

WhatTheyTh!nk

JULY/AUGUST 2022

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CAN





Eric Vessels
President
eric@whattheythink.com

WHATTHEYTHINK - AMPLIFIED!

At Amplify in Minneapolis, we announced that the Association for PRINT Technologies acquired WhatTheyThink. You may have received a breaking news update from us. If you aren't getting those, you should head over to whattheythink.com and make sure you are signed up to get them!

Like most things, it all started with a casual conversation.

Thayer Long, President of APTEch, and I have known each other since he took over the helm in 2016. We hit it off immediately. I jokingly say that we never have less than a 45-minute conversation, and that is based in actual fact. One of those conversations revolved around the missions of both APTEch and WhatTheyThink and how similar they are. Those conversations started to turn to how we could partner more closely together, and eventually that evolved into talks about an actual significant investment, and later acquiring the business. A year later, here we are - a part of the APTEch family!

I want to say a bit about what this doesn't mean:

WhatTheyThink will not just be the mouthpiece for APTEch and their programs, events and agendas.

WhatTheyThink won't stop covering the industry in a comprehensive and independent manner. This was a hard-stop stipulation.

WhatTheyThink will not just become a part of APTEch. We will continue to operate as we have for over two decades.

Now, what will this mean going forward?

This gives us the energy to enter a new chapter at WhatTheyThink and actualize many of the goals we've had for ourselves for some time now. We want to be the top-of-mind source for industry information, education and inspiration. That's our charge, and we are really excited to let that guide us as we undoubtedly improve what we're doing now, and find brand new things to bring that vision to reality.

Since the announcement, I've been overwhelmed with the outpouring of support from the industry. My phone, email and LinkedIn DMs blew up immediately. I'd love to hear from you, whether you think it is great or you have concerns or questions. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime (that's pretty much always the rule). Email me at eric@whattheythink.com or text/call me at 740-417-3333. You can also connect on LinkedIn as well. I stay pretty active there.

Thanks to an amazing community that has made all this possible, and I promise to continue to hold us accountable to our ideals and mission to inform, educate and inspire this great industry! ●



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QR CODES

Teleporting print into the metaverse

By Joanne Gore

The QR code is an interesting advent. While seemingly, it's just a two-dimensional barcode, with that extra dimension comes the ability to house more – and different types of – information.

Released in 1994, the QR code was initially invented for Japan's auto industry to assist with tracking vehicles and scanning components quickly (hence its name, "Quick Response" code). After adoption by the Japanese auto industry, other Japanese companies in the food,

pharmaceutical and contact lens industries began using QR codes to improve tracking, processing and logistics. It took another 15 years before they were adopted in the U.S. for consumer use, following the release of the first QR code scanner app for smartphones.

It was 2010 and QR codes were still platform-dependent at the time, meaning you couldn't just point your phone's camera to scan it like we do today.

In its infancy, the need for different readers, scanners and requisite apps led to slow adoption.



Early adopters of this new tech had some hits – and misses – that led to poor applications.

We saw unscannable QR codes on skyscraper billboards, scannable ones that went nowhere, and general confusion over how to create and use them to generate revenue. Adoption waned and the QR code was all but abandoned as a mainstream marketing tool.

Today, QR codes are an everyday (some would say necessary) part of our day-to-day life.

Once the OEMs began embedding QR code readers into mobile devices and smartphones, the need for dedicated apps became obsolete. By simply pointing your phone camera at it, you could scan, click and voilà – you are transported to your online destination.

Such universalization opened the door for companies like Snapchat, which introduced QR codes as a way to add friends on the app in 2015, and later made filters and lenses unlockable - via QR code.

With the explosion of social media, use of, and

exposure to, QR codes spread quickly.

When COVID hit – along with touchless restaurant menus, check-in links, information about protocols, etc. – they became a lifeline.



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Adapting to Digital: Turning Print into a High-Value Touchpoint

The recent widespread adoption of the QR code paints an important picture for the print industry. It spotlights the benefit (and power) that printers wield when they embrace and adapt digital solutions that feature print as a high-value touchpoint throughout the prospect to customer journey.

By making it easier for people to engage with print via a simple, interactive element, QR codes bridge the physical with the digital, teleporting them to their destination in an easy and fun way.

Print is transformed from a commodity to a high-value communications tool capable of linking to videos, landing pages, special offers, podcasts etc. And where there is greater value, there is greater willingness to pay more.

Online shopping is growing so fast that the global online shopping market size hit nearly four trillion in 2020. Three hundred million U.S. online shoppers are predicted in 2023. This presents a huge opportunity for printers, particularly those who offer packaging, labels, personalization and embellishment solutions. Not only are people more likely to purchase items they've touched, they will pay more for them.

As humans, we like and need to touch things. It affects emotions and is proven to provide the strongest sensory recall. Simply put, when you see it, you want to touch it. And when you touch it, you're more likely to buy it.

When you incorporate physical, interactive print into the buying journey, not only are you driving prospects to their online destination, you're creating a subconscious memory of that experience (and brand) – simply by adding the power of touch. Triggering interactivity, like an augmented reality (AR) experience, increases conversion volume - and profit margins – further positioning interactive

print into a necessary communication channel.

Software company Zakeke understands the power of an AR experience. Their platform allows users to design items – like a printed mug or soda can – and offers the ability to scan a QR code to trigger an AR 3D visualization of the product – all in the comfort of their own space.

By empowering the end user to design and see the product, you're also ensuring that they'll be happy with the end result. For printers, less touch-points means less chance of error, waste, frustration – and attrition. Empowered customers empower printers to grow and/or create opportunities within the explosive \$50 billion packaging market.

Digital and Publishers: Selling High-Value Print as Part of a Package

It's no secret that printed media is in decline. In the last five years, the U.S. consumer magazine industry declined by over 20%. People, and content, are moving online – and that's scary for the print industry. Digging in their heels in resistance, many have come to see digital marketing as the enemy - and have been slow to embrace multi-channel strategies. They're playing monopoly and rolling dangerous doubles.

Joomag is a digital publishing platform that turns digital media into interactive PDFs with videos, polls, surveys, feedback forms and other interactive and engaging elements, all wrapped into a digital magazine. What's more, is that they also have extremely in-depth analytics to measure performance, from demographics to activity per page and beyond.

In a recent session of "The Crown Pub," a weekly, online print industry meetup, Jay Majumder, Joomag's CEO, fielded questions around why the print industry would want to adapt technology that, in essence, reduces print volumes.

Majumder emphasized how print publishers are leveraging Joomag's "in-depth analytics about your consumers, your audience, their behavior, the content they're reading (and for how long) and more, to create personalized, segmented copies within their audiences... [and] because of the personalization that they're doing, they can go to advertisers, or their clients can go to advertisers, and actually charge more."



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.

Printers are at the top of the food chain when it comes to sensory marketing – the perfect complement to digital content platforms like Joomag.

Digital newsletters and communications can get a high-profile makeover when regular, monthly issues are supplemented with quarterly, semi or even annual special editions that keep the reader engaged, the brand top of mind, and the experience memorable. Detailed analytics that measure engagement and activity ensure the right content is delivered to the right people, while targeted ads based on digital behavior makes advertisers and sponsors happy - and inspires more brands to embrace print.

We Aren't Done. The Metaverse Is Coming.

Big brands like Nike (get ready for Nikeland), Coca-Cola and Louis Vuitton already see the potential of The Metaverse, a complex experience of virtual and augmented realities where users can connect, play and exchange transactions. They have quickly begun strategizing ways to attract and engage customers on this behemoth of next-generation commerce.

Without doubt, technology and e-commerce are dominating forces in consumerism; the notion of print complementing digital marketing and communication strategies represents an important pivot. By providing valuable ways to complement digital technology, printers create a hyperloop between digital and physical experiences - maximizing growth, profitability and relevance.

The QR code was a technology ahead of its time - its full potential hadn't been harnessed until recently. But if you're still shaking your head saying, "No, I've already made it this far without having to adapt to digital," then stop playing games and go directly to jail, do not pass go and DO NOT collect the massive profits you're missing out on. ●



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SMART RETAIL



AI in the produce section

By David Zwang

At one point in time, shopping was fairly straight forward. You went into your local brick-and-mortar store, made a selection, go to the cashier, paid for it with the local currency or more recently credit cards.

Things started to change with the advent of online shopping. In this case, we go to a website, make a selection and pay for it with some form of electronic payment through an electronic cashier application, and the items are either sent to us directly or we can pick them up at the local brick-and-mortar store.

And now we are entering a very different shopping model utilizing a brick-and-mortar store with a checkout-free virtual cashier.



Just Walk Out

Amazon opened their first checkout-free “Go” store in 2018 in Seattle. The Go stores’ checkout-free concept was executed in bookstores and general merchandise stores, some of which could be found in malls.

While this initial foray into technology-enhanced shopping was a great experiment, this year they announced that they will close more than 50 of their Go concept stores and focus the technology on their mainstream food markets, like Whole Foods, which they purchased in 2017, and a new line of “Fresh” branded stores.

The first “Fresh” concept store

Photo: Ting Shen for the New York Times

opened June 2021 in Bellevue, Wash. There are now over 30, and they are growing rapidly.

The store also supports traditional checkout lanes where shoppers can elect to go to a cashier and pay with cash, credit cards, Amazon accounts, etc. The decision to select which method occurs when you enter the store. In a recently enhanced Whole Foods Market, if you select the checkout-free option, you either scan the QR code on your Amazon app or your hands, which you have previously linked to your Amazon account, to open the gate and enter the store.

From there you proceed through your “normal” shopping experience, picking up a product off the shelf, looking at it and putting it back, etc. The entire process relies on computer vision, sensor fusion and deep learning techniques to track you and items as they move from shelves to carts and ultimately exit the store. Cameras and sensors are tracking all of your moves and creating a “virtual” shopping cart, which prepares a receipt and charges against your Amazon account when you finally walk out.

Alternatively, some of their stores have a “Dash Cart,” which is embedded with computer vision algorithms and sensors to keep track of what you

put in the cart. The cart is designed and manufactured by veeve.io, a company started by two ex-Amazon employees. The cart can even capture the type and weight of produce to calculate the price.

How does it work?

It is computer vision and deep machine learning. According to Arren Alexander of medium.com, the computer is likely trained with a multi-layered convolutional neural network.

Basically, each camera frame will pass through multiple layers of neurons. Each neuron is assigned a specific filter and will check for a feature, like an edge or a bend, in the image. Every filter is slid over a magnified portion of the image and comes out with a confidence value. The filters and weights get trained as more data is passed in and will become smarter and more confident with larger and larger data sets.

After a machine recognizes objects in a frame, it’s a whole new task to be able to track and identify a person picking up various items, even multiple items at a time, in a busy store. In real-time the



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Photo: Bettina Hansen/The Seattle Times



machine must understand movement from frame to frame. The learning process can include you, and your shopping habits as well.

Is it just Amazon?

Amazon licenses their “Just Walk Out” technology to other retailers, and they say that it takes “just a few weeks” to install it. However, there are other companies that have developed and licensed similar technology for retailers. One company, Zippin, works with retailers that install small stores, kiosks in airports and stadiums.

One of their clients, Camden Food Express, has a store at JFK Airport in Terminal 4, one of my regular stops. You scan your credit card to enter and then shop and walk out. There are no employees in the store.

Implications

In George Orwell’s classic novel, “1984,” every citizen is under constant surveillance by authorities. In today’s technological environment, data-centric surveillance is normal, and privacy is elusive. Amazon “ensures” your data is protected.

“At Amazon, nothing is more important to us than earning and maintaining customer

trust. We take data security and privacy seriously, and any sensitive data is treated in accordance with our long-standing policies.”

There are many convenience factors. Minimally it is estimated that it saves about 33% of the time you are in a market. There are also potential opportunities for cross marketing for consumer product companies, provided that the retailer is willing to share the captured data.

Since it is keeping a real-time track of purchases, it could provide a way for retailers and consumer product companies to better manage their inventories and orders. This could even trickle down to converters who need to create those labels and packages.

So is it convenience or Big Brother?

A recent skit on “Saturday Night Live” helps put it in perspective: <https://youtu.be/zS9U3Gc832Y>

And you thought you were just going to the store to pick up a few things... ●



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IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Increasing print business with augmented reality

By Heidi Tolliver-Walker

It's finally happened. Print and marketing firms are incorporating augmented reality (AR) into their marketing tool kits. Not just for fan engagement and brand building, but as a business problem-solving and revenue-driving solution. Far from AR competing with print, it's driving it.

Take the example of PaperJax, an AR agency in Green Bay, Wis. PaperJax was started earlier this year by Jon Bootz, a seasoned salesman for Brown County Graphics (BCG), along with his wife, Jane. Bootz describes PaperJax, not as a marketing or print agency, but as an AR agency, because all of its services are wrapped around the unique solutions that AR brings.

Why Augmented Reality?

Having worked in the print industry for 28 years, 17 of them with Brown County Graphics, Bootz knows his clients well. He also knows where AR can bridge gaps and solve business pain points that print and digital marketing cannot do alone.

Bootz has been fascinated by AR for nearly a decade. For a long time, however, the software was clunky and difficult to use. The majority of implementations were by large companies for entertainment and brand building, not for direct revenue generation. Gradually, large companies like IKEA began

adopting AR for in-home product visualization, but AR still required a heavy technical lift. It wasn't ready to meet the needs of smaller companies like Bootz's clients. Plus, robust AR was app-based, and users just didn't want to download more apps.

"Then one day, one of my clients approached me. They said, 'I know you've been chasing augmented reality for a long time. Did you ever get there?'" Bootz said. "At that time, Ricoh had just started partnering with RealityBLU through their Professional Services division. Brown County Graphics has been a long-time Ricoh customer, so that opened my eyes to a whole new way to approach augmented reality."

The RealityBLU platform offered by Ricoh is not app-based. It is part of a larger market shift toward WebAR, or AR scenes accessed through a mobile browser. With WebAR, augmented reality scenes can be accessed by any user with a mobile phone via QR Code or hyperlink. Plus, WorldViewAR is easy enough for a smart start-up company with no technical AR experience to use. All they need is an iPhone, a 360° camera and a green screen.

Bootz was sold. He purchased a license and launched PaperJax earlier this year. Bootz handles the sales and business development. The graphic design and print work is handled by Brown County Graphics.

Building Out a Book of Business

To build his book of business, Bootz started with his BCG client base. He recognized common business pain points that could be addressed in similar ways using AR. This allowed him to develop vertical market solutions for each client.

Take the example of Sonny's Pizzeria. In the past, printed rack cards were an important part of Sonny's business. With inflation around food prices, however, Sonny's had stopped printing rack cards because of the continual fluctuation in pricing. Bootz suggested reprinting the cards, but saving the pricing to be viewed through an AR scene.

Now Sonny's Pizzeria has a rack card that will, as Bootz likes to say, "knock people's socks off." On the front of the card is a QR Code (which Bootz calls an AR code) that allows them to place a holographic twin, or holotwin, of the owner, Jason Estes, in the room with them. After enabling camera permissions, the viewer anchors the holotwin on a flat surface in front of them (desk, floor). Estes' holotwin then appears in front of them, pizza paddle in hand. He talks directly to his audience, putting a face and a personality on what would otherwise be any other pizza joint. Then, from within the experience, customers can click on a button that says, "See Our Award-Winning Menu." If the pricing changes, PaperJax simply updates it on the back end in the AR scene.

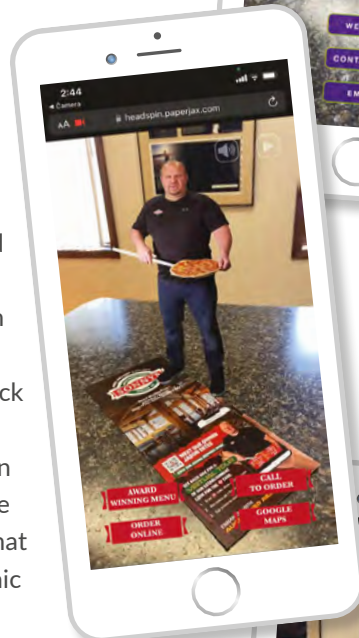
The holotwin also includes three other buttons: "Call us," "Order online" and "Directions," which launches Google Maps from the user's location to Sonny's.

What a Website Alone Can't Do

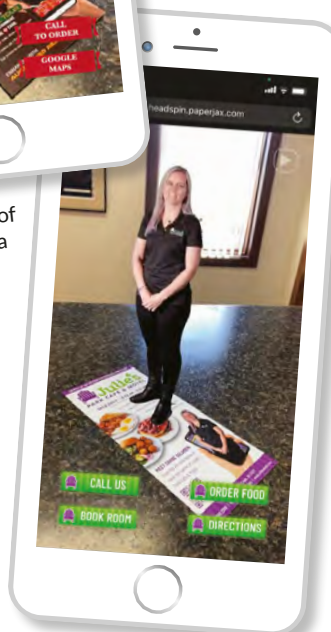
Couldn't Sonny's owner keep his pricing updated by sending people to the website? Yes, but the AR component adds functionality that a website can't. It lets Estes track engagement and tie sales back to the experience. It also creates an emotional connection



Jon Bootz of Paper Jax



Jason Estes of Sonny's Pizza



Sande Solomon of Julie's Motel



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far more powerful than a still image, a video or a website can do.

This, Bootz says, is the key difference between AR codes and QR Codes that lead to video.

"First, it lets people see Jason's personality," Bootz said. "After engaging with the holotwin, they don't just want pizza. They want pizza from this guy. Plus, because the holotwin includes buttons that take them right to the order-

ing pages, you don't lose customers like you do when you put a layer between the customer and the ordering process (such as asking them to type in a URL or Google the name of the restaurant)."

Bootz took a similar approach with another local restaurant, Buttercup's Coffee Shop. In addition to creating a holotwin of the owner on the front of its rack cards, Bootz also suggested adding a virtual tour on the back. Potential customers scan the AR code, which takes them

to an AR portal that they place, via their mobile phone, in the world in front of them. When they walk towards the door (as seen through their screens), it opens. They enter a virtual 360 tour of the coffee shop, where they can hear the sights and sounds of breakfast in the morning, with employees blending coffee and talking to customers. They can even turn around

CASE STUDY — Augmented Reality

360° as if they are actually there. On the screen is a button that says, “Order food.”

Living Up the Funeral Home Business

Illustrating the appeal of AR to a wide variety of businesses, it is also winning the loyalty of a local funeral home. Malcore Funeral Homes was still printing its forms, business cards and price lists, but it had stopped producing its company brochure. Malcore did invest in a local television commercial, which is running on four local stations, but now Malcore wanted to maximize its investment by expanding its reach.

Bootz made an intriguing suggestion — distribute the television commercial from paper-based channels. Using WorldViewAR, Bootz created an AR holotwin of a television screen on a stand that appears in the room with the viewer. Once the TV stand is placed, Malcore’s commercial immediately starts playing on the screen. This allows viewers to play the ad from any printed material, including Malcore’s own business cards, flyers, brochures and sales sheets.

“The owner was amazed,” said Bootz. “Who has heard of playing a television ad off a printed piece? He loved it and ended up reprinting his brochures and its sales sheets to add the AR code.”

PaperJax has sold similar applications to other clients, including a robotic solutions company, a sports apparel company and an RV sales company.

The Power of Virtual Tours

Holotwins have been a significant business generator for PaperJax, and so have virtual tours. The power of walking into a location, place or time as if you are actually there creates an emotional connection that no other channel can replicate.

One PaperJax customer, Young Automotive, is using AR to challenge the idea of the traditional auto repair shop. First, it invites people to meet the owner, Fred Young, as a holotwin on the front of its rack card. On the back, it provides an AR code leading to a portal that allows them to “walk in” and see how clean and well organized the shop is.

“The experience is so realistic that people think it’s a live stream,” Bootz said. “In fact, one of Young Automotive’s customers kept

coming back to the portal over and over to see if her car had been put up on the rack yet. She thought it was a live stream.”

Today, AR-fueled rack cards have become Young Automotive’s number-one source of new business referrals. PaperJax also has coffee shops and Airbnb clients using AR tours to stand out from their competitors on the same racks.

Once a client has created either a holotwin or a portal, it’s not unusual to cross-sell them on the other. Bootz has also created a holotwin for Young’s Automotive’s owner, Fred Young, for example, that he can now add to any of his print materials.

“This is driving business to him in a way that he hasn’t had before,” Bootz said. “Once people meet his holotwin, they think, ‘I like that guy. I like how he talks and presents,’ so there is a ‘schedule now’ button they can click, allowing them to schedule their own auto service right from within the AR experience.”

Young Automotive’s portal experience also includes a map button, which takes viewers right to Google Maps to make it easy for them to find the shop.

PaperJax seems to have found the sweet spot in its local market, and its book business is growing rapidly. This, Bootz insists, isn’t because of AR in itself, but because of the solutions AR enables.

“These are not AR campaigns,” Bootz said. “They are solutions. Augmented reality is simply a tool — a powerful tool, but a tool that allows us to do solutions-selling at its best.” ●



Fred Young of Young Automotive



Heidi Tolliver-Walker has been a commercial and digital printing industry analyst, feature writer, and author for more than 20 years. Her industry commentary can be found in national printing publications, blogs, and marketing publications.



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This page highlights the recent Tecnau Spring Forward virtual event series, and is a one-stop comprehensive resource for those thinking about getting into inkjet.

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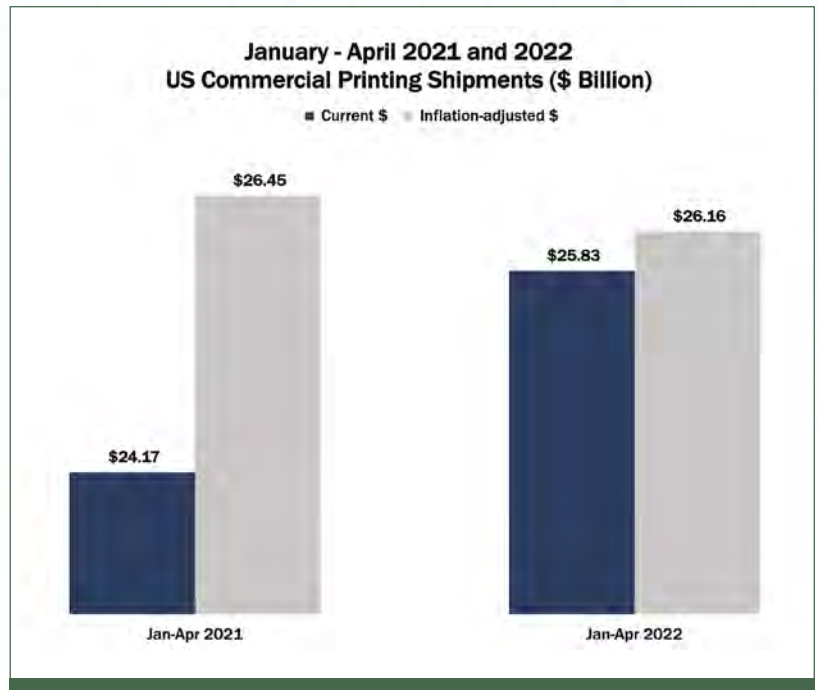
SHIPMENTS: IT'S THE TIME OF THE SEASON

By Richard Romano

April 2022 shipments came in at \$6.67 billion, down from March's \$7.03 billion, and it looks like 2022 is closely mirroring 2021—which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

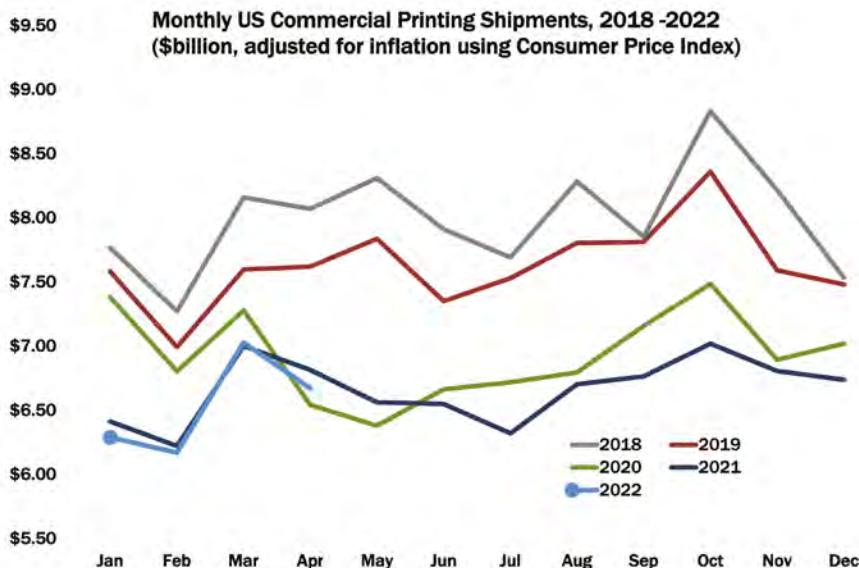
Early 2022 numbers had reflected the tail end of the omicron surge that dominated December, and now we've reached the "Virus? What virus?" stage of COVID. We expected that 2022 would return to the trend that started in 2019 before the interruption that was 2020, and even if overall shipments have not reached 2019 levels (yet?), we're at least reverting back to something resembling regular seasonality. The general trend in all but two of the last seven

January - April 2021 and 2022
US Commercial Printing Shipments (\$ Billion)



years has been for April shipments to decline from March's. That's not really good news but suggests we're getting back to normal.

Year-to-date, we are only slightly off 2021—January to April shipments for 2022 are at \$26.16 billion, a bit under 2021's \$26.45 billion. We also have some ground to make up if we are hoping to overtake 2021, or even 2020 (oddly enough).



The Words of the Profits...

Despite COVID, printing industry profits have been pretty good (heck, we don't need a pandemic to be unprofitable) with annualized



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profits for Q1 2022 coming in at \$4.55 billion, down a tad from \$4.79 billion in Q4 2021.

We also look at printing profits by asset class: large printers (more than \$50 million in assets) and small printers (less than \$50 million in assets).

In Q1 2022, for large printers (those with more than \$50 million in assets), profits before taxes had been +1.62% of revenues, not the greatest of quarters, but not the worst either. For smaller printers (less than \$50 million in assets), profits before taxes in Q1 were +9.48% of revenues, Again, not the best but not the worst quarter.

We had been referring to the disparity between “big” and “small” printers as our “Tale of Two Cities” since there had been a great profit disparity between those two asset classes, although the Census Bureau’s adjustment to \$50 million as the break point (see below) now disrupts that narrative a bit. So in Q1 2021, all printers big and small did better profit-wise, which means that, for the industry on average, profits before taxes were +4.79% of revenues, up from Q4’s +2.84%. For the last six quarters, profits have averaged +5.27% of revenues.

The asset class division is based on the breakdowns in the Census Bureau’s “Quarterly Services Report,” whence we get our profits data.

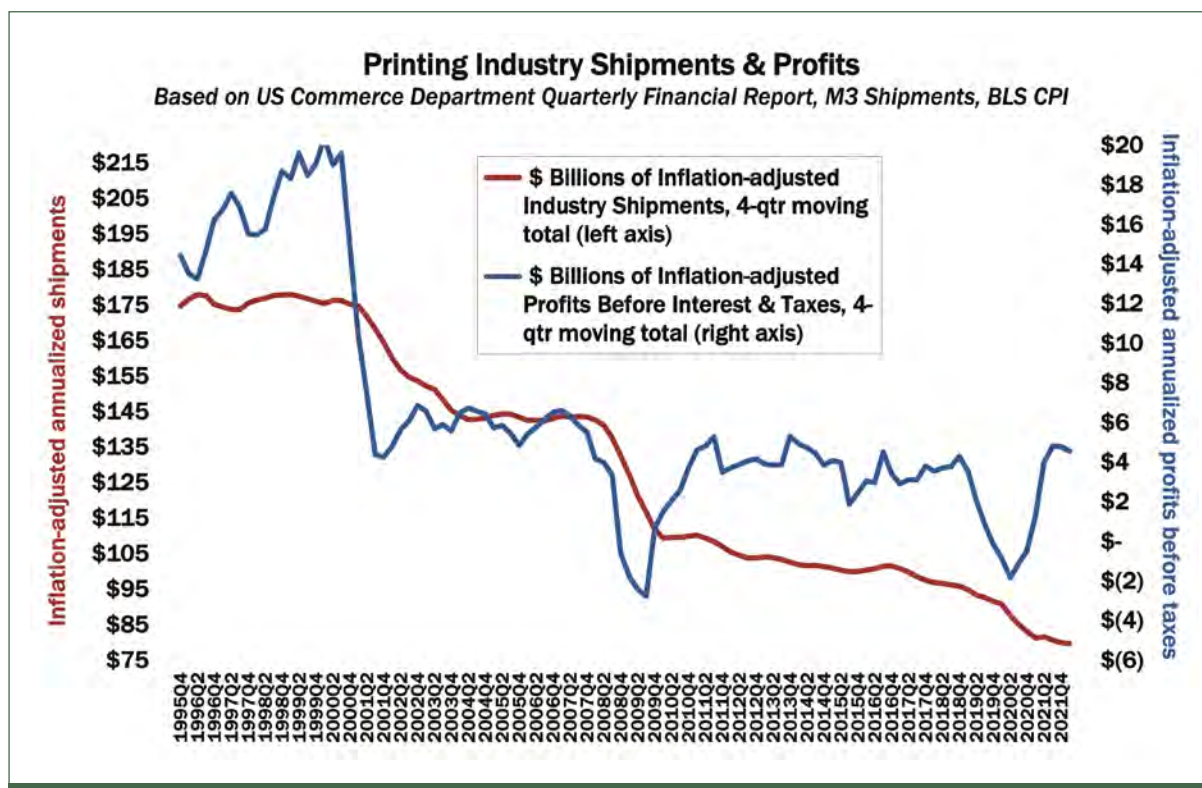
Starting with the “Q4 2019 Quarterly Services Report,” the Census Bureau changed their asset class breakdowns from more/less than \$25 million to more/less than \$50 million.

People Need People...

One gets the sense that the industry’s attempts at recruiting production staff are generally succeeding. In April 2022, all printing employment was up +1.6% from March, with non-production employment down -0.9%. This is the reverse of what we saw in March.

Publishing employment had been improving slightly over last summer, took a turn for the worse in the fall, and started to plateau at the end of the year. It was up a modest +0.6% in March, and now up another +0.4%.

Digging into the specific publishing segments



Net Income Before Taxes	4Q 2020	1Q 2021	2Q 2021	3Q 2021	Q4 2021	1Q 2022	Simple average, last six quarters
All commercial printers	2.79%	5.99%	8.56%	6.65%	2.84%	4.79%	5.27%
<\$50 million in assets	8.27%	14.08%	10.65%	11.77%	6.28%	9.48%	10.09%
>\$50 million in assets	-0.29%	0.77%	7.21%	3.06%	0.64%	1.62%	2.17%

NOTES: Approximate breakpoint for \$50 million is 100 employees. Data are from the Department of Commerce *Quarterly Financial Report* released December, 2021. Data analysis ©2021, WhatTheyThink

(the reporting of which lags a month), things continue to stay in a bit of a holding pattern, although on a more upward one than last month. From February to March, periodical publishing employment was up +1.9%, while newspaper publishing employment was down -0.8%.

The creative markets were doing about the same. Graphic design employment was up +1.1% from February to March, ad agencies were also up +0.9%, and public relations—usually a standout segment—was only up +0.5%. Direct mail advertising employment has been up and down for the past year but in March 2022 was down -0.3%.

The General Economic Outlook

Despite the doom-and-gloom you hear on the nightly or cable news, the current economic climate is actually pretty good, although there are some

trouble spots, with more potentially on the horizon. Pundits have been trotting out the “r” word, but there really is no sign that we are in a recession or about to go into one.

The employment situation is exceptional. In April, employers added 400,000+ jobs, and the unemployment rate is at 3.6% for the third month in a row. There is a kind of “real-time” recession indicator based on the unemployment rate called the Sahm Rule, formulated by and named for former Federal Reserve and Council of Economic Advisors economist Claudia Sahm.

The Sahm Rule (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/release?rid=456>): identifies signals related to the start of a recession when the three-month moving average of the national unemployment rate (U3) rises by 0.50 percentage points or more relative to its low during the previous 12 months.

Employment in thousands of workers	March 2021	March 2022	Y/Y Change	April 2021	April 2022	Y/Y Change
Printing, all	363.9	371.9	2.2%	361.5	374.0	3.5%
Printing, production	247.2	255.1	3.2%	245.2	258.3	5.3%
Printing, less production	116.7	116.8	0.1%	116.3	115.7	-0.5%
Publishing	783.9	814.8	3.9%	781.9	817.7	4.6%
Periodicals	69.0	70.1	1.6%	67.8		
Newspapers	104.6	102.4	-2.1%	104.1		
Publishing, ex-newspaper	679.3	712.4	4.9%	677.8		
Graphic design	55.2	56.8	2.9%	55.9		
Public relations	57.9	64.4	11.2%	59.6		
Ad agencies, includes PR	436.3	474.5	8.8%	437.2	475.0	8.6%
Ad agencies, less PR	378.4	410.1	8.4%	377.6		
Agency (incl PR) + design	491.5	531.3	8.1%	493.1		
Direct Mail Advertising	35.6	36.6	2.8%	35.4		

It is currently -0.1 percentage point, which is well below the 0.5 percentage-point indication of being in a recession. Meanwhile, consumer spending has been up (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PCEC96#0>) and employers throughout the economy are hiring (or trying to).

“ The causes of the current inflationary surge are not typical. Then again what has been typical about the last three years? ”

But the headline economic story—inflation—takes precedent over all the others, and it's understandable why, since it means everything costs more. The causes of the current inflationary surge are not typical. Then again what has been typical about the last three years?

Recovery from a global pandemic means increased demand as people get out and spend on the things they couldn't in 2020 or even 2021. Then there are pandemic-induced, Ukrainian war-induced and Chinese lockdown-induced supply chain

problems. After all, prices rise when supply can't meet demand. Gas is high because people are now traveling more as they arise from the bunkers, and oil production had been cut during the pandemic.

Unfortunately, these problems are largely beyond the reach of the usual tools the Federal Reserve has to keep inflation in check. The eternal challenge is raising interest rates enough to curb inflation without driving up unemployment and/or plunging us into a recession, as was the case in 1981–82. And let's not forget that inflation is high internationally, so it's not a uniquely American problem.

As Claudia Sahm wrote in June (<https://bit.ly/3xOnOwQ>): “The Fed is committed to bringing inflation down. But to do so, they need us to swap one hardship for another. Less consumption for less inflation. But that's not the only way. More supply—whether it's more workers to hire or more stuff to buy—would reduce inflation too. That's the better way but more uncertain and beyond the Fed.”

But, it's late June as I write this...those of you reading this in the future may be experiencing something completely different. If there's one thing we learned in 2020, as the song goes, in a New York minute, everything can change. ●

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OPENING TO THE REALITIES OF A REMOTE WORKFORCE

Allowing a remote workforce can improve your talent pool as well as force you into fixing your manual process habits.

By Jennifer Matt

The pandemic forced a lot of “employees must be in person” believers into a new reality. From sales to services and beyond, the “had to be done in person mentality” fell by the wayside in the wake of the global pandemic. The forcing of this issue—requiring nearly everyone to go virtual for some part of their business for some time—will have a lasting impact on all industries, print included.

You run a factory, so of course the press operators and finishing and shipping staff must be in person to move the physical aspects of print custom



manufacturing. This group of people will continue to show up on factory floors. The real transition is going to hit all the people who work in your company on both sides of the manufacturing process—sales, customer service, prepress in front of the press, and accounting and finance behind the press. Traditionally, this group of employees also worked “on-site” in offices and cubicles, typically in what I like to refer to as the “carpeted area” of your plant. For many printers, the idea of moving these staff members off-site seemed impossible before the pandemic. These people were constantly away from their computers talking to schedulers, on the press floor, advising on last-minute customer changes to jobs. How could they possibly be remote? Collaboration was required to move jobs through the process. A team effort was the name of the game. This has been the core belief and reality in most print businesses forever.

If you look at each functional area individually you can start to consider how a permanent remote workforce is a possibility. I'll start with an example that doesn't freak people out because, for a business that has never had a remote workforce, implementing one could feel very risky. This is what I'm

seeing happen to real print businesses employing real people in the pandemic era.

Your best CSR wants to move geographical



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locations. She doesn't want to leave her job. She has been with you for more than a decade, she literally knows your customers better than you do. In this instance, do you insist that she can't continue to be employed simply because she can't be physically in the building every day? Most owners would say "yes" to this situation, allowing their loyal employee to continue to work for them remotely. Who wants to go through the pain of replacing her in this tight labor market?

This is an ideal situation because a key member of your staff would pave the way for you to develop processes for supporting a permanent remote working staff. I'm not talking about all people, and I'm not talking about immediately. I'm talking about opening your business up to the prospect of recruiting and hiring talent outside your geographical region.

Presumably, for the life of your business, personnel recruitment has been restricted by geography. For virtually all businesses, this is a constraint worth exploring.

What if you're looking for a new print MIS/ERP administrator and you could search nationwide for someone with specific experience with your current print MIS/ERP? What if you could recruit college graduates who wanted to return to their rural communities but didn't see employment opportunities there? What if you could recruit stay-at-home parents to work

part-time from home?

Opening this door up even a crack in your business can change a lot about how you look at staffing and recruiting in the future. The other aspect of having even a few remote workers is how it forces you to tighten up your processes on-site. You can no longer rely on paper-based notes scribbled on a job jacket for reliable communication. Remote workers force you to start really using your ERP as a system of record that is dynamic, up-to-date, and visible by the right people in all locations, always. Just think about the impact that would have on all aspects of your business. What if the data in your Print MIS/ERP was accurate, up-to-date, and accessible to your entire team—no matter where they live and work—24/7?

I think one of the most revolutionary concepts in business efficiency is a trusted system of record that your whole business runs on. When your business runs on stranded data in non-connected systems (just think email, paper, spreadsheet files on desktop computers, notes on white boards, physical scheduling boards, etc.). Non-connected, static, information dead ends vs. a system that has the correct permissions, is

constantly being updated, and managed as the trusted system of record makes a world of difference. Sometimes we don't make the changes until we must. Once you have one employee move remote, they can be the instigator for one source of truth that is accessible to all.

When you really think about the functional areas of your business, most employees are coming into your office and working on a phone and a computer exclusively. These tools along with an internet connection are precisely what they need to do their job. Working from home is a desirable recruiting tool. Working from home can allow you to downsize your commercial footprint. Working from home saves your employees tremendous amounts of time and money.

I have been working from home for most of my career. The efficiency cannot be overrated. I have control of every single aspect of my working environment. I have tweaked it to be optimal for my working preferences. Without a commute, without the need to procure lunch, without the need to be dressed up every day, I have more time for work. ●



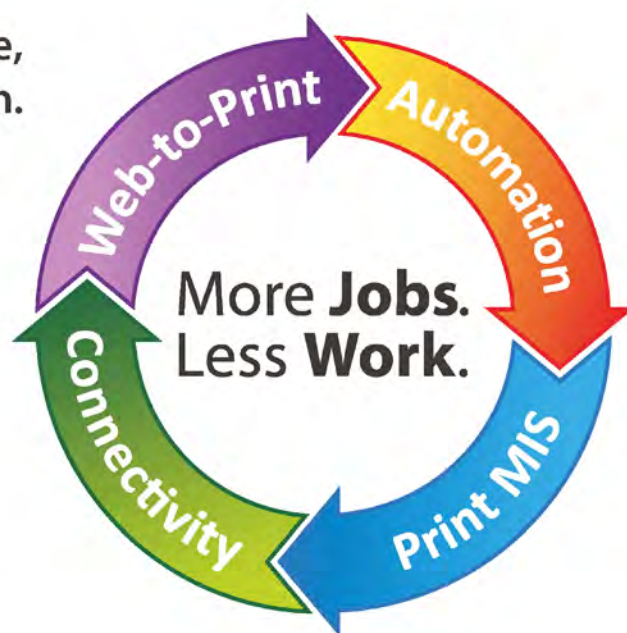
Jennifer Matt writes, speaks, and consults with printers worldwide who realize their ability to leverage software is critical to their success in the Information Age.

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INKJET INTEGRATION: FLEXIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE

Inkjet technology can provide sustainable and bespoke solutions.

By David Zwang

Inkjet technology is creating and transforming many disparate applications, and it has the potential to do it sustainably. Increasingly, people and organizations are looking at new forms of print and industrial applications to meet sustainability demands.

Material Deposition

Inkjet technologies support the deposition of a variety of substances that facilitate manufacturing processes. The types of substances can vary from water- to solvent-based on the specific inkjet technology and application. From an environmental standpoint, water-based ink is much more suitable since it is comprised of naturally occurring substances and doesn't contain any of the toxic chemicals of its counterparts. Due to this, water-based ink is lower risk for printers, manufacturers, consumers and the environment. In addition, because it's water-soluble, no specialized chemicals are required for its clean up. This keeps potentially harmful substances out of our waste and water supply.

It is important to remember that, while the components of water-based ink are less harmful to

the environment than those of solvent-based ink, the ultimate eco-footprint of water-based ink has as much to do with how it is handled, stored and cleaned as it does with the fact that it is much less toxic. Water-based ink is only eco-friendly when you use and dispose of it properly and completely, in a responsible manner. Even the best, most gentle industrial inks and cleaning products are still chemicals. Much of the long-term ecological damage of printing ink is a result of the alcohol in the fountain solution and solvent waste in clean-up, not the process or the chemicals.

Digital embellishment using inkjet technologies can now replace most analog solutions, in many different configurations, designed to make it easy to implement in any facility. The digital solutions are timelier and more cost effective, since you no longer need to create physical plates and dyes, instead using digital print technology such as inkjet heads.

The primary technologies used in digital embellishment are varnish deposition, usually using inkjet printheads or clear polymers. This can be used with various combinations of high-build polymer dispersion metallic "nano" particles in a varnish or polymer suspension and curable resin for creasing and embossing.



Commercial Print and Packaging

Consumer purchasing habits are shifting, and this is reflected in shifts in print and printing process requirements. McKinsey & Company has been following the impact of historic and recent events on consumer purchasing performance and produced some interesting statistics.

From 2017 to 2019, in the U.S., large brands of more than \$750 million in revenue lost volume at the rate of 1.5% a year, while small brands grew at a rate of 1.7% and private labels grew 4.3%. In fact, between 2018 and 2019, small brands grew four times faster than large brands. So, the shift away from big brands started before 2020, and the pandemic only accelerated it by forcing consumers out of their comfort zones. It is anticipated that the majority of consumers won't go back to the old ways and will take a closer look at alternative purchasing channels and brands.

How printing and packaging are produced and what it is produced for plays an important role in this effort. New, more efficient digital print production technologies like the FUJIFILM 42K Printbar System are beginning to address these new market requirements and to add value to the printed applications with inkjet technologies that are reliable enough for print to be applied in new ways. Commercial print and packaging are leading this movement toward using environmentally and socially sustainable materials and processes to provide products and services.

"This is good for the environment, and it puts more pressure on inkjet technology providers to offer inks with their jetting systems that can print on an expanding and rapidly changing set of materials," said Steve Atherton, senior manager of product management and marketing for Fujifilm Integrated Inkjet Solutions. "This isn't just about

having the inks, but also having the experience to apply the right ink in the right situation."

Sustainable print manufacturing is often referred to as green printing, and it is about more than using recycled paper, it is about designing sustainable products that are also focused on use, reuse, production and distribution. This new manufacturing mindset is based on creating and producing products that design out waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems. This focus known as a circular economy, will enable us to help put the brakes on the rise in greenhouse gases.

Industrial

While inkjet technologies are transforming commercial print and packaging applications, they are also extending to new areas of industrial applications. The industrial category of print is a catch-all for products that don't fit nicely into existing categories and is applied to many newer printing applications created as a result of the availability of inkjet technologies.



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One of these applications is focused on the decorative print market also known as décor. Décor is comprised of the furnishings and decoration of a room, and the market includes:

- Wallpaper
- Flooring laminates
- Furniture, panel laminates
- Wallcovering laminates
- Metal decoration
- Direct printing of objects, such as panels, doors and sundries (including glass screens and switches, knobs, buttons and dials).

The decorative print market is growing, ultimately because of increasing global purchasing resources being used to improve living environments, while owners of businesses and public buildings also wish to improve the public perception and approval of their premises. Trends driving this growth include keeping up with the latest fashion trends; the impetus to create an immersive brand experience in hospitality; an increase in new homes being built; and competition with traditional natural materials, such as wood flooring or stone tiles, using more sustainable inkjet-based production methods.

Fujifilm, for example, has several products that cater to this market. The Fujifilm StarFire SG1024 industrial print bar system can be implemented as a standalone print solution or integrated into a manufacturing production line with a

range of widths from 2.5 to 85 inches. Its Mini 4300 Series Industrial Inkjet Printbar System is small enough to be integrated into manufacturing lines for a variety of building-related products.

Textiles

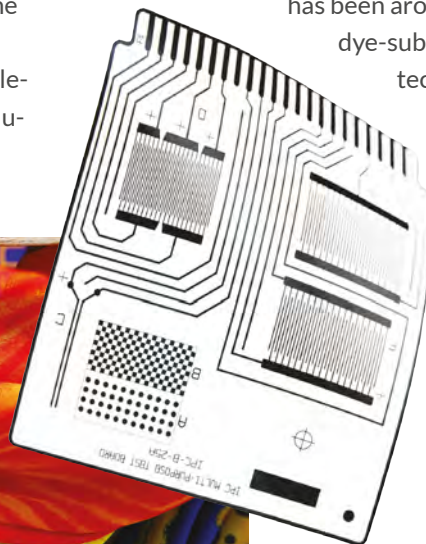
Textile production is another industrial application for using sustainable inkjet technologies. The stages in the life cycle of a garment are creation of raw materials, production, shipping, use and disposal.

Once the cotton is grown and harvested, the production phase begins including spinning, knitting and the wet processes of bleaching and dyeing. These processes use a great deal of water and energy, as well as commercial dyes and bleaches, which are harmful pollutants and contaminate groundwater. While this phase may seem like the least environmentally detrimental part of the garment's life cycle, once you consider that each wash uses about 40 gallons of water per full load, combined with the energy used by dryers, you can begin to see that the environmental impact is significant.

Printing on textiles for banners and soft signage has been around for a while using silkscreen and dye-sublimation methods, but using inkjet technology to print directly on fabrics or garments provides a more sustainable solution. It also enables the introduction of mass customization of clothing and soft décor furnishings to support the shifting consumer trends.

Electronics

Inkjet printing technologies have become a new and disruptive method of manufacturing electronic components to produce a wide range of devices, including photovoltaic cells, solar panels, batteries, light sources and sensors on thin, lightweight and flexible substrates. Printing technologies are currently used to create electronic devices on different substrates. Printable electronics have enabled



the production of electrical and electronic components to be used in conventional circuits on cost-effective, lightweight and flexible materials, including flexible film, cloth, plastic or paper. These have a low manufacturing cost, create flexible electronics and use environmentally-friendly technology on a wide range of substrates.

In traditional electronic manufacturing, subtractive techniques use multiple production steps and toxic etching chemicals to remove unwanted photoresist layers and metals. Using inkjet technology, the same functional material can be selectively deposited only where it is needed on the substrate, via printheads. This is an additive process, and it significantly reduces not only the number of manufacturing steps, but also the need for energy, time, consumables and reduces the amount of waste.

As a result, inkjet printing is an efficient, energy-saving and environmentally friendly manufacturing method for many electronics applications. Printed electronics are used in various industrial applications including batteries, packaging, consumer, sensor, displays and RFID. One of the main advantages of printable electronics are the efficient use of materials, which results in a significantly smaller amount of waste.

Just the Beginning

As the awareness of available inkjet technologies increases

and the potential benefits are recognized, we will see many new applications and uses. Many of these will include the integration of

customized modular inkjet print technologies into existing manufacturing lines to facilitate more timely shifts in production demands. ●

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Harnessing the Power of Proactive Maintenance

As digitization leads the way forward for print manufacturing, print service providers (PSPs) now can use machine learning and data analytics to shape processes and guide important decisions. Both capabilities are integral to Industry 4.0. They provide PSPs with the power to proactively optimize the management, conservation and ROI of their printing equipment as well as achieve higher levels of operational productivity and efficiency.

Benefits of Being Proactive

Common knowledge suggests it's better to anticipate a problem and take care of it before it crops up—that's basically the definition of being proactive. Common knowledge also says everything mechanical is going to need maintenance at some point in time. Digital printing equipment is no exception. A reactive approach to maintenance can be expensive, disrupt workflow and increase risk. But advanced knowledge and early action can help prevent problems, significantly improve performance and extend the longevity of these valuable capital assets.

That's why, at Canon Solutions America, Proactive Maintenance is at the core of our customer-first

support and service approach. This philosophy encompasses not only preventive but also predictive and performance-based tactics that can help PSPs:

- Avoid costly unexpected downtime and lost output
- Find and fix potential issues before they require extensive repairs
- Reduce unnecessary "routine" maintenance
- Prolong reliability and performance of printing equipment
- Protect critical investments

Preventative vs. Predictive Maintenance

Preventative Maintenance is familiar to anyone who owns a car. Typically, the timing and type of scheduled maintenance, like oil changes, is based on best practices, generic recommendations and aggregated data for similar vehicles.

Preventive maintenance is much the same on the print shop floor. Routine maintenance includes things like cleaning filters or replacing belts. Having digital printing equipment inspected, tested and tuned up by a qualified technician on a preset timetable according to manufacturer recommendations is standard

operating procedure. There can be disadvantages to relying solely on this approach, however. It's possible to address issues that don't even exist or replace parts prematurely, incurring higher inventory, labor and downtime costs than necessary. But the single most important consideration is scheduling preventive maintenance to reduce the likelihood of unplanned maintenance interrupting large production runs or important deadlines.

To aid customers in this effort, Canon offers Predictive Maintenance solutions—a systematic and holistic approach to avoiding costly malfunctions and downtime and helping achieve maximum uptime. Made possible by Industry 4.0, it yields accurate, immediate, condition-based information PSPs can use to time and perform maintenance tasks more strategically and to manage the supply chain more efficiently. It's also critical for detecting and preventing potential problems based on each customer's specific usage. This early intelligence can give print providers the lead time they need to "fix" issues before they disrupt the workflow or cause costly shutdowns and necessitate emergency repairs.

How Canon Powers Proactivity

Proactive service and support is a vital component of our ongoing commitment to customer-first innovation. It includes developing and deploying state-of-the-art tools and remote capabilities to help take equipment performance, engine uptime and ROI to new levels, like Canon On Remote Service (ORS).

Enabled by the Internet of Things, ORS is a productivity-focused toolset that uses machine learning, advanced analytics and secure remote access to measure critical functions, provide real-time troubleshooting and help make both preventive and predictive maintenance truly proactive. Its Remote Diagnostics, Remote Assistance and Remote Connect capabilities can help PSPs achieve:

- Higher uptime
- Smoother operation
- More efficient use of labor
- Improved inventory and supply chain control

A Closer Look at ORS

According to Scott Scheffer, a Canon product service advisor at the Canon America's Customer Innovation Center, ORS allows Canon's service team to "keep their fingers on the pulse of each press." It monitors real-time sensory data to track and analyze the press's actual utilization and functionality during normal operation.

"This information," Scheffer said, "helps make it possible to time preventive maintenance to avoid interruptions during big print runs or peak workload. It's also key to improving supply chain management for ink, paper and parts, which is more critical than ever right now."

In addition, Scheffer said several predictive triggers connected to various parts of the production process are monitored.

"If an issue is detected, an email alert is sent to the appropriate Canon service technician, who can log in to see more details, remotely troubleshoot in real time, and offer a higher level of service and support."

ORS also allows Canon to give customers "helpful information on how they could be more productive and efficient based on the analytics that we're seeing—their operational behaviors," Scheffer said.

And he points out another benefit that has risen in importance since the beginning of the pandemic: the ability to provide remote training opportunities to help shorten the learning curve for new hires or to share critical knowledge with current staff.

"We have the ability to pull in an expert no matter where they are on the globe. They can be there for a customer in real time, on site virtually, sharing their expertise, without having to be on the shop floor in person. With a clear, secure view of what the operators are seeing on the press, they can take control of the operator panel or service PC, manipulate the mouse, show them what screens they need to be accessing, and demonstrate exactly how to perform the different procedures in the technical service manual—all remotely."

Proactivity as an Industry 4.0 Advantage

"Helping you harness the power of being proactive as a print service provider is one of the many competitive advantages of doing business with Canon Solutions America," Scheffer said. "You have this arsenal of people behind you keeping a constant watch on your presses and anticipating what you need. And you have leading-edge tools and technologies—like ORS—that are generating the deep information PSPs require to evolve and innovate." ●



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Canon



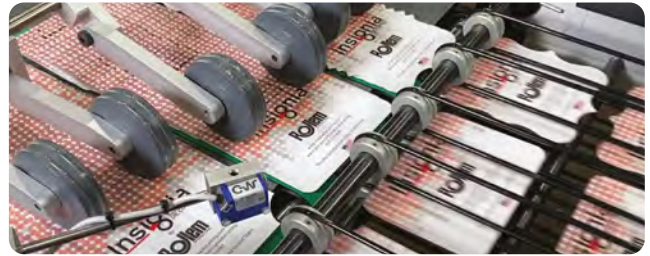
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RMGT's "Commit to Print" World Tour

RMGT's rock-n-roll themed "Commit to Print" World Tour, celebrating heavy metal and sheetfed-offset printing, kicked off earlier this month.

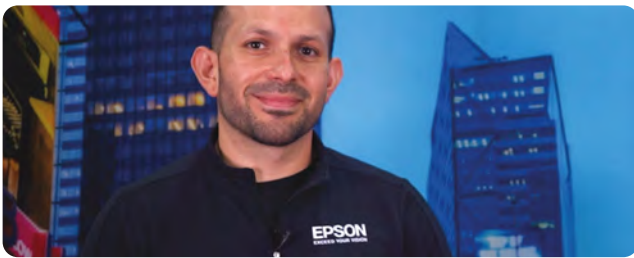
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Rollem Insignia Overview

This video is a brief introduction to the Insignia die cutting systems. For more information please visit www.rollemusa.com or call (800) 272-4381.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160013



David Lopez on Epson's Extensive Portfolio

Epson's David Lopez talks about some recent Epson product announcements that were on display at the ISA Sign Expo.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160129



Amplify Opens in Minneapolis

Kelley Holmes talks to AP Tech President Thayer Long at the inaugural Amplify event, presented in conjunction with the FSEA.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160128



ePAC introduces "Connected Packaging"

Carl Joachim, Partner at ePAC, which is continuing their substantial growth globally and have also introduced "Connected Packaging."

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160143



Trotec's Warren Knipple on Laser Finishing

Warren Knipple of Trotec Laser talks about the advantages of lasers in print finishing, giving users precise cutting control.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160144



Jim Raffel and Shelby Sapusek Geek Out Over the ISA Sign Expo

Jim Raffel and Shelby Sapusek recap some items that caught their eyes at the ISA Sign Expo.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160163



Warren Werbitt Goes Printer to Printer with Paul Hudson

Warren talks with Hudson Printing's Paul Hudson about the company's recent installation of two Landa S10P Nanographic Printing Presses.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160182





Parkland Direct's Envelope Embellishments

Clint Seckman talks to Kelley Holmes at the Amplify Print event about Parkland Direct.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160230



Ricoh and Tecna Help the State of Colorado Transition from Toner to Inkjet

The State of Colorado uses Tecna's Revolution 50 Series in tandem with Ricoh's VC60000.

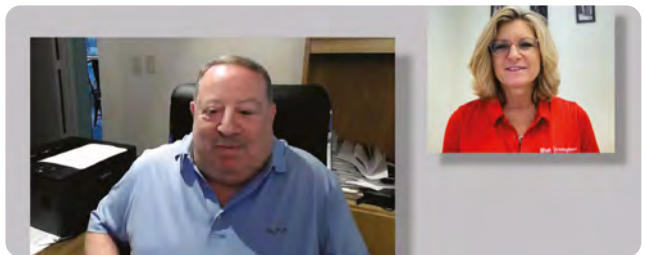
Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160193



Eric Vessels and Thayer Long on APTech's Acquisition of WhatTheyThink

Eric Vessels talks to Thayer Long, President of APTech, about APTech's recent acquisition of WhatTheyThink.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160217



David Ashkenaz on Software Investment Fears

Kelley Holmes talks with David Ashkenaz, independent software consultant for the printing industry, about the fears printers have of investing in software.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160218



Duplo's Rick Salinas on Cannabis Packaging Embellishment

Duplo's Rick Salinas talks with Kelley Holmes at last week's Amplify event about Duplo's offerings.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160244



Packaging Challenges: How Is the Industry Responding?

RR Donnelley recently conducted a survey of 300 U.S. professionals in the packaging industry.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160243



Warren Werbit Goes Printer to Printer with Mike Meshkati

Warren talks with Mike Meshkati of Sinalite in Toronto, Ont. Sinalite offers everything except 3D printing.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160245



Foiling, Sleeking, and Value Added Embellishments with RMGT

Chris Manley of Graphco talks to Kelley Holmes at AMPLIFY about the creation of the RMGT business.

Find video here: www.printingnews.com/21160274





Onyx Graphics Announces Global Availability of ONYX 22

ONYX 22 is now available globally. ONYX 22 introduces a new drag-and-drop user experience for file management and Quick Set automation, smart job submission from design to print, artwork placement controls for flatbed and DTG printing, and easy-to-use tools for everyday automation.

ONYX 22 also introduces color tools for increased color output accuracy and an all-new ONYX Color Reference Library to easily match color for any printer. This dynamic reference library highlights in-and-out of gamut colors and can be printed or used in ONYX software.

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Epson Now Shipping New High-Speed, Compact SureColor T7770D 44-Inch Technical, CAD and Graphics Printer

Featuring an innovative, compact design, the technical printer is the first available model in the new line of production-class SureColor T-Series wide-format printing solutions designed to meet the complex and demanding needs of technical and production printing environments.

The **SureColor T7770D** features 2.64-inch PrecisionCore printhead technology to deliver high image quality and accurate details, even at its fastest print speeds. It prints posters and POP displays at speeds over 300 sqft/hr, technical drawings at production-class speeds over 1400 sqft/hr, and A1/D-size prints as fast as 16 seconds. Up to 25 percent smaller than competitors,³ the SureColor T7770D features a compact, innovative design with complete front operation so it can be pushed against a wall, leaving more room for a walkway and other equipment. Leveraging UltraChrome XD3 6-color inks including, a new Red ink, ideal for producing red branding colors, it creates water, smudge, and fade resistant output with crisp lines and vibrant colors for graphics, signage, blueprints, documents, and more.

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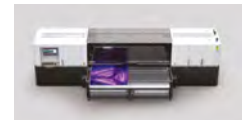


Fujifilm Announces First Foray into the High-End Wide Format Hybrid Market

The **Acuity Ultra Hybrid LED** offers all the benefits of ease-of-use, ultra-high quality and a competitive ROI, combined with the ability to print to both rigid and flexible substrates. The Acuity Ultra Hybrid LED is a 3.3m high-end printer that offers high quality printing to both rigid and flexible substrates. Printing at speeds of up to 218 m²/hr (RTR), and delivering a print resolution of up to 1200 x 1200 dpi, the Acuity Ultra Hybrid LED is able to combine ultra-high quality and a competitive return on investment, for both rigid and flexible applications, in one platform.

It is engineered with the operator in mind and designed with specialist inks to support the printing of exceptional near-photographic interior graphics and the high-speed printing of banners and PVC signage.

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Kodak Announces Fastest Inkjet on the Market with Groundbreaking KODAK PROSPER 7000 Turbo Press

The **KODAK PROSPER 7000 Turbo** inkjet web press uses KODAK Stream Inkjet Technology offering printing speeds of up to 410 mpm (1,345 fpm) or up to 5,523 A4/letter ppm. It enables commercial, publishing and newspaper printers to compete more effectively with offset and to shift more long run jobs from conventional printing processes to inkjet.

The KODAK PROSPER 7000 Turbo has vast application and substrate versatility. It supports a maximum web width of 648 mm (25.5 inches) with a variable cutoff length up to 1,372 mm (54 in.) while printing on a wide range of coated and uncoated stocks, newsprint, specialty papers as well as recycled papers.

Offering three optimized print modes, the PROSPER 7000 Turbo Press meets the specific requirements of different applications. The Quality mode, which is roughly comparable to offset printing using a 200 lpi (80 L/cm) screen, is best for direct mailings, catalogs and magazines.

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GET ON THE SAME PAGE

Pre-call prep leads to better prospect meetings.

Most salespeople agree that advance prep for important prospect meetings is a precursor for successful call outcomes. However, based on my observations from working with hundreds of salespeople over the years, many continue to just “wing it.” Sales call after sales call, they leave the entire outcome to chance.

Yet, statistics are clear. Sellers can gain at least a 20% bump in productivity through consistent pre-call work. What does a 20% increase mean for you? It means 20% improvement in revenue and a huge boost in sales commissions.

The purpose of pre-call prep, used in all stages of the sales process, is to meet your prospect where they are and design a conversation flow that ensures advancement. It starts with a clear understanding of which stage of your sales process you’re in and where the prospect is in their buying journey.

Advance planning ensures that you and all participants involved are on the



Lisa Magnuson is an author and founder of Top Line Sales in 2005. It has a proven track record of helping companies overcome the barriers to winning TOP Line Accounts. Learn more at www.toplinesales.com.

same page prior to the meeting, thereby increasing the overall effectiveness of the meeting. At its core, pre-call prep allows meeting participants to truly listen and stay flexible and responsive, which is a game changer for advancing with your prospect.

Imagine prepping for your next big prospect meeting. You worked incredibly hard to secure this appointment and you've put in a lot of work hoping it will lead to a next meeting.

During the discussion you plan on sharing information about your company and showing a couple of features of your product.

But your prospect's goal is to learn more about their problem so they can decide if it's severe enough to allocate resources to solve.

Clearly, your meeting goals are out of alignment.

If you move forward with your current agenda, your prospect will be frustrated since they didn't get what they hoped for from the interaction.

And you'll be discouraged since they won't agree to a next step.

If you want to avoid being out of sync with your prospects, I've got two simple steps for you to follow as part of your pre-call prep:

First start with your prospect's goals for the interaction.

And the best way to find out – ask them! Here are two critical questions:

- What would make the meeting productive for them? And
- What do they envision as possible next steps following the meeting? This second question is powerful as your prospect thinks about next steps in advance.

It's also a good idea to send them the agenda or discussion points a few days in

advance and ask them for input.

Now that you have that information, you have to align your goals for the meeting with their goals.

Be realistic. If your prospect is simply gathering information, then your goal should be to supply the right information in the right way, so they'll agree to meet again.

Let me give you an example from my recent experience. Jaden, an account manager for a large insurance company, was prepping for a client meeting to discuss expanding their services.

The client's goal for the meeting was to get Jaden's ideas so they could finish their internal business case to justify adding the new services. Because Jaden was crystal clear on her client's goal, she brought in an expert from her company who had all the data that their client was looking for.

The client was thrilled and shared their appreciation with Jaden recognizing her prep and willingness to secure an expert to help.

Jaden eventually walked away with a sizable contract for new services and deepened her relationship with her client.

The key to a successful prospect conversation; meet your prospects where they are.

Plan on "Ring the Bell" much more frequently by committing to pre-call prep before every prospect meeting. ●



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NEW LINKEDIN LEARNING COURSE

Check out my new LinkedIn Learning course which follows the 100% Confidence Call Sheet for simple, yet powerful, pre-call prep at <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/sales-precalls-prep-for-virtual-or-in-person-deals>

CONTINUED GROWTH WITH MANY APPLICATIONS

4Over demonstrates continued growth with a broad services portfolio.

By Cary Sherburne

4 Over is the largest trade-only printer in the United States with 10 locations and close to one million square feet of production space and 1,100 employees. The company offers offset, digital and wide-format printing, covering a wide range of customer applications. In this discussion, CEO Shaheen Javadizadeh, who joined the company in 2020 from the enterprise software industry, shares company updates and industry insights.

Printing News: Thanks for speaking with us today. As the largest trade-only U.S. printer, what does your sales channel look like?

Shaheen Javadizadeh: We have a growing network of value-added resellers, in fact just over 55,000 at the moment. This includes printers, print brokers, marketing firms, graphic design

artists, photographers, sign shops and a myriad of others that sell marketing essentials to their customers.

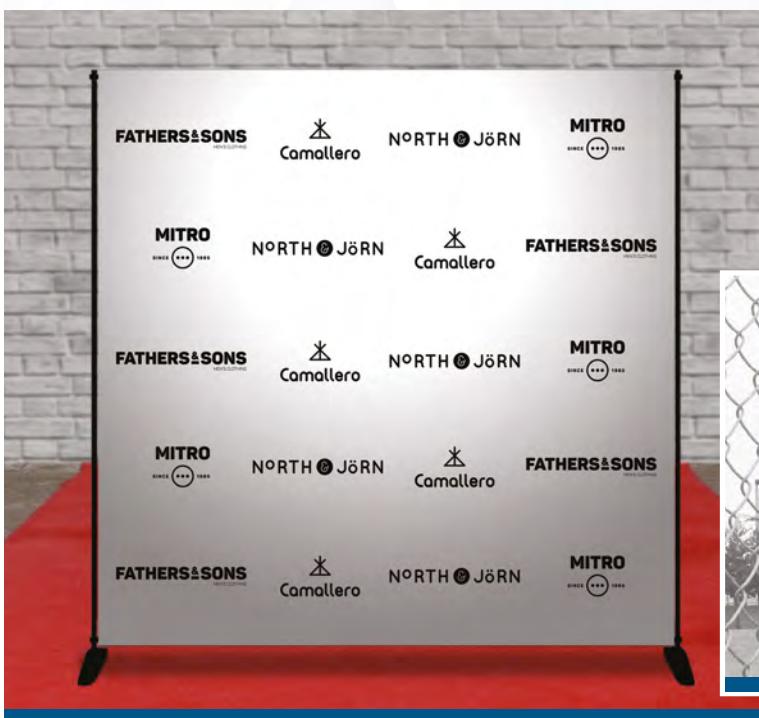


PN: You offer offset and digital commercial printing, as well as wide format. How long have you been offering wide format?

SJ: We have been doing wide format for about seven years now, and we've really doubled down in our investment there. We have a lot of technology, equipment and floor space dedicated to wide format, from rigid signs to printed banners and soft signage.

PN: One of the issues that the printing industry has, as well as other industries, is hiring talent. How has the labor shortage affected 4Over?

SJ: There are definitely some headwinds in our industry, both in print and in other types of light manufacturing. The first one, as you note, is people. People are your greatest asset. It's been challenging during the pandemic to make the right key hires within each of the plants, and it has been different from



region to region. However, it's something that we have just had to get better at. We've got one of the best HR teams and some of the best plant managers. Although we had probably four or five months of a rough go at growing our labor pool, we've really got that under control now. It ultimately means you have to increase benefits and increase pay, but those are the types of things we are happy to do to get the right team together.

Another is obviously inflation, not only in the cost of labor, but in raw materials. A lot of our industry relies on raw materials from overseas, and when shipping was backed up and sea freight became two to three times more expensive, these increased costs have been quite a challenge. We've been fortunate enough to be fairly well diversified. We have U.S. mills we buy from, but we also have some overseas mills we buy from. The shift to sourcing materials locally is becoming a bigger trend, but that's put a lot of pressure on the mills and suppliers. It really comes down to logistics and transportation. It's much more expensive. The cost of carriers like FedEx and UPS has gone up, simply because their labor and fuel prices have increased. And that directly impacts the logistics businesses.

PN: *I'm assuming you have a lot of automation in your plants to help offset some of the labor issues, as well as a clean and welcoming kind of work environment.*

SJ: Of course. It's amazing to me that a lot of our competitors still don't offer some of the things that are table stakes – proper heating, proper cooling for the summer, nice break rooms, that kind of thing. We also have an intense focus on safety in each of the 4Over plants, and we try to communicate with all of our employees frequently, announcing promotions and celebrating their successes

PN: *With respect to wide format, what percentage of your work is rigid versus soft signage?*

SJ: Our wide-format business is about 20% of

the overall business. And out of that, it's about a 50/50 split between rigid-type signs and then fabric or banner

material. I see the demand for both of those continuing to outpace the growth of traditional essential marketing products like postcards, flyers, direct mail and sell sheets.

PN: *You have obviously gained experience with printing on fabrics. Do you see 4Over getting into textiles, for things like home décor or direct-to-garment printing?*

SJ: That's probably not in our plans. The common thread across our customer base is that they are serving customers who are in need of some type of marketing tool to promote their businesses. So we really thrive in the short-run, quick-turn communications and signage.

PN: *As you know, we recently produced our Annual Franchise Review report for print and sign franchises. One of the things I noticed on the print franchise side is that a lot of them don't have offset anymore. That likely also applies to other smaller commercial printers as well. Are you seeing that as a trend, where you are*

able to produce offset printing for them when they need it?

SJ: Yes. We have a massive offset footprint, and some of the smaller producers struggle with offset because they simply don't have enough jobs to fill the sheet or fill a plate. So offset for them, if they don't have volume, suffers from late delivery or is not produced in time for the customer need. 4Over has 20,000 jobs

coming in every single day. While we are talking here, we will have at least a thousand jobs come in. That means we can efficiently batch offset jobs and get them out the same day. To achieve this kind of service level, a lot of our competitors use digital printing because it is faster and easier for them. But it doesn't have the same economy of scale as offset.



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Of course, we also have a big digital print footprint, but we use it for a different purpose, generally very short-run and variable print.

PN: *What is the job submission process for your customers?*

SJ: All our orders are entered online through our e-commerce sites or through an API into our systems. Our systems then look where the ship-to zip code is and determine what the product is – including what substrate is requested and when it needs to be delivered to the customer. Then we automatically route and batch those jobs through our proprietary algorithms. Customers can choose same day, next day or four- to eight-day turn-around. Because of our plant locations, we are within two-day ground shipping range for 95% of the population and more than 50% within one day ground shipping range.

PN: *So I assume that now that we are learning to live with COVID and getting back to in-person events, are you seeing that part of the business growing?*

SJ: Absolutely. There are now three different tailwinds that we are seeing lift our business, and we are assuming it is lifting the market in general. You hit on the first one, which is in-person events. Trade shows are becoming more frequent, and they are gaining higher attendance, although they are not at pre-pandemic levels. For next year, the trade show circuit is already booked to 2019 levels, so we are expecting next year to be a very big trade show year. We are also seeing Broadway open, and all of the sporting events are back. Even though the pandemic isn't over, people are acting like it is.

The second tailwind is travel. Tourism is up; people have been cooped up for quite a while and now they want to get out, so that drives a lot of foot traffic to retail stores, hotels, restaurants and other businesses. That is creating strong demand for our products.

As far as the third one, I don't have a crystal ball, so I can't tell you when we are going to get there but at some point, we will enter a recession. So high inflation combined with a recession – you would think that may not be a good thing for the printing industry. But it is quite the contrary, at least for short-run providers like 4Over and our customers. During a recession, small- to mid-sized businesses

need to increase the frequency of their marketing campaigns. And that demands more short-run products. Where traditionally they might run a promotion or marketing event for a month, during a recession we typically see more weekend sales, with prices generally the driver to drum up business.

PN: *So in closing, do you have any particular advice or future vision that you'd like to share?*

SJ: In general, we're extremely optimistic about the future of our business at 4Over, but also for the market in general. The way I see it, the market is a mix of what I would call do-it-yourselfers and do-it-for-mes. The former will go to online services; the latter go to value-added resellers and look for design services and all types of marketing services that include print. I see both of them continuing to be very healthy channels.

We still have steady growth in marketing essentials, albeit a modest growth rate. The big growth markets are signage, labels and packaging. I think that's where everyone needs to focus. For us, wide format is growing 15% year over year. I've seen studies that show that large, attractive signs in front of stores, restaurants and service-related businesses drive 48% more foot traffic. That's a big number, and it's a low-cost marketing technique.

With regard to packaging and labels, the first thing manufacturers do before they raise prices is reduce the quantity of product in the package. So what used to be a one-pound bag of coffee is now 10 or 12 ounces. That means more packaging is required to contain the same amount of product. That's one reason labels and packaging growth even outpaces wide format.

PN: *Also, especially for smaller businesses, they want the shorter runs of labels and packaging so they don't have to deal with excessive inventory or inventory obsolescence.*

SJ: Right. No one wants to have to store all that stuff – packaging, marketing material, etc. It's a lot easier to order it on demand, especially when you can get it same day or next day.

PN: *It sounds like you have a positive outlook and some good things going on at 4Over. We are looking forward to staying in touch as you have more news to share. ●*



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A MATTER OF RESPONSIBILITY

Know why you're checking in on your clients.

I was meant to a salesperson this morning. I'm sure that's what she thought anyway. For sure, the conversation didn't go as she planned.

"Hi Dave," she said.

"This is Monica from ABCo." (Not their real names.) "The reason I'm calling is, we haven't heard from you for a while."

My response: "And why do you think that is?"

Her response, after a bit of a delay: "Uh, I don't know. Uh, that's why I'm calling?"

Obviously she wasn't prepared for my response.

I believe she could have been. I also believe her strategy was flawed from the start.

Here's a very fundamental concept. It is never the buyer's responsibility to communicate with the seller. It is always the seller's responsibility to communicate with the buyer.

That actually means two things. The first is that it's never their responsibility to understand you. It's always your responsibility to understand them. That's an issue when printing salespeople use printing industry jargon in their conversations with prospects or customers, without ensuring that everyone fully understands what's being said.

The second meaning is more directly related to the call I got this morning. It's not their responsibility to stay in touch with you. It's the other way around.

I recommend establishing a contact interval for at least your most important customers. By that, I mean some number of weeks that you never let go by without



either you hearing from them, or them hearing from you.

The goal is an interval long enough to keep from smothering them, but short enough to make sure that nothing bad happens without you finding out in time to do something about it.

You want these calls to add value to the relationship, not subtract it. Calling to ensure customer satisfaction adds value. Calling to thank someone for their business adds value. Calling to educate the customer adds value.

Here's another very fundamental concept: The customer who complains is doing you a favor. That's a much better situation than having them simply take their business elsewhere. But remember, it's not their responsibility to complain. It's your responsibility to give them the opportunity to complain if a complaint is justified.

One of my favorite sales coaching clients embraces this responsibility fully, adding her own personal style.

"Hello," she'll say. "This is your regularly scheduled complaint call. I'm hoping you haven't got any, but if you do, I want hear them!"

Wouldn't you say that's a better strategy than the call I got this morning? ●



Dave Fellman is the president of David Fellman & Associates, a sales and marketing consulting firm serving numerous segments of the graphic arts industry. Contact him at dmf@davefellman.com.

Modern VDP – What, Why, How, and What’s Next

Transforming VDP into a media that supports fine-grained, unconstrained, and highly creative variability.

by Jacob Aizikowitz, Ph.D.

Modernizing VDP, which started in the mid to late '90s, transformed VDP into a print media that could deliver refined, creative, and unconstrained variability. The goal was to allow every part of every page – an image, text, charts, presentation style, and more – to vary from page to page. I use the term Modern VDP to refer to the result of this transformation.

Modern VDP was highly synergistic with the evolution of color digital printing. Its variability demanded the full range of capabilities of these color digital printers. However, Modern VDP's impact was – and still is – far beyond supporting digital color printers. It linked modern Marketing and Customer Communications disciplines with printing, opening the door for print to be an equal citizen to digital media in Customer Experience Management.

I retired from XMPie in mid-2019, and it gave me time to reflect on what my team and I did for personalization and VDP. Eventually, this led to writing a paper on Modern VDP – what was driving the need to “invent” it and what were the innovations and technologies needed to make it happen.



This article is an extensive summary of that paper, and it should help the reader decide whether they want to dive deeper and explore the full paper (<https://bit.ly/3NlcLv4>).

Why Modern VDP

When examining the evolution of Modern VDP, it is essential to understand that it challenged Legacy VDP, the incumbent VDP technology, which focused on supporting the variability needed in structured business documents, which was rigid and constrained. Such variability could not cover the free, unconstrained, and colorful variability that the emerging digital color presses enabled (from the mid to late '90s onward).

Modern VDP changed all of that, and it was a revolutionary move, starting fresh, not incrementally evolving the Legacy VDP technology.

Opening New Markets and Transforming Print

As mentioned above, Modern VDP opened for print the

large and fast-growing markets of Marketing Automation and Customer Experience Management (CXM). These markets expected the refined and unconstrained variability provided by digital media, and only Modern VDP could match that for print. Moreover, the object-level variability of Modern VDP made it possible to use data and rules for computing variability in practically identical ways to how variability was computed in digital media applications. This similarity enabled using print and digital holistically and consistently, strengthening Modern VDP's relevance to these markets.



As a result, the print businesses that embraced Modern VDP and its approach to data and rules transformed their companies to the digital age. Being digital-savvy, they could stay relevant to their customers and grow their businesses, even when the general print business declined.

Implementing Modern VDP – a Challenge

While the vision for Modern VDP was in perfect harmony with the emerging digital color printing technologies and the dynamic capabilities of digital media, implementing it was a significant challenge. First was the need to develop tools that would enable the originators – authors, designers, and creative professionals – to create documents with variability at the design-object level without restricting the type, location, dimension, or the number of variable design objects. The second was overcoming the computational challenges that supporting the refined and unconstrained variability of Modern VDP presented for Composition -- the generation of the VDP print streams -- and Interpretation -- the processing of such stream to generate printed pages.

Addressing these two challenges required (a) a solution that would mimic desktop publishing but for VDP and (b) innovations for optimizing the compute-intensive processes. The paper analyses these and covers the innovations and technology developments that addressed them and made Modern VDP a reality.

The closing section of the main part of the paper presents concurrent composition – harnessing a network of servers distributed computing style to collaborate on generating the print instructions for a variable data document. In presenting the solution, the paper examines alternative architectures and discusses their pros and cons. The paper then closes with a unique architecture that leverages Replication (to avoid process-coordination delays) and Gossiping – distributed computing techniques – to deliver an efficient and highly scalable implementation of concurrent composition.

A Glimpse into The Future

While the paper focuses on the evolution of Modern VDP, I added a What's Next section where I highlight a few directions that Modern VDP enables today.

Harmony between Physical and Digital Touchpoints in a Customer Journey

While in the early days of founding XMPie, the notion of cross-media individualized communications appeared futuristic, these days, it has become a must. Numerous reasons are driving this; however, two are solid and indisputable.

1. Brands desire to individualize products' external appearance – packages, labels, on-object print, and even garments (note: Individualization is not necessarily personalization; it might be mass versioning or mass customization)
2. Brands desire to view physical products beyond their product function; they view products as touch points in a customer experience journey

Given the digital-first nature of brands' marketing thinking and the above two, one sees that customer journeys where print (through the physical product) and digital must play together are necessary.

And Modern VDP, through the type of variability it offers and its online data and rules model, is critical for enabling such winning customer experiences.

The Role of ML and AI

Another theme I brought up in that section is the impact of Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). While I just scratched the surface with these in the paper, there is no doubt that ML and AI will have a profound and long-term impact on planning and implementing personalization and experiences. Those involved in planning the blueprints for such journeys know well that it's a complex task, which becomes even more complicated when physical and digital touchpoints are part of the journey. Therefore, I believe that ML and AI will help remove the journey planning bottlenecks, which will help materialize the vision of brands engaging their audience through ongoing individualized experiences that span time and media.

A Concern about an Emerging Disconnect in the Data and Rules Models used by Print and Digital Media

I decided to close the What's Next section, voicing concern about a re-emerging gap between the data and rules models used in print personalization with Modern VDP and digital media's data and rules models. Although, until about five years ago, Modern VDP's data and rules models were aligned with those used for digital media, I feel that the data and rules models of the digital media worlds are, yet again, drifting far away from those used in Modern VDP.

Background

Modernizing VDP was a central theme in my professional work since I rejoined Scitex to lead its R&D in Software and Hardware for Digital Printing (1996). Moreover, it became a central theme for me once I founded XMPie in late 1999, where together with my co-founders and our team, we developed XMPie to become a strong software brand in print and cross-media personalization. This leadership position exposed us to many customers, partners, and competitors, which triggered the refining and expansion of our vision. It also fostered partnerships with the stakeholders of this industry and ultimately helped make Modern VDP universally relevant and not just a characteristic of the XMPie software.

Why This Paper

The idea for the paper started once I retired from XMPie (mid-2019) and had the time to develop some perspective. One of the issues I reflected upon was a patent granted to XMPie early on (2000-2005), which included a section (and claims) about novel techniques for concurrent composition. I felt that taking the technology description out of a patent lingo would make it accessible beyond the boundaries of XMPie, opening it to the broad community of VDP software and hardware developers. Furthermore, given the abundance of cloud systems and the ease of providing massive scalability within such systems, the need for efficient architectures for massive concurrent composition is more acute today than in the past.

However, as I planned the paper, I realized that without a broad overview of VDP, such a paper would be relevant only to XMPie engineers. So, one thing led to the other, and I decided to write a paper that would describe the principles, innovations, and developments that created Modern VDP. And I knew that within that paper, I would be able to include sections about concurrent composition, which would help share the insights from the patents with the whole community of developers around VDP. ●



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INTERACTIVE SIGNAGE

An immersive discussion

By Richard Romano

Interactive signage is changing from simply providing information to creating immersive experiences. At the same time, the actual mechanism by which a user interacts with a display is changing from simple physical interaction to electronic interaction.

A Touching Story

The emblematic example of physical interactive signage is the touchscreen display, which we are all familiar with and, despite COVID, will likely become more common.

The first finger-driven touchscreen was invented

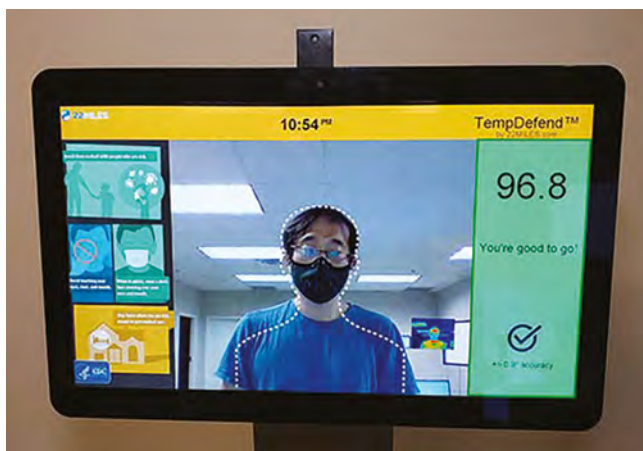
by Eric Johnson of the Royal Radar Establishment in Malvern, England, in 1965, gained popularity in ATMs and wayfinding kiosks, and after the advent of the iPhone and iPad touchscreen displays, proliferated virtually everywhere—and now even wide-format equipment manufacturers tout the “iPhone-like” touchscreen control panels of their printers and other units. It is even possible to buy touchscreen displays for your computer for around \$200–300 in BestBuy or Walmart.

In the world of dynamic digital signage, touchscreen kiosks continue to be popular for wayfinding and providing other information in private spaces. Retail locations have been adding interactive “swipeable” displays for “immersive customer experiences.”

Touchscreens can be either finger- or stylus-driven. For public signage and interactive kiosks, finger-driven touchscreens are the more feasible option, as there is the chance of a stylus getting lost or stolen, even if it’s secured with a cable.

As the cost of touchscreens has come down, they are more and more practical for DDS kiosks and digital posters and even though, during 2020, there were some hygiene-related concerns surrounding them, like most COVID concerns today, they are practically non-existent.

Another variety of physical interactive signage



Back in 2020, 22Miles launched “protection as a service” via the TempDefend temperature-detecting kiosk.

that flashed briefly into existence during the pandemic was temperature-taking signage. Basically, this was digital signage that used a thermal camera to scan people entering a building or other location, determine their temperature, and, if they are above an acceptable level, alert security who then implements policies associated with an elevated temperature.

There was a fair bit of interest in these kinds of displays during 2020, and one market sizing report I came across from “Fortune Business Insights” (<https://bit.ly/3Oqa5mW>) estimated that between 2021 and 2028, the global market for temperature-detecting signage would grow from \$2.19 billion to \$4.71 billion at a CAGR of 11.5%. A bit on the bullish side, I suspect, and while I have never seen one of these systems in out in the wild—even doctors’ and dentists’ offices don’t manually do temperature checks anymore.

The Three Rs

We’ve written extensively about QR codes, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR), which are non-physical ways of making signage interactive via a mobile device. You scan a QR code on a sign (or access AR content using an app) to, for example, see a restaurant menu, access a web site, launch a video or trigger some other kind of immersive experience.

It’s thanks to Heidi Tolliver-Walker’s interactive print features here in print or on WhatTheyThink that the term “holotwin” has entered my vocabulary. A holotwin—or “holographic twin” is a person or other character that can be inserted into a user’s real-world environment via their mobile phone, and



This is an example of “holotwins” from an article Heidi Tolliver-Walker wrote earlier this year on how AR was used to promote the Utah Black Business Expo.

they can appear to speak directly to the user.

They are starting to become, if not popular, then at least increasingly used to reinforce branding, promote events and even generate revenue. It’s not necessarily signage-driven at present, but that is certainly the next major development. We have already seen signage in retail or public spaces that can interact with a mobile device to change the display as a specific individual passes the sign.

Parallel Universe

I also came across what may become a fourth R: PR, or parallel reality, although it sounds like a variant of what I mentioned in the last paragraph.

Developed by Delta Air Lines and Misapplied Sciences, a beta version went live at the Detroit airport on June 29, 2022. Essentially, parallel reality lets users see personalized content on a digital display.

According to Delta, this category-defining technology, first debuted at CES in 2020, allows up to 100 customers to simultaneously see personalized content tailored to their unique journey on a single

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(Image courtesy Delta Air Lines.)

BUCKET LIST

Signarama Downtown Louisville wins “Best in Show” at Signarama Sign Awards.

By Richard Romano

At the International Sign Association (ISA) Sign Expo in May, sign franchise Signarama held its annual meeting and Sign Awards, awarding 12 of its centers in such categories as Directional Wayfinding, Vehicle Graphics, and Electric, Neon & Illuminated. (For a complete list of winners, visit <https://bit.ly/3Om8tKS>.)

This year’s “Best in Show” award went to Signarama Downtown Louisville (Ky.) (<https://bit.ly/3niAib5>) for a project that involved designing, constructing and wrapping a giant KFC bucket for Louisville-born rapper Jack Harlow

(<https://www.jackharlow.us>). The bucket, which also served as a giant loudspeaker, was created to accompany Harlow on the local leg of his concert tour. KFC signed on as a sponsor of Harlow’s tour, and one of the Louisville shows was intended as a launch event for the sponsorship.

The project began as many of Signarama Louisville’s do, with a conversation with Louisville marketing company NIMBUS, with whom Signarama has worked for many years.

“They called us up and they usually will bounce ideas off of us, and they said they were thinking about this giant KFC bucket,” said Maggie Harlow,

co-owner, with her husband Brian, of Signarama Downtown Louisville. “There are lots of different ways of doing something like that, so we had to get through the process of figuring out how long it’s going to be up and how big it’s going to be, and it crossed my mind that a lightweight aluminum structure might be the best way to go about it.”

Harlow hand-sketched the basic plans for the construction of the bucket, dividing it into four panels that could then be assembled.

Harlow then approached PVE, Inc., a metal fabrication company based in Sellersburg, Ind., that is Signarama Louisville’s go-to fabricator.

“These are some young geniuses,” she said.

The biggest challenge was the time-frame—and getting it through the budget process.

“We had maybe three weeks to get it done.”

Most of a KFC bucket is white, so



Signarama Downtown Louisville designed, constructed and wrapped a giant KFC bucket for Louisville rapper Jack Harlow’s local concert.



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"I will tell you, as a mom, it was very weird," said Maggie Harlow.

that went with the bucket which had to get done in that same timeframe," Harlow said.

The food truck was selling sandwiches that had Harlow's face on the packaging. Making the project even more personal was that Jack Harlow is Maggie's son.

"I will tell you, as a mom, it was very weird," Harlow said.

The bucket was originally intended just for a one-night appearance, and then it went into storage. Some months later, when the Jack Harlow Meal was launched at an Atlanta KFC, the fabrication company retrieved the bucket and had it shipped to Georgia.

"It breaks down into those four segments, so it's portable" Harlow said.

For Harlow, the project was a great example of how partnerships work.

"The marketing firm reaching out, taking advice and



Maggie Harlow (left), Maggie's friend Staci Rampenthal, and the bucket, live in Louisville.

direction and gaining information before they say, 'This is what we want,' and then working in partnership with a fabrication company to make it happen. That's one of my favorite ways to do business, to work in partnerships and collaborate on things. You get a much better result." ●

to save time and avoid having to wrap the entire bucket, they went with a coated white aluminum. PVE created a sample of one of the quadrants, sent a photo to the marketing team, and got approval. As soon as the pieces were sent to Signarama Louisville, they could apply the graphics, which were printed on Signarama Louisville's HP Latex 300 Series printer on Avery 1105 MPI adhesive vinyl and laminated with Avery 1360 gloss laminate, which is ultra-thin, ultra-conformable and optically clear.

"We also had a matching food truck wrap



Richard Romano has been writing about the graphic communications industry for 20 years. He is an industry analyst and author or co-author of more than half a dozen books.

LOOKING DOWN

A floor graphics application gallery

By Richard Romano

In this photo gallery, we highlight some recent floor graphics projects that display graphics providers have produced. These application galleries are intended to serve as “food for thought” in developing creative applications for clients.



↑ The Hole Truth

Affix of Japan created a mock manhole cover by printing a texture on cardboard using a swissQprint Nyala UV printer. Textured print with a glossy finish (varnish printing) gives the surface a realistic look and feel.



↑ ART Installation

Richmond, B.C., design and graphics business Premier Graphics, produced eye-catching graphics for an augmented reality (AR) art installation on the Cambie Street Bridge in Vancouver. The project brought to life a vision by artist Jessica Angel, who wanted to mix colorful graphics with AR to “extend” the Cambie Street Bridge into a 19,000 sq.ft. public art installation for the Vancouver Biennale exhibition.

Angel’s design featured a huge, two-dimensional vinyl mural that wrapped the pedestrian walkway, supporting columns and underside of the bridge. AR took this a step further, with passers-by encouraged to download the Vancouver Biennale app and hold up their phone while walking through the walkway, which opened up a whole new dimension, transforming parts of the installation.

Premier selected Drytac Polar Grip white polymeric self-adhesive film for the printed film parts of the installation, as well as Drytac Interlam Pro Emerytex PVC overlaminating film for the floor graphics and Drytac Interlam Pro Matte pressure sensitive overlaminating film for the pillars and ceiling. All the graphics were printed on the company’s HP Latex R1000 Plus.



↑ Gotta Dance!

Decal Doodle in Fairhope, Ala., produced this wedding dance floor graphic on a Roland DG TrueVIS VG2-540 54-inch printer/cutter. It was designed by Amber Ivey Fine Art and printed on 6-mil. Rad Grafix Printable Vinyl Wall Film. Wedding planner Jenna Laine Weddings worked with designer and florist Wildflowers Fairhope to create a luxurious floral environment. The tent and rentals were provided by SOHO Event Rentals.

Photo: Rae Leytham Photography



↑ Drive My Car

FloorSignage recently launched DriveOn Graphics, wide format-print media designed to be applied to surfaces that support both vehicle and pedestrian traffic. It's a retro reflective digital print media that can be applied directly to streets, parking lots and driveways providing motorists and pedestrians with clear visual communication in full color, and will stand up to the rigors of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

DriveOn Graphics can be cut to shape and used as turn arrows, symbols and other traffic control and curbside messaging. The material is matte white and compatible with latex and UV flatbed and hybrid printers.

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← Mind the Gap

Hastings-based Links Signs produced a series of attention-grabbing graphics at London Underground stations to celebrate the Euro 2020 football tournament. (Euro 2020 had been due to take place in the pandemic year but was delayed.) Wembley Stadium was one of the venues selected to host games, and to mark this special occasion, Transport for London (TfL) approached Links Signs to produce a series of themed graphics to accompany fans as they travelled across London to the stadium.

Graphics were installed at King's Cross and Paddington stations as well as Baker Street, London Bridge and Wembley Park Tube stops.

Links Signs worked with the commercial team at TfL and its agency to create a series of innovative and attention-grabbing wall graphics as well as football pitch floor graphics. All the graphics were printed on Drytac Polar Grip polymeric self-adhesive vinyl, paired with Drytac Interlam Pro Emery tex which is fully approved by TfL and carries all the required fire and slip certifications and ratings for public spaces. Links Signs used an HP Latex 570 and carried out installation of all the graphics over a period of five nights.



Spoonflower

ONE YEAR LAT



ner: ATER



Shutterfly acquired Spoonflower one year ago. Now it's time to check in.

By Cary Sherburne



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One year ago, the on-demand printing world was surprised by Shutterfly's acquisition of Spoonflower. Upon closer examination, the acquisition made a lot of sense: both companies were focused on innovative products that take advantage of the creativity of consumers and the maker community.

Whether starting with a photograph, digital art or a creation from Spoonflower's nearly two million designs, the ultimate outcome at every level is a unique product with a design that is driven by creatives of every level including first-timers, hobbyists, enthusiasts, small business owners, interior designers and makers across a growing community.

At the time of the acquisition's completion, Shutterfly said, "This acquisition will increase the depth and breadth of what people can create, customize and buy on the Shutterfly platform including wallpaper, fabric and home décor. And it will connect 21 million active Shutterfly users to more than one million designs by independent artists in the Spoonflower global marketplace."

For Shutterfly, the acquisition doubled its total addressable market, expanding its personalized product platform's reach into the fast-growing home décor category and securing a foothold in the creative marketplace. For Spoonflower, it gave the talented internal team access to more resources and a collaborative marketing and development community that better positioned it for growth.

As well, because of Shutterfly's manufacturing expertise, the acquisition will enable Spoonflower to scale its business and ship products faster to customers, while helping the small business owners included in its vast community to scale theirs, too.

"We used to be the R&D team within Spoonflower, and now we are a process innovation team directly devoted to textiles and wallpaper," said Kerry King, Spoonflower's senior director for process innovation for textiles and wallpaper. "The nice thing about that is that we sit within a larger R&D organization where there are a number of process innovation teams and experts on things like lean manufacturing and some of the base technologies around printing, both in terms of paper, but also more broadly in the industry. Now we have lots of great new friends that we can tap into in terms of their knowledge and expertise."

One of Shutterfly's strengths in this matchup is that they have multiple factory locations.

“We hope that that will not only help us scale, but that it will also help us bring joy and delight to the consumer base by getting products to them more quickly,” King said.

As the Shutterfly press outreach indicated, a key driver for the acquisition was access to Spoonflower’s marketplace and community of independent artists and makers.



“We are building a structure that allows creative people to tap into lots of different product categories,” King said. “We are starting to see some of the surface designs that exist on Spoonflower appear on the Shutterfly site, on both textiles and wallpaper products, but also as it relates to some of the product offerings that are core to Shutterfly’s brands.”

With all of the potential synergies of the combination of Spoonflower and Shutterfly, King said one of the biggest challenges is staying focused on top priorities.

“For us on the manufacturing side,” she said, “that’s really honing our manufacturing capabilities as it relates to home décor and wallpaper, which is a really huge category for us that is growing exponentially every year. We are doing our best to keep up with growth and, at the same time, improve our manufacturing process and quality level. Giving the creative community the opportunity to find something that is unique is really what we have to offer. And we are getting really

good at our ability to manufacture in units of one and to be able to manage a lot of design diversity through that manufacturing process. Being able to collaborate with the Shutterfly team only accelerates that process.”

They are also deftly handling two of the major challenges brought to bear by the pandemic and its after-effects, supply chain and hiring/retaining talent.

“Our procurement folks were very smart going into the pandemic, and I would credit Gart Davis, one of our founders, with the vision and understanding he had about what was about to happen,” she said. “We also worked closely with our leadership team prior to the acquisition to make sure we didn’t run out of anything. Then as time marched on, our procurement team has done a really great job of making sure we are stocked and planning ahead.”

Davis has a long history in the world of on-demand, including in the book printing business prior to establishing Spoonflower more than a decade ago. His vision and his energy have made him one of the industry’s leading innovators, and Spoonflower seems to have benefited from that before, during and after the pandemic.

“We have not experienced the big highs and lows in terms of supply chain that some other companies unfortunately have,” King said. “As we continue to broaden our footprint, we need to be really smart about what we are sourcing, where we are sourcing and what we are looking to purchase as we continue down that path.

“When the pandemic first hit, we found that there were lots of people looking for jobs; and we had a pretty dramatic growth scenario. So, we were very fortunate in that we were in a position to hire, and we brought in a lot of temporary employees. Some of those employees we have turned into long-term employees, in both the manufacturing and business organizations.



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.



be involved with AATCC, and her perspective is that larger brands and retailers love the idea of bringing manufacturing back to the Western Hemisphere. However, she does question who is going to make that happen.

“Large brands and retailers are not necessarily willing or in a position to invest in the infrastructure that’s required to make domestic manufacturing happen, which in many respects is kind of disappointing.”

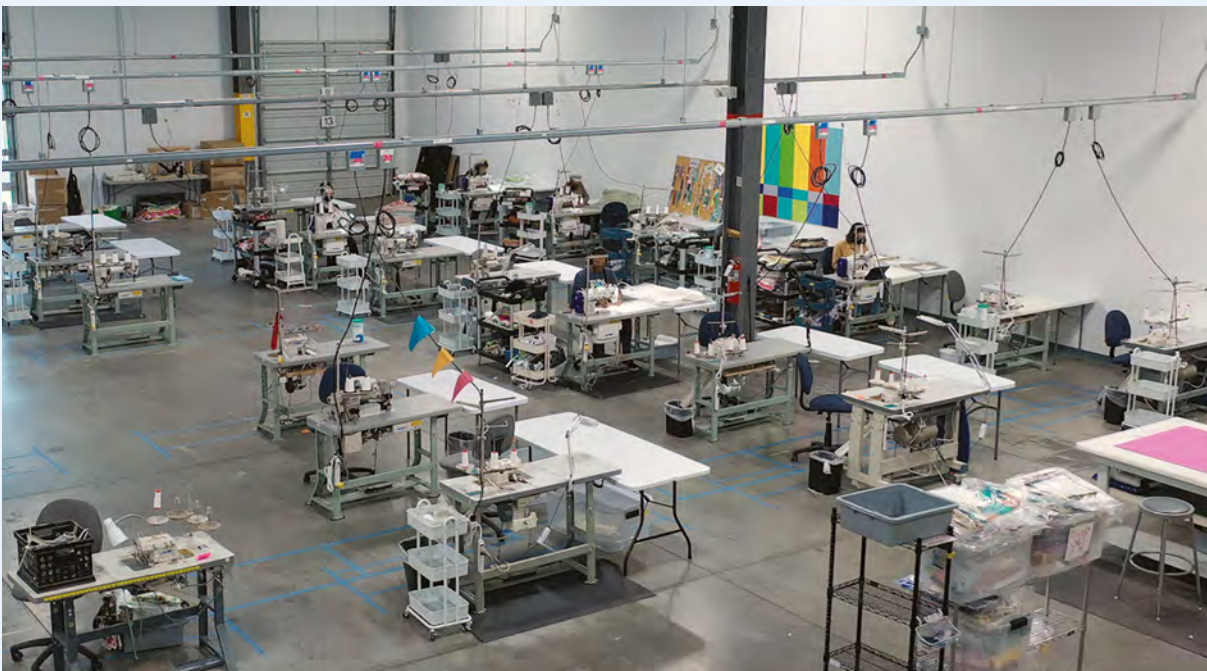
However, on a positive note, she believes the availability of digital technologies opens up a lot of opportunity for the entrepreneurial spirit.

“There are examples out in the world of individuals and startups who are looking to make it happen, as we did some 14 years ago at Spoonflower. They are looking to harness new technologies and next-generation processes, pairing that with new business models – not just e-commerce, but also manufacturing on demand and creative community types of business models, building something that didn’t really exist here in quite that way. The growth we have experienced at Spoonflower is but one example of the kind of business that can be successful domestically.” ●

“Of course, the labor market has become very competitive, and there is no question that it has been really challenging to hire and retain folks. But one of our strengths in this new organizational structure for the Spoonflower product lines is that we don’t necessarily have to rely on what the situation is in a single facility. We can spread some of that manufacturing across multiple facilities. And we are already doing that with wallpaper. Ultimately, that will also benefit the consumer with better turn times.”

King admit that sewing skills continue to be a challenge; and the company is having to get creative and work hard to make sure, they “retain the awesome employees we have acquired to date.”

Reshoring manufacturing is also a hot topic in textiles and apparel, as well as other industries. In addition to her role at Spoonflower, King continues to



The logo for the Americas Print Show 2022 features three overlapping chevron shapes in purple, teal, and light blue on the left. To the right, the text "AMERICAS PRINT SHOW 22" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. "AMERICAS" and "SHOW" are in black, "PRINT" is in black, and "22" is in a light blue color matching the chevrons.

AMERICAS PRINT SHOW 22

Predicting a vibrant event

By Cary Sherburne

The Americas Print Show 2022 (APS22), Aug. 17-19 in Columbus, Ohio, is an opportunity for commercial printing professionals to once again gather in person after a long pandemic hiatus. Its location in the heart of the country makes it easy to access and in driving range for a large number of printing companies.

The show already has more than 1,000 registered attendees (not including exhibitors or support staff) and already has 70 committed exhibitors, including well-known names as well as first-timers.

Mike Leciejewski of Add-Jet, located in Cincinnati, is one of those first-timers.

"I think this show is going to be kind of a sleeper show," Leciejewski said. "I think we will be surprised at the outcome."

They are a regional company that covers seven states in the Midwest. They have about 15 employees and distribute products from MCS, Bluecrest and others. Add-Jet caters to the commercial printing and mailing industry.

"We are neophytes coming to a show like this," Leciejewski said. «We don't normally do shows, and we don't do shows at this large of a scale. We have a 30x50 booth and are bringing close to a million dollars' worth of equipment.

"I think people are hungry to go to a print show. They want to go, but they don't really want to have to fly. They want to get into a car, and they want to be able to bring some of the people, but they also want to keep costs down. I think we will see a lot of people driving in, spending four or five hours at the show, and perhaps spending the night to drive back in the morning. I really thing the show is



going to be a surprise."

Leciejewski is showing a Bluecrest high-speed inserter that produces 26,000 inserted envelopes per hour with the ability to spray a corresponding address on the outside. He is also showing an MCS Merlin K14 inkjet printer, an affordable sheetfed press that does not require a click charge and prints at about 8,000 sheets per hour. Finally, he has an MCS color inkjet envelope printer that he says will help commercial printers better manage production time and costs for envelopes in light of the paper shortages.

Add-Jet is just one of many exhibitors at the show with new and existing solutions that printing business owners, managers and staff will see first-hand and gain an understanding of how they might help their businesses grow.

In addition to the exhibit hall, the show features educational sessions with a wide range of current topics and speakers.

"As the preeminent mergers and acquisitions firm working exclusively in the printing, packaging and labels industries, we are happy to be presenting two seminars at the Americas Print Show and are looking forward to welcoming attendees to these and other learning opportunities that are being made available," said Jim Russell of New Direction Partners, who is one of the presenters. "We are also glad to be getting back to in-person events where there are many networking opportunities as well, that are so important for the health of the industry."

Americas Print Show will also provide a venue for many co-located events, including meetings hosted by 17 different printing associations, including most of the former PIA Affiliates.

Melissa Jones, president of GAA, is putting together the Affiliates' Summer meeting, which will be held prior to the show, from Aug. 14-17, and will culminate with a tour of the Canon booth.



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The Affiliates organization, now known as Americas Printing Association Network (APAN), will also host a welcome reception at 5 p.m. on Aug. 17. The first-annual Americas Print Show awards is presented at 6 p.m.

“We have collected 15 top winning entries from each of 11 Affiliates for this competition,” she said, “and the entries are amazing. We are really excited about starting this tradition and recognizing the terrific work APAN’s membership produces.”

The summer meeting will also include two keynote speakers, WhatTheyThink’s President Eric Vessels, who will share ideas on how APAN can work with the media to mutual benefit; and Tim Minton, the Executive Vice President at the North Carolina Home Builders Association.

Jones said that Minton grew the association to the largest state home builders’ association in the country and will bring an outside-the-industry perspective to the association business.

For more detail about this upcoming show, we spoke to Jim Cunningham, president of Americas Print Show, and Jules Van Sant of Bubble & Hatch, who is doing marketing for the show.

Printing News: *Explain to us how the show is structured. I understand there is quite a bit of exhibitor square footage already reserved.*



Jim Cunningham

Jim Cunningham: Yes, there is still some space available, but it’s pretty well booked. On the education front, every morning there are two sets of sessions being presented by industry influencers and thought leaders on topics like sales, valuations, cyber security, sustainability – across the board with topics that are very relevant for print businesses today.

PN: *And in person, after a long hiatus!*

JC: Yes. We have had webinars all over the place, but to be able to actually engage in person, I think there is an elevated opportunity to dig in. That’s the idea of bringing everyone together to collaborate and connect during the show. Attendees will be able to visit exhibitors on the floor throughout the day, and many vendors will be making

presentations as well on some of their newer technologies or other opportunities attendees can be looking for.

PN: *Jules, any other aspects you would like to highlight?*

Jules Van Sant: We will have a workforce development area where we will host a summit and a lunch panel talking about those current challenges and hiring trends. We will showcase opportunities from the PGSF standpoint, with printers, suppliers, educators and recruiters joining together to better understand how we collectively elevate our game. We are also hoping to do speed dating interviews with prospective employees, and we are working with the universities and schools in the region to bring students here and perhaps others that are looking for a career change. We are thrilled to be including a tour at Hopkins Printing in conjunction with PGSF on Aug. 18.



Jules Van Sant

PN: *That’s so important. The printing industry isn’t alone with difficulty in hiring, but maybe we have some different problems because of the perception of the industry that needs to be changed. When people see that a printing operation is a clean, high-tech environment with fair pay and good hours, it can make a difference.*

JVS: The industry is having a conversation about that, and perhaps we have not been very good at selling that idea, and that we need to give employees an upward mobility opportunity within our companies. I’m excited about helping people to think a little broader in how they recruit.

PN: *I also heard that there will be a lot of co-located meetings and events during the show.*

JVS: Yes. A lot of the regional printing industry affiliates will be converging at the show and conducting their summer meetings there. There will also be a lot of social events for regional groups to come together, as well as other opportunities to connect, collaborate and rebuild the community in a way we have not had a chance to do for the last couple years.

Continued on page 63

THAT'S A WRAP

AMPLIFY Print Minneapolis was everything a new event should be.

There was a lot of anticipation for AMPLIFY—a first-of-its-kind event presented by Association for Print Technologies (APTECH) and the Foil and Specialty Effects Association (FSEA). The event centered around the topic of value-added print finishing and embellishment, and boasted the latest and greatest in technology, equipment, materials, inspiration and thought leadership.

Given my finishing background, I had very high (admittedly almost unrealistic) expectations for the event, and I'm happy to report that it did not disappoint. After spending several days at the show, the AMPLIFY experience can be summed up in three major categories:

- People
- Innovation
- Themes and Trends

The People of AMPLIFY

Many people (including myself) have not traveled to a show in a long time, due to the pandemic, so there was a palpable excitement in the air. Everyone was chatty, energetic and excited to be there. That energy transferred to the show floor, and to the audience engagement in the educational sessions and social events.

It felt a bit like a reunion around there—at one point, I was in a major thoroughfare with my friend Daniel Dejan, who, like me, had presented one of the educational sessions at AMPLIFY. Up walks Mark Geeves (ColorLogic), and Tom Moe (Daily Printing). A moment later, we were joined by Deborah Corn (PrintMediaCentr) with the buyer from The Pokémon Company (he was awesome), Jules VanSant (Bubble & Hatch), Jeff Hernandez (Classic Color), Erik Norman and the gang from Bolger Printing, Sabine Lenz (Paperspecs), Kevin Abergel and Warren Werbit (Taktiful), the teams from Smartpress and WhatTheyThink... and the group just

kept on growing. It was like an impromptu party, and that was only in a 10-minute stretch of time. It was amazing to see such an eclectic and talented group of professionals interacting in one spot.

Now, this is not to say that we haven't all been in one spot before—maybe we have—but at the really big shows, I can walk for 30 minutes before I might see someone I know or recognize. At AMPLIFY, there were 1000+ people from my category—printers, print buyers, designers, consultants, manufacturers, suppliers, media and more. You could find people and exchange ideas. It was an engaged, focused group, and I expect we'll see the attendee and vendor list grow next year as a result of this event's success and as people become even more comfortable with in-person events and travel.

The educational session I presented was called "Direct Mail in a Different World," and it was about being creative and adding value to mail for your customers in a time when there are real obstacles (paper and envelope supply, postage increases, etc.). At the end of my presentation, I hosted a panel of "boots on the ground" print and finishing executives from Smartpress, Bolger and MCD.

The discussion was powerful, because the environment at the show felt a bit like Dscoop in that everyone had a common interest in the success and momentum of the category, and there was an openness and generosity in the flow of information and advice that I really liked. Topics in the educational sessions spanned best practices, sales, trends, workflow, packaging and more. I was being social, so I didn't get to sit in on as many sessions as I would have liked, but word on the street was that the educational sessions were top-notch.



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.



The LINEA Automatica VP from APS Imaging & Supply offers high-speed, fully automated layflat bookbinding at speeds of up to 1,300 spreads per hour.

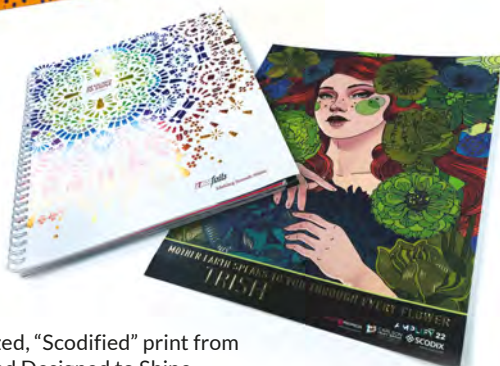
Innovation at AMPLIFY

I don't wander shows—I always have goals for maximizing my time while I'm there, and my goal for my time on the show floor was to find some exciting things I had not seen before, and to see many of the cool things I've reported on in living color. I cannot possibly share everything, but here are a few highlights:

- My #1 most favorite innovation at the show was from APS Imaging & Supply – the LINEA Automatica VP, a machine that offers high-speed, automated lay-flat bookbinding at speeds of up to 1,300 spreads per hour. The production process includes cover production, creasing, folding, insertion, heating, cooling and finishing. The machine leverages artificial intelligence (AI) for performance analysis and self-diagnostics and can create up to 20 1/2" x 20 1/2" size albums / 3.3-inch thickness, with optional robotics. It was running on the show floor, and I've never seen anything like it.



Eye-catching, embellished envelopes from Parkland Direct and Victor Envelope.



Personalized, "Scodified" print from Scodix and Designed to Shine foil sampler book from ITW Shinemark



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- I really liked the line of products from Skandacor—they have a series of compact and modular laminating systems, but my favorite was their Vulcan FC-500 Flatbed Digital Die-Cutter with vacuum table for quick and easy cutting and scoring of sheets/boards as large as 19" x 26" and 600 gsm in thickness for short-run production and sample-making. I could think of 1000 ways that machine would come in handy, and it's priced really well.
- In the Tech Zone, KURZ had live demos of their DM-LUXLINER digital transfer press, which performs metallic decoration and high gloss for digital finishing on labels, paper and cardboard. I feel like I'm over-simplifying what this press does—it's very impressive.
- I caught up with Kevin Moll and Carl D'Aguiar of Moll Brothers, and saw the Moll FlexCut Digital Rotary Die Cutter with servo registration, which I've been wanting to see for a while now. A great machine—I reported on this one in my tech outlook last month.

Themes and Trends at AMPLIFY

Theme: Sustainability

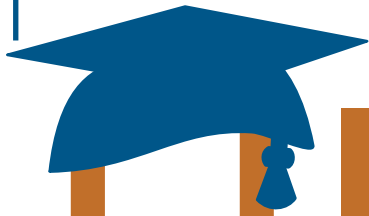
With the focus on sustainability in print that has become a real concern of brands and the companies who produce their marketing for them, sustainability was one of the biggest themes at the show. The show began with a three-hour Sustainability Summit, and there was intense discussion about embellishments, foil and recyclability

Continued on page 62

xerox™ Adaptive CMYK+



With Xerox Adaptive CMYK+, you can quickly swap out your CMYK toner for a Vivid Kit with white, metallics and clear, or a fluorescent kit with fluorescent CMY toners.



HIRING

The first graduates of the Mariano Rivera Foundation Printing Vocational Training Program are ready.

At EFI Connect in January 2022, the printing industry learned about the incredible work being done by the Mariano Rivera Foundation to bring mentorship, life skills, STEM education, and vocational training to at-risk youth. This training will not only change the lives of talented young men, but thanks to support from industry vendors such as EFI, Konica-Minolta, Ricoh, Idealliance, Printing United Alliance and Adobe, it will funnel much needed talent into the printing industry, as well.

The Mariano Rivera Foundation was founded by Yankees Hall of Fame pitcher Mariano Rivera, who has a heart for providing the same types of opportunities for at-risk youth as he was given as a child growing up in poverty in Panama. The headquarters are housed in a church property in New Rochelle, N.Y., until the foundation's permanent 40,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art training facility can be completed.

The foundation began offering vocational training in printing (the Print, Design and Packaging Development [PDPD] program) thanks to Luis Villa, vice president of production print - CIP of Atlantic Tomorrow's Office (ATO), who connected with Rivera through a mutual contact. Villa saw an opportunity to provide career opportunities for these students while addressing the printing industry's need for new talent at the same time. Larry Weiss, president of ATO's Atlantic, supported the effort, and ATO has been an integral facilitator of launching the program and continuing to expand its robustness and reach.

The PDPD program is run out of Gainesville, Fla. Konica-Minolta, Ricoh, EFI and Idealliance helped get the program off the ground by providing training modules and "train the trainer" support. Students receive the same training as members of the printing industry, and they have the opportunity to achieve much coveted industry certifications.

"Once they graduate from the program, we consider them more than entry level," said Villa. "We consider them 'entry level plus.'"

A second training center is set to open this July in Carlstadt, N.J., using space in the building leased by Premium Color Graphics.

The first students in the Gainesville PDPD program have completed the Konica-Minolta Outward Associate Certification, which is the first step toward a Konica-Minolta instructor-led hardware class. Six students have completed the full set of EFI Fiery Professional Certifications, to be followed by completion of Ricoh's Learning Institute and the Color Management Professional (CMP) certification from Idealliance.

The last week of April, Villa is flying to



Leevinsky Leonard with Stephen Hammond at the KM C7100 installation at Minuteman Press in Nanuet, N.Y.

Gainesville to prep the students for job interviews. Later in May, local printers and participating copier and printer dealerships will have the opportunity to interview them as potential hires.

“The benefit to them is not just the ability to hire highly qualified employees,” said Villa. “It’s the EFI Fiery and CMP certifications those employees bring with them.”

Atlantic Tomorrow’s office knows the value of these students first-hand. Villa hired one of the participants in MRF’s programs, Leevinsky Leonard, in January. Although Leonard did not go through the vocational print program, Villa recognized his talent and has been training him in-house.

“He has been with us for several months and is doing great,” said Villa.

Leonard’s first week on the job, Villa recalls, he was preparing to meet one of the ATO techs in the field.

“He sends me a text at 6 a.m. ‘I’m ready to go. Who am I meeting?’” said Villa. “Can you imagine? A 19-year-old kid saying, ‘I’m ready to go’! He’s pleasant. He’s nice — and he’s motivated. Almost right out of the gate, I sent him to a Konica-Minolta install with one of our veteran technicians.”

Once Leonard finishes his training, Villa is making him part of his Westchester team as a production field support engineer.

The foundation is also excited to announce that the Carlstadt, N.J., training site has been officially approved to hold classes. The plan is for these classes to start at the beginning of July, with students to be selected for the program in May.

“Because there is a full working print facility in that location, these students will have a real advantage,” said Villa. “They will have access to Premium Color’s prepress, digital production (two Ricoh full-color C9210s and a Ricoh black-and-white 8020, all with Fiery controllers), industrial wide-format (EFI wide-format H5 and LXPro3 and Mimaki rollfed wide-format); and full finishing department with four top-of-the-line Esko/Kongsbergs. That is a huge advantage.”

Premium Color Group is also one of only three printers in the country that can print and customize images on tissue paper. This provides

students with unique highly marketable experiences.

Although the students in Gainesville work online, they will be flown up to get 40 hours of hands-on training at Premium Color later this spring.

With the Carlstadt, N.J., location ready to launch, the foundation is targeting Houston as its next training center.

“There are tons of printers in that area,” said Villa. “Soon, they will have a stream of potential employees coming in with a significant skill set.”

In addition to offering free online training and certifications for students, EFI is adding ride-alongs with its field engineers in the Gainesville area. Other heavy hitters like Alphagraphics are looking for ways to be involved, as well.

In May, Printing United Alliance will brand part of its “I Learning Plus” 70-course training program to the Mariano Rivera Foundation.

“It’s the same content everyone else will get, but when students or someone from the foundation logs in, it will be branded to them,” Villa said.

Villa is also creating his own course catalog that divides the modules into three different levels—field support tech, design and prepress and packaging/wide format—to help students identify potential career paths upfront.

In June, in the New York/New Jersey area, the foundation will offer two internships in Lean Six Sigma certification.

In August, Adobe certification will be added.

“Gainesville will be the only vocational training center with Adobe-certified training,” said Villa. “We’ll train one of our existing trainers on the modules so we will have Adobe-certified instructors on staff.”



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Heidi Tolliver-Walker has been a commercial and digital printing industry analyst, feature writer, and author for more than 20 years. Her industry commentary can be found in national printing publications, blogs, and marketing publications.

Continued on page 63

Continued from page 59

in the category. Walk your way through the vendor booths, and the topic came up a lot as well.

There was a flurry of activity at the Kelly Spicers booth, where they were showcasing a new certified plastic-free and 100% recyclable metallized foil board called Ecofoil. Developed for the HP Indigo, dry toner and inkjet digital print markets, the board is positioned as the only sustainable and commercially viable foil board range on the digital market. Other brands at the show marketing eco-friendly foil and laminate products were Hazen Paper Company's Envirofoil and Nobelus Ecoelement Sustainable Laminates.

One of the coolest sustainability-related offerings was from KURZ, where they announced the world's first foil transfer carrier recycling system called RECO SYS. Without getting too deep in the weeds with my explanation, they convert residual transfer products into a high-quality injection molding material called RECO POUND - they had samples of the little pellets they create, and some injection-molded products made from the pellets. It was wild.

Theme: Production Flexibility

Flexibility, modularity, efficiency, customization—all of these were themes at the show, and they were reflected in many of the machines on the show floor. It was nice to see that there was truly something for every budget, whether you had \$7,000 or \$700,000+. There was a pathway for everyone who wants to get into value added print to step into it.

- I saw a machine called a Chameleon Finishing System, and although I can't explain much about it, I was in awe of its flexibility. They make customized converting systems (big and small) for direct mail products, media products and packaging, retail packaging and fulfillment, and other specialty end-of-the-line finishing systems. I was also very impressed with how much time they spent talking to me. That's not always the case at a show, and I was impressed with that.
- Xerox was showing off their Adaptive CMYK+ Kit, which adds shiny metallics, bold whites

and glowing fluorescent colors to a Versant 180/280 or PrimeLink C9065/C9070 printer, extending your palette to more than a million colors using 11 new toners. They had the press on the show floor, and they were making custom variable coasters for everyone using specialty colors.

Trend: Personalization and Wow-Factor

If you like cool samples as much as I do, this was the show for you—there were so many exciting, tangible samples to pick up while you were there. Here are just a few of my favorites:

- Scodix didn't have a machine on the show floor, but they pre-produced gorgeous, name personalized, "Scodified" prints for every attendee. Well played, Scodix.
- There were several companies at the show who sold every kind of foil under the sun. I can't mention them all, but my favorite "score" from the foil category was my Designed to Shine book of foils and foil design samples from the team at ITW Shinemark. There were also some very nice embossing/debossing/sculpted die companies that were true artisans, like E.C. Schultz & Company. They gave me a beautiful set of samples, so they get a shout-out, too.
- Parkland Direct had piles and piles of eye-catching and creative embellished envelope samples. I had a great discussion with their CMO, Stephen White, that has sparked an idea for my next article, so watch for that. Victor Envelope and W + D had some really cool envelope samples, too.
- Related to wow-factor, if you're looking for advice on how to sell, leverage, implement or design with digital print embellishment, check out the team from Taktiful. They launched at AMPLIFY, and are actively consulting brands, agencies and printers.

Can't Wait for Next Year

I ended my three days at the show with lots of new friends, some fresh ideas and strategies and a suitcase filled with samples. It was a great show, and I can't wait to do it all over again next year. ●

INTERACTIVE SIGNAGE *Continued from page 47*

digital screen. Customers who opt in to the experience will see customized flight and wayfinding information. Each viewer will get a unique and personalized experience, even as they stand next to dozens of other viewers enjoying their own uniquely personalized experiences.

The parallel reality display is located in McNamera Terminal's Concourse A near the Delta Sky Club. You launch the experience by scanning your boarding pass, or you can sign up for "digital identity" in the Fly Delta App, which will activate facial recognition on the kiosk.

Also according to Delta, leveraging multi-view pixels and proprietary technology, the parallel reality experience enables each customer to see

personalized, in-language messages – tailored just to them – as they walk past the digital screen.

Tailored messages include personalized wayfinding, flight information or updates to boarding time.

This experience will always be opt-in, and customer information is not stored.

Are You Experienced?

Interactive signage is all about providing users not just with information or advertising, but an immersive experience. And while hardware advances are making it easier and less expensive to install, these kinds of signage, software and app advances are also expanding the types of experiences you can provide. ●

AMERICAS PRINT SHOW 2022 *Continued from page 57*

Another event that is near and dear to my heart is the Girls Who Print luncheon. We are finalizing details for that luncheon, which will take place on the 18th. Deborah Corn and Kelly Mallozzi, Girl 1 and Girl 2, will be helping facilitate that event.

The show is in a location that is easy to get to, and everything is reasonably priced.

PN: *Jim, how about visitors? Do you have any information on registration so far? I know it's early, especially since people might be waiting a bit to see what the next phase of COVID is.*

JC: Yes, it is still a little early, but we are shooting for a minimum of 2,000-3,000 attendees. It will be an intimate enough opportunity show that you are really going to be able to connect, but a big enough opportunity that you are going to be exposed to a lot of information. It won't be something where you will walk in and be overwhelmed and not know where to go. We'll have something for everyone and enable them to connect the dots as they plan for the future. Six hundred people have already signed up for

sessions, which are filling up fast. So we encourage your readers to take a look at the program and sign up for sessions they are interested in.

PN: *One of the show trends we have seen of late, even before the pandemic, was perhaps fewer people attending the shows, but a larger percentage of attendees are decision makers and key influencers. But because of the central location, and because a lot of people are likely to drive there, maybe they can bring a production manager or CSR or sales.*

JC: That's a great idea. Again, there will be something for everyone, and the education session topics could bring great value to a number of different people in the company. We really invite individuals and firms to take a look at www.americasprintshow.com, where they can find more information about the show and register to attend. We'll look forward to seeing everyone and getting together in person again.

PN: *Thanks again, Jim, Jules and the rest of the team, for all of your hard work in pulling this event together.* ●

HIRING *Continued from page 61*

"The EFI Connect program really put us on the map. This was supposed to be an addition to the original Mariano Rivera Foundation Program, and after Mariano's presentation at EFI Connect, the print industry has embraced this program, and it is turning out to be one of the biggest things they do."

Want to get involved? On May 24, the foundation will hold its annual celebrity golf benefit at the Wykagyl

Country Club in New Rochelle, N.Y. The event has a variety of sponsorship and participation levels and will be attended by Yankees players past and present. These include Mariano Rivera, Joe Torre, Andy Pettitte, Jorge Posada, Andruw Jones, Nick Swisher, Bernie Williams, CC Sabathia, Ceil Fielder, Hideki Matsui, David Cone and Jim Leyritz. EFI, Konica-Minolta and Ricoh are all among the top-level sponsors. ●

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SOUNDS LIKE A DRY MARTINI

The art of a good blog

As a rule, I do not enjoy reading blogs. Countless scientific studies have unanimously concluded that online reading results in inferior comprehension and minimal retention. In-depth on-screen reading is also uncomfortable on my eyes.

The typical blog is written, posted and curated by one person. It is the antithesis of the printed magazine article that passes from a writer to an editor to a proofreader and layout artist. The absence of multiple sets of eyes results in blog postings that are sloppier, more prone to errors and typos, with a propensity for rambling.

Lastly is the issue of credibility. Anyone can put up a blog, for free, with very little effort. That's why the internet is filled with millions of blogs with billions of posts, the vast majority of which are filled with nonsense. Of course print can be used to spread nonsense as well, but it takes time, effort and money to do so. These factors tend to weed out the less credible information from print. Blogs have no such restraint.

One more thing: Johnson's World readers know that I'm an unabashed cheerleader for print. If you have something important to tell me (and the rest of the world) put it in print. Yes, I have strong opinions, and as a printer myself, I put my money and my attention where my mouth is.

Darn you, Müller Martini. The Switzerland-based manufacturer of bookbinding equipment (among other related things) has a blog, and I read it.

Yes, I know I just told you I don't like blogs, but Müller Martini lures me in with well-written headlines. Not clickbait headlines, just clear, concise headlines that let me know in a few short words that they have written about a topic of interest to me.

Links to Müller Martini's blog postings

come to me via email. Although I delete hundreds of emails unopened every day, I don't mind receiving an unsolicited email if its message is truly of interest to me. Whether on my desktop or on my phone, I can read one sentence in the preview pane of my email client. That's where a well-written headline comes in. Get my attention, and I might not delete you on the spot.

I also receive links to Müller Martini's blog posts on social media. Industry leaders whom I respect highlight these posts on LinkedIn. If you've earned my trust I'll check out your post even if the headline doesn't grab me.

Their blog isn't perfect. Sometimes the writing sounds a bit stiff. I'm guessing that's because many of the posts were originally written in German, then translated. The writing can be a bit on the dry side. (Neither the Swiss nor the Germans are particularly famous for their sense of humor.) That's ok with me. If you are writing about technical subjects all you need to do is make the content accurate and interesting.

What is the moral of our story? In Johnson's World there is always a moral.

Content is king! No matter the medium, solid content will get the attention of your prospects. No amount of animation, keywords or pretty pictures can hold audience attention without good content.

Asked about his musical style, saxophonist Paul Desmond once mused, "I wanted to sound like a dry martini." I'd say that Müller Martini has accomplished that.

Now go forth and do likewise. ●



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.



Modern VDP: A White Paper by Jacob Aizikowitz

The evolution and impact of Modern Variable Data Print (VDP)

Modern VDP is now used regularly by thousands of designers, printers, agencies, and enterprises to automate the production of personalized communications across print and digital. Still, many practitioners don't know the history of the technology or how it evolved to enable them to compete in the large and fast-growing markets of Marketing Automation and CX!

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