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CorelDRAW® Help
March 2015
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By Mike Neer, Publisher

Last weekend I went to my first symphony performance. Now, I know, at my age, that’s a little late to experience this full orchestra presentation. But it was a great experience! I enjoyed the conductor, Theodore Kuchar, who led each section of the orchestra. He would look at or point at the violins or the oboes or the cellos or the drums when it was time for them to come in. I was amazed that he could remember the whole Beethoven piece in such detail. I marveled at his skill. There was also a great piano soloist from Italy, who performed five Beethoven concerti in one weekend – a true tour de force.

The reason I bring this up is that it seems to me that graphic artists using CorelDRAW are really making a symphony with their artwork. Consider these points:

1) Graphic Artist as Conductor. Once you have a concept in mind (for the customer), you have to then bring in the tools from the CorelDRAW toolbox at just the right time to achieve the effect you want. You have to KNOW what each tool can do and how it can add to the illustration you are creating. Unlike the conductor, you do have some leeway in doing it over if it doesn’t turn out right. But the more skill you have, the quicker and more beautifully you can produce the finished piece.

2) Graphic Artist as Soloist. Sometimes the customer does not have a good idea of what he or she wants. They want you to totally design a concept for them. Essentially, they are trusting you to perform a great solo. Or they want a special type of art (a watercolor look, an extruded look, a special use of colors), and you have to master your tools with such finesse that you not only manifest their vision but make it sparkle with creative flair.

3) Graphic Tools as Musical Instruments. Your orchestra is made up all the tools in the CorelDRAW toolbox. Maybe your Text Tool is the bass that gives an underlying tone to your artwork. Then the lines you draw are the violins that stretch out the image in just the right way. And different size lines could be like the cello or the viola or a combination. Your Shape Tool will help you fine tune your art like working in different keys. Then for color, you use the Fill Tool like the brass section to punctuate your composition with deep hues of French horn, flute, or oboe. Finally, you add some final touches of shading, borders, contours, etc. as the deep startling percussion of drums to make the image standout.

So, next time you are working on a unique piece of art, think of yourself as a conductor of an orchestra, and use your tools to create a symphony of color, lines, shapes, and space that will get you a standing ovation. Take a bow!
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Calendar (Web Link)
Check out the upcoming training classes and trade shows of interest to CorelDRAW users.
Corner Roundness for a Rectangle

Rectangles can have just about any type of corner that you can think of. You can change the corner roundness of any rectangle that you have drawn as long as it hasn’t been converted to curves. Along with Corner Roundness, you can also have Scallop and Chamfer type corners as well.

The **Corner Roundness** options can be changed at any time. The roundness of these corners is based on percentages from 0 to 100. The Corner Roundness, Scallop, and Chamfer, can all be adjusted uniformly for all corners (which is the default setting), or you can adjust the roundness of each corner independently by turning off the *Round Corners Together* lock option.

With any rectangle selected from within your drawing, you can change the corner roundness of all or some of the corners by using one of the following options:

1) Select the corner style that you wish to use from the **Property Bar Corner Roundness** options. You then enter the desired percentage number manually, or use the up/down arrow buttons to adjust your corner size.

2) You can use the Shape Tool to set the corners manually by **CTRL + dragging** any corner control point away from its corner to change the roundness of one corner (corner options unlocked) or all corners equally (corner options locked).

3) Use the **Object Properties** docker by pressing **ALT + ENTER**. Then select the Rectangle tab to edit your drawing.
Adding and Removing Dockers in the Workspace

Series Review...
The CorelDRAW workspace is a customizable user interface. It consists of a drawing space, surrounded by tools and reference points to help you quickly create a layout.

In the last installment of Learning CorelDRAW, we showed how Dockers can be rearranged in CorelDRAW Graphics Suite X7.

This time, we will show how Dockers can be added to, or removed, from the workspace to suit your preferences.

Rearranging Dockers
Dockers have been a part of CorelDRAW for many versions. They provide a wide array of useful program controls that can help with a variety of layout tasks.

As you can see in picture 1, by default, dockers are opened and docked on the right side of the workspace. This is true for all versions of CorelDRAW and Corel PHOTO-PAINT.

That said, since the workspace in CorelDRAW is totally customizable, a docker may be relocated to any side of the screen by simply dragging it there. See picture 2. This
Closing a docker can be done in two ways.

Picture 3: Window-Dockers

Quickly customize a docker with the plus icon.

Picture 4: Transformations-Position

Click on the X to close the Docker

Picture 5: Closing a docker can be done in two ways.

Picture 6: Quickly customize a docker with the plus icon.
can be very helpful for working with more than one docker at a time. Picture 2 is where we ended our exploration of dockers last time.

Adding and Removing Dockers in the Workspace...
In CorelDRAW X7 and Corel PHOTO-PAINT X7 there are multiple ways in which you can add a docker to the workspace, or remove one from the workspace.

The Traditional Method...
The first method is by accessing the dockers via the menu. This method has been with CorelDRAW since the introduction of dockers many versions ago. It is the only method that you can use in CorelDRAW X6 and earlier versions.

To access the majority of the dockers, click on Window/Dockers. See picture 3. Notice in picture 3 that there is a checkmark next to the 3 dockers that are currently open.

To add a docker, all we need to do is click on its name. For example, if we wanted to add the Transformations/Position docker, we would click on Window/Dockers/Transformations/Position. That would add the Transformations docker to the workspace, opened to the Position tab. See picture 4.

Notice in picture 4, that there are 3 dockers in CorelDRAW X7 that have a fly-out menu. They are the Transformations docker, the Effects docker, and the Text docker.

The fly-out menu for the Transformations docker identifies tabs on the docker. In the case of the Effects and Text dockers, a fly-out menu identifies additional individual dockers that fall into those categories.

The traditional method of removing dockers from the workspace can be accomplished in one of two ways. You can click on the docker name in the menu; or, hover over the docker tab in the workspace, and click on the X which will appear in the name bar. See picture 5.

The New and Improved Method in CorelDRAW X7...
One of the many improvements in CorelDRAW Graphics Suite X7 is the ease with which the workspace can be modified. Many of the elements have a new quick customization feature.

There is a + icon at the bottom of the list of open dockers. Clicking on the + icon will call the Quick Customization menu for dockers. See picture 6. The Quick Customization menu allows you to add or remove dockers by simply clicking on the box next to the docker name.

Picture 7: Choose a new Workspace at the Welcome screen.
Not only will the quick customization menu add a docker to the workspace, it will add it to the group of dockers from which the menu was called. In other words, if the quick customization menu is called from the docker list docked to the right side of the screen, it will add the docker to the group docked on the right. If called from the left, it will add the docker to the group on the left.

No matter where the quick customization menu is called from, it can close a docker that is currently opened. This makes rearranging dockers a snap. If you find that you would prefer a docker, which is currently docked to the right-hand side of the screen, docked on the left, simply call the quick customization menu from the list on the left. Close the docker you wish to move, and then, reopen it. It will be moved to the list on the left.

All of the same workspace functionality is also available in Corel PHOTO-PAINT X7.

The Impact of Your Changes
As we mentioned before, be aware that the changes you make will only be effective in the workspace that you are presently working in. None of the other workspaces will be changed. However, by default, the workspace that is in use when you exit CorelDRAW, will be the default workspace selected when you restart the program.

If you wish to choose a different workspace when the program opens, you can select the workspace option in the Welcome Screen in X7. See picture 7. Notice in picture 7 that My Custom Workspace is highlighted.

In X7 and older versions you can also change the workspace by clicking on Tools/Options/Workspace. See picture 8. In that dialog screen, select the workspace you would like to use, and then click OK to make the workspace you selected active.

You can also create new workspaces in the Tools/Options/Workspace Dialog screen by clicking on New, shown in picture 8 as well.

Being able to customize your workspace means you can have as many workspace setups as you would like. It also means that each person using the computer can have a personalized workspace, designed by them, suited to their needs.

Conclusion
As you can see, the workspace is extremely flexible. You can rearrange it to suit your preferences. Rearranging the dockers is only part of what you can accomplish in customizing your workspace. Opening and closing dockers in version X7 is a snap.

For ACDRP Video Members: This article is available on Video. Click HERE to open and view.
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For over 44 years, Johnson Plastics has provided high quality products and service. We distribute and recommend products from industry leaders like Rowmark, JRS and IPI. Whether you are just starting your business, or have been engraving for years, we’re here to help you succeed. Why would you settle for less?
Last time we discussed how a computer stores photos and other bitmap images. We dissected a computer photo and looked at what happens when you increase or decrease the size of that photo.

**Review**

To review, in Computer Art Basics Part 1, we found out that a computer photo or bitmap image requires a great deal of storage to save, and a lot of memory to manipulate. We also learned that bitmaps are defined by color depth and resolution.

In Part 2, we explored how resolution is affected when we change an image’s size to fit whatever project we’re working on. We learned that bitmap images are constructed from a fixed number of pixels. If we scale a bitmap image up in size we decrease its resolution and increase the amount of physical area each pixel must cover. If we scale a bitmap image down in size we increase its resolution and decrease the physical area each bitmap must cover.

Therefore, how much a bitmap image can be changed in size will depend on its original resolution and whether we want to increase or decrease its overall size. As we decrease the size of a bitmap, we increase its resolution, so that’s generally ok. But, if we increase its size we’ll decrease its resolution and sharpness, which can be a problem.

We also learned that, through software, bitmap images can be "re-sampled" (increased or decreased in resolution); however, increasing resolution through re-sampling will generally reduce the sharpness of the image and the best programs can cost several thousands of dollars.
In short, what we’ve learned so far is that bitmap images are best for photos, or any image that has a lot of shading and tonal variations. However, they require a lot of computer storage and power for manipulation. In addition, bitmap images can usually be reduced in size or resolution without problems; but, will have an upper limit, for scaling up, beyond which they will no longer be suitable for printing, that is, unless we have fairly expensive raster image processing (RIP) software.

Now we’ll continue with our discussion of computer art with an analysis of a very simple vector drawing. We will also provide a comparison to the same simple drawing executed as a bitmap.

**Elementary Vector Art**
Vector art, as applied to most personalization processes, can be best described as a child’s connect-the-dot drawing, with lines connecting numbered points in 2-dimensional space. For the record, some vector art is 3-dimensional. Typically the applications for 3-D drawings are in computer-aided manufacturing which we won’t go into here.
As an example of vector art, if we have a 121-point grid that’s 11 points by 11 points, each point can be identified by its x and y coordinates (x,y). We’ll assign the lower left-hand point coordinate (0,0) and the upper right-hand point coordinate (10,10).

Now let’s say we want to draw a straight line between points (1,1) and (9,9), we can describe it as a vector (1, 1,1), (2, 9,9). The 1 and 2 in the coordinates are the order of the points. For an engraving or cutting machine that would mean, move to point (1,1) without engraving or cutting. Then lower the spindle, knife, or turn on the laser, then move (engrave/cut) to point (9,9), lift the spindle, knife, or turn off the laser, then move home without engraving (see picture 1).

**Bitmap Comparison**

As a comparison, let’s say we wanted to draw our line as a bitmap. Then our array becomes 100 pixels instead of 121 points. To draw our line, we’d have to describe every point in the array to the computer and whether that point, or pixel, was on or off (1 or 0). As a result, to draw the line as a bitmap we’d need 100 instructions rather than the 2 or 3 we’d need to draw it as a vector. Instructions for our bitmap line would include: x-coordinate, y-coordinate, and state (1-on or 0-off) for each pixel. So instructions would look something like…

1. Row 0 -- (0,0,0) - (pixel 0 off), (0,1,0) (0,2,0) – and so on through (0,10,0). A total of 10 instructions. All pixels off.
2. Row 1 – (1,0,0) (1,1,1) – (pixel 1 on), (1,2,0) – and so on through (1,10,0). Another 10 instructions. All pixels off, except 1.

The pattern above repeats for all pixels in the array -- a total of 100 instructions, with all but 8 pixels off. In addition to the storage requirements, the results, depending on resolution, would look less like a line and more like a series of squares (see picture 2).

Although there’s a little more overhead with vector drawings (for example, line color and weight), and with compression, bitmaps are somewhat more efficient, this very simple example can give you some appreciation of the efficiency of vector art in storage and computer memory requirements as compared with bitmaps. As we’ve said before, vector art is best for everything except photos.

**Conclusion**

As we’ve seen in our simple example, vector art is a very efficient way to store graphic images. The instruction set for a simple vector line consists of ordered coordinates. In our simple example that’s two instructions.

On the other hand the same line requires 100 instructions to execute as a bitmap line.

Next time we’ll dig a litter deeper, and explore how CorelDraw draws.
Heat-applied graphics are used extensively in the garment industry. Typically these graphics consist of appliqués that are assembled onto a garment. See the product pictures accompanying this article. Some appliqués are contour cut. Some are printed. And some are both printed and cut.

**Artwork for Heat Applied Graphics…**

Essentially the graphics/artwork required for this process consists of one or two elements. One element for cutting and one for printing. Either is optional.

Cutting may or may not be required. In almost all cases, heat-applied appliqués are contour cut. However, some pre-cut appliqués are available. In addition, some companies offer the services of custom cutting materials for the job. This eliminates the necessity for cutting in-house.

If printing and/or cutting is to be done on the outside, make sure to communicate with the supplier to determine artwork requirements.

**If Cutting Is Required…**

If cutting is required, then the artwork needs to be suitable for a vinyl cutter. In creating artwork that’s destined for a vinyl cutter, the most important criterion is that the artwork consist of clean, connected, vector lines. There should not be any hidden lines.

Here are a few CorelDRAW tools that can help.

1. **View wireframe…** This is the first step that should be taken when considering artwork for vinyl cutters. To access the wireframe view, click on View/Wireframe. Picture 1 shows a layout, which is suitable for printing that contains 3 simple objects. Picture 2 shows the same layout in wireframe view.
2. **The Shaping Docker**… This docker contains a number of tools that can help in preparing a layout for vinyl cutting. See picture 3. For example, if we select all the objects in the layout and apply Simplify, then all the hidden lines are removed. See picture 4. In picture 5 we’ve separated the individual items so that you can see the effect the Simplify operation has had on the objects in our layout.

3. **Boundary**… Another tool in the Shaping Docker is boundary. This tool can be especially helpful for print and cut operations. For example, if we wanted to print the rectangle, ellipse, and star shown in picture one, and then cut them out, and use the print as an appliqué, the boundary tool would provide a cut line around all 3 objects.

To create the boundary, simply select all of the objects, select Boundary in the drop-down list from the Shaping Docker, make sure that Leave original object is check-marked, and click apply. Picture 6 shows the result without the original objects. It’s a continuous border around all 3.

4. **Contour**… If you would like to add a little space between your printed objects and the boundary outline we created in item 3 above, you can use Contour to accomplish that. In picture 7 we have created a \( \frac{10}{\text{in}} \) boundary around all 3 objects. From here, it would be necessary to break the contour group apart and discard the inner line, so that it would not cut.
5. **Smart Fill...** There may be times when you import an Adobe Illustrator or AutoCAD file, and find that what appears to be connected lines are not. Picture 8 shows such an object. Notice in the Object Manager that there are 8 individual curves which make up this object.

We could select all of these objects and combine them. However, that would still not join them as one continuous line. To do that, we would need to use the shape tool and select adjoining nodes and join those. The task could be quite daunting for a large image.

Smart Fill to the rescue. The Smart Fill tool will create an object that will fill any open area to a boundary. For example, if we use Smart Fill to fill the object in picture 8 we will obtain a complete closed object. See picture 9. Smart Fill has created an object with a continuous outline that is suitable for vinyl cutting. At this point we would simply discard the 8 objects that were imported.

In addition, the project may consist of several pieces of contour cut appliqués that are cut from different materials -- perhaps appliqués of different colored materials or different textures. See some of the product pictures. If this is the case, then there needs to be a method of sending separate contour cut jobs to the cutter.

Separating elements of the artwork can be easily achieved in CorelDRAW by using pages and/or layers. Layers may be turned on and off for printing; and pages, may be printed individually.

**If Printing Is Required...**
In addition to cutting, printing may or may not be required for the job. If just printing is required, then the graphic may contain bitmap and/or vector art for printing.
Picture 10: Example of Glitter Flake heat-applied graphics.

Picture 11: Example of various heat-applied graphics products.

Picture 12: Example of Stahls’ CAD-CUT flock.

Picture 13: Example of Butterfly with heat-applied graphics and rhinestones.

Picture 14: Example of ThermoFilm with Columbia Car design.

Picture 15: Example of ThermoFilm with Dorados team letters and numbers.
If the appliqué is to be printed and cut; then, in addition to clean vector art for contour cutting, the graphic may also contain bitmap and/or vector art for printing.

If the artwork contains some vector art that is to be printed, and some that is to be cut, then the vector art designed for cutting should not print, and the part of the artwork designed for printing should not add any vector lines that will be interpreted as cut lines.

**Conclusion**

CorelDRAW has a number of tools which help in creating artwork for heat-applied graphics. We hope reviewing some of these tools has been helpful.

*John and Judy McDaniel* are owners of CorelDRAW® Help, Inc. They started in the personalization business in 1989 with CorelDRAW version 1.0. In their businesses they apply CorelDRAW! They’ve used it with—mechanical and laser engravers—to produce Awards, Gifts, and Industrial Products. They’ve also used it with all types of printers and vinyl cutters—for creating sublimation and other image transfers—for making sandblast masks—screen-printing screens—pad-printing plates—signs and banners—sales literature and flyers. In essence, they have over 20 years of experience in applying CorelDRAW! They have written hundreds of articles and tips; lectured across the country; and have been teaching CorelDRAW since 1991.
From time to time, we are pleased to provide educational tips provided by industry suppliers. Here are three tips offered by: Rowmark, a supplier of UV/LED printer and supplies through its new Vivid Image division; InkSoft, an online design studio; and Hotronix, a heat press manufacturer.

**TIP #1: Five Reasons to Consider UV/LED Over Solvent-Based Printer Systems**

1) **Absolutely no odor!** UV Ink is environmentally friendly, becomes 100% percent solid when cured, and does not release VOCs (volatile organic compounds).

2) **Color Consistency.** With UV inks, such as our GoVivid inks, the absence of ink reaction and absorption into the media ensures color consistency across different media types without requiring profiles specific for the media.

3) **Unmatched Media Compatibility and Adhesion.** UV ink droplets are cured by UV lights shortly after they land on the media surface, leaving almost no time for a reaction or absorption into the media. As a result, ink, such as our GoVivid ink, eliminates common ink and media compatibility issues and can be used with a wide variety of print media.

4) **High Print Quality.** UV/LED printers, such as our GoVivid DTS, feature vibrant, vivid colors. UV inks sit on top of the printed surface, rather than being absorbed, resulting in a sharper, crisper image.

5) **No drying in printhead.** UV ink, such as our GoVivid ink, never dries in the printhead. UV ink does not contain solvents that must evaporate during the curing process. Rather, it is a liquid that does not evaporate becoming a solid ink within 0.02 seconds upon exposure to UV light.

Submitted by Kristin Kachur of Rowmark of Findlay, OH, kkachur@rowmark.com. Visit www.govividusa.com MORE INFO

**TIP #2: Tips For Heat Printing Footwear**

Decorating a wide range of footwear with your heat press is fast and easy. The shoe platen, one of several specialty platens available from Hotronix® of Carmichaels, PA, makes it possible. Here are a few tips for maximizing your success.

• Check to make sure the shoe platen is compatible with your heat press.

• For best results, use a heat transfer material with a pressure-sensitive carrier. The tacky backing will keep the design in place during heat printing. Thermal tape also may be used to hold small designs in place.

• Use a silicone cover sheet to protect the surface of the shoe during heat application.

• When using a silicone cover sheet, add a few seconds to the dwell time for best results.

Submitted by Hotronix General Manager Ben Robinson. ben.robinson@hotronix.com Visit www.hotronix.com MORE INFO

**TIP #3: Boost Fundraising Results Using Reciprocity Strategy**

Nonprofits and other organizations have long used free gifts as a reward or incentive to encourage donations. The idea is that giving something establishes an obligation on the part of the recipient to give something in return. This reciprocity strategy translates easily to online fundraising.

A printing business can leverage it to boost fundraising results by using low-cost promotional items or easy-to-print products as a free gift, the value of which can be tied to the amount of the donation. The cost of such gifts is offset by increased sales of the primary fundraising product.

Educating customers about how logoed gifts can benefit their cause by raising awareness through repeated exposure is a great way to demonstrate your fundraising expertise. For examples of various ways to leverage reciprocity in your fundraising web stores, go to http://www.inksoft.com/increase-fundraising-results/.

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Riding The Digital Wave: Why You Should Be Considering DTG

Technology, marketing, and money are driving changes printers can’t afford to ignore.

An Interview with Mark Coudray
About Mark Coudray

Mark Coudray is an award-winning screen printer, educator, and consultant. Active in the decorated apparel industry for more than 40 years, he was a pioneer in the development of many of the artwork separation and printing techniques used today.

Coudray has shared his knowledge by writing for industry publications such as Impressions magazine, SGIA Journal, Screen Printing magazine, CorelDRAWHelp, and Printwear and speaking at the Imprinted Sportswear Shows and Specialty Graphics and Imaging Association (SGIA) Expos.

Coudray has been recognized by SGIA for leadership over the years with multiple awards including:

- Magnus Award (1982) for his work in promoting the screen printing industry,
- Swormstedt Sr. Memoral Award (1992, 1994) for the best published article or technical paper written for any aspect of the screen printing industry,
- Howard Parmele Award (2001), SGIA’s highest honor in recognition of his dedication, accomplishment, and ongoing commitment to improving the industry’s products, services, and image.
- Coudray served for 24 years on the SGIA’s board of directors and was chairman of the board in 2000.

As a consultant, Coudray has helped shops around the world update their equipment, techniques, procedures, and strategies to maximize efficiency, productivity, and profitability. In recent years, Coudray has focused his energy on learning about—and showing others—how to use the Internet, search engine optimization (SEO), and social media to their best advantage in promoting decorated apparel and other types of business.

He has been doing ecommerce since 1999 when he launched NetSeps, the textile screen printing industry’s first online color separation service. Through Net Seps, Coudray has been directly involved with hundreds of freelance artists and screen printers and has produced nearly 40,000 separation jobs online.

Coudray also has an online educational website called Halftone Secrets, which offers a comprehensive course on how to create top-quality halftones. His newest offering is CatalystPlan.com, offering accelerated business growth, digital marketing plans, and coaching/mentoring for T-shirt businesses.

One of Coudray’s most recent ventures was starting a Facebook group called Digital Marketing For Graphics, https://www.facebook.com/groups/DigitalMarketingForGraphics/. This group is intended to be a place where anyone who is part of the graphics industry (decorated apparel, signs, promotional products, trophy and awards, etc.) can learn about digital marketing for lead generation, target market development, determining viable niche markets, creation of automated marketing systems, follow-up systems, and testing and tracking. Its purpose is to help companies change the way they market their businesses so they’ll be assured a steady stream of qualified prospects and returning customers. The group is open to any graphics professional in any area, be it design, production, sales, management or ownership.

Digital direct-to-garment (DTG) printing became commercially viable about 10 years ago, primarily as an economical alternative to screen printing for full-color graphics and short runs. But as apparel decorating has come into the sights of major players in the digital marketplace—and their financial backers, DTG is poised to expand from a niche process into a mainstream printing process.

Changes in the industry landscape are occurring daily and, as with all things digital, the momentum is increasing exponentially. We’re rapidly approaching the point where the trajectory of these changes goes from being a curve to a vertical ascent. Decorators can no longer be complacent and go on keeping a peripheral eye on digital developments, including those relating to DTG.

If you started your business in the past six or so years, you’re familiar with direct-to-garment printing and aware of how slowly it’s evolved and been adopted. There have been a number of reasons for this. For one thing, while DTG offered the advantage of not requiring setups like screen printing, the images it produced looked, washed, and behaved differently than those that were being screen printed.

At the time DTG was introduced, the look and feel of screen printing was ingrained in the consumer mindset and a heavier plastisol print was what customers expected. In recent years, however, there has been a trend away from heavier-hand prints across all segments of the industry.

There has been increased interest in PVC-free, water-based and discharge inks, which produce a softer feel and the difference between the feel of screen printing and DTG has narrowed. Changing customer expectations regarding hand coupled with the minimal difference visually have boosted DTG’s acceptability.

Another factor in DTG’s changing status—and indication of its perceived potential—has been the entry of big-name manufacturers like Brother, DuPont, Epson and Hewlett-Packard, who had already moved into the graphic screen printing marketplace, into the apparel decorating arena. The decision of these firms to invest in

►
DTG tells us they see the possibility for real profit in the process and that they will be committing their resources toward achieving it.

But perhaps the most important development signaling the digital printing revolution in our industry has been Silicon Valley venture capital investments in several key DTG players over the past year. What this is saying is that after upending the music, video, photographic and graphic arts industries, the digital conquerors have recognized apparel as new ground. And not without reason!

A rising interest in DTG was inevitable in our increasingly digital world. And as the growing general preference for a soft hand changed the consumer mindset regarding how an image should feel, the on-demand, instant availability of products via the Internet has made customized one-offs and small runs another customer expectation. People are used to buying on the Internet from companies like Café Press, CustomInk, Teespring and Zazzle. Businesses like this are advertising on radio and TV and in magazines, and today’s consumers are aware that they can buy top-quality digital as well as screen printed apparel online. That barrier has been broken.

In the past year, we have seen major direct-to-consumer marketing campaigns for very short-run campaigns that are targeted to the passions of limited populations made possible by the super precise ultra-targeting that is available through Facebook. New digital marketing techniques are enabling decorators who have carved a niche, for example fun runs or spiritwear, to be able to syndicate and promote to a larger audience.

It’s also now possible for printers to set up web stores featuring online...
design capabilities. This invites customer input and provides for a new level of customization. It also promotes short runs and requires the ability to turn jobs quickly. Digital direct-to-garment printing puts decorators in the best position to respond to these needs and will likely be the tipping point that will drive the process to really take off.

What makes DTG such a good fit for the digital arena is that it can provide apparel decorators with the ability to incorporate variable data in short runs—a strong selling point in an area that is radically underserved. Software like the Wasatch RIP support variable data, allows different printing on each garment in the same run, without additional labor. That means, for example, you can print race bibs with the name and number of each runner.

DTG also is versatile in terms of size capabilities, easily addressing an 11-by-17 inch and sometimes larger formats, depending on the specific printer. It also can allow printing on darks without requiring a backing that results in a heavier hand. Even if you’re not selling online (yet), it’s time for printers to at least explore the possibilities of DTG. You have to find a way of addressing the need for short runs (fewer than 25 pieces). The ability to produce images with the same look and feel as your screen printing -- in small quantities and efficiently -- is becoming more and more important.

It can help boost sales by making it easy to do preproduction samples for marketing and to fill in sold-out sizes during or after an event without having to set up the press, as well as so much more.

There are two distinct categories of DTG printers—desktop and industrial. Desktop models are for small- to medium-volume production ranging from around 15 to 40 shirts an hour on light-colored garments. They start at around $14,000 and go up to the $50,000 range. Industrial units are designed for a high volume, mass production (the fastest models can do approximately 300 light shirts an hour) and range from roughly $100,000 up to $425,000.

The type you choose depends on the market(s) you’re targeting and your capital, similar to when you’re deciding between a manual and an automatic screen printing press. If you’re just getting started or adding it to your existing small to mid-size shop, a desktop model may make the most sense. If you’re dealing with exacting corporate or licensed work in high volume, the industrial machines may be worth the investment.

As far as peripherals, DTG prints can be cured with a dryer or a heat press. This will depend on your circumstances and applications.

As an alternative, you might consider outsourcing your DTG printing to test the waters and get used to the process. You can contract out your DTG work while you develop your market and make the investment to bring it in-house once it catches on.

What’s important is to open your eyes to the possibilities. Every printer should be examining his operation in light of the digital revolution. This calls for factoring the impact of digital technology into the way we view and do business overall. The changes occurring in the marketplace require reexamining what type of work you should be doing and how you should be selling it.

Custom printing isn’t going to go away, but it’s going to change. This means printers have to determine what percentage of their business’s pie is custom printing and how much money it can be expected to generate going forward. At the same time, they should explore the potential in short runs.
Everybody should be looking to develop a retail channel for what they do, and digital direct-to-garment printing makes this profitable. Rebecca Levine, R. Levine, sells a full line of her self-designed tops and accessories on her website all printed on a Mimaki digital printer. Photo courtesy of R. Levine, Solon, OH. Photo by Henry Bernstein, ThreeDrivewayMedia.com

While printing on dark shirts is slower than printing on lights, industrial digital direct-to-garment printers are fast enough to make dark shirt printing viable even at high volume. Photo of Elephant using Kornit printer.

Everybody should be looking to develop a retail channel for what they do. Consumers are expecting to pay $19.95 to 24.95 for a T-shirt and from $38 to $49 for a hoodie. The enormous difference between these margins and those for traditional custom screen printing can’t be ignored. It’s possible to literally double your gross sales on the same number of units.

An important and very accessible approach to this is via e-commerce. Selling online and through social media is a cost-effective way of doing this, provided you have the understanding and production capabilities to make it work. Although retail sales are one-offs, they are based on the size of your reach.

Multiplying a one-off by 300 at a retail margin changes the equation considerably. And using DTG technology, you can market a design “onsie-twosie,” and if it takes off, scale up the advertising and begin screen printing it.

With the outside venture capital coming into our industry, we can expect to see an onslaught of T-shirt campaigns on Facebook. It is important for printers to position themselves to benefit from this. If recent history is any indicator, the coalescing of...
digital marketing and garment printing technologies is creating an imprinted sportswear marketplace that is ripe for "disintermediation"—or going from the producer directly to the consumer and eliminating the intervening distribution stages.

Our industry is late coming to the party, giving us the benefit of hindsight. Take the music industry, where an explosion of indie producers and the availability of individual tunes by genre from sources like iTunes have disrupted established marketing and promotional protocols. An iTunes for T-shirts can't be far in the offing.

You can start off with a design, offer it to the market, deliver it to the market, and then if it takes off, you can scale the advertising up and take it to production in a regular screen print size.

Given the trends and technology in play, it behooves printers to consider changing their perspective. We're approaching a scenario where you'll need to decide whether you want to keep busy and earn pennies per print, or have more open time on the press and make a dollar or tens of dollars for fewer garments by incorporating alternative processes.

Now is the time to prepare for transitioning into this emerging brave new world of garment imaging. At the moment, what's going on is still pretty much a mystery. Decorators are setting up Web and Facebook pages, but don't have any idea how to make them pay off. They're buying tools, but not using them appropriately.

Go online and join a digital market for graphics conversation. Check out DTG and other short-run options and explore how they could fit into your business. Finally, consider how digital advances have impacted other industries so you'll be able to benefit from the new opportunities they create, rather than become a casualty of change.
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One of the most expensive costs a business incurs is hiring and training a new team member. And, if the company doesn’t get it right the first time, it can become more costly and a nightmare before the departure (one way or another) of the wrong-choice person(s).

Finding that right person isn’t always an easy task!

Most business owners, large and small, would agree that the quality of those they hire is important for business success. Most would also probably agree that finding that right person isn’t always an easy task. Some might say that trying to clearly define the job responsibilities, so the company can look for the right person, is one of the hardest tasks in the hiring process.

An industry friend’s company has been searching for the “right person” for some time now. They’ve made a couple wrong choices, and they’ve suffered through some “interesting” situations with their discharge process. All in all, they are now “gun shy” about moving forward and, yet, they are in great need of help. This small business does not have the luxury of hiring a “headhunter” to help them fill the position, and probably, with the kinds of diverse work this company does, and the kinds of work in this position, a headhunter might not know where to begin. So the company has to do their best to find the “all around” person they need that will help their company continue to grow and succeed. So, where should they have begun this process, and how should they start over? I asked a couple friends, both Human Resource Directors for large companies, how they would do a job search? Their suggestions were:

• Create a clear detailed list of duties and tasks that a new hire will perform. This will help in creating a job description when ready to advertise for the job opening.

• Create a list of interview questions to help you get to the “short list” of applicants.

• Write a compelling help wanted piece that can be placed in local papers, and on job search web sites from Craigslist to LinkedIn (now considered to be a top recruiting web site).

• Schedule time to do more than “scan” resumes and job applications. Due diligence requires you to look beyond the hype on the resume and the flowery words spoken in an interview. One must do the homework of checking references, and looking at other ways to get information. Just do it in a legal and above board manner.

• Look for and hire humble, hungry, and smart people who are ready and willing to roll up their sleeves and make things happen.

• Ask for samples of an applicant’s work, or provide them with a task to do during the interview process to see how they process tasks. It’s even OK to “role play” to see if the applicant would be a good fit.

• Share your job description with applicants so there are no surprises about expectations.

• Consider “test-driving” applicants through a “temp to hire” process with an agency.

There was a time when some might hire employees just because they answered an ad in a time of need. Right now, in Wonderful Wisconsin, as well as in many parts of the country, the unemployment rate is lower than in the past couple years which means the worker pool is slim. Especially in an industry like ours, where workers have to be able to spell, do the math, and read customer minds, we need to attract good employees who can do those things, while being creative, and, at the same time, totally dedicated to excellent customer care. Finding people with those qualities, who want to sign on for a long term career, is not always easy, especially nowadays when many applicant resumes show the person has jumped from job to job in short periods of time.

Not too long ago I attended a morning CEO Roundtable that featured an authority speaking on hiring. He started his presentation by advising us...
all to “always be in the hiring process.” He also stated that “firing an employee is worse than having a root canal.” He emphasized that it’s better to take time to hire the right fit than to “regret the hire and have to fire”. He also said that clearly defining the position and getting input from everyone who will be working with that person will help to clarify the kind of person you want to hire.

This expert suggested that current employees are the best source of referrals because they know the business, know what’s expected, and know the kind of person that can do the job. From our own experience, I can confirm that this theory works well. We’ve recently hired a friend of one of our team members…and that team member played an important part in “on-boarding” and initial training of our new hire.

Our expert told us that after screening applicants, many businesses are using different interview tactics, especially when hiring front-line team members. For example, to find out how candidates would handle hypothetical work situations, they might ask the candidate to describe a recent situation in which they had to deal with a very upset customer, or to describe a project he or she had planned in the past.

Some industry friends have designed their own “tests” for candidates that include ways to find out if a candidate is a self-starter, will take “ownership” of their job, can figure fractions, make change without a computer cash register to tell them the answer, use a dictionary when needed to correct a customer’s misspelling, or deal with deadline pressure. All the characteristics we need in our workers.

Another issue we have to consider nowadays is finding and implementing ways to keep the good workers we have trained and nurtured. Particularly because we’re in the recognition and appreciation business, we should be showing respect and thanks to those who make our business hum every day.

Fridays are sometimes deadline-centric at our store, so we treat the team to lunch. We use this time to come together and share what’s going with the work being done, and then everyone gets to chat about what’s important in their lives at the moment…and each individual gets some time to themselves afterwards. Everyone looks forward to Friday and what is comically referred to as “Group Therapy”.

Employees are the heart of the business. When we spend the resources (time and money) to seek, hire, and train new staff members, we don’t want all that to be in vain if the new hire can get a better offer someplace else. Employees leave a company for many reasons. Surveys have documented that workers who are not shown proper appreciation are more apt to seek “greener pastures” than for any other reason, including compensation. Then, again, some workers might say that being offered benefits from health insurance to a privileged parking spot would make them think twice about walking out the door.

Donna Gray is the president of Total Awards, Promotions, & Gift (aka AwardsMall.com) in Madison, Wis. She and her husband Dave have run their full service awards and personalization business since 1977. She has presented seminars nationwide, won awards as Business Woman of the Year, Retail Marketer of the Year, and Sam Walton Business Leadership Award. She is also the author of two books on family business, It’s All Relative! Surviving & Thriving in A Family Business (2007), and Never Quit: The Ups & Downs of Running a Family Business (2004). She has earned professional credentials as a Certified Recognition Master. She can be reached by email at donna.gray@AwardsMall.com.
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**John and Judy McDaniel** are owners of CorelDRAW® Help, Inc. They started in the personalization business in 1989 with CorelDRAW version 1.0. In their businesses they apply CorelDRAW! They’ve used it with—mechanical and laser engravers—to produce Awards, Gifts, and Industrial Products. They’ve also used it with all types of printers and vinyl cutters—for creating sublimation and other image transfers—for making sandblast masks—screen-printing screens—pad-printing plates—signs and banners—sales literature and flyers. In essence, they have over 20 years of experience in applying CorelDRAW! They have written hundreds of articles and tips; lectured across the country; and have been teaching CorelDRAW since 1991. For information on training and more, call 541-967-4271, or write to mail@CorelDRAWhelp.com.

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March Madness Predictions
Let there be no doubt…….”I LOVE MARCH MADNESS”! I get to see the best college basketball teams go head-to-head, toe-to-toe, bucket-to-bucket, in pursuit of the title “Best Basketball Team in America for 2015.” In pursuit of the John Wooden Trophy! YAHOO!!!!

Here are the teams I pick for the “FINAL FOUR”. EAST—LOUISVILLE; SOUTH—DUKE; MIDWEST—WEST VIRGINIA; WEST—WISCONSIN (I still haven’t figured out how Wisconsin is in the West). My pick to win it all is WISCONSIN.

ERIC PRICEMAN (Victory) has predicted KENTUCKY, VIRGINIA, IOWA STATE AND WISCONSIN. With WISCONSIN walking away with the John Wooden Trophy!

RON JONES (Sahuaro Trophy, Tucson, AZ) picks ARIZONA (of course), KENTUCKY, DUKE and LOUISVILLE. Ron is picking ARIZONA to win the whole thing.

While I was talking with Ron, he told me he will have to watch the finals on television, because Ron and JoAnne will be on a Caribbean cruise down to Cozumel, Mexico, and to Honduras before returning to Houston, and flying back to Tucson. Travel safe, Ron.

Let’s see…Otis and Eric pick Wisconsin, Ron picks Arizona…hmmm, what happened to Kentucky? Good luck to all the teams, and congratulations for making it to the Final Four….whoever you are.

Sports Quiz
Meanwhile, in the latest Crown Trophy email newsletter, Crown included a 2-question quiz.

Question #1: Who was the first gymnast to be awarded a perfect 10 in the Olympic Games?

Answer: Nadia Comaneci, 1976

Question #2: Which current NBA player holds the highest scoring average in a single season?

Answer: Kobe Bryant-35.4 in the 2005-06 season

That’s all for now! Remember to save some time for yourself and your family, and when you travel, please travel safe.