

WhatTheyThink!

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

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YEAR in REVIEW

A combination of technology, demographic and economic trends have helped drive the print, sign and textiles industry in 2020.

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2020

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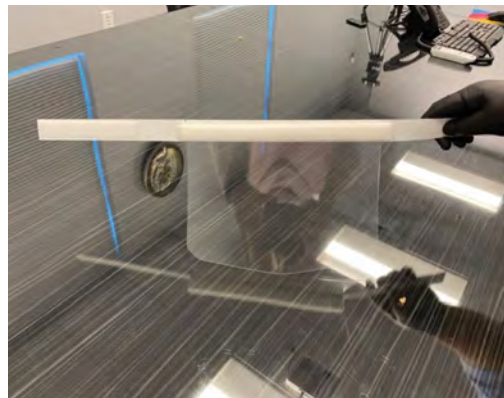
Divisional Graphics: Opportunities Post-COVID

was the latest installment in WhatTheyThink's monthly half-hour LunchNLearn webinar series.

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly spawned new forms of signage and display: what EFI calls Divisional Graphics™.

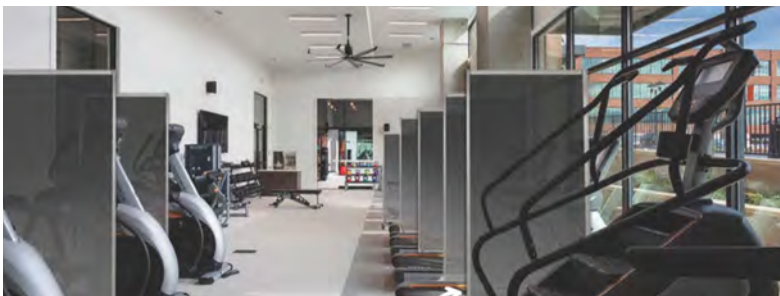
These are structural graphics intended to enable or enforce social distancing in public spaces like restaurants, bars, stores, and other locations to help in preventing the spread of contagions—and not just COVID. The coronavirus will remain a persistent threat for the foreseeable future, but even when the immediate threat of the virus has passed, demand for Divisional Graphics—and whatever they evolve into—will likely remain.

What will today's COVID-related materials likely evolve into? What opportunities will remain for these materials, and what new ones will arise? This webinar and white paper sponsored by EFI, looked at the present and future of divisional graphics and COVID signage. View the archive on [WhatTheyThink.com](https://www.whattheythink.com) or use the link below.



What you'll learn:

- What Divisional Graphics are and how they are produced
- How the COVID crisis quickly created new opportunities for print service providers offering these materials
- How the demand for these graphics will persist—even after COVID is no longer a threat
- What the business opportunities are for companies offering these materials



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VIRTUAL ADAPTATIONS

2020 is coming to a close and one thing is certain: We will all be able to look back on it all and say we lived in interesting times. It has not only been a challenge for our industry, but for each of us personally as well. Sometimes change happens slowly at a pace almost unrecognizable. This was not one of those times.

We were all forced to adapt to massive changes in the way we did business and in some cases, make extreme pivots and create new business out of lost opportunities. The biggest impact was in the area of how we communicate and work together. In-person live events were paused almost completely and a dramatic shift to virtual events occurred.

Some of this virtual activity will be temporary stop-gap measures to replace planned live events, while others will be more long lasting as attitudes and trends shift more toward this form of connection. We've seen some virtual events that were well-executed, while others were more cumbersome and missed the mark with bad technology or were simply too long. Finding the right balance of event length, quality of content and maintaining the attention span of the new virtual attendee proved to be a challenge for many.

Much like print in the media mix, in-person live events will never completely go away. User groups, niche conferences and a few large trade shows will continue to exist and will thrive. I think we can all agree that we are anxiously awaiting the day we can get together in person!

The biggest weakness of live events has always been the persistence of information. We all show up to a place and exchange ideas, look at products and then we leave. Digital platforms should have the capability to maintain such persistence given the

nature of those platforms, but we've noticed often they do not. Many seemed too eager to simply recreate the offline experience through online platforms in the same way.

Even with a good mix of both live and virtual events there still appears to be an information gap. The industry needs buying resources and research tools 24/7/365 that can be accessed from the office on a laptop, from the train on a phone or from the couch on a tablet. Realizing this, we are focused on bringing such tools to the WhatTheyThink Platform in 2021. They include:

Technology Outlook: Our 2020 Technology Outlook Week was designed to serve as a virtual platform for suppliers to the industry to get their messages out, and for print service providers to more easily stay up-to-date with the latest technology announcements as they plan for the future of their businesses. The program was very popular, so look for a return in 2021.

Livestreams: Printing executives and their ops teams can engage with industry analysts, peers and vendor subject matter experts in an education-focused video session to hear about critical trends and see new technology and products. These sessions are curated to maximize attention and bandwidth. Post event archives provide a reference for researching products and making capex decisions.

Buyer Research Tools: New online tools will provide printing executives with a way to research products and make better capex decisions. Our product database will provide on-demand access to product demos, case studies and a direct connection to vendor subject matter experts and sales channels.

As we approach a new year, we will continue to innovate and find better ways to bring actionable insight and useful intelligence to an industry that we all love! ●



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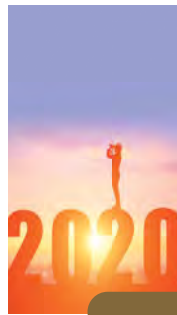
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CON

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020



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INKJET, TIKTOK AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

Despite a year of challenges, new products continued to hit the floor running

By Elizabeth Gooding

If there is one thing that OEMs learned this year, it's that technology launches need to be planned around customers, not around trade events. Many with plans to launch equipment in June found themselves dancing in place when drupa was postponed until 2021. Some decided to launch early but many decided to launch in June.

Those who decided to do virtual launches found a ready audience at home with time on their hands. There are only so many TikTok challenges you can do before buckling down and planning for the future. Online events had much higher than average attendance this year and this provided an unprecedented opportunity for prepared OEMs to reach future buyers.

This article discusses the production inkjet press launches serving the document and publishing market in 2020, when they were announced, when they will be commercially available and the related development trends. Of the seven presses launched in 2020, all but two were aimed at the commercial printing market. How they pursue commercial printing, however, differs. In our table of 2020 Production Inkjet Press Launches by release date we see companies pursuing top quality levels using aqueous and UV inks, as well as piezo, continuous

and thermal print heads.

With the majority of the presses targeting high coverage and quality sensitive markets, it's not surprising to find that the focus of improvement for many of the presses include one or more of the following:

- Enhanced ink formulation
- Higher resolution print arrays
- Improvements in drop formation and placement
- In-line quality control
- Nozzle compensation
- Innovative drying options

These are the features that work together to drive improved inkjet quality and expand media options. What's truly impressive is that most of these presses were available when launched, or very soon after, unlike the typical drupa-year dreaming of "announced" presses that might

finally be available by the time the next drupa rolls around. Several were actually available sooner than anticipated.

For each press, we've provided a snapshot of the core capabilities, improvements over the previous generation, and a brief update on how the press has been received in the market.



2020

2020 PRODUCTION INKJET PRESS LAUNCHES BY RELEASE DATE

OEM Model	Market Positioning	Print Heads/Ink	Upgrade Path	Announced Availability
MARCH				
HP PageWide Press T250HD	Commercial, direct mail, print and publishing	HP thermal dual drop Aqueous pigment	Yes	Q4 2020
APRIL				
Canon VarioPPRINT iX3200 and 2100	Commercial, direct mail	Kyocera piezo dual drop Aqueous pigment	No	July 2020
JUNE				
Kodak Prosper Ultra 520	Commercial, direct mail, marketing collateral, catalogs, books	Kodak Ultrastream CIJ Aqueous pigment	No	Q4 2020
Konica Minolta AccurioJet KM-1e	Commercial, packaging, labels and signage	Konica Minolta piezo UV curable	Yes	June 2020
Ricoh mono-only Pro VC 40000	Transaction, direct mail	Ricoh piezo drop-on-demand Aqueous pigment	NA	June 2020
JULY				
Canon ProStream 1800	Commercial, direct mail, magazine and catalog	Kyocera piezo drop-on-demand Aqueous polymer pigment	Yes	July 2020
DECEMBER				
SUPERWEB WEBJet 2100P	Publishing, transaction, direct mail	Memjet Duralink thermal drop on demand Aqueous pigment	No	Q1 2021

HP PageWide T250 HD

HP was first out of the gate this year with a “pre-drupa announcement” of their new continuous inkjet press with expectations of a full launch in June.

“We launched earlier than planned in 2020 because we saw tremendous demand for the solution in the market,” said Kris Albee, global marketing manager, HP PageWide Industrial. “We had multiple presses installed in the third quarter with very demanding, high-end commercial and direct mail customers. They love the gloss levels and gamut that can be achieved with this press using Brilliant ink.”

HP customers with T240 HD presses can “field upgrade” to the T250 HD.

The HP PageWide Web Press T250 HD includes new heads, a new ink system and improved priming fluid among other upgrades. Together they enable production on media weights of 40 to 250 gsm with thickness of up to 10 point including uncoated and gloss coated offset stocks. The press has a web width of up to 22 in (559 mm) and a print width of up to 20.5 in (521 mm). It will also ship with an inline spectrophotometer system.

The HP thermal heads have dual drop weights and produce a native resolution of 2400 dpi at 250



ft. (76 m) per minute. Performance mode doubles the speed and uses a single drop weight reducing the resolution to 1200 dpi. Performance HDK mode keeps top speed and 2400 dpi for black while reducing CMYK to 1200 dpi.

In July, American Litho was the first U.S. customer to purchase the new press. SoloPress in the UK announced their purchase of an HP T250 in August.

Canon VarioPRINT iX Series

Technically, Canon announced two sheet-fed presses in April, the iX3200 and iX2100, with their much anticipated Vario PRINT iX series launch. They are actually the same physical press with the upgrade available as a software key enabling pricing flexibility. Built on a similar footprint to the iSeries, the new press(es) have been redesigned in almost every other way including ink, transport, quality control and drying. With their eye on high-end

commercial print customers, Canon has made the presses faster, more accurate and more flexible. Since their launch in April, Canon has placed more than 40 orders globally.

Second generation Kyocera piezo drop-on-demand print heads were optimized for use with the iQuarius iX series inks. The heads deliver native resolution of 1200 dpi with two drop sizes. The varioPRINT iX-series offers two automated inline quality control routines, Nozzle Activity Control and Nozzle Uniformity Control to ensure consistent quality by detecting jet outs and evaluating past head performance to see if a jet is fully out or experiencing intermittent issues. Optimal performance is achieved with jetted ColorGrip conditioning liquid.

The iX series greatly expands the compatible media range supporting 60 – 350gsm uncoated and 90 – 350gsm offset coated at full speed, including mixed media jobs and gloss coated offset stocks. Full speed for the iX3200 is 320 A4 images per minute and 210 ipm for the xi2100. Beyond speed, instant media switching with a printer input module supporting four trays of up to 4,500 sheets and the ability to connect multiple printer input modules (for a maximum of 13,500 sheets in 12 trays) provides unrivaled productivity in a B3+ format device. Canon also touts improved drying and paper control systems. Their enhanced two-step drying process enables high coverage and a precision sheet control system managed with a perforated stainless steel belt and vacuum suction delivers impeccable registration.

The iX press was installed at Kampert Nauta in the Netherlands in May, one month after launch. “In recent years, we have been talking to Canon about investing in inkjet,” explained their managing director, Richard Kampert. “The main talking points were quality, productivity and paper weights. Canon was very responsive in addressing these points with the varioPRINT iX3200. The press combines heavier weight media with high quality, that is comparable to offset, and high productivity. That’s a golden combination. On the iX, we plan to produce greeting cards, business cards, leaflets, folders and brochures. All in small runs. That’s where our future growth lies.”



Canon indicated that the first two U.S. customers were being installed earlier this quarter.

Kodak Prosper Ultra 520

In June, Kodak hosted a virtual event.

“We had multiple new products planned for drupa and believed a virtual press event during the original time of the drupa show was the best approach,” said Randy Vandagriff, senior vice president of Print, Eastman Kodak Company.

A key element of that event was the announcement of the Prosper Ultra 520 continuous inkjet press slated for full availability in early 2021. The new press can be configured as a C version sporting an extended dryer for use in high-coverage commercial markets or a P version for publishing markets. Both make use of intelligent near infrared drying with 3 units in the Ultra P520 and four in the Ultra C520.

Vandagriff confirmed that the press is on track to ship to beta sites this year as planned.

It uses Kodak’s own Ultrastream continuous inkjet printheads to deliver resolution of 600 by 1800 dpi. The head differs from Kodak’s previous STREAM technology in its use of an electrostatic charge to deflect non-print-drops away from the media as opposed to air deflection. This enables precisely shaped drops of less than 4 picoliters. Kodak also delivers their own nanoparticulate aqueous pigment CMYK inks that have been tuned for the Ultrastream heads.

With a web width of 20.5” (520mm) and a speed of 500 fpm (150 m/min), the Ultra 520 produces 2,184 U.S. letter images per minute and supports papers from 45 to 270 gsm. The press is compatible with both coated and uncoated papers, with some



requiring a priming treatment for top quality. Kodak offers the flexibility of offline or inline priming stations to support top quality on challenging stocks. Continuing the vertical integration, the 520 is driven by the KODAK 900 Print Manager digital front end with state-of-the-art Adobe APPE 5 RIP.

Konica Minolta AccurioJet KM-1e

Konica Minolta announced upgrades to their AccurioJet KM-1 B2, UV inkjet press in June. The AccurioJet KM-1e, with “e” for “enhanced,” incorporates a new, 1200 dpi print-head design and a patented LED curable UV ink formulation. Improved media versatility, sharper text quality, image correction capabilities and reduced downtime are among the press enhancements.

Konica Minolta’s patented Dot Freeze Technology prevents ink dots from spreading on the substrate. The company claims zero dot gain due to a high viscosity ink system “that allows reliable jetting due to much lower viscosity at that moment, but instantly ‘freezes’ the ink upon contact with the substrate” preventing uncontrolled movement of the ink dot and deep penetration of the ink into uncoated materials. Automatic duplex printing is possible on media between 50 and 400 gsm with thickness of 0.06 to 0.45 mm including textured and embossed paper, canvas, synthetic and

translucent media, clear plastic and film, plastic card, metallic media and packaging carton stock. An image correction system checks the print quality

of every printed sheet promising color matching within a tolerance of ΔE 1.5.

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productivity enhanced by a large-capacity media input and output system. Konica Minolta has offered proof-points for their claim of reduced downtime including 40% lower paper preparation

time and 50% faster head replacement time than for the KM-1.

Enhancements in the KM-1e available to KM-1 customers can help them expand



beyond commercial applications into growth markets such as packaging, labels and signage. The press is commercially available with the first U.S. press installed in March, prior to launch, at trade printer, FolderWorks, a subsidiary of Taylor Corporation.

Monochrome-Only RICOH Pro VC40000

While other OEMs featured enhanced presses in order to penetrate a new market, Ricoh delivered a press that took features away in order to better serve



one of their core markets. In June, Ricoh introduced the monochrome-only version of the RICOH Pro VC40000 model. While the trend for OEMs overall, including Ricoh, is to pursue volumes in high-color, high-coverage markets, many also have core markets of transaction printers and direct mailers and book printers that need help managing managing productivity and production costs. Ricoh addressed a continuing need in the market for crisp, high speed monochrome production. The mono-only press operates at speeds of 590 ft/min (80 m/min) and a web with of 20.5" (520.7 mm) to produce up to 2,500 mono letter images per minute. Like the full color version, the monochrome-only Pro VC40000 uses piezo drop-on-demand heads for resolution of 600 x 600 dpi at full speed and offers a MICR option. The press is compatible with uncoated, inkjet treated and inkjet coated stocks at weights of 40 to 250gsm and is available with either aqueous dye or pigment inks.

Broadridge Financial Solutions was one of the first to take advantage of the flexibility in the PRO VC 40000 line replacing the last of their toner fleet with a combination of mono-only devices configured with and without MICR, as well as the full color version also configured with and without MICR. While the mono-only system has been commercially available since the beginning of the year, it was formally announced in June.

Canon – ProStream 1800

In July, Canon introduced the next generation of their continuous inkjet ProStream line, the ProStream 1800. The prior model, the ProStream 1000, began shipping in 2018 and received some significant updates within the first year. Like the 1000 and the iX series, the ProStream 1800 uses Kyocera heads and Canon iQuarius aqueous polymer pigment inks along with ColorGrip priming solution. It also uses the unique air flotation drier developed for the 1000 model. During the drying process, the web passes between two arrays of hot air nozzles positioned alternately above and below the web. The web is floated by the nozzles and does not touch any rollers. The hot air and air flow evaporates the water to dry the ink. A series of chilled rollers in an external cooling unit then lowers the temperature of the media.

While there are a number of software and media options available, the main advance in the new press is speed.

The ProStream 1800 is 66% faster than the 1000. It runs at 133/m minute and delivers 1,791 A4 images per minute at full speed. It supports a wide media range and will run at its top speed using media weights from 40 to 160 gsm. Speed drops to 80 m/min on weights from 160 to 250 gsm. There is an optional heavy paper kit that expands media compatibility to 300 gsm. While the printheads are capable of true 1200 dpi production, at the highest speed, the resolution drops to 1200 by 720 dpi (in imaging direction). The system offers the option for the Inline Quality Control system introduced in 2019 is a camera system jointly developed with a third-party control supplier. It assures nozzle uniformity and compensates for nozzle failures.

At the announcement in July, the ProStream



1800 had already found its first customer, Italian book printer, Grafica Veneta who also took the first ProStream 1000.

“For many years, we were looking for a digital press but we were never happy with the quality available on the market,” said Dr. Mauro Fontanari, Grafica Veneta general manager. “With the ProStream, we have found a machine that enables us to achieve a final product that has similar paper and the same quality as offset. Since installing the ProStream 1800, we are able to produce 50% more work.”

As of November, Canon was in the process of delivering another six upgrades to ProStream 1000 customers in the U.S. and were in negotiation with several additional customers.

SUPERWEB WEBJet 2100P

Superweb has quietly delivered their latest inkjet market offer shifting from dye to aqueous pigment using Memjet Duralink thermal print heads. The WEBJet 2100P roll-fed inkjet press delivers 1600x790 dpi resolution at its top speed of 490 ft/min, as compared to 330 ft/min on the WEBJet 200. In high quality mode, the press can deliver 1600 x 1260 resolution at a reduced speed of 307 ft./min. The combination of a 2.1picoliter drop size and Xitron Navigator RIP provide fine control of ink for sharper text and images.

“The WEBJet 2100P represents the marriage of Memjet’s award-winning next generation pigment inkjet technology, DuraLink, with Superweb’s decades of success with versatile paper transport and fully-integrated OEM paper finishing solutions,” said Dustin Graupman, senior vice president of sales and marketing Superweb. “The WEBJet 2100P builds on the success of the WEBJet 200D (launched in 2014) and WEBJet 100D (launched in 2018) to bring the benefits of dramatically improved head life and the increased permanence, water-fastness, color gamut and substrate versatility.”

Superweb is focused on publishing, transaction printing and direct mail markets with a more robust pigment ink and expanded

substrate range including uncoated offset papers and uncoated inkjet optimized papers media between 60 and 160 gsm. As of this writing, Superweb was continu-

ing to test and approve a range of inkjet optimized matte and gloss coated papers. Finishing options remain the same as the WEBJet 200D line including Superweb proprietary finishing and third-party options, however; there are now two drying options, a base and an enhanced drying package aimed at higher coverage applications.

The first press was installed in November and the press will be commercially available in early 2021. Look for further launches from Superweb partner, Konica Minolta, the primary distributor of Superweb presses.



Don't Say Nothing Good Happened in 2020

The new production presses launched in 2020 continue an accelerating trend for faster, higher quality and more flexible presses. In 2021, these presses will all be commercially available and market tested. Not covered in this article is the line-up of inkjet packaging and label presses covered in David Zwang’s article in this issue. In both market segments we expect to see additional presses launched in 2021. In the document and publishing space we expect to continue to see the focus on taking volume away from offset and to a lesser degree, toner.

In the process of figuring out how to launch products without going to events, and how to safely install devices amidst a pandemic, OEMs have gained new skills that are likely to translate into better communication and more responsive service for customers. That looks like the making of a Happy New Year. ●



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Elizabeth Gooding helps companies to streamline their business process, improve customer retention, and maximize new opportunities for document design, print and Internet technology. Contact her at Elizabeth@inkjetinsight.com.

2020: THE YEAR IN FINISHING

Automation is the word of the year

By Trish Witkowski

2020 has been the year of imposed flexibility—and a worldwide pandemic made it abundantly clear that diversification is the key to surviving and thriving in uncertain times. The finishing category offered a range of opportunities for printers to stand out and expand their offerings. The highest volume of announcements in finishing this year have been in the cutting and embellishment categories, followed by exciting developments in robotics, and some fascinating new offerings in book-of-one bindery automation.

Additionally, the year's challenges brought us encouraging stories about transformation—companies seizing upon opportunities to open up to new markets and customers by using their finishing equipment in creative ways, with the equipment manufacturers stepping up to support their journeys.

The Pivot

In what began as an exciting early Q1 leading into a drupa year, things quickly turned to uncertainty by March. By then, the biggest news in finishing was related to notices of continuity and support. There was a wave of virtual demos and events, and a round of notable retirements. And then something interesting happened—everybody started to get creative.

Printers and equipment manufacturers figured out how to work with different materials to develop products to meet the needs of entirely new business segments—using their finishing equipment to make PPE, temporary beds, dividers, sneeze guards and signage. In-house finishing equipment and a



POLAR Cutting Systems 200

willingness to adapt and change to get new products to market quickly became a differentiator for many businesses and helped to provide critical sales in an unexpected downturn.

For example, the team at B&R Moll figured out how to turn their Rotary Die Cutting System into a roll-fed system that can accept PET materials and die-cut face shields. Standard Finishing Systems customer, Moo, is using their RD-4055 Rotary Die Cutting system to make paper face masks. The marketing team at MGI gave their customers a “buzz worthy” creative idea for embellishing face shields with super hero graphics as a nod to first responders working on the front lines.

Other challenges brought on by COVID were in the realm of sales. POLAR showed tremendous creativity in marketing during COVID, launching a “Solo to System” campaign in July. The campaign was designed to promote industrialization in post-press, and to provoke a move from a solo cutter to a cutting system. The special promotion offers the lift peripheral for free with an upgrade from a qualifying high-speed solo cutting system to the four-piece CuttingSystems 200 (cutter, jogger, unloader and lift). In addition to a free peripheral machine, the value-add for the customer is up to 100% more output, increased safety and efficiency.

To keep the sales pipeline moving, many finishing

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equipment manufacturers had to scrap in-person demos and master the art of the interactive streaming video demonstration.

“We have definitely pivoted here at Standard,” said Don Dubuque, director of marketing. “Pre-COVID, we were very busy with in-person VIP visits, and now we are doing lots of virtual equipment demonstrations. The virtual demos have been really successful for us as we get through COVID, and they will certainly be a part of our sales and marketing portfolio even after we get through the pandemic.”

2020 Advancements in Finishing

Looking across the announcements and news of the year, there were definitely a few categories that were on fire—cutting, embellishments, automated perfect binding and robotics. Let’s start with cutting.

Cutting Trends and News

There were lots of upgrades and installations in cutting to save time, reduce errors and to automate and improve workflows. Cutting investments were also driven by necessity due to today’s labor issues—including competing with Amazon for labor, dealing with smaller talent pools, the new challenge of social distancing on the shop floor, and the human limitations of keeping up with high-speed equipment and repetitive tasks. Announcements of companies investing in cutting technologies like the BOBST VISIONCUT, Zund G3, Colter & Peterson SABER cutters, Rollem Insignia6 Die Cutters, and others were frequently popping up in the newswire throughout the year.

The year also brought new offerings in cutting technology. Here are some of the most exciting highlights, featured here in alphabetical order by company:

The Duplo DPC-400 Dieless Digital Die Cutter produces short-run packaging, custom-shaped cards and labels without physical dies. It cuts, kiss cuts and scores in one pass on a range of substrates including paper, laminates, adhesives and synthetic stocks up to 14” x 20.” Media is held in place on a flatbed through a suction zone below the conveyor



(Above) Heidelberg Multimatrix 60 FC
(Left) Duplo DPC-400 Dieless Digital Die Cutter

belt as the tooling head moves throughout the sheet. Great for labels and stickers, packaging, prototypes and samples.

Heidelberg developed the Multimatrix 60 FC small format die-cutter and hot foil stamping machine to support short to intermediate runs in digital or commercial printing. The machine is great for presentation folders and irregular-shaped direct mail pieces.

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Tecna Stack 1212

digital die-cutting in the Packaging and POP space with the Highcon Beam 2C. Featuring non-stop feed, crease, laser cut, strip, waste removal and stacking for corrugated, this machine meets the stringent market requirements for corrugated packaging at speeds of up to 4,000 B1 sheets per hour. The Beam 2C is available in two versions – a pallet-fed standard configuration, and a field-upgradable non-stop feeding, stacking and waste removal configuration.

Koenig & Bauer launched the CorruCUT in 2020—a new sheetfed flexo press designed for the large- and high-growth market for direct printing on corrugated board. The CorruCUT can print and rotary die-cut in one pass on corrugated sheets with a width of up to 110 inches. The machine can run at speeds of 12,000 sheets per hour.

For printers who produce laminated cards for direct mail promotions, the new Moll Flexcut 760 rotary die-cutter line offers the ability to thermal laminate, rotary die cut, strip waste and deliver a finished product in one pass. They've basically turned a tedious, three-step production process into one streamlined workflow. The system can handle substrates from 8pt.-30pt. and is ideal for anyone who produces gift cards, hospital and student IDs or insurance cards.



Moll Flexcut

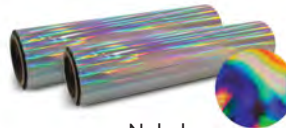
MBO had some exciting advancements for direct mail and material packing this year, but I'm

highlighting their niche Bogram ACC Deck-Making Unit and STA550 Card Pile Stacker for its innovation in labor reduction for smaller format cut products. The big value in die-cutting is handling large amounts of finished products, like cards/tags/labels, with little to no labor. These two machines perform small product cutting, collating, counting and stacking functions with a single operator.

It could take 20 or more separate cuts on a guillotine to accomplish what the new Tecna Stack 1212 can do in a single pass. The Stack 1212 pairs with the new generation of sheet-fed B2+ inkjet presses (and sheet-fed offset presses) and supports impositions from 1-up to 21-up with final output as small as 4" x 5." The machine footprint occupies a space-efficient 100 sq. ft.



Mainline Holographics



Nobelus Rainbow Metalized

Embellishments

Digital print effects, foil, laminate films and coatings were smoking-hot in 2020, as value-added print and digital effects have hit the mainstream and proven their value over the past few years.

There was definitely a trend in stylish new holographic and metallic films and surfaces. Nobelus launched a new Rainbow Holografik Overlamine film with seamless rainbow holographic pattern, and a Gilt Metalized specialty thermal printable laminate film with a stunning gold reflective foil effect. Not to be outdone, Mainline Holographics

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 CANON SEE IMPOSSIBLE



(Left) ACTEGA
EcoLEAF
(Below) MGI
Jetvarnish

premiered a new White Holographic surface that mimics the look of white board or paper for an entirely new “subtle yet vibrant” holographic patterned effect for luxury brands, cosmetics, fragrance and more.

Foil and eco-friendliness don't usually end up in the same sentence, but ACTEGA EcoLeaf Digital Metallization technology for self-adhesive labels uses only the precise amount of metal required for the printed area. EcoLeaf replaces the use of hot and cold foil rolls and their subsequent high impact on waste. The digital metallizing technology also reduces the cost of profit-driving metallic embellishments for packaging.

There were also several notable new equipment offerings in the embellishment category this year (in alphabetical order by company):

In the high-speed web specialty coatings category, Harris & Bruno premiered the ExcelCoat ZRW—a coater capable of running aqueous and/or UV coatings, allowing printers to meet customer demands in conjunction with the increasing need for post coated media. The ExcelCoat ZRW, offered in 22” and 42” (simplex or duplex) configurations can be integrated in-line with most digital high-speed web presses. It can also be supplied as an offline solution with dedicated unwind and rewind.

MGI JetVarnish 3D One is the newest and most cost-effective point of entry into MGI's complete series of sheet-fed, digital print enrichment finishing presses, offering sculpted/raised special effects, or flat spot UV coatings on runs from one to thousands. This machine occupies a smaller footprint and is positioned to provide printers with new revenue



Roland
DGSHAPE
LD-300 Laser
Decorator



streams from value-added services.

The Roland DGSHAPE LD-300 Laser Decorator allows for precision foil decoration on larger three-dimensional items, plus the ability to imprint directly onto natural leather. Designed to embellish cosmetic items, custom gifts, wallets, purses and much more, this machine is incredibly versatile and will open doors for print service providers to service new markets.

Scodix launched the Ultra Press Series of digital enhancement presses that are tailored to industry sectors – W2P, Commercial and Specialty, and Packaging. This new array of 6 specialized presses offer service providers an opportunity to choose the press that will best support the future growth of their business.

The new Xeikon FEU (Fusion Embellishment Unit) is a stand-alone embellishment solution for label printers and converters. With complete digital finishing and embellishment capabilities, Xeikon's FEU is based on MGI technology and provides UV spot varnish, tactile varnish, foil, 3D textures, high-opacity white and other effects across a wide range of substrates.

“Book of One” Bindery Automation

There were two disruptive developments in “Book of One” bindery automation this year:

Muller Martini has developed an automated case binding system for book-of-one (or many) production scenarios. The Vareo-Infintrim Hardcover Cell brings fully-automated hardcover digital book production to the market with a bang. This groundbreaking advancement features an end-to-end, “file-to-finished product” workflow solution that intelligently manages production throughout the entire manufacturing process. The system



Scodix Ultra Digital Enhancement Press

features automated endsheet-tipping, perfect binding and trimming for hardcover digital books all-in-one pass.

Also new to the market is the Standard Horizon BQ-500 Perfect Binder, which is designed for optimum book-of-one productivity with increased automation, and increased quality control over a wider range of substrates compared to competitive models. The system is equipped with iCE LINK, a new cloud-based monitoring tool from Horizon that can also handle KPI analysis, PM schedule/alerts, JDF/JMF workflow, scheduling, job creation, editing and more. The BQ-500 Perfect Binder can be run in-line with the fully-automated HT-300 Three-Side Trimmer, also released this year and 35% faster than earlier models.

Robotics and Automation

There is no way for one machine operator to keep up with the newest automated and high-speed folders without using an automated back end. This issue also applies to today's high-speed perfect binders and saddle-stitchers as well. The solution is generally to add more people and/or to slow down the machine, which defeats the purpose and efficiency of high-speed equipment.

"In commercial printing, the postpress department accounts for the highest personnel costs at typically around 60%," said Jörg Dähnhardt, head of postpress business management at Heidelberg.

So, by adding robotic technology to the bindery, we can reduce the amount of human labor and error, increase the flow of materials and reduce the operator's workload.

The Heidelberg StahlFolderTH/KH 82-P uses their "Push to Stop" folding technology for the highest output, and the ability to produce different folded signatures or jobs of similar formats and folds on a single pallet—without any human touch-points. The system is barcode-driven and initiates job changes, so there are no slipsheets between jobs. However, high-speed folding requires high-speed stacking, and the Heidelberg StahlFolder P-Stacker features a cage-less autonomous robotic stacking mechanism that supports non-stop production



Standard Finishing RD4055

and loading at a rate of 300 stacks per hour, with minimal gaps between the stacks.

When coupled with the MBO Palletized Feeder, the MBO CoBo-Stack Palletizer features a collaborative robot (also called a cobot), that needs no protective cage. The palletizer runs uninterrupted, and nearly eliminates physical labor to the point where an operator could be running other machines, focusing on quality control, loading or prepping for the next job.

Related to the topic of robotics and automation, Henrik Christiansen of Graphic Robotics wrote a couple of must-read stories for WhatTheyThink! this year— "Printing Plants and Robots after the Coronavirus" and "Fence-Free Collaborative Robots." If you have not read them yet, they are definitely worth looking up, because he is not just writing about the topic—he is actually developing and implementing cobots and robot cells in the printing industry today. With all of the post-COVID changes in work environments and the acceleration of business decisions during this time period, robots and cobots may be closer to your business than you think.

Finishing as the Final Frontier

Exciting things are happening in finishing, and I have every reason to believe that we'll see an acceleration of innovative technologies in the bindery in 2021 heading into drupa, with a continued focus on automation and workflow efficiency across all bindery categories, value added print effects and precision cutting technology. ●



Trish Witkowski specializes in creative solutions and engagement strategies for direct mail and marketing. She frequently travels and speaks to print organizations and their clients to illustrate the power of print.

PRINT IS “VIRTUALLY” EVERYWHERE

How 2020 re-shaped the way the print industry communicates and engages

2020 has been unlike any year. Ever. Despite all of its challenges, the print industry rallied, re-invented and re-tooled to help provide relief. Let’s take a look at how 2020 re-shaped the way we communicate and engage.

Print’s New Role as an Essential Service

In the wake of the pandemic, print providers have been declared an essential service – and have re-invented how they engage with buyers, new markets and new revenue streams. From the start of the pandemic, printers were filling the PPE gap - today it has expanded to include the production of face shields, protective barriers, social distancing floor graphics and more. Today, print is helping stimulate the economy.

Pennsylvania’s Ace Designs is one example. Before the pandemic they specialized in display needs, picturing framing and visual merchandising. When they were declared an essential service,

they began manufacturing and donating thousands of face shields to local retirement homes, hospitals and frontline workers.

Print’s new role as an essential service not only helps provide much-needed solutions that can help prevent the spread of COVID, but makes it possible for businesses to re-open – and stay open – safely.

The Reprographic Services Association (RSA) facilitated seven initiatives for their members, including weekly owners meetings, where they openly discussed ways to classify their printing businesses as essential businesses to keep the doors open. They also fostered a member program in conjunction with an advertising agency where a comprehensive COVID-19 signage program was developed - including a catalog of templates for signage to sell into current member client companies with built-in marketing resources and messaging completely financed by the Association.

The focus has shifted from a legacy of printing ink on paper, to one focused on safety, economic



recovery and buyer experience. This has altered the language of selling print - to one that helps companies on the road to recovery.

How Technology is Helping Create a Better Customer Experience

The pandemic forcefully bridged the worlds of work and home. Even if you worked from home prior to March 2020, you felt an impact – from how we dress, to accepted (in some cases expected) distractions from children, pets and spouses.

Companies are re-evaluating their approach to every dimension of their business, which includes having staff work from home as much as possible – even after the COVID-19 pandemic ends.

In May, 2020, Tobi Lutke, CEO of e-commerce company Shopify, said, “We will keep our offices closed until 2021 so that we can rework them for this new reality. And after that, most will permanently work remotely. Office centrality is over.”

Buyer expectations were altered as well – interactive and digital customer experiences are becoming the norm, with buyers expecting (and willing to pay for) a smooth, flexible, engaging, ultra-personal customer experience. Making print interactive – with AI, QR Codes, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) – merges analog with digital, grasps the attention of prospects and buyers for longer, and ultimately creates a better buying experience.

Print providers are realizing that there are fruitful revenue streams stemming from embracing AI technologies – which uses data to make decisions – and can provide more personalized customer experiences, optimize workflow, reduce waste and facilitate customer support. In contrast to data-oriented AI, QR Codes, AR and VR are experience-oriented. They allow print providers to engage prospects and customers digitally, while simultaneously supplying the analog sensation of print. For example, you can provide a QR Code on a piece of direct mail that points prospects to a special offer, a virtual tour or behind-the-scenes production info – an opportunity to show off equipment, paper, finishes, etc. These interactive technologies keep

prospects and customers engaged with a multi-sensory, personal experience – that helps speed up the prospect-to-customer journey.

Re-Inventing the Cold Call

With cold-calling rooted into every sales department’s DNA, seasoned pros are struggling to have live conversations with today’s business buyers, while a new regime of digital-savvy hunters lacks the polish honed over years of face-to-face conversations. But communication preferences ebb and flow, as channels evolve and society adjusts to new technology. While the majority of print and business buyers don’t even consider dealing with a salesperson until they are halfway through their buying journey, this has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Seventy-five percent of B2B buyers use social media as a part of their purchasing process. Embracing social media as a sales channel allows you to be present and engaging during the critical first half of the buyer journey. It is where you learn about each other and join in conversations.

Having a variety of content – short, long, mixed, original, shared – engages prospects in a multitude of ways. It also helps you fine tune who you help, how you help and why it matters, as you build credibility, trust and business relationships – as well as pinpoint where your buyers and prospects congregate, whether it’s Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram or Twitter.

The Show Must Go On

Not only has social media usage spiked during the pandemic, but virtual events have increased 1000% since the outbreak of COVID. According to Center for Exhibition Industry Research conducted in June, among organizers forced to cancel 2020

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Joanne Gore is founder of Joanne Gore Communications. She has spent the last three decades helping companies maximize their marketing and communications efforts. Contact Joanne at joanne@joannegorecommunications.com.

ABBIE NORMAL'S YEAR

2020 has been about as normal as we could expect for a very abnormal year.

By Richard Romano

People have been asking, “What is the new normal?” or “When will we reach the new normal?”—but this assumes that there was ever an “old normal.” True, from a printing shipments standpoint (if not virtually everything else in existence), this has been an abnormal year. But 2019 was also an abnormal year—abnormal in the sense that it was “really good” for the printing industry. If you remember

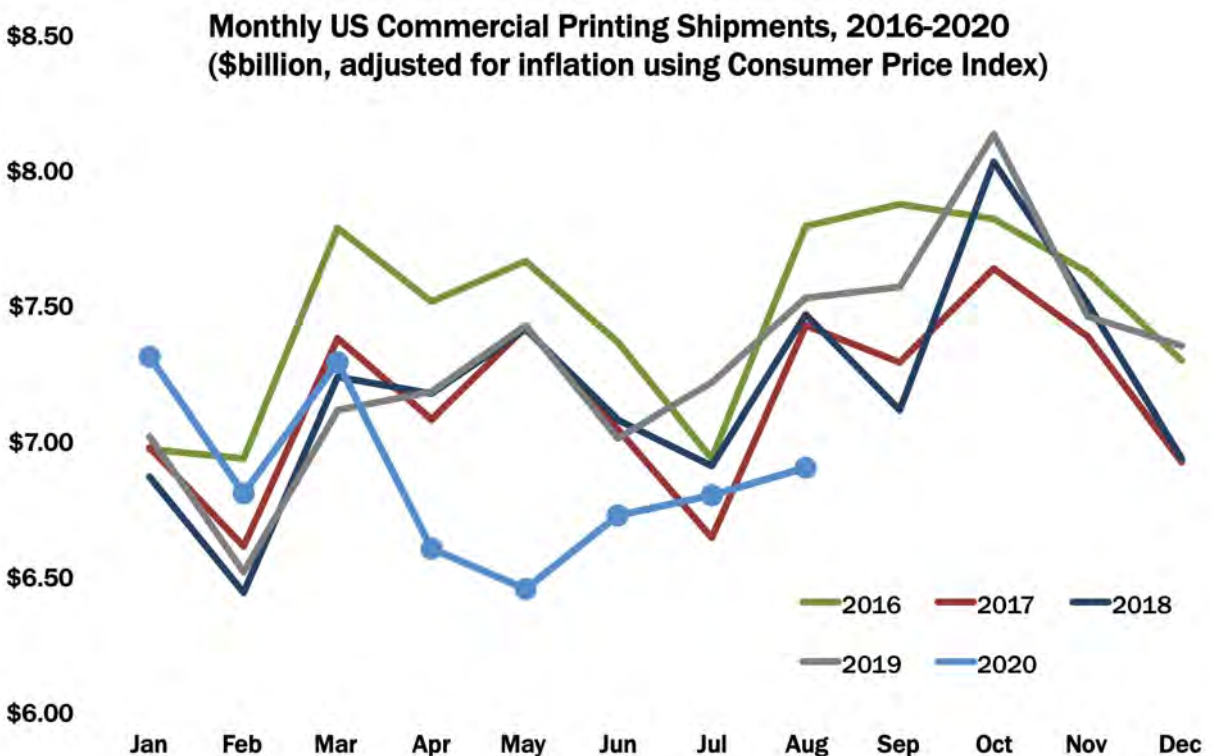
the years 2000 to 2019, if we were going to define “normal” for the printing industry, that meant decreasing demand for print, declining print volumes and industry consolidation. So I’m not sure we really want to get back to “normal.” If we think of “normal” as stable and profitable, we’d have to go back to the 1990s, if not earlier.

Shipments

Anyway, looking at shipments for 2020, in August,

shipments were up for the third month in a row—and in the past five years (even longer if we dig into our shipments archive) that has only happened once before: in the latter half of 2019, we had four months of increasing shipments. Abnormal, but in a good way.

April and May were, as we knew they would be, abnormal in a bad way, but we saw a strong rebound in June, which continued in July and August, where printing shipments rose



to \$6.90 billion. And while it is still well below August 2019's \$7.52 billion, given from whence we came, that ain't bad.

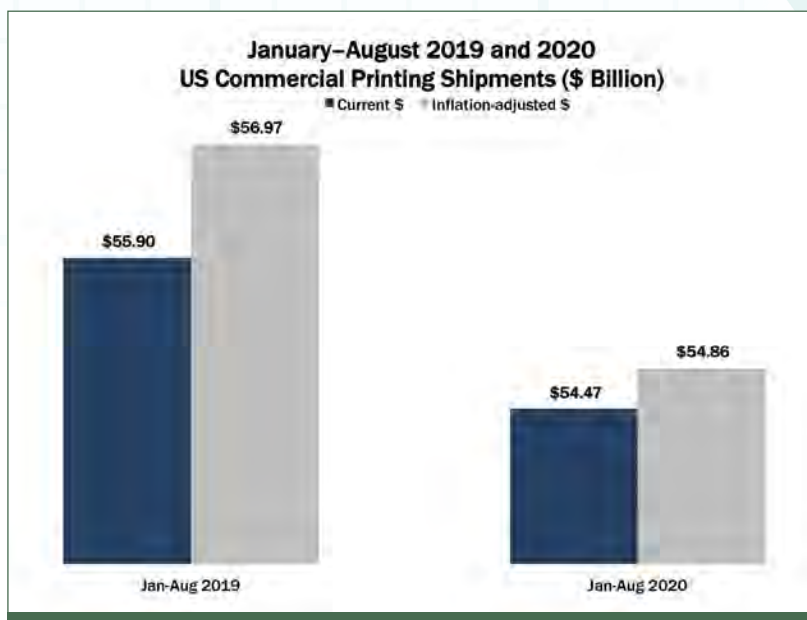
There are a few forces at play here. The first is the recovery (such as it is) from the worst of the pandemic, as businesses have—to some extent—reopened. The second is what has turned out to be the highlight of the year: immense demand for social distancing and other safety signage. The third is the upcoming election (which will hopefully be over and decided by the time you read this; if not, I'll have gone off to start our Antarctica edition), and elections, especially major national ones, always benefit the printing industry. In the social media era, more attention is given to electronic campaigning, but there is still a lot of spending on traditional campaign advertising channels, such as direct mail and TV/radio—especially for down-ticket races. (TV political advertising for the House and State Senate races in Central New York, for example, has been relentless.) And of course lawn signs are always popular.

So we are expecting another continued upward trend in September. As for October, under the previous seasonality that was usually a high point of the year as the holidays loomed, but what this year will bring—with retail being as challenged as it has been—is up for grabs. We're

cautiously optimistic that the upward trend will continue into October, but it probably won't be quite the spike it has been in past years.

Beyond that, it will be a function of what happens with the virus. As I write this in mid-October, there are still record numbers of outbreaks in some parts of the country, and

or advertising in local newspapers. As much as the new COVID-centric print applications have helped get many print businesses through this year, what they really need is the return of their primary markets and customer bases. And that's only going to happen if the virus is under control. 20201112Rr Pp Shipments



some places where the virus had been under control (such as New York City) have seen things worsen as people move inside with the cooler weather. We could be in for a long, bad winter and go into next spring in the same situation we were in last spring, which would suck on so many levels (call me in Antarctica), but if for no other reason than the events and hospitality industries have been some of printers' biggest verticals, as are local businesses sending out direct mail or other collateral materials,

In terms of year-to-date (January-to-August) shipments, 2020 is only about \$2 billion off from 2019, which, again, ain't bad, all things considered. Funny, back in January, I likely said that 2020 shipments could easily exceed 2019's. But I was so much younger then, so in April I probably said something like 2020 will not even come close to 2019's. But I was so much older then (I'm younger than that now), so now I say we'll probably end up splitting the difference.

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A GOOD YEAR FOR SOFTWARE

Software is the new infrastructure of your print business.

By Jennifer Matt

Try to think back to January 2020 and what you were planning to accomplish in your business, the goals you had set for potential business growth. Now as we are closing out the fourth quarter of 2020, I can't imagine a single plan you made in January did not get adjusted or thrown out completely.

In looking over the articles I wrote in 2020 for the software section of WhatTheyThink; so many of them had COVID-19 in the title as we all pivoted our approach to the markets based on how the pandemic was uniquely

impacting our business. We didn't have one live event as an industry; we missed our four-year revival (the Olympics of print) in drupa as virtually all business travel was halted.

My view of the print industry has always been through the lens of the software solutions used to run print businesses, enable new print products and engage with print buyers. 2020 was a good year for software in general. By "good year for software," I don't necessarily mean profit for software vendors, I mean that the unique aspects of a pandemic has driven us further into our digital lives all powered by software.



So, what has 2020 done to print software specifically? How will the specific software tools that we deploy to run print businesses, enable new print products and engage with our customers change due to 2020 in general and COVID-19's impact specifically?

Before COVID-19, the print industry and many print businesses were differentiating based on their ability to invest and successfully implement software. Printers who came into 2020 with a Print MIS that was truly their "trusted system of record" had a real advantage when virtually overnight some degree of remote work was introduced into

every print business. Whereas printers still relying on paper-based business processes struggled to operate when employees were no longer in the same facility. Software has been a really important part of your print business for decades; COVID-19 made it even more important.

Software is the new infrastructure. We are collectively realizing that a lot of work can be done remotely IF there are software systems that connect us virtually. I'm not talking about Zoom or email. I'm taking about a pre-press automation tool that allows your people to create workflows and manage the business process of prepress from anywhere as long as they are online. If customer service is still relying primarily on email, phone and fax, they can no longer rely on the face-to-face interactions of meetings or cubicle visits. Collaboration has to move into the virtual environment where people can show up and have access to "context" because the communication is transparent - not locked in individual inboxes.

If software is your new infrastructure, who is your architect? Do you have a company-wide plan for how your software infrastructure will continue to evolve? Software infrastructure will allow you to move faster and pivot in the face of market conditions that seem to like U-turns and backflips. A software infrastructure is simply all the software you use to run your business. Think of utilizing software like you utilize labor. You optimize what it can do for you to get a solid ROI. We know every print business needs to be more efficient and more flexible. These characteristics require systems that can be scaled both up and down, as well as systems that keep getting more efficient.

One of the macro trends that

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“
Technology is evolving so quickly, and printers need vendors to keep offering software solutions that utilize the new capabilities.”

concerns me about COVID-19 is the across-the-board reduction in people coming together for all purposes. Think about where the print industry has continued to thrive – when people come together and need to consume paper-based information. For example: trade-shows, trainings, sporting events, seminars, sales meetings, etc. Cultures across the globe were forced to quickly push forward by moving events to a virtual space. You don't print anything out for a virtual meeting. What percentage of these in-person events will come back when the pandemic is behind us? Meeting face-to-face is one of those things that we kept doing because it's the way we've been doing it. People would have thought you were nuts if you suggested to move all in-person events to virtual overnight. It would never have happened, and it would have been met with massive resistance. A crisis suspends resistance; then when the crisis passes you are left with a massive adoption of new ways of operating that stays with the culture long after the crisis has passed.

Another concerning trend that I've been watching for some time is the lack of new print software solutions coming into our industry. Technology is evolving so quickly, and printers need vendors to keep offering software solutions that utilize the new capabilities. Because we have very few new software solutions; many printers are forced to stick with technologies that have failed to keep up. There are several solutions in our industry that still have Adobe Flash components somewhere in their solutions. This technology is basically falling off the cliff of obsolescence next month when

major browsers (Including Chrome) stop all support for it.

The first product I worked on in the industry was in the late 1990s. It was a web-to-print solution. We spent about a half a million dollars just to get started because we had to buy hardware, expensive database software and expensive hosting arrangements. Today that investment would have cost a couple hundred dollars per month in hosting with Amazon Web Services. The barrier to entry for software solutions couldn't be lower as far as infrastructure and availability of plugins, platforms and toolsets. This isn't bringing in lots of new solutions – the print industry is complicated and takes some time to learn. Penetrating the market is hard because print businesses are difficult to reach. Whereas general business software companies are taking the self-service sales approach to software sales; typically including a low featured free trial, our industry has expectations of a full sales cycle and hand holding during implementation.

Printers will have to adapt to the way software solutions are being deployed in other industries as I see more and more printers use technologies that were not built specifically for the print industry. As 2020 comes to a close, the hope would be that we would return to something more normal. This is clearly not happening as the U.S. is still struggling with the containment of the pandemic, and economies are still slow to pick up investment until people are free to move about with restrictions. ●



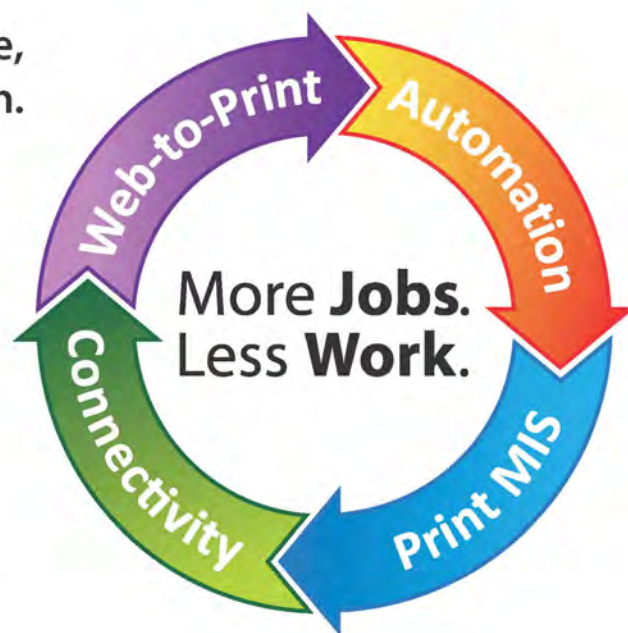
Jennifer Matt writes, speaks, and consults with printers worldwide who realize their ability to leverage software is critical to their success in the Information Age.

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LABELS AND PACKAGING: 2020

The year in review

By David Zwang

2020 will be remembered for many things, although for some it may also be worth forgetting. For packaging, however, it really was a transformative year, not so much for new and significant developments, of which there were some, but rather for trigger-

packaging, just as we saw and still see in commercial print, the shift from analog to digital is multifaceted. There is the technology shift, which brings with it lots of new developments in both analog and digital production solutions, but there is also a significant and more difficult shift in how businesses adopt and adapt.



Heidelberg's new plate-to-unit technology further extends their push-to-stop concept. In addition to Heidelberg's push-to-stop productivity enhancements, they have introduced FoilStart Cure, which permits metallic finishing effects with cold foil on in-mold labels (IML) with LED UV on a Speedmaster XL 106

ing increased awareness of the value of digital packaging production. This in itself is significant since it will help to drive and accelerate the ongoing migration from analog to digital production. In

New Technologies and Products

There were some interesting new product announcements this year even in the absence of drupa, and they are still coming. As an analyst and media person I was used to visiting the manufacturing plants and seeing the new technologies, although this year we all learned how to do business virtually. Like the original moon landing, we need to believe what we saw on the screen. So, I guess it really isn't that different from "some" of what we would have seen at drupa anyway.

Packaging spans such a wide application area, that we can't cover it all. However, I will highlight what I believe are the seminal developments that will affect the migration from analog to digital packaging production. Some of these developments reflect in the digitization of analog technologies and some new developments in toner (EP), and some in inkjet.

Analog Digitization

For folding carton and even label work, in addition to flexo, offset is still the most productive high-quality solution. To keep up with the changing demands, both offset and flexo are digitizing and automating. This digitization and resultant automation haven't changed the basic imaging concepts, however, the digital enhancements are affecting everything from the transport and material handling to imaging quality. The use of visual and other sensing technologies combined with digital servo controls, and even robots, enables less operator involvement and better control.

There has been a lot of digitization and upgrading of flexo presses as well.

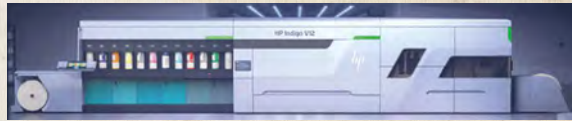
There are many new CI (common impression) flexo presses making it to the market, providing much better registration and media handling. The Koenig & Bauer Evo line of 3 CI flexo presses designed for short, mid-sized and long runs can run up to over 600 m/min with web widths up to 2000 mm. Bobst has focused on digitizing their entire line of products as evidenced by the DigiFlexo solutions with ink on demand (IOD). While no longer part of Heidelberg, the Gallus Labelmaster, supports up to 16 different process positions, including ink color, embellishment and die cutting and can run up to 200m/min.

Digital Presses

2020 has been a big year for digital press introductions. The new Xeikon PX 2000 and PX3000 7 color UV label presses are based on their Panther inkjet technology and can run on a wide variety of



©HP



media at up to 50 m/min.

The HP Indigo line has been refreshed increasing the processing speeds by up to 30%. They have increased their process speed to 180 m/min. That doesn't mean that the presses will necessarily run at that speed today, but it does provide an imaging platform to support higher speeds.

HP has also announced a new imaging architecture LEPx for their new "Series 6" press moving the imaging from the current CI drum to inline print stations with an imaging belt.

The HP V12 label press will be the first to use this new technology platform and will currently run at up to 120 m/min (400 fpm), providing a competitive solution against so it production inkjet and even flexo or flexo hybrid.

Of course, if we are speaking about digital presses, we need to mention Landa. While they didn't officially release a new product, they have been installing a lot of their sheetfed S10 and P10 perfecting presses. The W10 web press is ready and I believe in beta at this point, but I guess they are waiting for the right place and time to announce.

Managing Data

One of the constraints on production inkjet reaching the speeds needed to compete with flexo is how to handle the volume of data required to drive the imaging engines. Global Graphics has developed the first direct-to-printhead processing



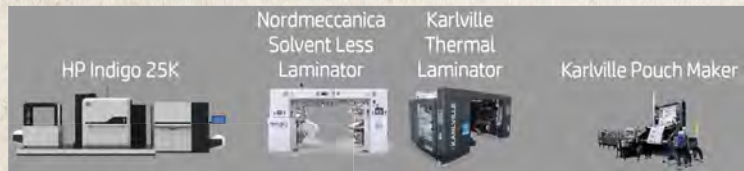
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pipeline using desktop class CPUs creating a future-proof solution to keep up with the latest production inkjet presses. This is a very significant development and is truly a game changer and will undoubtedly open the way for more productive digital print packaging solutions.

Hybrid

In packaging, the concept of hybrid equipment approaches that combine different printing and finishing technologies is commonplace. In fact, it is less about hybrid technologies and more about the application of the hybrid technologies. Flexo and digital are one way to address those needs and have found a growing role in label and even some flexible packaging applications.

Unlike the liquid and dry toner or UV Inkjet equipment on the market, this new hybrid technology is designed to be cost effective at very short,

short and medium run lengths. The latest product is the new UTECO Sapphire EVO W product production inkjet press designed for flexible packaging. The “W” refers to

“wide” since this press has a 1250 mm (49 in) width. The EVO W is not the first Sapphire, but it is the first to be powered by Kodak ULTRASTREAM technology. The press supports a higher resolution of 600 x 1800 dpi at up to 150 mpm (492 fpm).

Mark Andy Digital Pro is a new 77 fpm toner-based press that can be upgraded with inline finishing capabilities, including single slot die station or with a semi rotary die module. This compliments their existing flexo product lines, which can also include inkjet and finishing modules. The Canon LabelStream 4000 consists of an Edale flexo transport, and an FFEI and Canon imaging and control

system. The Fujifilm Graphium press shares some similar features to the LabelStream 4000.

Koenig & Bauer Durst has three hybrid presses in their current

lineup. The DeltaSPC flexo and digital inkjet, their modular CorruJET hybrid flexo/digital corrugated platform which just came out of beta and the new VariJET, a 7-color folding carton press which is designed with flexo, offset and inkjet printing capabilities and will be going into beta end of this year, or early next year. It will be shown at drupa in April and they will be ready to take orders.

Bespoke

Changing market demands go beyond the packaging process itself to packaging types, repackaging and how they need to change to support the new distribution demands. Designed well, purpose-built or bespoke solutions provide more cost effective and timely solutions with fewer setups and less handling. This concept is evidenced in the HP and partners pouch factory for under \$3 million.

Xeikon also has a pouch production suite called flexflow, which uses their existing CX500 digital press with a laminator.

Embellishment and Finishing

Packaging requires more than just print to get it to engage the consumer and stand out on the shelf. It requires finishing and usually some form of embellishment. Digital packaging production requires new and updated hardware solutions to support it. There has been a lot of development in this area and lots more coming down the road.



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Actega Metal Print, a division of Altana AG, acquired the Landa technology shown as a technology demo during drupa 2016 and rebranded it EcoLeaf. The EcoLeaf process uses a trigger image with a mono layer of Nano sized metal pigment flakes, that are attracted to the trigger image. The result is a metallized print. In a recent agreement with AB Graphic International, the EcoLeaf is now available for the ABG Digicon Series 3 finishing press, which will be available for the new Indigo V12 digital press on release. Actega has also developed Actega Crystal, a technology that can be used as a more sustainable sleeve, label or as a replacement for direct-to-object printing.

Xeikon has also released their long-awaited Fusion Embellishment Unit (FEU) which can be used in line with their presses for digital finishing and embellishment. It uses MGI technology inside.

Lasers are very compatible with digital print technologies and increasingly used. Sei laser has been developing laser systems since 1982 and has been focused on packaging production processes. The sei Labelmaster can run up to 100 m/min and are used in line on label and flexible packaging products, while the Packmaster WD can run up to 500 m/min performing scoring, perfining and die cutting on a range of flexible packaging. Their Paperone 5000 is designed for laser die cutting and creasing folding cartons and can run up to 2500 sph. Highcon, has four different model sheet-fed laser die cutters. Their sheet-fed solution includes inline cutting and creasing without the need to make any external dies or counters for folding cartons and corrugated at up to 5,000 B1sph.

Corrugated

Since I recently covered corrugated in a series of three articles, things are still changing. For a more in-depth review, I would refer you to: "The Future of Corrugated," "Corrugated Re-Envisioned Post-Print" and "Corrugated Re-Envisioned Pre-Print," "Corrugated Growth and Challenges Part 1" and "Corrugated Growth and Challenges Part



2." However, even with that, there have been some new introductions and updates to postprint corrugated presses. The most recent is the updated EFI Nozomi C18000 PLUS, although we have also seen new introductions and enhanced versions of existing presses like the Hanway Glory re-envisioned as the Xeikon IDERA.

Additionally, Domino has updated and re-envisioned the Sun Automation Corrstream as the Domino X630i.

Today more than ever, the press and finishing technologies are available to address these new market transformations and will continue to develop even further. Stay tuned!

Labels and Packaging is a fairly strong and safe market segment for print service providers. After all, as long as products are created, or grown in the case of some foods, there will be a need for packaging.

More to Come ...

I would like to address your interests and concerns in future articles as it relates to the manufacturing of Print, Packaging and Labels, and how, if at all, it drives future workflows including 'Industry 4.0'. If you have any interesting examples of hybrid and bespoke manufacturing, I am very anxious to hear about them as well. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, suggestions or examples of interesting applications. ●



David Zwang specializes in process analysis, and strategic development of firms involved in publishing and packaging across the globe. Contact him at david@zwang.com.

Q&A WITH *efi*®

Chief Revenue Officer Frank Mallozzi shares the latest updates from EFI

By Cary Sherburne

EFI has made a number of key announcements recently, including the launch of the second generation of its digital direct-to-corrugated press, the Nozomi C18000 Plus.

Here's what Chief Revenue Officer Frank Mallozzi has to say about the latest EFI news.

Printing News: *Let's start with the most recent EFI news; the launch of the second generation of the Nozomi C18000 direct-to-corrugated press, the Nozomi C18000 Plus.*

Frank Mallozzi: Yes, we are very excited about this. One of the things I love about the company is we are very technology centric and we do the best we can to understand customers, and we did that with Nozomi. We launched the first version of Nozomi at drupa 2016, and we then listened to our customers who were operating in real commercial environments. We take all that feedback and come up with derivative offerings that match what the customers

are looking for. And that's what you will see with the Nozomi C18000 PLUS.

PN: *What are some of the new capabilities this brings?*

FM: There are a number of them. One is a new transport that has much better hold down. In the corrugated environment, better hold-down gives you better registration, better dot placement, better quality and better throughput. We've also enhanced the system software, so set-up time is greatly reduced. We also have added automation on the back end with an enhanced camera system that provides intelligence back to the press on color uniformity, nozzle compensation, etc., enhancements that increase the throughput to our customers. It also offers

the option of a new enhanced coater and drying station for printing on non-porous substrates such as plastics. And there's a new EFI Fiery NZ-1000 digital front end featuring Adobe PDF Print Engine 5, the latest version, that delivers 5% faster processing. Also improved is Fiery's Smart Ink Estimator that provides a more precise job costing and estimation versus real consumption.

PN: *Can you talk a bit about the timing of this announcement?*

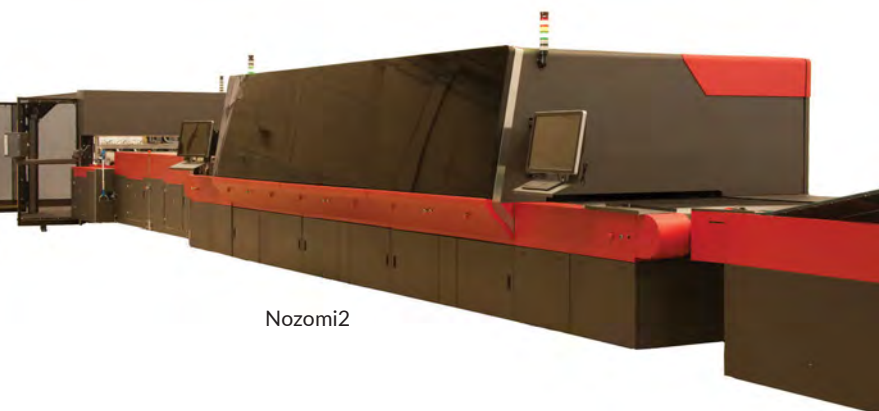
FM: The timing is just right. We had our first wave of early adopters, and those who potentially would follow later, and we're starting to see a lot of interest in that second group.

PN: *There's been a lot of other news from EFI recently. Let's start with your drupa announcement.*

FM: We made a decision not to



Frank Mallozzi



Nozomi2

participate in drupa 2021. Up front, we want to state that we have tremendous respect for the show organizers and the show itself. This would have been my seventh drupa, and it's always added a tremendous amount to our business. But it's really not about the event itself; it's more about the pandemic and the safety of our employees. We evaluated the risks, and at this point, we didn't think it was the right thing to do. We hope there will be some ancillary opportunities around that time-frame that will allow us to promote some of the new things we are looking to offer the marketplace, and to engage with the marketplace and the show itself.

PN: *You've also made some announcements about EFI Connect as well.*

FM: Our Connect conference is our physical customer conference we have at the Wynn Las Vegas every January, and due to the pandemic, we cancelled Connect 2021. We are still planning to have Connect 2022 at the Wynn, and hopefully it will be business as usual by then. But for 2021, we will be launching a new virtual event called Engage. We've had such tremendous success working with our customers via virtual. Just recently I was on a call with one of the largest commercial printers in Australia, and we did a full-on demonstration to their executive team out of New Hampshire. They came back and said, "We felt like we were there. You gave us everything we could possibly want." We have tried a few things, and we think we've nailed it. So we're going to take what we've learned and launch this incredible event.

PN: *So talk a little about the details.*

FM: After every Connect, we poll our customers for their feedback. Many of them said they would love to have more regionally focused events in their languages. So we're going to make Engage a global eight-day event that will accommodate attendees to come in at their leisure. We'll be introducing a number of new products and will have the same general look and feel of our general and breakout sessions, but the main thing is our ability to expand our reach. We will take advantage of every bit of technology that's out there, and I think you will be surprised at

how we will be able to pull this off.

PN: *I understand congratulations are in order for your receipt of an InterTech Award for the EFI Reggiani BOLT digital textile printer.*

FM: Thank you. We've received InterTech Awards in the past, but this is the first for textiles. We're really excited about it, and the BOLT is a fabulous product with incredible single-pass technology. We have a number of placements and a lot of interest. A fun fact: One of our customers that purchased the press about 10 months ago has printed enough fabric to stretch from Italy, where our EFI Reggiani business manufactures the BOLT, to California, where I am and where EFI is headquartered. That's all pristine, high quality output. We also think as a result of the pandemic, there will be more on-shoring where you need bursts in capacity, and the BOLT fits in well there.

PN: *Plus the sustainability and cycle time advantages. None in the U.S. yet?*

FM: Not yet, but there have been a lot of discussions and interest. It's very similar to what happened with Nozomi in the corrugated space. Once we started seeing the early adopters place those presses, we started to see more take-up. I see similar trends with BOLT. ●

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Entrance to EFI Engage Virtual Event

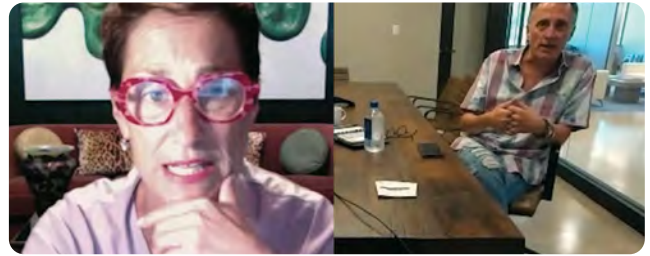


Example EFI Engage General Session Set-Up



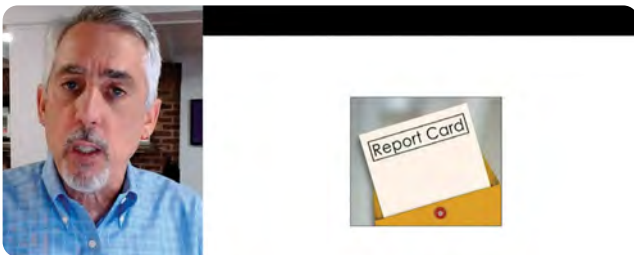
Smithers' Sean Smyth Talks About Digital Print for Packaging

Sean Smyth recaps some of the highlights of Smithers' recent "Digital Print for Packaging" virtual event.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145921



Saint Louis Fashion Fund: Driving the Fashion Industry Forward

Susan Sherman and Jon Lewis discuss how the Saint Louis Fashion Fund is revitalize the industry.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21144243



Target Report Interview—The Target Report Annual Recap 2020

Mark Hahn of Graphic Arts Advisors looks back at M&A activity in 2020 and identifies trends.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21144956



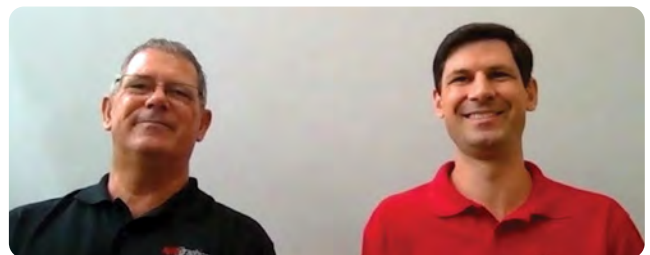
Software Automation Sewbots: The Future of Apparel Manufacturing?

Palaniswamy "Raj" Rajan, Chairman & CEO, Software Automation, talks about sewbots.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145236



Lilly Pulitzer Increases Agility, Reduces Lead Time with Digital Technologies

Margaret Getty, Senior Associate, Woven Fabric and Trim, for Lilly Pulitzer, shares the company's story.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21146031



Independent Digital Printer ISS Discusses Its Conversion to an AlphaGraphics Franchise

Jeff and Eric Schwarz share their reasons for making the change to an AlphaGraphics franchise in 2019.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145317



iJetColor Pro

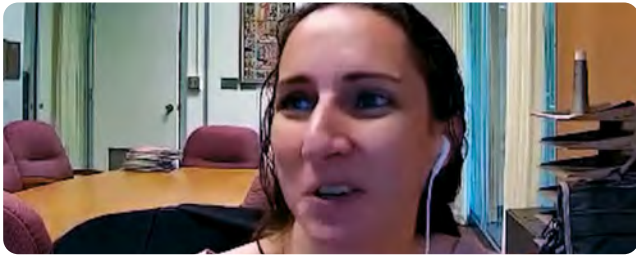
The iJetColor Pro is a high speed, light industrial envelope press that can print full-color filled and unfilled envelopes of various sizes.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21144976



Die-Cut Round Cornered Business Cards Printed 18-up with Die-Changeover to Square Corner Cards

Rolle's Insignia5 die cutter at Dscoop 2019 in Orlando, FL producing business cards with live die changeover.
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145057





AATCC Update: What's New and What's Coming

AATCC Executive Vice President Diana Wyman shares the latest AATCC updates, including initiatives that will be considered at the virtual committee meetings.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145533



The State of Consumables:

The Changing Supply Chain

How has the COVID crisis impacted the print supply chain for inks, plates, and other consumables?

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/2114544



Are You Using The Right Workflow?

Explore 6 key areas of your business to consider when evaluating whether your current workflow is RIGHT for you!

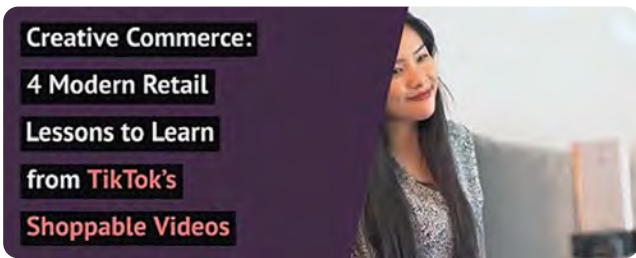
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145676



Springs Creative Team Shares Latest Developments for Designers and Brands

Kathryn Lawrie, Kathy Phillips and Cathy Valent share the latest developments at Springs Creative.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145781



4 Modern Retail Lessons to Learn from Tik Tok's Shoppable Videos

The company announced a new shoppable video stream in collaboration with the video shopping platform Ntwrk.

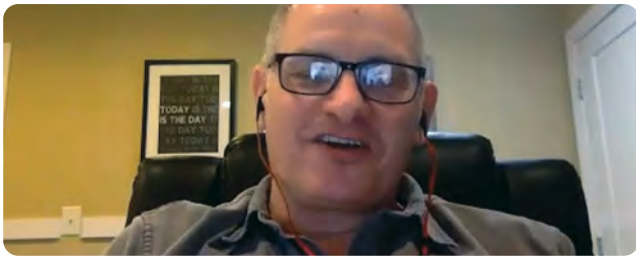
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145680



Frank Plays with the Stones

Frank provides a short history of chromolithography, Louis Prang, its most famous practitioner, and shows some beautiful samples of this colorful printing art.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145681



Warren Werbitt Goes Printer to Printer with John Cassidy

Warren talks with John Cassidy, Co-Founder and President of S.C.'s Duplicates INK, about how he started the company and managing through the current "craziness."

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145821



EXCLUSIVE: EFI Chief Revenue Officer Frank Mallozzi Provides Details about New Nozomi C18000 PLUS

EFI has launched the second generation, the Nozomi C18000 PLUS, available as a field upgrade.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21145782



DEVELOPING NEW AGILITY PHASE TWO

Plan from the foundation.

In Phase One: Assess Organizational Design, I described the fundamental constructs necessary to design an organization for maximum agility. Phase Two, Plan from the Foundation, is a methodology for tapping into the power source of organizational agility: your people. The frontline stakeholders in your organization are the tactical problem solvers and purveyors of foundational perspectives that compound into profound wins for the organization and its customers. Flipping the traditional perspective of trickle-down, authoritarian strategic planning to a process that is more inclusive will ignite a tangible energy that will manifest within the ranks of your workforce.

An excellent example of this inclusive leadership style can be found in the historic command of George Washington. Following the famed Delaware River crossing and a surprise attack victory in Trenton, N.J., the energized yet ragged Continental Army set up camp across the Assunpink Creek from arriving British reinforcements. Washington did not like the odds of a full engagement with a reinforced enemy. He instead, convened a council of officers and locals to devise a solution. After a robust discussion of ideas, it was proposed that the army slip away under the cover of darkness and on narrow, unfamiliar roads, head north to Princeton. To accomplish this, Washington invited two locals into the council with knowledge of the terrain his army would have to traverse. They volunteered as guides through terrain familiar to them and

the successful maneuver led to key victories that bolstered the success of the Continental Army.

The lesson in this action is the humble inclusion of the local farmers as guides, a common site in Washington's councils. When leadership is genuinely open to all ideas and solutions proposed by the people most familiar with your company's terrain of business performance, the likelihood of success compounds exponentially.

Rethinking strategic planning to be more inclusive will create a new competitive advantage for your company. Why? Because so few are doing it well today. Studies show an abysmal 2% of leaders

have confidence in the prospect of achieving 80-100% of their strategic objectives. Possible causes of low leadership confidence in strategic plans may be that

previous top-down efforts netted poor results. Or perhaps the process was too burdensome to create, distill and track results by manual means such as spreadsheets.

Certainly, change wrought by time and outside factors render plans obsolete at a brisk pace (think 2020 pandemic). However, nothing will derail a strategic plan faster than a lack of commitment and engagement from the workforce tasked with running your daily business and delivering positive outcomes. The ripple effect of the leadership "crisis of confidence" is that only 5% of employees



Preston Herrin is a strategy, growth, and performance consultant. He has served in c-level and senior leadership roles at fast-growth companies like 4over LLC, Café Press, and Drummond. In his 30-year career Preston's roles span strategy, business development and executive management providing e-commerce, software, logistics and service solutions for all vertical markets such as Manufacturing, Finance, Healthcare, Nonprofits and more.

are aware of their company's strategy. Additionally, a low 40% of employees believe their manager understands the company strategy. The reasons notwithstanding, the need for inclusive strategic planning and agile execution are more important than ever in uncertain times.

Here are tactical steps to create an inclusive strategic planning process within your company:

Gather Cross-Functional Insight

Cast a wide net to include as many employee stakeholder voices as possible in the process. The purpose is to engage the frontline of every function in providing the feedback necessary to build a plan that influences company investment, resource allocation, project priorities and organizational performance. This will likely result in conducting multiple meetings (ideal participants of 15 or less) by function or cross-functionally.

First, select an analysis tool to gather feedback. The most recognized planning tool to accomplish this is undoubtedly the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis. While there are several variations of the SWOT that have genuine merit as planning tools (e.g. SCORE, SOAR, and NOISE Analyses) the objective is to gather unfiltered, objective feedback from your employee stakeholders.

Second, define and communicate a clear purpose of the analysis and planning exercises. Include company vision, mission and core values that correlate to the inclusive nature of the planning effort. Clearly define a framework for the rules of engagement during the planning and analysis meetings (e.g. respect, honesty, candor).

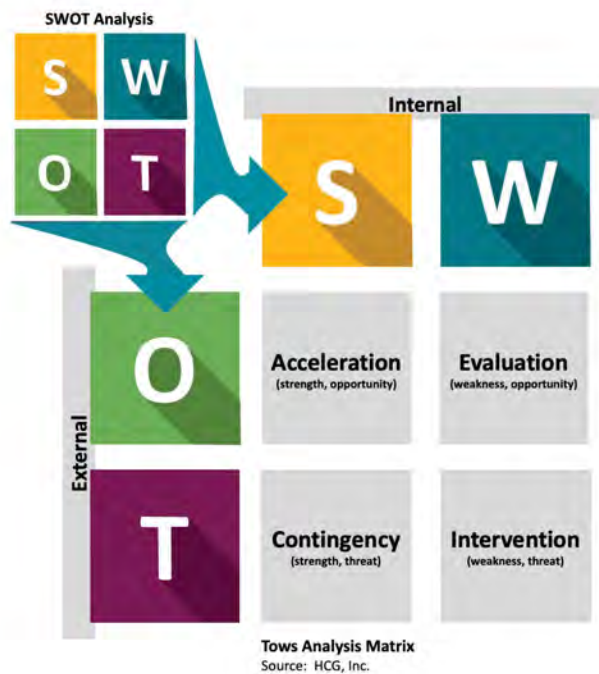
Third, allow team members to submit their feedback electronically prior to the first meeting. This pre-work allows informal collaboration to occur prior to the formal planning and analysis meeting and impacts the quality of feedback and meeting participation.

Fourth, select a professional facilitator, compile the pre-work feedback from participants and conduct the meeting. The success of the entire process hinges on the facilitation of the meetings. Performed well and in accordance with the defined

purpose, your team will be engaged and enlivened. Done poorly the pendulum will swing to the other extreme. Seeking outside professional help, if necessary, ensures unbiased facilitation of full, honest and respectful feedback.

Translate Insights into Action

Spend the majority of the analysis meeting focused on translating the situational analysis into actionable strategic options. This can be accomplished by employing an action-oriented prioritization matrix called TOWS Analysis Matrix. The illustration demonstrates the process by which



the SWOT analysis feedback is subcategorized into the TOWS Analysis Matrix. The subcategories are labeled to describe the kind of actions to be taken: Acceleration, Evaluation, Contingency, Intervention.

- **Acceleration:** Strength + Opportunity. Prioritize plans, resources and budget to leverage competitive differentiators and unique value.

- **Evaluation:** Weakness + Opportunity. Develop plans to evaluate markets, products or technology to leverage opportunities into a strength.

Continued on page 62

5 KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE RESUME

With so many people out of work and many companies struggling due to the pandemic, competition for available jobs is fiercer than ever.

Job seekers must often rely on resumes submitted to electronic systems like Indeed or ZipRecruiter, or to a company's in-house jobs site, without any personal interaction with the company's HR staff or hiring managers. So it is ever more critical that resumes are structured to meet today's very different needs in order to stand out and be considered in the job application process.

Five Keys to an Effective Resume

1. Make it "Parsable." Recruiters and companies use cloud-based platforms to manage the large volume of these documents they receive. Excessive formatting and graphics do not work well and result in less accuracy when the resume is parsed, or broken down, by the system. For example, you might break a sentence down into its individual components – noun, verb, adjective, etc. – or, in the case of your resume, the system will look for certain elements that have been programmed into the system to help them weed out unqualified resumes and bring the cream to the top.

2. Communicate concisely. Too many words and too many accomplishments listed will raise eyebrows and potentially result in the exact opposite of what a candidate hoped to achieve. As you write, review each sentence you have written and shorten it a least once.

3. Use key words. Resume key words should include specific job requirements, including skills, competencies, relevant credentials and previous positions and employers. Keywords should be words that, immediately, will show the recruiter

or hiring manager that you are a good fit for the job. In this digital age, using the right key words may be the difference between being seen and being lost in the shuffle.

4. Customize. Have a very basic upload-friendly version of your resume ready at all times; but also research the job you want, and tailor the version you will use for that specific job and hiring manager. While recruiters and HR professionals will typically use the "no frills" version, the hiring manager will look at the hard copy and how well it is tailored to their company and the job you want there. They will be able to see that you took care to thoroughly research the position and the company, and that you are serious about wanting to work for them.

5. Include three references. It can be especially helpful if these references are in the same industry and were direct supervisors or peers in your past employment. Also include the statement: "additional references available upon request."

These days, at least part of the job interview is likely to be virtual. Make sure you have a professional-looking space and the computer resources ready and available to participate in video interviews. For more tips and hints, visit us on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/printlinktalent/>.

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Arnold Kahn, a respected authority on staffing issues for the graphic arts industry. He has owned and managed printing and prepress companies for over 25 years. In 1994, Arnold formed PrintLink to successfully help candidates and hiring managers find each other.



Dino Scalia is the senior vice president, managing partner at PrintLink. He has spent over 30 years in the Printing Industry. He has lead cross functional teams in sales, business development, and account management serving the enterprise account marketplace.

Innovative Industry

Welcome to the 2020 Custom Content Section. These pages preview some of the latest, cutting-edge products, technologies, and services from the Printing and Sign Marketplaces.

A major driver of the consolidation of the various “silos” of these industries that have been taking place over the past several years has been digital technology, which underlies virtually all of the products in the pages. This year, this digital-driven consolidation has never been more apparent, as we have seen more and more traditional commercial print businesses pursuing opportunities and investing in Textile, Industrial, Home Decor, Wide-Format, and Signage.

Change often brings about challenges, but also

opens up new opportunities. This can happen fast. As a result, we need to be constantly vigilant and keeping one eye on the future so we can foresee the next wave of opportunities, and invest in the technologies that will allow us to take advantage of them. The companies in these pages have invested in their own businesses to develop and introduce products and services that can provide additional revenue opportunities, and drive more growth, for commercial printers, sign shops, in-plants, and others. They also prove daily that it is their “service” attitude that consistently keeps them in front of the competition. As we reach the end of the year, and as you consider investing in your businesses—and staying ahead of your own competition—please use these pages as a guide to finding new opportunities. ●

Print Marketing **Beyond Presentation Folders**



One thing that has remained vital during this turbulent year is print marketing. In today's digital world, printed brochures, catalogs, postcards and calendars stand out to consumers. Folder Express is known for our quality presentation folders, priced right and delivered on time. But did you know that we print more than just folders? Here are a few reliable print marketing pieces to consider for 2021 and beyond.

Catalogs & Brochures

When it comes to purchasing decisions, print catalogs and brochures are two of the most effective marketing tools. In a survey by USPS, 72% of people said catalogs made them more interested in a product. Another study found that 83% of people who saw a brochure intended to do business with the brand being advertised. Catalogs and brochures are great at increasing awareness, establishing brand voice and driving customer conversions.

Postcards

Direct mail is not only an effective marketing channel—it has steadily grown in effectiveness as the world has gone digital. Why? Because it's something tangible and real amid a constant deluge of digital noise. Postcards are also perceived as less intrusive than digital advertising. In fact, 73% of American consumers say they prefer direct mail because they can read it whenever they want.

Calendars

Printed calendars are another cost-effective branding tool. Many companies give branded calendars as customer gifts, which increases the odds that they'll be kept and used regularly. A custom printed calendar is the perfect piece to help businesses stay top of mind with their customers all year long.

Remember: Folder Express has 40,000 square feet of storage space available to you! Save money by printing larger quantities, then let us ship exactly what your customers need, when they need it.

Call 800.322.1064 or visit folderexpress.com to get started on your next print marketing project!



A Decisive Game Changer for Commercial Printing

Comparing the options and weighing the pros and cons may no longer be necessary. After four years of development, Canon Solutions America launched the varioPRINT iX-series sheetfed inkjet press in April 2020, revolutionizing the commercial printing...

Commercial print service providers typically face tough decisions when buying digital printing equipment. Toner technology is relatively fast (depending on the specific brand and model), but the run costs are high and downtime for service can be frequent and frustrating. Production inkjet technology offers attractive running costs, speed, and uptime, but some models may have substrate restrictions and/or image quality limitations.

Now, comparing the options and weighing the pros and cons may no longer be necessary. After four years of development, Canon Solutions America launched the varioPRINT iX-series sheetfed inkjet press in April 2020, revolutionizing the commercial printing business experience and decisively tipping the scales to the future of printing with production inkjet.

A True Game Changer

Upon close inspection, calling the varioPRINT iX-series a “game changer” is no exaggeration. Featuring proprietary iQuariusIX technology advances in quality control, ink innovation, drying technology, and media handling, it offers some of the highest productivity and cost efficiency in the industry, with incredibly high speeds, an average uptime of 94 percent, and attractive savings in running costs and labor.

Of particular importance for commercial print providers is its ability to print on an epic media range while retaining razor-sharp details, outstanding color, and a perfectly flat finish. With up to 350 gsm on offset coated and uncoated paper, the varioPRINT iX-series consistently delivers stunning image quality that rivals or exceeds toner, no matter the media or design demands. This allows for greater

application versatility and flexibility, opening opportunities to expand print volumes as well as pursue the profitability of smaller, more diverse jobs.

Taking the Industry by Storm

Despite uncertainty about the future, market reaction to the varioPRINT iX-series has been overwhelmingly positive since the April launch. Our 2020 inventory sold in record time, and we are now taking orders for 2021. Forward-thinking PSPs are investing in this platform for their future based on the profit potential and return on investment of the varioPRINT iX-series, including John Mashia, president and COO of IMS Direct in upstate New York, who bought one shortly after it hit the market.

“We chose to invest in the Canon varioPRINT iX-series this year because it gives us the ability to run high-quality jobs—comparable to offset on an inkjet press—expanding our ability to support our customers,” Mashia says. “We’ve been able to displace multiple toner boxes and drive our overall costs down while increasing our efficiency.”

For commercial print providers weighing their business prospects, potential opportunities, and investment options going forward, assessing the game-changing Canon varioPRINT iX-series should be high on the list. The ROI is easy to calculate: More business. More profit.

To view a technology overview video of the Canon varioPRINT iX-series, visit pps.csa.canon.com/iXseries. To speak to a technology specialist, call 1-877-623-4969

Canon



Flatbed UV Printing in a Small Footprint at Affordable Prices: **A Dream Come True with Xante'**

If a flatbed UV printer isn't on your wish list, it will be or, at least, should be. For many commercial print providers, flatbed printers were just too large and too expensive to be realistically considered.

If a flatbed UV printer isn't on your wish list, it will be or, at least, should be. For many commercial print providers, flatbed printers were just too large and too expensive to be realistically considered. Thanks to Xante' and its innovative development team, the barrier to entry for flatbed printing has been lowered – or, more accurately, shrunk – in both size and cost.

The Xante' X-33 and X-16 flatbed UV printers are designed to meet the constrained floorspace that print shops must endure. Taking up an area no more than just six square feet, these printers offer shops the ability to quickly produce high profit margin products such as signs, promotional specialties, personalized gift items, and décor with extremely high quality. Powered by iQueue, Xante's simple but incredibly versatile Adobe PostScript-based PDF workflow software, the X-33 and X-16 give even the most novice operator the ability to produce the best output at the finest resolution and most brilliant full-color quality. Xante's X-33 and X-16 give commercial printers the best solutions for adding UV technology to their shops at extremely affordable prices.

The X-33 UV printer especially benefits those shops in need of better, faster, cheaper alternatives to the traditional methods of producing signs on coroplast or other rigid substrates thanks to its ample 24" x 36" vacuum flat bed. Turning around typical 18" x 24" signs with full-color graphics at speeds under two minutes per sign with excellent quality on the X-33 eliminates the tedious, costly process of cutting and applying vinyl lettering. Shops can also easily add full photographic images without much added effort that give an extra level of impact to everyday signage thanks to the highest quality resolution of 2880 dpi available on the X-33. Speed, of course, is essential. The X-33 incorporates two four-channel print heads including one with four-channels of white ink only that is offset from the CMYK head. This feature allows the X-33 to accelerate print speed by applying any white ink simultaneously with the process colors. Signage, however, is not the only print job that's ideal for the X-33. Xante's design allows the print

head to elevate up to a height of six inches for printing on three-dimensional objects such as boxes, golf balls, baseballs, or footballs. All that's required is a jig to secure the object on the bed and the X-33 takes care of the rest.

For shops trying to find a UV printer that can handle the widest array of production for demanding clients, the X-16 fits the bill in many ways. The printer's 18" x 24" vacuum bed is large enough for handling rigid substrates. The print head elevates to a maximum 7.75" to accommodate

three-dimensional objects with ease. The X-16 also includes a rotary attachment for printing on cylindrical objects such as bottles, cups, or glassware. The X-16 is truly a "do-it-all" printer. Whether the job is a typical yard sign, promotional specialty mug, a personalized gift box, or a logo imprint on a ballpoint pen, the X-16 has the capacity and quality to produce outstanding results.

The powerful iQueue workflow software, included with both printers, is the key to achieving the best results. Full control of white ink, color profiles, imposition, and even variable data are just a few of the extensive benefits that iQueue provides. Its straightforward user interface is quick to learn. Within minutes, operators of the X-33 or X-16 can be producing money-making jobs of the highest quality using iQueue. Repeat jobs are trouble-free since iQueue retains all settings ready for the next order. Future upgrades of the software are included as well for as long as the shop is printing with the X-33 or X-16. iQueue is the ideal software solution for fast, reliable highest quality output on the Xante' printers.

Whether the choice is the X-33 or the X-16, the dream of affordable but right-sized UV printing has become a reality thanks to Xante'.

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XANTE'

PressWise - Turning Touches Into Automation

Designed by a visionary printer burdened by the traditional manual workflows that still plague many printers today, PressWise provides a single, cloud-based print workflow with the tools you need to streamline, automate and grow your business.

Designed by a visionary printer burdened by the traditional manual workflows that still plague many printers today, PressWise provides a single, cloud-based print workflow with the tools you need to streamline, automate and grow your business.

“Before PressWise, each order would take about an hour of admin time to create the estimate and job ticket, get the job into production and get it shipped. With an average of 225 orders per week at an average order of \$500, the cost of manual processing rapidly ate into margins.”

How many times are you touching a job?

From estimating to orders, job tickets to impositioning, quoting to invoicing, PressWise reduces print production touches, increasing margins and providing faster turnarounds.

Are you tired of calls to the shop for job status?

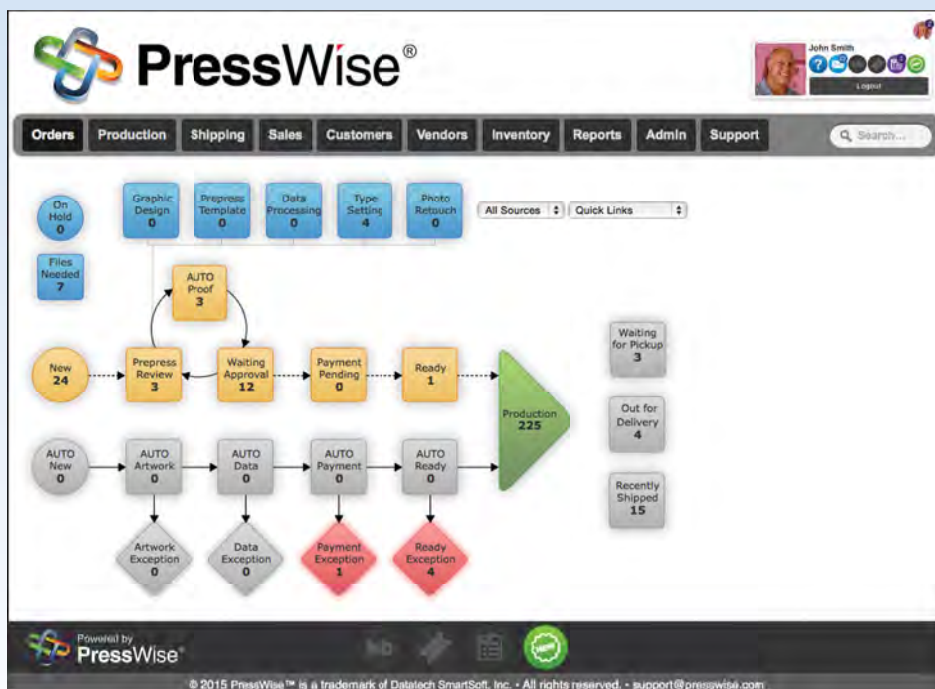
As a cloud-based application, your shop goes everywhere you and your mobile device goes. Clients can even check job status, track shipments, place orders and make payments.

Are high upfront costs keeping you out of the MIS game?

With a low flat fee to launch the system and then a monthly fee, there are no long-term contracts or massive upfront costs. Unlimited technical support, training and product updates are all included.

Progressive printers are abandoning manual processes and legacy systems for PressWise. Here's what they have to say:

“PressWise offers a modern, web-based job ordering, processing and proofing system that allows our entire staff to stay on the same page at all times.”



PressWise Order Management Dashboard

You get unlimited Web Storefronts, Estimating and Quote generation, Auto-Proof Approval processing, Job Ticket creation, Job Tracking, Automated Impositioning, Inventory, Mail Processing and Shipping, QuickBooks integration, connectivity to third-party storefronts and more.

PressWise was designed by a printer for printers - and is supported by an expert staff. We know print!

Visit www.presswise.com.



Print, Press, Profit – with White Printing

“Print, Press and Profit” summarizes how digital transfer works. And its nearly that easy. Applying “print” from a single printer to the widest range of materials and substrates greatly expands the ability to produce premium products, and print for profit

“Print, Press and Profit” summarizes how digital transfer works. And its nearly that easy. Applying “print” from a single printer to the widest range of materials and substrates greatly expands the ability to produce premium products, and print for profit.

A compelling aspect of the Digital Transfer market is that you can target short runs, profitably. In place of chasing pennies per copy, digital transfer products are collecting



dollars. For example, applying corporate logos to 50 polo shirts can easily deliver \$500 to \$750 in profit. In just a half-day's effort.

Digital transfer is also easy to acquire, easy to use, requires little maintenance, yet it is very versatile in terms of the wide range of materials or substrates that can be embellished. Adding digital transfer to your business is also complimentary to other decorating methods such as sublimation, embroidery, even DTG.

But T-shirts are not the only item that can be produced. This industry has evolved to include highly refined heat transfer media that is engineered to apply print to more surfaces than ever before. Including metal, ceramics, wood, plastics, clear films and of course textiles. And when it comes to transferring on to garments, digital transfer covers cotton, polyester, blends, athletic wear, and canvas.

White Printing

A key element to the growth and success of digital transfer is White ink and toner. The ability to print with white lends itself to producing compelling output with surprisingly little effort.



“White Printing” opens the opportunity to apply vibrant color on to dark surfaces. The most common being black t-shirts.

It is understood that “White” is fundamental in printing. After more than a century of applying CMYK inks on to white paper, white seems to go unnoticed. However, the foundation of color printing is based on using subtractive CMYK inks on a white surface to control the light/color that is reflected back to our eyes.

Now imagine the ability to apply “White” along with traditional CMYK inks and toners to expand printing beyond white surfaces. An ideal solution includes:

- A rich, opaque white achieved with a single impression.
- An automated process of applying white while using traditional color printing.
- The ability to print on a wide range of substrates and materials.

Enter OKI. OKI Data Americas, Inc. is recognized as an innovator in the decorating market for more than 15 years, and introduced the first printer dedicated to using white toner 10 years ago. White printing technology is the hallmark of several of OKI's printer lines that target light production, mailing and digital transfer.

A key factor in building success and simplifying White Printing is the toner formulation and the OKI print technology that delivers a rich opaque layer of white, directly under CMYK in a single pass. The viability of this combination is attested by industry leading partners that have developed media, RIP software, fabrics and more, specifically for digital transfer printing. OKI technology, along with partners representing the best in industry, will continue to drive the digital transfer market forward.

For more information, please email procolor@okidata.com or call 972-891-3304

OKI

HOW IT STARTED AND HOW IT'S GOING

The wide-format year in review

By Richard Romano

Recently, there was a Twitter meme making the rounds in which two juxtaposed images depicted “how it started” and “how it’s going”—“it” being, presumably, 2020, offering wry, pictorial comments on the year:



In terms of wide format and signage:

How it started:



How it's going:



Yesterday

As we entered 2020, wide format was booming. Companies all over the place were investing in new equipment, some even adding new locations and/or expanding their current locations. In January and February, it was a golden age for sign and display companies.

One of the hot application areas that had emerged was environmental/experiential graphics, or the intersection of décor and signage. There was a bit of a construction boom over the past several years, and businesses and other organizations sought to deck out their headquarters with wall graphics, window graphics (exterior and interior, such as those in conference rooms), elevator graphics...there was even a sense that if employees stood still for too long they'd get wrapped with some kind of graphic. Now, with work from home being encouraged, if not mandated, and new construction slowing down, that has taken a back seat to other applications, and has transformed to COVID-related graphics.

Retail's problems began long before the COVID crisis, but in some areas of retail, businesses were expanding and sign companies were reaping the rewards of that expansion. Back in January, at the annual FASTSIGNS International Convention in Phoenix, Ariz.—one of the last in-person events the Wide Format & Signage crew attended—FASTSIGNS of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., won the Grand Prize at the Wide Format & Signage/FASTSIGNS Awards for the signage created for craft eatery and bar Maggie McFly's, which was opening its ninth location at Crossgates Mall near Albany. Like a lot of shopping malls, Crossgates has been in the process of becoming less a retail center and more of an entertainment destination—or at least was. Companies like

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FASTSIGNS of Saratoga Springs could also benefit from the high turnover rate of mall businesses; while they were working on the Maggie McFly's signage, they picked up some work from other businesses that were expanding into Crossgates as other businesses exited.

In the area of electronic media, as we stood on the cusp of the "Before Times" and the "Now Times," dynamic digital signage (DDS) had already lost a bit of its cachet, but was starting to itself transform. Tellingly, at the last few in-person ISA Sign Expos, DDS played a much smaller role than earlier in the decade, although the past couple of years have seen the rise and improvement of LED-based DDS, perhaps poised to overtake LCD-based digital signage. But, as we'll see below, 2020 brought a new transformation to DDS.

Today

After the universe changed in March, the first thing that happened was that the bottom fell out for those shops that served the events and hospitality industries. When events and travel shut down, sign and display graphics providers needed to "pivot" (a word that is bandied about as if pivoting from one application to a completely different one is an easy thing) to other products. A lot switched to personal protection equipment (PPE)—especially those businesses that had cutting machines and/or 3D printers and could make face shields, plastic dividers and similar materials. Mask-making/printing became a cottage industry and environmental graphics remained the top application—but it became less an extension of a corporate brand and more social distancing- and safety-based, although in time both would merge. So-called "distancing dots" appeared on supermarket and other retail locations' floors seemingly overnight, one-way aisle markers attempted (sometimes successfully) to control traffic in grocery stores. Some of this new signage was on-brand and professional-looking...

But very often it was little more than tape stuck to the floor:

Early on—and often still to this day—distancing signage was ersatz and not thought of the way one should think of signage: an extension of both a



brand and a physical location, which led to one of my favorite tweets:



Amen to that!

This rapid "pivot" to distancing signage led to supply chain problems for certain kinds of floor graphics, and some companies found floor vinyl as hard to get as toilet paper was in early April.

Earlier this year, we also saw an increase in business-to-consumer signage. In the spring and early summer, with school graduations cancelled or turned into drive-by events, lawn signs began to be used to congratulate the class of 2020—and it will be interesting to see if this "celebration signage" continues and evolves.



Families and schools used lawn signs to congratulate the class of 2020 in the face of cancelled graduations.

As retail locations and restaurants started to reopen toward the end of the summer, they started using interactive print technologies such as QR codes to eliminate the need for reusable and potentially germ-y printed menus. SpeedPro launched a Near Field Communication-based interactive signage solution called InfoLnkX, by which restau-



(Left) SpeedPro's InfoLnkX is a chip embedded in a label or sign that provides contactless menus or other content. (Below) 22Miles' TempDefend temperature-taking digital signage.



rant patrons (for example) can scan a chip-enabled label or sign and access an online menu or other information right on their phones.

As indicated earlier, dynamic digital signage has seen a bit of change as well, with the post-COVID advent of temperature-taking signage. One system I wrote about last summer was from digital signage and wayfinding systems developer 22Miles, which launched TempDefend, a customizable “protection as a service”(PaaS) solution. TempDefend integrates DDS with thermal cameras to scan visitors as they enter a business or other establishment, generating an alert if the visitor’s temperature exceeds 99.5°.

Another company that has expanded into

temperature-taking signage is consultancy and professional IT services and software provider Altoros, which launched Mass Fever Screener, a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) cameras and Altoros-developed software designed to facilitate prevention of COVID-19. Altoros started with the thermal cameras and temperature detection software, but started adding additional modules, including one that provides UV-based disinfecting and another that helps enforce mask compliance. As businesses and offices continue to open—and as the virus continues to spread—more of these kinds of solutions will be appearing.

Tomorrow

Wide-format and signage shops were generally among the best-positioned to, if not thrive, then at least survive the pandemic, by virtue of the fact that signage and similar graphics were essential during and after the worst of the pandemic (although we may not actually have seen the worst of the pandemic yet). The printing industry as a whole is still doing relatively OK (see “Printing Pulse” on page 22), but unless things turn dramatically around macroeconomically, that may not last. Back in our May issue, when all of this began, Elizabeth Gooding and I wrote:

“The best-case scenario is that the disease peaks in mid-May, ebbs by the middle of June, and we can return to some semblance of normal by August. If it is that short-lived (and if that doesn’t sound ‘short-lived’ just remember how g-----n long March felt, there might not be much lasting impact at all—if the CARES Act does what it was supposed to do. (That is a big ‘if.’)”

Oh, how naive we were. We had listed six keys to that best-case scenario happening:

1. The CARES Act keeps individuals and businesses afloat until the crisis passes. (A big “if.”)
2. Or, if more relief turns out to be necessary, the government acts in a timely manner to address the problem. (Yeah, you probably did a spit-take there.)
3. And, we don’t jump the gun, attempt to return to normal too soon, and thus trigger a second wave à la 1918. Quarantining is working.

4. On the other hand, we can't get so fearful that once the threat does appear to have passed, we keep quarantining and refrain from economic activity.
5. A treatment becomes readily—and affordably—available. A vaccine is not likely to be available in less than a year, even though a potential vaccine is about to go into clinical trials. What is more likely is that something mitigates the symptoms of the disease. At present, nothing has been conclusively proven to treat COVID-19 symptoms, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary.
6. We listen to actual medical and science experts.

Number one kind of worked, number two was a complete fantasy to begin with, and where number three happened, it worked, but as “virus fatigue” set in, even in those geographies that got things under control early, people got antsy and started letting their guards down. And, of course, where no one ever took the pandemic seriously, cases have been exploding and, sad to say, it's going to get worse as we move into winter. This is important for wide format and signage because getting the virus under control is the only key to reviving the events

and hospitality industries—two of our biggest verticals—because number four is a big factor. Even if events do start taking place again, how many people will want to go to them? Even those companies that “pivoted” to PPE and/or distancing graphics don't see those as anything but stop-gap opportunities; they're desperate to get their old customers and their old work back.

The million-dollar question, not just for wide format but for all of printing—if not the entire economy and society at large—is: when will things get back to normal? Or, at the very least, when will the traditional vertical markets be back? When will events be able to take place again? When will theme parks reopen or, if they are already open, when will people want to go to them again? When will new construction projects ramp up so that architectural signage is in demand again? Ultimately: when will we rebound?

The consensus is the second half of 2021, although we can hope that it is sooner, but it may even be later. Again, it all really depends on what happens with the virus. Until there is a vaccine, the mitigation strategies—quarantining, masking, distancing—are all we have. ●

THE YEAR IN PRODUCTS

Despite the pandemic, as well as the fact that there were no in-person events at which to launch new products, that didn't stop new introductions. In commercial print, most product launches—or at least new technology demonstrations—were timed to coincide with drupa, but in wide-format and signage, the ISA Sign Expo and PRINTING United (né the SGIA Expo) have tended to be the showcases for new product intros.

Here are some of the highlights of the year. (For space reasons, this is far from a complete list.)

Agfa introduced the Oberon RTR3300 3.3m LED-UV roll-to-roll printer. (<https://bit.ly/2HqrFcl>)

Canon Solutions America announced the Arizona 2300 Series UV curable flatbed printers, featuring the new Arizona FLOW technology, a unique vacuum technique that supports a zone-less, multi-origin table layout. (<https://bit.ly/37snPe8>) Canon also updated its ColorWave and PlotWave wide-format printer series with the ColorWave 3600 and 3800 and monochrome PlotWave 3000, 3500, 5000, 5500, and 7500. (<https://bit.ly/31sDBC4>)

Continued on page 60



Canon Solutions America's Arizona 2300 Series.

K, THEN: WHAT'S IN STORE FOR RETAIL

Retail recovery branches off in several directions.

By Richard Romano

There is a phrase that, over the past several months, has become something of a cliché, but like most clichés contains an essential truth: “The COVID pandemic has accelerated trends that had already been set in motion.” This is especially true in the world of retail.

“Retail”—at least in terms of what government data tracks—is a broad sector that includes food service and gasoline, both of which have been subjected to brand new trends that had most certainly not been set in motion before the pandemic.

But then there are segments of retail that had been struggling even before the pandemic. As recently as last January *Forbes* asked, “Is the retail apocalypse over?” A Yahoo! Finance story from early September summed up some high-profile bankruptcies: “It’s getting outright ugly in retail ahead of the critical fall shopping season.” (See Figure 1).

September’s sales data may paint a slightly misleading picture of the health of the retail sector. According to the Census Bureau, “Advance estimates of U.S. retail and food services sales for September 2020, adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$549.3 billion, an increase of 1.9% from the previous month, and 5.4% above September 2019” (see Figure 2). That certainly is an improvement, especially when you consider the massive plunge in retail sales in the early days of the pandemic.

On a year-over-year basis, retail sales were up 5.4 percent from September 2019 (see Figure 3).

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Figure 1. Retail bankruptcies in 2020. (Source: Yahoo! Finance)

Restaurants had not been forced to close or limit dine-in capacity, there had never before been quite the gasoline glut that we saw in the spring and early summer, and not since the heyday of the hippies had so many people forgone haircuts. So for a lot of retail businesses, March was a sucker punch.

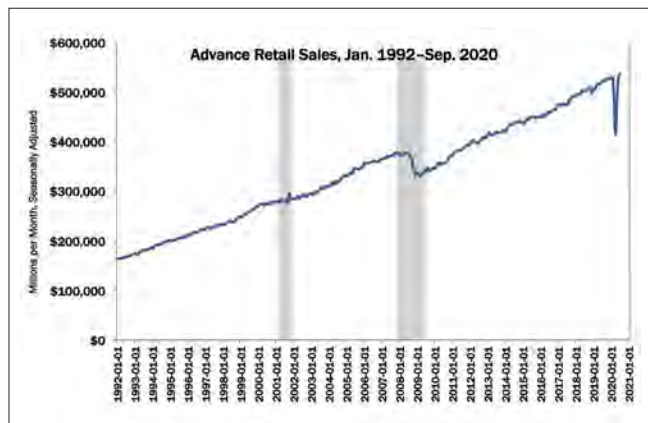


Figure 2. Advance Retail Sales, January 1992–September 2020. (Source: Census Bureau)



Figure 4. Ecommerce as a Percentage of Retail Sales, Q1 1999–Q2 2020. (Source: Census Bureau)

At first glance, it looks like retail is experiencing a “V-shaped” recovery, but V may be the wrong letter to use. Perhaps retail (if not the economy at large) is experiencing a K-shaped recovery. Wrote Barry Ritholtz at Bloomberg:

“This description of the economy fairly captures the two separate paths of the recovery. The line heading upward [the arm of the K, to use proper typographic terminology] symbolizes those parts of the economy that have benefited from pandemic: Technology (Apple Inc., Alphabet Inc., Microsoft Corp.), general merchandise retailers (Target, Walmart), entertainment (Netflix Inc., Walt Disney Co., YouTube), Biotech and Pharmaceuticals (Moderna Inc., Johnson & Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co., Pfizer Inc., AstraZeneca PLC) work-from-home firms (Slack Technologies Inc., Zoom Video Communications Inc.) and online retailers (Amazon.com Inc., Shopify Inc.)”

And the tail of the K heading downward represents everyone else—the bars and restaurants struggling to reopen profitably, and the retail chains and independent stores that were struggling before all this, and so on. K, then.

We dwell on retail because it is a substantial print-buying segment, and print businesses that predominantly serve the retail market have been severely impacted through all this.

According to USA Today in early October: “As of the end of August, 32,700 franchised businesses have closed in the USA and lost 1.4 million jobs,” the [International Franchise Association] said. “About one-third of those businesses are closed permanently, and about 40% of the job losses are permanent, estimates the group, which represents restaurants, gyms, hotels, salons and spas, day care and other businesses and services.”

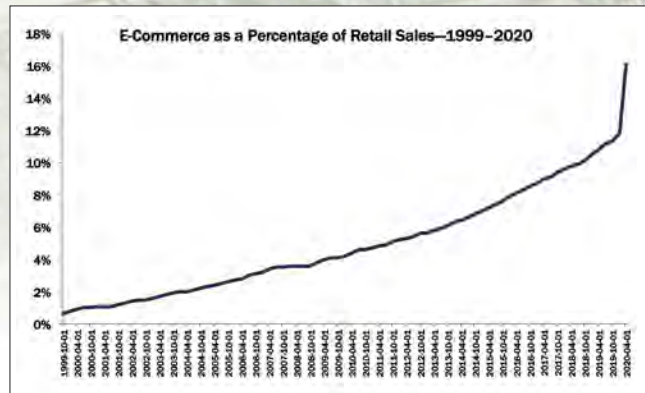


Figure 3. Year-Over-Year Change in Retail Sales, January 2003–September 2020. (Source: Census Bureau)

And that’s just franchises. Last summer, the Independent Restaurant Coalition said that 85% of independent restaurants could go out of business by the end of 2020. So for certain retail sectors, it’s serious.

Even among the retail stores that have survived, certain elements of the “customer experience” have changed. Curbside pickup has proven to be popular and that may, like other trends, outlive the pandemic. This will negatively impact the need for things like interior graphics, but create more demand for exterior graphics. And even inside the store, what we consider retail signage and POP displays often integrate distancing and mask-enforcement messaging.

But if you want to talk about the pandemic accelerating a trend that was already in motion, look at e-commerce as a percentage of retail (Figure 4). In Q4 2019, e-commerce had accounted for 11% of retail sales, the result of a slow climb over the course of the past 20 years. In Q1 of 2020, it climbed to 12%, and then in Q2 shot up to 16%. As of this writing, Q3 data isn’t available yet, but it’s a safe bet that it’s closing in on, if it has not exceeded, 20%.

And I’ll also bet that this will have a major impact on the demand for retail graphics.

Retail will of course not die and what the landscape will look like once the pandemic passes (if it ever passes) is a big question mark. The demand for and nature of retail graphics will be quite different. Those who serve retail customers need to stay in close contact and help them navigate the new changes in the market. ●

ISA QUARTERLY ECONOMIC REPORT

There's improvement in Q3, but recovery is still a long way off.

By Richard Romano

On Oct. 21, the International Sign Association (ISA) hosted a Q3 2020 economic webinar that looked at the current state of the sign industry, and offered a general macroeconomic short and long view. The webinar was based on the ISA Sign Industry Quarterly Economic Report (<https://bit.ly/34BtIUw>) and was presented by Shane Norton and Leslie Levesque, director and associate Director, respectively, of IHS Markit, who produced the report. The report was sponsored by the National Association of Sign Supply Distributors (NASSD).

The session began by providing some macroeconomic context with which you are probably already pretty familiar. The macroeconomic assumptions underlying the sign industry forecast are:

- After reaching a trough in April, GDP rose sharply over May and June, reversing 60% of the spring decline, but the recovery slowed sharply after that. As of August, about 26% of the decline had yet to reverse.
- As of our Oct. 5 forecast, we estimate that real GDP in the third quarter grew at an annualized rate of 33.2%. We expect the decline in 2020 to come in at 3.5%.
- We project growth of 3.7% in 2021 and 3.2% in 2022. GDP surpasses its previous peak late in 2021, and the economy regains full employment in mid-2023.

The researchers attribute the decline in GDP growth to the dwindling of fiscal support and the continued high rates of COVID-19 infection. "There is no expectation of further stimulus," Norton said.

Some other factors:

- Inventory investment is recovering faster than is typical given the pace of GDP growth, likely because the lagging service sector requires fewer inventories than the rapidly rebounding goods sector.
- Residential investment has already surpassed its pre-pandemic peak, boosted by low mortgage rates and new demand for improved and larger units in suburban neighborhoods.

"Services were much more acutely affected than manufacturing," Norton said. "Expect a drop in disposable income."

He also added that one of the bright spots was spending on computer software—the lockdown period required software purchases/upgrades for work/school from home and also provided an ideal time to upgrade. He also identified housing as a

US economic growth by sector

Percent change	2019	2020	2021	2022
Real GDP	2.2	-3.5	3.7	3.2
Final sales	2.2	-2.9	2.9	3.1
Consumption	2.4	-4.0	4.0	3.0
Light vehicle sales (Millions)	17.0	14.2	15.4	15.7
Residential fixed investment	-1.7	4.6	4.0	-2.6
Housing starts (Millions)	1.30	1.36	1.33	1.30
Business fixed investment	2.9	-4.6	1.8	4.3
Federal government	4.0	4.9	-0.4	-0.6
Exports	-0.1	-12.3	10.0	8.9
Imports	1.1	-10.3	8.8	2.9

Figure 1. US economic growth by sector. (Source: IHS Markit)

bright spot.

They also broke down overall U.S. economic growth by sector (see Figure 1).

We are still awaiting the official BEA

Leisure & hospitality remains by far the hardest-hit sector

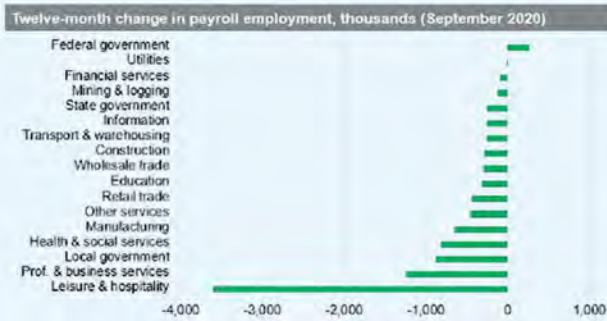


Figure 2. Leisure & hospitality continued to account for the bulk of job losses in September. (Source: IHS Markit)

US real construction growth by sector

Real investment in structures				
Percent change, 2012 dollars	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total construction	-1.3	-2.3	-0.4	-0.7
Residential	-1.8	4.6	4.0	-2.7
Commercial	-2.6	-3.5	-10.2	-1.6
Manufacturing	4.6	-11.5	-7.6	16.4
Mines & wells	-2.1	-42.5	-22.6	31.1
Healthcare	-0.2	1.8	5.9	8.7
Public utilities	2.1	6.2	2.6	-12.3
Highways & streets	2.5	7.3	-3.1	-1.1
Public education	-1.2	3.0	-2.9	-1.2

Figure 3. Real US construction growth by sector. (Source: IHS Markit)

announcement of Q3 GDP, but their forecast aligns with other forecasts.

They also identified those sectors of the economy that experienced the worst job losses (see Figure 2), and leisure and hospitality led the pack.

Important for the sign industry, commercial construction growth was down from 2019 and it is expected to decline even more in 2021, with no real rebound occurring until 2022 (see Figure 3).

Sign Industry Outlook—Supply Side

As they usually do, they divide the sign industry into print and electronic/digital. By “supply side,” they refer to the industries that supply components used in sign manufacturing, including wood, paper and printing, metals, plastics and other machinery manufacturing.

The IHS Markit Printed Signage Index is based on a given year’s comparison to the historical trend.

According to a methodological footnote in the “Quarterly Economic Report” on which the webinar was based: “A value of ‘0’ represents an expectation of industry growth right in line with the historical trend. Positive values repre-

Supply Side – Printing

- Data show less weakness than previously expected leading to an improved outlook for 2020
- Data revisions show historical performance was better than originally estimated
- Continued slow recovery for rest of year into 2021



Figure 4. Supply Side Printed/Constructed Signage Index, Q2 vs. Q3. (Source: IHS Markit)

Supply Side – Electric/Digital

- Robust recovery thus far in 2020 brightens outlook
- Expect improved activity in 2021 which should lead to above historical average performance



Figure 5. Supply Side Electronic/Digital Signage Index Q2 vs. Q3. (Source: IHS Markit)

sent stronger than average growth. Negative values represent below average growth. The QER figures were revised based on new historical data to provide a true comparison point for the new index values.”

On the supply side, 2020 is decidedly bucking the historical trend (see Figure 4).

“We won’t be back to re-pandemic levels until 2022,” Levesque said.

On the supply side of the digital/electronic

Continued on page 63

2020 IN TEXTILES



A year like no other

By Cary Sherburne

2020 was a year like no other in recent history of the world. For many industries, textiles included, the pandemic brought things to a screeching halt early in the year. But as things began to ease up a bit – at least in some parts of the world – and we were able to take a step back and a deep breath, stakeholders across the industry began taking stock of the textiles supply chain, whose weaknesses and fragility were laid bare by the pandemic.

Among other things, people were

wondering why we have ships full of textile products constantly traversing the seas, and why we are still using the old “design, manufacture and hope-to-sell” model.

While there were many exciting developments in textiles during the year, including significant improvements in digital textile printing technologies, this focus on restructuring the supply chain is likely to have the most long-lasting effect on the industry. The pros and cons of the industry’s ability to make this move were recently discussed by WhatTheyThink contributor and textiles expert Debbie McKeegan, who made these suggestions:

- Let’s stop designing and manufacturing waste and switch to on-demand digital or hybrid production and reduce the industry’s carbon footprint further by manufacturing closer to the consumer.
- Let’s leverage software to control and communicate the design process and embed production data in a cloud-based platform where all suppliers have access to transparent information.
- Let’s get to know our suppliers better and shorten the supply chain and insist on the use of sustainable technologies. Traceability is equally important if we are to reduce greenwashing and validate the production process to deliver an eco-friendly product to the consumer.

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3D Knitted Mask from
Evolution St. Louis.



From design through to all aspects of textile production, there is now a digital alternative...and a digital imperative. The innovations within our industry are many and varied, so let's make the leap, take back control of our supply chain, and prepare for a new future using digital manufacturing. Let's work hard to deliver a sustainable future together!

A New Future for Knitting

Another interesting development is the use of 3D knitting. This refers to a type of knitting machine that can create a sweater, for example, all in one piece rather than in several pieces that have to be assembled by "linkers."

In the case of a sweater, the machine knits the tube that is the body, and the two tubes that are the sleeves, merging them together at the armholes and neck for finishing. There is little finishing work to be done when the piece comes off the knitting machine, making the process much more efficient and creating less waste.

One example of this is Evolution of St. Louis, a factory that has 30 Stoll 3D knitting machines installed, operated by 14 employees. These machines can also knit smaller items like masks with a filter pocket all in one pass. Tailored Industry in Brooklyn is another example of 3D knitting at work, and both Evolution St. Louis and Tailored Industry report that brands are expressing increased interest in this technology for at least some part of their knitted products.

Living Textiles

Canadian researcher Roya Aghighi has invented a living, biodegradable fabric called Biogarmentry. It's made from algae and can purify the air around it. The purification capabilities – as well as the depth of its green color – increases over time. While it will be several years



Proof-of-concept Biogarmentry fabric based on algae.

before this is commercially available, the idea is to have consumers think of their garments as living things that need to be cared for and have a long life, thus reducing textile waste.

Pigment Inks

There have been significant developments and improvements in pigment inks. Why is this important? Because with pigment inks, you can print directly to a wide variety of synthetic and natural fibers. Some systems and inks require some pretreatment, but once the fabric is printed, it doesn't have to go through further steps. Washing and steaming use water and consume energy as well as extend the production cycle time and manufacturing footprint. For ultra high-quality items, such as a designer silk scarf, brands may still prefer to use reactive inks, which do require steaming and washing. But if they print those digitally, there are still economic and environmental benefits when compared to conventional analog printing processes, especially for lower quantities or custom orders.

Wearables Continue to Evolve

When we started talking about wearables a few years ago, it primarily referred to products like a Fitbit or Apple Watch that could measure and report certain biometrics. This is an area that continues to evolve.

The ultimate goal of research being conducted at MIT in conjunction with Advanced Functional Fabrics of America (AFFOA) is focused on fiber computing. In this model, the computing capability is built right into the fiber so that the functionality is integrated into the fabric, rather than being a separate object. AFFOA has proven that a variety of non-polymeric functional materials can be integrated into fibers, enabling us to think about the functionality of fibers and fabrics in ways we couldn't before.



Graphene-Enabled fitness Band.

(Image sourced from the EU Graphene Flagship Initiative)

CEO Alexander (Sasha) Stolyarov says that the functionality includes things like physiological monitoring of body temperature, heart rate, blood oxygen

level, respiratory rate and more, as well as monitoring things like contaminants in the environment that might be harmful. Stolyarov sees a not-too-distant future when technologies will be able to add computation and algorithms that give you actionable data to the sensing and communications capabilities they have proven in the lab today. He explains, however, that one of the biggest barriers today is availability of a power source that is not bulky and uncomfortable.

Graphene: A Miracle Material

There is a significant amount of research being done with graphene, which could be one solution to the power

source problem. In 2010, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics to Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov of the University of Manchester in the UK “for groundbreaking experiments regarding the two-dimensional material graphene.”

In its press release, the committee stated: “Graphene is a thin flake of carbon, just one atom thick....As a material it is completely new—not only the thinnest ever but also the strongest. As a conductor of electricity, it performs as well as copper. As a conductor of heat, it outperforms all other known materials. It is almost completely transparent, yet so dense that not even helium, the smallest gas atom, can pass through it. Carbon, the basis of all known life on earth, has surprised us once again.”

An EU consortium has been established to further this research and has identified a number of application areas where graphene is applicable, including sensors, biomedical technologies, aeronautics and space, and, of course, wearables.

The EU Graphene Flagship Initiative site states, “There is a demand for unobtrusive, soft and light smart devices that could be worn un-noticed. Graphene and other 2-dimensional materials are, due to their inherent properties, extremely suitable for such devices. They offer an alternative material platform for the creation of low-cost and multifunctional wearable products with unique form factors. Prototypes of health tracking devices, environmental sensors, durable e-textiles and flexible power sources, to name a few, have been developed and demonstrated additional functionalities beyond the limits of the state-of-the-art.”

Double-Digit Growing in Digital Fabric Printing

We've been saying that for some time,

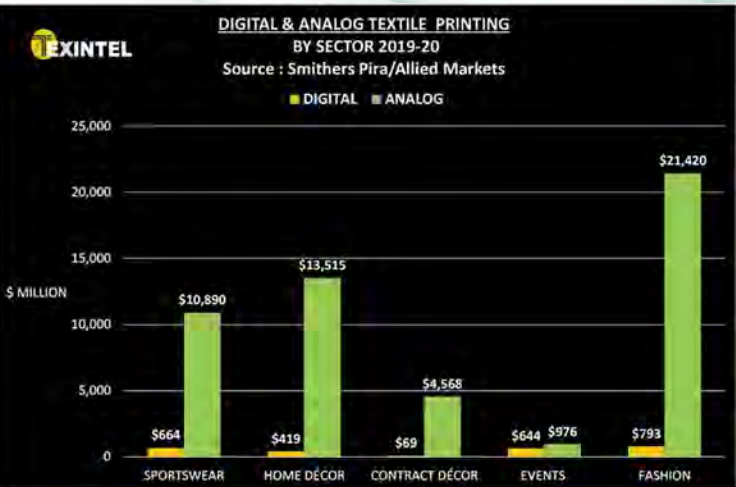
and while the global percentage of digitally printed fabrics has increased from 2.8% about three years ago to its current level of 6.9%, according to WTIN, it's still miniscule when compared to the overall volume of textile printing, as shown in the graph.

In another view, WTIN reports that digital textile printing solutions are broken down into two primary categories: those that replace or increase capacity and those that enable new businesses.

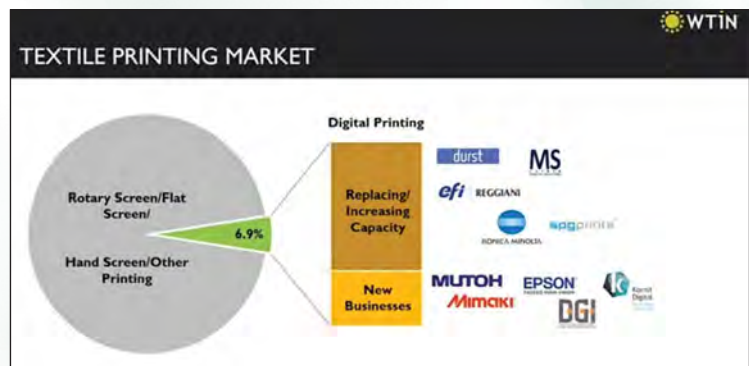
An example of the former would be the EFI Reggiani BOLT that can print at up to 90 meters per minute and have the ability to replace older analog technologies. An example of the latter might be the Mimaki TX300P-1800 MKII, which has a relatively small footprint and dual ink systems that can easily be switched to print direct-to-fabric or to heat transfer paper, making it easy and affordable for companies to enter this market.

Another aspect of digital fabric printing is direct-to-garment, and that market is growing rapidly as well. Kornit, for example, has several DTG printers, and Ricoh has just announced a new member of its DTG portfolio, the Ricoh Ri 2000, which has a small footprint, can produce something like 50 white shirts per hour, and sells for less than \$25,000, with a projected payback in less than a year, depending on production volume.

For those looking into purchasing a digital textile printer, the list of potential suppliers is long: DGI, Durst, EFI, Epson, HP, Konica Minolta, Kornit, Mimaki, MS, Mutoh, Ricoh, SPG Prints – these are just a few! Selecting a digital fabric printer requires a full analysis of the goals you are trying to achieve, and then research into the various offerings to



Digital and Analog Textile Printing. Source: Texintel, Smithers and Allied Markets



determine what fits best. This was easier when we could go to large trade shows, like PRINTING United in the States or ITMA in Europe.

More to Come

While it's not possible to cover every development in textiles during 2020 in this space, these are a few of what we think are the most important highlights. The bottom line for the industry is: How do we reduce the industry's environmental footprint, make it more agile and keep technology and innovation moving forward at the same time? ●

Cary Sherburne is a well-known author, journalist and marketing consultant whose practice is focused on marketing communications strategies for the printing and publishing industries.

ARE LIVING CLOTHES IN YOUR FUTURE?

Designer Royal Aghighi thinks they should be.

By Cary Sherburne

Canadian researcher Roya Aghighi has invented a living, biodegradable fabric called Biogarmentry. It's made from algae and can purify the air around it – with the purification capabilities – as well as the depth of its green color – increasing over time.

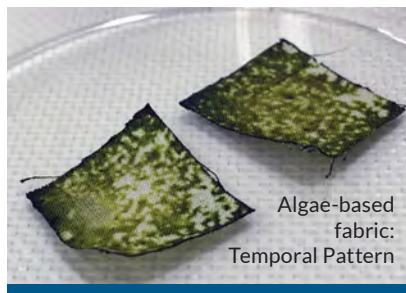
Roya Would you think about your clothing differently if it were a living thing? Aghighi thinks so. You wouldn't stuff your dog or cat in a dark closet or put them in a washing machine. Aghighi would like to see a line of clothing that you think about in the same way.

First, some background. Aghighi grew up loving fashion – her mother was a fashion designer.

"I realized that as a designer, I am responsible for what I bring to the world and for creating demands before people know they have a need or even know it is a need," she said. "At the same time, I felt responsible for understanding the environmental footprint of the textiles industry. I grew up in Tehran

where the air pollution gets to the point you can even taste the air in your mouth. I wanted to do something about that as well as the textile waste."

She set out to find something that could trigger human behaviors and settled on humans' deep connection to living things.



"Close your eyes and think of your outfit as alive," she says. "I wanted to use that small guilt trigger to change people's attitude about clothing. Fast fashion is a systematic approach to programming human behavior. It's become so cheap and accessible we just buy and buy without thinking twice about it. Research shows that clothes we have are only worn about 20% of their potential life.



That simply is not sustainable."

Aghighi points out that movements promoting recycling or upcycling of clothing can have impact on the end cycle, but that places no focus on the environmental impact of the production process or during their use -- for example, shedding polyester microfibers during the laundering process that end up in just about everything on earth. Or the crazy amount of toxins and chemicals being released in water during the manufacturing, dyeing and finishing textiles that simply isn't acceptable anymore.

Aghighi started her journey with a multidisciplinary collaboration with a group of biologists and created the first proof of concept for her living and photosynthetic fabric based on algae, Biogarmentry.

As the garment is worn more and exposed to sunlight, not only does it photosynthesize, but the algae grows, resulting in

Proof-of-concept Biogarmentry fabric based on algae.

the garment changing color and pattern to a deeper green. That's what we call a temporal pattern.

Following proof of concept, Aghighi engaged with another team to work on enhancing the functionality of the fabric. This second round of research is sponsored by lululemon in collaboration with Netherlands-based Materials Experience Lab. The fabric consists of algae cells embedded within the textile fibers.

"Because of the porosity of the textile," Aghighi said, "the algae are able to absorb CO₂ and emit oxygen; the CO₂ is their food. But they also need light. If you want to stop the process, you can put it in the dark, but it lowers their longevity."

Speaking of longevity, that's the next stage. Aghighi is working with more durable

fabrics like cotton and linen.

"What I find beautiful," she said, "is visually seeing the life cycle from zero to death. It's an amazing visual cue for people to know how they are caring for their clothes. It starts with no color – white cotton – and grows to beautiful green patches. Toward the end, the whole fabric is completely green and after the garment is deceased, the color is also faded away."

While the fabric will have a certain life cycle, it can be given more life by either submerging

it in water or spraying it with water. Submerging it in water can also get rid of any odor, reducing the need to launder the item.

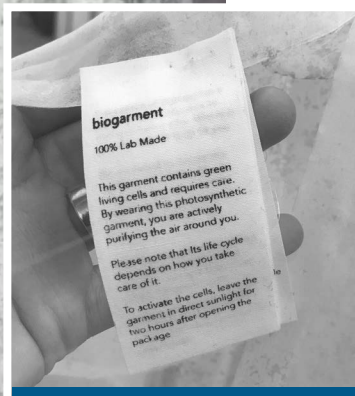
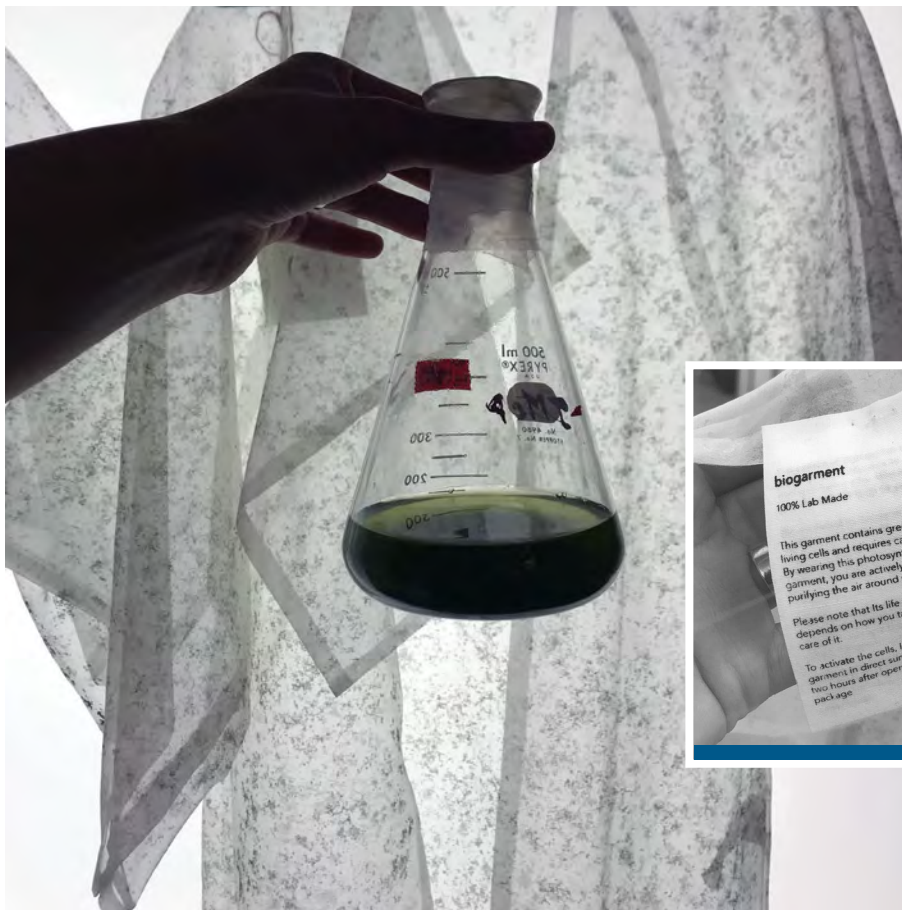
"As the algae grows, it has a natural scent," Aghighi said. "That's another cue that brings a connection between the wearer and nature."

When will Biogarmentry be commercially available? Likely not for another five to seven years, according to Aghighi.

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"This is still in a very early stage," she said. "There are a lot of improvements being done. I see this as a white space for other creatives to also be able to create and establish new pathways and new ways of thinking and interacting with our environment."

But she also admits there is a significant amount of market education that needs to take place, both with brands and the consumers. Having more research sponsors could be a huge benefit there. ●



TECHTEXTIL NORTH AMERICA AND TEXPROCESS AMERICAS LAUNCH VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUMS

Mark your calendars for upcoming virtual events.

By Cary Sherburne

Some event organizers have turned their in-person events into mega-virtual sessions over a period of several days with 3-, 4- and more hour virtual sessions. While the content is likely excellent, one wonders how many people will actually sit in front of the screen that long. Perhaps many will choose individual sessions of interest and only listen to those; others will pick and choose what to watch on replay later. Messe Frankfurt and SPESA, organizers of Texprocess and TechTextil in the Americas, has taken a different – and I believe more valuable – approach.

Over the next several months, the organization will present additional symposiums on a variety of topics, ranging from sewing technologies and fashion on demand to 3D printing and high performance fibers. Full disclosure: I'm excited to moderate a session on Jan. 13 at 2:30 p.m. Eastern: "Industry 4.0 and the Evolution of Printing." My outstanding panelists include Kerry King of Spoonflower and past president of AATCC; Patrick Tio of Equipe Athletics, an on-demand manufacturer of athletic wear; and Kristen Dettoni of Design Pool, who not only facilitates access to fabric designs online but is also building a

network of manufacturers who can produce those designs digitally for designers, brands and others. They will share their experiences and insights about how the digital transformation in textiles and apparel has affected or enabled their businesses and benefited the industry overall.

Regardless of where you play in the industry or which aspects you are interested in, you'll find valuable content that will help you as you move your business forward. And it doesn't require sitting in front of a screen for days – it's offered in manageable chunks scattered over the next several months, allowing folks to get the sessions of interest blocked out on their calendars well ahead of time.

To register and to get more information about this outstanding series, visit <https://techtexsil-texprocess.us.messefrankfurt.com/atlanta/en.html>. We'll be tuning in to most of the sessions and share what we learn in the months ahead. Hope you'll join as well! ●

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SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Sewn Products Track		
Topic	Date	Time
The Factory of the Future	7-Oct-20	11:30 AM
The Workforce of the Future	7-Oct-20	2:30 PM
Readily Available Sewing Technologies	18-Nov-20	2:30 PM
Industry 4.0 and the Evolution of Printing	13-Jan-21	2:30 PM
Fashion on Demand	17-Feb-21	11:30 AM
On Demand Technology Implementation	17-Feb-21	2:30 PM
How Direct-to-Consumer is Transforming the Supply Chain	24-Mar-21	2:30 PM

Technical Textiles Track		
Topic	Date	Time
Designing Textiles with Energy Functionalities	8-Oct-20	2:30 PM
Advanced Manufacturing through Direct-Write 3D Printing	19-Nov-20	2:30 PM
Session Info Coming Soon	14-Jan-21	2:30 PM
Materials Informatics and Discovery	18-Feb-21	2:30 PM
Smart Textiles	25-Mar-21	2:30 PM
High Performance Fibers	29-April-21	2:30 PM

AATCC UPDATE AND INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

Q&A with Executive Vice President Diana Wyman

By Cary Sherburne

We recently spoke with Diana Wyman, Executive Vice President at the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists (AATCC). Founded in 1921, the Association continues to evolve to meet the needs of those in the ever-changing textile, apparel, and materials industries. Wyman shares an association update and her industry insights.

WTT: Diana, thanks for joining us today. Let's start with a brief overview of AATCC for those of our readers who many not be as familiar with the association.

DW: AATCC is officially the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, but these days it's a lot more than that. It is a global association and much more than just chemists and colorists. Our focus is still textiles, but we have members ranging from designers to researchers to people on the marketing side – the full supply chain. We have folks that are making the fibers and chemicals that go into textiles, as well as the physical products – the garments that you and I are wearing.

WTT: What would you consider to be the association's top three objectives?

DW: We were founded with three objectives, and I think we still stick pretty close to those. One is knowledge. We are all about technical knowledge and information. AATCC is not here to lobby for industry legislation, to track goods or anything like that, but to expand the knowledge of textiles. The second is research, which obviously goes along with knowledge and one of the ways we develop that knowledge. And finally, the interchange of that knowledge – the networking and communication and the way we share that information. It really comes back to being a technical association.

WTT: What are some of the key initiatives the

committees are pursuing, and how has that changed, if at all, due to the pandemic?

DW: There definitely has been some new direction. We have about 50 committees, and they have a wide range from focused to broader topics. We have an entire committee devoted to developing test methods for color fastness to crocking, the rubbing test. We've got committees for laundering, we've got committees for just about anything you can think about in the textile industry. Most recently with the pandemic, we developed a new committee titled Emerging Technologies. We found there was a real need to address those general use face coverings you can buy at any store or you can make. There are really no guidelines or regulations as to what makes a good face covering or a not-so-great one, and there is certainly a range out there. So a group put together some guidelines as to what does constitute a good face covering, and that was adopted as an AATCC monograph that we are making available at no charge as part of our pandemic response, along with other resources at www.aatcc.org/covid. And now that committee is working on guidance for children's face coverings. We are also looking at a more straightforward way of evaluating filtration. For the full article visit the link above. ●



Diana Wyman



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NOTE: To view the full video interview, visit www.printingnews.com/21145533

THE YEAR IN PRODUCTS *(Continued from page 47)*

Direct Color Systems released the UV-84DTS, a 4 x 8-foot (120cm x 243cm) UV LED printer.

EFI introduced the VUTEk D3r and D5r LED 3-meter and 5-meter mid-volume inkjet printers.

Epson launched its new R-series of 64-inch roll-to-roll printers, the SureColor R5070PE and R5070L, based on a new aqueous resin-ink that is looking to compete with latex in the signage/soft signage space. Epson also updated its T-series technical printers for the AEC markets with the SureColor T2170, T3475, and T5475 for small to mid-sized offices.

Gerber Technology launched the next-generation cutting solution built around the Atria digital cutting room, providing an end-to-end solution for mass production.

HP updated its DesignJet series for the AEC and home office markets with the HP DesignJet T200, T600 and Studio Printer series. HP also collaborated with 3M to develop social distancing signage solutions.

LogoJET launched a new tabletop UV printer, the Express 30R, which allows full-color personalization of 3D objects. It has an 11 x 15-inch printable area and can print on objects up to 2.5 inches in height.

Not a product launch per se, but **Mimaki** has taken over stewardship of the ColorPainter line of wide-format printers from OKI Data, comprising the 64-inch ColorPainter M-64s Traffic Sign Printer, the 64-inch ColorPainter M-64s Graphics Printer, and the 104-inch H3-104s Grand Format Printer.

Mutoh introduced their latest UV-LED printers the XPJ-461UF and XPJ-661UF, suitable for printing trophies and awards, Braille signage, personalized products, name badges, promotional products, interior décor, packaging prototypes, drinkware and more.

Roland introduced its VersaUV LEF2-300D flatbed UV printer, with an expanded workspace that supports heights of up to 7.87 inches. Roland also expanded its TrueVIS line with the TrueVIS VF2-640, designed to produce signs, backlits, posters, vehicle wraps and more. The company also updated its VersaWorks RIP software and launched social distancing signage turnkey solutions.

SNA Displays introduced ASPECT, an all-in-one direct-view LED display series.

Tracer launched a new online web-to-print system for producing lenticular images.



Gerber Technology's Atria Digital Cutter.



SNA Displays ASPECT direct-view LED display.



Epson's Sure-Color R5070L



Roland VersaUV LEF2-300D flatbed UV printer.

Continued from page 23

Profits

Shipments-wise, we've been having a pretty OK third quarter, but given the lag time in the release of quarterly profits, we have to time travel back to Q2, much as it pains us to do so, where we see that annualized profits for Q2 2020 stayed steady at -\$4 billion. That's still really low, but at least it's no lower than Q1 profits had been (these are four-quarter moving totals). As I remarked back in June, Q4 2019 profits had plunged from Q3, and this was before the pandemic. The pandemic only accentuated trends that were already well-established, and there is some comfort (cold though it may be) in seeing that there was no plunge from Q1 to Q2 2020. Of somewhat bigger concern is our ongoing "tale of two cities" saga, although it's more of a short story this quarter.

In Q1 2020, for large printers (those with more than \$25 million in assets), profits before taxes had been -7.96% of revenues. In Q2, this rose slightly to -6.95% of revenues. But for

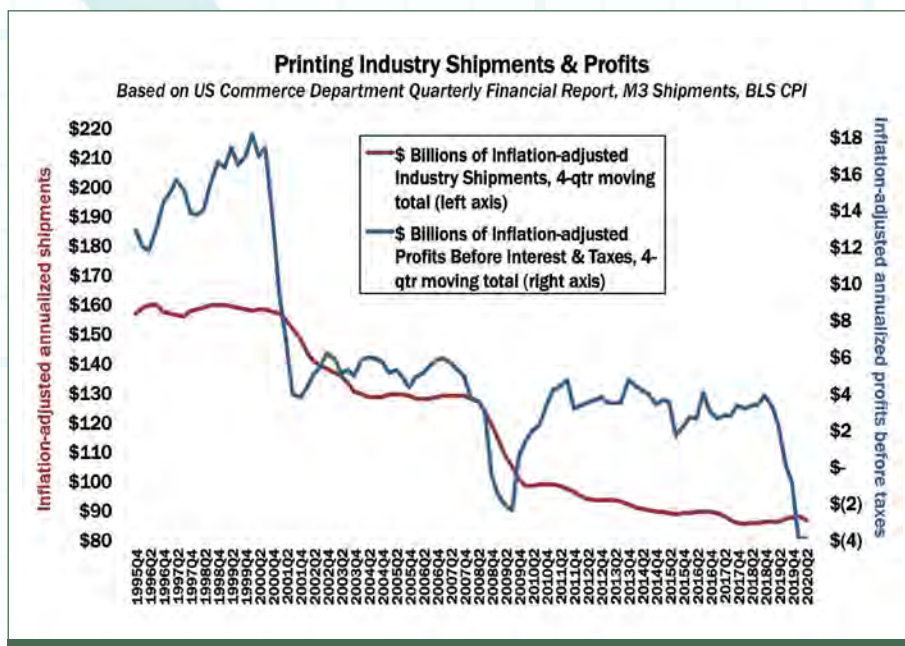
small printers, profits before taxes in Q1 were +5.11% of revenues, but in Q2, this dropped to -2.09% of revenues. That would be the pandemic effect. Q2 interrupted our narrative a little—big printers did a little better profit-wise, while small printers did a lot worse. For the industry on average, profits before taxes were -5.31% of revenues, and for the last six quarters, they've averaged -1.50% of revenues.

We can't really blame the large printers for driving down overall industry

profitability—this time. As with shipments, the impact of the pandemic on profits hasn't been insignificant, but has been a little muted; we were expecting the Q2 report to be a lot worse. We are expecting a little bit of a turnaround in Q3, the report for which we'll see in January.

But, as with everything else, whether we rebound or relapse will all depend on what happens with the virus. ●

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Continued from page 37

● **Contingency:** Strength + Threat. Create plans of action to defend positions and develop adjacent offensive opportunities.

● **Intervention:** Weakness + Threat. Develop plans of action to quickly bolster positions or strategically exit a losing environment.

Working through the initial meeting with employee stakeholders, develop three-five strategic options for each subcategory resulting in 12-20 options per function or department. The role of the facilitator is to consolidate the strategic options and supporting analysis into a management report-out, careful to clarify language and remove duplicates. The leadership team holistically reviews company strategic options derived from the TOWS Analysis Matrix process and engages the functional heads to rationalize the options and adopt functional objectives. Goals (which must be SMART) are borne of the functional objectives and should be digitally cascaded to the workforce who invested in the germination of the strategic options, completing the inclusive strategic planning process. Since we know the best laid plans will change often, it is imperative that leadership adopt a digital SaaS solution to manage the distillation of goals and objectives to the organization. Dozens of affordable platforms are available for this purpose and can help create an agile system whereby the organization can quickly pivot should a crisis arise.

Beyond the inclusive strategic planning process, leadership may choose to layer-in additional analyses such as the PEST(LE) Analysis, Porter's 5 Forces, or others for even deeper insights. These deeper analyses create an excellent opportunity for your management bench to gain visibility and experience through participation in these more in-depth studies.

I have always been a firm believer that people support what they help create. There is an innate

yearning in people to belong to a greater mission, vision and cause. Whether actively or passively, your employees are

asking these questions: Where are we headed as a company and why? How are we going to get there? Can I add value and contribute to our success?

I learned from some great CEO's and leaders to be genuinely inclusive so that team members are informed and feel valued. As a young sales manager in Atlanta with a \$400MM company I was excited when our CEO came to town for a call on one of

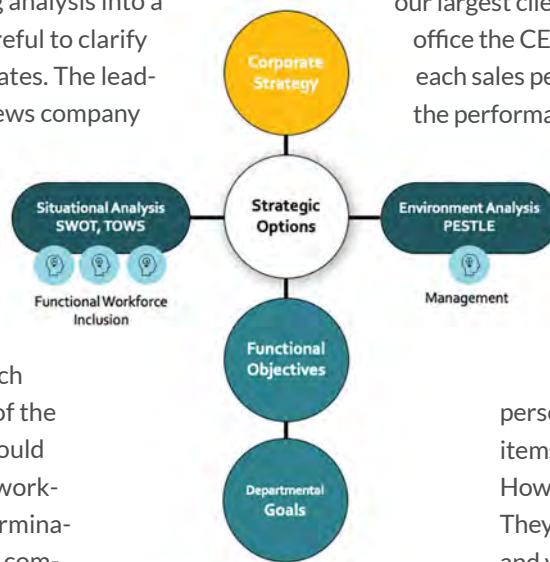
our largest clients. Upon arrival at the sales office the CEO took time to sit down with each sales person and ask questions about the performance of the company in support-

ing their sales efforts. By the time the CEO made it to my office he had pages of notes from team feedback. Over the next few weeks he personally communicated with each sales

person as to the status of the action items he had recorded on his visit. How do you think the team felt? They had been included, respected and valued by the chief executive. Whether the engagement is tactical in nature or strategic in scope the principle of inclusion applies.

By adopting a new ethos of inclusion, authentically listening, investing time and creating continuity between top-line strategy and functional goals, leadership can ignite a renewed level of engagement companywide. The inclusive strategic planning process will stoke a cultural fly-wheel effect that delivers results, attracts and keeps the kind of talent you want in the organization, and creates a competitive differentiator which your customers and competitors will surely notice. ●

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Inclusive Strategic Planning Process
Source: HCG, Inc.

Source:
Fisher, David (2004). *Washington's Crossing*
Mulder, Patty (2017). *TOWS Matrix*, Toolshero.com
HCG, Inc. (2020).
HBR - *Executives Fail to Execute Strategy*, Ron Carucci, 11/2017

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End Markets – Electric/Digital

- Outlook for 2020 has improved a bit but uncertainty remains
- Weakness likely to persist into early 2021
- Full recovery not expected until at least 2022, but could be longer



Figure 6. End Use Electronic/Digital Signage Index Q2 vs. Q3. (Source: IHS Markit)

signage front, the past couple of years had been performing better than printed signage (see Figure 5).

End Use Markets

IHS Markit then looked at the end use markets, which reflects the “demand” side of the supply-and-demand equation—these are industries/markets that buy signage, be it digital or static (that is, printed/constructed). In terms of electronic/digital signage (see Figure 6), “Uncertainty remains,” said Levesque, “but there is interest in incorporating digital signage into best practices,” like adding temperature-taking capabilities to establishments’ digital signage as they reopen. However, she said, “That hasn’t translated into much demand yet.” She doesn’t expect to see that transpiring until next year.

As for static signage in the architectural market (see Figure 7), “there is still a lot of construction

happening and still a need for architectural signage,” said Levesque, especially in health care facilities. But, she added, “We have not seen the bulk of it yet.”

They are bearish on spending on infrastruc-

End Markets – Architectural

- New data point to better-than-expected performance moving into the second half of the year
- The architectural segment is expected to outperform digital next year for first time since 2017
- We anticipate faster recovery from this segment, but still might be pushed into 2022



Figure 7. End Use Architectural Signage Index Q2 vs. Q3. (Source: IHS Markit)

ture, as they expect that government spending issues—especially at the local level—will make many projects non-starters.

At the End of the Day

As we expected it would be, it’s going to be a long, hard slog to full recovery, and it’s not just domestically. IHS Markit expects world GDP to decline 4.8% in 2020—“the steepest decline since the end of World War II,” said Norton. In some areas, 2021 will be a decided improvement, but don’t expect the “new normal” (whatever that is) until 2022. ●



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events, the shift to digital has grown to 81%, compared to 69% in their April survey. What is most notable is the increase in full virtual trade shows, 41% compared to 15% in the April survey.

Virtual events provide several cost-saving benefits – like no travel costs, no hotels and no physical booths or equipment to ship. They make it possible for anyone around the world to attend – at any time. And the recorded assets become a library of

high-value content that can be shared through any number of channels – including analog, interactive, digital and print.

2020 has forced us to rethink every aspect of business, including where and how it’s conducted. Thankfully, we have the technology, skillset and expertise to create a better customer experience, share and engage with buyers, partners and customers, and showcase our essential role as print professionals. ●

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5,000 4"x6" \$89.00	2,000 3.5"x2" \$21.00	5,000 8.5"x11" \$149.00	1,000 8 Page \$467.00
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GO AHEAD, JUDGE ME

Christmas cards and politics can go hand-in-hand.

Whew! This has been one wild election season. Everyone has strong opinions about the presidential race, and tempers ran short in many states regarding House and Senate contests as well. Races for seats in state legislatures were also hotly contested, but the further down on the ballot we went, the less screaming we heard on social media and in barrooms.

The sad fact is that while everyone either loves or hates the president, many folks don't care or even know who exactly is their county clerk, their coroner or their representative on the library board or fire protection district.

In my state, circuit court judges are elected by the public. Everyone had an opinion about the most recent Supreme Court appointment, but given a chance to actually decide who will hold judicial office, most voters throw up their hands.

You can't really blame them. Judicial races get virtually no media coverage, and if you aren't a lawyer, you don't even know how to "judge" the candidates (pun intended.) It takes a dedicated, civic-minded citizen to research judicial races in order to cast an intelligent vote. Of course, the

dedicated and civic-minded are the only sort of citizens to inhabit Johnson's World.

Last December I received Christmas cards from many friends, relatives and associates, among them Judge Anne Celine Walsh, Judge Jim McCluskey and Judge Rick Felice. Johnson's World readers know I am a fan of Christmas cards, for both personal and business relationships. Many client/vendor relationships develop into friendships, creating a gray area. Such was the nature of the Christmas greetings I received from the judges. I've met them all before but I really didn't know that much about any of them. The

Some pundits tell us the future of print lies in packaging. Taking this to extremes is Prank-O of Minneapolis, which produces boxes for ridiculous products that don't even exist.

Giving Grandpa socks again this year? Don't leave them in the original package. Put them in a carton printed with full color graphics so grandpa thinks he's getting the "Plant Urinal" or the "Wake 'N' Bake" combination griddle and alarm clock.

Giving a bib or a rattle to expecting parents? Buy a "Birthie Stick" box so the mother-to-be thinks you are gifting her a selfie stick with thigh clamps to photograph and post the blessed event.

Why print boxes at 4¢ apiece for someone else when, with a little creativity, you can print your own to sell for \$8 each? There's nothing like a little humor to brighten the holidays—and nothing like a proprietary product to grow your bottom line.

cards prompted me to do my civic duty and research each of them.

A bit of digging, and I soon discovered all were rated "highly qualified" by their respective bar associations, something their opponents could not claim. All were experienced. In short, all deserved my vote. I could have voted based on preferred political party or a familiar-sounding last name, but instead I can rest easy knowing that I selected the candidate most qualified.. All because my curiosity was piqued 11 months before the election by a greeting card. Such is the power of print. ●

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Steve Johnson is a successful print owner and digital pioneer. Each month in Johnson's World, he offers up his take on the day-to-day world of graphic communications.



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