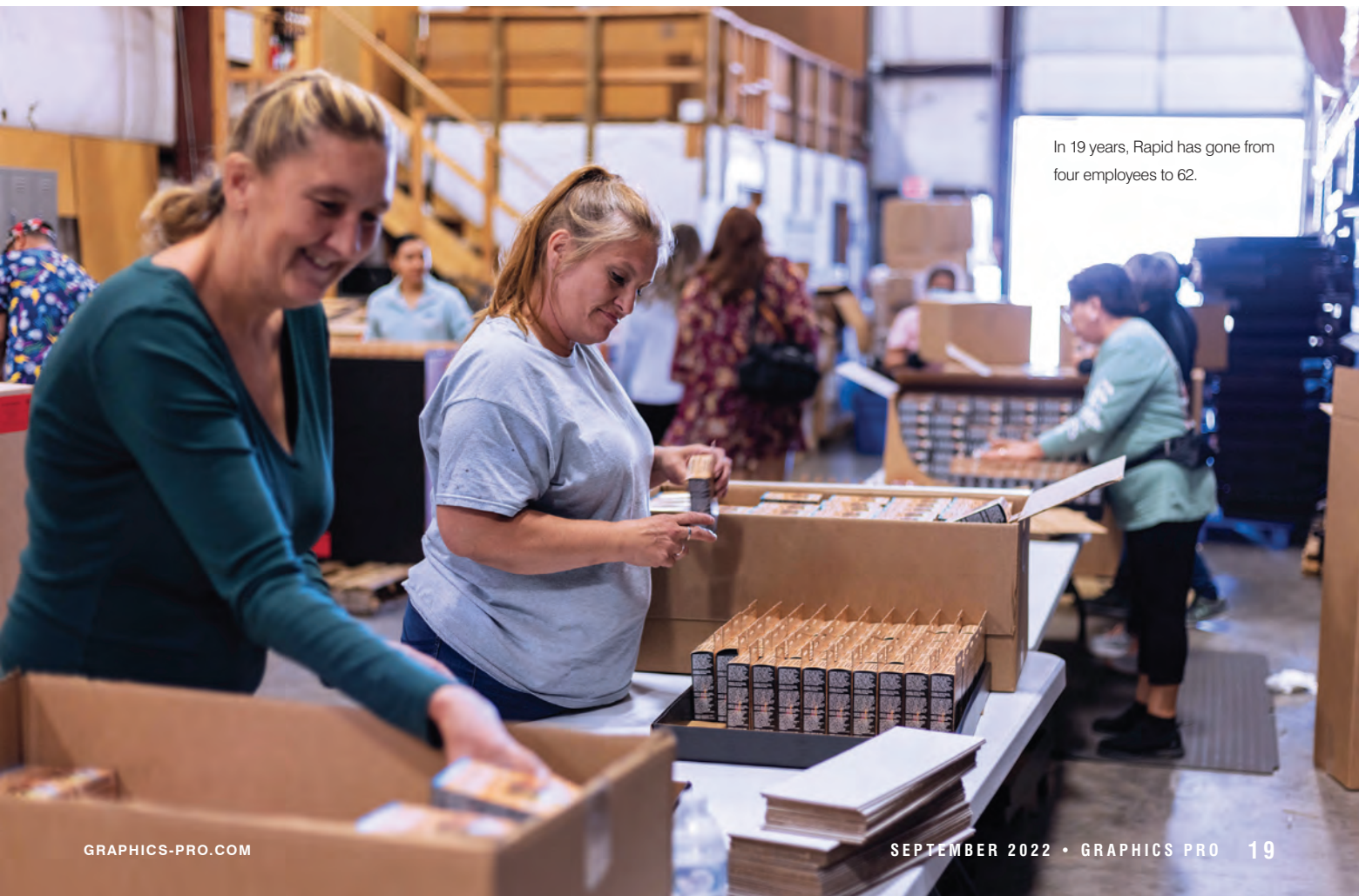
"While we were still doing prototyping for one-offs – it was still a key part of our business – we added on the short run and production run volumes we are doing now."

The pandemic changed everything. Walmart's business dipped when the country began to shut down because of "supply chain issues and logistics. Nobody was innovating or doing anything new. They were just trying to get products to stores," says Jack. "We were fortunate we picked up e-commerce business at that time. It took off and added to our expansion pretty heavily."

Now, a large part of Rapid's business is making bespoke boxes for home subscription services.

TRANSITION AND GROWTH

Prior to 2015, Rapid had a very early Durst RHO 205 flatbed printer that was "fairly entry-level," Jack says. "For the time, it was innovative. Significantly better than what we had before that."



In 19 years, Rapid has gone from four employees to 62.



In January 2021, Rapid paired the Kongsberg automated worktable with a Durst P5 350, which has increased the company's footprint.

There are a lot less of the exotic-type materials being manufactured right now. We are seeing challenges with some of that. We used to be able to offer more customized things that right now we can't do because we can't get the material for it.

In 2015, Rapid upgraded to a Durst P10-250 HS flatbed printer. The shop also has five Kongsberg cutting tables. Every time it needs to add a cutter, it buys the latest model. It has XL, XP, C-series cutting tables, and a ¾ automated C64 that is much less labor-intensive.

When Rapid got into e-commerce packaging, it started looking for solutions to produce a lot of smaller quantity orders faster. Rather than printing 10,000 of the same box, it needed a way to print orders of 30 or 50 unique boxes at a time.

“We needed a way to run through those quickly and be able to switch on a dime, multiple pieces per sheet,” Jack says. That was what the Kongsberg C64 allowed it to do. In January 2021, Rapid paired the Kongsberg automated worktable with a Durst P5 350, which has increased the company's footprint.

In 19 years, the company has gone from four employees to 62. Once the pandemic started to ease off a bit, Rapid's e-commerce business continued to grow, and its prototyping and packaging business began to take off again.

Walmart started ordering new displays and new features. That, paired with Rapid's e-commerce growth, forced it to expand again much earlier than expected.



Kyle Jack began looking at what percentage of his business was being done on a somewhat smaller format rather than large sheets and decided to purchase a Highcon Euclid 5C digital laser cutter.

When Rapid got into e-commerce packaging, it started looking for solutions to produce a lot of smaller quantity orders faster.

“We put in the Durst in June, and by September, we were looking at another machine,” Jack says.

He began looking at what percentage of his business was being done on a somewhat smaller format rather than large sheets and decided to purchase a Highcon Euclid 5C digital laser cutter.

“I never felt it would fit our business model,” he says, but he realized that 70% of Rapid’s e-commerce material that was running through the flatbed cutting tables would fit on the Highcon’s smaller footprint.

It moved that work over to the Highcon, which “dramatically expanded our capacity at the speed in which it cuts,” he says. “We offer a lot more capacity to our customers.”

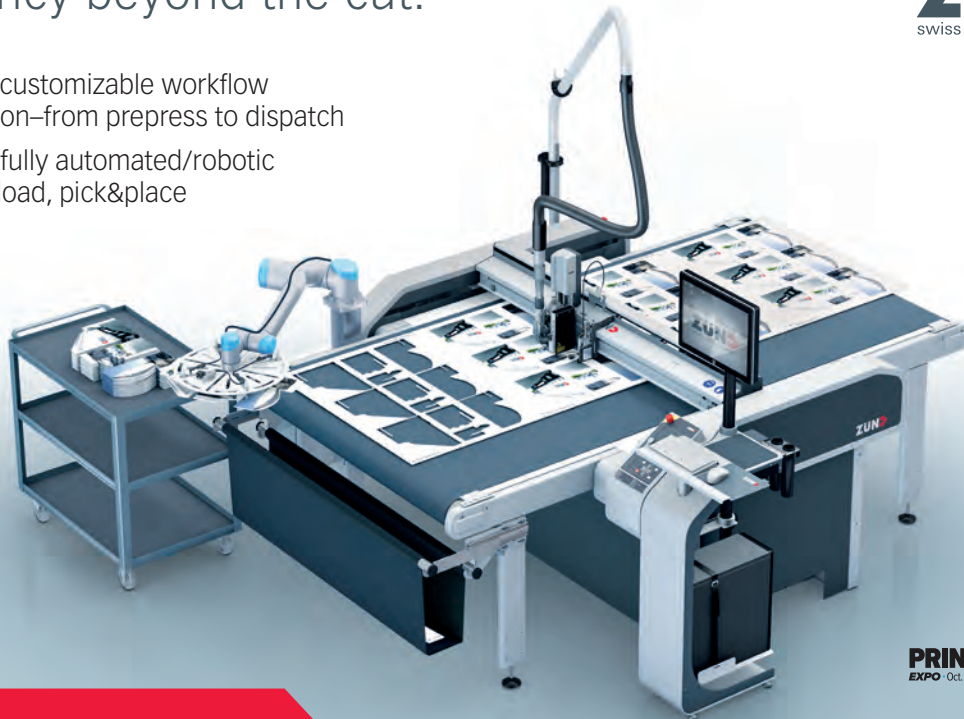
Rapid didn’t even have a facility to put the Highcon machine in when it started its research in September.



In 2015, Rapid added a Durst P10-250 HS flatbed printer.

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In the past two months, Rapid added a 60,000-square-foot warehouse that it uses for the pack-out and distribution side of its business.



Supply chain problems have plagued the printing industry since the pandemic began, but Jack says that the materials Rapid needs are not necessarily hard to find; it's just hard to plan and ensure they don't run out.

“At that time, our Bentonville facility was completely full. There was no expansion capability that wouldn't take a year or more to do. We needed to strike while the iron was hot,” he says.

He found another facility about 15 minutes away in Rogers, Arkansas. Because of the Highcon's sheet size, Rapid needed to find another press that it could pair with it.

“We needed a minimum three or ideally four lanes wide. That's when I reached out to Agfa. They happened to have a machine where the feeding mechanism would allow for at least four lanes,” he explains.

Originally, Rapid had looked at getting another Durst machine, but it could only handle two lanes at the smaller sheet size. It also had a 12- to 14-week lead time to get it manufactured and shipped to the U.S. from overseas.

Agfa, which is based in Canada, had a new Jeti Tauro H3300 with $\frac{3}{4}$ automation available, and within four weeks of ordering the machine, it was on-site. The new facility was set up between Nov. 1 and the end of December. Since the addition of the Agfa press, Rapid's corrugated business has grown from 100,000 square feet per month to over 750,000 square feet per month.

With the Highcon, it's “able to take a lot more unprinted orders, just plain boxes, inserts for



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trays,” Jack says. “We are able to produce those at a lot higher volume, so the price per unit goes down, and efficiencies go up. It was an impactful business decision for us to bolt that onto our existing business and not affect our existing business.”

Rapid also offers full design and 3D rendering capabilities on the front end. The company is operating out of three different facilities now, its 25,000-square-foot corporate headquarters, where it handles all of its prototyping and short-run manufacturing, and the new 22,000-square-foot facility, which opened in January and is dedicated to short-run manufacturing and some inventory control.

In the past two months, Rapid added a 60,000-square-foot warehouse that it uses for the pack-out and distribution side of its business. Now companies can hire Rapid to handle project design, printing, and production of packaging. The company will receive the goods that need to go into the boxes, pack them, and ship them out.

SUPPLY CHAIN PROBLEMS

Supply chain problems have plagued the printing industry since the pandemic began, but Jack says that the materials Rapid needs are not necessarily hard to find; it’s just hard to plan and ensure they don’t run out. “That was the biggest challenge for us when lead times went from four or five days to five or six weeks to get material,” he says.

His solution was to increase inventory control in-house, so Rapid bulked up its orders. It tries to keep 3,000 sheets on hand. When inventory drops to 2,000 sheets, Rapid will reorder 3,000 more.

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Agfa, which is based in Canada, had a new Jeti Tauro H3300 with ¾ automation available, and within four weeks of ordering the machine, it was on-site.

Some suppliers have been unable to manufacture the type of material Rapid would typically buy pre-pandemic, or they have cut down on the variety and color of products they produce.

“There are a lot less of the exotic-type materials being manufactured right now,” Jack says. “We are seeing challenges with some of that. We used to be able to offer more customized things that right now we can’t do because we can’t get the material for it, or we find alternate materials.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Jack says the biggest lesson he has learned since the company began to grow and expand so quickly is that “everything costs literally twice as much as you think it is going to cost. Be prepared for the cost impact.”

When a shop buys a new piece of equipment, a price is negotiated, but shipping and the logistics to get it into the building are not included. Add onto that the electrical requirements of the new equipment.

“You realize, especially at the speed we are moving on, that you tend to overlook things,” Jack says. For instance, when Rapid opened its new facility in January, it forgot to buy a forklift for it.

“The little things add up to be quite a bit of money and tend to be more than what you expected startup costs to be,” he says.

When the company first moved into the new building, it

realized it didn’t have the electrical requirements it needed. He thought they could just call the city and have them put in a new breaker panel, but the city didn’t have the equipment it needed to do the job.

“For them to find a transformer to support the amount of electricity we needed, at first they were telling me six months to get a transformer,” he says. That’s when he started looking for alternatives to power the building immediately and rented a generator designed to power hospitals.

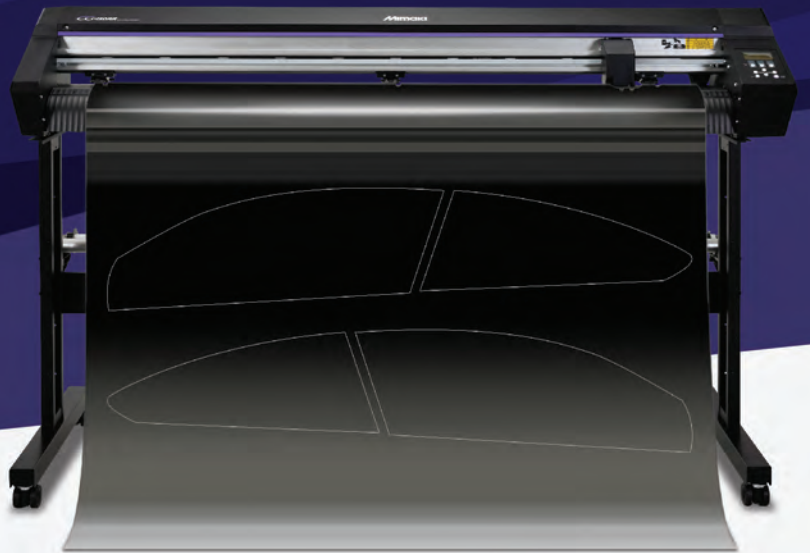
It sat in the parking lot, and Rapid ran all its equipment off it for three months, waiting for the new transformer to be installed. The cost was \$20,000 to \$30,000 per month in fuel and rental costs that the company had not planned on spending. Still, the investment was worth it. It has allowed Rapid to take advantage of consumers’ desire to shop online. Jack believes e-commerce will continue to be a good business to be in.

“I think the continued growth potential there is almost unlimited,” he says. **GP**

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



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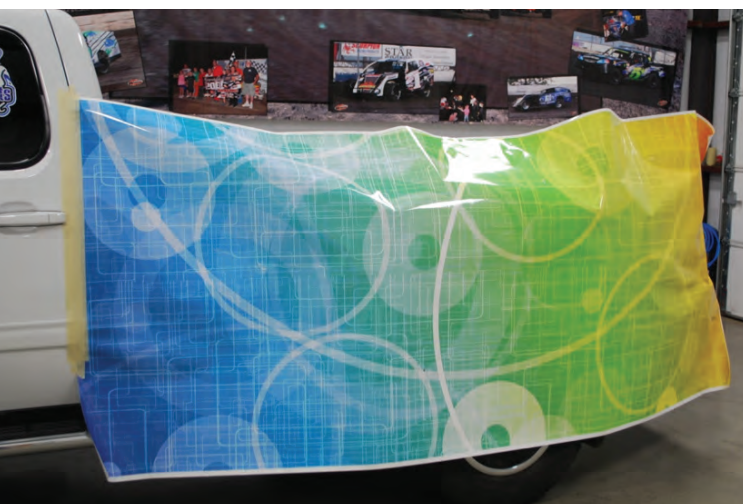


Dually Done Solo

HOW TO WRAP THE SIDE PANEL OF A GIANT FENDER BY YOURSELF



BY MIKE ZICK



Once I finish prepping the vehicle, I dry-fit the graphic by taping it to the cab to make a hinge and match it up to the cab graphics, which I usually apply first.

So, you have that one customer that wants you to wrap his work truck. The first thing you think and say is, “Absolutely we can do that.” Then he tells you the truck is a 2013 Chevrolet Dually ... and you think of the bed and fenders ... then doubt may enter your mind. How are we going to do this? Can we design it to look right? How do we handle the curves? Can we actually install it properly? Can we make money on this one?

LESS IS MORE

First, you want to start looking at the project and decide if you can get the customer’s information across in such a way that it is clean and easy to read. There are times when less is more, especially when you are dealing with a truck bed like this. There are only a few areas on the bed that are truly flat. You should keep those areas in mind if you are looking to place information on the bed and in the print. Overlays are always an option if you are concerned about the final placement of the customer’s information.

MATERIAL MATTERS

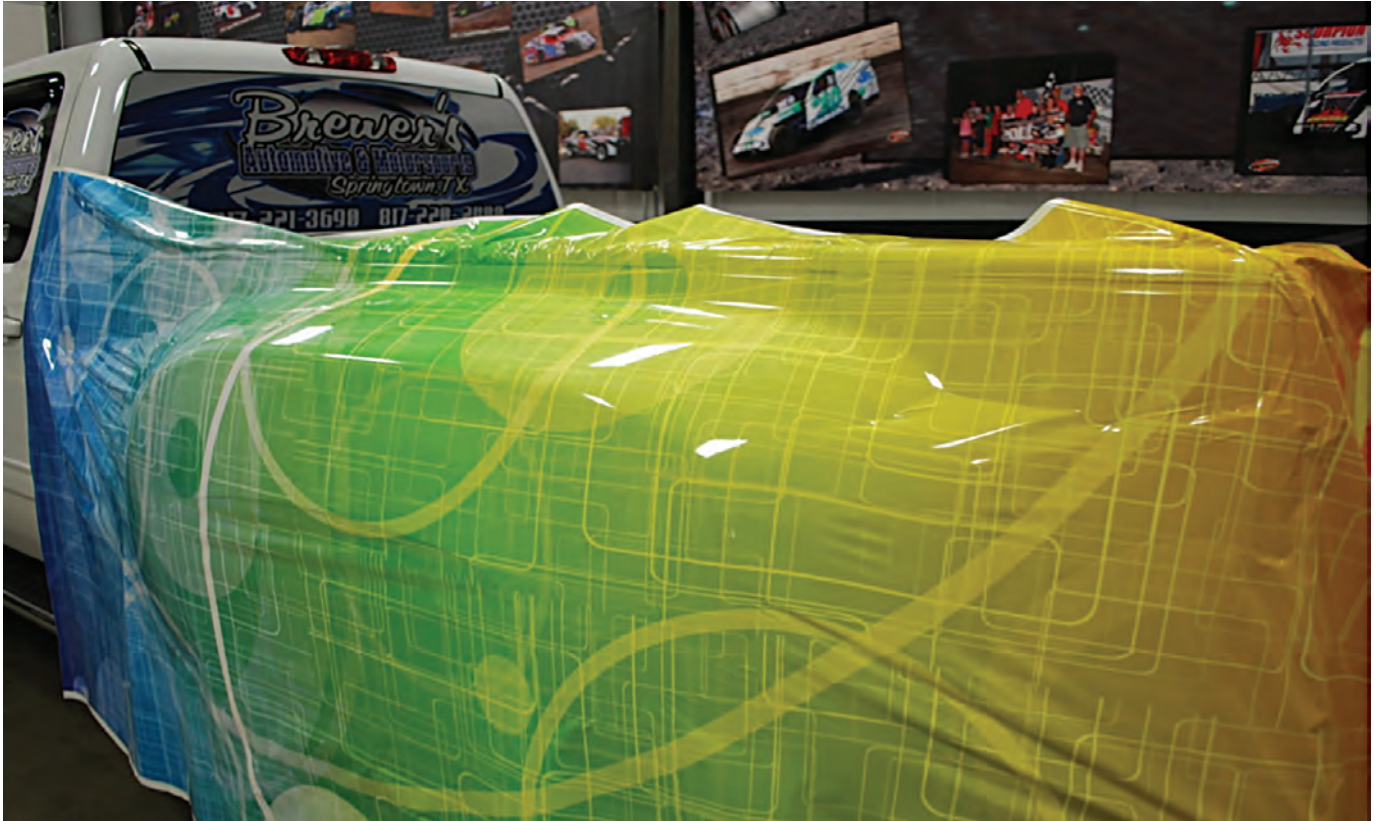
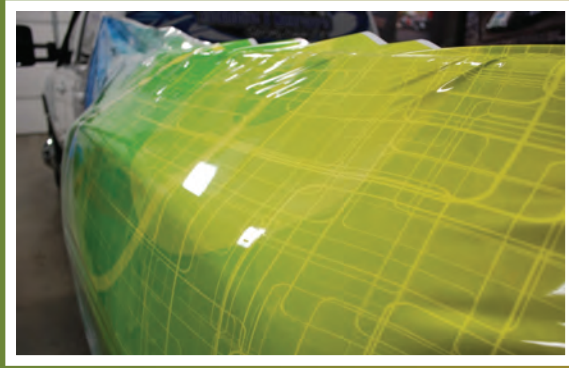
Choosing your material for this type of wrap will be critical for your project to be successful. For this, we chose 3M 480CV3 Envision Print Wrap Film with its corresponding laminate. I have also wrapped these trucks with 3M 180CV3 and had great results.

The other thing to think about is, “How big do I need to make this panel to wrap this fender in one piece?” We determined that a panel that was 53" × 124" would be large enough to give us the length needed to start from the cab and end on the tailgate. The height needed to be 53" to give me plenty of material to wrap over the top of the bed and down below the bottom edge of the bed with plenty of extra. You need the excess material to heat and stretch during the install with a minimum amount of stress on the graphic.

VEHICLE PREP & DRY-FITTING

I prep the vehicle per my normal cleaning process. A basic wash first, then I remove the marker lights and tape the connector to the bed so I don’t lose them in the inner fender well. The next steps are prep sol wipe and a final cleaning with isopropyl alcohol diluted with water (2/3 alcohol, 1/3 water).

Once I have finished prepping the vehicle, I am ready to dry-fit



I always use a heat gun to attack this kind of install because I can get more consistent controlled heat over a larger area than with a torch.

the graphic. I tape the graphic to the cab to make a hinge and match it up to the cab graphics, which I usually apply first. I also use magnets on the tailgate side to hold the graphic in place until I remove the liner.

I will then remove the liner and pull the material tight to try and pull the wrinkles out of the material – mainly on the outer most flat portion of the fender.

INSTALL

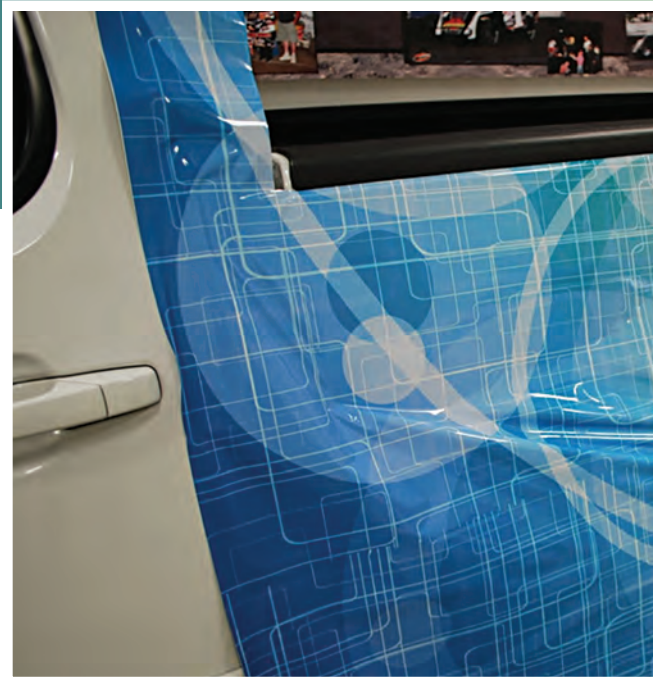
I'm now ready to start installing the large flat area of the fender first. I will keep an even line where I have installed just as it starts to break over the top of the fender. If you don't keep the line even, you can get yourself in a jam quickly. When working down the face of the fender, I usually stop where the marker lights are and work that section when I am working the fender transitions.

The next step is where the beauty of the material will come into play. I start applying heat to the top section of the fender to allow

the material to relax and become more pliable. It takes quite a bit of heat to get this done on such a large area. I always use a heat gun to attack this kind of install because I can get more consistent controlled heat over a larger area than with a torch.

While the material is still warm, I start working from the flat outer edge toward the top of the bed. This process needs to be slow and consistent and keeping an even line across the top of the bed. Once you reach the top of the bed, begin to work along the top of the bed toward the front and rear of the truck bed.

Now you will have a good amount of material in front and behind the fender. You need this to heat and conform the material with a minimum amount of stress on the material. Start working from the flat area toward the bedside. You need to continue to use your heat gun (heating a larger area than needed) and squeegee a little at a time. The excess you have at the front and back of the bed will be used to pull the wrinkles out of the material as you work. You will get to a point where the vinyl is





Once I finish my install and before I trim any portion of the bed, I post-heat the bed.

Mike Zick is the owner of Mike Zick Installations Inc. in Arlington, Texas. He's been in the sign and graphics business since 1989 and had his own installation company since 2001. He is a 3M Preferred Installer, Lowen Certified Installer, and a 3M Graphics Authorized Trainer.

finally low enough to break it over and pull the material down toward the bottom of the fender. This will be accomplished by using heat and tension.

I use the same process on the front of the fender, working from the flat area of the fender toward the bed. The only difference is that I set the graphic along the front edge of the bed to make sure the graphic aligns with the graphic that is on the cab.

POST-HEATING & TRIMMING

Once I finish my install and before I trim any portion of the bed, I post-heat the bed. Post-heating the bed is done by using a heat gun and getting the truck bed heated up to 200 F in the areas where I have stressed the material. The post-heating process will break the memory of the material and keep it in the form in which you have installed it.

Finally, to finish things out, trim all edges, use edge tape along the bottom edge of the graphic if you feel it is needed, and pop the marker lights back in. If you take your time and think ahead of where you are at, take what the vinyl gives you, and don't work yourself into a jam. You should be able to wrap a dually fender by yourself in one piece. **GP**

A special thanks to Brad & Missy Shirley of Extreme Graphics in Weatherford, TX; Paul Pace of Pace GFX in Plano, TX, and Bob Barr of 3M Commercial Graphics. They made this project possible.

Top 5

Vehicle Wrap Installation Tips

BY RYAN ALLEN, AVERY DENNISON GRAPHICS SOLUTIONS



Utilize classroom-style training programs for vehicle wraps and color change films. Here, master installer Justin Pate, with The Wrap Institute, instructs a class on Supreme Wrapping Film installation. (All images courtesy Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions)

Justin Pate with The Wrap Institute demonstrates how to work with Supreme Wrapping Film around a complex curved edge.



Wrapping a white car with a darker or bright color film requires more film for door jams, under the hood, and other areas so that the white paint will not be visible. Justin Pate demonstrates the proper technique for trimming film under the hood.

Shops and installers looking to enhance their skills and level of service specific to vehicle wraps have a wealth of resources available to them. Film manufacturers offer training programs across the country, including classroom-style training programs for vehicle wraps and color change films. Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions' training team shared five tips they thought were the most helpful.

1 Proper Prep: Never underestimate this first step in installing vehicle graphics – properly cleaning and prepping the vehicle surface. Even if your customer delivers their car newly washed, you should still give it a once-over to verify that all the surfaces to be wrapped are clean. The most commonly missed areas are the undersides of the bumpers, the sides of the car, door edges, seals, and other areas that are not readily visible. Even if the vehicle passes the white-glove test, you may want to do an IPA wipe-down to remove any remaining wax or sealant.

2 Breakdown: How much of a breakdown you do beyond mirrors and door handles should be determined in a discussion with your customer. If you are going to break down the vehicle completely, you should be charging for a premium wrap. You don't need to remove bumpers, doors, and headliners for most installations. But make sure the customer understands that. Conversely, if your customer is adamant about wrapping their white car in a dark color, you should explain why it's going to cost more to wrap deeper into the door jambs and under the hood and trunk lid to prevent the white paint from showing.

3 Inlays: In years past, it was considered better to have no seams or inlays in the wrap. With today's high-quality materials and better tools, a trained installer can hide seams in the body lines so they aren't noticeable. Using inlays will reduce installation time and prevent product failure resulting from overstretching the film. Plus, many of today's vehicles have complex curves and sections that can't be effectively wrapped without inlays.

4 Material familiarity: Most shops tend to be loyal to one brand, but that one brand may not always have the color or specialized film your customer wants. So, it's a good policy to become familiar with different brands, their sales and technical reps, and their products. Chances are, you'll have a question or need support at some point. At a minimum, if you're using a product that you're unfamiliar with, read the installation instructions.

5 Installation wrap-up: Your process should include a careful post-install inspection and selective post-heating. When the material is applied to a complex curved edge or an area that was formed outside the original shape of the roll of material, it absolutely needs to be post-heated. This will trick the material into retaining the shape it was formed into, preventing it from moving back to its original shape when the ambient air temperature changes. When time and weather permits, have a vehicle sit outside in the sun to see if any edges or seams appear. **GP**

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GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (GPX) wraps up the expo season with START HERE Academy in Charlotte, N.C., providing valuable start-up resources, information, education, and production methods for apparel decoration, personalization, signage, wide-format printing, and more.

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LEARN TO KERN

FOCUSING ON THE SPACES IN BETWEEN LETTERS

To kern, or not to kern, that is the question to ask yourself regarding your latest sign design project.

LEARN TO KERN

Challenge: Fonts are designed to work within certain platforms, and code is written that gives the font the ability to flow out into sentences where uppercase L's are nested next to an uppercase T. However, once you use the font in artistic mode, rather than paragraph mode, the font's ability to self-kern is sometimes less than acceptable.

The creator of the font designed its space and distance (nesting) behaviors and developed it as either a True Type or an Open Type font. What does that mean to you and the requirement for proper kerning to occur? Unless you are a code guru, the font is what it is, and it will most likely do a less-than-optimal job of self-kerning when used in artistic mode.

Solution: Learn to kern – it's not difficult; it simply takes patience, distance, and lots of experience in the various kerning violations that we see play into use every day.

Nobody really sees it, nor really gives it the attention it deserves. Case in point, there are several companies whose logos violate kerning basics so egregiously that I simply can't ignore them.

So, how does something like kerning slip past the obviously very talented graphic designers and creative directors at these large firms? Is it simply the fact they don't see it themselves? I call this having a bad case of seeing something so many times that it no longer identifies in the brain as a word, rather it takes on a whole weird new identity as the word tries to reestablish itself in your brain as a graphic.

Have you ever had this happen to you when you are working with a quirky word or phrase, where your brain suddenly refuses to recognize it as the word it is? It's suddenly looking like a strange new language you are not familiar with.

Kerning becomes easier when this disassociation within the brain occurs.

7 STEPS TO KERNING

Step 1: Start out being very negative ... that means I instruct my design students to create a large black box on the page and place their word or phrase on top of that black area, then change the font or logo text color to white. With this sharp, clear, and well-defined high-contrast approach, your eyes can more easily pick out the kerning problems a lot faster than leaving the text black on a white background.

Step 2: Stand back from your monitor or screen, way back, so you can see where the hot spots are. These are pretty darn





In this example, I pulled three random fonts and placed them on the page exactly as they were laid out in my software program. Notice that it all looks rather acceptable when viewed in a group with other text elements that confuse the eye and take the attention off of the obvious. (All images courtesy Matt Charboneau)

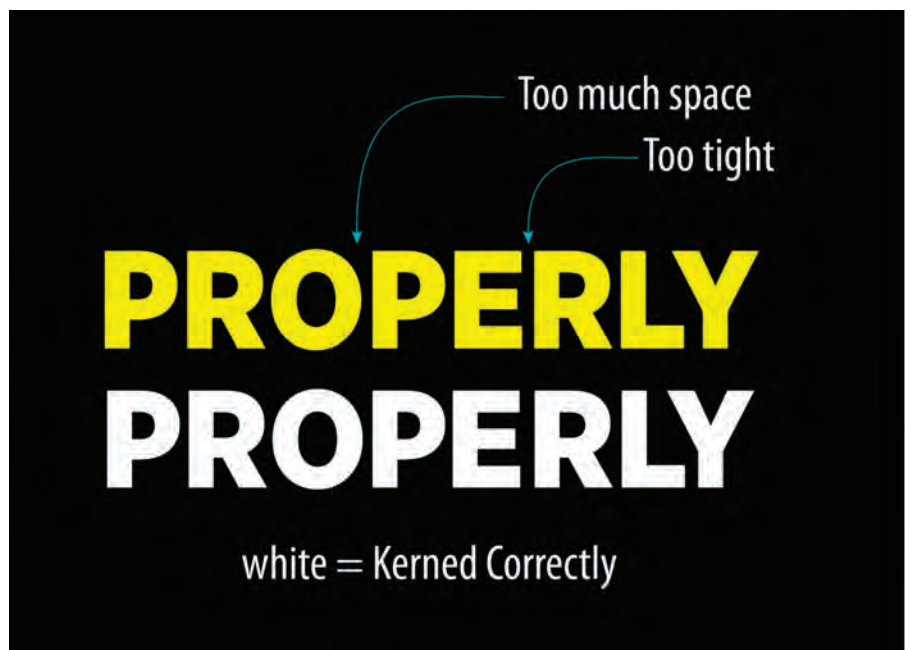
noticeable once you grasp what it is you are looking for.

Step 3: Start from the right side, and kern to the left. Why would this make any difference? You will find that the more you kern, the easier it becomes, and you will discover it becomes easier to start with the last letter, as where it's sitting is probably correct in relationship to the next word (if there is one).

Start by selecting the second to last letter that has too much space between it and the letter to its right. Move it closer to the last letter by nudging it closer. By now, you should be realizing you are creating a worse looking logo or design than you started with. That is because you are looking at and focusing on only one tiny part of the logo, rather than observing the entire word or logo and seeing where the uneven spacing is affecting it negatively.

Step 4: Flip the word backward, and re-kern it. Once you mirror image it, it becomes blatantly clear where each kerning issue exists.

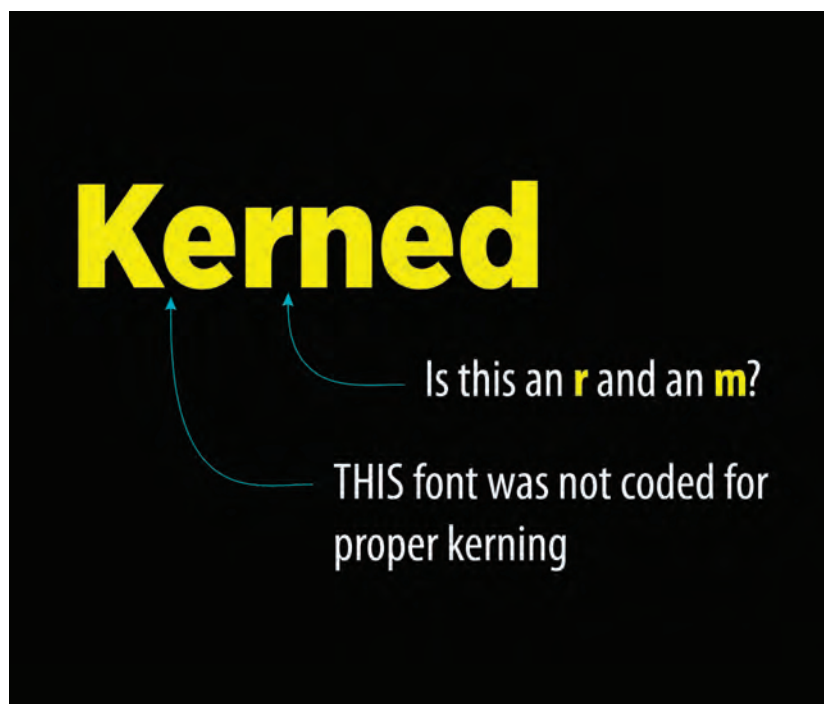
Step 5: Document your efforts. Make screenshot files of the before and after so you can show the client – if the client even notices it.



Let's look at the word "PROPERLY" and see how it ended up on the kern scale. Notice the upper text in yellow – that is exactly how it appeared after typing it. I properly kerned the lower example in white for comparison. Squint your eyes while observing these. What do you notice?



I placed the properly kerned word "PROPERLY" over the top of the font layout. I made this example red so it stands out for comparison. Notice the differences – oh so subtle and minor, yet it changes how the letters relate to each other, and how they flow.



I have isolated the word "Kerned." Notice how it's now looking a bit jumbled once it's away from other words. There are many times when an "r" can be placed too close to a lower case "n" which can make the letter look like a lower case "m" from a distance. Avoid this at all costs. Use the squint test to verify it. The K is also sitting a bit too far away from the lowercase e, and this needs to be adjusted. Use your squint test to give it a try.

Step 6: Create two files. One file of the original, and a vector file of the new one you've just kerned.

Step 7: Now what? So, you are now the Kerning King of Kentucky, but now what? Do you sub out the old provided logo and substitute the newly re-kerned version?

In my opinion and based on the countless number of times I've done just that; it is better to err on the side of correctness than to reproduce the problem by providing yet another incorrect letter set with bad kerning.

I'm not talking about the obvious logo kerning that is intentional. I am talking about the letters in commonly seen and spoken words that our brain recognizes and dismisses from our attention before noticing the problems that exist visually.

What happens if you have the letter-set fabricated and installed onto the sign band and the client then suddenly realizes that you have moved some of the letters around ever so slightly.

A) If the client catches your kerning, and doesn't like it, they can rightfully reject your channel letters, and ask you to re-kern them to match the previous file provided.

B) In reality, even if your client has an in-house designer, and even if they catch the re-kern, it is 100% on them if they notice the corrected kerning and complain about it. They won't, nobody will, and that is the beauty of this "professional fix." You are correcting a wrong, with a very much more visually balanced version that you also provide to them in a vector format for incorporating into their other marketing efforts.

C) Oh, you think it might be wise to run it past your contact person or client, before you build the channel letters? Let's examine what that step really looks like, and what it will gain from the client. The client obviously did not create the kerning issue themselves; it has occurred many dozens of times by various outside artists who all "followed the provided logo

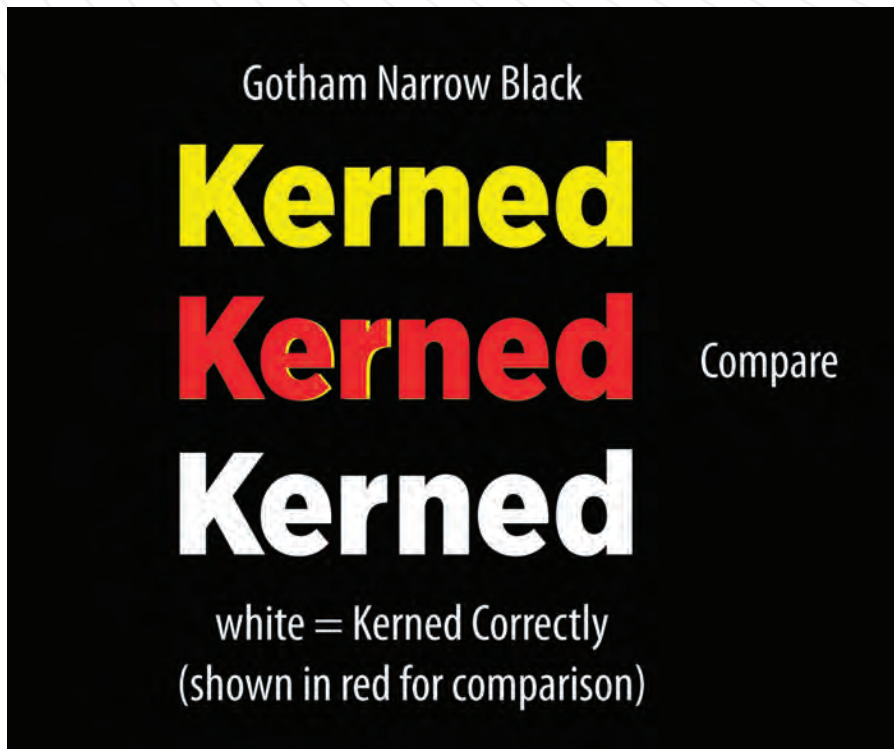
exactly,” which means they carried across the previous kerning mistakes. Even if the client notices the bad kerning that exists, they will not bring it up. For the clients who deal with this, the overwhelming idea of intentionally changing their logo on a corporate-wide platform is simply too big of an albatross to try and land in the boat. And would that client be considered a hero for bringing it to the company’s attention? No ... not for a minute. In fact, they would most likely be looked down upon by upper management for walking across a field to kick a turd just to make it skink.

So, here is where you remove your “I’m learning kerning” hat and put on your “solution provider” hat, and then grab your bootstraps and prepare to stand your ground if anything is said by the client.

You can counter most objections by saying something like this: “As a professional sign company, we are challenged often by artwork files that are not balanced or correctly spaced. We are constantly challenged with the decision to either run the artwork as provided, or make it right, so it looks right for the entire life of the sign. Using artwork that has issues is reflected in the finished sign product. These kerning issues simply must be corrected – by each sign company who works on a sign or other project.”

How are your company logo or identity graphics kerned? Have you ever looked at your own graphics and spotted any kerning issues? You may not be able to see it; you may be too close to your own forest to be able to see the trees. **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.



I placed the properly kerned word “Kerned” over the top of the font layout just as I had done on the previous example. I also made this example red so that it stands out for comparison. Notice the differences – it changes the word and how it’s interpreted.



Yep, it was a terrifying slap in the face when I realized I had missed the kerning of an address at the top of a directional sign. It happens. Yes, even after everyone looked at it, and all parties approved it, this kerning issue was still missed, just as most kerning errors are. Welcome to the human factor of signage. This is how you build professional proofing skills that become iron clad. I have been much more detail-focused in my work since this happened, yet I know it will occur again, and I may miss another kerning error. This was a hard ego lesson learned. Youch!



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FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

HELPING OUT A FRIEND WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON

So, going back over 20 years now, we wrote a story about helping out a friend with a project. At the time we changed the names and locations “to protect the innocent.” We guess we thought we were writing fictional stories and that seemed clever at the time. You know how much we love tellin’ stories, so that’s just what we are gonna do. Been tellin’ stories with this column for a little while now. I think we may be on our fifth or sixth editor, ha!

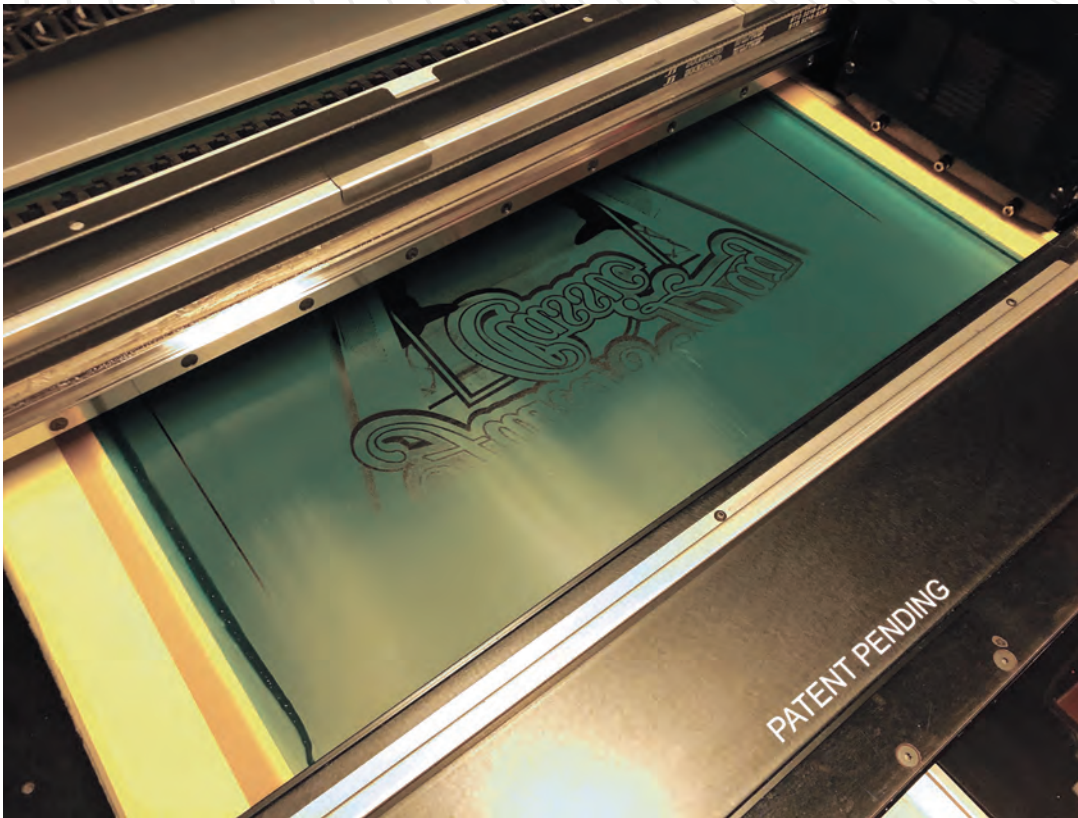
This is how it went back then. Our really good friend and colleague has a sporting goods and apparel business in western Nebraska, among other things. The only automated shop in the panhandle as far as we know. We have become friends for a number of reasons, one of which is that we do nice things for each other. That is, we help each other out whenever we can. That said, we got a call from Shane on the Wednesday before Father’s Day. He was in a panic because he had a print job on press, and it looks like ... well it doesn’t

look good. His artist had just left town for a week after separating this job with new software. The art was OK, but this was the first separation. Shane says they tried everything on press and couldn’t get it right. “You guys gotta help me!” he exclaimed. It was Wednesday afternoon, and we had no digital file. We did, however, have a whacked-out dude on the phone. Time to rescue our pal, ‘cause that’s just the kind of good ol’ boys we are.

This was a pseudo hot market gig. He had to print onsite, so to speak, and wouldn’t know the quantities until the day of the event. Long story short (too late), Shane drove a disk four hours to our place (no such thing as sending a link at that time), we separated the image, outputted films and he took the seps home to run the job.

Fast forward a couple decades plus and here we are. This time, no name changes and none of us are all that innocent. Our friend of 30 years now, Shane from Scottsbluff Screen





Scottsbluff Screen Printing had to print onsite, so to speak, and wouldn't know the quantities until the day of the event. (All images courtesy Lon Winters and Shane Wilson)



Graphics Elephants was able to image 11 screens for Scottsbluff Screen Printing, which was all the Festival of Hope and Father's Day baseball tournament screens for the scheduled events over the weekend.

One of the largest events Scottsbluff Screen Printing does all year is called the Festival of Hope.

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



The Father's Day Classic is an annual baseball tradition.



After a 22-hour day ensuring the project could be completed, Scottsbluff Screen Printing got two hours sleep, then headed back to the shop to print the Father's Day shirts.

Printing found himself in a pickle once again over Father's Day. We asked him to share the experience and tell us how it went down from his perspective, as the situation went from bad to worse. Here's his lightly edited version below.

It was a Wednesday. I had just lost my last artist. So, I was relying on friends in the business to help me get through this difficult time. We were trying to output separations for one of the largest events we do all year called the Festival of Hope. For many years, we have printed the merchandise for this event in support of those unfortunate people battling cancer. This event is near and dear to my heart and the organizer is Ty's, my nephew and right-hand man, grandma.

We couldn't get the printer to work to output film separations. It was out of one of the color cartridges. Shouldn't have been a problem. My artists were trained to always keep extra on hand. Well, that was not the case this time. So, I called the factory to get a cartridge sent to us overnight. They didn't have any. I went to Amazon, but they wouldn't be delivered until Saturday. Did me no good. But if I bought all 10 cartridges, I could take delivery on Thursday. So, I paid \$850 plus freight. Thursday morning, I tracked the package, and it hadn't even shipped yet. So, I called my longtime friend in the industry Lon Winters. I asked him if he can output some

stuff for me. He says, "We don't use film anymore. But I may be able to find someone who does." He finds an awesome lady in Arkansas. Tracy from Running Threads – a friend of Lon's. She made the films and took them to FedEx for arrival first thing Friday. We tracked this package, and its last scan was in Memphis the night before. So, I drove to my FedEx to see what the deal was. The plane broke down.

I called Lon back and begged him to make screens. He informs me he headed to see his daughter in Sidney, Nebraska, which is only an hour away from my shop. This was perfect. I could meet him. He talked with Jason to make sure they even have enough screens. They were able to image 11 screens for me, which was all of the Festival of Hope and the Father's Day baseball tournament screens for the scheduled events over the weekend. I met Lon, his wife Jane, and Jaxx, their Siberian Husky puppy, in the Cabela's parking lot and drove back to Scottsbluff. I got to the shop at 5:30 and started the Festival of Hope job that finished at 4:30 the next morning. After a 22-hour day, we got two hours sleep, and headed back to the shop to print the Father's Day shirts. We sold out of two locations. Ty and I cut and heat transferred names and numbers on over 500 shirts over the weekend from 8 a.m. Saturday until 4 p.m. Sunday.

Without Lon as my great friend and colleague, I would

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SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE



Scottsbluff Screen Printing heat transferred names and numbers on over 500 shirts over the weekend from 8 a.m. Saturday until 4 p.m. Sunday.

have not been able to pull off this miracle. I would have disappointed thousands upon thousands of customers.

This is a story of the worst-case scenario in my 29 years of doing business. But it's the best story. It shows that making those connections with others in the industry is the most valuable tool you can have. Business and life are about relationships. Our parents used to say that. We're thinking those are pretty good words to live by. GP

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



Want to catch Lon in person?

Check out his class **Accelerating Your Screen-Printed Apparel Decorating Techniques** at GPX Charlotte this month! Visit <https://gpro.link/lon> to learn more.

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GP0922

A background of a stack of folded t-shirts in various colors including red, pink, orange, yellow, green, grey, and blue.

LOOK

BOOK

2022

A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver rim, positioned over the text.

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COLORS: Black

SIZES: S-4X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 100% combed ring-spun cotton; 30/1 fabric

FEATURES: Engineered for DTG printing; entirely pre-pretreated, including the sleeves, front, side, and back

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NAVY 1600 - ADULT
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OD GREEN 1600 - ADULT

WHITE 1600 - ADULT
1600 - YOUTH
1460 - RACERBACK TANK

BLACK 1600 - ADULT
1600 - YOUTH
1700 - LONGSLEEVE
1460 - RACERBACK TANK
1465 - ALT. RACERBACK TANK

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F260



ULTIMATE COTTON SWEATSHIRT / F260

COLORS: Ash, black, cactus, charcoal heather, dark chocolate, deep forest, deep red, deep royal, light blue, light steel, maroon, mauve, natural, navy, oregano, oxford gray, pebble, pumpkin, pale pink, sand, smoke gray, teal, white

SIZES: S-3X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: **Solid colors:** 90/10 cotton/polyester; **Light steel:** 85/15 cotton/polyester; **Heather/oxford gray:** 65/35 cotton/polyester

FEATURES: Easy-to-print canvas; tear-away tag



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F170



ULTIMATE COTTON HOODIE / F170

COLORS: Ash, black, cactus, charcoal heather, dark chocolate, deep forest, deep red, deep royal, light blue, light steel, maroon, mauve, natural, navy, oregano, oxford gray, pebble, pumpkin, pale pink, sand, smoke gray, teal, white

SIZES: S-3X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 10-oz. fleece; **Solid colors:** 90/10 cotton/polyester; **Light steel:** 85/15 cotton/polyester; **Heather/oxford gray:** 65/35 cotton/polyester

FEATURES: Two-ply hood with jersey lining; tear-away tag



**SANTA CRUZ PULLOVER
HOODIE / 9303**

COLORS: Natural, maroon, forest green, midnight navy, heavy metal, desert pink, red, white, black, military green, graphite black, lead, mauve, royal, antique denim, galaxy purple, oxblood, shiitake

SIZES: XS-3X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 80/20 fleece; 30-singles; 7.4-oz. printable 100% cotton face with brushed fleece backing

FEATURES: Jersey-lined hood with natural drawcord; set-in long sleeves with 1X1 baby rib cuffs and waistband; locker patch; tear-away label

9303



NEXT LEVEL
A P P A R E L[®]

9302



**UNISEX MALIBU
HOODIE / 9302**

COLORS: Heather military green, heather midnight navy, heather slate blue, cardinal, oatmeal, heather black, heather gray, heather forest green

SIZES: XS-3X

FABRIC

COMPOSITION: 7.4-oz. 60/40 heathered fleece; 30-singles

FEATURES: Three-piece hood with metal grommets; DTM drawcord; kangaroo pocket; 1X1 baby rib set-in sleeve cuffs and waistband; locker patch; tear-away label



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2022 Catalog

DT1300



DT1300



FLEECE PULLOVER HOODIE / DT1300

COLORS: Black, deepest gray, heathered charcoal, heathered eucalyptus blue, desert tan heather, ochre yellow heather, blush frost, gray frost, military green frost, navy frost, red frost, royal frost

SIZES: XS-4X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 7-oz. 54/40/6 polyester/combed ring-spun cotton/rayon

FEATURES: Dyed-to-match drawcords with metal tips; side-seamed; 2X1 rib knit cuffs and hem; tear-away label

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DISTRICT®





JHA003

**CONTRAST HOODIE
/ JHA003**

COLORS: Burgundy/charcoal, charcoal/orange crush, fire red/arctic white, fire red/jet black, French navy/fire red, French navy/heather gray, French navy/sky blue, heather gray/fire red, heather gray/French navy, jet black/fire red, jet black/gold, jet black/heather gray, jet black/orange crush, Kelly green/arctic white, royal blue/arctic white, sky blue/arctic white

SIZES: S-3X

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 8.3-oz. midweight fabric; 80/20 ring-spun cotton/polyester with 100% cotton face

FEATURES: Contrast flat lace drawcords; double-fabric contrast inner hood; tear-away label; ribbed cuff and hem; twin-needle stitching details

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JHA035

**LADIES CROPPED
SWEAT / JHA035**

COLORS: Arctic white, dusty pink, heather gray, jet black

SIZES: XS-XL

FABRIC COMPOSITION: 8.3-oz. midweight fabric; 80/20 ring-spun cotton/ polyester with 100% cotton face

FEATURES: Hemmed crop; feminine fit; tear-away label; twin-needle stitching; ribbed cuff

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THE AGONY OF SUCCESS

DEALING WITH THE GROWING PAINS OF A JOB WELL DONE

Growing pains is a very interesting topic that you never really hear anyone speak of. It is something that is very positive but also very negative at the same time. As a business owner of 19 years, I know this issue very well in stages. Our company's normal expected growth ranges from 15% to 20% each year, which we typically can handle since the growth is spread out all year. But this year is unlike any other we have ever encountered. We are up 47%. That is a whole new level of learning about growing pains for our company.

NEW INVESTMENTS

Over the past three years working through COVID, our company was still maintaining our current growth patterns since we learned to not only pivot but we started offering new services and products. One service we started offering was fulfillment, where we would pack out bulk order packages for clients and ship or mail them. We just thought that would be a short-term service, but customers are still wanting that more than ever. It helps them not have to use their own staff to do it and allows them to focus on what they are good at.

We also invested in top-quality online store software. We had always offered online stores for years, but the new software allowed so many more options like digital gift cards and more, which, again, we thought would be a short-term gain but exploded. Some companies will purchase anywhere from \$5,000 to \$70,000 worth of digital gift cards at a time.

Another process we added about a year and a half ago is our 2D and 3D lasers. We were always interested in this process but did not have the extra time to learn, but COVID gave us the time to make the investment. It is a process that is in high demand that most do not realize the true potential of the process. The last major change we made to our company was the investment in becoming a full-fledged uniform shop for police, fire, and EMS. This was our largest and almost unheard of for our industry. It's another market that was much larger than we realized.

KEEPING UP WITH GROWTH

As you can see, we have added a lot throughout the past three years, and during those past three years, our total growth in sales was up 60%. Now we have this year, which is a whole new animal with a growth rate of 47%.



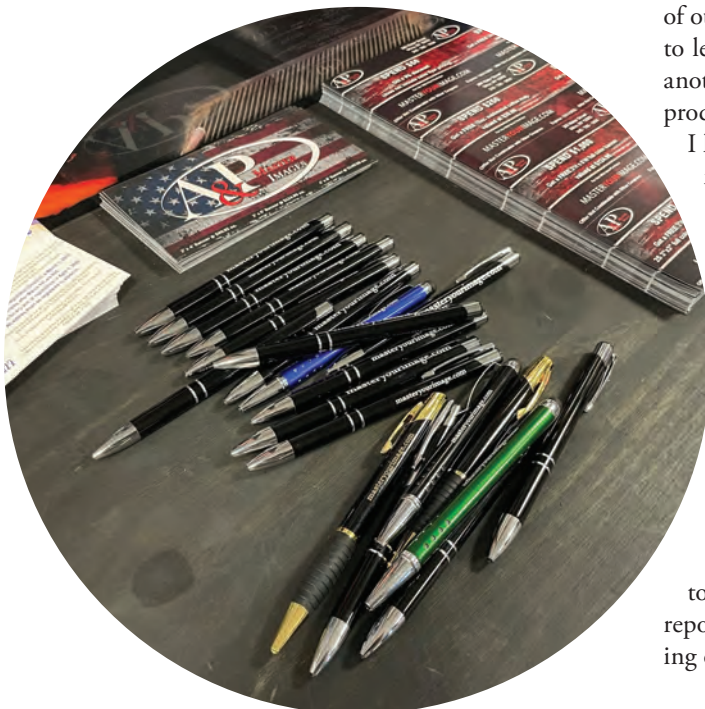
One service we started offering was fulfillment, where we would pack out bulk order packages for clients and ship or mail them. (All images courtesy Howard Potter)

MAKING SHOP MOVES



Another process we added about a year and a half ago is our 2D and 3D lasers.

“Imagine trying to take in an extra \$475,000 in sales for the first six months of the year when your normal growth is around \$150,000.”



During the last six months of last year, we experienced a major spike in sales that was above normal. So, I made my wife aware of what my concerns were, so we could plan like normal. The only issue was I had never planned for growth like that before. As the year started, our slowest month (January) had a nice boost, but nothing we could not handle. From there, every month has jumped by \$50,000 to \$100,000 in growth per month.

My normal main job as our CEO is to book the lineups for all of production, handle the marketing, write up orders to help customer service, keep an eye on our daily numbers, and help in production as needed to fill in. This is where it gets interesting.

We started writing up so many more orders each month, and I was booking so much more work and at the same time having a new building drawn up to expand; I did not see that we were not able to further our training with existing staff or new ones as we hired them. Our managers were swamped simply just trying to keep production going out the door on time and never had any real time to relay that they were not able to get the training done that we needed.

So, around March is when I started seeing a real spike in replacements for internal errors and the morale of the workforce dropping. I could not understand why, but I knew in my gut something was wrong and the only way to fix it was for me to get back into production full-time. I also knew customer service needed me to help keep up, and I could not be in two places at once! My wife is our CFO, and we had a meeting about our growth and growing pains. She took over managing customer service, and we added one more person to her team and took one of our customer service reps and moved her into my wife's office to learn hands-on with my wife to speed up her training to be another me, writing up orders. This allowed me to go back into production full-time. Sounds easy, but it was the hardest thing

I had to do in business. I sat my general manager and department managers down and explained to them that I know they have a ton of work on their plate at a level they were never trained for and that I was going process by process to each area to help reset each department to run how I wanted it to, to get it all back on track to make it easier for each of them in the end.

All my managers were on board for the help. They had days that they did not like it since I was ripping the Band-Aid off from how things were running. I went in, and I worked every department. One thing we do at the end of every day is a walk-through. The manager is supposed to take up to 30 minutes to make sure they have everything needed for their team to run the next day and to inspect their areas to ensure all is clean and any issues are reported. Those were not being done properly at all. The training of that was very fast.

The next issue I found was each area's tools/supplies were spread out and not organized very well, which means it slowed down production and, at times, had our company ordering supplies we did not need, which not only cost us more money but chewed up space in each production area. As I was

in each area, I noticed our replacements were spiking, which is not normal for us. This is where I learned our training had broken down and not on purpose. Some staff were taught bits and pieces of their jobs as the work came up due to management simply trying to keep the volume moving, so when it came time for the staff to help, they did not have enough training, which then spiked the replacements, which naturally increased the workload on the backend causing the stress in each department.

Think about something. My wife and I work 60 to 80 hours a week. We are both planners. We love structure and organization to the max. Over the past three years, we have invested more than ever into our own software, equipment, processes, supplies, staff, and more, and this growing pain hit us like never before to the point where we were both not happy at work and miserable for the first four months of this year until we both sat down and examined what was causing it. It was not us; it was not management not wanting to do a good job; it was not the staff not wanting to learn. It was the growing pains, and we, as the owners, had to take a step back and make the hard decision to reset our company and how it was running to fix it. I have now been full-time hands-on with my team for at least three months, and our crew has never been so happy to come to work over the past year. Everything is running smoother than ever. Our training is getting better each week with multiple staff at a time.

Our growth jumped at such a rate. Imagine trying to take in an extra \$475,000 in sales for the first six months of the year when your normal growth is around \$150,000 for the first six months. It is a good problem to have but learn from us. Growth is good but in quantity, and if you are growing over your normal rate. Take a quick step back, and spot-check each area of your company to make sure nothing and no one is slipping due to the volume in growth. No one could teach us this until we experienced it, and now we know what to look for to prevent it from happening ever again. **GP**



The last major change we made to our company was the investment in becoming a full-fledged uniform shop for police, fire, and EMS. It's another market that was much larger than we realized.



Trying to grow your business?

Bryant Gillespie, Better Sign Shop, shares **3 No-Nos for Print Shop Growth** at <https://gpro.link/nono>.

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



COLOR MANAGEMENT TIPS

DETERMINING THE RENDERING INTENT THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

The current color management system used in CorelDRAW was first introduced with the release of the X5 version of the graphic suite. Although it has been in existence since 2010 when first released, there seems to remain a bit of confusion for some users as to how it all works. I hope here to briefly describe the most necessary settings in the color management module contained in the program.

For a more thorough discussion of color theory and how it applies to CorelDRAW, I would urge you to go to the following link and download and study the PDF file: <https://gpro.link/corel>. This is a 61-page PDF file that was made available by Corel in conjunction with the release of Graphics Suite X5. Though it particularly references X5, all the information contained in it pertains directly to all subsequent versions.

Prior to X5, color management was application based, meaning that any changes made to one file were changed on all files. Now, each file can have its own color description

without affecting other files. This was a major advancement in reproduction.

So, we will begin with the default settings in **Fig. 1**, then proceed to document settings. Most likely, the default preset is North American General Purpose. In **Fig. 1**, you'll notice that it says "custom." That is because I have made a couple of changes to the default settings. As we proceed, it will be clearer. When you expand the drop-down, you'll see a list of options that include European, Japan and other choices specific to the region of the world where you reside. For the main part, the default is the best choice, but others can be chosen as needed.

COLOR PROFILES

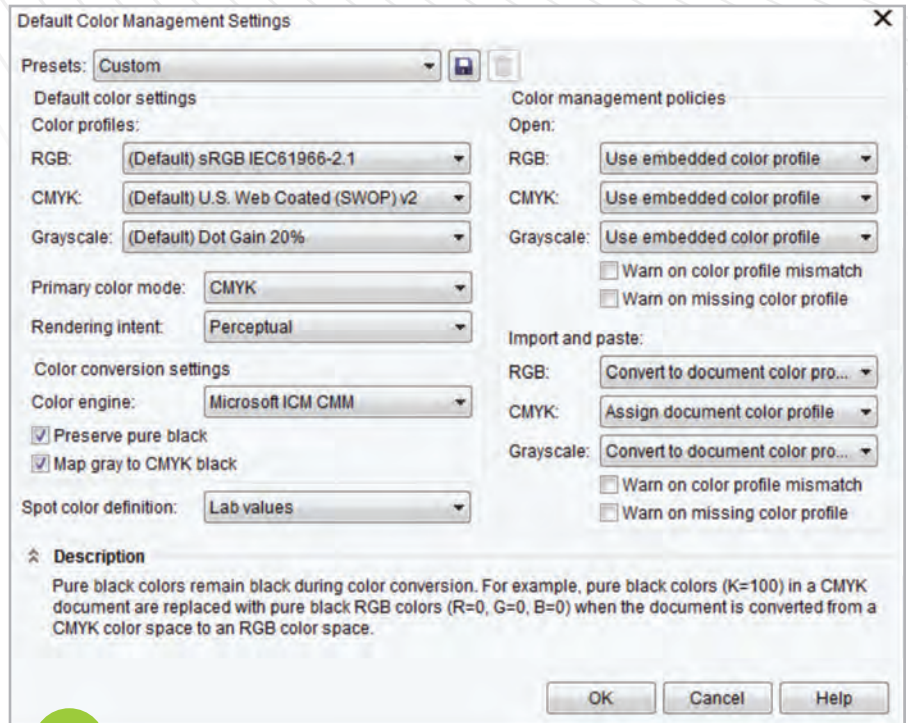
Next is color profiles. RGB is first in the list and the default is usually best for general purpose desktop printing. If, however, you're printing to a RIP (raster image processor)



program, the Adobe RGB (1998) option may be a better choice. CMYK is next in the list and though the drop-down lists several options, the default is most accurate. Grayscale is next, and though several choices exist, the default usually yields the best results. Primary color mode is self-explanatory, either CMYK or RGB. The default color palette changes to reflect whichever mode is chosen.

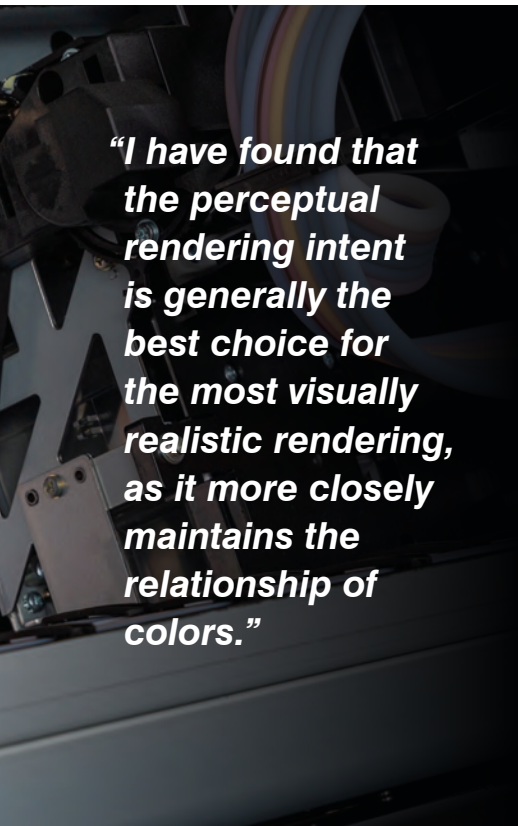
Fig. 2 shows the drop-down menu of the four rendering intents available. Since this is a fairly important setting, I will briefly describe each of them.

- **Relative Colorimetric**, the default, is suitable for logos or graphics that contain only a few out-of-gamut colors. It matches



1

Default color management settings in CorelDRAW. (All images courtesy Doug Zender)



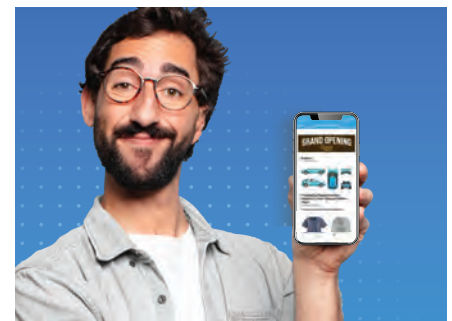
“I have found that the perceptual rendering intent is generally the best choice for the most visually realistic rendering, as it more closely maintains the relationship of colors.”

out-of-gamut colors with the closest in-gamut colors at the destination. This causes the white point to shift, so if you print on white paper, the whiteness of the paper is used to reproduce the white areas of the document. It is a good option for printed documents.

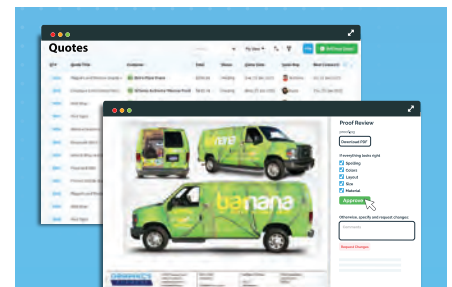
- **Absolute Colorimetric** is suitable for logos or graphics that require more precise colors. If no match is found for the source colors, the closest match is used. This intent preserves the white point through the conversion and does not adjust for the whiteness of the paper and is best used mainly for proofing.

- **Perceptual** is suitable for photographs and images that contain many out-of-gamut colors. The overall color appearance is preserved by changing all the colors to fit within the range of colors at the destination. It maintains the relationships between colors to produce the best results.

- **Saturation** produces more concentrated solid colors in graphics such as charts and graphs. Colors may be less accurate than other rendering intents. The



shop management.
simplified.



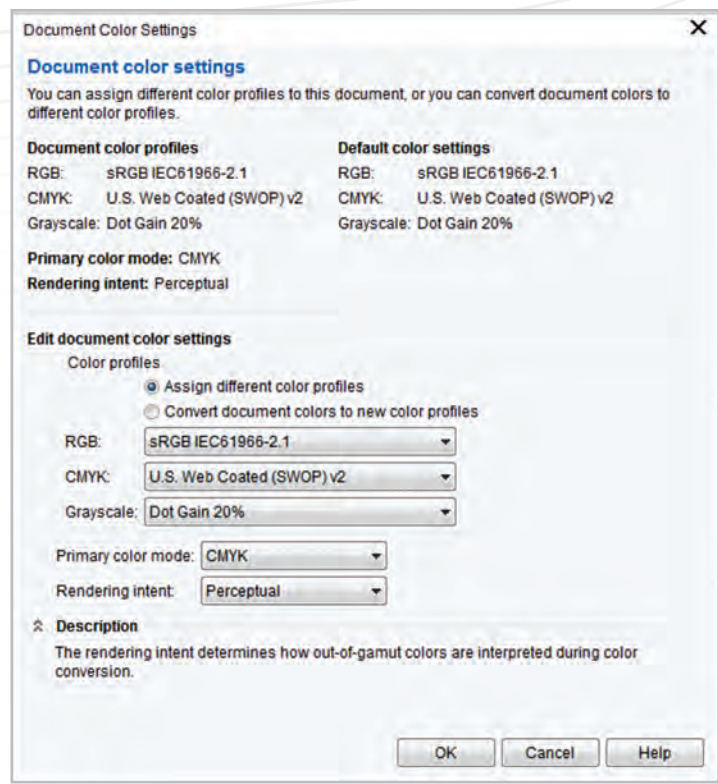
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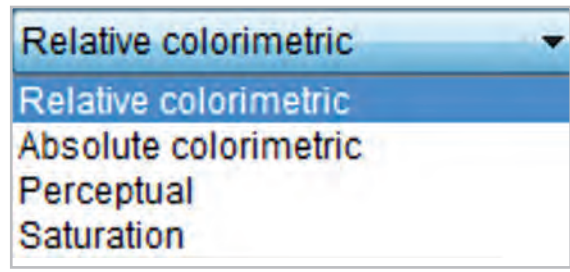
3

Dialog for the document settings.



2

Drop-down menu of the four rendering intents available.



above descriptions are those provided in the CorelDRAW help files, and honestly, I find them to be of little help. So, all of that said, I have found that the perceptual rendering intent is generally the best choice for the most visually realistic rendering, as it more closely maintains the relationship of colors.

COLOR CONVERSION SETTINGS

The next category is color conversion settings. The default color engine is Microsoft ICM CMM and is likely the best choice. If you frequently receive files from users of Adobe Illustrator, it may be of benefit to download and run the Adobe CMM engine.

Next is Preserve pure black. I have chosen to enable it, but this choice may have

some problems with some fountain fills, so is a personal choice. Map gray to CMYK black is on by default and maintains neutral grays with no color tint.

Spot color definition has lab values chosen by default and is likely the best choice. The reason for this is explained in the PDF information mentioned earlier in this article.

Moving on to the right side of the dialog are the color management policies. These are mostly for documents received from a source outside of CorelDRAW. Open is concerned with a file that is to be opened. The default for all is “Use embedded color profile,” and probably does not need to be changed unless you have a particular reason to do so. The warning tabs are not on by default, and I leave them off to avoid

the annoyance they provide. This again is a personal preference.

Import and paste has differing choices. Most often, the default works fine. Convert and Assign are based upon the settings on the left side of the dialog. (Note: When you hover your cursor over any of the categories, a brief description appears to help you determine what it does and its meaning). Any profile you create can be saved as a preset with a unique name.

Fig. 3 is the dialog for document settings. These are settings that can be changed as necessary for a particular document and are retained in that document. These begin with the default settings but can be tailored to any particular document. Choices include color profiles for RGB, CMYK and grayscale based on the default color settings. Each can be changed here, if needed. Primary color mode and rendering intent can be altered here as necessary for any chosen document without affecting other documents.

The information included here is, by no means, a comprehensive description of all the nuances of color management. It is inherently a vast concept that requires some intense study to comprehend all the functions. My intent here has been to help the average user set up his system for the most productive result. A number of tutorials and videos exist online that deal with color issues related to CorelDRAW. I recommend users take advantage of them.

As always, I encourage questions, comments and/or insights at dezender1@gmail.com. I will respond as soon as possible and share them with the magazine editors. GP



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

Laser Engrave a Cork Journal



THIS ENGRAVED GIFT OFFERS A MODERN, TEXTURED LOOK

BY CHERYL LOBAN

Laser engraved gifts display branding, personality, and creativity on everyday objects. Leatherette cork, for example, has a modern, textured look, which you can easily add personalization to via laser engraving. These are the supplies you'll need for engraving:

- Laser engraver
- Cork journal
- LAZ32 or LA's Totally Awesome all-purpose cleaner
- Microfiber cloth

5 SIMPLE STEPS

1 Download a journal template or measure the journal. Your art should be 100% RGB black.

2 Place the journal in the upper left corner of the laser bed. Make sure the journal is level.

3 Adjust your engraver's focus so it's on the surface of the journal.

4 Engrave the journal using leatherette settings. Settings can vary slightly as each laser is a little different. These are settings we have tested and use that you can use as a starting point.

- 35W – 600DPI – 65S – 20P
- 60W – 600DPI – 80S – 15P
- 80W – 600DPI – 90S – 15P

5 Clean with LAZ32 or LA's Totally Awesome and a microfiber cloth.

It's ideal not to have any residue, so during testing, try to avoid wiping it clean because the material is so porous it can worsen.

Dialing in a fairly fast speed and mid to low power is essential for cork. **GP**



Check that the journal is level in the laser.



Dialing in a fairly fast speed and mid to low power is essential for cork.



Laser engraved gifts display branding, personality, and creativity. (All images courtesy JDS Industries)

Cheryl Loban is the communications specialist at JDS Industries. She joined JDS in March of 2001 as a customer service rep and worked in various roles in that capacity over the past 18 years before moving to her current role in the marketing department in 2019.



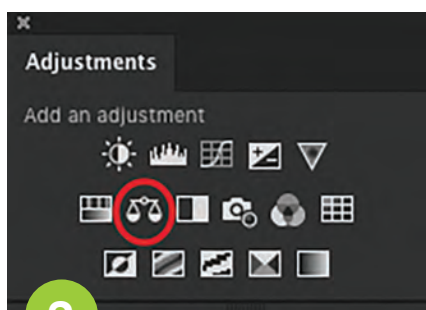
BALANCING ACT

THE DYNAMICS OF BALANCING COLOR



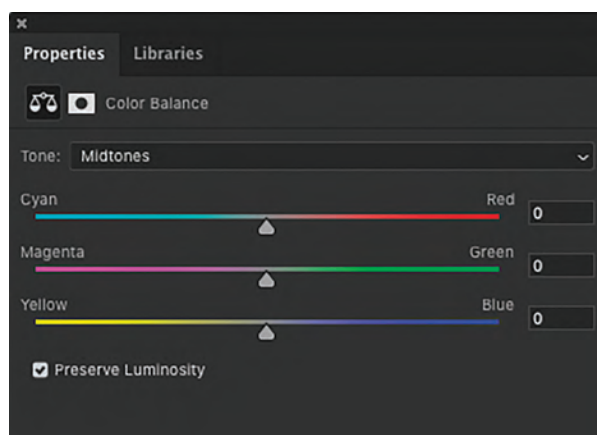
1

Photos taken using fluorescent lighting tend to have a greenish colorcast. (All images courtesy Stephen Romaniello)



2

The Color Balance controls in the Properties panel.



Harmony in nature is a state of balance where multiple entities resonate together to produce a greater whole. In the world of images, balance means that the total combination of colors is harmonious, unified, and pleasing to the eye. They exist in a dynamic equilibrium that enhances each color and strengthens the essential characteristics of the picture. The application of color is both a science and an art based on color theory and the psychology of color.

TOOLS

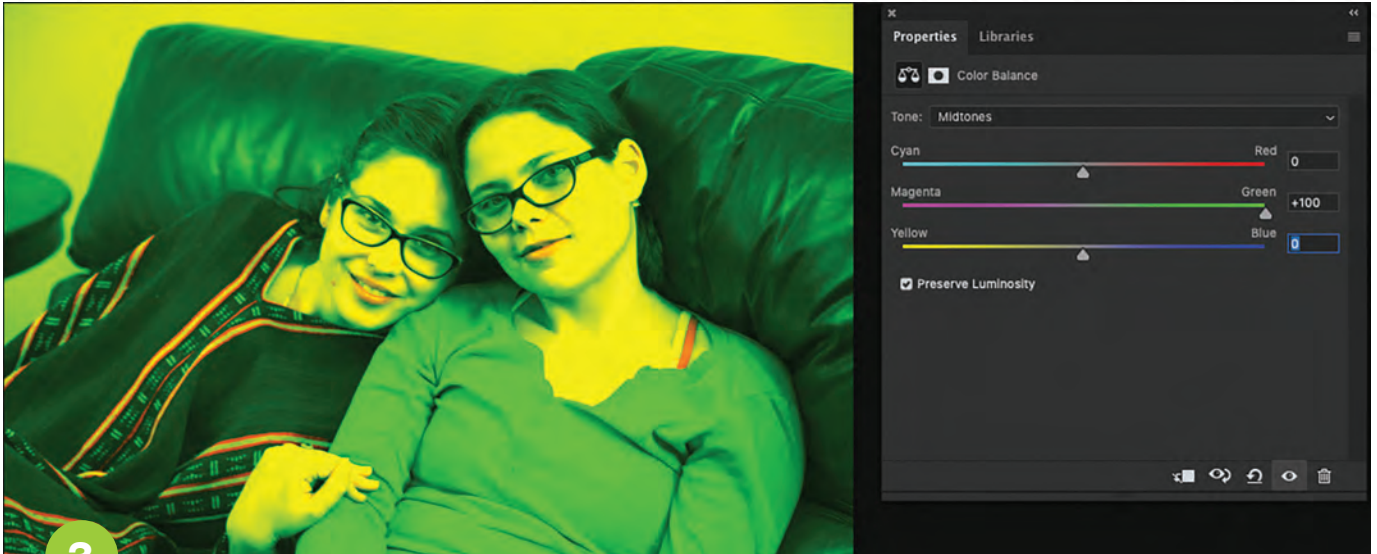
No doubt you are aware of basic color correction features that are available in image editing software. Brightness and Contrast, Levels, Curves and Hue/Saturation are the nuts and bolts of color correction and contrast adjustment. Applied individually, they can extend the range of color and improve contrast. These

features are critical to the color correction workflow and are essential tools for enhancing color and contrast in any image editing software. There are, however, even more specific tools that are designed to handle unique color problems.

CALIBRATE

Although I've said it before in other articles, it's worth saying again; color management is essential for predictable results at the printer. Before making color adjustments, calibrate your hardware to determine what the colors on your monitor actually represent. Manage the color

“A colorcast is an undesirable tint of a particular color that globally affects an image.”



The green slider has been pushed to the extreme producing an intense green tint.

on your monitor to display the gamut of your printer – using at the very least, calibration software or better still, a colorimeter and a spectrophotometer to create an accurate custom ICC profile. Calibration is about producing an on-screen image based on the actual numerical RGB values of the pixels as displayed in the most accurate window possible. If there are color problems, they can be detected and corrected.

COLORCAST

One of the most common problems is the colorcast. A colorcast is an undesirable tint of a particular color that globally affects an image. It can be caused by reflected light from a nearby object or a specific light source. For example, many photos taken using fluorescent lighting tend to have a greenish colorcast. (**Fig. 1**) In film, the wrong timing or imbalanced chemical mixtures can cause colorcasts during development. Colorcasts can occur in old photographs due to the fading and discoloration of dyes, particularly under the action of ultraviolet light. This type of color distortion is usually correctable on a scanned version of the image with image editing techniques.

TIGHTROPE

Balancing color is about walking the color tightrope. Specifically, adjusting an image to eliminate a blue colorcast can potentially add too much yellow. The same is true with eliminating red that adds cyan, and green, which adds magenta. The point is that these colors exist within color ramps, where the strength of one color indicates the absence of another.

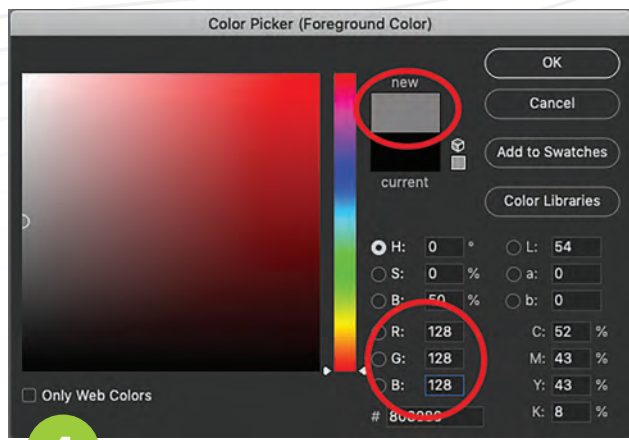
BALANCE POINT

In this article, I'd like to cover three specific techniques that are surefire cures to eliminating pesky colorcasts and guarantee a balanced image every time. I'm demonstrating these features on Adobe Photoshop, but Adobe Lightroom and Corel Paintshop Pro have similar features. There are several methods used to conquer the colorcast conundrum and perfectly adjust complex color relationships, so let's start with the most obvious - Color Balance.

Click the little scale shaped icon on the Adjustments panel to reveal the Color Balance controls in the Properties Panel (**Fig. 2**). This dialog box controls color in three different tonal ranges that are chosen from the tone menu: Highlights, Midtones and Shadows. It's generally best to start with the midtone range because it overlaps both shadows and highlights.

Click the Preserve Luminosity check box to maintain the tonal balance of the image and affect only the color and not the darks and lights. Each of the three-color sliders represents the two color opposites I previously mentioned. By increasing the amount of a specific color by moving the slider toward its name, decreases its opposite. To increase the amount of a color in an image, drag a slider toward it. To decrease the amount of a color, drag the slider away from it. If you push any of the sliders too far the image can develop an intense tint (**Fig. 3**). The task is to find the perfect balance of colors within each tonal range. While adjusting with the sliders, you observe the changes on screen in real time. This is called the eyeball technique. It works, but it's not the most accurate. For maximum precision, you need to be able to read and understand numbers because numbers don't lie.

THE DIGITAL EYE



4

A neutral color consists of equal values of red, green, and blue and appears as black, white, or gray

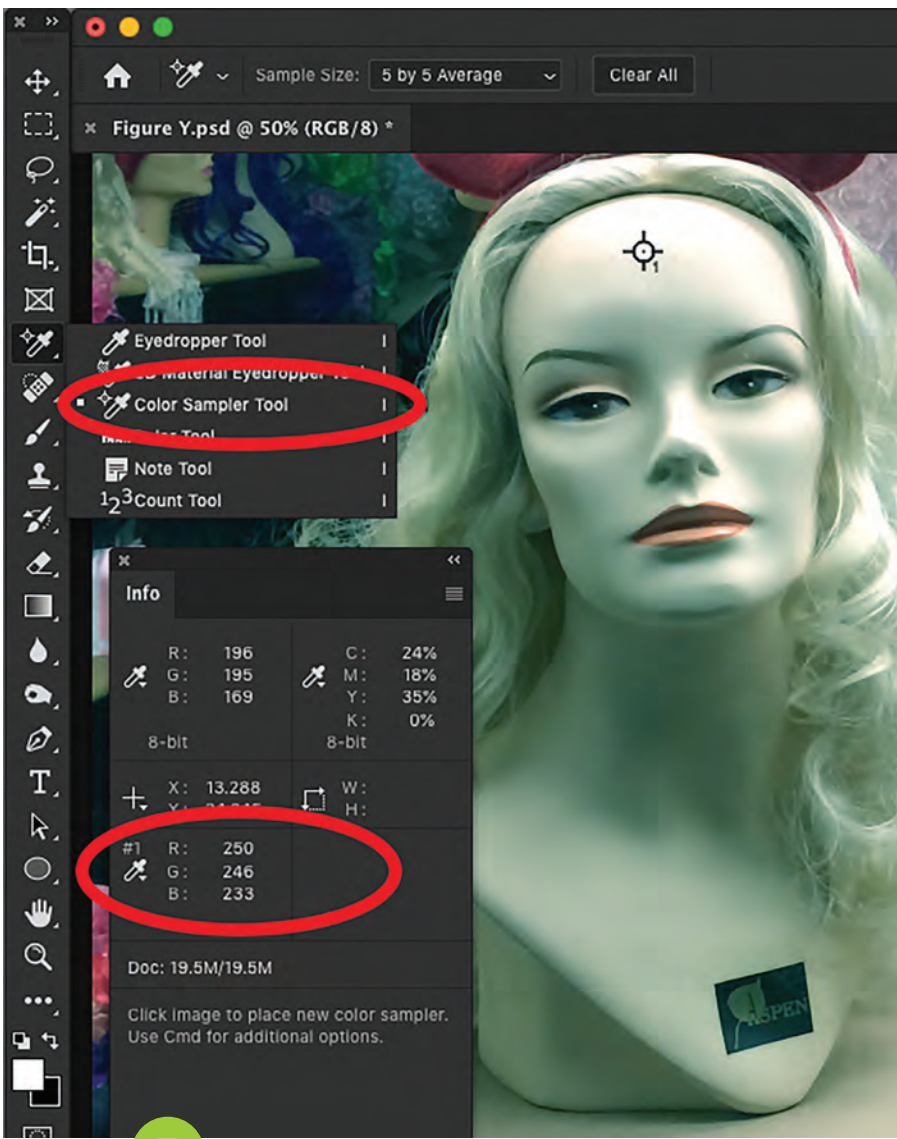
NEUTRALITY

All neutral colors have identical RGB values. A neutral color consists of equal values of red, green, and blue and appears as black, white, or gray (Fig. 4). By sampling a specific highlight area of an image and mapping a light gray color to it, the colorcast of the entire image will magically disappear.

First, choose the Color Sampler tool. In the Options bar, set sample size to 5 By 5 Average. The Info panel is displayed showing the RGB values of the current point where the cursor is positioned. (Fig. 5)

Drag over the image to locate the lightest area on the image. As you drag, the Info panel displays high numbers in the light areas and low numbers in the dark areas. Observe the panel to see the highest RGB values of the sample point. Do not choose a specular highlight (Red 255, Green 255, Blue 255) because it is pure white and cannot be easily modified. Instead, choose the lightest area that contains detail and click to deposit sample point #1.

In the example shown here, (Fig. 6A), I chose a gray floor tile as the sample point. The red value is 210, the green value is 224 and the blue value is 223 indicating that there is a deficiency of red that results in a cyan-blue colorcast. In the Adjustments panel, click the Color Balance icon to display the color balance sliders in the Properties panel. Choose the Midtone option from the Tone menu. Drag the cyan/red slider to the right to add red. As you drag, the image becomes warmer. Drag until the red value in the Info panel reads 218. By dragging the red slider, you'll notice that the green and blue values have decreased. Drag the magenta/green slider to the right until the green value reads 218. Ditto with the yellow/blue sliders so that all three values in the Info panel are identical as in (Fig. 6B) and the colorcast is eliminated.



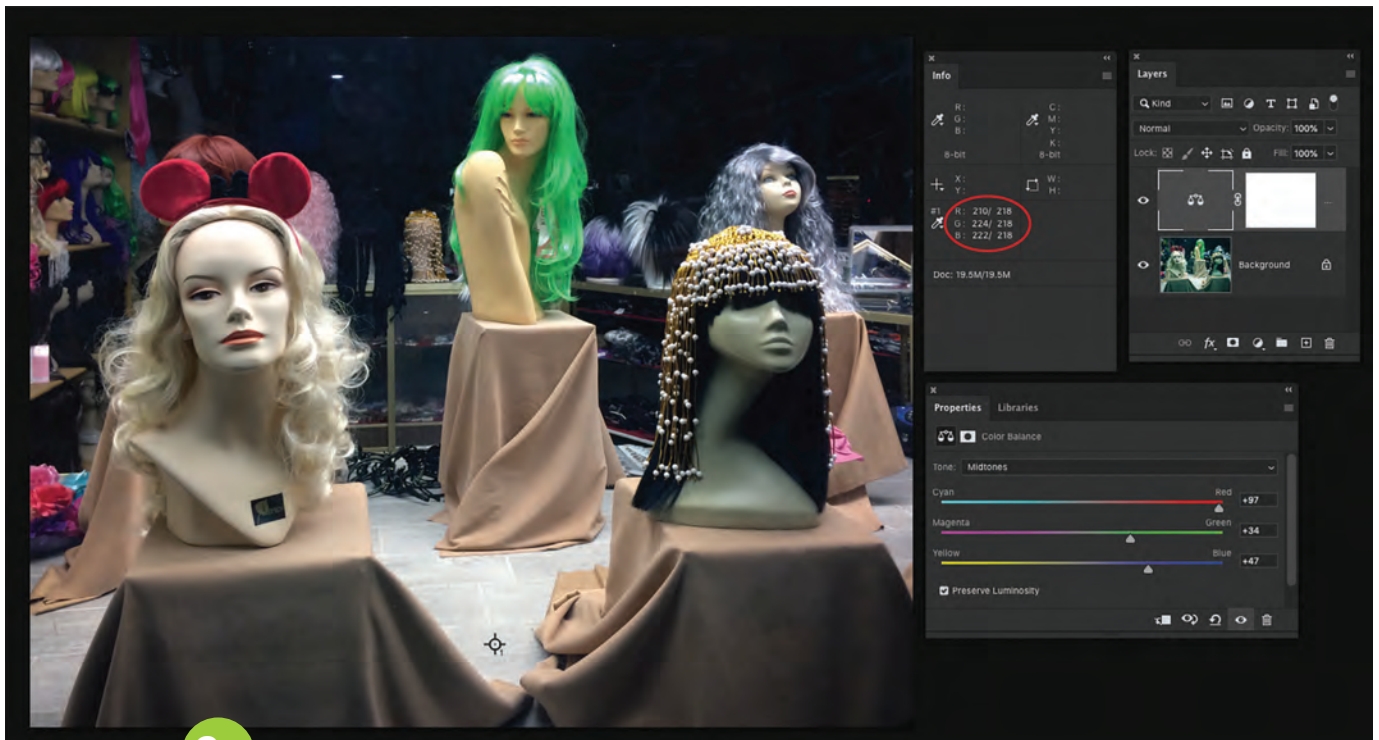
5

The Info panel is displayed showing the RGB values of the current point where the cursor is positioned.



6A

The red value is 210, the green value is 224 and the blue value is 222, indicating there is a deficiency of red that results in a cyan/blue colorcast.



6B

Drag the sliders so that all three values are identical: Red 218, Green 218, Blue 218.

THE DIGITAL EYE

WHITE POINT BLACK POINT

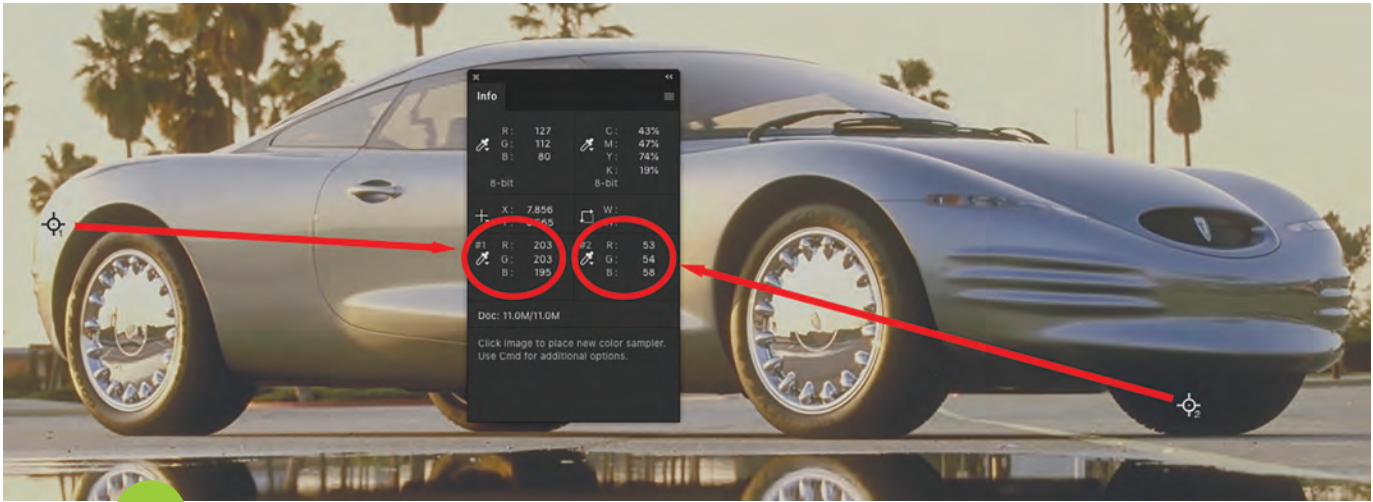
The Levels feature can be used to assign neutral highlight and shadow colors to the lightest and darkest areas of the image. With the WPBP technique, all the colors in the image will remap the brightness information based on the light and dark extremes of the image. In practice, this will usually produce the best contrast and completely eliminate any colorcast in just a few steps. What follows is the step-by-step workflow:

1.) Here is the “Dream Car” (Fig. 7), and it runs just fine. It can go 0-60 in 2.2 seconds! But it desperately needs a contrast



7

The “Dream Car” needs a contrast adjustment, and its murky yellow colorcast needs to be removed.



8

The light area on the rear of the car is the white point and the left front tire is the black point.

adjustment and its murky yellow colorcast needs to be neutralized.

2.) Drag over the image with the Color Sampler tool. Read the numbers in the Info panel to find the lightest area of the image and click to establish the white point (#1). In this case, it’s the light area on the rear of the car. Remember, don’t choose a specular highlight for the white point, and don’t choose absolute black (0R, 0G, 0B) for the black point. Choose the areas with the lowest numbers and click to deposit (#2). In this case, it’s the left front tire. (Fig. 8)

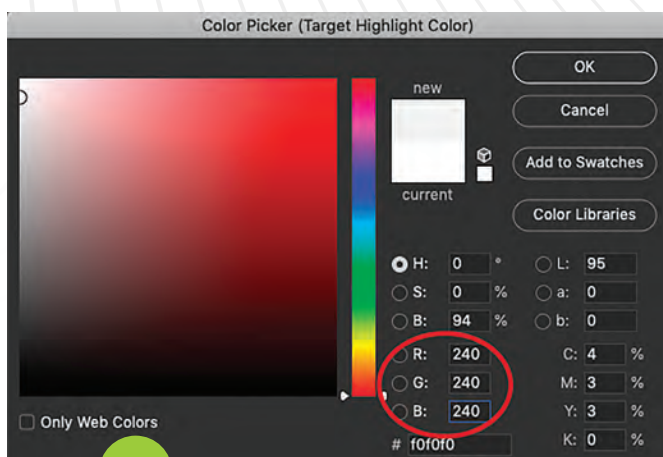
3.) Click the Levels icon in the Adjustment panel. Click on the white eyedropper on the panel to display the Color Picker. Enter these recommended values in the RGB fields for the white

point: 240R, 240G, 240B that produces a very light gray. Click OK. Then click on the black eyedropper on the panel to again display the Color Picker. Enter these recommended values in the RGB fields for the black point: 25R, 25G, 25B to produce a very dark gray. Click OK. (Fig. 9)

4.) Choose the white eyedropper again. On the image, click sample point #1. The image lightens.

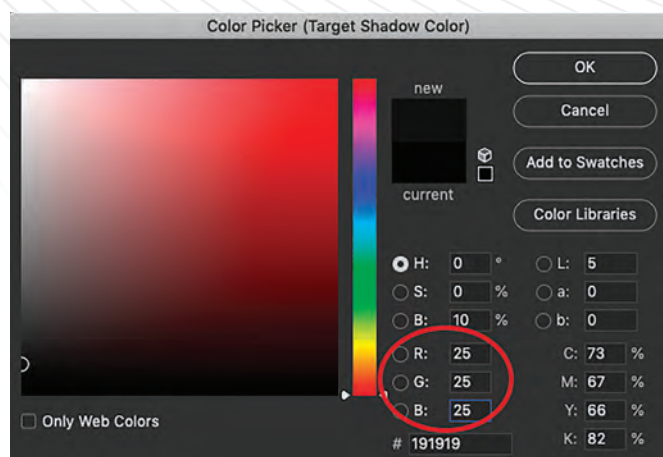
5.) Choose the black eyedropper. Click on sample point #2. The image adjusts to perfect tonality.

When the light and dark extremes are adjusted using the WPBP method, all of the colors are remapped, and everything usually falls nicely into place as you can see in Fig. 10.



9

Recommended values in the RGB fields for the white point are 240R, 240G, 240B that produces a very light gray. The values in the RGB fields for the black point are 25R, 25G, 25B, which produces a very dark gray.



10

When the light and dark extremes are adjusted using the WPBP method, all of the colors are remapped, and everything falls nicely into place.

PICK YOUR METHOD

Eliminating a colorcast is simple and requires only a few steps to improve color relationships. I've presented three different methods to choose from depending on the image. If the image has no white or black point, then visually apply the color balance technique. If there is only a white point, then use the lightest area as a marker to adjust the numbers to neutrality. Finally, if the image has a white point and black point, then you're in luck! The process is virtually automatic. I think you'll find that with these techniques even the most discolored images can be improved. By the way, if you want to give these techniques a try, you can download the images used in this article at <https://gpro.link/srom922>. GP



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

Where to Sell Online

GETTING YOUR PRODUCTS ON THE RIGHT SITE FOR EASIER SALES



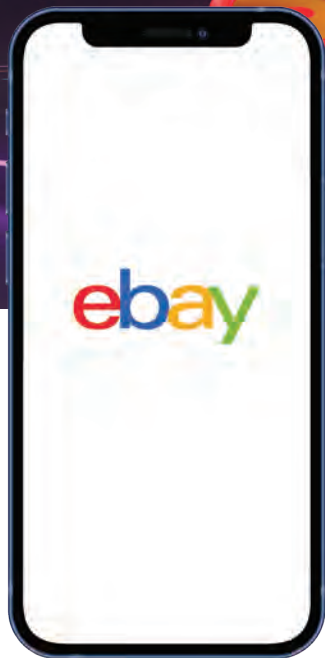
BY KRISTINE SHREVE

When selling online, one of the most important decisions that needs to be made is where exactly you're selling. For some people, that decision begins and ends with a website they create and maintain themselves. For others, a website specific to their particular company may not be the best option, either in terms of the skills required to create and maintain a site, or the cost of doing so. In some cases, the best option for online selling is to use one of the online platforms or marketplaces that already exist for this purpose. Two of the most popular are Etsy and eBay.

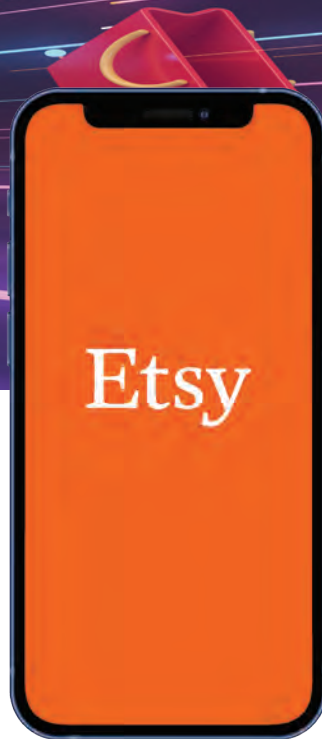
At first glance, Etsy and eBay may appear to have a lot in common. Both

are places where companies or individual makers can sell things. Both charge fees on each sale and have requirements about what products can be sold. Both place an emphasis on customer service and reviews and seller popularity. Both have extensive marketing campaigns designed to draw people into their sites to buy. As usual, though, the devil is in the details. Although, if you look casually, the two selling platforms look quite similar, they're really serving different audiences and slightly different goals. Depending on what you sell, one platform may be a much better option for you than the other. So how do you know which one is the right platform for you?





Vs



In the end, the general rule of thumb is that selling somewhere is better than selling nowhere.

LOOKING AT EACH PLATFORM

Let's start with defining what each platform purports to be. Etsy touts itself as an online marketplace where sellers offer custom made items or vintage treasures. Although that mission has morphed some over the years, Etsy is still known as the place where creatives can sell what they make. Its handmade policies may not be enforced as stringently as they once were, and some Etsy sellers would argue that there are other sellers on the site selling mass produced items, but the overall goal of the site is to offer artists and creatives a place to sell their unique handcrafted and created goods and intellectual property. Etsy also claims to specialize in vintage goods, but that's generally a lesser product category. Most buyers go to Etsy looking for items with which they can create their own projects, or for unique and fun goods created by others.

As for eBay, it's been known for years as an online auction house. Sellers can sell things for a straight price, or they can have auctions where people bid on goods and the highest bid wins. The products don't have to be handmade. A seller can, in fact, sell new and used products that it bought from a supplier, if the seller is so inclined.

Buying on eBay is not so much about finding a unique, handmade product as it is about finding a deal. Essentially, eBay is where the bargain hunters go. To be fair, eBay is also the place where people look when they're trying to find something vintage or unique that could only have come from someone's private collection or attic. In some respects, eBay is a giant online garage sale or flea market, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. If you have the right merchandise, eBay can be a very fertile marketplace.

Before talking about what makes the sites different, and which selling proposition might be right for your business, there is one commonality that should be noted: competition. Both sites are highly competitive selling arenas, with lots of sellers competing for the eyes and dollars of the potential customers who visit. According to the latest data for 2022, there are 4.36 million sellers on Etsy. In 2022, so far anyway, there are 19 million sellers on eBay. That's a big signal to noise ratio, and sellers have to be diligent and work hard to stand out in the crowd. While both eBay and Etsy spend money and effort to bring customers to their sites, and do have sizable flows of traffic, that

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“There are 4.36 million sellers on Etsy. There are 19 million sellers on eBay. That’s a big signal to noise ratio, and sellers have to be diligent and work hard to stand out in the crowd.”

traffic is met with an onslaught of sellers and stores all competing for attention and sales. Given that, standing out is imperative and will require good branding, a well thought out product and selling strategy, high quality product photography, and a willingness to provide top notch customer service.

WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Now, on to how to choose which product is right for you. First, consider the products you’re selling. For most shops in the industry, those that make things on demand, or create designs which customers can use to make their own items, Etsy would seem to be the better option. The Etsy marketplace is geared toward creatives and people who are making goods by hand, or who are creating designs or transfers or things of that nature. Etsy is a place where people go to buy unique goods or, increasingly, it is a place where

crafters and others go to buy items to make their own unique goods. Etsy buyers are also often looking for personalized goods, which makes the site a good market for those shops that screen print shirts, sublimite mugs, or make patches.

By contrast, eBay is not so much how an item is made as it is about how it’s sold. There are two selling options on eBay: auction and straight price. They’re basically what the names imply. Auctioning an item means that bids are taken, and the top bid wins the item. Selling for a straight price means the item has one price and consumers can elect to pay that price to buy the item.

Unlike Etsy, eBay is also less about being an e-commerce environment, with personalized shop templates. Sellers on eBay are there to move goods and are known more by their customer reviews and ratings than they are by their shop setup or brand names. People who want to sell

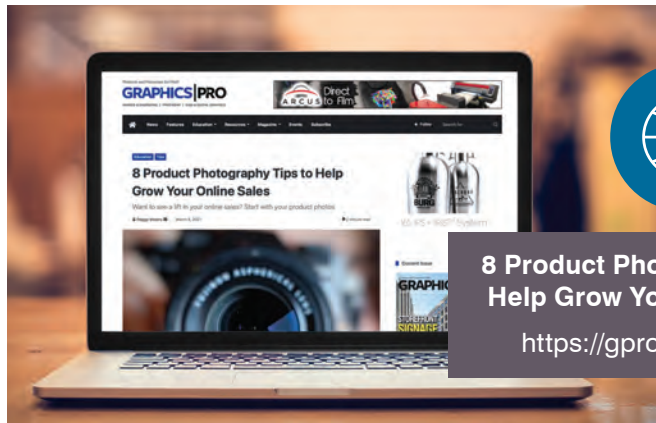
goods that are not custom and are already decorated with popular sayings or pictures (nothing copyrighted, please) could potentially do well on eBay, if they're willing to put the effort into attracting the attention of the percentage of buyers visiting the site who would want those sorts of goods. Do keep in mind, however, that most visitors to the site may not have come looking for those sorts of things.

CONSIDER COSTS

Next, let's look at what it costs to sell on each platform. For Etsy, sellers pay a listing fee of \$0.20 for each item listed for sale on its platform. Once an item sells, there is a 6.5% transaction fee, which considers the price for the item, plus the cost of shipping and gift wrapping. If you elect to advertise your shop using Etsy Ads, you set your own budget, but there is a predetermined minimum budget level required by Etsy. To subsidize the cost of their off-site ads, which bring traffic to the site, Etsy will also take a cut of any sales made from an offsite ad that includes your listing. Fees can be either 15% or 12% of the sale, depending on various criteria stipulated by Etsy.

Some sellers may also opt into Etsy Plus, which is a subscription-based service offering an expanded set of sales tools. The fee for an Etsy Plus Subscription is \$10 per month. There are also payment processing fees, shipping fees, and so on. Make sure you research and read all the information about fees thoroughly and take the fee structure into account when pricing products.

In the world of eBay, the fee structure looks a bit different. Those who sell on eBay are charged an insertion fee when a listing is created, and a final value fee when the item sells. The amount charged depends on the price of the item you're selling, the format and category chosen for the listing, the optional listing upgrades you choose to use, and the conduct and performance of the seller. Insertion fees vary based on how you sell, what you're selling, and are charged per category. So, if you list an item in two categories, you will pay two insertion fees. The final value



8 Product Photography Tips to Help Grow Your Online Sales:

<https://gpro.link/phototips>

fee is a percentage of the total amount of the sale you made, plus \$0.30 per order.

If you're selling on eBay, make sure to check the final value fee structure in the categories to which you wish to add products, as those percentages will vary. There are also advertising fees, a dispute fee and other fees that may impact your listings. As with Etsy, be sure to read all the fee information and figure out which fees may impact your final profit.

In the end, the general rule of thumb is that selling somewhere is better than selling nowhere. While Etsy may seem like a no-brainer to people who make personalized or creative products, eBay can be fertile sales territory for some categories of goods. What you choose may depend on whether you want a more personalized store experience (Etsy), if you're looking to sell your goods auction style (eBay),

what your perception of each platform is, and how much the e-commerce storefront experience matters to you. The main thing to keep in mind before setting up shop on either platform is the necessity of doing your research, particularly when it comes to fees, and the fact that both sites have heavy competition, and it will require diligence and thought to stand out from the crowd and make sales. **GP**

Kristine Shreve is the founder and CEO of Kristine Shreve Consulting, offering writing, marketing, and business development services. Visit www.kristineshreve.com for more info. Kristine is also the creator and host of the Business + Women podcast and is also the director of marketing and outreach for Applique Getaway. Kristine was the director of marketing for Ensign Emblem and EnMart from 2006-2020.

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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SHOP SOFTWARE

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



RIP AND WORKFLOW SOFTWARE

Onyx Graphics Inc. announces the global availability of ONYX 22, the company's latest version of its wide-format RIP and print workflow software. It includes a new drag-and-drop user experience for file management. It also features color tools for increased color output accuracy.

800-295-8324
onygfx.com



DESIGN SOFTWARE

Corel Corporation offers the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite, a design software with vector illustration, layout, photo editing, typography, and collaboration capabilities.

514-358-7807
coreldraw.com



ORDER MANAGER

Netsoft Studio offers the BizWizard Order Manager and BizWizard ShopKart for the awards and personalization industry. The products have integrated bidirectional communication to allow users to update product prices, names, and descriptions without duplicate data entry.

775-996-1343
bizwiziq.com



SIGN-MAKING SOFTWARE

SAi offers the fully updated Flexi 22 sign-making software, a print and cut software for sign and print providers. It's engineered to further increase productivity and workflow efficiencies for users and incorporates sign-specific design tools, RIP software, and print-and-cut software for direct vinyl cutting.

800-229-9066
thinksai.com



LASER SOFTWARE

Trotec Laser Inc. offers Trotec Ruby, a laser software that gives users the ability to create text, photo, and graphic elements. It also allows users to import a variety of file types without a third-party design software.

866-226-8505
troteclaser.com



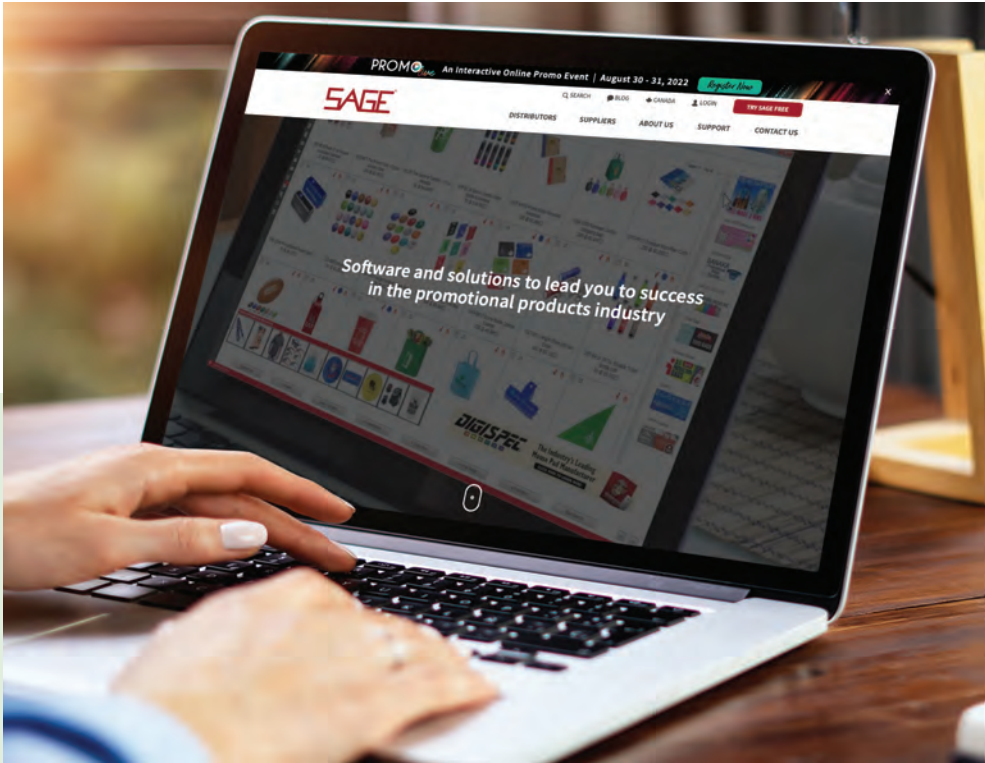
PRINT SHOP MANAGEMENT

JCW SOFTWARE offers Teesom, a cloud-based business management software for the decorated apparel industry. The company says it's integrated with top vendors, as well as QuickBooks, and can quickly generate orders. It features a customer portal where customers can view job statuses, make online payments, view art approvals, and request quotes.

561-337-4449
teesom.com

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: SHOP SOFTWARE

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



PROMO INDUSTRY SOFTWARE

SAGE offers the SAGE Total Access software, which includes promo product research, order management, and email marketing for the promo product industry. The recently released SAGE Mobile 11.1 allows distributors access to research and management operations on the go. The latest version features enhancements to product research, project management, file center, and SAGE Chat. The app is available on iOS and Android.

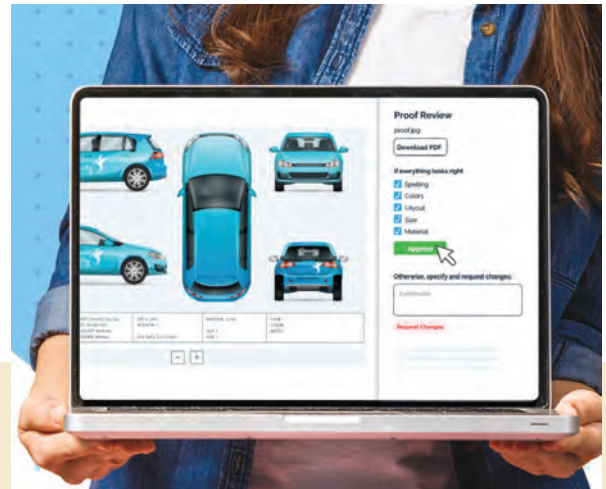
214-631-6000
sageworld.com



ERP SOFTWARE SYSTEM

SquareCoil offers SquareCoil Software, a full ERP software system to help users manage projects. It has built-in timecard tracking and inventory control.

844-289-2645
squarecoil.com



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

shopVOX offers the shopVOX software, a cloud-based business management software made for companies in the graphics industry. It includes a CRM system, online proof and quote approval, workflow management, reporting, scheduling, and product pricing templates for quotes and invoices.

shopvox.com

SHOP MANAGEMENT

Printavo's software helps shops keep track of their workflow and jobs, improve shop communication, automate customer approvals, create online stores, or help with scheduling.

800-213-9317
printavo.com

The screenshot shows the Printavo software interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Invoices', 'Users', and 'Search Invoices & Customers'. Below this, a dashboard displays several key financial metrics:

- TOTAL WAREHOUSE:** \$33,658.24
- CURRENT:** \$13,032.64
- IN PROGRESS:** \$0
- 30 DAYS BACK LOG:** \$3,688.37
- 60 DAYS BACK LOG:** \$492.23
- 90 DAYS BACK LOG:** \$0

Below the dashboard is a search bar and a table of invoices. The table has columns for ID, Customer, Production Due Date, Outstanding, and Status.

ID	Customer	Production Due Date	Outstanding	Status
4071	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 6, 2020	\$144.50	PRE-PRODUCTION
4070	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 6, 2020	\$0.00	REVIEW US [PAID]
4057	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 27, 2020	\$511.25	REVIEW US
4066	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 5, 2020	\$733.95	QUOTE APPROVED
4063	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 4, 2020	\$459.38	PRE-PRODUCTION
4062	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 4, 2020	\$0.00	SHIPPED - SEE TRACKING [PAID]
4059	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Aug 4, 2020	\$0.00	PICK UP - TEXT [PAID]
4057	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Jul 31, 2020	\$235.73	REVIEW US
4054	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Jul 31, 2020	\$931.35	QUOTE APPROVED
4053	John Doe - Acme Production Inc.	Jul 31, 2020	\$10.50	PICKUP - EMAIL

GP

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How LEADERSHIP Impacts Your SALES



BY PAUL INGLE

TIPS FOR BEING THE COACH YOUR COMPANY NEEDS

Leadership is key to driving your company's sales. It promotes your firm's culture, and it sets you on a path to success. Compassion, communication, and drive help set the stage. But being active and a leader in your industry — and in your local market — can boost your sales dramatically.

As the son of an All-American in college basketball and a future baseball Hall of Fame inductee into a west Texas university for the inaugural 1957 NAIA World Series title, I was immersed in sports early. My dad was offered pro baseball and basketball opportunities but since I was born while he was a senior, he chose to coach instead. I'm sure my mom was not keen on him being on the road while she had a new baby!

Organized sports teach you quickly about self-discipline, competitiveness, ambition, and teamwork. It shaped my future sales career and ultimately led me to my high school basketball coach Brooks Dozier (and ironically one of my dad's cross-town coaching rivals). Coach Dozier introduced me to two critical ideals that have been instrumental to my success: mentors and personal development. He was my first mentor and it changed everything.

My coach's mentor was John Wooden, the legendary UCLA coach and everyman philosopher. We called him The Coach. And we were loyal disciples.

Every practice and as homework, we learned about John Wooden. We watched his great standout Bill Walton dominate games, repeated his defense and offense innovations, and embraced The Coach's Pyramid of Success. Why mirror such a humble man of integrity?

In 12 years, John Wooden won 10 Division I titles and seven were back-to-back. (No other coach has won five in a row). In 1973, his team became the only one to ever have back-to-back undefeated



“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

– Winston Churchill

“I think that in any group activity — whether it be business, sports or family — there has to be leadership or it won’t be successful.”

– John Wooden

seasons. He coached his team to over 600 victories. He became the first basketball player to be named All-American three times, winning him a spot in the Hall of Fame as a player, and as a coach – another first.

The Coach had a favorite saying, and we had it on a banner hanging in our sign fabrication area for many years:

“If you don’t have time to do it right, when do you have time to do it over?”

Coach Dozier and my dad played golf often and were great friends. I’m sure that was another reason he took a deeper interest in me. He invested extra hours of his busy life as a dad, coach, and teacher to mentor me. He embodied leadership and he was a great role model. Little did he know, he would shape my life.

Since 1985, I’ve been in the sign industry in sales, sales management, and as a company owner. I’ve sold over \$100 million in signage to local, regional, national, and international clients. I’m passionate about marketing, education (my mom was also a teacher), and helping others become entrepreneurs. I believe you should do your best to give back to the industry and your community.

As I enter the “fourth period” of my life and career, I spend more time thinking about what my legacy will be. So, the following are rules that I’ve gleaned from my experiences to help you be a better leader. And leadership will help you grow your sales.

“If you are not committed to getting better at what you are doing, you are bound to get worse.”

– Pat Riley

Little steps, compounded over time, make a difference. The things you do every day do matter. They may not look dramatic, but they make *all* the difference.

RULE NO. 1 - GET A MENTOR

The future belongs to the competent. A mentor can help you model good behavior through trust and their expertise and life skills. They can help you set goals, develop key contacts, identify resources, and define your career goals. A mentor is usually a good listener and can give you feedback in a nonjudgmental way. When these things click for you, you gain confidence. When we’re confident, we move forward with opportunities and even embrace risk. Better still, when we fail, confidence allows us to get back up and move forward.

RULE NO. 2 - GET INVOLVED

Volunteer. Join a civic club or organization in your city. Once you are part of the local chapter, join a committee. Pick one that interests you or appeals to your innate abilities. Become a servant leader. It is gratifying to be part of something big that has a common goal of your peers, friends, and community.

RULE NO. 3 - BE ACTIVE IN YOUR INDUSTRY

Get active in this industry; we need you and your special set of talents and experiences. For almost four decades, the sign and graphics industry has been very good to me. I felt it was my duty to give back. My mentor taught me this ideal.

I’ve been honored to be president of our state association and a charter member of our Dallas-Fort Worth local chapter. It takes a time commitment and when you own a shop; it isn’t easy. But the benefits of life-long



"You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

– Jim Rohn

relationships, experiences, and a role in shaping the trajectory of our industry are priceless. By being on our state association executive committee, I had the opportunity to address a key regulations group at our Texas state legislature in Austin. And our efforts were instrumental at a critical time. So, get to know your lawmakers and vote. One person *can* make a difference.

Here is a novel idea: help your competition. You never know when your printer might go down at the worst possible time and the only solution is to call your competitor to see if he has an extra ink cartridge so you can make your order as promised by Monday. This happened, but it was the reverse. I drove over and delivered a cartridge to my competitor. It changed his perspective on what he thought he knew about our company, and we've helped one another since.

Network and network some more. Great leaders are always networking. The more people that know you and your capabilities and equipment will pay big dividends in sales. If sales are the lifeblood of business, cash flow is the oxygen. Marketing is the plasma that makes it all move and work. Be a good promoter of your company.

Leave a legacy. Start thinking about it now; life moves exponentially fast as we grow older. My grandmother was right when she told me that at 17. What will your legacy be? What does this industry think and talk about when your name or company is mentioned today? Tomorrow? In 20 years? Being a leader carries a lot of responsibility. But when we think of history, it's often the great leaders that capture our imagination, and we hope to emulate.

RULE NO. 4 - INVEST IN SELF IMPROVEMENT

My basketball coach started me on cassette tapes listening to John Wooden, Zig Ziglar, Norman Vincent Peale and others. It became part of my everyday life and the motivational and inspirational aspects of these dynamic speakers helped keep me upbeat and an active goal setter in my sales efforts. I had the privilege of spending time with Zig during his tapings of video and audio educational seminars in Dallas. He was a mentor as well; his firm even considered buying my first company to showcase how his unique sales training aids could fundamentally alter the sales process and improve revenue. Zig's bestselling first book, "See You at the Top," was rejected 39 times before it was published.

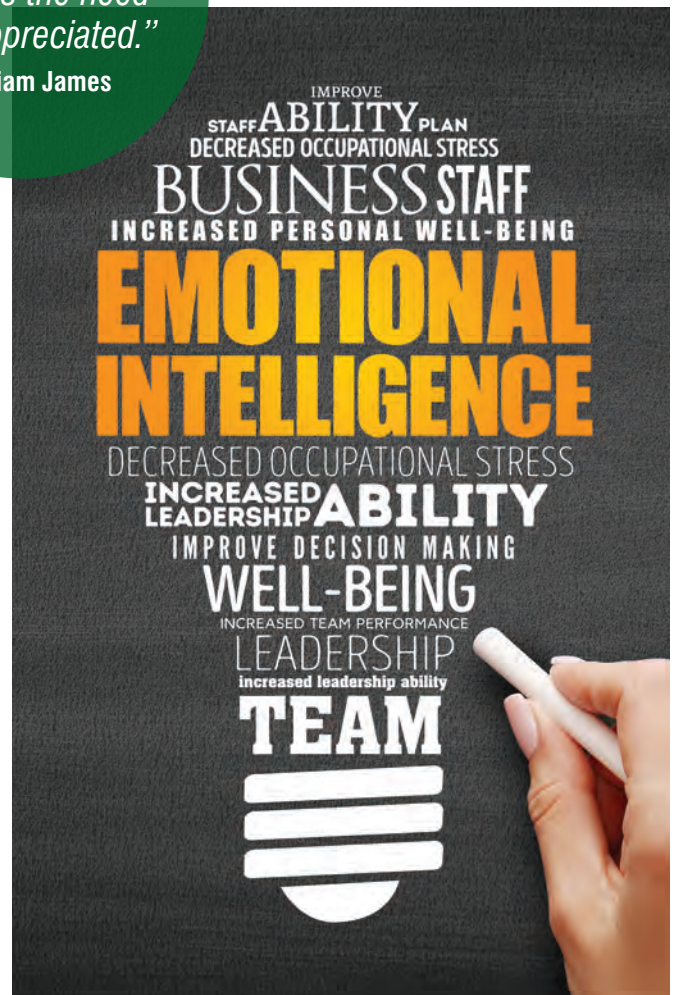
It is still in print. Zig Ziglar was the epitome of persistence and that has been a hallmark for me in my pursuit of sign sales. Never, ever quit!

Always develop new skills. Your company's success depends on how relevant you are in your geographical area and your differentiating factors among your competitors. Sometimes you must reinvent your company. Become a master of change. Technology gallops fast and it is gaining momentum each day. Don't be afraid to let go of products or services you've always carried. Make sure they make sense. Don't be a victim of "that's the way we've always done it." Be a speedboat and not the Titanic!

Become indispensable. Make so much difference in your community, relationships, and industry that your absence would create a vacuum. Hang with people you respect and admire. We patterned our company after one of our favorite vendors that was uniquely successful because they revolutionized customer service, order accuracy and branding.

"The deepest craving in human nature is the need to be appreciated."

– William James



“The eyes have one language everywhere.”

– George Herbert

“Only in being productively active can man make sense of his life.”

– Erich Fromm

“The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting.”

– Plutarch

RULE NO. 5 - PRACTICE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Focus on the good. We didn't choose the easiest vocation on Earth. We are in a custom environment of stress, tight deadlines, low margins, tough working conditions, outdoor weather extremes, large equipment investment, and demanding customers. But we get to create some works of art and make all the parts flow like a ballet somehow. And now we get to add in volatile raw material prices and supply chain issues for good measure! Those of us that are “age challenged” can remember the Gulf War, 9/11, and other recessions and how they impacted the industry. But focus on the great things we can do when our team is in the zone or when prosperity is breaking all sales records. Remember, this too shall pass.

Be grateful. Compliment others often. People thrive in a positive environment where they feel appreciated and part of the team. We are learning that a flexible work environment is tantamount to employee well-being. It wasn't always that way, but change happens. Embrace the change. Take seminars on how other generations work best. It's worth your time and investment to help your Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers maximize their contribution to life, liberty, and the pursuit of your bottom line.

Be positive, even when you don't feel like it. Smile, even if you think it might break your face. You'll be surprised how you can change the entire workspace emotionally by these simple actions. Happy, energetic, and enthusiastic employees help sell more signs, banners, decorated corporate apparel, imprinted promotional products, and digital graphics. You can set the course. Be the example; that's what leaders do.

RULE NO. 6 - DEVELOP YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EQ)

One of the watershed events of my life was when my wife Nita and I attended a multi-week seminar on Emotional Intelligence or EQ. What is emotional quotient? It is the ability to understand, manage and regulate your emotions in a positive manner to mitigate stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, and diffuse conflict.

EQ can help you strengthen relationships (it did wonders for our already great marriage), and it helped us figure out ways to reduce team stress. That is extremely valuable to a business owner. It also helps in job satisfaction.

It is not easy to work on your empathy for others, but when you learn how, it changes your perception on your own motivations, your employees, customers, and vendors. It's a dynamic that can create synergy in your day-to-day operations and cause fast scaling up of your company's volume. Improving your social skills takes some work but like anything, the rewards are commensurate with the effort.



Operating with integrity is a big part of EQ. If you think about great leaders in any industry, most have very high EQ. I encourage you to invest in a seminar/workshop as part of your self-improvement.

RULE NO. 7 - BECOME A MENTOR

Become a subject matter expert. Within our industry, there are products or services that you gravitate to automatically either by choice or ability. Become the very best at learning everything you can about that one thing. Study, invest, ask questions, and research all you can so that people will think of you when that topic is foremost on their mind. This helps you become indispensable and in demand.

Motivate and inspire others. Great mentors lead as role models. Be generous with your time and encourage others. Help someone write a business plan. Introduce a friend to your banker. Invite a competitor to join your local industry chapter. Donate a sign to a non-profit group that cannot afford one. Help charter a new organization or group that has a valuable service goal. Advise others on how to be successful in the sign industry like you. Share your experiences and offer to teach seminars at trade shows. Your voice is needed (even if you don't like speaking in public)!

Sales is not always about chasing leads and making cold calls. It's about the foundation you have as a salesperson or business owner that is supporting the leader you are becoming every day. What else helps you become a leader? Learn to laugh. Ask for advice. Be self-aware. Continuously work on your empathy. Focus on coaching and developing people. Duplicate yourself in others. Be willing to talk about uncertainty. Be willing to risk and learn from your failures. Just don't forget to get back up, dust off your jeans and get back to work. As my coach always said at the end of practice, “Now take the ball and run with it.” **GP**

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



HIDDEN ASSETS

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR SUPPLIERS' INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Who knew that when you became an embroidery and/or apparel decoration professional that you would also need to become an expert in so many other things? To be a successful apparel decoration professional, your knowledge base must expand well beyond how to operate your equipment. Even more than that, you need to know where and how to get all different kinds of information to support your success.

OPTIONS GALORE

Take **embroidery thread**, for example. Over the past 20-plus years, the variety of embroidery threads has exploded. When I first joined the embroidery industry in the early '90s, we worked with two kinds of thread – rayon thread or polyester thread – for 99% of our orders. We had what we called the “rainbow wall,” which was a 4' high × 6' wide pegboard covered with all the embroidery thread colors we owned. Seriously, they all fit on that 4' × 6' board!

Nowadays, you have poly or rayon threads as your primary embroidery thread, but I suspect you also have some metallic threads, some finer-weight threads, some heavier weight threads, some neon threads and maybe even some specialty threads for specific customers or industries.

Not only do you need to own these threads, but you also need to understand when they should be used. A job that is going to be commercially laundered requires the polyester thread, or the thread colors will not remain consistent over time. A job that is going to be a treasured heirloom keepsake may require a finer weight thread to get the crisp details the customer is expecting. The next time you order thread, take a moment to ask your supplier about what they have that is new, what is a trend they are seeing, or what they've seen or heard about recently that was unique.

The evolution of **embroidery stabilizers** has followed a similar path. Many moons ago, there was a lightweight and a heavyweight cutaway backing, there was one weight of black cutaway backing, there was a tearaway backing, and there was a soluble topping. Now, you have a much wider inventory of stabilizers at your disposal.

There are specialty backings for specific fabrics, there are different weights of backings in every category, and there are backings that can be applied to products with heat, with water, or with pressure. Understanding which stabilizers will create the ideal surface for the embroidery job at hand comes with research and experience. Ask for a sample pack of all the stabilizers available when you place your next order, along with the specifics about how and when to use each of them. When you have a unique or unusual order, reach out to your supplier, and get input on what stabilizer they would recommend.

For the most part, our customers ordered **T-shirts**, golf shirts, sweatshirts, jackets and headwear. The big decisions our customers had to make were deciding if they wanted a cotton shirt or a poly/cotton blend, and what color the shirt should be. In today's marketplace, no two shirts are created equal. You have cotton, heavy weight cotton, textured cotton, abraded cotton, and distressed cotton. You have cotton/poly blends. You have polyester fabrics. You have performance fabrics. You have stain-resistant fabrics. You have wrinkle-resistant fabrics. You have eco fabrics. You have specialty fabrics created for specific industries. And to add even more





“Talk with your preferred suppliers. Find out who your inside sales reps are. Prowl their websites, as many of the industry leaders have a wealth of information available for apparel decorators.”

variety to the mix, you have a selection of weights of many of these different kinds of fabrics. And to make things even more challenging, many of these fabrics are now available in many product categories.

TALK WITH YOUR PREFERRED SUPPLIERS AND REPS

Back in the early days of our business, we ordered nearly all the blank apparel and products from two or three suppliers. The sales representatives from those companies reached out and let us know when they could stop by. They would come into our business and show us the newest products and colorways that were available in their catalogs. We could touch product samples, compare similar products and see the color palettes of each of the brands they offered. They would ask us what our customers were looking for, and then make recommendations based on what they knew about their products.

Today, it is likely that you order inventory from more than just a few industry suppliers. This is probably in part due to inventory shortages and supply chain issues and the toll the pandemic has had on all industries. Yet, I suspect that even before the pandemic turned the world inside out, you did not know the name of your sales reps, and that you cannot even fathom the idea of someone coming to your business and providing you with an hour or two of product education on a regular basis.

Talk with your preferred suppliers. Find out who your inside sales reps are. Prowl their websites, as many of the industry leaders have a wealth of information available for apparel decorators. Some suppliers even offer free or reduced prices on marketing support materials or marketing services. You may be eligible for an allowance towards free samples based on the volume of business you do with them, or at least be able to request grommeted samples.

The fact that you are reading this article indicates that you want to succeed in your business, as you are doing something different than many of your competitors. You are seeking information. You are looking for ways to think about your business differently. You are not satisfied with the status quo. While Google is an amazing and endless source of information, it is not always your best bet for applicable knowledge. The suppliers in our industry are experts in their lanes. They succeed when you succeed. Therefore, they have a vested interest in how much you know about their products, and how easily and effectively you can use them, decorate them or with them, and ultimately, sell them to your customers. Your suppliers and their knowledge may be the best yet most underutilized and hidden asset that you can leverage to ensure your success. **GP**

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





CLARITY IS KEY

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN UNDERSTANDABLE MESSAGE

Clarity is such an interesting concept. Clarity is “the quality or state of being clear.” But what does being clear mean, especially regarding the message we are trying to convey as a small business? Clarity of message is an essential element of small business success because if we are not clear with what we are communicating, there are thousands of other options on Google. But we get too close to it, and all we see are the features we offer, like the in-stock products, number of heads of embroidery, speed of your direct-to-garment, or permanence of your sublimation transfer. And that is the disconnect. The features don’t mean anything to people not reading this magazine. The people you care about connecting with are the ones coming to your website. Those people read the features and get no clarity.

Then it goes beyond that too. I can’t tell you how many times in my 22+ year career I have asked people who their market is, and the reply is “Anyone with money.” This is due to a sense of scarcity and the no’s people told us as we were growing up. We think we have to be all things to everyone. Those who know me know what happens when we try to be all things to everyone ... We end up being nothing to no one. To get above


the noise of *everyone*, we need unlimited marketing budgets and the loudest bullhorn known to man. We can’t when trying to talk to everyone, sharing specifically what our small business will do to help people. Our desire to help everyone clouds the message and no one gets it because they are unsure if it will suit them.

STORIES SELL

So how do we get lost in all of this? We lose sight of the fact that business is simply an exchange of value between two people, even if there is social media, websites, and technology between the transactions. It is still people talking to people, and people like a good story. Since the first telling of a good story that stuck, there has been a formula all good books, movies, or other stories follow that gets people interested. I have heard it called the Monomyth or, more commonly, “The Hero’s Journey.” It starts with a hero who doesn’t know he is a hero, who faces adversity and must set out on a journey. On the journey, they learn valuable lessons, and often, a guide or mentor is introduced. And then, finally, the hero overcomes adversity and returns home victorious. Let me prove it! I bet you will be able to name this movie just by seeing the hero’s journey.

A humble farm boy is introduced to some droids and is called to come to a faraway land. He initially refuses to leave but discovers his aunt and uncle killed by the group he was called to arms against. The mentor teaches the farm boy his ways and then is killed as they save the princess and find the plans they need. The hero saves the princess, delivers the death blow, and finally returns and receives medals as there is peace due to his heroics.

Yes, it is the original Star Wars movie, and lucky for us, this storytelling method also works to talk about our business and what we do. We have to become storytellers, not just pushers of the features. When you share your



Storytelling
is the best marketing!

“The people you care about connecting with are the ones coming to your website.”

business as a unique identity, you build a bridge between yourself and your audience. Storytelling allows you to share your mission, vision, and values with *clarity*.

The original hero's adventure from Professor Joseph Campbell laid out 17 stages of a hero's journey, as he defined it in his book, “The Hero with a Thousand Faces.” Since then, it has been simplified, and we can use just four key areas to get to the heart of the story we want to tell our customers.

YOUR CUSTOMER IS THE HERO

As storytellers, we must first make sure we are talking as if we are always talking to the reader and sharing from their perspective. What is in it for them? What is the journey they get to go on that you will be the guide to help them achieve their goals? The No. 1 rule is that you are not the hero! The customer is the hero. I know we tend to want to show ourselves as the victor or to be viewed as the hero. We want to be regarded as the one who saves the day. But a good story allows the customer to be the hero, and you are the wise guide who is there to enable them to come back victorious as they overcome their challenge. So, knowing that your customer is the hero, here is how you break it down.

- **Who is the character?** Your *ideal* customer and what best describes them in their state before they do business with you.

- **What problem do you solve?** What is your ideal customer's common problem they come to you to solve?

- **How do you plan to solve the problem?** What is the process or plan for how you solve the problem for your ideal customer?

- **What does success look like?** What is the specific success your customers (the character) have after doing business with you?

Now, I have to give credit where credit is due. The four-part framework is the work of Donald Miller, and he details this and more in his book, “Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen.” But I want to show you how this might work for you in your business. Remember that when we first start describing our business, most of us will talk about ourselves, how great we are, and the features we offer. Here is a real-world example. I found this off a local personalized gift company's website talking about what they do or, in other words, their story:

{Name Withheld} Gifts for Simply Southern T-shirts, Hello Mello lounge wear, and unique jewelry! Find the perfect baby gift, personalized jewelry, or self-care gifts in our cute boutique. Please stop by our store on Main Street in {location withheld}! We are ranked #1 for “Best Gift Shops.”

Now let's convert that story based on some assumptions I am making about their ideal customer and the core values they have as a company.

Have you scoured the internet looking for the perfect baby gift, personalized jewelry, or self-care gift only to be overwhelmed and left with a feeling of worry that your gift won't be what you expect? As a caring loving gift giver, we know you desire Simply Southern T-shirts, Hello Mello lounge wear, and unique jewelry. And you can touch and feel the personalized bits of perfection in our cute downtown Main Street boutique. Come experience the #1 ranked gift shop in {location withheld} and be known as the perfect gift-giver who is invited to all the best parties.

The first description is not bad, but as you read both, side by side, you can see a lack of clarity in the first. The lack of clarity is because we, the “potential customers,” must create the story ourselves to see how it might align with our needs. We must calculate on our own to determine if their features equal the desired benefits. In the second version, we introduce a character with a problem and show them exactly how we solve it and give them an easy visual of what their life might look like after doing business with us. Which one provides more clarity, and which one will attract more people to buy? **GP**

Aaron Montgomery is certified by New York Times best-selling author Jack Canfield as a Success Principles Trainer and is the co-founder of OurSuccessGroup.com. Aaron has 25+ years of experience with personalized products and small business development and is the co-creator of the “5 Keys of Business Success.” Find Aaron co-hosting the 2 Regular Guys Podcast (2regularguys.com), and check him out on his podcast channel called Small Business Saturdays (smallbusinessaturdayspodcast.com).



For more must-know business tips, check out Aaron Montgomery's content at <https://gpro.link/amont>.



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- HIX® Corporation** - Learning the Sublimation Business

1:30-3 p.m.

- STAHL'S** - Printing Outside of the T-Shirt Box **START HERE**
- Trotec Laser** - Skills, Materials & Laser Hacks to Help you Succeed in a Changing Business Environment

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2022 (cont.)

1:30-3 p.m.

- Rayzist Photomask Inc** - Learn Sandcarving with Rayzist Photomask **START HERE**

4-5:30 p.m.

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

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2022

8-9:30 a.m.

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

11 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.

- GRAPHICS PRO** - Managing the Details of the Sign Creation Process, with Matt Charboneau **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO** - Making the Most of your Production Time and Energy in Small Business, with Lori Champagne **PRO**
- GRAPHICS PRO** - Accelerating your Screen-Printed Apparel Decorating Techniques, with Lon Winters **PRO**



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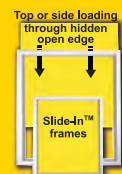
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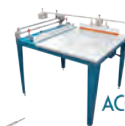
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