

February 2015

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# MARKING INDUSTRY

magazine

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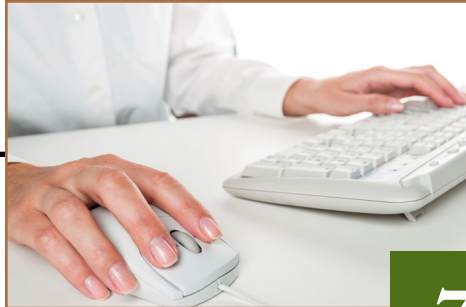
The Customer Chat™ system offers numerous settings for complete customization control of the program's functionality. Each company will have different preferences, based on how they envision the system working for their operations. With that in mind, the vigorous options allow you to do just that. Let's continue our exploration of the *Chat* tab and its settings.

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# Start blogging for business or get left behind

*by Wendy Pike*

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*Blogging has come a long way since its humble beginnings as a web diary or web log. What started out as a creative outlet for writers has morphed into a powerful marketing tool that can help you engage with customers and share relevant information.*

Have you been thinking about adding a blog to your dealership's marketing mix but are wondering if it's worth the time and effort? Here are some statistics that may encourage you.

- 60 percent of companies with a blog have acquired a customer from their blog (Source: Hubspot).
- Small businesses that blog get 126 percent more lead growth than those who don't (Source: ThinkCreative).
- Some 346 million people read blogs throughout the world. Adding a blog gives you the ability to reach millions of prospective customers (Source: The Future Buzz).

These facts speak for themselves. If you're not blogging, it's time to get started or get left behind. If you need a bit more inspiration, here are five compelling reasons why your dealership should be blogging:

- **It connects you with customers.** A blog is an easy-to-use platform for connecting with and sharing timely, relevant information with your customers.
- **It gives your dealership a voice.** Here is your opportunity to talk about whatever you choose. You can talk about new products or services, comment on the office products industry or what's going on at



your company. A blog lets your personality shine through. Tell your story. Offer more insight into your company and show people what you are all about.

- **It generates traffic.** Blogs fuel search engine optimization (SEO). Search engines love content. With carefully chosen keywords, your blog can show up in searches and drive traffic to your website.
- **It establishes you as an expert.** Provide practical solutions and solve customer problems with your content. Showcase your expertise on a given subject or your knowledge of the office products industry or business. People will come back again and again.
- **It provides content for other marketing efforts.** A blog gives you something to share regularly on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, emails, newsletters, etc. Take advantage of the opportunity for exponential amplification of your social networks.

So now you know you need to blog and you're convinced, but I know many of you are going to say...

- I don't have time to blog.
- I'm not a good writer.
- I don't know how to start.
- I don't know what to write about.
- Nobody is going to read our blog.

If you don't have time or are not a good writer, find someone who is or who will head up this function for you. Bribe someone if you have to!

Your next decision is deciding where to host your blog. Blogger and WordPress are two of the most popular blogging platforms, but you can also host your blog on your website.

We started our blog, The Twisted Pencil, on WordPress, but have since moved it to our website to make our site "stickier."

The next hurdle to overcome is what to write about. I would suggest looking at other blogs in the office products industry. Here are a dozen dealer blogs and half a dozen supplier blogs to get you started:

## Dealers

### **AAA Business Supplies & Interiors:**

<http://blog.aaasolutions.com/>

### **EZ Office Products:**

[www.ezop.com/category/water-cooler-talk/](http://www.ezop.com/category/water-cooler-talk/)

### **Friends Business Source:**

<http://friendsbs.com/blog/>

### **Global Office Solutions:**

<http://blog.globalofficesolutions.com/>

### **Impact Office:**

[www.impactofficepro.com/blog-0/](http://www.impactofficepro.com/blog-0/)

### **Innovative Office Solutions:**

<http://innovativeos.wordpress.com/>

### **New England Office Supply:**

<http://blog.neosusa.com/>

### **OEC:**

[www.oecbi.com/blog.asp](http://www.oecbi.com/blog.asp)

### **PortersOP:**

<http://www.portersop.com/blog>

### **Shoplet:**

<http://blog.shoplet.com/>

### **SunDANCE Office Supply:**

[www.sundanceofficesupplyblog.com/](http://www.sundanceofficesupplyblog.com/)

### **The Supply Geeks:**

[www.supplygeeks.com/blog](http://www.supplygeeks.com/blog)

## Suppliers

### **Fellows:**

<http://blog.fellows.com/>

### **HON:**

<http://honcompany.wordpress.com/>

### **Pentel:**

[www.pentel.com/blog/](http://www.pentel.com/blog/)

### **Samsill:**

[www.samsill.com/blog](http://www.samsill.com/blog)

### **Sharpie:**

<http://blog.sharpie.com>

### **USSCO Speaks:**

<http://usscospeaks.com/>

And look for opportunities to include guest contributors on your blog. We have had manufacturer reps, as well as customers, write articles for our Twisted Pencil blog.

Also, reach out to your employees and have your employees create posts. This lets customers get to know your staff and gives insight into your company, its values and people. You might even discover some hidden talent when you ask a delivery driver, warehouse person or customer service rep to write a post.

To get the most bang for your buck, so to speak, make sure to post links to your blog on all of your other social media

sites and online communities. And you can repost blogs you feel were successful.

Blogs have a longer life than Facebook posts or tweets. Don't be afraid to promote posts multiple times.

Include your blog posts in your email newsletters or eblasts. Many of these email subscribers might not be reading your blog, but they would be interested in the content.

If you want more ideas and information about blogging, I found these great articles I wanted to share:

<http://offers.hubspot.com/an-introduction-to-business-blogging>

[http://socialmediatoday.com/](http://socialmediatoday.com/stephaniefrasco/1870871/5-ways-promote-your-blog-posts)

[stephaniefrasco/1870871/5-ways-promote-your-blog-posts](http://socialmediatoday.com/content/blogging-tips-people-who-hate-blogging-5-easy-keys-success)

[http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/](http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/blogging-tips-people-who-hate-blogging-5-easy-keys-success)

[blogging-tips-people-who-hate-blogging-5-easy-keys-success](http://feldmancreative.com/2013/09/benefits-of-blogging/)

<http://feldmancreative.com/2013/09/benefits-of-blogging/>

<http://www.thesaleslion.com/qualities-best-business-blogs-world/>

Last, but not least, recognize that you have to commit to blogging, just like any other sales, marketing or operational effort. Regularly post—whether it is once a week or once a day.

I have heard owners say that they blogged a few times but stopped because they didn't see any results.

That is almost like saying you went on a couple of sales calls but didn't sell anything so you gave up. Sounds silly, right? I would encourage you not to give up.

This has been a learning experience for us at Twist OP. We are still learning and evolving, and we would love to hear from you—what has worked for you, what hasn't and where you find inspiration. Mlm

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*Wendy Pike is president of Twist Office Products in Wood Dale, Illinois and Roseville and New Prague, Minnesota. She can be reached by email at [wpike@twistop.com](mailto:wpike@twistop.com). For more information on her dealership, visit [www.twistop.com](http://www.twistop.com).*

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# Converting bitmap artwork to vectors

by Foster D. Coburn III

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*Everyone wants to just push a button and get a perfect conversion.  
The reality is that it just isn't going to happen that way.  
For most bitmaps, the best method is to re-draw from scratch.*

One of the more common tasks users have to perform is converting bitmap artwork into vector. The bitmap may be something that has been scanned, or it simply could have been supplied by a customer as a JPG, PNG or other flavor of bitmap. Often it is a logo.

Before we get into the process of conversion, make sure to ask customers if they have a vector version of the logo. If customers understand that any conversion will be lower quality than a vector original, they will search a little harder. Explaining that you have to charge customers for the time it takes you to convert it will also motivate them to find the vector version, if available,

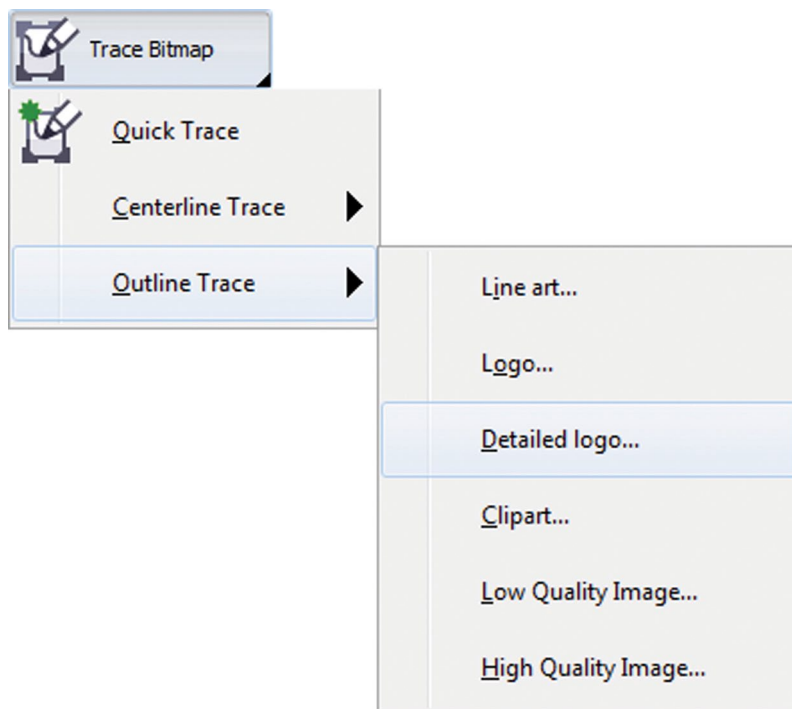
and that makes things better for everyone.

## **The “automated” conversion**

Everyone wants an automated solution. You want to just push a button and get a perfect conversion. The reality is that it just isn't going to happen that way. Maybe you've seen demonstration of software that looks to be perfect. While some software is better than others, you need a very good source bitmap to get great results. Getting even a decent quality original is difficult. Remember the phrase “garbage in, garbage out” because most of the source bitmaps will be very low-quality originals taken from a website.



**Figure 1:** Trace Bitmap menu found on the Property Bar when a bitmap is selected in CorelDRAW

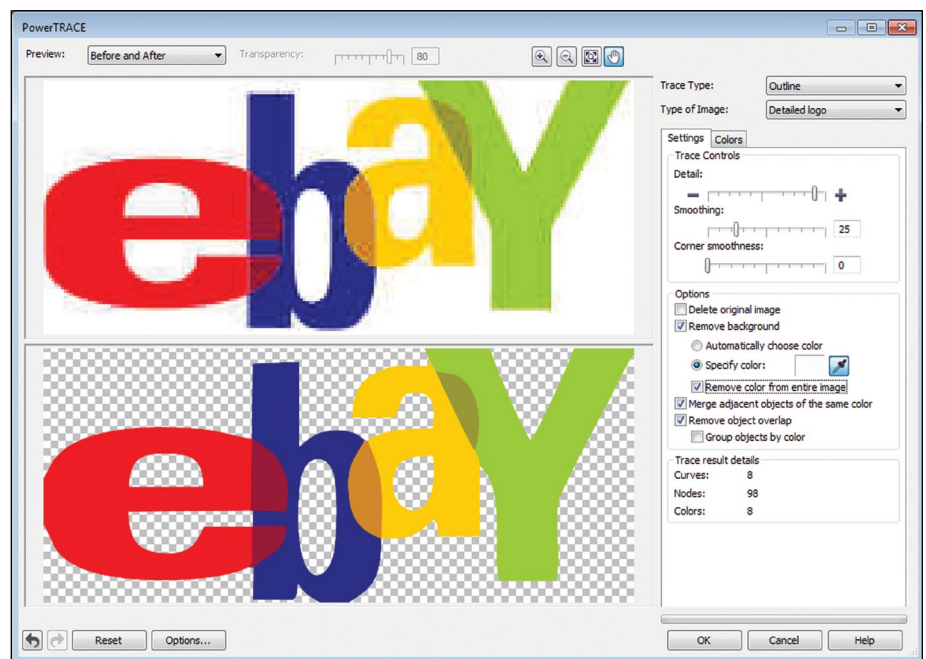


The CorelDRAW Graphics Suite includes a tool named Corel PowerTRACE for performing automated conversions. Note that earlier versions included Corel TRACE, and it will not be discussed here since it was replaced years ago. For some artwork, Corel Power TRACE can work well if you have a high-quality original.

Import the bitmap you wish to trace into CorelDRAW and make sure it is selected. On the Property Bar, you'll see a drop-down menu, as shown in Figure 1, which gives you various choices for the settings to use when tracing the bitmap. I find that "Detailed logo" in the Outline Trace menu is the best setting for most bitmaps.

Once you have selected an item from the menu, you'll be taken into Corel Power TRACE where you can adjust the settings and see the results. Figure 2 shows the preliminary results when attempting to trace an Internet-quality version of the eBay logo. Look carefully at the vector results (bottom of the

**Figure 2:** Tracing an Internet-quality version of the eBay logo in Corel Power TRACE



screen shot), and you'll see it isn't very accurate.

Also note the splotchy colors in the original JPG (top of screen shot) that was used for tracing. Along with the low resolution of many bitmaps you'll get, JPG makes things worse because of the

Figure 3: Various bitmaps and the trace results for the eBay logo



lousy compression, causing these splotchy colors.

To give you a better idea of how the quality of the original bitmap affects the quality of the trace, I started with a variety of different versions of the eBay logo and traced them. Figure 3 shows the original bitmaps with their specifications on the left and the resulting traces on the right.

My example was a controlled environment because I created each of the source bitmaps from a perfect vector version of the logo. In the real world, you'll be stuck with whatever the client provides, and it will likely be a low-quality JPG.

When you start with bad quality, you get a bad trace. After the automated trace is completed, you'll need to spend time in CorelDRAW editing the nodes

of each of the shapes created, in hopes of improving the results. If there weren't a lot of details in the original bitmap, part of this is nothing more than a guessing game. One reason that an automated trace isn't always the best answer is that the editing can take much longer than simply recreating the artwork from scratch. Rarely do I use automated tracing tools because I find the manual option gives the best result in the least amount of time.

### Manually tracing the artwork

Many users will dismiss this method because "manual" sounds more difficult than "automated." The reality is that even automated traces often require a large amount of time with node-editing the initial result. For this reason, the manual method will typically take less time and give you better results.

In last month's article, *Understanding the Basics of Vector Graphics*, I went over nodes and drawing with the Bézier tool. Hopefully, you have spent some time learning to draw with the Bézier tool, as this is the foundation of the manual conversion process.

As I look at a bitmap that needs to be converted to vector, I try to break it down into elements. If there is text, I use the WhatTheFont?! service included in CorelDRAW to identify the font used and simply retype the text in that font. Why trace the text when you can just type it?

Let's look at the example shown in Figure 4. The top example shows the original bitmap I was provided from a website. In the middle is a scan from a printed brochure. Using WhatTheFont?!, I was able to identify the font used and type it over the slogan at the bottom, as well as the stylized "Arizona" at the top. You'll see my re-creation in red over the

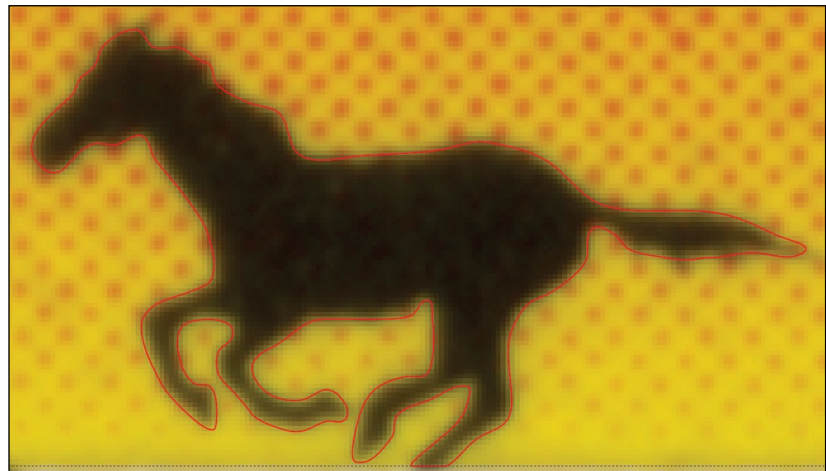
**Figure 4:** The progression of manually tracing a logo



top of the logo. The mountain and horse had to be drawn using the Bézier tool based on a very blurry original.

At the bottom of Figure 4 is the logo after I had finished converting it to vector. What do you think? Does it look good to you? Let's now look a little closer at the horse. Figure 5 shows a zoomed version of the bitmap of the horse, along with the red line I drew above it. You'll see there aren't a lot of details in the scanned bitmap, and so I was limited in the details I could draw

**Figure 5:** Zoomed version of the horse shows a lack of detail.

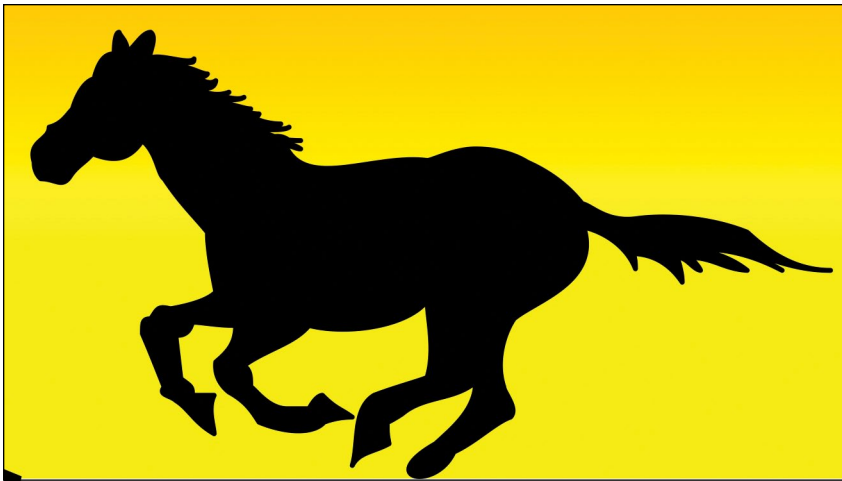




*Figure 6: The original vector version of the logo has more details than the redrawn logo.*



*Figure 7: Zoomed version of the horse in the original vector logo has much more detail.*



in my re-creation. An automated trace would be nothing short of a disaster.

Depending on how the vector version of the logo will be used, the re-creation I made could be of reasonable quality. Unfortunately, the lack of detail would become evident if the logo was output at a larger size. This project was an interesting case, as I was provided with the vector original after I had finished re-drawing, as you saw in the earlier example. Figure 6 shows the vector version of the logo I was provided, and you'll likely notice the additional detail even when displayed as a fairly small size within this article.

So that you can see the additional detail a little bit better, look at the zoomed horse in Figure 7. Specifically, look at the mane and the tail, as there

was no detail evident in the re-drawn vector version due to the low quality of the original bitmap.

It is not only important to have the graphic skills to re-create bitmap artwork as vector, it is even more important to have a quality original, as the re-creation can only be as detailed as the original.

## In closing

The absolute best way to convert bitmap artwork to vector is to continually ask until the original vector artwork is provided. In situations where you have really good source artwork, automated tools such as Corel Power TRACE might do a good job. For most bitmaps, the best method is to re-draw from scratch. First determine the fonts used and type the text using that font for best quality. Then use the Bézier tool to draw any other parts of the graphic. If you've never used the manual method, it may seem harder at first. Once you have practiced with the Bézier tool, it goes much faster and the results are far superior to the automated tools. ■

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*Foster D. Coburn III is the author of 13 books on CorelDRAW®, including the latest, CorelDRAW® X6 Unleashed. He*

*also writes the free Graphics Unleashed Blog and provides fonts, artwork and add-ons of interest to designers through the Graphics Unleashed website at [www.unleash.com](http://www.unleash.com). Connect with Graphics Unleashed on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/graphicsunleashed](http://www.facebook.com/graphicsunleashed) and follow Foster on Twitter @fostercoburn. Email your project questions to [foster@unleash.com](mailto:foster@unleash.com).*

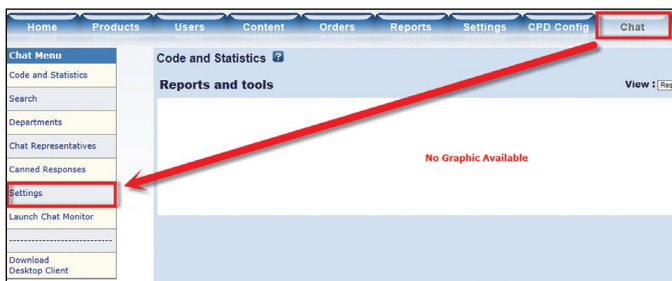


## STAMP SHOP WEB™: Step by Step

# How to use Customer Chat™, Part 4

by Amanda Katon

*The Customer Chat™ system offers numerous settings for complete customization control of the program's functionality. Each company will have different preferences, based on how they envision the system working for their operations. With that in mind, the vigorous options allow you to do just that. Let's continue our exploration of the Chat tab and its settings.*



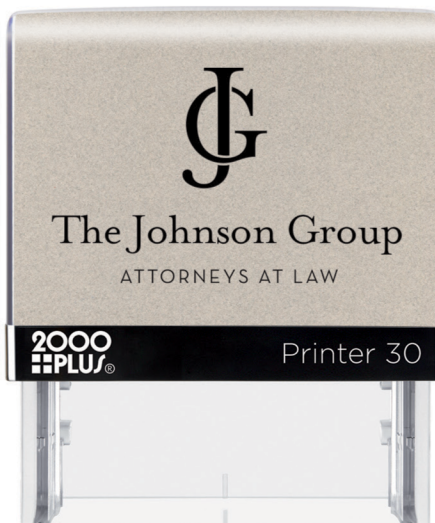
**Picture 1:** Link from Chat tab to Settings screen

Please note Customer Chat™ is a service that must be turned on in order to be utilized. Contact Connectweb Technologies, Inc. for more information.

### Settings

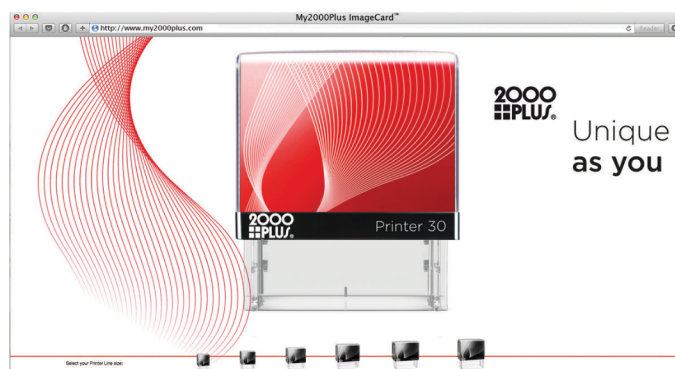
As with all Stamp Shop Web™ lessons, first sign in to the admin area of your Stamp Shop Web™ site. Once you are logged in, click the *Chat* tab. Next click the *Settings* link from the chat menu on the left of your screen (see Picture 1).

The Customer Chat™ system includes a robust group of settings that enable you to configure the Customer Chat™



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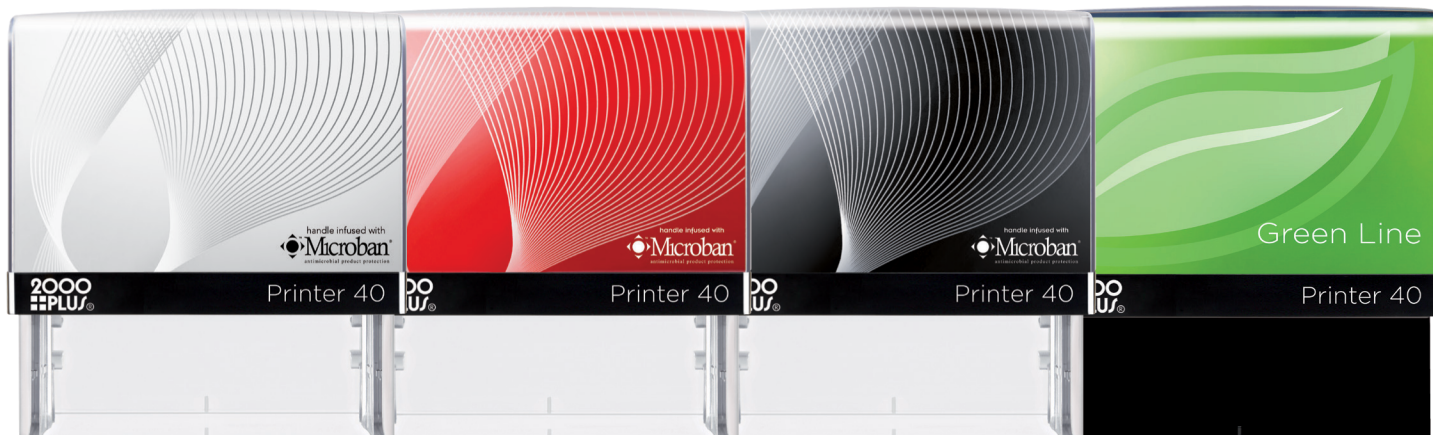
P20



P30



P40



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Phone: (800) 738-3304 Fax: (800) 263-7060  
coscan.ca

**Configuration Settings**

Use this option to set and configure the application.

**Session Timeouts :** Representatives : 3 Minutes, Customers : 2 Minutes

**Chat Refresh Rate :** 4 Seconds

**Customer Chat Refresh Rate :** 10 Seconds

**Max. Customer Wait Time :** 40 Seconds

**Busy Requests :** ☐ Requeue the request call if not taken by any representative, ☐ Keep log of representatives that did not take a call, Reassign requests to another representative after 0 attempts.

**Customer Chat Window :** Window Title : Customer Chat Support, Dimensions : Width : 520, Height : 350

**Pre-chat form :** ☐ Customer Name and E-Mail are required fields, ☐ Ask for the user's e-mail in the pre-chat form

**Optional Form Fields :** Field 1 : , Field 2 : , Field 3 : , Required : ☐ Required, ☐ Required, ☐ Required

**Default Customer Nick :** Guest

**Default Department Name :** Customer Support

**Representative Chat Window :** Width : 520, Height : 520

**Visitor Tracking :** ☒ Enable Visitor Tracking, ☐ Track Representatives, ☒ Play sound alert when a new visitor is tracked, Refresh Tracking every 15 seconds, Display up to 20 tracked visitors on the chat monitor, Do not track visitors with no activity during the last 5 minutes

**Request Notifications :** ☒ Play Sound Alert to representatives for new incoming requests, ☐ Flash Incoming Request to the representative

**Chat Options :** ☒ Save Session Transcripts To Database, ☐ Play Sound Alert to representatives on each customer reply, ☐ Focus Chat Window to the user on each representative reply, ☐ Focus Chat Window to the representative on each user reply, ☐ Display the representative photo and public info to the user, ☐ Notify when the other party is typing (high bandwidth)

**Other Options :** ☐ Update the support button status in real time, ☐ Allow customers to e-mail a copy of the saved session transcript, ☐ Save The Full URL of the pages where the requests came from, ☐ Perform IP Lookup on users, ☐ Perform Country Lookup on users

**Monitor reconnect :** ☒ Automatically reconnect the chat monitor in case of losing connection, ☐ Notify representatives about network congestion.

Picture 2a: Top portion of Settings main screen, highlighting all available settings and options

**Session Feedback and Rating :** ☐ Allow customer to rate the support sessions, ☐ Ask the customer for feedback on the support session

**Instant Messenger :** ☐ Enable Instant Messenger

**Quick Words :** ☐ Enable Quick Words

**Auto Engage :** ☐ Enable Auto Engage after 0 seconds on a page

**Hot Lead Tracking :** A Hot lead is a customer referred to the website with a high purchase potential. Customers whose referral contains one of the following keywords will be marked as Hot Leads : yahoo.com, google.com, altavista.com, aol.com, lycos.com, hotbot.com, excite.com

**IP Filter :** Block any requests coming from the following IP Addresses :

**State and Logs :** Display Stats for the Last 30 days, Delete saved transcripts from the database after 0 days

**Invitation Messages :** ☒ Allow Reps. To send custom invites to the users, Default Invitation : Hi, would you like to chat with one

**Welcome Message :** Welcome [NAME]. Please wait wh

**Accepted Request Message :** You're now talking to [NAME] from

**Bye message :** Thanks for contacting us (Optional)

**Leave a Message :** ☐ Use default form to leave a message, ☒ Use the form at /contact.aspx to leave a message

**Default E-Mail Address :** support@yourdomain.com

**Message Subject :** YourSite.com Support Rx

**Save Changes**

Picture 2b: Bottom portion of Settings main screen, highlighting all available settings and options

application so that it operates properly (see Picture 2a and Picture 2b). Under *Settings*, you'll find these options:

**Session Timeouts:** You can set the number of minutes of inactivity per chat session before it's considered a timeout (example: Representative—four minutes, Customer—three minutes).

**Chat Refresh Rate:** Select the refresh rate in seconds for messages in the chat window (four to six seconds is recommended).

**Customer Chat Refresh Rate:** Set the time interval for the Customer Chat™ to look for new incoming requests (10 to 15 seconds is recommended).

**Max. Customer Wait Time:** The maximum time to have a customer on hold before assigning a representative. Enter a zero ("0") here if you don't want to set up a maximum time.

**Busy Requests:** This option reassigns any requests sent to a representative if he or she does not respond after a number of attempts (Monitoring Chat Refreshes). This is useful when a representative is not at his or her desk and a chat request is received. If the chat is not taken or set as busy after this predefined number of attempts, the chat requests will be reassigned to the next available representative. You can also send the chat to the queue again if a representative does not respond.

**Customer Chat Window:** Type the title for the customer's chat window and enter its default dimensions and pixels.

**Pre-Chat Form:** Set this if the user will need to provide his or her name and email address before sending a support/chat request.

**Optional Form Fields:** Customer Chat™ lets you collect up to three additional items of information before the user submits his or her chat request. Use these custom fields to collect details related to your business needs, such as the user's website, phone number, address, order number, etc.

**Default Customer Nick:** Provide a default nickname for your customers. This alias will be used in proactive chats, as for example, "Guest".

**Default Department Name:** Enter a default department name for proactive chats, such as "Customer Support".

**Representative Chat Window:** Set the representative's chat window dimensions in pixels.

**Visitor Tracking:** A series of options to control your visitor tracking.

**HELPFUL HINT:** Please note that Customer Chat™ can track users only on those pages where the visitor tracking code has been pasted (this code is provided on the *Code and Statistics* main screen).

**Request Notifications:** Set this if you would like representatives to hear a sound alert or see a flashing screen when each incoming request is received.

**Chat Options:** Additional chat window settings and options.

**Other Options:** Select from several options, such as:

- *Update the Support button in real time:* Set this option if you'd like your support buttons to refresh automatically every 10 seconds to update their status.
- Allow customers to send by email a copy of the chat session.
- Save the complete URLs from where the request originated. Checking this option will include any parameters found in the referring URL.
- Perform IP lookups to get the user's ISP host name information.
- Perform country lookups to get the customer's country.

**Monitor Reconnect:** Enable this option if you would like your monitor to reconnect to the system if the connection is lost.

**Session Feedback and Rating:** Set this if users can rate the support session and if the system should ask them for feedback on their sessions. If this last option is selected, when a user finishes the chat, a pop-up window will appear, asking for feedback on the support session. You can also customize this form by adding any number of fields, thus creating a user survey when the chat is over and the chat window is closed.

**Instant Messenger:** The Instant Messenger allows representatives to send instant messages to other users through the chat monitor.

**Quick Words:** Enables or disables the use of Quick Words (shortcuts) to trigger your canned commands and automated replies.

**Auto Engage:** When you enable the Auto Engage feature, the application will automatically invite the users to a chat after a predefined amount of time on a page. For instance, when you set the Auto Engage to five minutes, if a visitor spends more than five minutes on a page that includes a pasted visitor tracking code, the application will show the user the default invitation message and invite them to a chat.

**Hot Lead Tracking:** Customer Chat™ can identify users with high purchase potential by checking the user's referring URL for special keywords or domain names.

For example, if a user comes from [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), and a keyword in the Hot Lead tracking is Google, the user will be marked as a hot lead. Any user who comes to your site from a search engine should be considered a hot lead, as that person was browsing the search engine for a product or service like the one you offer and decided to visit your site.

You can also set keywords. If you set "stamps" as a keyword, any user with the keyword on the referring URL will be marked as a hot lead. A user who comes from <http://www.anysite.com/article.asp> will be set as a hot lead. You should type only one keyword per line in this field.

**IP Filter:** Type specific IPs or partial ones to block any incoming requests from these addresses (useful in avoiding spammers).

**Stats & Logs:** Set the timeframe for the stats and reports (example: last 30 days). You can also set the number of days that the transcripts should be kept in the database before being purged. Type zero ("0") to disable this feature.

**Invitation Messages:** This is the default message to invite the user to a proactive chat. You can also disable this option.

**Welcome Message:** A system message to display to customers, welcoming them to the chat session. You can use the special keyword, `[[NAME]]`, to insert the customer's name in the message. For example, if the customer's name is John, *Welcome [[NAME]] to the support session* will be displayed as "Welcome John to the support session."

**Accept Request Message:** The message displayed to the customer when his or her request has been accepted and assigned to a representative. You can use the special keyword `[[NAME]]` here as well.

In this case, `[[NAME]]` will be replaced with the representative's name, `[[DEPT]]` will indicate the representative's department and `[[TOPIC]]` will display the topic entered by the customer.

**Bye Message:** Display a "Goodbye" or "Thank You" message to the customer, once the session is finished.

**Leave a Message:** Select if you'd like to use the built-in "leave a message" form from Customer Chat™. You can also type the URL to your own custom form.



## STAMP SHOP WEB™: *Step by Step*

**Default Email Address:** A default email used for sending emails from the Customer Chat™ system.

**Message Subject:** Default email subject used on emails sent from the Customer Chat™ system.

Once you've established all your settings, click the *Save Changes* button to save them.

This concludes Part 4 of working within the *Chat* tab! Settings give you complete control over the functionality of the Customer Chat™ system. We will continue with our final installment of the *Chat* tab in April. If you have any questions regarding your website(s) or would like the chat feature turned on for your site(s), please contact Technical Support at 800-556-9932 or [support@cwebtechnologies.com](mailto:support@cwebtechnologies.com).

Stay tuned for next month's installment when we resume with managing your inventory in Custom Vantage Office™ (formerly Stamp Shop Manager™). Mm

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*Amanda Katon is a member of the Connectweb Technologies, Inc. family, a software development and Web hosting company that specializes in software for the marking devices industry. Katon is a graduate of Mount Ida College in Newton, Massachusetts, with a Bachelor of Science in Graphic Design. Upon graduating in May 2010, she started out working for a marketing company. After eight months, she went back to school at North Shore Community College in Beverly, Massachusetts where she earned her certificate in Web design. She joined the Connectweb family in June 2011, focusing her skills on designing custom websites for Stamp Shop Web customers. As part of Connectweb, Katon enjoys helping customers and building lasting relationships with them by implementing one-on-one customer service. Outside of work, Katon enjoys outdoor activities and doing crafts. For further help, contact Amanda Katon at 800-556-9932; Email: [amanda@cwebtechnologies.com](mailto:amanda@cwebtechnologies.com).*



*On the road:*

## Stamprite Supersine *Lansing, Michigan*

*by David Hachmeister*

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*Stamprite Supersine in Lansing, Michigan, has been a part of the marking devices industry for more than five decades. Wendell Parsons, owner/CEO, and Scott Parsons, president, discussed the evolution of their business with publisher David Hachmeister.*

**David Hachmeister:** This is actually the first time I've been in Lansing, let alone at your place of business. I know you've been in business for a long time. When was it founded?

**Wendell Parsons:** We say that Stamprite was founded in 1955. I started working here in 1962, putting myself through MSU. In 1976, I bought into it, and in two years owned 100 percent of it. I can't tell you when Scott came in...

**Scott Parsons:** I started mowing lawns (*laughs*). That was my early gig. Then I started working part-time in 1982 when I was heading to MSU. Been here ever since.

**DH:** Did you start out as primarily a rubber stamp company or more of a stamp and sign business?

**WP:** That's a good story. The guy who founded this was a Canadian, Stan Darling. He came from Kitchener,

Ontario. His brother-in-law owned Warwick Marking. Are you familiar with them?

**DH:** Absolutely, they were a past Manufacturer of the Year, about 25 years ago.

**WP:** We were their poor sister (*laughs*). Stan came to the States and was into printing and moved around from St. Louis, Missouri. He came to Lansing because of relatives. This was when we had Motor Wheel, Diamond Reo, John Bean, Fisher Body, Oldsmobile,

Demmer and all of the forging companies.

It was a great place—the companies said, “Nobody makes rubber stamps,” so we started out as a rubber stamp manufacturer. Stan’s son, Ron, was very bright and realized that there was something called steel stamps. So he convinced his dad to buy a machine, but his dad thought he was going to buy a machine to engrave signs—desk nameplates, room signs. Ron, in his genius mode, got a 3D Pantograph. He knew that’s what he needed for steel stamps because that’s what they had at Warwick in Kitchener.

We started making steel stamps. Well, then we had to get a 2D to make engraved signs. So we evolved through steel stamps and rubber stamps. We used to sell ink by the truckload to Fisher Body to mark all their parts. We were a full-fledged marking device company.

I came on as a part-time engraver. Eventually, I was moved up to the office. I remember the gamut of marking devices. It was incredible...marking pens, ink markers, steel stamps, rubber stamps—ridiculous rubber stamps—it was quite an industry back in the day.



*The company entrance, featuring signage created in-house*



*Wendell Parsons displays samples from a label project.*



At one point, we got so good in our steel stamps that we were doing about 85 percent of all the steel hot stamp dies for AC Sparkplug in Flint. We did all the speedometers for GM and Chrysler. That was maybe 80 percent of our business. We had a huge steel stamp department. Then those companies went to decals to stick on for 0–100 on your speedometer...so there goes that business. My life has seen a lot of drop-offs like that.

I used to deliver rubber stamps at a printing company up the street and I'd think, "I love ink, it smells great!" *(laughs)* One day, my accountant says, "That's for sale. Do you want it?" I didn't know much about printing, but it was one of the best decisions we made in evolving our company. And that's where Scott came in on the scene. He was going to be a biology teacher/forestry guru, and they were full up. I had a guy to run the printing company, but he told me he was retiring at the end of the month. So all of sudden, this guy who doesn't know anything about printing... I took Scott to lunch and asked him if he'd like to run a printing company.

**SP:** Not where I thought we were going! *(laughs)*

**WP:** And to this day, he and I do lunch every Friday. Life's issues—personal, family, business. It's just been a great thing. With the purchase of that printing company, what I didn't know was that their biggest customer, Michigan National Bank, was moving its headquarters to Farmington Hills 100 miles away. So here I am in this situation—hope you love the ink.

You know what? Wednesday became "Hump Day," "Wendell Day," and "Farmington Hills Day." I drove every Wednesday to Farmington Hills. And you know what happened? We not only kept the printing, but we picked up all the rubber stamp business for about 220 branches. We picked up all the vinyl for their doors and all of their quality boards. We were their sign company, up to and including their post and panel signs. We did not do their electrical signs.

David, out of the potential disaster, my accountant says, "What are you going to do? Just close shop, have a bankruptcy sale and be done with it?"

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Scott Parsons, president of Stamprite Supersine



No...we became dedicated to "Get with them, and own them," as some marketing guy would say. I called on one, two, three, four people, and I walked through that door, and I knew what each one needed. And yup, I'm going to be that guy to carry back problems and find solutions. It was one of the best things we ever did. We grew,

had to get more equipment, had to learn new processes and had to make a stamp that made our competitor say, "How did you make that thing?"

Then we got into labels. My accountant still says, "How can you go from rubber stamps to signs to labels?" Well, you know the commonality. We make the photopolymer printing plates—we do good ones. I needed to get into consumables. It's called survival. And we were making one to two million labels a month for a local bottling company, and they were bought out by an outfit in Chicago. And you say, "How can this happen? What will we do?"

**DH:** So what did you do?

**WP:** We sucked in a little bit! *(laughs)* We got a local bottling company that we're still doing labels for.

**SP:** We do labels for some folks in Pennsylvania and Ohio...and a lot in Michigan. We're in niches here and there. It works.

**WP:** It's like they say, "It's not how many times you get knocked down. It's how many times you get back up again." And with this Michigan economy, we make no bones about it. We've been



Outdoor signage produced by Stamprite Supersine



A donor wall, featuring a three-dimensional scroll, created for a Rabbinical school

struggling. But my opening statement is: “We are here.” I’m actually excited for the future.

My concern is I know some of the ups and downs Scott’s going to face. But David, he’s young blood. He handles our IT because that’s just a whole other world. We need software. We need hardware. I thought I just bought the computer system, but no, they’ve changed it or they don’t support it any more. I’m thinking, at one time, we had a Ludlow out there that we used forever. Then we moved into Linotype. I’m not afraid to try new things. The guy who left to retire said, “You’re going out of business because I didn’t have anybody to run the Linotype.” (*laughter*) I look at what the desktop publishing is doing today—it’s scary.

**SP:** Now, one of our main segments of the business is signage—wayfinding, ADA Braille.

**WP:** Right now, Dave Penkevich directs our outdoor sign program. Steve Field is our estimator who works almost exclusively with contractors. Schools have been a large focus for signage. Our purchase of The Supersine Company has given us a new area of expertise. Our die-raised aluminum signs are the

perfect solution for vandal-resistant signs. We’re also now making a thermoformed sign.

**SP:** Those are all done in-house. They meet ADA codes, and they’re as durable as you’ll ever get. You’ll never pick them off.

**WP:** So we have our label department, our rubber stamps, our signage fabrication, and of course, Supersine.

**SP:** One of our more successful and unique products is our donor recognition program. Steve Field was asked by a Rabbinical school to create a donor wall for major contributors. Our talented production staff actually made a three-dimensional scroll-like design. It was six feet long and wrapped around a curved wall.

**WP:** The rabbi couldn’t stop talking about this scroll. I actually turned the handles on my lathe at home. The rabbi was very pleased that he found a company to make a custom piece to recognize his donors.

We just try to do the right things for people. That’s why we’re still here. I believe we have some excellent people because they make all the difference.

**DH:** Great to hear your story. Thank you very much for your time! *Mlm*

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## Stamprite Supersine

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*Stamprite's label department*



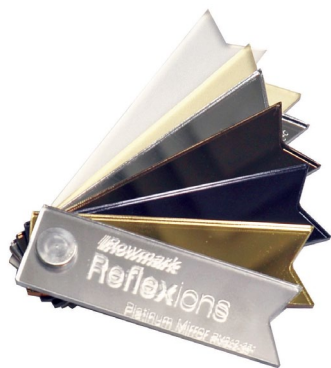
## Rowmark announces new Reflexions™ product line



Shining a new light on sign-making substrate trends, Rowmark announces the launch of Reflexions, a striking new line of fabrication-friendly mirrored acrylics with a stunning surface resembling glass and mirror products.

Offering enhanced durability and safer use as an alternative to glass or mirror, Rowmark's Reflexions is half the weight and more than eight times stronger... plus shatter, smudge (frosted option) and scratch-resistant.

Well-suited as a decorative signage/display component or substrate, Reflexions enhances a broad range of indoor applications, from signage, POP projects, custom gifts and craft jobs to memorial walls, exhibits, vector cut letters and more. It is easily front- or reverse-engraved with a CO<sub>2</sub> laser, rotary engraver or router and can be enhanced with back painting and back lighting effects.



Reflexions is available in a variety of lustrous metallic finishes, including four high-gloss reflective metallic (Silver Mirror, Bronze Mirror, Gold Mirror, Carbon Mirror), one non-glare metallic (Platinum Mirror) and two frosted matte metallics (Ice Silver Mirror, Ice Gold Mirror).

For more information about Rowmark's Reflexions, visit [rowmark.com](http://rowmark.com).

## JDS Industries, Inc. introduces Art Acrylics

JDS Industries, Inc. introduces a new designer line of acrylic awards. The Art Acrylics are reverse engravable acrylics with black engraving areas bordered by colorful designs that provide the awards with their names. The two designs, Water Color and Stained Glass, are each available in round and triangle with a black acrylic base that ships unattached, as well as a plaque version that comes with an adhesive easel for standing or hanging. The circles for each design come in 6-inch and 7-inch sizes; the triangles in 7 1/4-inch and 8 1/4-inch sizes; and the plaques in 7 inches x 9 inches, 8 inches x 10 inches and 9 inches x 12 inches. The new Art Acrylics are stocked in all of JDS's 14 nationwide warehouses that reach over 82 percent of the USA in one day and over 99 percent in two days via ground shipping!

To get samples or for more information, contact JDS Industries, Inc. at 800-843-8853; Fax: 605-339-1467; Email: [sales@jdsindustries.com](mailto:sales@jdsindustries.com); or visit the website at [www.jdsindustries.com](http://www.jdsindustries.com) today.



## LaserBits 2015 Catalog

The 2015 LaserBits catalog is filled with lots of new products and materials for laser engraving. Tips, settings and ideas are on every page, making the LaserBits catalog an excellent resource. LaserBits' expanded product line includes Acrylic Sheets, Metal Shape and Wood Sheets and so much more. Each product is laser-tested for top-quality results. Request a copy by visiting [www.laserbits.com](http://www.laserbits.com) or calling the toll free phone number 1-800-733-7705.

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## LaserBits offers new Solid Color Cast Acrylic Sheets

Create brilliant-looking projects with these richly colored Cast Acrylic Sheets. Cast Acrylic Sheets are ideal for signs, key chains and many more laser cutting projects. They are available in five rich colors which engrave a frosty white or can easily be color-filled. Each sheet is 12 inches x 24 inches x 1/8 inch and can be easily cut and engraved with a 30 watt or higher laser system.

Visit [www.laserbits.com](http://www.laserbits.com) for more information.

## Tom Kirchner has retired

After 30 years in the marking device industry, I have hung up the sample bag and will be picking up the golf bag, once winter is over! Effective Jan. 1, 2015, I have retired from my Regional Sales Manager position at Trodat USA.



I cherish the many friendships that I've developed in the industry and look forward to seeing many of you at future IMIA conventions; although not this year, as my wife and I have a trip scheduled that coincides with the 2015 convention in Indianapolis.

We may have the opportunity to talk with each other on the phone, as I'll continue doing some work helping out in the Customer Service department at Trodat during busy times.

Thanks for your friendship and kind support over the years!

Best regards,

Tom Kirchner



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# INDUSTRY INDICATOR

by David Hachmeister

## Just a little light in December

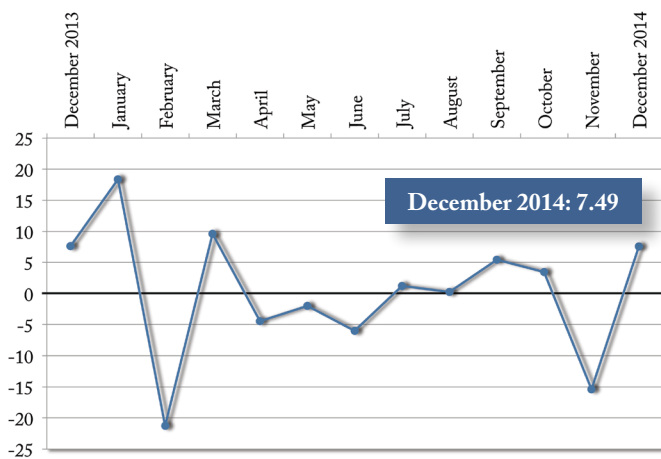
The only ray of sunshine in the December Industry Indicator is that stamps rose against November. They were up 7.49 percent. They declined 9.43 percent against the previous December. Other Products, however, were of larger concern,

falling 12.76 percent. For the year, stamps managed to rise in seven of the 12 months against the previous month's total. Other Products managed to break even, up six of 12 months.

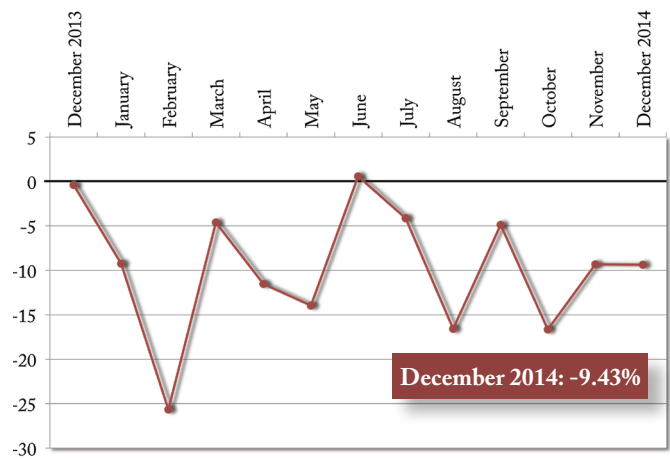
Let's work for better things in 2015! *M*

## Stamps only

Monthly Sales—Gain/Loss Percentage



Gain/Loss Sales Percentage compared to same month in previous year

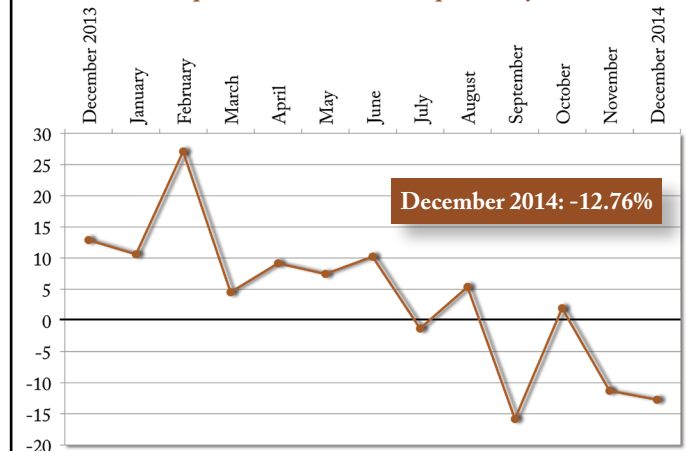


Percent of Annual Sales by Month (illustrating seasonality)



## Other products

Gain/Loss Sales Percentage compared to same month in previous year



Visit [www.markingdevices.com](http://www.markingdevices.com) today for the latest news and industry statistics!

# INDUSTRY IMPRESSIONS

by David Hachmeister

## Who was your favorite teacher?

We bet if you were asked this question, you might initially go with the sweet-hearted soul who gently guided you through first grade. We also bet that if you spent a little more time with some mature thinking, you might come up with a different answer. You might think of that teacher who demanded far more of you than you thought you were capable of doing. You grumbled and resisted, but in retrospect, you may reflect that it was the best for you and your preparation for life and learning.

Many of us have attended the school of hard knocks. As such, we have been forced to adapt and learn from the most demanding of environments and have been spurred on to better things. We know many of you endured some tough teaching, maybe by your own parents?

When we started at this magazine, the vast majority of shops were still using hot type. The sophisticates had a \$40,000 typesetter. Some even had disks to swap out with each change of font. With the swift pace of production innovations, the process of adapting to technological changes became an expensive and difficult lesson.

Then as now, we are not suggesting that you should enjoy these painful challenges. (Think of the paddling scene in “Animal House”—“Thank you sir, may I have another!”) But paddling can be instructive if for no other reason than that we don’t want to experience it again. From that, you also learn to endure.

The other side is that we also get some very wonderful and positive lessons. They occur when things do go very well, and frequently, we are not exactly sure why. What we do know is that they are more likely to come to us when we have graduated from the school of hard knocks.

When things really start to click in a business, there is no other feeling like it. You know that you have created something that others really want because they are willing to pay for it. This is quite heady stuff.

When all those lessons produce success, it is especially sweet because we know we have earned it. Unearned success is usually frittered away because there is little appreciation for how hard it really is to build and sustain an accomplished business. If you truly earned it, you appreciate it and all that it took to get there. Congratulations! Mlm



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