

Products and Processes for Profit

MAY 2023

GRAPHICS | PRO

AWARDS & ENGRAVING | PRINTWEAR | SIGN & DIGITAL GRAPHICS

GRAPHICS-PRO.COM

Womenswear Trends

Exploring this exciting market
for apparel decorators

- E-Commerce Company Stores
- Glass and Crystal
- Breaking Down Dye-Sub

GP+

HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS



INWARD FACING GF 208

GF GEN
FORM

STATIC

SIGNS365 NOW PROUDLY OFFERS **STATIC**
BOTH GF 207 AND GF 208 FILMS ARE DE
AND TEMPORARY APPLICATION ON BOTH
GLASS FOR UP TO 3 MONTHS.



GF 207 OUTWARD FACING

GENERAL
FORMULATIONS

CLING

CLING FROM GENERAL FORMULATIONS
DESIGNED FOR SIMPLE INSTALLATION
IN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

SIGNS³⁶⁵
We are Only Trade Only

SALE

01070C/1070CV
SALE ENDS JULY 1, 2023

TRIED AND TRUE

These are the retail-proven tees that everyone asks for, and now they're available in CVC heathered colors. From smooth ring spun cotton to recycled poly, these classic, comfortable tees are just waiting to be embellished.

VIEW THE LINE AT [BRANDWEARUNITED.COM](https://www.brandwearunited.com)



GO-TO

1070CV
GO-TO CVC TEE



ALTERNATIVE®

THE BETTER ALTERNATIVE



ACHIEVE AN AWARD WINNING PERFORMANCE FROM MUTOH

PerformanceJet **2508UF**
4'x8' UV-LED Flatbed Printer



Award Winning PerformanceJet 2508UF 4'x8' UV-LED Flatbed Printer

The 2022 Pinnacle Award Winning MUTOH PerformanceJet 2508UF 4'x8' UV-LED Flatbed printer excels in performance, quality and value. Its standard staggered four print head design is field upgradable to six heads when adding white and varnish inks provides high print speeds while the dual UV lamps on both sides of the carriage provide exceptional cure times, allowing for higher production capacity. Perfect for yard signs, event signage, window and POP displays, home decor and more. The PJ-2508UF delivers outstanding output you expect and provides the reliability you need in a UV-LED flatbed, making it the smart choice for any production shop.



MUTOH

Request a free print sample: www.MUTOH.com | 1.800.99.MUTOH



GRAPHICS|PRO

» CONTENT «

VOLUME 37

MAY 2023

NUMBER 9

FEATURES

SIGNAGE & PRINTING

8

TACKLING THE BOTTLENECK

Flatbed digital die cutters that keep up with your printer

By Bill Schiffner

16

BREAKING DOWN DYE-SUB, PART 2

In the world of dye-sub printing, choosing the right fabric can be daunting

By Mike Syverson

22

LET'S TALK SHOP

Media advancements

By Charity Jackson

26

SIGN DESIGN

Taking a layout from bad to good

By Matt Charboneau

29

WRAP PROJECT

A rustic look

Courtesy of Moody Blue Designs

GP+ HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS



33

MAKING SHOP MOVES

DTF printing results

By Howard Potter

37

HOW TO KNOW IF DTF PRINTING IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Courtesy of ColDesi

38

HOT OFF THE HEAT PRESS

How heat-applied graphics fit in our printing toolbox, and the various ways they're utilized to streamline workflow and add profit

By Christina Haines

43

HOW TO PREPARE AND CURE DTF TRANSFERS WITH CONVEYOR DRYERS

Courtesy of Vastex

44

TOP 3 TRENDING LOOKS FOR ANY MARKET

Courtesy of STAHL'S'

45

TIPS FOR DECIDING ON A DTF PRINTER

Courtesy of ColDesi

46

HEAT TRANSFER REVIEW

The top five principles of heat transfer production

By Shane Wilson

50

REMOVING DTF AND HTV ERRORS

Courtesy of AlbaChem

51

HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS PRODUCTS



new
POLAR CAMEL
20 oz. & 30 oz. Ringneck Tumblers
WITH SLIDER LIDS



DISHWASHER SAFE

↓ CHECK OUT OUR LOWER EVERY DAY PRICES
on all Polar Camel Drinkware



SCAN HERE

ORDER TODAY

Same Day Shipping **\$99 FREE FREIGHT**
on Orders Placed by 4 PM!

Your Recognition, Personalization & Sign Supply Partner **JDS**

14
Warehouses
Over 1.3 Million Sq Ft
Nationwide



jdsindustries.com

sales@jdsindustries.com

800.843.8853

GRAPHICS|PRO

CONTENT

VOLUME 37

MAY 2023

NUMBER 9

FEATURES

APPAREL DECORATING

52

WOMENSWEAR: BOLD AND COMFORTABLE

An awesome blending of what's hip with what's sustainable for families

By Christy Rossi

58

WOMENSWEAR: CREATIVE, MODERN, AND RETRO

Detailing the most exciting and popular trends in womenswear for 2023, from color and style to design and decoration

By Jeremy Picker

64

THE MOTHER OF ALL MARKETS

The depth and breadth of the mom market is deep and wide

By Kristine Shreve

68

SOFTWARE TO SUBSTRATE

Dolphins score!

By Lon Winters

AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION



74

74

GLASS AND CRYSTAL: PROFITABLE ADDITION

Breaking down what it takes, what you can make, and the possibilities of adding decorated glass and crystal products to your offerings

By Barry Slea

80

PDS EQUIPMENT SHOWS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THE PRINTING ROPES

Students were given a glimpse into the UV printing world and competed in a design contest

Courtesy of Steve Weist

BUSINESS STRATEGIES

81

FINANCING LARGE PRODUCTION EQUIPMENT

Are you ready to expand your graphic production capabilities?

By Julia Schroeder

84

THE RISING TIDE OF BUSINESS

From stasis to ACTION

By Aaron Montgomery

86

E-COMMERCE: THE COMPANY STORE OPTION

Company stores are a profitable e-commerce option with a lot of potential for your business

By Erich Campbell

90

WHEN 2+2=10

How to leverage results with your talent pool

By Paul Ingle

COLUMNS

6

VITAL SIGNS

The battle to reduce overhead

By Matt Dixon

DEPARTMENTS

30

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

32

PRODUCTS

93

AD INDEX

94

MARKETPLACE

96

WEB EXCLUSIVES

ON THE COVER: Screen printing womenswear at Snatch and Run Screen Printing, Fort Mill, South Carolina. Coverage of this dynamic market for apparel decorators starts on page 52. Photo courtesy Snatch and Run Screen Printing. Bottom right: This month's GP+ section is all about heat-applied graphics and the various methods and applications available for graphics providers. Photo courtesy Howard Potter, A&P Master Images LLC.

©2023 National Business Media, Inc., all rights reserved. GRAPHICS PRO (ISSN 2766-953X) is published monthly by National Business Media, Inc., 10170 Church Ranch Way, Ste 400, Westminster, CO 80021; (303) 469-0424, Fax (303) 469-5730. Periodicals Postage Paid at Broomfield CO 80020-9998 and additional mailing offices. USPS/National Business Media Automatable Poly. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GRAPHICS PRO, PO Box 460794, Escondido, CA 92046-0794. All items submitted to GRAPHICS PRO become the sole property of GRAPHICS PRO and National Business Media, Inc. and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Advertisers and/or their agencies, jointly and severally, assume all liabilities for printed advertisements in GRAPHICS PRO. Opinions expressed in GRAPHICS PRO may not necessarily reflect the opinion of the magazine, its management or its advertisers. Letters, pictures and manuscripts welcome.



DTG/DTF Equipment • Embroidery Equipment • Workflow Automation



 **HIRSCH**
SOLUTIONS



1.800.394.4426 care@hsi.us | www.hsi.us

10170 Church Ranch Way Suite #400, Westminster, CO 80021
 (800) 669-0424 | (303) 469-0424 | FAX (303) 469-5730

WWW.GRAPHICS-PRO.COM
**PRESIDENT**DAVE POMEROY dpomero@nbm.com**VICE PRESIDENT / CONTENT**REGAN DICKINSON rdickinson@nbm.com**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**MATT DIXON mdixon@nbm.com**DIGITAL CONTENT EDITOR**MARIE FENNEMA mfennema@nbm.com**PODCAST/CONTENT EDITOR**ERIN GADDIE egaddie@nbm.com**DIRECTOR OF SALES**JAMES "RUGGS" KOICHEVAR jkochevar@nbm.com**SENIOR TERRITORY MANAGER - WEST**BRANDY JAMISON-NETH brandy@nbm.com**TERRITORY MANAGER - MIDWEST**SARA REESE sreesee@nbm.com**TERRITORY MANAGER - NORTHEAST & CANADA**KRISTAL FRANKLIN kfranklin@nbm.com**TERRITORY MANAGER - SOUTHEAST**DESIREE DELFRARI delfrari@nbm.com**TERRITORY MANAGER - PACIFIC & INTERNATIONAL**RYAN APPLEBAUM rapplebaum@nbm.com**DIRECTOR, EVENT OPERATIONS**JACKIE RAMSIER jramsier@nbm.com**EXHIBITOR SERVICES MANAGER**JOIE MARTIN jmartin@nbm.com**ART DIRECTOR - MANAGER, CREATIVE DEPARTMENT**LINDA CRANSTON linda@nbm.com**SHOWS ART DIRECTOR**IVETH GOMEZ igomez@nbm.com**SALES SUPPORT**SANDY MAES smaes@nbm.com**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**
 ERICH CAMPBELL, MATT CHARBONEAU,
 CHRISTINA HAINES, PAUL INGLE, CHARITY
 JACKSON, AARON MONTGOMERY, JEREMY
 PICKER, HOWARD POTTER, STEPHEN
 ROMANIELLO, CHRISTY ROSSI, BILL
 SCHIFFNER, JULIA SCHROEDER, KRISTINE
 SHREVE, BARRY SLEE, MIKE SYVERSON,
 STEVE WEIST, SHANE WILSON, LON WINTERS
EDITORIAL INTERNNATHAN STROMBERG nstromberg@nbm.com**PRESIDENT**
DAVE POMEROY**VICE PRESIDENT / AUDIENCE & EVENTS**
LORI FARSTAD**VICE PRESIDENT / FINANCE**
KORI GONZALES, CPA**VICE PRESIDENT / CONTENT**
REGAN DICKINSON**DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES**
WOLF BUTLER**CEO & OWNER**
ROBERT H. WIEBER, JR.

The Battle to Reduce Overhead



If there's one thing all shops have in common, it's the fight to limit the amount of profit flushed down the drain on overhead costs.

Overhead costs refer to the expenses a company incurs for running its operations, which are not directly related to producing goods or services. This includes expenses such as rent, utilities, administrative staff salaries, office supplies, and other costs essential for running the business but do not generate revenue directly. For several reasons, limiting overhead costs is critical to a company's financial health and long-term success.

The most obvious reason is that costs can significantly impact a company's profitability. The higher the overhead costs, the lower the profit margin. By reducing these costs, a company can increase its profit margins and reinvest the savings in other areas of the business, such as research and development, marketing, or expansion.

Secondly, limiting overhead costs can help a company weather economic downturns or unforeseen circumstances. In times of economic uncertainty, companies with lower overhead costs are better positioned to survive and thrive. These companies can adjust their pricing strategies or reduce expenses quickly to adapt to changing market conditions.

And, of course, limiting overhead costs can improve a company's cash flow. By reducing unnecessary expenses, a company can free up cash to invest in growth opportunities and technology, pay down debt, or perform much-needed maintenance on equipment to get the longest life possible from your machines. This can improve the company's financial position and reduce its dependence on external financing.

You probably face decisions all the time about ways forward that will either increase or decrease your overhead costs, such as buying vs. renting your shop space, buying vs. leasing your equipment, keeping limited or significant inventory on hand, or hiring a new employee who will increase productivity while also increasing expenses.

And keep in mind all of the worst-case scenarios. Can you afford to skimp on shop security? On insurance? On safety equipment and training? I'm willing to bet that most people try to avoid thinking about their overhead costs because, when looked at as a whole, those numbers can be pretty depressing. And if you let those costs get out of control, it can feel like the end result of all of your hard work is simply to fund other businesses.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Tackling The Bottleneck, Page 8

Breaking Down Dye-Sub, Part 2, Page 16

GP+: Heat-Applied Graphics, Page 32

Womenswear: Bold And Comfortable, Page 52

Glass And Crystal: Profitable Addition, Page 74



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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

5.2 oz. 50/50 Combed
Ring-Spun Cotton/Polyester
560WVR V-NECK
560LSR LONG-SLEEVE
560RR RAGLAN

PREMIUM BLEND COMBED RING-SPUN T-SHIRTS






NATURALLY CHILL

Made with the superior softness of combed ring-spun cotton for comfort that comes naturally. Choose from 31 colors and 4 styles—including our **NEW** Ladies' V-Neck T-Shirt.

JERZEES®

DO AND WEAR WHAT FEELS NATURAL

JERZEES.COM • 800.321.1138

@JERZEESApparel     

DIGITAL DIE CUTTERS

Tackling the Bottleneck

BY BILL SCHIFFNER

Flatbed digital die cutters that keep up with your printer



Bill Schiffner is a freelance writer/editor based in Holbrook, New York. He has covered the imaging industry for 30 years and has reported on many evolving digital imaging technologies including wide-format printing and newer electronic digital signage. He was the editor for a number of imaging publications and websites. He can be reached at bschiffner@optonline.net.

Digital finishing is an essential part of any sign shop's workflow. The right table cutter can eliminate bottlenecks to help your printing operation run smoothly and remain on the cutting edge.

The latest crop of flatbed digital die cutters can make life easier for sign and graphics businesses. If you are in the market for a new unit, finding the right machine for your shop will take some investigative research as well as asking the right questions.



Esco's Einar Ek says that the speed of your digital press could determine if a feeder and/or stacker is needed. (Image courtesy of Esko)

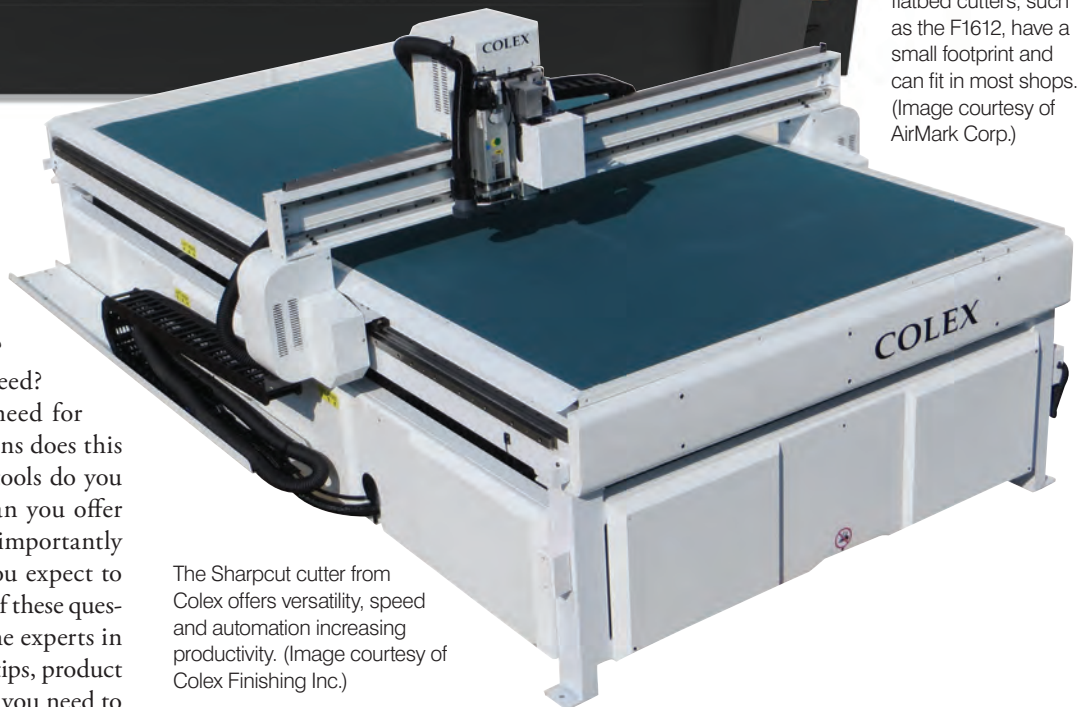


Summa F Series flatbed cutters, such as the F1612, have a small footprint and can fit in most shops. (Image courtesy of AirMark Corp.)

What are some features to look for (such as vacuum table, double-head models, router capabilities)? How much space do you need? How much power do you need for the motor? Which applications does this cutter excel in? How many tools do you need? What new services can you offer your customers? And, most importantly — how much money can you expect to spend? To help answer some of these questions, we spoke to some of the experts in this area and compiled some tips, product suggestions and other points you need to consider when shopping for a flatbed digital die cutter.

Cuts like a knife

“As the lines between print market segments continue to blur, the new normal for print service providers (PSPs) is to offer a full spectrum of products ranging from retail promotional graphics, decals and banners, to all types of displays, folding



The Sharpcut cutter from Colex offers versatility, speed and automation increasing productivity. (Image courtesy of Colex Finishing Inc.)

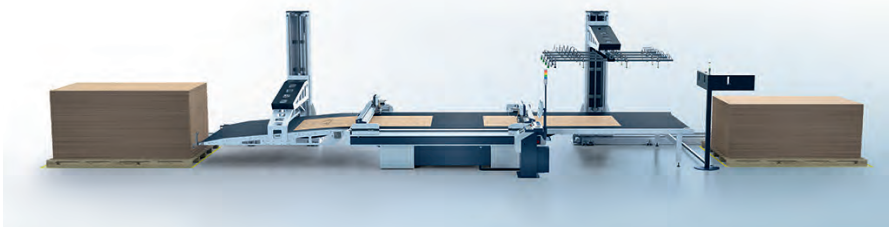
carton, and corrugated packaging,” says Beatrice Drury, Marketing Manager, Zund America, Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

“To meet this incredibly diverse range of finishing demands efficiently and therefore profitably, PSPs need specialized tooling and automated workflows that encompass all phases of production

— no matter the specific finishing process or application.

“Precisely for this reason, Zund continues to focus on adding capabilities and workflow automation to our modular systems,” Drury adds. “For example, Zund recently added laser capabilities to its already extensive range of tool options. At the same time, Zund also introduced the over-head camera, which is a game changer when it comes to workflow efficiency. Instead of reading multiple register marks sequentially, which is the traditional registration method for flatbed cutting systems, the over-head camera captures all register marks at once.”

Zund offers the BHS150, the latest generation of fully automated board loading/unloading/stacking — a system geared specifically to high-volume,



The BHS150 is designed for operation with the Zund G3 and D3 cutter series. D3 dual-beam technology provides a significant increase in performance and thus offers maximum productivity. (Image courtesy of Zund America Inc.)



Graphtec FCX4000 cutter series is an affordable cutting solution for small to medium print on demand jobs. It employs an electrostatic system to hold media. (Image courtesy of Graphtec America)

industrial-level digital cutting/finishing. Paired with the dual-beam D3, the BHS150 is said to help deliver unprecedented non-stop productivity with 1.5m (5') stacking capacity at either end.

“What’s unique about Zund’s modular machine concept is that a user can, for example, take the original digital cutting system they purchased for processing output from their flatbed printing device and adapt it to meet increased demand in, for instance, textile applications by adding a cradle feeder and Cut & Seal Laser Module,” Drury explains.

She adds another user may want to expand on their routing capabilities with the powerful 3.6kW router and automatic tool changer. And a third may be interested in adding fully automated loading & stacking, or picking/sorting and placing capabilities with the BHS 150 or the Robot PortaTable. “Zund can accommodate all of these expansions — be it with a brand-new cutter configuration or an update to an existing one. New components can easily be added, thereby eliminating the need for purchasing additional equipment and maximizing the ROI on existing cutting systems.”

Digital is a game changer

Royce Owen, marketing director for AirMark Corp., Seattle, Washington, points out that flatbed technology is still relatively new when you compare it to traditional vinyl cutters, but digital technology of these models has moved rapidly and they have become a staple for popular finishing options due to their flexibility as well as the growth of rigid printer capabilities.

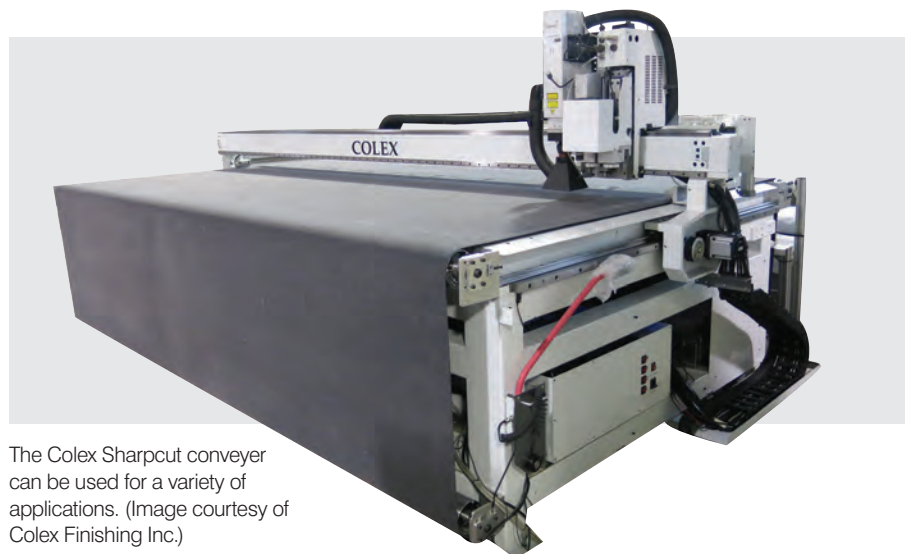
“Continuous-feed features and large cutting tables are both traits sign businesses should look for in a cutter,” he notes. “The former helps prevent bottlenecks by working through projects one right after the other. Essentially, you can queue the next board before previous ones are done. Continuous-feed cutters save time and help you complete more projects,” he suggests.

Owen says in addition to knowing what types of cutters are out there, you should also look at your operations.

“The types of jobs you take on will determine your cutting needs. Will you be making product labels or large displays? Are you printing on vinyl or paper? Such factors determine the type of cutter you need along with the features it should have. For example, large products need space, which means a big flatbed cutter. As for material, get a cutter best suited for your medium. If you print on a variety of materials, you’ll need a cutter that can handle them all.”

Owen points out that large flatbed surfaces are also popular in the industry. “As more wide-format printers continue to be introduced, cutters have gotten larger to keep up with the demand. Not only that, but with more space, your machine can handle complex contour cutting.”

He explains that another thing to consider is that flatbed cutters have many different tool options for a wide variety of



The Colex Sharpcut conveyer can be used for a variety of applications. (Image courtesy of Colex Finishing Inc.)



X-SERIES

UV Unlimited Included
Just Print and Apply!



Don't Just Read About It
See The X-Series In Action

TAKE YOUR CREATIVITY TO THE
NEXT LEVEL
WITH
PANELING

ONE OF XANTÉ'S EXCLUSIVE FEATURES

Get ready to experience the ultimate in printing power with the Xanté X-Series Flatbeds! Energy efficient, running on only 110 volts, and boast Epson industrial UV printheads, making them perfect for those looking to create high-margin large-scale full-bleed prints with stunning 2880 DPI clarity and precision. Let's not forget the incredible ability that all printers can easily fit through ANY standard door, making it a breeze to transport and set up wherever you need it.

Our printers are all driven by true Adobe PostScript; you won't need to be a printing expert to produce stunning results! iQueue is packed with many incredible features like paneling, braille, and so much more we can't list them all. In iQueue's paneling option, take any image and divide it into different varying sizes giving you the freedom to arrange them in any way you like with just one click! If you're looking for a printer that delivers top-notch performance and unparalleled versatility, look no further than Xanté's X Series Flatbed Printers.



XANTÉ 251.473.6502



Summa's F2630 cutter offers a multifunctional head that holds up to three modules at one time. The central unit houses a positioning laser and an integrated camera system for contour cutting-mark recognition. (Image courtesy of AirMark Corp.)

or units that employ pneumatic media advance clamps to hold down the hard media and continuously move it forward to accommodate large finishing jobs. In addition, the roll support and conveyer systems allow for long, continuous runs of flexible media.”

He adds that the type of work that your shop will be handling should be something that should be researched — what size and types of media, length and tracking accuracy needs. “The number of functions included, and the level of quality built into the cutting table must be balanced against how much you are willing to spend.”

Accelerated results

Einar Ek, CAM solutions — pre sales at Esko, Miamisburg, Ohio, says that the customer's job specs will determine the speed and power that is required.

“Let's be clear that acceleration is what is really important. Cutting long straight edges fast is pretty simple. Stopping and going quickly around a number of small detailed cuts is a much greater challenge. For example, the Kongsberg cutting tables sold by Esko are engineered for production with no compromise between speed and quality over the entire surface.”

He says that the Kongsberg table's focus areas are pretty versatile and include sign making, P.O.P. displays, protective packaging, short run corrugated and sample tables for packaging designers and converters. “Behind the many segments there are hundreds of materials from fine vinyl to heavy-duty paperboard or Plexiglas.”

When looking at how many tools are needed, Ek says that the answer goes back to determining what materials are being

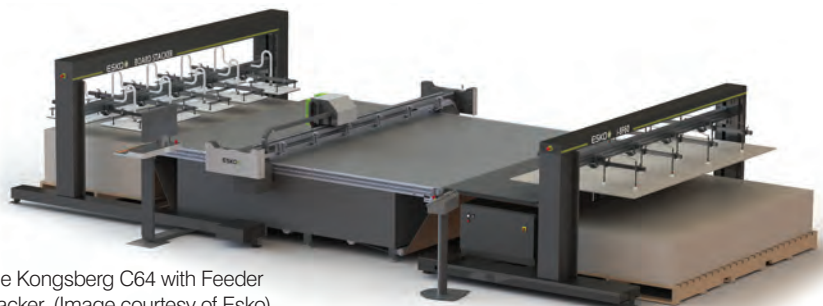
applications. “Flatbed cutters have a versatile motorized tool head that can accept many different types of tools for a variety of substrates and applications — from fabric, wood, leather, and acrylic, to foam board, cardboard as well as roll material. The flexibility of the flatbed finishing system allows you to expand your business into new areas in many cases by just inserting a new tool.”

Sizing things up

Owen reports that the size of a system can be also be an issue for some smaller shops. “Many different sizes of flatbed cutters are now available. The flatbed cutters we sell have a rather small footprint and can fit into most shops, yet they are able to handle large panels of rigid substrate media. Rather than a vacuum bed,



The Sharpcut cutter features a triple interchangeable tool head that includes a router for rigid material and two tool stations for a wide variety of tools for customer-specific workflows. (Image courtesy of Colex Finishing Inc.)



The Kongsberg C64 with Feeder Stack. (Image courtesy of Esko)



EQUIPMENT FINANCE

Financing as essential as ink.

You're focused on getting the equipment you need to get set for success. At First Citizens Bank Equipment Finance, formerly part of the bank's CIT division, we offer industrial financing options like custom selling structures, capital and operating leases and usage-based fleet rentals designed with your goals in mind.

printteam@firstcitizens.com | 877-786-5327



[firstcitizens.com](https://www.firstcitizens.com)



The Optima V250 4' x 8' digital flatbed cutter from Graphtec is designed for all applications in the digital printing, packaging, signage, and apparel markets. It features a dual tool head system and variety of tool options, and a powerful vacuum hold-down system. (Image courtesy of Graphtec America)

finished. “Normally, a customer would own three to six tools directed at their specific material selection,” he says. “For Kongsberg tables, it comes down to having the right portfolio of tool bits and blades to fit a customer’s requests. Esko offers a complete set of advanced quick-change tool heads that provide versatility, making it easy to set up the cutting table to process any material.”

More applications

Ek points out that adding digital finishing to your process allows you to offer new and exciting applications and capitalize on some key trends such as:

- **Personalization** — “Every sheet can be printed differently. In the same way, every sheet can be cut differently.”

- **Creativity** — “Straight-cut signs are basically commodities. Companies compete for this business on price. Digital finishing tables, with the right CAD design software, can allow print providers to offer creative 3D displays. This not only offers the ability to enjoy higher margins for unique work; it also allows a print provider to offer structural design services as a separate profit center.”

- **Interesting Materials** — “New and more interesting materials that can only be finished on a CNC machine. For example,

there is the ability to finish re-board for P.O.P. display projects, and most other materials used for signs.”

- **Just in Time Production** — “In-house finishing can deliver quick delivery times from the print provider. In addition, the print provider benefits with greater capacity from faster throughput,” Ek concludes.

Making a sharp cut in fabrics

Maureen Damato, sales dealer account manager at Colex Finishing, Elmwood Park, New Jersey, says the biggest trend is the ability to automate and provide versatility and speed to increase productivity in shops. “Sign and graphic shops should

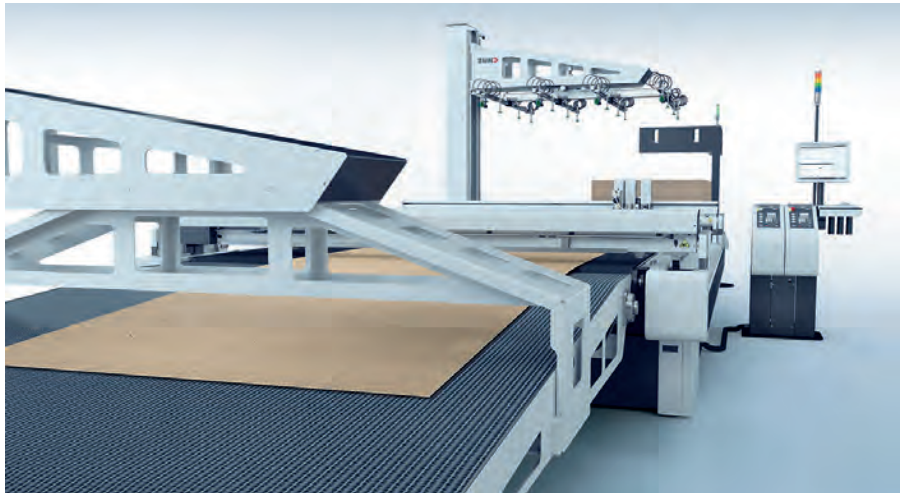
Today’s flatbed cutters offer a plethora of tools and modules, giving them a lot of application options. (Image courtesy of AirMark Corp.)



make sure that their cutter is capable of cutting a wide range of media with the ability to handle every job request and expand your business.

She says the Sharpcut triple tool head is capable of cutting foamboard, coroplast, PVC, corrugated plastics and more while the router can route Dibond, acrylic, wood and aluminum up to 2-1/2 inches-thick producing clean, smooth edges. “Colex also offers the EngView Library software that contains more than 2,000 resizable templates offering boxes, P.O.P. and trade show furniture.”

Damato adds that the Sharpcut SXC1732 (5' x 10' Conveyor model) offers an optional Production Automation software QR code recognition with onboard registration camera to simplify processing of jobs with no more operator errors loading and processing the correct file in



The BHS150's stack height of 1.5 m allows much longer uninterrupted operating time: long runs are finished efficiently and economically while finished stacks can be removed without interrupting the production process. (Image courtesy of Zund America Inc.)

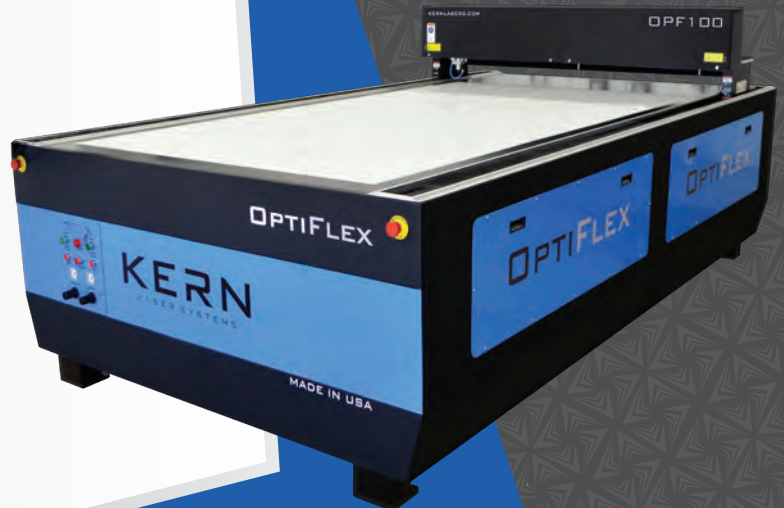
addition to production information system that captures and reports on all jobs processed. This provides accurate information on time to process a job as well as linear cut lengths and media usage. This is an essential tool in understanding your finishing production capabilities. **GP**

The right table cutter can eliminate bottlenecks to help your printing operation run smoothly and remain on the cutting edge.



KERN MEANS PRECISION

- Large Format CO2 Laser
- Cut | Engrave | Mark
- Metals & Non-Metals



KERNLASERS.COM



BREAKING DOWN

DYE-SUB

PART 2

In the world of dye-sub printing, choosing the right fabric can be daunting

BY MIKE SYVERSON



Mike Syverson has been in the printing industry for over 20 years, at the forefront of the pivotal time of analog to digital conversion. Mike's industry experience over the past 20+ years was instrumental in the development and launch of multiple industrial inkjet printing devices, helping to create and refine many techniques that are still critical to successful print through digital methods.

Continuous advancements in fabrics, inks, and printers have made the wide-format textile printing market one of the fastest-growing segments in digital printing today. It is estimated that the volume of digitally printed textiles is expected to grow at over 13% CAGR from 2023-2030*. Most of that printing will be done through dye-sublimation.

This is the second in our five-part series that explores the intricacies of dye-sublimation with Mike Syverson, National Textile Manager for Durst Image Technology. Mike has more than 20 years of experience in the printing industry and was instrumental in the development and implementation of the first grand-format dye-sublimation printer in 2001. In this article, we will delve into the world of substrates, primarily fabric, from polyester to natural fibers to other materials.

Subsequent articles will address heat presses, finishing, marketplace economics, and workflow. We asked Mike the following questions:

Aside from fabric, what are some other substrates that can be sublimated?

Dye-sublimation is designed to work with polyester products. Dyes are formulated to penetrate the substrate or coating. When polyester gets heated, the molecules expand, allowing the dye to penetrate the surface. When the substrate is cooled, the dyes are locked into the material. The colorant becomes part of the substrate itself. There are many examples of dye-sublimated products today. Items such as polyester-coated ceramic mugs, wood, glass, mouse pads, luggage tags, coated metal sheets, and so many other things. There



(Images courtesy of Durst)

*Grand View Research



Advancements in fabrics, inks, and printers have helped grow the burgeoning wide-format textile printing market.

are several websites dedicated to providing these coated blanks for print providers. Additionally, many of the print-on-demand (POD) products today are sublimated. Fabrics are the most widely used in the print industry. Today, they offer many textures and finishes, which allows print providers to offer a wide variety of products to meet a wide variety of client demands.

Tell us about the different types of fabrics and their applications.

Fabrics are generally categorized as woven or knit. Woven fabrics are very stable in terms of their stretch characteristics but tend to fray when cutting, making finishing more difficult. Knit fabrics are much more popular in the graphics industry, as they have a bit more stretch by nature compared to woven fabric, and they do not fray when cut, which eases the finishing process.

A very common material for hanging signs and banners is a soft knit fabric. Soft knits are typically of a lighter weight and have some stretch to them, making them ideal for overhead signage, tension fabric applications like exhibition graphics and framed signage for a smoother look and feel. They are also very popular in the production of silicon edge graphic (SEG) frames. Flag material has an open construction, so wind passes through it. Flag is typically used for outdoor applications, such as teardrop displays or actual flags. Generally, this fabric is directly printed so ink will pass through to the back side (strike-through). This allows the design to be seen on both sides, creating a double-sided application. If a customer wants a lightweight double-sided sign or banner, this would be a good choice.

Satin is a closed, tighter weave with a gloss or sheen to it. It drapes beautifully but can be expensive. Satin is most often

Dye-sublimation is designed to work with polyester products. Dyes are formulated to penetrate the substrate or coating.



To view Part 1, visit <https://gpro.link/syverson1>

used for P.O.P. displays and indoor applications. PolySilk is a versatile, lightweight material that is growing in popularity for its translucent, draping applications. It can be bold and bright, but it's not as durable as the heavier materials due to its lightweight weave. Gaming felt is another type of fabric used for specialty applications like pool tables or poker tables with graphics.

One of the most popular fabrics today is *black back* fabric. This is a knitted fabric usually coated with black on the back side of the fabric, or in some cases, knitted with black yarn. This creates a blackout fabric, which is ideal for fabric installations where you need opacity. We see this fabric in retail installations and trade show graphics regularly.

What are the trends in new fabrics?

The macro-trend in general is that fabric is becoming the preferred choice over rigid or vinyl substrates for large and grand format applications. Fabrics are versatile, lightweight, and have a wide range

of applications and provide a high-quality look and feel. They are easier to install and remove. Additionally, they are more cost-effective to ship, which continues to grow in importance. Fabric manufacturers and suppliers are continually evolving their products to meet customer demand for environmentally friendly, flame-resistant fabrics that have excellent stretch and recovery characteristics, as well as little to no shrinkage.

Some fabricators are actually designing fabric for clients based on how they want it to look and feel, and to match the stretch attributes, shrink level and opacity needed. This is especially true in the big-box retail arena where companies want eco-friendly fibers woven into their fabrics with customized specifications. There's also a growing trend in specialty upholstery projects and interior design elements. Everyone from architects to hotels to small, independent interior decorators are using fabric for custom-printed furniture, draperies, shades, wall hangings, and other indoor applications.



What are some tips for working with various fabrics?

The endless fabric choices make working with them confusing. They all have different characteristics that need to be addressed when printing and sublimating. For example, fabrics with a great amount of stretch need special attention on the



Fabrics are versatile, lightweight, have a wide range of applications, and provide a high-quality look and feel.



setup of the printer for the material to flow through the machine with consistent tension. Flag materials are typically direct-printed to maximize the strike-through to the reverse side of the material. When using transfer paper and flag fabric, it is virtually impossible to get over 50-75 percent strike-through. By printing direct, you can easily achieve 90-100 percent. It's important to control the amount of ink printed on the fabric because too little will not penetrate deep enough, and too much can cause the ink to bloom on the fabric (dot gain).

Many knit fabrics are relatively easy to print, whether transferred or direct. Again, ink load is critical for direct print. When sublimating fabrics, it is important to have your settings dialed in at the calendar (contact time, temperature, and blanket pressure). Once these settings are in place, make sure they are maintained because changes in these calibrations can alter how the dyes are sublimated and affect color.

Are there certain media transport systems that work better with different fabric types?

There are different philosophies as to media transport, each with its own advantages depending on the application. Many systems use a single nip for the material as it is loaded into the printer. This is a very sound system and can handle a wide array of fabrics and paper, but it lacks the robustness of larger, more industrial systems.

More industrial systems use a dual pinch roller system with tension applied to the material so it can feed very evenly and consistently through the printer.

A third system utilizes a "sticky belt," which is a belt transport system with glue applied that the fabric "sticks" to. This is a great solution for large-volume fabric printing.

What are the most important considerations when selecting fabric?

The most important thing in choosing a fabric is to understand how it will be used. What's the application? Do you need blackout? Is it backlit and going into an SEG frame? Will it be hanging, draped, or stretched? The proper fabric should match the application. For example, SEG

installers prefer some stretch to the fabric when installing it into a frame. If there is no stretch, the installation can be an issue. Another aspect is fabric consistency. Suppliers should have a good consistent shrinkage rate for their materials, and it shouldn't exceed 1-2 percent. Cost is another factor, and sometimes buying the less-expensive option could end up costing more because the quality of the fabric may be inferior or inconsistent. There may be more flaws in the fabric or unpredictable stretch/shrink from lot to lot.

How does printing equipment affect fabric selection?

Your equipment can also influence the choices in fabrics. If you have a printer that can print only directly to textile, for example, you need to be very aware that some fabrics may not print well, (especially at wider widths) even though they may be available with a direct-to-textile coating. It is important to speak with your suppliers about your applications and your equipment so they can recommend the best solution for your needs.



The newer water-based, eco-friendly textile inks offer an improved depth of color and consistency.

Are there specific inks that work better with fabric than others for both direct and transfer printing?

Dye-sublimation is designed to work around polyester materials. When printing to a different material, such as silk, cotton, nylon, or linen, other ink technologies need to be considered.

Cottons and linen, for example, require reactive dye or pigment inks designed for textiles. The chemical properties in the dyes and the cotton or linen fibers create a very strong bond for wash fastness and color fastness. With reactive dyes, the fabric needs to be steamed and washed for the ink to bond to the fabric, whereas pigmented inks are generally ready to cut and sew once printed.

Silk, nylon, and wool require acid-dye inks. These are printed similarly and require steaming and washing after printing to affix the colorant to the textile. Reactive and acid dyes yield very good results in terms of color brightness and maintaining the hand of the fabric. An alternative to these technologies is printing with a display graphic pigment-based inks (such as latex, UV curable or solvent-based pigmented ink). These inks provide great flexibility as you can print on most any of the fabrics. However, most need to be coated (in the case of solvent, for example). Additionally, pigmented inks will change

the hand (feel) of the final product, which may be very important, especially in the case of a stretch fabric application.

What should a print shop owner look for in choosing a dye-sub transfer paper?

There are several things to consider when choosing a transfer paper. First, make sure the coating is compatible with the ink technology being used. Many manufacturers make different papers that are compatible with different ink carriers (solvent, oil, or water-based).

Water-based inks by far, are the most common today. As most papers are designed for water-based inks, most companies look at the performance of the paper in terms of dye transfer to the fabric and the optimal paper for a given printer. Paper weight has also become a major point given the increasing costs of goods. Companies who print with transfer paper will often look for lighter-weight papers and compatible printers to save on consumable costs.

Another thing to look for when choosing a paper is how it runs through the printer. You want a paper that doesn't cockle and will run through the printer smoothly. If the ink load is incorrect, the paper will tend to cockle, potentially causing head strikes and other print artifacts.

Large shifts in humidity can also cause problems with the paper by making it unstable on the printer and more prone to wrinkling on the heat press. It is important to keep humidity levels stable within your facility.

Most of the printer and heat press manufacturers have a lot of experience with different papers. When choosing one, they should be able to help by recommending products they have tested on their equipment.

How have printing and ink technologies contributed to the growth of digital textile printing?

There's been an increasing demand for printing equipment particularly in the 10-foot-wide textile market. Manufacturers have started providing more options to customers interested in direct and transfer printing with equipment that can offer both and are faster and more efficient. Print quality has improved significantly in recent years. Grand format printers have adopted high-resolution print heads, which has resulted in greater sharpness and detail, finer lines, and better image quality with excellent color gamut.

The newest generation of water-based sublimation dyes have better color gamuts and are designed to print on transfer paper and directly on the fabric with inline sublimation. Advances have also been made in coating technologies for direct printing.

There seems to be more communication between the mills and the ink manufacturers in how they develop effective coatings for fabrics. The various manufacturers of printers, supporting devices, and consumables are constantly innovating in all these areas, as this is a fast-growing segment of the textile printing business. **GP**



For a full list of resources for your fabric needs, visit the GRAPHICS PRO Verified Supplier Guide at:

graphics-pro.com/resources/vsg

GRAPHICS | PRO EXPO

FEATURING
**START HERE
ACADEMY** GPX

Indianapolis, IN

JUNE 15-16 (Education starts June 14)

Get connected at GPX Indianapolis: apparel decorating, awards and customization, and signage and printing. Explore new products and technologies, learn from industry experts, connect with peers, and take advantage of exclusive show deals and discounts.

Registration is free and includes:

- Entrance to the exhibit hall both days
- Unlimited access to Training in the Classroom, including START HERE Academy
- The Mixer @ GPX Thursday evening, June 15, sponsored by **First Citizens Bank**
- A chance to win \$500 in Buyer Bucks each day



To register for FREE, enter Promo Code: **JOIN1**

Go to g-p-x.com/in or scan the QR Code



GOLD SPONSORS



SILVER SPONSORS



Media Advancements

Improve quality and efficiency and meet your customers' needs with new media



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

I'm the type of person who settles into chosen technology and products and is reluctant to make changes. As long as I can text, make calls, take photos, and scroll the internet on my phone, I'm good to go. My husband is the one who keeps on top of new tech. For me, the main reason I upgrade my phone is typically because the camera has improved, and I can get better photos.

It's easy to stay in this same rut with your business, too. Learning a new software program or even upgrading an existing program means you have to adjust to the new features, which undoubtedly slows you down at first. But, once you give it a chance, the benefits of the new features typically outweigh the temporary slowdown.

Trying new media is much the same. It's easy to keep using the same materials you've always used, but keeping track of new products and determining how their features may benefit your shop is essential.



Way back in the day, airbrushing was how we achieved fades and full-color effects.



3M Scotchprint graphics from Gregory Inc. were our first step into offering full-color vehicle graphics.





Progress

The sign industry has dramatically changed over the years. When we started our business nearly 30 years ago, full-color printers weren't common for small sign shop owners. If we wanted multiple colors, we had to cut and layer solid-colored vinyl to create the effect we were going for. For a short time, we even dabbled in hand-painting and airbrushing vinyl to create woodgrain effects and color fades; this proved to be time-consuming, messy, and not very durable.

Full-color printed graphics arrived on the market when we were finding our niche with vehicle graphics. At the time, it was more cost-effective for us to purchase graphics wholesale and incorporate them with premium cut vinyl.

In 1996, we landed our first big account doing a fleet of box trucks for a local winery. They wanted to use the logo from a specific wine label along with large, Forest Green and Metallic Gold lettering and stripes. We contacted Gregory Inc., a wholesale supplier out of Kansas. In the 1990s, they added full-color digital technology, and we purchased 3M Scotchprint graphics from them.

As the years went on and full and partial vehicle wraps slowly started to hit the market, we looked into bringing the technology in-house for more control. Our shop was one of the first in our city to purchase a large-format printer to provide full-color



With improved technology and better media, we can now print rolls and rolls of media in-house to achieve full-color wraps on a small-to-large scale.

graphics. Being early adopters meant we had to figure out a lot the hard way. Tech support and information back then were very limited, and the media and inks on the market were less durable than what we use nowadays.

Sometimes when we have our printers cranking out the graphics and prepping rolls of vinyl for a large install, I'll think back to how, 20 years ago, you wouldn't have seen that in our shop. There was cut vinyl, lots of weeding, application tape, and cutting down stacks of spot graphics. Of course, we still do our fair share of cut graphics, but now they're printed, laminated, and contour cut — not so much cut vinyl.

Consistency

Consistency in our products is a big deal for our shop, and we like to keep a set arsenal of go-to products. Limiting the products we use means that we can carry less inventory, we always know what material was used on a job, there's consistency in the colors coming off the printer,

and the quality of what we're using has been proven.

If you try out new products — especially if you try them on a customer's vehicle or signage — be sure to note the material used on their paperwork. If there are any issues in the future, it's important to know if there were any changes to the media. If you have to do any reprints, you need to ensure that you're using the same materials for consistency.

We have tried new products over the years and have had them fail us. It does happen, and it's why we're so cautious. One time we ordered a perforated vinyl and optically clear laminate that a supplier highly recommended. We used it to wrap the windows on seven buses, and all of them failed in a matter of weeks.

In another case, we printed reflective labels for a local solar company. We tried a house-brand printable reflective since it was a flat installation, but the labels wouldn't stick. They were a total failure, and we had to reprint hundreds of labels in a better reflective material. We

currently have two reflective films and one perforated film that we use, and I'll be cautious about deviating from those in the future.

Benefits

When considering the benefits of switching up a material or adding something new to your arsenal, consider how the material can improve efficiency and quality or solve a customer's needs. If it doesn't meet one of these criteria, you may not need to make a change.

The vinyl and laminates on the market now are a vast improvement over the original media that came out. These newer versions improve the efficiency of installs with better slideability, conformability, and stretch, and they allow for fewer bubbles.

I remember when people first started asking for wraps, and we had a request to wrap the fenders of a PT Cruiser in solid blue to accent the company's spot graphics. This was before air release and the stretch we have in current wrap media.



This specialty, adhesive-backed magnet material and magnet-receptive printable media open up new options for us in the display market.



Trying to wrap those fenders in premium vinyl with its aggressive adhesive was an absolute nightmare. With improved wrap media, these kinds of installs are much more manageable.

The quality of our signs and wraps have also dramatically improved over the years. Better inks, better media, and better laminates have created longer-lasting graphics. Using a non-PVC laminate on our wraps has greatly reduced the browning issues we have here in California on horizontal surfaces. This wasn't an option for a long time, but with media advancements and a willingness to try something new, we found a solution to a major issue.

This new media coming out improves the speed and efficiency of installs, and as materials get thinner, we see improved stretch and smoother trimming around obstacles. Get sample rolls when possible and test new media to see what works best for you.

For the Bronco Wine Co account we landed in our early years, we had to meet the customer's needs by exploring full-color graphics when they were coming on the market. We may have never earned that account if we hadn't found a way for them to put their wine label on the sides of their delivery trucks.

Discovery

Trying to research product features or specialty materials can be a bit overwhelming, but building a rapport with supplier sales reps is a great way to find information on new products. Manufacturers also have a ton of information on their websites, in product bulletins, and in material product catalogs. The information usually comes in a handy chart with comparable features listed.

We also discover new products through magazine articles and emails, and industry trade shows are among the best ways to find new media, software, and machines. We don't attend as often as we should, but when we do, we typically come away with a new excitement for the industry and the products and tech available.

We do a lot of work for a wholesale distributor company, and the work they



Testing a sample roll of 3M's newest printable wrap media to determine if we should make a switch.

bring in involves displays, point-of-sale products, and changeable menu systems. The company was recently bought by another out-of-state company that already had products and materials in place. They wanted to work with a local sign shop, so we needed to match our products to what they were already using.

One of the displays was for a national chicken restaurant, and they use a specialized material with a magnetic backer and thin printed steel that sticks to the backer. It's the opposite of what we usually do — creating magnets that attach to a metal background — so we had to do some research to track down a solution.

We found the same material at LexJet. The magnetic base was UltraFlex XMR ACTION Magnet, which has an adhesive back; we bought it on a 24" roll. The printable magnetic receptive material was UltraFlex Signetics Select. It's very thin and prints nice images on our printer. The material is heavy, though, so we had to make sure we fed out extra on the back

so the printer wasn't having to pull on the roll, which creates head strikes.

They have already purchased initial displays for two different brands, so we anticipate using this material on an ongoing basis. Now that we've tracked down a source and have tested the media, we feel confident using it on future projects.

3M recently introduced their IJ280 vinyl with corresponding 8428 gloss overlaminate. We spoke to our 3M rep about the products, and she reviewed the differences between the new material and the IJ180Cv3 we've been using. 3M sent us a sample roll of the vinyl and laminate to work with to see if we prefer the new media. If this material proves to be faster and have higher quality on a larger project, we'll definitely make the switch.

As the sign industry continues to make advancements in software, machinery, and media, we'll do our best to avoid comfortable ruts and will grow and improve along with the industry. **GP**

Taking a Layout from Bad to Good

Breaking down the thought process that leads to solid sign design layout



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. He also provides sign design training at his site: LearnSignDesign.com. Contact him at matt@stormmountainsigns.com, LearnSignDesign.com, or 970-481-4151.

The word *layout* can mean different things to different people. Other than laying out by the pool, the word layout typically refers to some sort of organized plan for placing, setting, or mapping out the items that are to occupy some sort of pre-determined space.

A bad sign layout

Bad layouts can prevent the *chosen words* from doing the job they were intended to do. The same can be said for T-shirt, textile or other graphic-for-production design process. But what does a good sign design layout look like and how do you know if it's going to do the job it's supposed to do?

- Is it the way the text goes all the way to the edges of the sign?
- Is it the heavy font that seems to command attention?
- Is the quantity of information that is crammed onto the sign face?
- Is it your partner who says it looks "really special"?

Substrate size = real estate

The process of laying out a sign starts with the available real estate you have to work with. How big is the substrate? Yes, that is what the *panel* or *showcard* or *banner* or surface the sign is being laid out onto for production. In fact, if you say *substrate* to a sign shop owner, they will at least realize you have a better than average grasp of the terms used in the sign industry.

This study

For this exercise, we are going to make up a sign need for which we will design a solution. It's a flat panel sign to be installed onto a wall for viewing by the public, but the copy we will be using focuses on what we are doing. In this first image (**Example A**) you will notice that the copy has been added to the sign in a very uniform way that ignores the flow of thought for the message.

This very dull layout style is what I refer to as *basic government block* because regardless of the topic, subject or importance of the message, these signs are typically designed *as the copy and fonts spill out onto the page*, just as if someone were to speak them while someone types out the words.

It won't read well

I mean, seriously, try to read the copy on that sign out loud, quickly... you can't.

It's full of what I call *thought-filled speed bumps* where the train



Correct copy placement on a sign requires you to plan-out your layout!

Example A: This is how the government likes to create sign layouts. Effective, but not really. Thoughts are hard to capture due to poor thought management.

of thought is fragmented by improper line breaks. This illustrates (**Example B**) how annoyingly ineffective this can be and how it affects the entire role that the sign must perform.

Proper grouping of thought

The next sign (**Example B**) shows how the words should be grouped according to the thought being conveyed. When this is done properly, the primary message is more clearly understood, and the sign has a good start to becoming an effective sign design. Now, take another stab at reading the sign... Notice how much easier it is to understand what is being said. This step is necessary for effective sign design. Next, let's look at how it can better fit the sign space provided.

Great thought isolation, lousy layout so far...

To group the thoughts per line creates a new arrangement of line length(s) that now creates an unattractive layout of the copy on the sign face. Even if we enlarge the text, it still doesn't fit the sign face like it should; there are weird-looking blank spaces that make the sign look unkempt.

Why do some designers stop here?

So much of the time, sign designs are taken to this point and left as-is. The designer doesn't realize how much better the sign can be if they get just a little creative. In **Example C** I have enlarged the primary copy for two reasons: First, I wanted to better fill or utilize the space. Secondly, I wanted to visually separate the primary message from the secondary message. The secondary message is important for sure, but it's not the hook of the sign's role. Remember, making the primary message dominant is not only the easy way to bring attention to the copy, it's the way it's supposed to be done for proper sign design.

Now, to get back to the design in **Example C**, this sign layout shows us a much better-looking design, and the letters are easier to see and read after I adjusted the top copy. But for a sign, it's not popping like it should (or could). Signs can be (sometimes) very loud (visually). That means we have the room to get bold, dynamic, and attention-getting.

The design has got to grab the viewer's attention and clearly convey the message being presented. This font is not optimum, but for the sake of brand consistency we will continue to work with it and leave off other, bolder fonts that might really help the sign's readability.

Correct copy placement on a sign requires you to plan-out your layout!

Example B: Each line of thought is separated, per line, for easier readability. It's not a perfect science, but it helps the viewer to understand what the message is that's being conveyed. Try reading Example A, then Example B and see which one reads easier for your brain to understand, quickly.

Correct copy placement on a sign requires you to plan-out your layout!

Example C: Now we fill in the space a bit more, working toward image balance and white space balance that keeps the sign readable at a distance.

Correct copy
placement
on a sign
requires you to
plan-out your layout!

Example D: Fonts say it all. Sometimes they project impressions and or themes we don't want the sign to say. This would never work for a biker bar sign, an accountant, or a coffee shop.

Correct copy
placement
on a sign
requires you to
plan-out your layout!

Example E: Now we're talking... this is looking better! Bold and easier to read due to strong contrasting elements.

Correct copy
placement
on a sign

requires you to
plan-out your layout!

Example F: Yes, now that's what I'm talking about... bold, clean, readable. BOOM! That's looking better.

Correct copy
placement
on a sign

requires you to
plan-out your layout!

Example G: And now even better reading! The message is clear; the sign can perform its role in society without being ashamed that it's not readable.

How creative does the sign NEED to be?

How many ways can you make the primary copy more visually dominant without adding a new font? Outlines? Shadows? In-lines (called key lines) that follow the inside shape of each letter, or even using colors and texture elements are all good ideas.

Who's reading this sign? Does this sign require fancy creative elements to be added, which may pose a visual distraction that hurts the message being conveyed? Tread lightly when it comes to *fancifying* a sign in order to fluff up the impact of the message. Too fancy, or a graphically rooted font, can change the meaning, impact, and delivery of the sign's message.

Changing the font makes a huge difference in what the subject might be, or who wrote the sign or who it's meant to be seen by. **Example D** would logically lead you to think that the sign was for a daycare, or a kid's group or school event. It's not. The topic is sign design and a kid's-style font is so inappropriate for this it's not even worth mentioning, but I did. That font does nothing to promote the feel and vibe of learning sign design. In fact, it makes it harder to comprehend what the message really is as the viewer is wondering how this affects kids?

Hence the confusion that occurs when well-meaning designers use fonts that are not appropriate for the business, school, church, nightclub, or biker bar. Using the correct font is mandatory for a message to be conveyed appropriately, read by the viewers who it applies to, and done in such a way as to not create a bad impression.

So, being bound to the branding, the next logical step is to bold-up the primary text or message. In **Example E** you can see here that I did not go crazy; I simply made the font bold.

Now, notice how much easier it is for your eyes to know exactly where to line up for reading the sign.

Let's make this sign really grab the viewer's attention (**Example F**). I've done that here by adding a dark contrasting color to the upper background. And, take notice, this works for either the top copy or the bottom copy as the top copy is readable and has plenty of impact all by itself.

Add in the dark color to the bottom text (**Example G**) and again it helps the top copy maintain its dominance for the viewer. Either way, the contrasting color helps to isolate the message to guarantee that the sign is effective for the job it's been designed to do.

Experiment

Play around with layouts to determine the best way to place your copy so that the sign is actually able to do the job it was intended to do. Follow these examples and copy the spacing, font and layout parameters I used when I created the artwork examples.

It's how signs are designed. This is how you create great signage. Don't lose this article! Refer to it often with each new sign project. And in the end, the signs you create are equal to the signs... you make. **GP**



(Images courtesy Ian Gonzalez, Moody Blue Designs)

A Rustic Look

COURTESY OF MOODY BLUE DESIGNS

As twin brothers, we've always shared a great love for automotive design. We founded Moody Blue Designs while working after hours in a home garage. We quickly upgraded to a more adequate climate-controlled facility, becoming the upstate's leader in custom design, graphics, and vinyl wrap installation. As a family owned and operated small business, we strive for excellence and a solid reputation built on industry standards.

We were tasked with wrapping a Burgmann C815S rear-tip dumper for Burgmann Americas in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

It's a custom dirty rustic design, clearly intended to attract attention, for the ConExpo in Las Vegas. Besides its sheer size and complexity, it is definitely 1 of 1, first in its class to be fully wrapped for promotional use in the U.S.

The wrap material used was Avery Dennison MPI 1105, paired with an Avery Dennison DOL 1360Z matte overlaminates for a perfect finish.

All design printing and production was completed in house here at Moody Blue. Also, the complete installation was done by our in-house installers Blake and Barrett Langford. **GP**



PrintNOW™
technology by



It's ready to print
right out of the box!

The **NEW** Hanes® Perfect Pre-treat Tee
with PrintNOW technology
arrives with every surface ready
to print DTG—making it faster
to get that order out the door.



NEW 498PT
Hanes® Perfect
Pre-treat Tee



©2023 Hanesbrands Inc. All rights reserved.

brother
Stampcreator®
PRO System!



High-Quality
pre-inked stamps
produced at the
speed of light!



Jackson Marking Products
800-782-6722
www.RubberStampMaterials.com
info@rubber-stamp.com



GRAVOTECH
EXPRESSION OF THINGS



Laser Engraving Machines

www.gravotech.us
We're now textable at (770) 762-1904



LS100



LS100EX





EpilogLaser

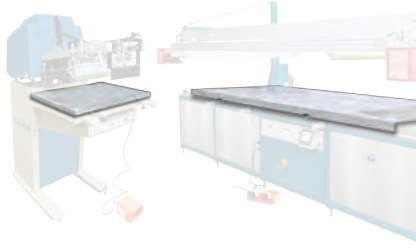


ENGRAVE | CUT | MARK

EPILOGLASER.COM/GP



**VACUUM TABLES
NEW OR REBUILT**




FOR MANUFACTURERS such as:


AWT American Argon Lawson	M&R Svecia Theime and more...
------------------------------------	--

- Certified flattest in the industry
- Short deadlines
- Built to your specifications

Largest manufacturer of vacuum tables for all
screen printing machines for over 35 years



773.725.4900
sales@gpiparts.com
www.gpiparts.com



773.725.4900
sales@vacuumtables.com
www.vacuumtables.com

PLATINUM
BY DELTA APPAREL



FEATURED: P601C

OUR MOST LUXURIOUS COLLECTION YET
INCREDIBLE PRINTABILITY
UNMATCHED QUALITY

DELTAAPPAREL.COM
800.285.4456




new **PREMIER RAZOR GLASS AWARDS**



JDS **IN STOCK ORDER NOW!**
www.jdsindustries.com


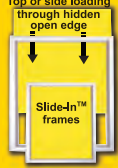

THE PERFECT FLEECE FOR NU IDEAS



NUBLEND® FLEECE
Showcase your newest designs on NuBlend® Fleece. The 50/50 cotton/polyester blend fabric resists pilling and shrinking, and the high stitch density gives you a super smooth printing canvas. Now available in 10 new colors.


JERZEES SEE ALL 17 STYLES AT JERZEES.COM
#JERZEES #JERZEES #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees #Jerzees

Fast Change Frames
Sell More Graphics!

- Signage changes are FAST & EASY - sell more graphics and signs
- ANY size frame, LOW prices
- Made in Chicago for QUICK turnaround
- NO MINIMUMS: 1 or 10,000
- Many color and profile choices
- FREE shipping on orders over \$75 to US States.

NEW LED edge lit frames
Any Size, Any Color
1 Minimum

American Owned

American Made

ALPINA Manufacturing
1-800-915-2828
sales@fastchangeframes.com
fastchangeframes.com

GROW & DIVERSIFY
With AP Lazer's S1012LR




24/7-365 Tech Support Removable Base for Large Objects High Detailed Engraving


Drop the Laser Beam to the Floor or anywhere in between.

Add Emotional Value to Your Products!
Visit APLazer.com or call 800-585-8617.

AP LAZER® LEADING THE WAY | 4215 LEGION DR MASON, MI 48854

LET YOUR DESIGNS SHINE

CAD-CUT® UV SHIFT SUN ACTIVATED



SEE THE SHIFT
▶ stahls.com/hvt-sunshine

STAHL'S

GP0523

RADIAN™
LASER SYSTEMS



REVOLUTIONIZE YOUR GLASS MARKING WITH UV LASER TECHNOLOGY
RADIAN IS NOW OFFERING HIGH-PERFORMANCE 2D AND 3D UV (ULTRA-VIOLET) BEST-IN-CLASS LASER MARKING SOLUTIONS

714-278-4333
WWW.RADIANLASER.COM

NEW PRODUCTS

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

SUBLIMATION WOOD

Johnson Plastics Plus introduces the Chromaluxe MDF Natural Look Wood Sheets, which can be used to create your own sublimatable shapes and designs. The sheets can be cut with a laser, CNC, or rotary engraver, and sublimation works on both sides.



800-869-7800
jpplus.com

GLASS AWARDS

JDS Industries Inc. has added three new Premier Glass awards to its selection. Platinum Glass features an arched or full metal base and is available in six different styles. Razor Glass is in blue or black and has a beveled peak. Sierra Glass is available in four styles and has a walnut base.



800-843-8853 • jdsindustries.com

EXTERIOR COLORS

Rowmark has added two new color combinations to its LaserGloss product line: dark grey/white and orange/white. The company says LaserGloss Exterior can keep its finish for years after nearly any application.



419-425-8974
rowmark.com

DIRECT-TO-FILM POWDER

Lawson Screen & Digital Products announces that its line of DTF powder has received Oeko-Tex's Eco Passport Certification. The company offers DTF powder in to "grades," standard ground and fine ground, which it says can work on dark and light garments.



314-382-9300
golawson.com

UNISEX FASHION SHORT

Royal Apparel offers its unisex fashion terry short, which is made of 50/50 combed ring-spun cotton/polyester. It also features a side pocket, set on rib cuffs, a waistband with elastic and drawcord, and a tearaway label.



866-769-2517
royalapparel.net

DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Telecine and YCD Multimedia have introduced RAMP Up!, a new, all-inclusive financial institution package of digital signage. It is a branded financial news television channel with your bank's name and logo on the screen, and the companies say content is updated automatically throughout the day.



646-237-8100
ycdmultimedia.com

HIGH-DEFINITION CUTTER

Sisner introduces the Romeo High-Definition cutter, a counterpart to its Juliet product. Its workspace measures 24" wide, and the company says it prioritizes speed and quietness. It also says it works seamlessly with the Leonardo Design Studio.



866-301-9409
siserna.com

YARN HOODIE

Lane Seven introduces Future Fleece, a 100% regenerated yarn hoodie. It is made from yarn that is composed of post-consumer waste, as well as scraps left over from the cutting edge stage of the garment manufacturing process. Since the yarn is repurposed, the material forgoes the dyeing stage, which the company says reduces energy consumption by roughly 80%, water consumption by roughly 75%, and chemical consumption by roughly 90%.



562-584-5255 • lanesevenapparel.com

GP+

HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS

GP+ is a monthly section of GRAPHICS PRO dedicated to taking a deep dive into a specific graphics market. This month's section is all about heat-applied graphics and where the future can take you.

33 MAKING SHOP MOVES

DTF printing results
By Howard Potter

37 HOW TO KNOW IF DTF PRINTING IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Courtesy of ColDesi

38 HOT OFF THE HEAT PRESS

How heat-applied graphics fit in our printing toolbox, and the various ways they're utilized to streamline workflow and add profit
By Christina Haines

43 HOW TO PREPARE AND CURE DTF TRANSFERS WITH CONVEYOR DRYERS

Courtesy of Vastex

44 TOP 3 TRENDING LOOKS FOR ANY MARKET

Courtesy of STAHL'S

45 TIPS FOR DECIDING ON A DTF PRINTER

Courtesy of ColDesi

46 HEAT TRANSFER REVIEW

The top five principles of heat transfer production
By Shane Wilson

50 REMOVING DTF AND HTV ERRORS

Courtesy of AlbaChem

51 HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS PRODUCTS

ColDesi DTF

Market Changing Technology

- Brightest Whites, Vivid Colors
- Fine Detail, Stretchability, Soft Hand
- Poly, Cotton, Blends – LIGHT AND DARK GARMENTS
- Full Digital, Variable Designs, Low Cost Per Print
- Easy To Learn, Production Friendly



Short and long runs of high-color, high-quality images with no set-up time or costs are now a reality. Turn the profit spigot on in your business with a Direct-To-Film Solution from ColDesi today!

See more of what DTF can do for your business in 2023 - coldesi.com/DTF2023 or call (877) 651-4700.



Digital
HEATFX

ColDesi 
Achieving Dreams Together

DTF Printing Results

Running the numbers to check the return on investment on our new DTF printer



Howard Potter has worked in the promotional industry since 2003, from designing to building brands and a family-owned business. He is the co-owner and CEO of A&P Master Images LLC, Utica, N.Y., with his wife, Amanda. Their company offers graphic design, screen printing, embroidery, sublimation, laser engraving, direct to film, online stores, vinyl graphics, and promotional items. For more information, visit MasterYourImage.com.

Like any new process, everyone is always worried about the learning curve, the quality of the printing capabilities, and the supply costs, now more than ever since the cost of running a business is going up drastically each year.

Our company really took notice of the Direct to Film (DTF) process around August of last year and asked ColDesi to ship us some samples to test print and wash. They heat-pressed very easily and held up really well after several washes.

ColDesi's prints are rated up to around 55 commercial launderings before they start showing any signs of breaking down at all, and it's our understanding that most people will not notice any visible degradation even after those 55 or so washes.

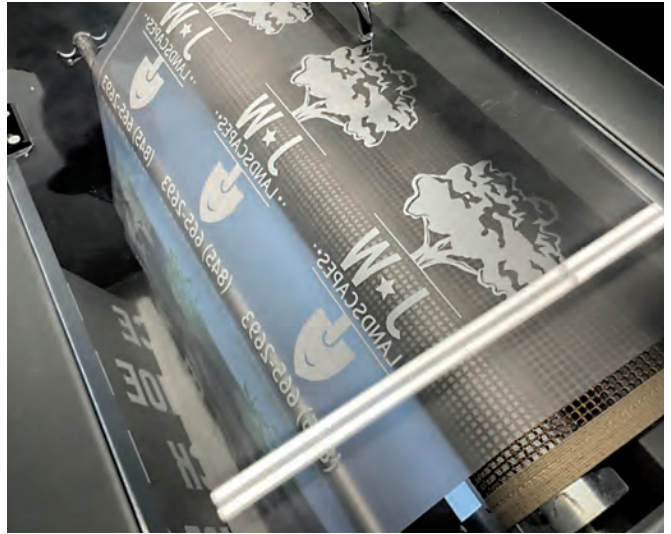
Testing the waters

This past January we received our DTF-24H4 and installed it that week in between doing our normal workload each day. Our general manager did all the test print runs, starting with some files that had spot colors and half tones in them to see the differences between how each print would come out. Both prints out the gate needed little to no major tweaks to make them more than passable.

We also manage over 300 online stores, and many of them use screen-printed transfers or apparel vinyl. Our GM took several of those designs and tested them with the DTF printer to see if our settings and print quality either matched or improved those processes. Each design actually improved and was much better and cleaner looking.

Normally screen printed, this shorter-run project was perfect for DTF, which produced quality prints quickly.





Printing on our new ColDesi DTF-24H4. DTF has been a game-changer for us, providing high-quality, full-color prints, allowing us to shift a lot of production work to this process. When working with the powder that's part of the DTF process, we treat it like any chemical we use in the screen-printing process, handling it with gloves and a face mask. Moreover, we have two air purifiers and a humidifier in the room.



This client always gets screen-printed apparel and needed a four-screen, two-location rush order of 150 shirts. We were able to print these in about three hours with two heat presses.

This was a new customer that we directed to DTF for this 100-piece order and they loved it. We have samples of the different printing techniques in our showroom, and when people see DTF and feel the texture, they gravitate to it.



This was the first order we did with our DTF printer. We would normally sublimate a koozie order like this, but the entire project was completed in less than two hours, and the quality was fantastic.

One thing we caught onto right away is that this process allows us to press using 270 degrees for 15 seconds and adheres right away. That may not seem like a big deal, but it's huge for us.

With sublimation, you typically have to heat up to 400 degrees and press for up to a minute per location for several products. Apparel vinyl can be just over 300 degrees and 30 seconds.

With DTF, you don't need to heat the press up past 270 degrees, and the press time is 15 seconds or less, which means you should not experience dye migration

when working with those more difficult product lines where the dyes activate when you hit close to 300 degrees for 45-plus seconds.

After we got the machine up and running that week and felt we had a handle on it we started offering it to our customers right away. Normally with new processes, this takes at least a month or more to become comfortable with any new process and equipment. This machine and process felt like second nature.

Direct return on investment

In our first seven business days of production, we did just over \$19,000 in production. Now I know what everyone is thinking ... great, but what did that cost you in supplies? How much did you print? And so forth. It blew me away and I had to triple-check the numbers my GM gave me along with what it cost us.



POSIPRINT™

**100% DTG-READY TEES
RIGHT OUT OF THE BOX**

Tired of the messy, smelly process of pre-treating tees before your direct-to-garment (DTG) printing? Skip it with revolutionary PosiPrint technology.

Faster, cleaner and more cost-efficient, PosiPrint Tees arrive ready-to-go with their entire fabric completely pre-treated for optimal DTG printing.

Scan code for more
PosiPrint info



STAY ON TREND with Faux Suede Patches

Faux Suede Patches provide a must-see finish and feel. These stylish patches are perfect for headwear, apparel, hard goods, accessories, and more!

- ▶ Laser etched, engraved detail
- ▶ 20+ vibrant colors
- ▶ Borderless or Overlock Stitch



RAISE YOUR PROFITS
▶ stahls.com/suede-finish

STAHL.S.COM | 800.478.2457



GP0523

CURE

ALL DTG INKS, PRETREAT, DTF ADHESIVES,
SCREEN PRINTED INKS, AND DISCHARGE
—WAY FASTER, USING LESS ENERGY

Vastex LittleRed XD-Series dryers rocket ink temps up to 320°F in the first several inches of conveyor travel and hold at-cure temps longer for the highest possible rates.

Cure 185+ garments/hr DTG printed with white ink, 555+ with pretreatment or screen printed water-based ink or discharge, or 1080+ screen printed with plastisols.



NEW!
Lo-E uses 20% less energy!



LITTLE RED XD SERIES

Choose from 18-, 30-, 54- and 78-inch wide models. Quickly add one or multiple heating chambers and extend the conveyor belt to multiply capacity in direct proportion to each module added.



LR-X10



LR-X20



LR-X30-30



LR-X30-54



LR-X30-78

**15 YEAR
HEATER WARRANTY**



+1-610-625-2702
SALES@VASTEX.COM
VASTEX.COM

6/20-1

Below is what we produced within seven business days:

- 742 (front lefts) 3"-4"
- 236 (full fronts) 10"-12"
- 600 (medium size) 5"-6"
- 38 (names)
- 1,616 total prints
- Supplies Used:
- 8 bags of powder
- 1 of each color (CMYK)
- 4 white inks

Our total worst-case supply cost was \$774.92 out the gate, even given that we tweak everything to print more color and use more white ink to make sure the color saturation is solid and pops with each print. Take \$774.92 divided by 1,616 for about 48 cents per print on average for a full-color print option.

The printer prints at such high quality and so fast that we normally do not have it running longer than two hours per day and we print thousands of prints per week already with it. Moreover, the operator can be cutting down DTF prints while the machine is printing.

This process has been a huge game-changer for our team and has actually boosted morale. This has replaced many of our screen print, sublimation, and apparel vinyl orders. Our time weeding apparel vinyl is gone, we have reduced the amount of time it takes to clean screens, and the time needed to burn screens since many smaller and larger jobs shifted to the DTF process.

Another major factor is the electric bill has dropped dramatically. The entire system pulls 30 amps while with a screen print dryer and flash unit you can pull 75 amps, which is a drastic difference, and both are on eight to ten hours per day.

Screen printing and sublimation will always have a place in the market for printing on apparel, but for the everyday user, DTF is a great process to investigate.

You have a lot of options out there to choose from for this process. Be sure to do your research and understand your needs for which size machine you choose to go with and leave yourself room for growth. Keep making moves, everyone! GP

HOW TO KNOW IF

DTF PRINTING

IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

COURTESY OF COLDESI

Is DTF printing right for your business? Not every technology is the appropriate solution for your current business needs. Technological needs will change over time and so will the decisions you make for the right T-shirt or transfer printer for your business. How do you know if DTF is right for your business? If not, what else is?

Your business should consider a DTF printer if you are:

- Printing a medium to large volume of apparel on a daily/weekly basis
- Consistently ordering outsourced transfers
- Wanting to downsize your screen-printing operation.
- Outgrowing other full-color digital solutions (DTG, sublimation, printed vinyl, white toner)
- Looking to add printed garments to your operation (embroiderers, sign shops, etc.)
- Running sublimation printers and need to customize dark colors
- A DTG shop and you are getting a lot of inquiries for synthetic fibers (polyester, tri-blends and the like)

Your business should consider other technology if you:

- Don't have a plan for how to market T-shirts or a need that already exists.
- Have a customer base that demands a lot of one-off prints (e.g. a store in a mall)
- Are only printing transfers / T-shirts once or twice a week
- You are a startup without a solid growth plan for med/high-volume printing

In these cases, you should consider DTG, white toner printing, sublimation, cut vinyl, or print-and-cut vinyl. **GP**



HOT OFF THE

[HEAT] PRESS

How heat-applied graphics fit in our printing toolbox, and the various ways they're utilized to streamline workflow and add profit.

BY CHRISTINA HAINES



Screen print transfers for a school's online store help lower overhead and risk.



Christina Haines works at Varsity in Fort Pierce, Florida, a custom apparel and local goods shop, and is a founding OG of Print Girl Mafia (PGM), a group for women in the industry.

Before we get started, and for purposes of this article, I'll refer to a heat press as it is defined by wikipedia.org, "A heat press is a machine engineered to imprint a design or graphic on a substrate, such as a T-shirt, with the application of heat and pressure for a preset period of time. While heat presses are often used to apply designs to fabrics, specially designed presses can also be used to imprint designs on mugs, plates, jigsaw puzzles, caps, and other products."

I'll ignore those specially designed presses to focus on those we currently have and that I've seen most in shops I've visited: the traditional flat platen press and the hat press.

Heat principles

After five years in this industry, it's become clear that heat pressing is a bit controversial. Some see it as a threat to screen printing, but as my good friend Dylan Gilligan from Upstate Merch/ Shirt Show always says, "It's just another tool in the screen printer's toolbox." I don't believe it could or will ever replace screen printing, but it *can* provide another opportunity to increase and diversify your current offerings.

In 1972, the shop I work for was started as Varsity Sport Shop. Beginning with names and numbers on jerseys, heat



This mini iron helps with heat pressing unusual locations. (Images courtesy Varsity)

pressing heat transfer vinyl (HTV) has been a part of our shop for over 50 years now. As our business has grown and the industry has evolved, so have our offerings. We've taken to utilizing transfers as strategically as possible:

- It's allowed us to maintain a more streamlined screen-printing process by **keeping outliers off press**, such as child/toddler/onesie sizes, sleeves, tags, odd locations like curved around the collar, etc.

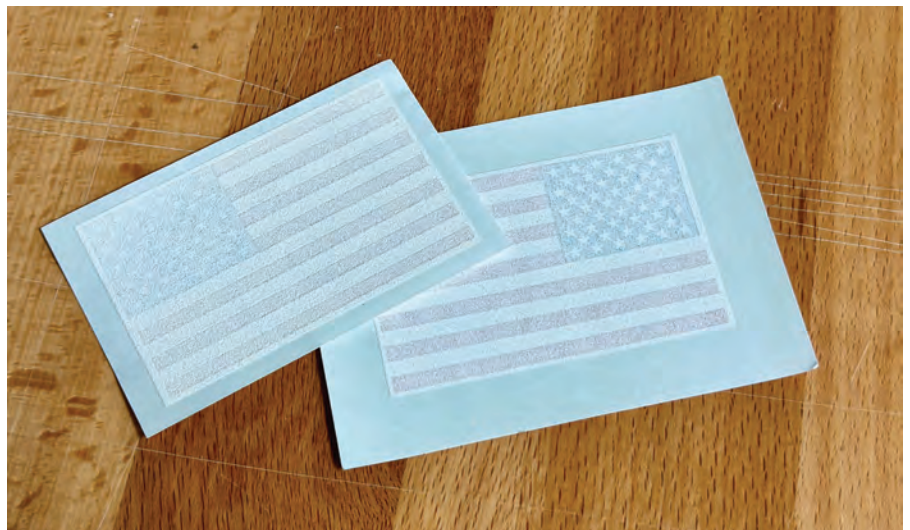
- As a small downtown business, we are a shop with size constraints, one of which is currently maxed out with six heads of embroidery. Heat pressing hats with direct-to-film (DTF) transfers and patches — leatherette, woven, embroidered, sublimated, etc. — has **alleviated some pressure from our embroidery department**.

- We met Candy from Howard Transfers last year, and she taught us about the magic of their options, such as puff, glitter, reflective, hybrid, and glow-in-the-dark screen-print transfers. Because of that amazing information, we've been able to **increase our material offerings**, which basically means we can *offer* that stuff, but we don't have to *screen print* that stuff.

- As technology becomes more accessible, so have *design apps* and *graphic designers*. As I'm sure you know, these



Full-color Jetty Rat heat transfers for a customer with a low minimum and low budget.



Heat-applied American flags for right and left sleeves allow us to offer additional customization without compromising the printing schedule.

HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS



This foam hat has a patch with heat-activated adhesive backing applied with a hat press.



This structured hat has a patch with heat-activated adhesive backing applied with a hat press.



Stacks of heat transfer vinyl from our supply.



Polyester shirt gets a screen print transfer helping to avoid any potential off-gassing/dye-migration issues on press.



Having transfers as an option allows us to keep more business in-house by making our customers' lives easier.

After five years in this industry, it's become clear that heat pressing is a bit controversial. Some see it as a threat to screen printing.

things have complicated some facets of our industry, one being the general public's understanding of a logo vs. a graphic. Heat pressing options have helped us bridge the gap for those customers who would like access to **higher color count prints but have lower quantities and/or budgets.**

- Despite our best efforts, some substrates have given us trouble on-press. Transfers with a blocker base combined with a single variable of heat (the temperature of the heat-press) vs. multiple on press (flash and dryer) have helped us **combat off-gassing and dye migration with finicky fabrics** such as polyester and nylon.

- Like many of our industry friends, we moved into the online store space a hot minute ago. We've been on that learning curve with the rest of you. Heat press and transfers have helped us provide more of an **on-demand and quick turn model for online stores**, saving us overhead and (precious) storage space, as well as lessening the buyout risk for our customers when their store closes.

Despite heat transfer vinyl being around just as long as plastisol for apparel (give or take), it's often treated as the new kid, which undoubtedly means resistance and controversy. Understandably so. This business can be difficult at times, and we have so much on the line every day that it's no wonder we are protective of it.

I've reached out to several friends who have been in this industry for many years, and the general consensus is that there was a shift not that long ago. Based on those conversations, I've been able to pinpoint that the shift occurred when heat pressing became more accessible to the general public, with the increasing availability and ease of use of home cutters and presses.

While first introduced in the early 2000s, the spike in popularity occurred around 2015-2016. I even used a Cricut before I started in this industry. As a mom, it gave me the flexibility to create Pinteresty one-offs in a matter of minutes/hours for my kiddos without the pomp and circumstance of navigating ordering through a shop.



ChemicaUS
HEAT TRANSFERS FOR TEXTILES

Check out our new college football themed **QuickFlex Revolution colors**



DK20SP Automatic Heat Press

The Heaviest Built - Lasts Decades!
Fully Digital - 3,000 lbs total force - Only \$2,950!
The hands-down choice of constant-use production facilities...



For More Info & Video Visit:

www.heatpress.com





Varsity totes are more easily created for our favorite customers by utilizing transfers.

Leatherette patches awaiting heat press.



Heat pressing a leatherette patch to an unstructured polyester hat offers a higher perceived value item, while lessening the risk of puckering with embroidery.

ERASE MISTAKES!

AlbaChem®'s VLR® (Vinyl Letter Remover) will save those misprinted shirts from the throw-away pile. Almost like magic, it completely removes HTV and DTF vinyl lettering, sublimation vinyl, ink patches, heat transfer labels and more. An easy-application tip uses just a few drops of solution and the vinyl comes off the garment. The garment is like new while you reduce waste and save profits!

EMAIL: sales@albachem.com

WEBSITE: www.albachem.com

PHONE: 800-233-4468

NEW YORK • LOS ANGELES • SOUTH CAROLINA
CONTACT YOUR VINYL OR SCREENPRINT DISTRIBUTOR FOR ALBACHEM VLR

AlbaChem

AlbaChem® and VLR® are registered trademarks of Albatross USA Inc.

Judge those moms (and me) if you want, but as a shop, it has alleviated a lot of the one offs and sub-minimum screen print orders that previously created bottlenecks. As an industry, I believe it propelled us forward in the heat transfer world, whether we liked it or not, much like that lil' pandemic caused us to learn all about other hat and shirt blank options. We are an industry that needs to be pushed sometimes, aren't we? I digress.

Sometimes I've found it's easy to get caught up in day-to-day minutiae of this industry, and I have to give myself a reality check about what our fundamental business purpose is: customer service. Having transfers as an option allows us to keep more business in-house by making our customers' lives easier.

There's a reason a majority of Wallyworlds have become what we used to call

Super Wallyworlds; they realized the financial benefits of being a one-stop shop for their customers.

Heat pressing has provided us an opportunity to offer a larger scope of services in terms of branding and apparel for our customers. It helps us, as small businesses, stay competitive with the plethora of online options available at our disposal.

As technology evolves, the industry landscape will continue to change; I expect heat pressing options to become more accessible and the hand/feel to become better than it already has. As I said from the get-go, I don't believe heat pressing and transfers could ever replace screen printing, but if you haven't already, I recommend considering how it could benefit your customers and business. GP

HOW TO PREPARE AND CURE

DTF TRANSFERS

WITH CONVEYOR DRYERS

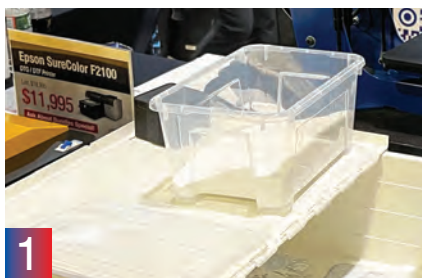
COURTESY OF VASTEX

Direct-to-film printing is currently a popular method for garment decoration that allows you to print artwork directly onto a special film and then transfer the graphic to a garment of virtually any material. Using a high-quality inkjet printer designed for textile printing and heat transfer film, the design will print out “backward,” meaning the colors are printed first, then the white base.

There are different types of transfer film. With “cold peel” film you peel away the backing after heat pressing once the garment has cooled; “hot peel” film, as the name implies, requires that you peel away the backing of the newly pressed design as quickly as possible after pressing.

While there are many ways to cure the DTF film, using a conveyor dryer provides consistent, repeatable results. Setting up a box or basket to collect the transfers as they exit the heating chamber frees the operator to print the next transfer or perform other tasks. Tabletop units such as the Vastex D-1000 shown to the right require little space and are available with optional exhaust hoods to remove excess moisture and fumes from the work area.

With the appropriate equipment, DTF printing is a straightforward process:



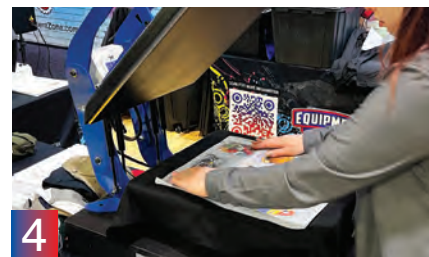
1 Insert DTF film into printer modified for DTF printing with CMYK + White ink channels designed for textile printing. Make sure the frosted side is up. After printing and while the ink is still wet, disperse the adhesive powder over the inked side of the film.



2 Repeat multiple times to get a nice consistent coating and shake off excess powder into collection system.



3 Set sheet into DTF compatible conveyor dryer with adhesive side up and cure for 60 to 90 seconds. Time and temperature may vary based on dryer manufacturer.



4 Place shirt on pallet of heat press with Teflon paper on top and press to remove wrinkles and excess moisture, then line up your design with print side down.



5 Heat press for ink/adhesive manufacturer’s recommended time and temperature. Allow shirt to cool down to room temp before peeling off the backing when using cold peel adhesive. When using hot peel transfer film, remove the backing as quickly as possible after pressing.



6 Enjoy the fun and variety of options with DTF printing.

TOP 3 TRENDING LOOKS

FOR ANY MARKET

COURTESY OF STAHL'S'

Whether it's HTV, custom transfers, or high-end dimensional emblems and patches, make sure you have everything you need to offer a professional finish with every order. Here are the top 3 ways to create on-trend, profitable looks for any market.



- 2 Direct to Film Transfers**
Go-to solution for creating full color apparel orders of any size.



- 1 HTV & Digital Transfers**
Perfect for one color or special effect finishes.



- 3 Emblems & Patches**
Premium offering for apparel including embossed, embroidered, leather, and PVC, and suede.

GP

TIPS FOR DECIDING ON A

DTF PRINTER

COURTESY OF COLDESI

Most of the challenges related to DTF technology are related to the type of solution that is chosen as well as the company that provides the equipment. The horror stories that many of us have heard about are most frequently associated with DIY (Do It Yourself) solutions that are converted printers that are not designed to do multi-layer printing with white ink. As with any DIY system based on a page printer, the majority of the work is done trying to make the printer not do things. To make a long story short — these types of solutions are difficult to get working at best and even when they do work, they are very slow. There are many commercial solutions for DTF printing on the market at this time. Finding a good reseller who is vested in the technology and is able to support and service the equipment is crucial.

One of the challenges to consider is actually one that is universal among printing. The issue of dye migration on some polyester fabrics (especially cut and sew sublimated garments). Both ink and powder manufacturers continue to work on eliminating any dye migration. Of course, this is heavily dependent on the fabric, art,



colors, etc. The good news here is that the answers will likely be as simple as changing inks and/or powder in the machine, with no need to buy additional or replacement equipment.

Another challenge, especially with larger users, is dealing with post processing of the rolls of transfers, also known as conversion. You have a large roll of film with hundreds, maybe even thousands, of transfers and you need them cut to transfer. You can cut them by hand or use a roll cutter. Dealing with the cutting of transfers in high volume is the next big challenge. This process is not fully automated with current systems in the market.

These are challenges that are all easy to overcome. It's just a matter of considering three things.

Be sure to work with a very experienced printer dealer that can support you for the long haul.

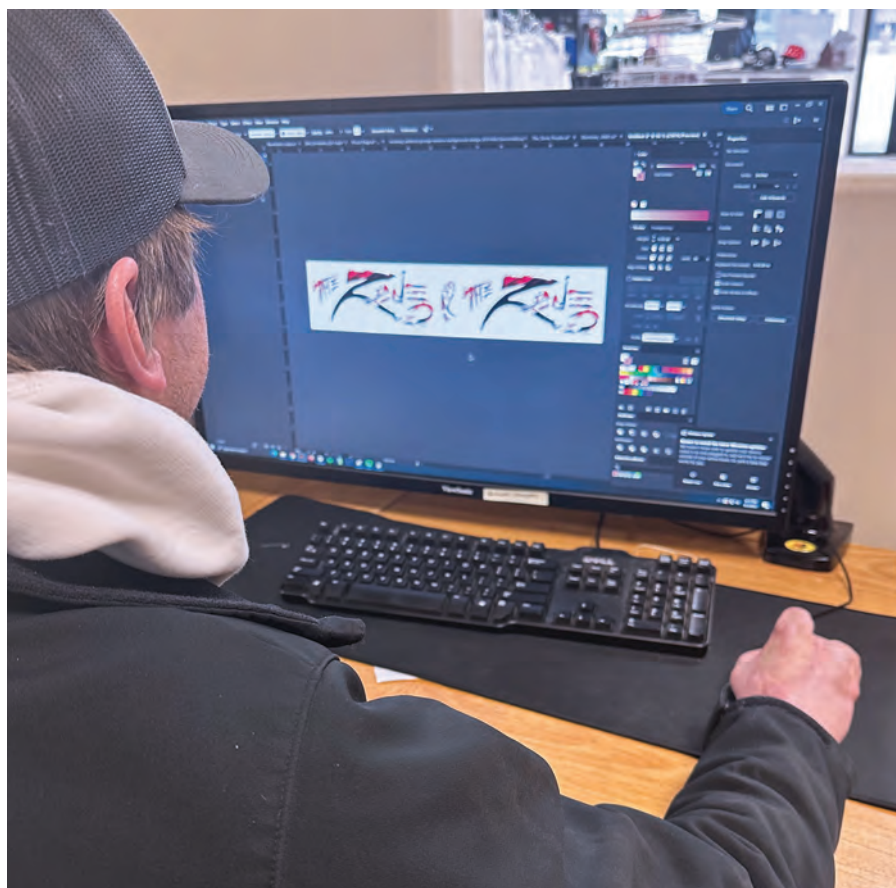
If you work with very specific fabrics or colors that often have dye-migration issues, get samples to test ahead of time to rule this out.

Consider how you will handle post-print cutting of transfers. There are many solutions from something as simple as scissors to roll cutting machines. **GP**

HEAT

TRANSFER

REVIEW

BY SHANE
WILSON*The top five principles of heat transfer production*

Ty at the art computer working on a new Zone logo. (Images courtesy Scottsbluff Screen Printing & Embroidery)



Shane Wilson owns a screen printing and embroidery shop in Nebraska that is also a retail sporting goods store, selling everything you need for your favorite sport. He has been in this industry for 29 years.

Heat transfer is a term I have struggled with for years. When I started in this business almost 30 years ago, heat transfers were thick, labor intensive, and just a general pain in the rear!

You had to pick out the individual letters and line them up straight and centered with a ruler. Then, we had to tell customers to make sure to turn them inside out when they wash them. You know, all the fun things we dealt with in the '90s and early 2000s. All that changed when the new vinyl printers and cutters came onto the scene.

Cheesy transfers?

My first experience with this started in Green Bay, Wisconsin. My son and I went to Lambeau Field to check it out. My son is a huge Packers fan, so that was a great day for him. He begged me to buy him a pair of sweatpants. So, I bought him a pair with the Packers *G* printed on the leg.

When we got home to Nebraska, he wore them every time they came out of the clothes dryer. After about 25 washings, I thought to myself, "That is not screen printing. That is a darn heat transfer. I paid 80 dollars for a pair of heat-transferred sweatpants! That is ridiculous!"

Then I washed them at least three times a week for many more weeks. The logo still looked perfect. It was still bright and vibrant. That is when I knew I had to figure out what this stuff was.

I called our heat transfer supply house and described what I had, and they told me exactly what it was and how to order it. So, we implemented that into our printing business right away. It made printing on double-layer shorts the easiest thing ever. If you have ever screen printed on double-layer shorts, you know what I mean.



The Zone logos printing on the Roland machine.



Weeding The Zone logos.



The Zone logos finished weeding.



On the heat press.



Another one ready for transfer.

We ordered thousands upon thousands of heat transfers over the next few years. Within the last year, we decided to purchase the machine that makes them, and we have never looked back. It is so nice having full control of the heat transfer part of the business. Not only does it make heat transfers, but we make stickers, banners, and about anything else you can load into the machine.

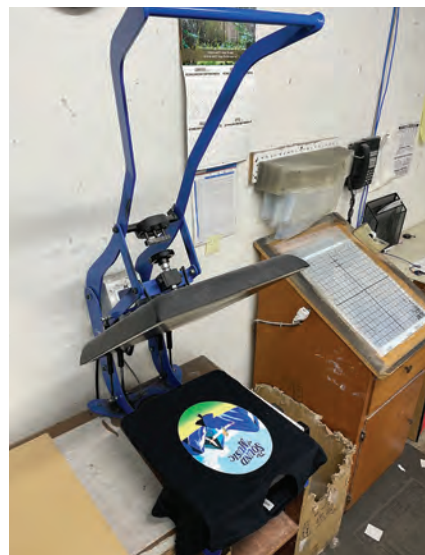
Heat transfer production tips

Here are my top five principles of heat transfer production...

1. Use the correct substrate. This is very important to ensure you get the quality and longevity your customers expect.



Completed products for The Zone.



If you are ordering them from a manufacturer like we did at first, they can help you decide which material is best for the garments you are applying them to. When you manufacture them yourself, take the time to educate yourself on what materials work best for each type of garment. For instance, you can get a bleed blocker material for fabrics that are susceptible to dye migration.

2. Use the right heat press. This is very simple and straightforward. Make sure you use a quality press with accurate timers, heat gauges, and pressure gauges. The quality and longevity of heat-transferred products is directly related to those three variables. If one of them is not perfect, then your product will not perform the way your customers expect. Also, make sure you have different size pallets for your machine so you can heat on little garments as well as oversized things.

3. Make sure your staff is trained on how to set up the heat press for every job they do. We recommend having a cheat sheet for them right at the press. That way, all they need to know is what material they are heating and follow the chart.

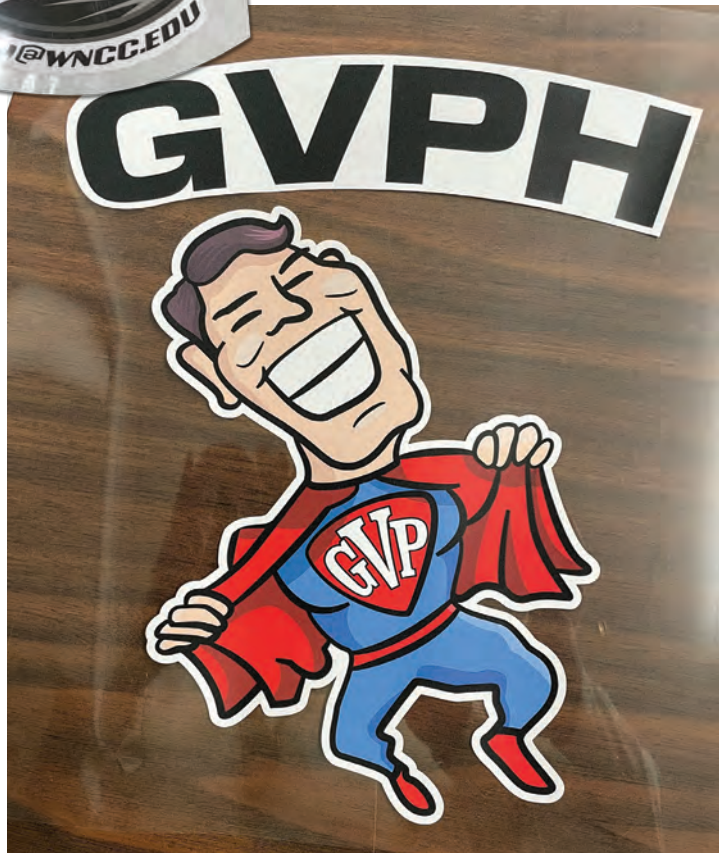
4. Packing your finished product. This is pretty self-explanatory, but we want to make sure every product we produce is pulled out of the box by the customer in perfect condition. So, when you are finished heating your garments, make sure to fold them nicely when they are done. Do not ever fold the heat transfer material itself. Let them have plenty of time to cool in the box before you give them to your customer. Following those simple tips can save you from leaving wrinkles and creases in your finished product.

5. Finally, you can actually make very inexpensive heat transfers with your laser printer. We only do this in a rush, and when they only want one or two as a quick full-photo printed shirt. You can simply buy the heat transfer material at



any Hobby Lobby. Load that into your printer and print it just like anything else. Then you can peel that off of the carrier sheet and heat it onto the garments. Make sure to use a cover sheet when doing this. Craft paper or Teflon paper work the best.

Heat transfer material has come a long way in the last few years. Saying the words *heat transfer* does not make me automatically think lesser quality anymore. Many of the uniform factories in the world are using heat transfers instead of screen printing now. Take the time to do your research. You can save yourself a lot of work depending on the project you are doing. GP



REMOVING

DTF AND HTV ERRORS

COURTESY OF ALBACHEM

Vinyl letter remover is an essential product for removing DTF images that may have been misapplied. For years, VLR has been used for removing HTV. It is equally effective in removing DTF. VLR releases the bond that holds the DTF or HTV image to the material.

Here's how to remove heat-applied graphics from textiles:



- 1** No matter how careful you are, a letter, number or graphic sometimes is misapplied. Fortunately, you can remove these mistakes and save the garment.



- 2** VLR Letter Removing Solvent is applied to the underside of where the vinyl needs to be removed. Apply a few drops of VLR to the area that needs to be removed. Use only a small quantity of the solution.



- 3** Flip the shirt back over and stretch the shirt. This will start to release the bond that is holding the vinyl to the shirt.



- 4** Peel the vinyl from the shirt. Sometimes this will come off in one piece. Other times it will break apart and you will need to peel off several pieces. You may see some residue where the letter had been located.



- 5** If there is a residual mark, this can easily be removed. Apply a few drops of VLR to a clean white cloth. Rub the area with the damp cloth.



- 6** VLR will dry within a few minutes. Once it is dry, you can apply the letter or graphic correctly. (There is no need to wash the garment before reapplying the new letter or graphic.)

GP

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



DIRECT-TO-FILM PRINTER

Mimaki USA introduces its first DTF printer, the TxF150-75, and its heat transfer pigment ink, the PHT50. The TxF105-75 is an inkjet printer with a maximum printing width of 80 cm for producing DTF transfer sheets. The PHT50 consists of five colors (CMYK and white), and the company says it is scheduled to obtain Eco Passport Certification from Oeko-Tex by the end of March 2023.

888-636-0491
mimakiusa.com

HEAT TRANSFER VINYL CUTTER

GCC America Inc. offers its GCC vinyl cutter. The product has three functions: and auto alignment system, up speed and up acceleration, and paper saving mode, which the company says allows users to make adjustments on the printed transfer films to make iron-on decals of garments.

909-718-0248
gccworld.com



HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS

Trotec Laser Inc. offers the Speedy series of heat-applied graphics, which is vinyl-free transfer film. Users can decorate apparel and textiles with graphics, logos, and lettering.

866-226-8505
troteclaser.com



HEAT TRANSFER MATERIAL

JDS Sign Supply offers the Kota Pro Clear Print heat transfer material. The company says it delivers a feel similar to screen printing, it can press in 10 seconds, and that it is low-temperature setting.

800-843-8853
jdssignsupply.com

HEAT TRANSFER VINYL FILM

FDC Graphic Films Inc. offers the Lumina by FDC 9200 Series textured heat transfer vinyl film, which the company says is designed for application to textiles. It is for use on 100% polyester, 100% cotton, and poly/cotton blends.

800-634-7523
fdcfilms.com



HEAT TRANSFER VINYL

STAHL'S announces the release of the CAD-CUT Chroma-TWILL, a heat transfer vinyl that offers a glossy shine with the feel of woven fabric, according to the company. It is available in a range of color options including neon, and it applies with a heat press on cotton or polyester fabric.

800-478-2457
stahls.com

GP

WOMENSWEAR:

Bold and Comfortable

BY CHRISTY ROSSI

An awesome blending of what's hip with what's sustainable for families



(Images courtesy of Snatch & Run Screen Printing)



Christy Rossi owns Snatch & Run Screen Printing in Fort Mill, South Carolina, and hosts the Last Call for Plastisol podcast (lastcallforplastisol.com).

As a female-owned and operated shop right outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, we have a firsthand look at the trends and direction of the overall decorated apparel industry right in the palm of our hands. Charlotte is a great place to do business specifically because of its smaller suburban communities that can be accessed within a 15-mile radius of the metro city center.

For this reason, we have an awesome blending of what's hip with what's sustainable for families. I'm going to break down the different categories of our business and where we see women's wear going in each of them. Additionally, I think it's important to note how we sell to each area of womenswear since that's what can benefit you the most.

Styles

The old faithful for the decorated apparel industry, the standard tee. As a self-proclaimed *shirt snob* I pride myself on knowing the best of the best with tees. The overall trend in women's tees is moving away from the soft blended fabrics and more towards an oversized and thicker look.



Pigment-dyed options are increasing in variety as this trend grows.

A great example of this is the Comfort Colors 1717. This tee caters to a variety of body types, looks great with a pair of jeans or paired with an oversized blazer. Educating your customers on what other trending garments a tee style will look good with is a best practice so that your customers can envision how their branded wear will actually get worn.

Our screen-printing shop is rooted in the athletic apparel industry. We excel at advising gyms on the trendiest garments, decorating styles, and price points for their clients. Over the last few years we've seen a move from tight garments for women such as the Next Level Ideal Tank to the boxy crops offered by a variety of suppliers such as Bella Canvas, Next Level, and Comfort Colors.

As you've also seen with the most common commercial brands in this sector — Lululemon, Adidas, and Nike — simplified design, bright colors, and an oversized look paired with tight joggers or leggings is perfectly on trend.

The great part about an oversized or boxy crop is that it pairs amazingly well with leggings and, in turn, will accentuate a lady's waist. Again, the better an end user looks in a garment or style, the more likely they are to continue to gravitate towards that wardrobe piece.

Despite the weather in North and South Carolina, fleece is a year-round necessity down here. We're seeing an oversized look, even more pronounced than in the T-shirt sector, as a daily request from our customers. We're encouraging any of our



(Above) Comfort Colors recently expanded their color offerings. (Below) Boxy Crops are the top seller to gyms and physical therapy offices.





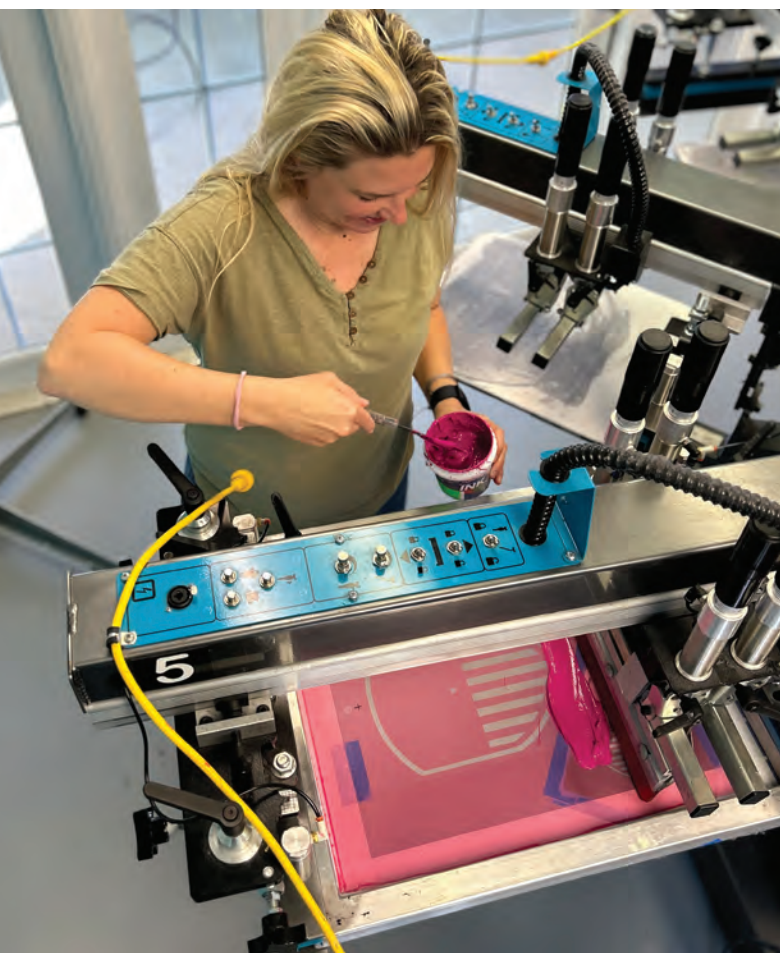
Muted, single-color tie-dye is seeing a rise in popularity.

customers who are reselling to slightly adjust their typical bell curve of shirt ordering up one or two sizes to accommodate for this comfortable-looking trend.

Fabric colors/decoration

Fabric color trends this year have been the most fun since we started business eight years ago. Our female clients are not afraid of a bold color: neons, teals, pinks, and even black with a bold print is making a comeback.

We're also seeing a movement towards '70s and '80s inspired artwork in our clients' designs. Smiley faces, peace signs, and distorted Woodstock-like fonts are a staple. A few years ago this trend was coming up repeatedly with our high school and sorority clients, and it has now definitely made the transition over into older age brackets. For our clients trying to resell to an end user, we encourage them



Bold printed garments are a fun add for small business clients.

We also can't talk about fabric color trends without mentioning the continued use of tie-dye.

to hop on this trend with their design work to appeal to a greater audience.

We also can't talk about fabric color trends without mentioning the continued use of tie-dye. Our shop saw a lot of traction with tie dye during 2020, and while it has slightly morphed from the bright, bold, multi-colored look, the trend is still around. Single-color black or a color blast look is an easy sell, especially if you place it on an oversized crew neck sweatshirt.

Another trend on the women's wear decoration side has been a really interesting one for me. There's an increasing movement away from large, oversized prints or multi-location prints to a small, single, center chest image. I think this is spawning from the use of high-impact fabric colors that do not need to be overwhelmed with a large design. This print style also benefits our customers during the changing economic times, so if noted,



Whimsical fonts from the '70s are making a comeback.



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ARE BREAKING RECORDS!

In the last 20 years, women owned businesses have increased by **114%** and generated **2.8 trillion** sales annually

It's time to help women bring maximum visibility to their business with a cap engineered specifically for them. And that's what we are here for.

infinityforher.com
for more information:
info@headwear.com

 @infinityheadwearforher
 @InfinityHer



INFINITY
her
ENGINEERED FOR HER™



Heat pressed transfers and screen printing are popular decoration methods for all trending garments.

it can put your customers at ease that they are putting their wearable marketing budgets to good use.

Printing on trending garments

As fashion and styles evolve quickly, you may be using garments or colors that aren't in your standard wheelhouse. It's important to take heed and do a few test runs before you're in a pinch with a client.

For printing on bright colors, perform a test run to keep an eye on dye migration that may need to be compensated for; overdye on brights is very common. We're finding it's best to also put down a blocker to account for the same in tie-dyed fabrics. Monarch Color ULT Shield Grey and International Coatings Guardian Grey make excellent options that will not noticeably increase the overall thickness of your print.

Overall, the womenswear trend is moving very quickly and it's important as decorated apparel professionals to stay on top of what's actually being worn. I've found that scrolling Instagram or keeping an eye on what college-aged ladies are wearing is a good way to see where things are going and, in turn, keep your clients' products moving.

As screen printers, I know we all love a basic, no frills, black tee, but doing a little research into up-and-coming trends will go a long way for your customer base and your business profitability. **GP**



Live screen printing at events is a great way to have easy, organic conversations with your current and potential customers.



Comfort Colors Color Blast crews were the top-selling crew this winter in our shop.



SHOW YOUR TEAM SPIRIT

A pair of Authentic Soffe Shorts in your team's colors is the *only* way to show your team spirit. Available in Adult, Youth & Curvy sizes and all ready to be customized at your local decorator!



THE AUTHENTIC SOFFE CHEER SHORT

AVAILABLE AT DELTAAPPAREL.COM | 800.285.4456

WOMENSWEAR:

Creative, Modern, and Retro

Detailing the most exciting and popular trends in womenswear for 2023, from color and style to design and decoration



(Photos courtesy Comfort Colors)



Jeremy is the creative director and CEO at AMB3R Creative, a Colorado-based apparel design firm. He has over 20 years' experience in the fashion industry and brings a depth of knowledge in custom design, screen printing, embroidery, appliqué, finishing, and promotional products. He is a cancer survivor and a co-founder of ESTAINE, a high-end accessory line to support cancer education. You can reach him at jeremy@AMB3R.com and 303-304-9948.

BY JEREMY PICKER

Womenswear is a constantly evolving field, with brands always seeking to stay ahead of the curve and keep things fresh. Each year brings new color, style, and graphic design trends that influence the clothing choices of women around the world.

In this article, we'll explore some of the most exciting and popular trends in womenswear for 2023. Whether you're looking to help your clients stay on-trend or simply want to see what styles are popular from our supplier network, we've got you covered with the latest insights and predictions. From bold color choices to fresh takes on classic styles, there's something for every fashion-forward woman of all sizes.

Color and style trends

Let's first dive into color and style trends as seen in the retail marketplace. With Pantone selecting Viva Magenta as its color of the year, this pinkish-red hue gives a great pop of color especially when paired with softer earth tones and warm pastels. This color is great to have as the garment color or just the decoration.

The three main color stories that are proving popular are...



- 1) Perky Pinks
- 2) Nurturing Greens & Blues
- 3) Rich Earth Tones

When helping your client purchase womenswear it's always good to freshen up the color story, allowing the wearer to pair the garments with the rest of their wardrobe that is in line with the season.

Knowing the trends will help you gain credibility with your client whether they use them or not. It builds trust and shows that you're always trying to help them make better merch. Here are some style trends that will remain popular for 2023 ...

Y2K fashion: Break out those old Von Dutch hats and Juicy Couture velour jumpsuits. The looks from the turn of the last century are showing strong in retail. Cap Sleeve baby doll tees, mini-skirts, baggy jeans, and bedazzled denim jackets are just some of the items seen in retail.

Prep/sporty: The prep look will probably never go out of style. Classy and refined, this look will continue to hold strong in 2023. Letterman jackets, cardigans, tennis attire, and knitted sweaters are some of the pieces that make the prep/sporty look authentic. This look falls in line with a lot of what is available in our supplier's catalogs.

Gorp core: Hopefully this is the tail end of this trend, but "Good ole raisins & peanuts" looks mixed utilitarian outdoor style with eclectic mismatched pieces. From





color-blocked windbreakers to jumpsuits to puffer jackets with cargo pants, this hodge podge of style allows people's personal style to shine through. While you won't catch me rocking this, young people embrace this look.

Now let's talk about some pieces I am really digging from our suppliers right now that I think pair well for this year in womenswear. While there are so many staples, I want to show strong pieces that will elevate a merch collection. Cropped

tees, hoodies, relaxed shirts with specialty washes, matching top/bottom sets, mom hats, and hip bags are all solid pieces to any collection...

Decoration and design trends

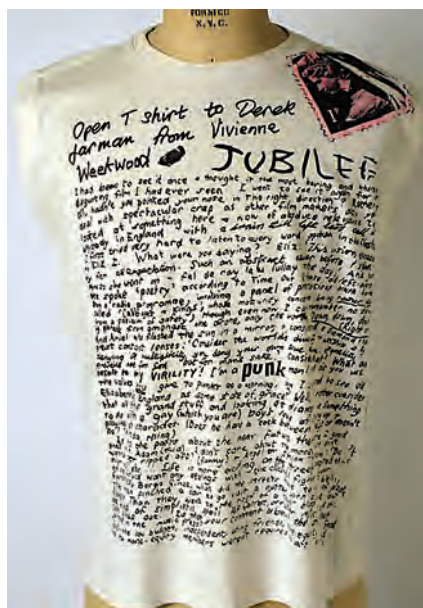
Lastly, because we have to sell decorated apparel, I want to showcase some decoration and design trends I'm seeing in retail...

Raised prints: Whether it's HD ink or standard puff, womenswear seems to have more fun with graphic apparel than what I see in menswear. Having an ombre puff or adding some crystallina to the ink, texture is a winner!

Creative embroidery: I don't understand why more of our industry doesn't explore embroidery beyond the left chest corporate logo slap. Unique stitches, unique thread, and creative placements are a new frontier to explore when it comes to embroidery. Free-form graphic embroidery seems to be picking up with the young crowd because it gives an artistic freedom that brings so much more texture and depth than screen printing. Try to help your client create a multiple media piece that combines print and embroidery for the ultimate retail garment.

When it comes to design style, there are so many different looks that you can adopt, but here are a couple I see across most brands...

Tonal and hand drawn typography: Whether it is a touch of punk rock with hand-drawn or scribbled text or chunky letters filling up the shirt, typography gives you a great way to celebrate your



NEXT LEVEL PRINTING RESULTS

DTG • SCREEN PRINTING • DTF • HEAT TRANSFER



INTRODUCING

SOFT WASH

VINTAGE COLLECTION



NEXT LEVEL
APPAREL®



(Photo by John Mueller)

With the rise of NFTs and the metaverse, artists are showcasing their work on apparel more than I have ever seen.



feelings and interests. I try to get clients to focus on statements and text more than their logo. Unless you are one of the huge brands, having your logo as the focal point won't have the impact you think it will. Showcase what problem your client's business solves or their mission statement that keeps the logo secondary.

Artistic/abstract: This design style really showcases what we call *graphic tees*. Through photo realism, collage work, and gritty texture, the feminine expression really shines. Soft prints and specialty inks also make this style popular. With the rise of NFTs and the metaverse, artists are showcasing their work on apparel more than I have ever seen. Manual screen printing also gives more flexibility with this style to achieve unique placements and coverage.

It is so important to ask your client questions when they are requesting womenswear.

- What vibe is the client going for? Professional, casual or weekend vibes?
- What fabric will work best? Sheer, heavyweight, drapey, technical?
- What neck or collar type is preferred? Crew, v-neck, scoop, boat, over the shoulder, dolman?
- What demographic will be buying or wearing this?

Understanding a client's project better will help you curate items that will resonate with their audience. While a lot of these trends might not fit for your clients, having a broader understanding of the marketplace will take you from order taker to partner. We should want to learn what is out there to become better at our craft and to help others look good and build their brand.

Keeping body positivity in mind, we advise our customers to take all of the above points into account when creating an apparel line in order to provide a variety of offerings that appeal to every body type and help everyone feel comfortable and look their best. **GP**



START HERE ACADEMY @GPX

Indianapolis, IN

June 14 • 4-8 p.m. (doors open at 3)



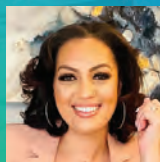
START HERE Academy (SHA) at GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (GPX) in Indianapolis is the perfect resource if you're just starting out in the business or want to take your business to the next level: exchange ideas, explore new product lines, share challenges, and hear from industry pros and influencers about success in today's graphics market.

PRESENTERS:



AARON MONTGOMERY
Our Success Group

Aaron's presentation – Planting the Seeds of Success: Achieving Your Goals with Clarity and Confidence



ANGEL BROADNAX
Angel B. Designs

Angel B's presentation: Build Your Brand: How to Make Sales and Influence People



LORI CHAMPAGNE
Champagne Engraving

Lori's presentation: Keeping Peace and Profitability in Your Home-Based Business



Registration is free. Simply register for GPX Indianapolis and select START HERE Academy as one of your classes.

TITLE SPONSORS



TABLE SPONSORS



Go to g-p-x.com/sha for more information or check the QR Code

WOMENSWEAR:

The Mother of All Markets

BY KRISTINE SHREVE

The depth and breadth of the mom market is deep and wide



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

Dance moms. Soccer moms. Football, baseball, and softball moms. Cheer moms. Pick almost any sport or activity a child can do and there's probably a squad of moms looking for gear. The Mom Market can be a lucrative one, and it's all around us in most communities.

The challenge is connecting with the market and figuring out which gear will sell best to your particular coterie of moms. While the market is big, it can be segmented, and there are some challenges you'll need to overcome in order to be successful in marketing your mom merchandise.





(Images courtesy 6Money's Creations, www.6moneys.com)

The size of the market

The standard statistic for the number of mothers in the United States in 2022 is 85 million. Granted, not all of those moms are going to have children that participate in activities or be inclined to wear items that proclaim the activities their children may do. So, let's be conservative and say one third of those moms would be interested in buying merchandise. That's still just over 28 million women. Now add in grandmothers, and possibly aunts, sisters, and so on, and your market could increase exponentially. Clearly, this is a market niche that can be large and very lucrative for the right merchandise and the right approach.

One thing to keep in mind when assessing a potential market and deciding what to offer is that not all activities are created equal. Some may have a higher price point and will, most likely, have a pool of participants and families that have higher disposable incomes than others. There are some activities — dance, cheer, and gymnastics come to mind — which have a higher cost of entry and may require more traveling. This may mean, although it won't always, that the kids who participate and the families who support them may have more disposable income and would be more likely to spend money on a Dance Mom or Tumbling Mom decorated item. While this is not a hard-and-fast rule, it is something to consider when choosing what to sell and setting price points for items.





(Images courtesy Grit and Glitter Sports)

What to sell

The depth and breadth of the mom market is deep and wide, so almost any item you can decorate could probably be sold to some part of the market. There are some items, however, that are standards and may be easier to sell:

- **Clothing** — T-shirts are probably the first thing to mention in this category. Whether sublimated, screen printed, embroidered, or blinged, moms may have several of these types of T-shirts in their closets, particularly if they have multiple children participating in multiple different activities. Shirts aren't the only option, though; warm-up jackets, sweatshirts and sweaters, hats, and socks may also be popular items. A reminder here: make sure whatever clothing item you select is within the potential budget range of the moms to whom you'll be selling.

- **Drinkware** — Water bottles, tumblers, travel mugs, coffee mugs, basically anything you can put a liquid into for safe transport. Keep in mind that moms have to drive to practices and sit through meets and matches, and they need to stay hydrated (and probably caffeinated) while

they do it. So, drinkware that allows their drink of choice to come along for the ride is always going to be appreciated.

- **Bags** — Many sports require gear and/or special clothing, which needs to be transported to matches or meets or practices. Moms also require bags to carry all the items they may need in order to be prepared for whatever situations may arise. Yes, in some cases a purse may do, but in others a tote bag or a duffel bag will serve the situation better.

- **Blankets or wraps** — If you're a football mom or the mom of a kid who plays some other outdoor sport, or if your child plays hockey or figure skates, sitting and watching a game or a practice can be a pretty cold endeavor. While this category may be less known than some of the others, having a warm blanket or wrap can really come in handy, and if it's decorated with something that shows your allegiance, so much the better.

Where (and how) to sell your wares

One simple way to sell what you create is to capitalize on a niche you're already in. If you're a parent who has a child on

a team or doing an activity, create some gear for yourself or the moms in your life, and have that gear make an appearance at an event. Chances are someone will ask where you got the cool gear, and then you can explain that you made it and that they could get something similar.

Make sure you're prepared with pricing and ordering instructions and that you have business cards or some other way to distribute your information. If you're really ambitious, you might even have a store set up from which people can order. The idea is to make it easy for those who see your work to go from "I like that" to "I want that" to "I own that now."

Having children is not a prerequisite for entering this market. Maybe there's just a particular activity or sport you like, or a particular team, school, or club that seems like a good target for mom-centered merchandise. In those cases, there are a few things to remember.

If you are targeting an organization with a logo, and you want to use that logo on your merchandise, you will have to get permission to do so. This may involve purchasing a license or getting written

permission from the owner of the logo for its use. Some organizations are very diligent and fierce about protecting their logos, so it's always wise to secure the necessary permissions before you start making and selling gear. If you don't, all of your hard-earned profits could potentially end up in the hands of the owner of the logo. No one wants that, so practice due diligence and make sure all your ducks are in a row legally before you start selling merchandise.

While you're securing permissions, you may also want to try to work out deals with the organization granting the rights. Perhaps you can be their official supplier for mom merchandise. Offer to set up online stores where purchases can be made. Maybe do a deal where they help you promote the stores and merchandise for a cut of the proceeds. Having the stamp of approval of the school, league, or organization may make potential customers feel more secure about buying, and it will certainly help get the site in front of your potential customer group.

Don't forget on-site vending as a sales option. Sports teams have tournaments and matches. Chess clubs and other school clubs may have on-site competitions. If you vend on site, you will need to either have the equipment and supplies to create on demand, or you'll need to have enough inventory made so you can offer a variety of options for those who want to buy. The advantage to this sort of selling is that you're in a place filled with potential customers. This is, however, another situation where you may have to pay a fee or get permission to sell.

Some events grant exclusivity rights, so that's something to ask about as well. As a last-ditch option, you could wear something you made to the event and hand out business cards to those who ask about it; if you are there as a parent of a participant, you might get away with it. However, some events — particularly those that grant exclusivity to on-site vendors — can be touchy about that sort of thing, so double check before going that route.

Another fertile place to sell your wares is on social media. Many sports or



(Image courtesy Jaime A. Carnes, Signs & Printing)



(Image courtesy Grit and Glitter Sports)

organizations have groups for moms of the children who participate. A simple search on your social media platform of choice may lead you to some ideal ground for selling.

As with any type of social media selling, there are a few things you need to be aware of. First, check the rules of whatever group or forum you're intending to use as a sales platform and make sure selling is allowed. There's no point in wasting time making posts if they're only going to be deleted and get you banned.

Second, make sure that you're doing more than just selling when you join an

online community. People buy from companies and people they know and trust, so focus on becoming a trusted community member first and getting sales second.

Last, but not least, when you're looking for markets for mom gear, don't forget the pet moms. The trend of calling pets fur babies or fur children means that women are interested in dog mom or cat mom gear. The latest trend seems to be embroidering the names of the pets on the garment as well. Approximately 70 percent of households in the United States own pets, so that's a lot of moms out there who may be looking for gear. **GP**

Dolphins Score!

Making multiple sponsors work on printed apparel and other challenges



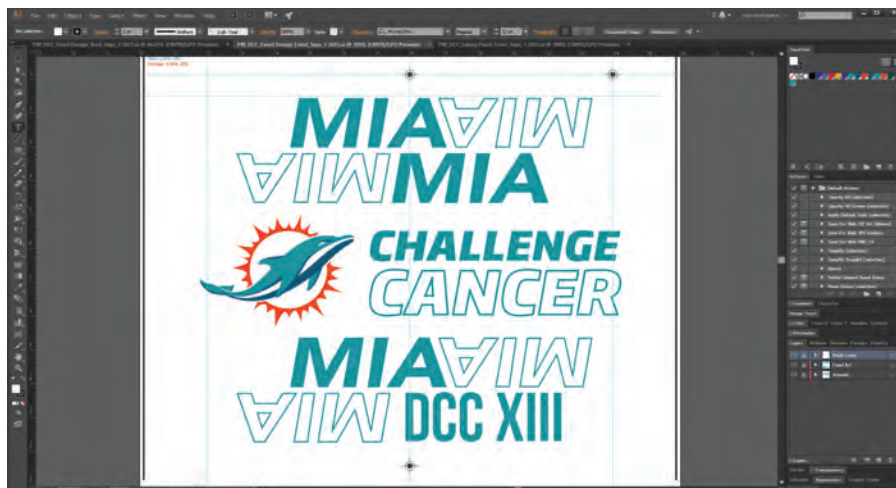
At 21 years old, Lon Winters was the production manager for Ocean Pacific and started his 30+ year career reclaiming screens. He's the president and founder of Colorado-based Graphic Elephants, an international consulting firm and apparel decoration studio specializing in screen printing technical advances, plant design, layout, troubleshooting, productivity, quality analysis, and complete apparel decorating solutions. Lon is also a presenter at GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (g-p-x.com).

The Miami Dolphins have a rich tradition of football success, having gone to five Super Bowls, winning two and being unbeaten during their '72 championship run. In a sport and world where nothing is ever perfect the Dolphins can refute that.

Along with the past accolades, trophies, and players and coaches in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the Dolphins have always been a leader in football and sport in philanthropy.



Final prints.



Art screen shots.

Thirteen years ago, the Dolphins created one of their most impactful initiatives, Dolphins Challenge Cancer (DCC).

Since 2010 this signature event has contributed more than \$65 million, 100 percent of which goes to cancer research at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami. The DCC stands as the largest fundraising event in the NFL and represents the most significant known philanthropic pledge in all professional sports.

Sponsor logos everywhere

The Miami Dolphins recently once again joined forces with the South Florida community for the 13th annual Dolphins Challenge Cancer. DCC XIII made history in both fundraising and

participation, raising more than \$10 million and uniting a record-breaking nearly 6,000 participants.

The event has grown because of leadership, partners and fans throughout the community. The Dolphins Challenge Cancer’s efforts spearheaded by the annual event is a demonstration of the “one team, one fight” mission as players, cancer survivors and community leaders come together to find solutions to this disease. Participants were given the opportunity to cycle, run, walk, or volunteer at the event. Thirteen years ago, no one could have predicted that this event would resonate so much within the community.

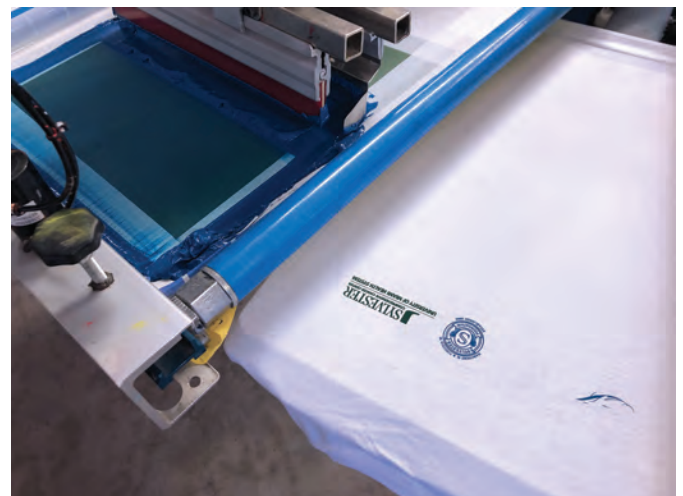
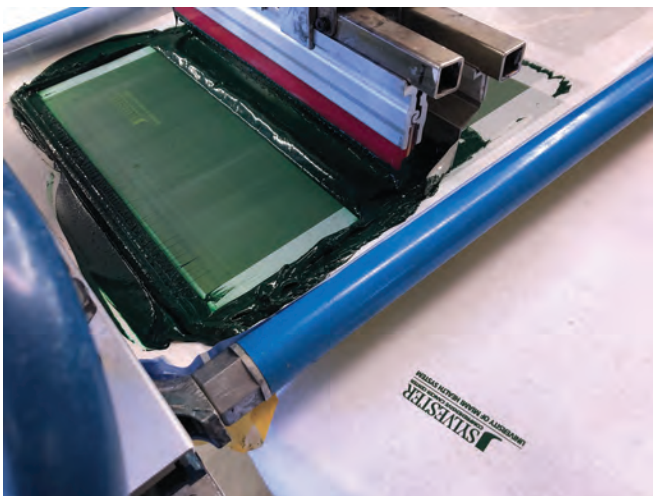
Some of us are weekend warriors. Others are serious athletes (we’re not so sure about a 100-mile ride). Primal Wear, a three-plus

decade client of ours, makes the clothing and accessories for this and many biking events, among other things, and are, in fact, a major sponsor for DCC XIII. We are lucky enough to make our contribution by providing the apparel-decorating services. Primal is an aggressive clothing line specializing in dye-sublimated biking apparel. We don’t do the dye-sub work. We do, however, handle the screen-printed and embroidered apparel.

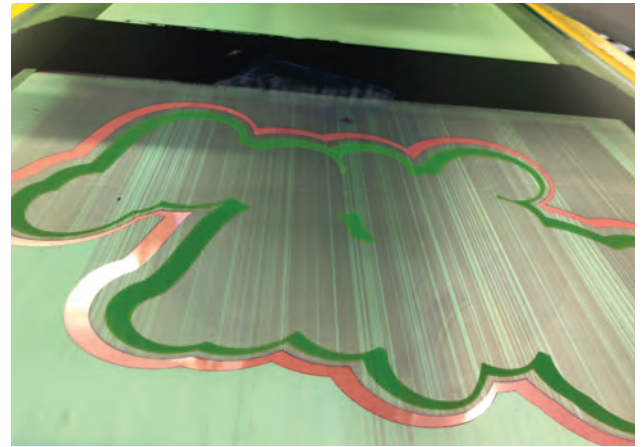
We began this project by downloading the original art files, and, as usual, we found some problems. Primal, which you may recognize from previous articles, has challenged us frequently, particularly with the sponsor art: a multitude of supporting sponsors with tiny logos filling up the back of the shirt.



Color matching.



Color build of the sponsors.



Ink buildup front.



Let's define our terms, shall we?

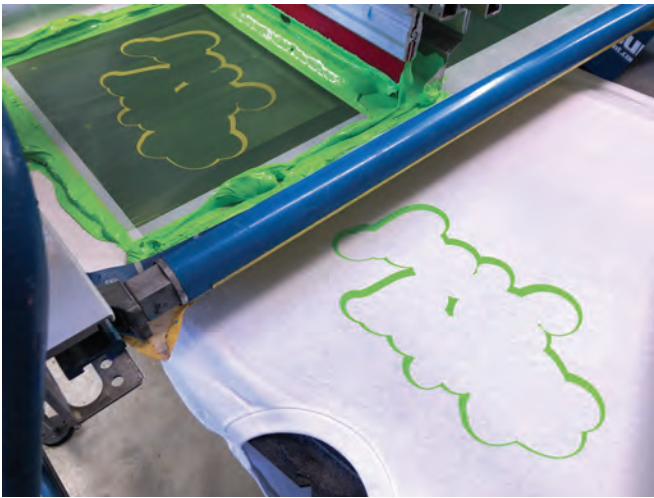
Sponsor, a noun, is defined as a person or organization that provides funds for a project or activity carried out by another. "The money for the ride came from sponsors." The verb: To provide funds for a project, activity or person carrying it out. "Jason is being sponsored by his church."

The dreaded sponsor back for any event is as challenging a project we get. While supportive of the cause, particularly DCC, we knew we might struggle with what always seems simple to the client. Re-creating the logos has its issues. While the files have improved considerably over the years, it's never easy.

The sponsor logos were collected and provided as a PDF to size. This is what we typically ask for from our customers. That's good, right? Not! After opening the file in Illustrator, it had multiple process colors with several linked files and low resolution jpegs. Ugh! Some logos were vector and some not so much. We would need to make them production friendly for sure.

We ran a trace on the less than perfect logos in need of vector conversion. To speed the process, we actually sourced some vector conversion from a trusted partner and cleaned up the logos that were simple enough to fix.

The colors were identified with spot colors rather than the process colors initially indicated, allowing individual output. To maintain clarity, we made adjustments by opening up very small negative spaces and increasing line weights in tiny positive areas, creating space between, say, a drop shadow and the main image. We also dropped some outlines, increased spacing, and blew up registered ® trademarks ™.



Living Proof shirts color build on the press and final shirts.

With all of these sponsors and the DCC original art along the top, the final image would nearly max out our stroke at 20+ inches. Most of that was on a single color. To speed up production we ran two different screens to split up the print stroke lengths. Clever, eh?

Back to the front

The fronts were much better and easy to set up for seps. Same colors as the back. This year we added a survivor shirt to the order as well. We placed the eps files individually into Illustrator onto our registration board or template. Because of the size of some of the logos, we output at a 55 lpi (lines per inch) at 22.5 on CTS (Computer to Screen).

The inks were matched to the called-out Miami Dolphins and University of Miami colors using a color matching system and scale. Print order was a bit creative for



Shirt fronts.

minimal build up and smearing, minimal wiping and max production. It would be 5,000 pieces with multiple locations.

Since the shirts were white and 100 percent cotton (that doesn't happen too often) screens were all on 230 tpi (thread per inch), stretched to 35 N/cm2 on retensionable frames.

With the preplanned strategic print order we managed a fairly quick setup. With minimal micro adjustment we were

ready to run. The squeegees were 65/95/65 triple ply dual durometer but with minimal pressure and still managed good ink saturation. We had the flood and squeegee speeds fairly rapid, again for speed.

This community has individuals who have dedicated portions of their life to help the Dolphins do their part in the eradication of cancer. Collectively, the DCC riders have pedaled over a million miles in the journey to beat cancer. **GP**

Embroidery & Apparel Decoration Business Owners:



Get Growing!

Are you tired of "winging it"?

Join **NNEP** now to
Find Customers,
Keep Customers, and
Make Money!

Struggling with Marketing? Let NNEP do it for you!

Try the **Joe Logo Marketing System** for 90 days for just \$150:

NNEP.com/JoeLogo22/



Join NNEP!
National Network of Embroidery Professionals

330-678-4887
NNEP.com

GLASS AND CRYSTAL:

PROFITABLE ADDITION

BY BARRY SLEE

Breaking down what it takes, what you can make, and the possibilities of adding decorated glass and crystal products to your offerings



Barry has spent over 30 years in the awards and recognition industry. As the founder of the Slee Corporation and its CrystalEdge brand, his innovative award-winning product designs have led the industry. Barry is an expert in glass and crystal design and manufacturing, and he is a regular contributor of articles and educational content to the industry.



(Image courtesy of Insta Crystal LLC)

Manufacturer of Gantry & Galvo Lasers,
 CNC Rotary Machines, Cutters, Accessories,
 Laserable & CNC Rotary Engraving Sheet
 Materials for the most efficient production
 Engraving & Traceability.



A question that many trophy and award shop owners have asked me during my 30 years in this industry is, "Should we add glass and crystal to our offerings?" This question creates logical follow-up questions: Why add glass and crystal products? What products should I add? How do I show it? How do I price it? How do I promote it? And, what resources do I need to do it? Spoiler alert: Answers below...

Why add glass & crystal products?

When I entered the glass and crystal award industry in 1992, very few traditional trophy and award shops offered them. The industry consisted mainly of crystal gift shops, large established glass and crystal engraving companies, and a small number of the larger trophy and award retailers. The industry also consisted of a considerable number of glass and crystal engraving hobbyists who worked out of their basements or garages.

In those days, the variety of blank glass and crystal products available for engraving was minimal. The designs were basic, and it was not until the mid to late 1990s that optic crystal products were introduced and by then, the number of glass trophy product designs had grown exponentially.

By the early 2000s, the volume of glass and crystal products on the market had started to take significant market share from traditional trophy and award products, like cups, trophies, and plaques. At this point, several of the major industry trophy suppliers and distributors had already taken note and were adding glass and crystal products to their own lines.

So why was this happening? First, glass and crystal products have a very high perceived value. Because they are heavier than most other trophy and award products, they are perceived to be more expensive than they really are, so profit margins can be very good.

Second is the *sparkle factor*. With edges, facets, and bevels that reflect light in all directions, they are eye-catching. Add to

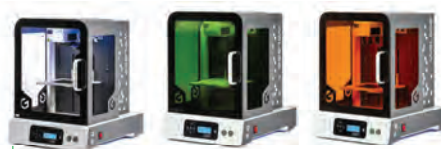
Gantry & Galvo Lasers



LS100



LS900

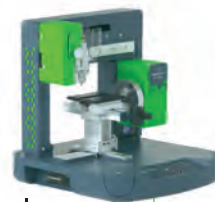


Welase Galvo Laser

CNC Rotary Engravers



ISx000 Range



M20 Jewel



IS400 Volume



M40



www.gravotech.us



(Image courtesy of Southern California Trophy Company and the JD Powers Company)



(Image courtesy of the Country Music Association)



(Images courtesy of CrystalEdge)

this a nice, deep abrasive etch and perhaps a touch of color fill, and you have a trophy or award that looks classy and expensive.

Two of the most famous examples of this, which have stood the test of time, are the JD Powers Award introduced by the Southern California Trophy Company in 1990, and the CMA (Country Music Award), originally designed by Frank Waggoner using walnut but changed to Italian hand-blown glass in 1983. These are two very good reasons why you should consider adding glass and crystal to your offerings.

What products should I add?

As with almost any product line, the 80/20 rule will apply. This means that 80% of your sales will most likely come from 20% of your products.

The cost of glass and crystal product blanks will range from a low of about \$5 to well over \$100. This will put your finished product within a \$20-\$300 recommended retail cost range. From my experience, the majority of your sales will come

from products in the \$25-\$125 retail cost range. This means you should select the bulk of your range of blank glass and crystal products that cost between \$5-\$45.

At a blank cost higher than \$45, your sales will taper off considerably, so only select a small range of these higher-cost products to show but limit the number of styles and sizes. The top shapes to select should include diamonds, peaks, circles, towers, bowls, vases, and paperweights.

How do I show it?

When it comes to displaying glass and crystal products there are a few important factors to consider. The first is to always display engraved or decorated products so that your customers can see what the product looks like finished.

Blank products do not show like a finished product does. Lighting plays an extremely important factor when displaying glass and crystal. An enclosed glass show cabinet with integral LED lighting is always an attention-getter and keeps products clean and dust-free.



(Image courtesy of CrystalEdge)



Open shelving will require constant cleaning as the products are more likely to be handled. Whichever method you use, glass and crystal displays (and sells) best when it is spotless.

How do I price it?

Pricing involves many factors, but I will try to simplify the process. The first is to know your actual blank product cost (meaning the cost landed at your door). For simplicity, let's assume our landed blank product cost is \$20.

Next, you need to estimate the cost for preparing artwork and engraving and any assembly and packaging needed (labor and materials). Let's assume the engraving and assembly cost is \$20. We now have a product cost (total cost of goods) of \$40.

For established businesses in similar industries, we would normally seek to achieve a 50-60% gross margin. This would equate to a selling price of \$80 to achieve a 50% margin or \$100 for a 60% margin. Your gross margin percentage is

Selling Price minus Actual Cost divided by Selling Price.

For example: Selling Price is (\$80) minus Actual Cost (\$40) divided by Selling Price (\$80) = 50% gross margin.

Now comes the hard part. What factors are known that will affect your profit margin? For example, does the finished product have direct competition? Is the product unique, and therefore has little or no competition? Is the quality of your product and engraving better than the competition? How much lead time is your customer giving you (is it a rush order)? Is the order a single award, or are multiple quantities involved?

These are only a few of the factors that can affect your profit margin. In general terms, only unique products with little or no competition can justify margins approaching or exceeding 60%. A 50% margin (double your actual cost) is a good target starting point.



Bowl in non-lead crystalline. (Image courtesy of CrystalEdge)



Optic crystal awards etched, color filled, and ready to ship. (Image courtesy of Insta Crystal LLC)

If multiple quantities are involved, it would be normal to apply some discount, which would reduce the margin, but you would typically see reduced labor costs that will offset this and help improve your margins. Also, if you have competition, you might need to reduce your margins to retain a client or win a new client.

Another simpler pricing method is to take the actual glass or crystal blank product cost (without artwork preparation, engraving, assembly, and packaging costs) and multiply it by four. This method will typically come very close to a 50% gross margin after all costs are covered.

How do I promote it?

As I have already mentioned, how you show it will have a huge bearing on sales. The quality and cleanliness of your showroom samples and the engraving quality are all extremely important. First impressions are a key promotional factor for glass and crystal.

One very important selling point is that glass and crystal products are manufactured using a raw material that is infinitely recyclable; it can literally be recycled over and over again. Glass is a product that uses only natural minerals to make it, namely silica, soda ash, and lime.

For eco-conscious customers, products that are recyclable can have a clear sales advantage. Optic crystal essentially uses the same minerals as glass, and for lead crystal, lead oxide is added. Lead crystal, however, is gradually being replaced with lead-free versions such as crystalline.

RADIAN
LASER SYSTEMS

THE FUTURE OF
LASER ENGRAVING

FAST & PRECISE 2D / 3D FEATURES
UV / CO2 / FIBER GALVO AND FLATBED SYSTEMS
SPECIALIZING IN PERFORMANCE ENHANCING ACCESSORIES

WWW.RADIANLASER.COM | SALES@RADIANLASER.COM

What resources do I need?

There are two options to consider: subcontracting or engraving in-house. Subcontracting does not entail the purchase of equipment, but engraving in-house obviously does. Glass and crystal products are most commonly engraved using abrasive etching (sandcarving) equipment. This process also requires equipment to develop artwork and produce photoresist masks.

A typical abrasive etching setup can run between \$6,000 to over \$12,000, depending on size and features. It also requires an air compressor unless your shop already has one that is large enough. Perhaps your shop already has a CO₂ laser or UV-cure direct color printer. These two processes can be used on certain glass and crystal products, but abrasive etching is essential for the majority. A full range of abrasive

etching equipment is available from IKONICS Imaging and Rayzist Photomask.

Many of the glass and crystal blank suppliers now have in-house engraving and decorating capabilities. This was not the case when I started in this industry. We designed, produced, and sold only glass and crystal blanks and did not compete with our engraving customers.

Fast forward 25 years, and most glass and crystal blank suppliers now also have a full range of decorating methods. For those who do not wish to invest in capital equipment initially, these one-stop-shop suppliers offer a good cost-effective alternative. It's also a great way to start out; then, you can consider the purchase of your own equipment when your sales have become well established. **GP**



(Image courtesy of CrystalEdge)



Engraving Glass and Crystal vs. Acrylic

Each is better suited to a different method of engraving

<https://gpro.link/crystal>

THE BEST FOR THE BEST



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

© 2016 CRYSTAL BY DESIGN CO., INC.



Crystal by Design

9955 Baldwin Place, El Monte, CA 91731

888-358-8298

info@crystalbydesign.com

www.crystalbydesign.com

PDS Equipment Shows High School Students the Printing Ropes

Students were given a glimpse into the UV printing world and competed in a design contest

COURTESY OF STEVE WEIST, PDS EQUIPMENT

PDS Equipment West, a Nevada-based demo and support center of PDS Equipment, recently hosted a PDS Career ENERGIZER Event in Las Vegas, Nevada. The event hosted 11th-12th grade graphic design students from Southeast Career Technical Academy (SECTA).

Industry professionals, including software designers, commercial print shops, digital print shops, commercial binderies, laser owners, equipment manufacturers, and PDS's team, helped to encourage and teach the students about the print industry and the many ways they can take advantage of the global printing industry. Several of the professionals also presented to the students, explaining how they got into the print industry and how important it is to keep learning graphic design.

The students also participated in a business card design contest, where they designed their own personal holographic-textured business cards for the chance to win a \$500 prize. The designs were printed and voted on in person as well as a Facebook live vote tally.

"This event was developed to fill a need in the local Las Vegas area for PDS Equipment and our Las Vegas customers in the area to meet with the local graphic design students for future employment," states CEO Steve Weist.

He continues, "As a business owner, I need employees that are passionate about the industry, and during this event, I was encouraged to find 15-20 students that had definite goals to make a career in the print industry. I hope these students got energized at the PDS Career Energizer Event!"

PDS Equipment plans to host similar events quarterly at its branch locations. Graphic design schools/classes are encouraged to attend. **GP**

Southeast Career Technical Academy students (Images courtesy PDS Equipment)



Financing Large Production Equipment

BY JULIA SCHROEDER

Are you ready to expand your graphic production capabilities?



(Image courtesy of swissQPrint)



(Image courtesy of Durst)



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

Whether you consider yourself a beginner with “bad” credit or already run a well-established graphics business, you will likely reach a point where financing new equipment comes into the equation. From your first contact with a lender to the final payment, the process of financing new equipment may seem daunting.

You may wonder, is your shop ready to take on an expansion? With the proper preparation and understanding what to be aware of, financing can help get your business up and expanding.

First things first

For some shop owners, a new piece of equipment can mean offering a new service that is in demand, which will boost sales, says Mike McCaffrey, MMP Capital. For others, it can mean an upgrade in technology to increase efficiency.

Before a shop should invest in new or additional equipment, they need to consider the profitability, McCaffrey explains. Like any business decision, what will help increase revenue?

John Sullivant, Adia, says to calculate the Return on Investment (ROI). This helps determine if you can afford the costs of the investment. “What possibility of new customers could it bring to the table and what expansions does it offer current customers?” says Sullivant. He recommends figuring out the appreciation of the equipment as well.

One of the most important things to consider is how long it will take to start realizing positive cash flow after making the investment, adds Greg Bourdon, First Citizens Bank Equipment Finance (formerly CIT). “If the purchase is speculative in nature, then it’s important to consider



Best Practices for the Financing Process

Ensure that all your business paperwork is in order. Double check that your Secretary of State filing is active, and your annual reports have been filed. All your financial statements, including your current balance sheet and income statements, should be prepared and available as well. You may not be asked to provide them, but it will avoid any delays and it's a good reminder to check off all those housekeeping items.

— **Greg Bourdon,**
First Citizens Bank
Equipment Finance
(formerly CIT)

what happens if that additional work or contracts that you're banking on do not come in," Bourdon says. "Do you have enough free cash flow from your existing operations to cover the new payment while you look for other work to make use of the equipment?"

Other important questions to ask:

- What are the costs and needs associated with the equipment?
- Will you need additional staff?
- Will you need more warehouse space for raw materials or finished goods?

Thinking through all possible best- and worst-case scenarios and additional needs/costs that come with investing in large graphic equipment will help ensure that a shop is in the right place to take on an expansion, Bourdon says.

"If you think you can do this process for 14-18 hours a day and be comfortably busy, but you're only able to do it 8 hours a day because of your current production restrictions, by all means add more or better equipment," Sullivant adds.

An extra tip from Sullivant: *Whenever you're adding equipment, always consult with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA).*

Steps to secure funding

The process to secure funding can vary. As Sullivant explains, there are many variables within the process, depending on who the client is. "As a lender, we ask questions to find out what's the best possible scenario for this person's approval," he says.

According to Bourdon, the process to secure funding typically follows these steps:

1.) During your first contact with a lender, they should ask you about the equipment you are looking to buy, including how much it costs and what vendor is providing it.

2.) The lender will submit your application for approval. Depending on the dollar amount requested, you may need to supply additional information beyond the application, such as bank statements, tax returns, or financial statements.

3.) If your application is approved, you will be notified, and loan terms will be

provided. The lender should provide you with a handful of different options to find something that best fits your budget.

4.) You will sign your paperwork, which is often done electronically.

5.) The lender should then coordinate payment of the equipment invoice with your vendor. Your lender will get the payment instructions and request any final invoices for your purchase.

6.) Your vendor will ship and deliver the equipment once the lender has provided a purchase order and confirmation that all the documents needed are complete.

7.) The lender pays the vendor for your final invoice, which you agreed to for the purchase.

8.) Your regular payments begin, based on whatever terms you agreed upon. In most cases, they will be monthly payments.

9.) You continue to make regular payments throughout the term of your loan.

10.) You can expect to hear from your lender occasionally as they check in on your business needs for more equipment. Once you already have done business with that lender it should be quite easy for them to support you on any future business needs.

Ultimately, the funding process is based on the comfort level and eagerness of the customer. "Customers that know what they want and are 100% ready, can have financing in one day," McCaffrey states. Those that need more help can work with their lender every step of the way.

Lender versus bank loan

What's the difference between obtaining a loan with a regular bank or with a lender?

An experienced equipment finance lender can help you navigate the financing process specific to your business needs, Bourdon says. They also can check your vendors to ensure you're working with the right people, and because they have industry-specific knowledge and expertise, they can provide you with a higher chance of approval and competitive terms.

Additionally, "we understand your business model, what the equipment does,

EXPERT TIP:

The Time Value of Money

Less than 3% of people do early payoffs. With commercial financing, you don't ever pay things off early — they're tax write-offs. Your money is worth more in your pocket today than it is someone else's. Take your money and put it to work for you. Put your cash back into your business, or into stock. Debt is credit.

— John Sullivan, Adia

how it is going to generate revenue and positively impact your business,” says McCaffrey. “For example, we know when a piece of equipment will cut down on ink cost or labor cost and can write that as a reduced operating expense into your application.” Whereas local banks may not have specific industry experience to understand the financing implications. McCaffrey explains that could lead to a slower process and the banks requiring more financial information.

A local bank also may not be accustomed to working with the vendor to gather invoices, coordinate shipments, and issue purchase orders to your suppliers. Bourdon comments, “if you were to walk into your local bank to purchase a new flatbed or roll-to-roll printer, there's a good chance it will be the first time they have financed one.”

Sullivant agrees that while working with an industry-specific lender is easy and saves time, he still recommends looking at a regular bank and comparing with the lender to find the best option for your business.

Terms and conditions

With the terms and conditions, you should know whether your loan rate is fixed or adjustable, Bourdon says. “In most cases today, the rate will be fixed for the entirety of the term on a lease or an equipment finance loan,” Bourdon explains. “However, that may not be the case if you are using a line of credit or another instrument to pay for your hardware. Variable rates make it more difficult to budget, so knowing this information

upfront can help you to better plan.”

Sullivant highlights the importance of knowing your front-end costs. “How can you pay off? Can you pay off early?” asks Sullivant. “What you could also ask for is an amortization schedule, so you know from the beginning where you'll stand after month 36, for example.”

McCaffrey advises customers to make sure they understand the contract. “Do not be afraid to ask questions, as some lenders are not clear with things like early buyout options and balloon payments,” he says. Pay attention to the details and understand what you're signing.

A side note about Personal Guarantee: *If you are going to personally guarantee your business financing, you should ask the lender what that means. In most cases, a lender may check your credit, and ask you to guarantee the loan, but they may or may not report anything to personal credit. You should look for a business lender that reports to your business credit, even if you do offer a personal guarantee. Gregory Bourdon, First Citizens Bank Equipment Finance (formerly CIT)*

Avoiding pitfalls

There are some leasing people out there who don't have good ethics or morals, Sullivant points out. “If you're not comfortable with a deal, don't avoid your gut feeling.”

Bourdon says you should avoid overbuying or underbuying for your current needs. The purchase should be considered an investment in your business that will be utilized for a period of time, for a specific use case, he explains. That time period should match as closely as possible to the term of your financing.

“If you only expect a piece of equipment to last you three years based on your frequency of use then don't finance for longer than that, even if the lower monthly payment looks attractive,” Bourdon says. “Having to make payments on equipment that is beyond its useful life isn't a great position to be in.”

When all is said and done, McCaffrey believes that financing shouldn't drive the purchase; the need and potential benefit of the equipment should drive the purchase. **GP**

Advice for Financing for Low Credit Scores and First-time Buyers

When financing, everyone is shopping for the best deal. In the financing world, the best deal is reserved for the lowest risk customers, Mike McCaffrey, MMP, explains. There is often a mistaken belief that new businesses, or those with below average credit, will be unable to secure funding. McCaffrey points out there is no need to wait until your business is “well-established.”

First-time buyers or those with low credit scores do have a couple options, according to Greg Bourdon, First Citizens Bank Equipment Finance (formerly CIT). Startup financing is typically available but has higher rates. Bourdon says that in most cases, this should still work for a buyer's monthly payment budget. If the equipment can pay for itself based on the monthly payment, it could be a sound investment regardless of the rate.

Bourdon explains another option is to focus on terms. Select either the shortest term you are comfortable with or the lowest payment — if the term doesn't exceed the useful life of the equipment. The term should provide you with a payment that you are confident you can make on time, every time, for the life of the loan, Bourdon includes.

Even with these options, it's important for buyers to take the necessary steps to get their credit in order. Pay off or bring current anything that is past due, keep credit card ratios in check and keep an eye on personal credit. There are lots of free credit reporting tools available on the market. Knowing your credit makeup before you apply will provide you with the best chances to state your case and get the best deal for you and your business, Bourdon concludes.

From Stasis to ACTION

Taking the first step toward success with these action tips



Aaron Montgomery is certified by New York Times best-selling author Jack Canfield as a Success Principles Trainer and is the co-founder of OurSuccessGroup.com. Aaron has over 25 years of experience with personalized products and small business development and is the co-creator of the 5 Keys of Business Success. You can also find Aaron co-hosting the decorator's industry podcast 2 Regular Guys (2RegularGuys.com). Also, check him out on his podcast channel called Small Business Saturdays (SmallBusinessSaturdaysPodcast.com).

Zig Ziglar famously said, “You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.” In the 40-plus years I have been around small businesses, from the time I was around my dad’s accounting firm as a kid up until now, when I get to support small business owners through Our Success Group, ACTION or lack thereof has always been the common thread in success or failure. And I put ACTION in all caps on purpose, because I am referring to real action — not just thinking or consuming but doing things outside of your comfort zone.

The 85% of small businesses who don’t reach their idea of success think that osmosis, luck, or consuming information is going to get them there. But those thoughts are just building excuses to stay in their comfort zone. Then they do busy work and call it action, but that is stasis.

According to Merriam-Webster, stasis is defined as “a state or period of stability during which little or no evolutionary change in a lineage occurs.” Stasis is not a bad thing. Being calm and stable and spending some time there is valuable. It’s a time when we can better look for feedback, measure, and evaluate, with no evolutionary change.

But growth requires evolutionary change and too much stasis holds us back from that growth. Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome is the definition of insanity. Building momentum and utilizing the momentum from the actions you have taken is a key to success. So how can you get into action?

An old Chinese proverb attributed to Lao Tzu says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” That first step you take into action is always the most challenging, though, because you have to put the excuses behind you and be willing to take 100% responsibility for your own success. It’s hard to move beyond your comfort zone, especially when you’re stepping





into unknown territory and aren't 100% certain of what lies ahead.

As a business owner or a success-minded person, it's only through taking intentional action that you will ever be able to grow. The results of taking action are always worth it and, as I will share shortly, we must embrace the results that some might consider a failure.

The other thing I have learned is that momentum is key. At first, it is going to seem like a herculean effort is required to take those first steps; but, with the following nine tips, you can build up momentum.

It will soon feel like a ball rolling downhill nearly on its own. As long as you keep taking daily intentional action, that momentum will continue to carry you until it seems almost effortless. The challenges that seemed so far out of your comfort zone will soon look like specks of dust in your rearview mirror as you enjoy your expanded comfort zone and the fruits of your actions.

Here are some tips you can utilize to get out of your comfort zone and into action:

1 Clarify your reason — Your reason for taking action is what will keep you going when things get tough. Make sure you have a clear reason for why you want to achieve your goal. It is also important to really go back to the start and clarify why you are doing this to begin with. Are you fulfilling someone else's idea of success, or is this really what you are meant to do?

2 Become a goal-getter — Set a goal that aligns with your purpose. One of the biggest reasons people fail to take action is that they don't have a clear idea of what they want to achieve. Setting a

goal that aligns with your purpose can help you focus your efforts and give you a sense of direction.

3 Take intentional action — Yes, taking those first steps might seem scary. The key here is to take action intentionally. Don't just do something because you feel like you have to. What is the big picture telling you? Think about the action you're taking, and make sure it's aligned with your goals.

4 Chunk it down — And I mean *really chunk it down*. Break your goal down into smaller, more manageable pieces. This will make it easier for you to take action and stay motivated. You don't have to know all the actions to achieve a goal, just the very first one.

5 Trust your instincts — Sometimes, taking the first step requires a leap of faith. You may not have all the answers or know what lies ahead, but you can trust your instincts and have faith that things will work out in the end. Don't let fear or doubt hold you back. F.E.A.R. is just an acronym for Fantasized Experience Appearing Real.

6 Go slow and steady — Momentum is a key to success, and taking any action each day is better than taking no action at all. Slow and steady progress is still progress, and it's important to keep the ball rolling even if it's moving at a snail's pace. Leave excuses, complaining, and commiserating to others. Trust me, there are plenty of people to carry that torch for you — just look around. You should focus on taking intentional action every day.

7 Embrace failure — Don't be afraid to fail. Failure is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of trying. As the

saying goes, "F.A.I.L. can also stand for First Attempt in Learning." Learn from your mistakes and keep pushing forward. You'll gain confidence and resilience with each obstacle you overcome.

8 Celebrate — Don't forget to celebrate your victories, no matter how small they may be. Every step toward your goal deserves recognition and praise. Celebrating your progress not only boosts your morale but also reinforces the habit of taking action.

9 Be accountable — Accountability is crucial to staying on track and achieving your goals. Find someone to hold you accountable, whether it's a friend, family member, or peer. Or consider joining a Mastermind group. Of all the people I get to work with at Our Success Group, none of them achieve success as fast as those in our Mastermind program: Masters of Success. You could also consider hiring a mentor or coach to guide you through the process one on one. Having someone to answer to can provide the extra motivation and support you need to keep taking action.

I invite you to take stock of your actions. Really look at them without judgment and determine which actions are getting you closer to your goals and which actions are just keeping you in stasis. What new intentional actions will you start taking? Do you have a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, and the ability to push through fear and doubt? With each step you take, you'll build momentum, gain confidence, and inch closer towards your goals. So, what's the first action you're going to take today? **GP**

E-COMMERCE:

The Company Store Option

BY ERICH CAMPBELL

Company stores are a profitable e-commerce option with a lot of potential for your business



In previous days, custom decoration was all about direct contact and order forms like these. Though the interaction is still valuable, this kind of hands-on process isn't always the best method, nor does it make sense necessarily to address each customer by replicating the custom-order process every time they need apparel.



Paper order forms for team sports will reduce difficulty for purchasers, but not as much as moving the process online. This specificity and context, however, is a good analogy for the company store style of an e-commerce site.

Erich has more than 18 years of experience as an award-winning digitizer, e-commerce manager, and industry educator. He empowers decorators to do their best work and achieve greater success. A current educator and long-time columnist, Erich takes every opportunity to provide value to the industry.



Selling online is no longer revolutionary. E-commerce has become just part of doing business; one of the many channels by which we can offer products and provide experiences that entice our customers.

That said, for creators of custom, decorated goods, we often find ourselves tasked with more complicated implementations than those simply listing finished goods. Even so, the measurable and perceived value we can create through properly leveraging online stores is considerable, particularly for clients for whom an online store offers utility that conventional ordering just can't match.

By defining clients for whom e-commerce is the best channel and serving their needs in ways unique to selling online, we can improve our standing, create loyalty, and increase sales all while making our own management of customers and products more manageable.



Personalized apparel can require a host of individual names and titles. Who better to spell and submit them than the wearer?

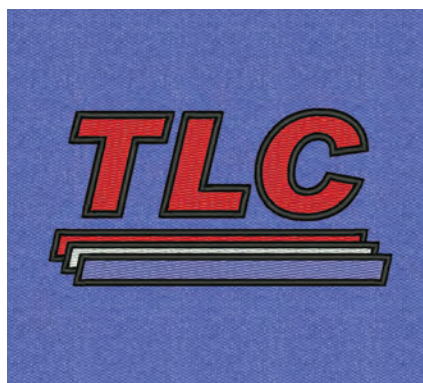
Creating context: company stores

Though it can be tempting to think of selling online as replicating your brick-and-mortar presence in an online format, there's an additional benefit to the digital marketplace you shouldn't overlook. Your shop can be the fulfillment engine behind any site or number of sites online, each with the ability to address the specific needs and culture of a class of customers or of a single customer when the opportunity warrants it.

Though the custom-shop online decoration model is viable, the most profitable and valuable stores I've created were those made specifically for single companies and teams. Company stores can be branded to match or appeal to the corporate culture of a company or group, with curated offerings and preconfigured mockups and product selections that require little to no work on the part of the end customer, providing a retail-like experience that removes customer friction and justifies a more retail-like pricing scheme. With the right customer, the value you can provide will create a long-lasting and lucrative relationship.

Customer profiles: potential company store clients

The ideal company store client is one for whom an online option offers particular benefits and whose consistency and order volume can justify the work you'll need to take on to get them up to speed. Some of the best clients I've served have the

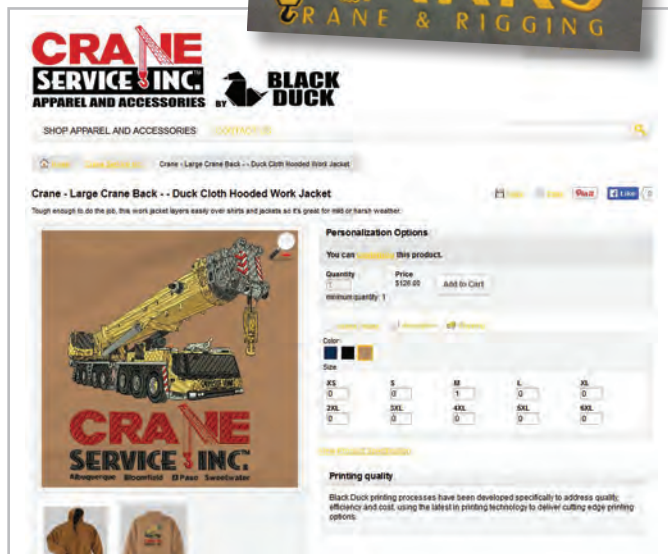


In environments where apparel is frequently replaced, waiting for bulk orders isn't always practical. Direct ordering may alleviate the need for building up to those order minimums, even when it necessitates higher pricing.



Though this style-guide mockup was an internal shop guide meant to educate customers, it's this kind of color, style, and art specificity that you can utilize in serving corporate clients or that you can help establish for clients that don't yet have their own guidelines. Establishing this as the backbone of your store offerings makes every product you provide stay on-brand and official.

Multi-location regional companies or those with more than one brand under their corporate umbrella can benefit from a store with preloaded decorations easily selected by employees.



following in common: strong corporate style, multiple regional, national, or international locations, and a more-than-average amount of employee or garment turnover.

Defining the ideal client is somewhat like using design thinking in reverse. Whereas we usually look to solve a problem and create a solution based on the pain points of the client, we instead work from the strengths of the company store and consider for whom its abilities are likely to solve a problem.

In looking at these ideal clients, it's easy to see how the tools and services offered by e-commerce fulfillment would make the ordering process easier. From medical clients with multiple hospitals and garments that frequently need replacement, to construction companies with similar destructive job sites and consistent new employees, to the world of real estate where agents may move from company to company, but always require personalized logowear, the corporate case for these stores is easy to make.

Moreover, on a smaller scale and with less investment, team sports, schools, and clubs can all fit into a similar space where multiple members come and go all needing on-brand products with a minimum of fuss in the ordering process.

Validating e-commerce value

We have to ask ourselves a difficult question when we look at our e-commerce offerings: "What is it that makes ordering from our store valuable to the client?" Better yet, "What about not only working with us but specifically ordering online makes it unquestionably their best option?"

In the case of curated company stores, particularly for clients with distributed workforces, teams, or audiences that frequently need products, there are a number of reasons that make ordering online and direct fulfillment so compelling.

Style control

In working with a company to establish its company store, you will be able to verify the correct usage of logotypes, fonts, and colors to create a consistent look as well as match your product with the needs of the end users.

Moreover, if your client has specific requirements like color coding or specific taglines, decorations, or other variations for individual departments or locations, you'll be able to set up your site to make the selections clear and simple for those purchasing the product.

Setting up your site and production allows you to verify art and have it on file and ready to use for future orders, making you the simplest choice for anyone attached to your client's company that needs what you offer.

Order management

Anyone tasked with ordering decorated products for a company or team knows the pain of managing the mountain of information and assets required to get from the initial concept to getting the right goods in the hands of the individual end users.

From the literal assets one must collect if pooling money for a



mass purchase, to the information required for everything from personalization to addresses for shipped goods, the handling of custom orders is a non-trivial task that most purchasers from companies or teams take on in addition to their usual role.

Online ordering, especially paired with direct fulfillment, removes most of these headaches, making it the end-users' task to enter correctly spelled names and information as well as allowing for individual purchase and payment. Though the prices are undoubtedly higher than wholesale-styled bulk orders, the value of this convenience is hard to overestimate.

Continuous availability

In the case that your store can offer individual decoration and/or the on-demand production your store can eliminate the need for time-constricted bulk purchases and make what would have otherwise been a painful process of filling in for missed deadlines or sudden need into a simple and predictable ordering and production process. Turning what was once an event into a continuously available store means that clients who find themselves reliably needing additional products or taking on additional employees/members needn't either pre-purchase decorated goods or rush through an order to meet minimums.

Whether they have the kind of environments that cause their products to need frequent replacement or the kind of employee churn that sees the frequent need for new decorated goods, the company store's availability makes the process of purchasing as simple as one would expect from any online order.

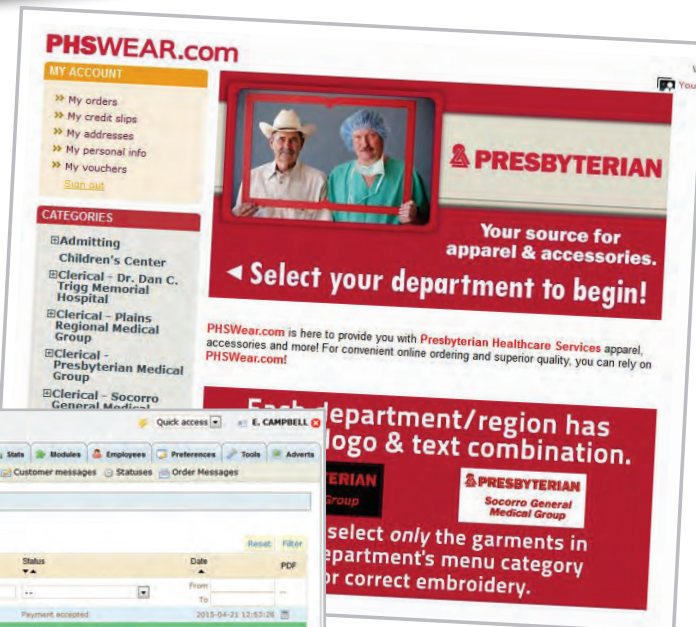
Creating a curated collection of garments with carefully-vetted decorations and providing them through an easy-to-use interface makes you more than the average custom decorator. It makes you a trusted source; someone who has the right product and knows what's important to the customer. Moreover, it makes your ordering process the path of least resistance.

Consistency, simplicity, and context make a company store a vital trust-building tool as well as a labor-saver for both your customer and your shop. They get easy access and ordering, and you get the ability to demand higher prices while creating a consistent process wherein well-formatted orders whiz through your established production process with the right information intact.

Find the right customers, match them with the decoration method that makes this on-demand process possible, and you'll have a combination that creates value for everyone. **GP**



In the case that your client has a particular color scheme, decoration, or text for a department or location, the ability to provide direction and isolate choices in an online store can make ordering easier for the end user and provide valuable branding/style control for the company in one stroke.



ID	New	Customer	Total	Payment	Status	Date	PDF
4233			\$8.00	Free order	Payment accioned	2015-04-21 10:53:28	
4231			\$8.00	Free order	Payment accioned	2015-04-17 22:18:12	
4229			\$8.00	Free order	Payment accioned	2015-04-17 14:14:18	
4234			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-15 13:03:53	
4227			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-15 15:35:14	
4226			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-15 14:28:30	
4225			\$25.58	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-15 09:43:42	
4224			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-13 14:40:51	
4223			\$32.18	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-12 18:31:14	
4222			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-11 07:26:08	
4221			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-10 07:15:51	
4220			\$2.14	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-09 10:03:14	
4219			\$14.98	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-08 17:25:01	
4218			\$8.54	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-08 12:04:44	
4217			\$16.70	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-08 11:52:09	
4216			\$51.38	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-08 11:34:25	
4215			\$37.45	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-04-08 08:20:05	
4214			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-04-01	
4213			\$2.14	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-03-31	
4212			\$8.00	Free order	Preparation in progress	2015-03-26 16:33:13	
4211			\$13.77	Credit Card	Preparation in progress	2015-03-26 13:00:07	

When $2+2=10$

BY PAUL INGLE

How to leverage results with your talent pool



Paul Ingle started selling signs in 1985 and has worked with regional, national, and international accounts with custom, architectural and production manufacturing firms. He has held various positions in sales, sales management,

and marketing since 1973. From 2006 to 2017, he and his wife Nita owned Design Center Signs in Tyler, Texas (A Comet Signs Company). Comet Signs is now part of Stratus, a leading facilities and branding implementation firm. 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.

I'll be the first to admit that when God was considering what innate abilities he was going to arrange in my DNA or lay bare in my future environment, math was low on the list. While mathematics may be a cultural acquisition, many scientific studies suggest some of us are born with at least some math skills *hardwired* into our brains. I like to say that my left brain is stunted and my right brain is on steroids. But that is not quite right either.

The left brain is called the digital brain; it's ideal for reading, writing, and doing computations. So, for me, two out of three are good. Research shows the left brain helps with logic, linear thinking, facts, thinking in words, sequencing, and math. There's that math again.

The right brain is more visual and intuitive, and it's often thought of as the analog brain. It is more creative and less organized than its twin. If you are right-brained, you have lots of imagination and intuition, and you can more easily enjoy the arts, feel rhythm, sense non-verbal cues, visualize, and even daydream.

The last one got me a lot of low grades in citizenship class. But my right brain was at the helm to help me be a leader, run a company, read a prospect, assist with a design or vision, and close on millions of dollars-worth of sales during my career.

Thus, the two sides of our brain are different. Does that mean we have a dominant brain like we favor our right or left hand?

Magnetic resonance imaging of volunteers has shown no proof that this theory is correct. The networks on one side are

not generally stronger than the networks on the other side. Both sides function differently, but they work together and complement each other. There is synergy using both sides of your brain. $2+2$ can equal 10. Or sometimes five, or better yet, 32, like with Albert Einstein.

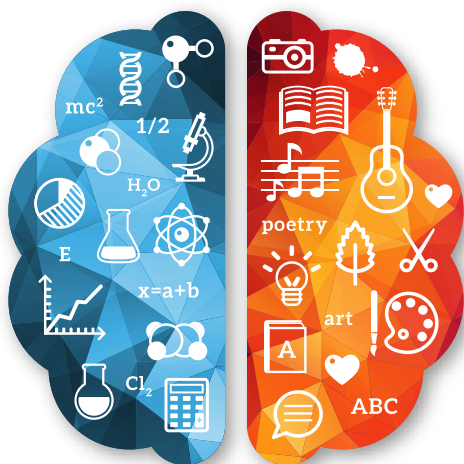
As the son of a coach, I often visualize in the form of sports. Whether it is for fostering teamwork, practicing for improvement, being or teaching others to be competitive, having perseverance, or going for a winning sale, I translate the sign and graphics industry into sports categories automatically.

The deep end of the talent pool

Whether you are building a world class sports team or your local sign shop of five, your talent pool is one of the primary foundations for success.

What exactly is a talent pool? It is a database that holds the profiles of all the people that are interested in your organization. It can be made up of people that have not applied yet, but they are following the company in the meantime (this is why social media is so important). Or it is those who applied in the past but didn't get a job. They might not have had the right expertise, or it was not ideal timing, but they did match your company culture. And it's the people already employed on your team.

A talent pool can be a safety net where you can search through qualified candidates quickly so you do not have to launch a long or expensive recruiting process. So, you are a coach and a scout.



It can also help your brand as you share what you are doing in the workplace with your talent pool. It can get them excited about your company and it might even get them to lead others to be in your talent pool.

Sometimes your best solutions are your current employees. You already know these people, what they are capable of, and if they fit in your culture. Make sure you help these people see a career path even if your company is small now. Employees want to be valued and appreciated and know they have a future.

How do you leverage results with your internal talent pool? When I think of a talent pool, an easy metaphor has always been water sports.

In popular watersports, there are swimmers, divers, rowers, sailors, surfers, rafters, water skiers, and many other kinds of athletes. Each one of these participants has some of all of the others' basic abilities (for example, they know how to tread water), yet each has their own specialized and individual talents and skill sets.

As their coach, you have to determine whether you face a shallow talent pool or a deep one. You must look at your talent pool constantly. Regularly browse through it; that will help you be prepared when you've got a position opening up by making it a habit to think of your *pool* first.

Here is a nugget: don't ever forget about former employees. Regardless of why they left (legal reasons notwithstanding), they may now be the best candidate to fill a position. Do not let your ego get in the way of success. If you do, you might win the first turn but lose the race. After all, your goal is to make the best decisions that positively impact the day you sell your business.

Research shows that professionals who are encouraged to use their unique strengths are *six times* more likely to perform better in the workplace. Yet many managers believe their role is to delegate tasks rather than motivate their team members to leverage and develop their strengths.

On that note, what are the core fundamentals for coaching your internal talent pool?

Pool fundamentals

Assess your existing talent. Identify the key strengths and competencies of each employee. Use personality profiles and testing. Retest your employees over time; things can change. In this era of social media, most of your employees have accessible personal and professional profiles out there to review.

Ask questions, listen, observe, and be direct with employees during performance reviews. Your goal is to develop self-aware employees who know what they are good at and what they need to work on to be better. Look for patterns and make notes on each employee. Competition is a great motivator for showcasing strengths and weaknesses. And it can be fun.

Identify what energizes an employee. What are their interests and passions? What did they do when they were young? What do they do for fun when they are not at work? Connect with your employees and be genuinely interested in their lives!

Define how each employee's strengths add value. What if you *supercharged* those attributes? Define action steps that help then amplify their strengths. Outline and provide the support needed to ensure success. If you want valuable outcomes at work, give your employees a reason to put their strengths on steroids. It is easier to build on a strength than work tirelessly on a weakness.

Fixation on a weakness is never helpful. It is a recipe for burnout. If it does not get in the way of success, let it go. But do not neglect a process if a weakness is inhibiting or slowing progress. That

The advertisement features a large black and white image of a precision cutting machine in the foreground. In the background, a fashion boutique is visible with mannequins wearing coats and a rack of clothes. The text 'PRECISION CUTTING SOLUTIONS' is at the top, and 'FASHION DESIGN' is written vertically on the right side. The GraphTEC logo and website 'graphtecamerica.com' are at the bottom.

Synergy is a constant process, and it must be managed. Your team is the crew of a ship on a journey that you embark upon together, and everyone must row and work to reach your destination.

would be a disservice to your employee. But use caution when reviewing weaknesses. Reframe them as developmental opportunities and create a plan. Give the employee needed resources and support for growth. Be a mentor and motivate accordingly.

So how do we get $2+2=10$ or 32 ? What causes synergy? Synergy can arise when two persons with different complementary skills cooperate. It creates a combined effect that is greater than the sum of its separate parts. Synergy builds trust through collaboration and co-creation. Trust can lay the groundwork for innovation.

Leverage your employees as individuals and as a team. Put a diver with a swimmer. Pair a rower with a surfer. Use their complementing strengths to make them unstoppable. Synergy creates better results and effects; it can generate better solutions to problems, and it helps organizations to achieve their mission and vision.

So how do you promote synergy in your business? Creating a company vision, mission statement, and list of core values and targets is a great way to start. Begin with the end in mind. Your employees need a sense of purpose as to why they come to work every day, whether it's at a shop or their home office at the dining table.

Steps toward synergy

Putting the right people in clear and responsible roles minimizes the risk of overlap or work gaps. Goals create challenges. Trying and stressful situations often forge a team, and when they emerge, they come out closer and with stronger relationships. Whether you do great or not so well, always review what everyone did right and wrong and improve for the future.

Good team synergy takes leaders and followers. They must co-exist. When less people try to lead and more become good followers (willing to be led and listen and cooperate with others), the tasks at hand can be completed much more efficiently and effectively.

When all employees on the teamwork with trust, compassion, and respect, each

person will give their best. Synergy comes when everybody pulls their own weight. When you trust others for support and forget about your own fears, the team can gain momentum and achieve success.

Synergy is a constant process, and it must be managed. Your team is the crew of a ship on a journey that you embark upon together, and everyone must row and work to reach your destination. But it is not a destination that you arrive at and just halt. It is a process of teamwork. Managing and resolving relationship conflicts is not like fixing a broken skiff. It requires practice, experience, time, patience, and commitment. Being a coach is important, but you must also help create order where these great relationships are the key ingredient in creating harmony.

With the current volatility and instability in the marketplace, how can your company expand their talent pool right now?

Improve your recruitment and application process. Reduce the application process to five minutes or less. 60% of Gen Z applicants (who will soon make up 30% of the workforce) will not spend more than 15 minutes filling out an application.

Be flexible with terms of employment. Allow remote or hybrid work, offer flexible hours, or experiment with job-sharing, ride sharing, etc. What worked for

you — or for you dad — won't necessarily work in today's world!

Offer competitive benefits and pay. Get creative. If you want to grow your talent pool, you must offer great compensation packages. It will help you attract and retain talent. And it's not just about salary, either. Work from home stipends, equity in the company, longer or unlimited vacation time, and other perks are what new job seekers are looking for from a prospective employer. Make these benefits clear on your social media, website, company handbook, job application, etc.

Encourage referrals. Turn your existing employees into recruiters by giving them incentives for helping to fill open positions. Most companies say that referrals are their top source for new hires.

Offer professional development opportunities. Allow employees to seek out their own education with online providers, or offer workshops, training, and certifications. This will expand employees' skills and make your organization attractive to top talent.

Showcase your company culture. You want your customers to be brand advocates, but you also want your employees to be brand advocates. What your employees say about your company on social media can be your best endorsement opportunity (or your worst nightmare). You want your talent pool to know that your shop is a great place to work.

Partner with educational institutions. Team up with colleges, universities, and trade schools. Provide internships, co-op programs, and other ways students can learn about our narrow vertical market sector. In return, your firm will be top-of-mind for new talent as students graduate or tell their friends and family.

Utilize social media. Almost five billion people use social media in the world today. You must use social media to build demand for your organization, for your talent pool, and for your prospective customers. Share content often. It can set you apart from your competitors.

Here is to your talent pools and new synergy; may they all give you a winning calculation. **GP**

ADVERTISER INDEX

The Advertiser Index is intended solely as a convenience for our readers and is not a written or implied part of any advertising commitment. As such, GRAPHICS PRO assumes no liabilities for unintentional errors or omissions.

ADVERTISER	PAGE	URL
ADA Central Signs	94	www.adacentral.com
Alpina Mfg LLC	94	www.fastchangeframes.com
Alternative Apparel	IFC	www.brandwearunited.com/alternative
AWT World Trade Inc	95	www.awt-gpi.com
B2Sign Inc	94	www.b2sign.com
Big Sky Woodcrafters	77	www.bigskywoodcrafters.com
Crystal By Design Co Inc	79	www.crystalbydesign.com
Delta Apparel	57	www.deltaapparel.com
Epilog Laser	BC	www.epiloglaser.com
First Citizens Bank Equipment Finance	13	www.firstcitizens.com
Gildan Activewear SRL	CVTP	www.mygildan.com
GPX Indianapolis	21	graphics-pro-expo.com/event/indianapolis-2023
Graphic Parts Intl	95	www.gpiparts.com
Graphtec America Inc	91	www.graphtecamerica.com
Gravotech Inc	75	www.gravotech.us
Hartlauer Bits	94	www.hartlauerbits.com
Hirsch Solutions Inc	5	www.hsi.us
Infinity Product Group	55	www.infinityforher.com
Jackson Marking Products	95	www.rubberstampmaterials.com
JDS Industries Inc	3	www.jdsindustries.com
JERZEES	7	www.jerzees.com
Kern Laser Systems	15	www.kernlasers.com
Lidco Products	94	www.lidcoproducts.com
Mimaki USA	IBC	www.mimakiusa.com
Mutoh America Inc	1	www.mutoh.com
National Network of Embroidery Professionals	73	www.nnep.com
Next Level Apparel	61	www.nextlevelapparel.com
Radian Laser Systems LLC	78	www.radianlaser.com
Rayzist Photomask Inc	95	www.rayzist.com
Signs365.com	FGC	www.signs365.com
START HERE Academy	63	graphics-pro-expo.com

ADVERTISER	PAGE	URL
Transfer Express	95	www.transferexpress.com
W.F. Lake Corp	95	www.wflake.com
Wittek Decorating	95	www.wittekdecorating.com
XANTE Corp	11	www.xante.com
Xpressscreen Inc	95	www.xpressscreen.com

GP+ HEAT-APPLIED GRAPHICS	PAGE	URL
Albatross USA Inc	42	www.albachem.com
Chemica US Corp	41	www.chemica-us.com
ColDesi Inc	32B	www.coldesi.com
Geo Knight & Co Inc	41	www.heatpress.com
SanMar	35	www.sanmar.com
STAHL'S	36	www.stahls.com
Vastex Intl Inc	36	www.vastex.com

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS	PAGE	URL
Alpina Mfg LLC	31	www.fastchangeframes.com
AP Lazer	31	www.aplazer.com
Delta Apparel	30	www.deltaapparel.com
Epilog Laser	30	www.epiloglaser.com
Graphic Parts Intl	30	www.gpiparts.com
Gravotech Inc	30	www.gravotech.us
Hanesbrands	30	www.brandwearunited.com/printnow
Jackson Marking Products	30	www.rubberstampmaterials.com
JDS Industries Inc	31	www.jdsindustries.com
JERZEES	31	www.jerzees.com
Radian Laser Systems LLC	31	www.radianlaser.com
STAHL'S	31	www.stahls.com

THE MARKETPLACE

SIGNAGE & PRINTING



PHYSICIAN OFFICE
YOUR CUSTOM TEXT HERE
202

ADAcentral
SIGNS | WAYFINDING

ADA Compliant Signs
Stock & Custom
Wholesale Pricing
On Time & On Budget

Give us a try!
www.adacentral.com
308-221-8226 • sales@adacentral.com




BANNER STRETCHING FRAME

Beautifully display any size banner! Patented


bannergrip.com
1-800-915-2828 sales@bannergrip.com

CHANNEL LETTERS
TRADE ONLY



\$3.99 per inch

3 Business Days Turnaround

5 YEAR WARRANTY 

www.b2sign.com
1-888-739-8501

Fast Change Frames
Easiest way to display graphics!

FlipUp™ front load frame
Top or side loading through hidden open edge
Slide-In™ frames

Any Size 1 minimum Low Cost

NEW LED edge lit frames
Any Size, Any Color 1 Minimum

Acrylic Standoff Frames, any size, any shape

Chicago, IL American Made
1-800-915-2828
sales@fastchangeframes.com
fastchangeframes.com

Lidco Felt Series SQUEEGEES

- Industry standard poly with a soft, felt edge
- Ribbed profile, radial corners
- Terrific for dry applications without pre-mask
- 4", 6" & 12" sizes

STANDARD WEIGHT FELT EDGE
HEAVY WEIGHT FELT EDGE

NEW

Felt Edge Wrapped Squeegees & Low Friction Felt Sleeves

LOW FRICTION FELT SLEEVES
HEAVY WEIGHT FELT EDGE

Contact your local sign & equipment supplier 
lidcoproducts.com

The manufacturer of squeegees and applicators for over 30 years

Banner Grip Jr™ for Building Sides and Trucks

Beautiful Banner Display, Wrinkle free, Drum Tight, Won't blow out in any winds, perfect for Semi Trailer use.

Only our frame offers perfect linear alignment with our included "Joiner Straps." Longer sections join easily and perfectly for the best results!



Frame stretches and clamps down



Introducing Banner GripFlip™

Patents Pending. All Rights Reserved. PURE BEAUTY

Any Size - Low Cost. No Minimum • Free Shipping

American Owned 

ALPINA Manufacturing
Chicago, Illinois
1-800-915-2828

Create large and beautiful, drum-tight stretched vinyl banner displays!

Only 2.50 inches
1 inch

Screw pushes clamp bar down through bottom to force tightening and clamp down on the banner.

Vinyl Banner Material

Flip top snaps down completely covering all screws and stretcher bar. Clean, perfect look!

bannergrip.com
sales@bannergrip.com

Need Help with Routing?

- High-Quality Tools & Customer Service



HARTLAUER BITS

800-644-2487
www.hartlauerbits.com

RESERVE YOUR SPACE

To advertise, visit:
graphics-pro.com/
advertise or call
1-800-669-0424



APPAREL DECORATING

AWARDS & CUSTOMIZATION

RUBBER BLANKETS
for
Screen Printing



- Non-porous, flexible rubber extends life
- Use on any type of exposing unit
- Will customize to fit your specific application

GRAPHIC PARTS
773.725.4900
sales@gpiparts.com
www.gpiparts.com

NEW SIMBROIDERY EFFECT
Easily add embroidered looks to full color heat transfers.



learn more

STAHL'S
TRANSFER EXPRESS
TransferExpress.com • 800-622-2280



Made in Just 3 minutes!


STAMPS
Make Them In-House
Use your laser or our Stampcreator Pro System

JMP Jackson Marking Products
800-782-6722
www.RubberStampMaterials.com
info@rubber-stamp.com

SIMPLE TO MAKE AND HIGHLY PROFITABLE TOO!

DRYING & STORAGE RACKS
Heavy-duty sizes

- 40 or 50 shelves: sizes from 32" up to 80"
- Individual spring tension adjustment
- Permanent steel spacers
- Rust & solvent resistant
- Stainless steel filters



AWT www.awt-gpi.com | sales@awtworldtrade.com

XPRESSCREEN QS2536
MAKE 2 COLOR PRINTS IN MINUTES!



Mesh Teflon DRYER BELTS
Manufactured in house and shipped FAST!
All styles and sizes... most in 24 hrs!

(800) 428-1162
W.F. Lake Corp., Glens Falls, NY
www.wflake.com



WE BUY
SCREEN PRINT & EMBROIDERY
BUSINESSES

Are you looking to retire?
Looking to close your doors for good?

WE PAY CASH FOR
YOUR BUSINESS

CONTACT TIM TODAY!
847-404-6668
T.PRUBAN@FOCUSMG.COM

RAYZIST
Photomask



Sandcarving Films

ADVERTISE WITH US!

Got big news? Have a new product?
Don't know where to start? We can help!

Visit: graphics-pro.com/advertise



Avery Dennison Completes Thermopatch Acquisition

Thermopatch is now a part of Avery's Solutions Group
<https://gpro.link/averythermo>



Jody Lemme of JDS Industries Named Sales Rep of the Year

Lemme was one of three JDS sales reps nominated for the award
<https://gpro.link/jdslemme>



Equipment Financing for Startups

How to secure funding for your growing business
<https://gpro.link/startup>



The Importance of the Pantone Color Bridge Swatch Book

Why every digital print shop needs one
<https://gpro.link/swatch>



Ep. 51 – Focus and Diversify

Building a dynamic decorated apparel business from scratch with moxie, attention to detail, and intelligent outsourcing
<https://gpro.link/ep51>



WANT ACCESS TO MORE EXCLUSIVE ONLINE CONTENT?

Head over to gpro.com and subscribe to the GRAPHICS PRO newsletter.



TA | Textiles & Apparel



TxF150-75

Professional Grade
Direct to Film Printer

The **TxF150-75** combines the outstanding reliability and print quality of Mimaki's best-selling 150 series with the simplicity of the direct-to-film (DTF) process.

This system offers the first branded solution for the decoration of apparel, sportswear, t-shirts, bags and more with the most demanding graphic details using the printing technique directly on the film.



@mimakiusa | @mimakiusa_textile

mimakiusa.com/txf150-75





FUSION MAKER

- Laser engrave, cut, and inlay materials
- Customize projects for added value
- 24" x 12" x 7" work area
- IRIS™ Camera for artwork layout
- Affordable pricing for entry-level
- Made in the USA