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Head online to awardspersonalization.org for all the latest APA content—everything from new webinars and membership benefits to our Member2Member Forum and an article library for past Insights issues. The forum community in particular has a host of opportunities to connect with, help and learn from fellow members.

DIVE IN

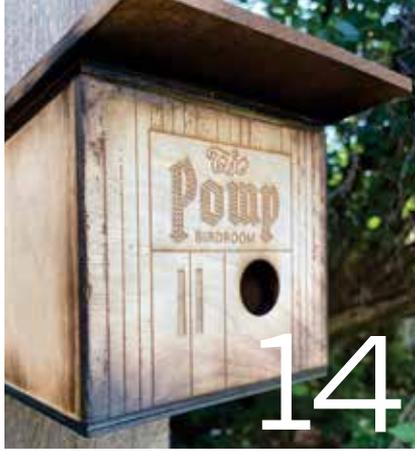




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The Power of Volunteering

Tony Robbins, a prolific motivational speaker, doesn't mince words when it comes to volunteering. According to an article on his website, Robbins says: "Giving back is paramount to finding meaning in your life. Why? Because the secret to living is giving. No matter how busy or cash-strapped you might be, you have something unique to offer others."

I've always wanted to volunteer more than I do, especially since I've found so many benefits of volunteering, including:

- I meet a lot of people I would not normally get to know on my own.
- I get great satisfaction from helping an organization that greatly benefits me and my business.
- I find that when I meet other people, I learn more from them than I could ever possibly teach them.

In addition to bonding with others, Robbins says that volunteering helps you learn new skills, find a sense of fulfillment and reach your goals. He writes: "If you wait for the perfect moment to grasp the importance of volunteering, it might never come. But if you choose to act today and start supporting a cause that's important to you, you'll start grasping the depth of giving back. Every moment that you're contributing to the greater good will lead to a life full of more joy and fulfillment. Instead of finding excuses, find your purpose. Find the cause that speaks to you, and start giving back today."

APA relies on a lot of volunteers throughout the year—from the board of directors to committees that run the Education, Membership, Communications, Trade Show and Awards programs. During the annual International Personalization & Awards Expo, set for Feb. 7-10, 2023 in Las Vegas, we need even more volunteers. That includes people to help support the auction and education advocates.

If you can spare it, consider donating your time and skills to the APA for an hour or two at the Expo or a couple hours a month throughout the year on a committee. Reach out to me or any board member if you have any questions. (Our contact info is on page 4.)

Whether it's a matter of learning something new, meeting new people or just having fun, I guarantee your volunteering time will be rewarding! 🇺🇸



John Stangle, CRM,
Creative Awards & Screen
Printing; president, Awards and
Personalization Association



The 2022
volunteer board
of directors got
sworn in at this
year's Expo.

John A. Stangle



INTERNATIONAL
PERSONALIZATION & AWARDS

EXPO

February 7-10, 2023 | Paris Las Vegas
AwardsPersonalization.org/Expo23



AWARDS and
PERSONALIZATION
ASSOCIATION

Registration Opening Soon

The Booker Prize

One of the preeminent literary awards, the Booker Prize seeks to award the best fiction written in English and published in the United Kingdom and Ireland. First awarded in 1969, the inspiration of the Booker Prize was to rival the Prix Goncourt, France's prestigious literary award, and to stimulate the reading and discussion of contemporary fiction. Today, authors who win the award, as well as writers who are long- and short-listed for the prize, receive a noticeable publicity bump. In 2020, for instance, Douglas Stuart saw a 1,900% increase in sales the week after winning the Booker Prize for his book, *Shuggie Bain*. This year's winner, who will receive a £50,000 prize, will be announced Oct. 17.

The award itself has taken many shapes. Jan Pieńkowski, an illustrator and writer of children's books, designed the original trophy. At 24 1/2 inches tall, the fiberglass award had an aluminum finish and featured a woman in a draped top and skirt holding a bowl over her head. In the following years, the award shifted to a 10-inch replica before becoming a solid acrylic block in the shape of a book, with a color-matching scheme to coincide with each year's theme. In 2022, the prize switched to a model resembling the original award design.

1976

First year the BBC televised the prize

20

Age of Leila Mottley, the youngest author to ever be long-listed for the award

4

Number of authors to have won the award multiple times, including J.M. Coetzee, Peter Carey, Hilary Mantel and Margaret Atwood



The Booker Prizes

ARIEF Scholarships

The Awards and Recognition Industry Educational Foundation (ARIEF) encourages all eligible students to apply for one of 10 available scholarships offered annually. These scholarships provide financial assistance to students pursuing higher education in any field.

A scholarship committee selects the recipients by conducting blind reviews of candidate applications, letters of recommendation and essays. The scholarships are open to all Awards and Personalization Association member



company employees, their children or their grandchildren. The deadline to apply is Friday, Dec. 16. Recipients will be announced at the 2023 International Personalization & Awards Expo at the Paris Las Vegas hotel, Feb. 7-10.

// APPLY TODAY //

For more information and the application, contact our headquarters at 847-375-4800 or visit our website, awardspersonalization.org.



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From left: Chris Beach, Lauren Stoll, Shana Beach and Robert Lynch

Chasing Support

Sometimes the best marketing opportunities are free. Just ask Chase Street Accessories & Engraving, which won *Baltimore Sun's* Best Readers' Choice contest for the gifts category for the second year in a row.

Winning was no accident, says Shana Beach, owner and project lead, Chase Street A&E. "If this is a route your business wants to try, be sure to read the contest rules closely," she says. For the *Baltimore Sun's* competition, people were allowed to cast one vote per day. So Chase Street A&E sent messages to its customers requesting votes, including sending a calendar invite to customers that generated a reminder each day with a link to the voting page. "Many businesses may not have known to emphasize daily voting, which made a huge difference over the two-week voting period," Beach says.

Of course, it takes loyal customers to follow through on submitting so many votes—and to be interested in

supporting the business in the first place. "While no business can win a 'best of' competition with an inferior reputation, there are things that well-regarded businesses can do to get a leg up," Beach says.

Chase Street A&E also requested assistance from the Baltimore City Chamber of Commerce, who published the voting link in its weekly newsletter. Frequent social media posts and requests for support in neighborhood forums also helped increase the number of ballots cast in Chase Street A&E's favor.

"We were honored just to be in the same category as some of the other candidates, who also have reputations of excellent customer service and prolific community involvement," Beach says. "While Chase Street Accessories & Engraving is proud of what 'Baltimore's Best' means—and believes its customers really do think it's the best—a little bit of campaigning helped lock in the win."



JDS' First-ever Sales Rep Retires

After 24 years of dedicated service to JDS and his customers, Tom Sletten retired July 1. Sletten, who has been a part of the awards and personalization industry for over 40 years, took on the role of the first JDS sales rep in 1983. He worked in that capacity for eight years until he opened his own retail awards shop. In 2006, Sletten returned to JDS as a sales rep and worked different territories, his most recent being the Southwest. We congratulate Tom and wish him all the best in his retirement.

INTERNATIONAL PERSONALIZATION & AWARDS EXPO

February 7–10, 2023 | Paris Las Vegas



The International Personalization & Awards Expo is ready to welcome retailers and exhibitors back together at the Paris Las Vegas Feb. 7–10, 2023. The Expo, the largest tradeshow for personalization and awards professionals, features over 30 education sessions and is a one-stop shop to browse the latest laser engravers, rotary lasers, UV printers, sublimation printers, sandcarving equipment, blanks, services and much more. Plus, the tradeshow features unbeatable deals available only during the Expo.

Scenes from the 2022 Expo



There are also plenty of opportunities for attendees to catch up with friends and make connections during the Party on the Show Floor After-Hours event, Awards Celebration and APA Member Breakfast.

Mike Westbrook, owner of Mile High Laser Engraving, says: “APA’s trade show is important for staying on top of what’s new. It helps to talk about challenges I’m dealing with, to talk with a vendor that might be able to help my account. Even if you walked away with just one nugget, it was worth it. I always come back from the Expo and think, ‘OK, what changes do I need to make? What new things do we want to be looking at?’”

The Expo will serve as a vital event for attendees to discover more efficient and effective ways to perform their work. For instance, the 2022 event introduced new hands-on training sessions in CorelDRAW, colorfill and sandblasting that allowed participants to practice their skills while receiving close guidance from expert instructors.

In 2023, attendees can customize their learning experiences by engaging in these intensive courses, joining in education sessions relevant to their business and listening to Learning Lounge presentations that offer quick tips and tricks—right on the show floor.

Karl Scheife, owner of Competitor Awards and Engraving, Inc., says that the Expo helps retailers find personalized solutions from verified suppliers. “For both products and equipment, there’s no place else you can see it all,” Scheife says. “The show gives you a chance to see how things work. It’s invaluable. I mean, you’re not going to get a rep to drive out to your location, set up a UV printer and let you demo it for a day. But the Expo provides that exact opportunity.”

Expo registration opens in mid-October.

The Reviews Are In

What do attendees like about the Expo? Here’s what attendees said about 2022’s show.



It was a great first-time experience. I hope to attend next year. I made a lot of great contacts. It was a great and worthwhile experience.”

Show Time

Across all industries, attendees experience a lot of benefits when going to trade-shows, especially in finding new products and services. It's no surprise then that personalization and awards professionals have a lot to look forward to for APA's annual Expo in February.

#1

Reason for attending trade shows is to find new products and services

56%

of tradeshow attendees travel more than 400 miles to attend

92% of tradeshow participants go to a tradeshow to find new products and services

\$17.4 billion

Value of the tradeshow market in 2022

TRADE SECRETS

8.3 hours

Average time that attendees spend engaging with exhibitions at trade shows

77%

of executive decision-makers found at least one new supplier at the last show they attended

7 out of 10

Tradeshow attendees say the show influenced a buying decision

Sources: IBISWorld, Center for Exhibition Industry Research, APA

30+

Number of training opportunities available in 2023

98%

Proportion of Expo retailers who were decision-makers or influencers for purchasing choices in 2022

39%

Proportion of 2022 Expo retailers who were first-time attendees

APA'S EXPO



I enjoyed the educational sessions, and some influenced my purchase decisions. I enjoyed being able to have hands-on product [experiences] and do a few demos."



The opportunity to get to know suppliers and attendees on a personal level was limitless." 



// WANT TO HEAR MORE ABOUT MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES FROM THE EXPO? //

Head to bit.ly/apatestimonials to see testimonials from the 2022 tradeshow!





Jingle Sales

Tons of tips to help you maximize sales for the upcoming holiday season.

Can it really be the fourth quarter already? It seems like yesterday the APA Expo was in Las Vegas, and we were preparing for the busy season, doesn't it? But before you can blink, the holidays will be here. Ah, the holidays—a time for beloved family traditions. A time for spreading good cheer. A time for gifts—both big and small. And, like it or not, a time for retailers to end the fiscal year on a positive note.

The fourth quarter is crucial in the world of retail. “Black Friday” was originally named because it was the day traditional retailers’ bottom lines went from red ink to black ink. Luckily, that is not the case for awards and personalization retailers, but it can be a successful time of the year. So, will you be prepared to increase sales and have a healthy fourth quarter? You already know the keys to success in your business, but let’s take a few minutes to brush up on a few key ingredients for filling the last three months of 2022 with cheery holiday sales.

DECK THE HALLS

If your store doesn't scream holidays, consumers may not recognize that your store is a great place to purchase unique, personalized gifts. Like it or not, a festive

showroom lends itself to putting people in the shopping mood. How do you take your shop from a great awards store to a destination gift store?

1. Start with the basics, like a holiday wreath and festive lights. The more your showroom can look like the holidays, the easier it will be for consumers to see you as a gift resource. Use greenery, poinsettias and lots of lights. Put a small tree on your checkout counter, decorated with small engravable gifts. Pre-wrap gifts with monochromatic paper and ribbons. Not only will you create holiday spirit for your customers, but your staff will also enjoy the atmosphere.
2. Set up a display of gift suggestions at your store's entrance. Spread displays throughout the store, and use signage to identify your gift suggestions. “Gifts for Children,” “Gifts for Teachers,” “Gifts for the Office”—you get the idea. Turn your point-of-sale display into easy gift-giving ideas. You might be surprised how many customers will buy on impulse, especially if the price point is under \$20.
3. Set the mood with holiday music in your showroom. A pleasant, stress-free shopping experience will slow customers down and make them want to buy more.

4. Create an awards display that gives your customers a reason to purchase during the season. Consider showcasing a plaque engraved with a holiday message or a set of tree-shaped acrylic awards that will give customers new ideas.
5. With so much happening inside your store, it can be easy to forget the exterior of your building. If passing customers do not notice your storefront, they may not venture in. Outdoor signage lets consumers know that you sell personalized gifts.

MERRY MERCHANDISE

Many awards customers may recognize for the first time that your store has more than awards to offer. For this to happen, you will need to showcase your gift ideas.

1. Most of us have gift inventory year-round. If you wish, you can increase your selection during the fourth quarter, but you may find you already have lots to offer. What do I have, you ask? Glassware, picture frames, luggage tags, desk accessories, BBQ sets, wine boxes, letter openers, card cases, bookmarks, silver jewelry, clocks, money clips, jewelry boxes, cutting boards—just to name a few.
2. Group your gift items by possible recipients. “Gifts for the Boss” might include coffee mugs, small clocks, travel mugs, desk blocks or pen sets, which could help your customers with new ideas.
3. What can you offer customers other than merchandise? This is the time of year that shoppers will reward you for making their day easier. Offer gifts bags, delivery or layaway. You may choose to offer services for free or for an additional charge.

THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Most store owners are known for their generosity in the marketplace all year. Retailers sponsor little league teams, make product donations to nonprofits, volunteer time in community organizations and help make their community better. So, how is giving back any different during the fourth quarter?

1. It’s a time of the year when being involved in a charity can bring added exposure to your business. Think about it: Don’t you want to do business with companies that are community-oriented?
2. Many local and national groups have promotions in the fourth quarter. Check out what’s happening in your area and decide how your business can help. Most communities have a Toys for Tots program, winter coat drives, food bank collections and more.
3. Many community events require collection sites, and your store can easily serve as one. Your business benefits

when noncustomers come in to make a drop-off. The charity benefits from every item you collect—a win-win.

SHINING BRIGHT

Whether you are thinking about having a holiday open house or just looking to let consumers know you exist, you have to market your business in some way every day.

1. Marketing can be a big promotion or a small one. Update your social media accounts to feature holiday merchandise. Contact online customers and friends, and show featured gift items. Revise your website to feature your holiday products.
2. A contest promotion is a good way to entice customers to your store.
3. Take a booth at a local holiday market and use the event to show off your holiday and personalized gift selections.
4. Host an open house to showcase your store and merchandise.
5. Whatever you do, get yourself noticed. If you simply let your clientele know that you serve light refreshments on Fridays, for instance, they can then do their shopping on their lunch hour.

BAH HUMBUG

OK, so you aren’t convinced that holiday gift merchandise is the way to go for your business. You can still add dollars to your bottom line in the fourth quarter.

1. The last three months of the year are the perfect time to reach out to the corporate community to promote new recognition programs for 2023.
2. Many schools will have fall/winter sports banquets. When was the last time you focused your marketing efforts on schools in the fourth quarter?
3. Many social and professional groups finish the calendar year with an awards banquet. Are you getting your share of this business?
4. Contact every little league football team and provide them with product information, as well as information about your store.
5. Contact all newly elected officials to determine how you could provide awards for them.

No matter how beautiful your showroom, no matter how great your product selection and no matter how brilliant your marketing efforts—the bottom line to success in the fourth quarter may just be providing exceptional customer service to consumers that will have a very hard time finding your wonderful service anywhere else this time of year! 🎁



Fran Carville, CRM, is an Awards and Personalization Association past president, educational speaker, 2008 Speaker of the Year, a member of the Hall of Fame and winner of an Award of Excellence from the APEX Awards for Publication Excellence. Fran and her husband, Tom Carville, CRM, own Carco Awards in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

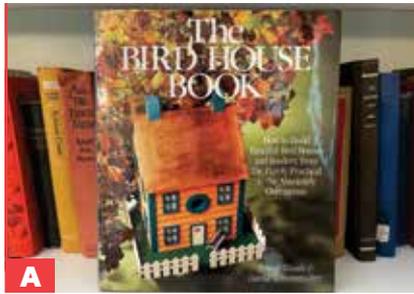
For the Birds

Combining two separate interests led to creating a souvenir birdhouse in the style of a beloved music venue.



I love it when two seemingly unrelated subjects suddenly converge into a whole new idea. Especially when that new idea becomes a product I can sell.

Before I begin, I need to share a bit of backstory.



A

In Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the small city I have called home for more than three decades, one can find good live music at just about every

restaurant, bar and coffee house. But in the late '80s and '90s, venues with live music were rare. And if you wanted to hear local musicians, there was only one place to go—the Pomp Room.

The carpets were sticky, the plumbing was in disrepair, and the cigarette smoke was so thick it was difficult to see the bands. And people loved it.

Those folks who dared to venture into the sketchy part of town to see their favorite bands play at the Pomp Room left the venue with fond memories. Those that did not visit now wish they had. The Pomp Room hosted its final show in 1998. The building was demolished in 2000 to make room for a parking ramp. It's a story that sadly resembles Joni Mitchell's song, "Paved Paradise."

I was among the many who ventured, and I often reflect with friends about our shared experiences. It's where I listened to blues artists like Matt "Guitar" Murphy, Walter Trout and The Dirty Dozen Brass Band. Good times.

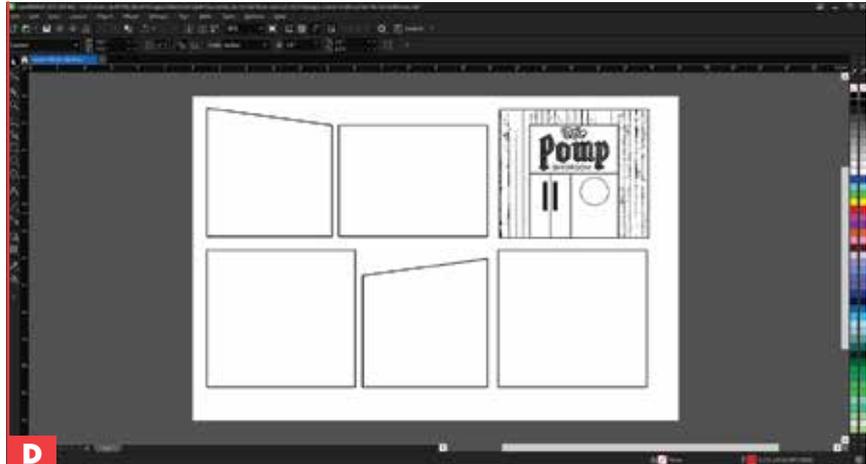
Recently, a group of nostalgic and talented folks created a documentary about this regional and legendary music venue. It will premiere soon, and Sioux Falls is buzzing with excitement.

Separately, my wife and I have begun attracting the local bird population to our backyard by hanging bird feeders around the patio. My mother-in-law (an avid bird watcher) took notice of our ornithological efforts and gave us a book about unique birdhouse constructions (Figure A). Some of the book's examples include birdhouses that resemble log cabins, Dutch windmills, rockets, cuckoo clocks and a Frank Lloyd Wright ranch house. It's a hoot.

So my instinct was to mashup these disparate elements into a product that I can market—The Pomp Birdroom (Figure B).



B



THE BUILD

I started with a search for venue photos online. (I knew I had a photo of me in front of the Pomp Room from the mid-1990s but finding this artifact would be another story.) Luckily, I found an image online and used CorelDRAW to recreate the look of the entrance of the building (Figure C). Using a reference guide from the bird book, I calculated the size of the birdhouse and the size of the opening to attract a smaller variety of bird, like a finch or chickadee. Then, using CorelDRAW again, I made the necessary vector lines for cutting out the walls, floor and top (Figure D). The material used is birch plywood and can be sourced at the nearest home improvement center or online, if necessary. I had some leftover cedar shingles that worked handily as a roof for the birdhouse, ensuring that the birds would keep dry while also protecting the structure from wind, rain and sun.

After vector-cutting the parts of the birdhouse from the birch plywood, I used a few wood tools, wood scraps (as inside support), wood glue, screws and nails to create the overall structure (Figure E). Tools and materials are shown in Figure F.

The last step was no less important than the idea itself or the construction: marketing the birdhouse. I uploaded the image onto social media to create some interest with my followers and friends, then pitched the product to my existing clients that own local gift shops.

Creating unique gifts like the local souvenir birdhouse feeds my creative bucket. I also understand the demographic for this product: a Sioux Falls resident of a certain age that may no longer go to as many concerts but, like



my wife and me, spends more time watching birds in their backyard, reminiscing about their memorable experiences.

Every city, town and village has a history and a story to tell. That history is almost always linked to personal experiences—experiences that customers can connect with through a nostalgic souvenir. Whether it's a t-shirt, coffee cup, hat or a birdhouse, our industry is designed to fill that need. 📌

//LEARN MORE//

Request the files used to create this structure via email at shon@sublimationconsultant.com.



Shon Roti is the owner of 9th Street Designs, a sublimation and graphic design consulting and promotional products business. A graphic designer, Shon has spent more than two decades working as a production artist and instructor in the awards and promotional products industry. In 2014, the Awards and Personalization Association named him

Speaker of the Year. Contact him at shon@sublimationconsultant.com.

Outside the

Three custom engraved water bottles are lined up on a beach. The bottle on the left is black with a silver base and is decorated with colorful floral patterns in pink, blue, green, and purple. The middle bottle is silver with a black cap and features a red bullseye design, a black triangle, and a red rectangle. The bottle on the right is white with a silver base and has colorful floral patterns. The background shows a clear blue sky and the ocean.

Getting creative—whether in the products you engrave or the way you source materials—can help pull in extra money.

By Caroline Heller

Box



Creative water bottle designs from Recognition Plus

Sure, personalized tumblers make great gifts for teachers, parents or wedding parties across the country. But retailers are getting creative with what they engrave and personalize, including everything from whiskey and perfume bottles to the edges of coins, bomb shells and even cow patties.

Pamela Deats Connaly, owner, Custom Built Awards, believes creativity is the answer to creating a robust company after COVID-19. “We’ve found through the pandemic that we’ve had to change stuff,” Deats Connaly says. “A trophy isn’t a trophy anymore. It’s whatever you make it to be. It no longer has a figure, a base and a plate. It may be a banner; it may be a piece of acrylic; it may be a piece of wood cut out in a shape with printing on it.”

Custom Built Awards is no stranger to more—let’s say—unique projects, including the aforementioned cow patty and a jockstrap and bra. “A lady brought me a jock strap and a bra and said they needed the most uplifting and supportive award,” she says. “I had to think out of the box and put something together.” Ultimately, she says, they created an award that exceeded the customer’s expectations. As for the patty, which was wrapped in plastic and sealed, Deats Connaly says: “We were able to make a really cool trophy out of it.”

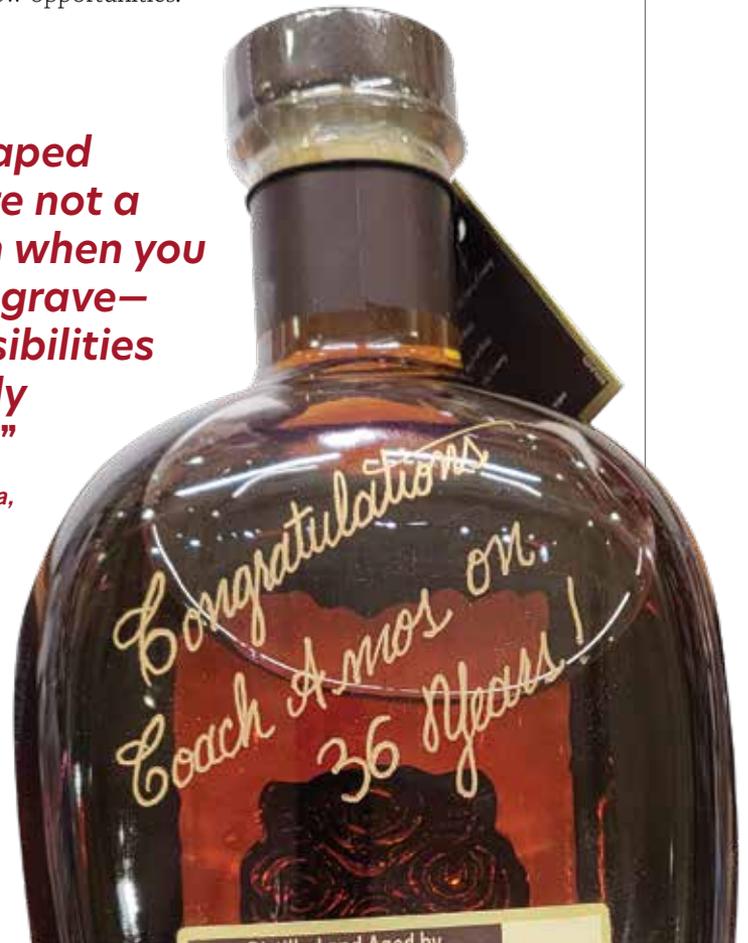
When customers aren’t bringing in their own unique objects like underwear to engrave, Deats Connaly tries to proactively look for new items to engrave and personalize. “When you’re watching TV at night, you see trophies in the background,” she says. “I’m always looking for new opportunities.”



Odd-shaped items are not a problem when you hand engrave—the possibilities are really endless.”

*Desiree Colonna,
CEO, Inkwel
Designers*

*Inkwel
Designers’
engraved
liquor bottle*



Such creativity doesn't just extend to products—businesses across the country are getting inventive to overcome supply chain issues, as well. Overall, innovation is helping boost the bottom line. Custom Built Awards, for instance, was recently able to turn a profit from an idea that Deats Connaly saw on Facebook. “It was a piece we should have gotten less than three digits for, and I was able to get several hundred dollars for it,” Deats Connaly says.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Desiree Colonna, CEO of Inkwelldesigners, is always hunting for new opportunities. Five years ago, Colonna

turned a calligraphy hobby into a successful business of engraving distinct objects. “I actually had a client who said, ‘You ought to be engraving wine and liquor bottles,’” Colonna says. “There’s a big need for that. I learned how to do that, and ever since, I’ve been traveling all over the world doing engraving.” Engraved liquor, wine and perfume bottles are now her most popular items, and Colonna has worked with companies including Marriott, Visa, Christian Dior, Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale’s. Hermès has even flown her to New York several times to engrave their products.

How does one hand engrave a whiskey bottle or a perfume bottle? With none other than a proprietary dental drill. “I use the same kind of drill that dentists use for false teeth and bridges,” Colonna says.

One of her strangest engraving endeavors was a bomb from World War II for a police officer’s retirement in Atlanta, near where her business is based. “It was a shell and inactive, of course,” Colonna says. “The benefit of hand engraving is I can engrave anything from the smallest object to something large. Odd-shaped items are not a problem when you hand engrave—the possibilities are really endless,” Colonna says.

She also has hand-engraved knives and jewelry. “The challenge is writing in a straight line. That’s the hardest part—making sure the mechanics are there and that you don’t get sloppy,” Colonna says. “It’s taken me five years to get where I’m at.”

About 50% of Colonna’s business comes from other methods of personalization. “I do UV printing, laser printing, leather embossing, hand engraving, painting; I do so much,” Colonna says. “Every day is something different.”

TAKING A SWING

For businesses looking to expand the creative work they do, a slow and methodical approach can help—whether that’s gradually adding to a product line or investing in new equipment. For instance, Vince Frank, president of Catania Medallic Specialty Inc., likes to add one or two new products every couple of years to his company’s offerings. One product he added since buying the Avon Lake, Ohio, business 20 years ago is the Pop2Now bottle opener, a bottle opener that opens both bottles and cans. “We manufacture it, and I personally own the patent for this product,” Frank says.

Catania Medallic Specialty Inc. also engraves coin edges. “A couple of customers requested it, so we just kind of experimented to see what works and what doesn’t,” Frank says. “It was a little tricky engraving on the edge of the coin initially.” But soon, his company was able to figure out how to laser and rotary engrave coin edges. “Laser is just a little easier than rotary engraving, but you can rotary engrave them as well,” Frank says.

Deats Connaly, who has been in business for 43 years and grown Custom Built Awards from a 250-square-foot bedroom, partly credits her innovative approach and willingness to buy new equipment for her company’s

Engraved gifts from
Inkwelldesigners





I believe you've got to stay up with the equipment to make sure you can make your product look like it's worth a million dollars.

Pamela Deats Connaly, owner, Custom Built Awards

longevity. “The classic plaque is evolving into something different than what it was. I believe you’ve got to stay up with the equipment to make sure you can make your product look like it’s worth a million dollars,” she says. One type of equipment Deats Connaly has invested in is direct print machines, or UV printers. “We’ve got direct print machines here, and we’ve learned all kinds of stuff that we can do with them to keep our products up to date,” Deats Connaly says. “You can print on anything.”

Investing in direct print machines is something that Susan Cox, president and CEO of LogoJET, knows a lot about. LogoJET sells direct-to-substrate printers. “I would say 75% of our customers also have a laser, so the pairing is becoming more popular and is extremely complementary,” Cox says. “We often say that when you can integrate laser with UV printing, it’s like peanut butter and jelly.” Catania Medallic Specialty Inc. is one of those companies that does both. “We direct print, as well. We use a LogoJET printer, which we have had really good success with,” Frank says.

Adding direct printers allows retailers to get creative with personalized products and do more work in-house. Cox sees her customers printing on a variety of objects. “We are seeing a lot of items for wedding gifts, like jewelry



Catania Medallic Specialty Inc.'s engraved bottle opener and coin

boxes, totes and even golf balls,” Cox says.

SURVIVING THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Responding to inventory issues and getting around the supply chain crisis is affecting all businesses, large and small. “The biggest concern right now is the supply chain,” Cox says. “It’s really hard to get products.”

One of her customers who engraves a lot of

plaques has found a creative way to get around the low supply of metal sheets. “Inventory is very scarce, so one of my customers literally takes a blank slate—it could be white—and they UV print on it.” Instead of having to purchase 20 different laminates, they can purchase one kind. For example, customers don’t have to pay more for marble sheets, Cox says, but instead just download a marble background and print on it, saving a lot of money while also avoiding supply chain delays.

LogoJET customers are also getting creative with medallions, given the supply chain issues, Cox says. Customers can purchase a standard circular medallion and UV print whatever they want inside. “If you’re an advanced user, UV printing can do textures,” Cox says. She has seen customers print textures inside a medallion to mimic embossing with resin colors. “You can get really creative to fake different techniques,” Cox says. From sandblasted looks to color fills, UV printing is allowing retailers to be more creative and in control of their product when supply issues are a concern.

“With inventory the way it is, I’m fixing to invest in a bunch of new equipment,” Deats Connaly says. “I want to be able to cut things out and print on them so that I’m not in a box.” 

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EASY AUTOMATION STRATEGIES

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Navigating automation in an industry based on personalizing.

By Matthew Blake

As Sam Varn, CRM, sees it, there's only so much you can automate in an industry with "personalization" in the name.

"When I think of automation, I think of robots and assembly lines," says Varn, who is the owner of Awards4U, an awards and recognition company in Tallahassee, Florida. "But, in our business, there are still a lot of human beings involved. We are not in any mass production business. We're in the personalization business."

After all, acrylic is still glued together by hand, and metal is cut by hand using shears, Varn says. But look more closely, and it becomes evident that automation is helping businesses with everything from producing orders, taking orders and communicating with customers.

It's perhaps no coincidence that businesses are turning to automation given the difficult economic climate in the wake of COVID-19. U.S. inflation stands at its highest level since 1981, as measured by the Consumer Price Index. Plus, struggles continue in importing supplies like acrylic, and there remains a shortage of truck drivers, warehouse employees and other workers. In this taxing climate, automating work presents huge opportunities to cut costs and increase efficiencies.

COURTING CLIENTS

Mike Westbrook, president of Mile High Engraving in Denver, is always looking to automate processes: "I am always interested in what is happening in the tech world and how to automate best."

Earlier this year, Westbrook discovered "Copy.ai," an autocorrect editing tool that lets him more quickly write promotional materials and client reminders. The software is predictive, anticipating the text based on what Westbrook has written before.

Westbrook places this copy into Buffer, one of many platforms that take an announcement about a sale, promotion or any other business update and schedules the content to appear on multiple social media platforms. (Westbrook prefers Buffer to Hootsuite, which has over 18 million users but is more expensive than Buffer.) For instance, Westbrook can create a post about an upcoming holiday and remind customers about his shop's holiday-related materials.



[Using software automation] gives us a common place to discuss our strategy."

Shana Beach, owner and project lead, Chase Street Accessories & Engraving



Some of the employees at Chase Street Accessories & Engraving

The social media management platform will then post all that content to any channel that Westbrook wants, such as Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

Shana Beach, owner and project lead at Chase Street Accessories & Engraving in Baltimore, uses Sendible for her awards and recognition company. On Sendible, Beach might write a post like: "Get in your Valentine's Day custom orders by mid-January." The platform lets colleagues review and revise what she wrote. It also lets her customize the post, if desired, for a particular site. For example, there might be a picture of a brightly engraved heart on Instagram or no picture but a longer message on Twitter.

"Sendible posts to everything, including Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. And it's easy to use: You write one post and check all the boxes," Beach says. Buffer, Hootsuite and Sendible each provide information on how many users interact with a post and on what platform.

APA members, including Beach, use Shopify, Etsy, Sage, NetSoft and other consumer-facing platforms to receive orders. Varn, who has been in the industry since 1975 and has run Awards4U since 1987, uses the order management software NetSuite.

Today, the most important automation technique Varn does is a simple one: scheduling emails. If you have customers who, for example, have regular banquets every year, you can schedule an email to send to them ahead of the event, saying, "Hey, don't forget to order your hall of fame awards for next month."

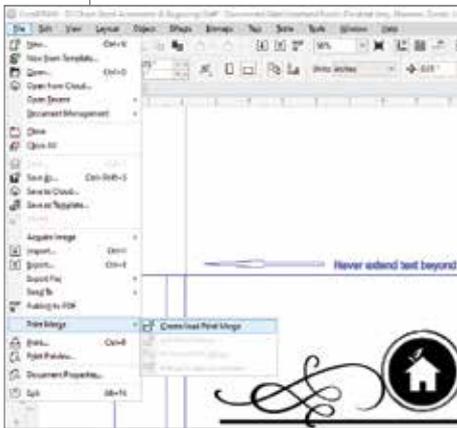
This is important for more elaborate orders, Varn says, like the corporate client who may need a bronze tablet engraved and shipped two months prior to a recognition dinner. "They really appreciate that," he says.

ALL ASSEMBLED

CorelDRAW debuted back in 1989. The software, along with its parent company, Corel Corporation, has gone through several iterations since. But 33 years later, CorelDRAW, which enables vector drawing and image correction, is a preferred avenue for people in the industry to speed up production.

Take Beach, who has a client who sends a weekly list of last names to be engraved in a standard cutting board design. She creates a script in CorelDRAW that imports the names, ensures their

One of Beach's automation tips is to use CorelDRAW's "PrintMerge" function.



correct placement on the final product and produces individual files for each honoree. To do so, Beach navigates to the "File" tab in CorelDRAW and selects the "PrintMerge" function.

Other APA members, including David Stevens of Trotec Laser and Doug Green, have conducted video walkthroughs on maximizing the PrintMerge feature, Beach notes.

Dan Bencsik also relies on CorelDRAW. Bencsik is the president of Bux-Mont Awards, a family business in Sellersville, Pennsylvania. He first joined the company at age 16, laying out the business' strategic plan. "The first strategic plan spoke nothing of automation," Bencsik recalls. "I remember when Dad first started the business 32 years ago, he was engraving a single medal at a time. But there have been many ways we have automated over the years."

That changed partly thanks to CorelDRAW's step-and-repeat function. "That enabled us to create plates in a matrix and to print 100 medals in the time it took us to engrave 10."

Besides speed, CorelDRAW has helped Bencsik cut down on mistakes. "Any mistakes that occur now are on the customers' end," he says. "While we redo them at no extra cost, it is still nice to know it's not a lack of training or a careless mistake on our end."

Adobe Illustrator and Ink Scape can work as alternatives to CorelDRAW, Beach says. Adobe Illustrator is more expensive, she explains, but perhaps more user-friendly. A possible downside to CorelDRAW, Beach says, is that it charges by the computer instead of per account.

To speed up assembly, Varn uses cloud storage software to share standard operating procedure documents. A company that takes 300 orders a day needs files so

employees know, for instance, the right heat and pressure settings on a sublimation printer, he says.

Other automation techniques are perhaps incremental but can save labor and wear and tear over time, such as automatic tape dispensers. "We bought a number of automatic tape dispensers from Innotec when they were first brought to market in our industry," Bencsik says. "It saved not only our fingers from getting shredded when we

had 400 trophy plates to tape, but also variation no longer occurred from employees who may have used excess tape in the past."

Another is color mapping, a process where different engraving speeds can be assigned to pixels of different colors. The result is that some color areas are more pronounced than others. "We run hundreds of color boards," Westbrook says.

SMOOTH TALKING

At Beach's shop every morning, an automated bot posts a message to the employee work channel that lists all of the priorities for the day, she

says. "It gives us a common place to discuss our strategy."

The bot is part of Microsoft 365, a software product that includes the virtual communications platform Microsoft Teams and lets users create a series of if/then statements. For example, if a client communicates in a Microsoft Outlook email about needing an order sooner than anticipated, the software puts the order in the "priorities" channel in Microsoft Teams. "Each order is associated with an item in our tracker, which has its own form that anyone on our team can manually update," Beach says. "So, all they would have to do is change the due date in the form to [something sooner]."



Change is inevitable. It's whether you want to make the investment and create the processes necessary to remain competitive in today's marketplace."

Dan Bencsik, president, Bux-Mont Awards

Next, Beach says, “everyone on the team would receive an automated notification through Teams that the due date for that order has changed.” Additionally, Teams has a sales channel where order updates are posted. The use of Microsoft 365, Beach says, “saves us a lot of hunting around between various sales apps.”

Beach personally prefers Microsoft products because her employees are already using Outlook. Microsoft 365 Teams “has been critical to allowing our team to work remotely when needed,” she says. Beach acknowledges there are a growing number of alternatives, including Slack, Monday.com and Google Workplace that other business owners may be more comfortable operating.

Part of the automating process is putting into one virtual area all the orders coming from the different virtual marketplaces, including Shopify and Etsy. Westbrook uses Monday.com to create automatic reminders about incoming orders. When the company internally marks the order as complete, that triggers a message to be sent to the customer.

For accounting software, Varn uses SAGE, formerly MAS 90, while other members use Essent. Westbrook uses Quickbooks, which first launched in 1983 and has evolved to include features like sending automatic reminders through their payroll service. “We send out the

first invoice,” he says. Quickbooks then sends a reminder after three days and another after seven days. “It is automating the collection process and has definitely helped the payment process.”

SCALING WITH THE FUTURE

“I was automating almost nothing back in 1987,” Varn says, recalling Awards4U’s first year. That changed with buying an Apple computer for accounting and, eventually, software for laser engraving.

Today, the challenge is different. There are a lot of recent technology developments relevant to the personalization world. But it can be hard to know what product offerings are the best and what to prioritize. For Varn, the rule of thumb is to integrate “programs that have the scale that can scale with us.”

If the tool is not something Varn sees as directly applicable to scaling the business, he doesn’t bother with it. Other APA members expressed the importance of staying up to date and being curious about the latest tech. “We look at software all the time and try to assess whether using it would make us more productive,” Bencsik says. “Change is inevitable. It’s whether you want to make the investment and create the processes necessary to remain competitive in today’s marketplace.” 



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One heat press tip: Determine if you'll be creating transfers in-house or outsourcing and applying designs in your workspace.



GET STARTED WITH HEAT TRANSFERS

Use this guide to narrow down your best processes.

By Kelly Walters, affiliate and event coordinator, GroupeSTAHL

Whether you're looking to add apparel decoration to your personalization and awards business or you're starting from scratch, you made the right decision. When decorating apparel and accessories, there are a variety of processes, applications and heat transfers to consider. Hopefully, this information will help you narrow down the best process for you—or at least the process you'd like to begin with.

Before getting started, here are some things to consider:

1. Do you have a budget for equipment and materials?
2. Who's your customer, or what's your decorating goal?
3. Do you currently have orders that need to be fulfilled?
4. How big is your production space?
5. Are you solo, or do you have employees?

The reason we ask these questions is that the answers can point you down different paths. The most important consideration is whether you're creating transfers in-house or outsourcing and applying designs in your workspace.

BUDGET AND EQUIPMENT

No matter your budget, you have to look at what the most important equipment is to produce quality garments. If you are producing your own transfers or outsourcing custom designs, the No. 1 piece of quality equipment you'll need is a heat press. This gives your business the ability to work efficiently and effectively and provides an accurate reading of time, temperature and pressure, which is the recipe for success.

When reviewing your budget, look at the cost of the press you're considering, and then determine if you want to add any other equipment:

- Do you want to cut vinyl?
- Do you want to screen print?
- Do you want to produce full-color designs?

Depending on your budget, some of these processes may not be feasible if you're just getting started, but that doesn't mean you can't offer this type of decoration method. So, how do you fulfill these types of jobs?

- If you already own laser equipment, you can cut heat transfer products like heat transfer vinyl (HTV) and twill. With HTV, you can check with the company selling the materials to determine if that specific material is safe and compatible with a laser. Believe it or not, most are safe!
- Order custom ready-to-apply vinyl transfers (if you aren't interested in using your laser or in saving money on equipment) or invest in a small craft cutter to cut designs in-house.
- Order ready-to-apply screen-printed transfers. This saves you money on screen printing equipment, screen setup and the overall time it takes to clean and prep for the manual screen-printing process.
- Full-color transfers can be ordered in a variety of ways—sublimation, direct-to-film (DTF), digital screen print, twill and other textured options. Ordering these eliminates the need for other equipment, which you could add down the road if you prefer.



When reviewing your budget, determine if you'll want any additional equipment.





Some of GroupeSTAHL's heat press work

All the options above are available to be ordered, shipped to your door and ready to be applied. Not only does this save you money, but it gives you time back in your day for other tasks that must be completed as a business owner.

WHICH SERVICES SHOULD I OFFER?

This question plays into knowing who your customer is, as well as needing to fulfill current jobs or opportunities in your pipeline. What does your customer need, and what void are you trying to fill in your business as well as in the market around you? Is your customer price cautious, or is quality always key?

If you want to focus on becoming more of a specialty shop, what transfers can you use that make you stand out: dimensional products such as patches and emblems? Textured transfers to target spirit and fanwear like glitter, metallic and other glitzy materials? Is your goal to get into sports, and are you looking for current jersey trends?

Maybe you're looking to hit a certain minimum, like one to six pieces, and you need a fast turnaround time. Cutting vinyl in-house on a craft cutter or industrial cutter gives you full control of production time and art capability. If a customer needs an item in 24 hours, it's your decision whether you can fulfill that request. It's also the most affordable option to start with if you're looking to keep production in-house.

Screen-printed transfers allow you to fulfill screen-printed orders while keeping your production space mess-free, maximize order quantities and complete orders in four-to-five business days. These transfers are great for high-detail, quick turnaround times and effort-less prep and application. They also give you the ability to maximize what you order by grouping designs on a sheet.



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Think of these orders as one to two colors but a minimum of 25 pieces.

Vinyl transfers mimic the feel of screen print but allow you to produce your transfers in-house, creating an extremely quick turnaround time of one-to-two business days, given that you have the material. These transfers are great for on-demand personalization and standard designs (no distressing or microcavities in the art unless cut with a laser). Specialty materials are available as well, such as glow-in-the-dark, glitter, reflective and dimensional finishes. With most vinyl, you can create designs with a variety of colors and mix media to create depth and dimension. While there is prep involved with weeding and cutting, you can also order transfers that are delivered to your door, ready to be heat applied.

Direct-to-film transfers provide you the option to decorate in full color with unlimited color options, order individual designs or gang sheets, meet the demand for quick turnaround times and produce extremely fine details. You can also streamline pricing and know the upfront cost to order your designs.

All three of these transfer options offer different price points and produce different prints but feel relatively the same on a garment and fulfill the needs of different customers. No transfer is wrong, so the question becomes:

“Which transfer is best for my job, and which is the most cost-effective and gains me a higher profit?”

To help you decide which transfer will be best, ask yourself:

- What is the material of the garment I'm decorating?
- What is the color count of the artwork, and what does it look like?
- What is the quantity of the job?
- When do they need it in hand?
- What is the customer's budget?

You should be able to look at the specifications of each transfer (adhesive, design capability, production time-frame) and narrow down which will be the best fit. Over time, you might find a transfer or process you really enjoy working with and choose to only offer that as a decoration option. As new transfers and methods are created, you can always adjust your offerings and enhance your production.

Remember, it's easier to make the decision to add equipment to your lineup once you have more orders in your pipeline and figure out what will make your production life easier. You can decorate apparel with an entire lineup of equipment consisting of a heat press, laser, cutter, print/cut system, sublimation, DTF printer and whatever else comes to market or choose to keep it simple and just rock 'n' roll with a heat press.

Have fun creating! 



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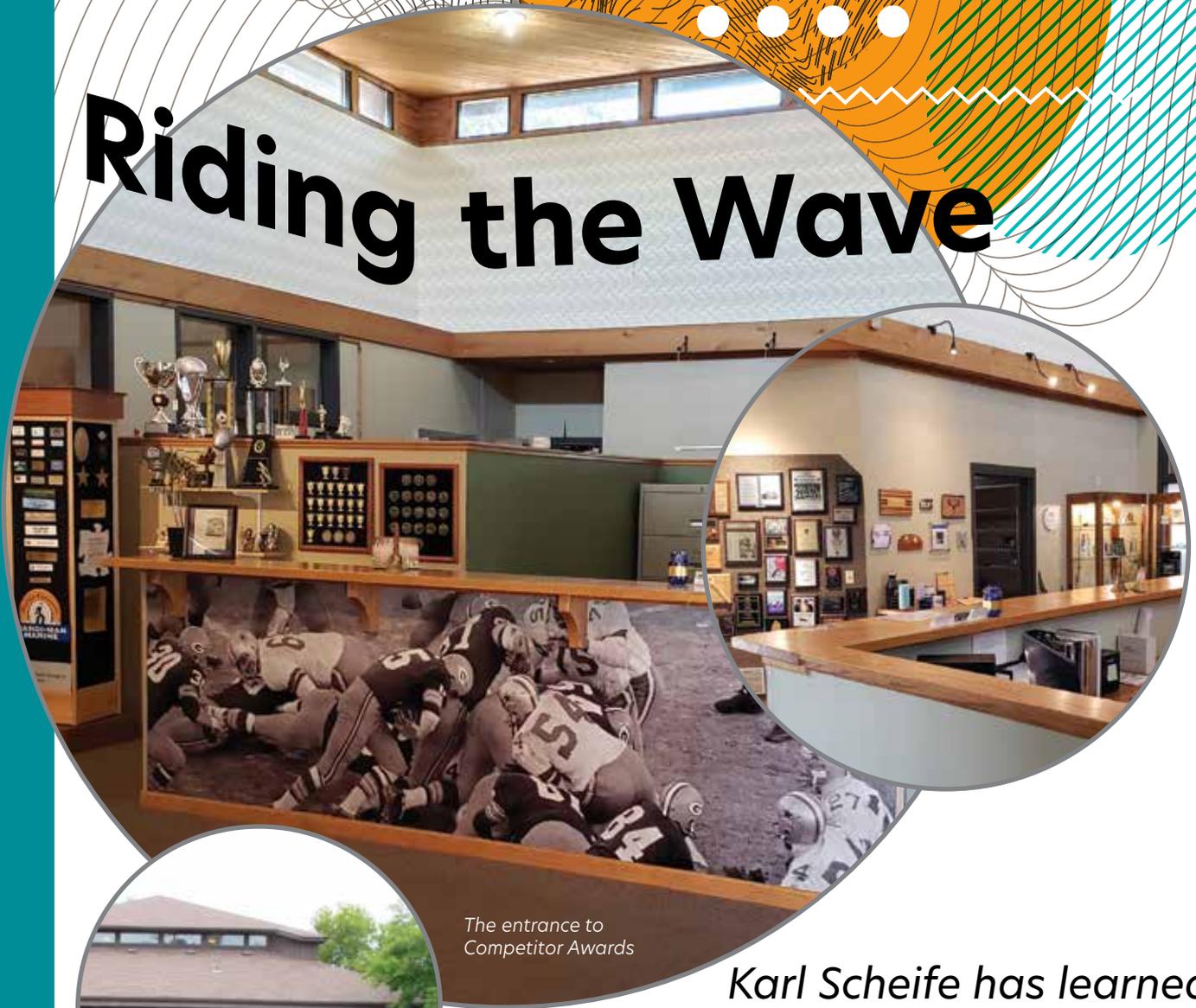
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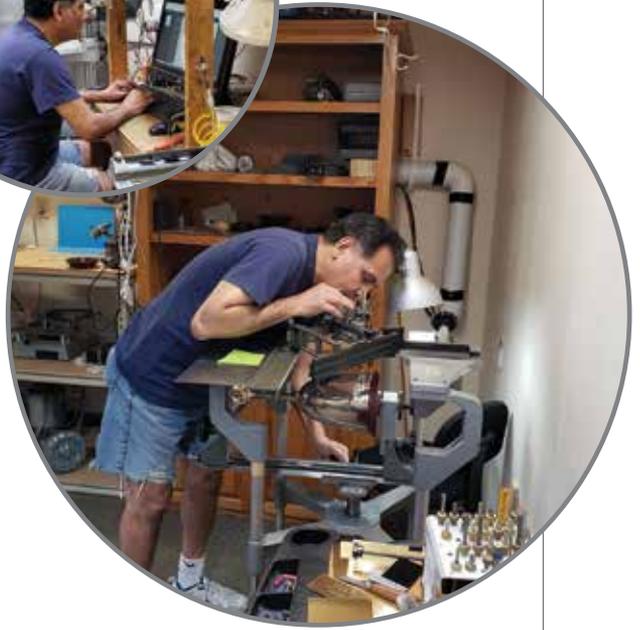
The entrance to Competitor Awards

Karl Scheife has learned to adapt to all the changes this industry has thrown him.

By Matt Schur



With a good staff, Karl Scheife focuses his time on sales, the website and ordering.



Change is constant. That's something Karl Scheife knows well, witnessing the industry's shifting landscape as he's run Competitor Awards and Engraving, Inc., for more than 30 years now. Just look at what's happened with recreational sports leagues, he says.

"Between the city of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County, there used to be 100 softball leagues at least," Karl says. "We would do awards for all of them. Between the two, they might not run five leagues anymore."

It's the same with bowling, he says. There used to be 70 bowling alleys, presenting plenty of awards opportunities. "There were good customers of ours that went by the wayside, and you can't get them back. You're not going to be able to sell awards to a bowling alley that closed."

So he's learned to pivot. To go with the change. "I've really looked to increase my sales outside the awards industry because I think that's where there is longer-term potential," Karl says. "We still do a lot of awards—we're never going to not do awards. But if I concentrate on machine plates, industrial engraving or getting another sign shop, that's long-term. If you can find decent specialty distributors that want to buy from you, they can turn into huge customers."

It's not just change in the industry landscape; Karl has weathered the rise of the internet, the 2008 recession, the pandemic and more. Overcoming these challenges has meant a constant evolution in his approach to the business, including investing in new equipment and even building his own website.

"My first websites were horrible," he says. Over the years, he's worked with different web designers to improve the sites, eventually getting to a point where he says his machine plate site is "great, and we get a ton of business from it."

But, for all the shifts, certain things don't change: the need to have good employees, to be active in the

community and to keep growing as a business owner. All of this work, he says, "really is a learning process."

FRIEND OF A FRIEND

With five employees, Karl, like many retailers, handles the website, sales and ordering. "I don't do a whole heck of a lot of employee supervision," he says. "I've got a really good staff. I'm not constantly looking at schedules or making sure people are getting things done because they've all been super responsible, and they're taking care of business. That frees up my time."

Finding these employees has been a bit sporadic, including a new hire this year that happened by "sheer luck." He was looking to hire someone to do mechanical engraving and wasn't sure how to go about it.

"I was getting a haircut and told my hairdresser that I was looking to hire someone," Karl says. "I told her that I was looking for someone with no experience so that we can train them. I explained that it'd be a great thing for a young person who is looking for a career path and trying to figure out what they want to do."

Turns out, his hairdresser's son, Mason, was in exactly that spot, having bounced around landscaping jobs in recent years. "He's been here for a few months now and learning to engrave. It's been unbelievably great."

The last two employees he hired also happened via word of mouth when current employees posted the opening on Facebook. "Both of those times, I tried all the regular platforms—ZipRecruiter and stuff like that—and didn't get far. I was reluctant to have friends working with friends at first. But they weren't super close friends, so it's worked out."

Karl's looking to hire yet again as one of his employees, Emily, is pregnant and likely not returning. "I think hiring is probably the most difficult thing in the future. There was a time, at least in my market here, that if I offered someone



One of Karl Scheife's new hires at work



I've really looked to increase my sales outside the awards industry because I think that's where there is longer-term potential."

Karl Scheife, owner, Competitor Awards and Engraving, Inc.

\$16-\$17 an hour, you could have your pick. I don't think that's the case anymore. If you offer that money, no one applies."

As a result, he's looking into offering his first-ever work-from-home arrangement. "She's super proficient in design. There's a possibility she could be remote and send us her designs for the laser, sublimation printers and UV printers. I'm not at that point yet, but I'm figuring out if I might be able to do that."

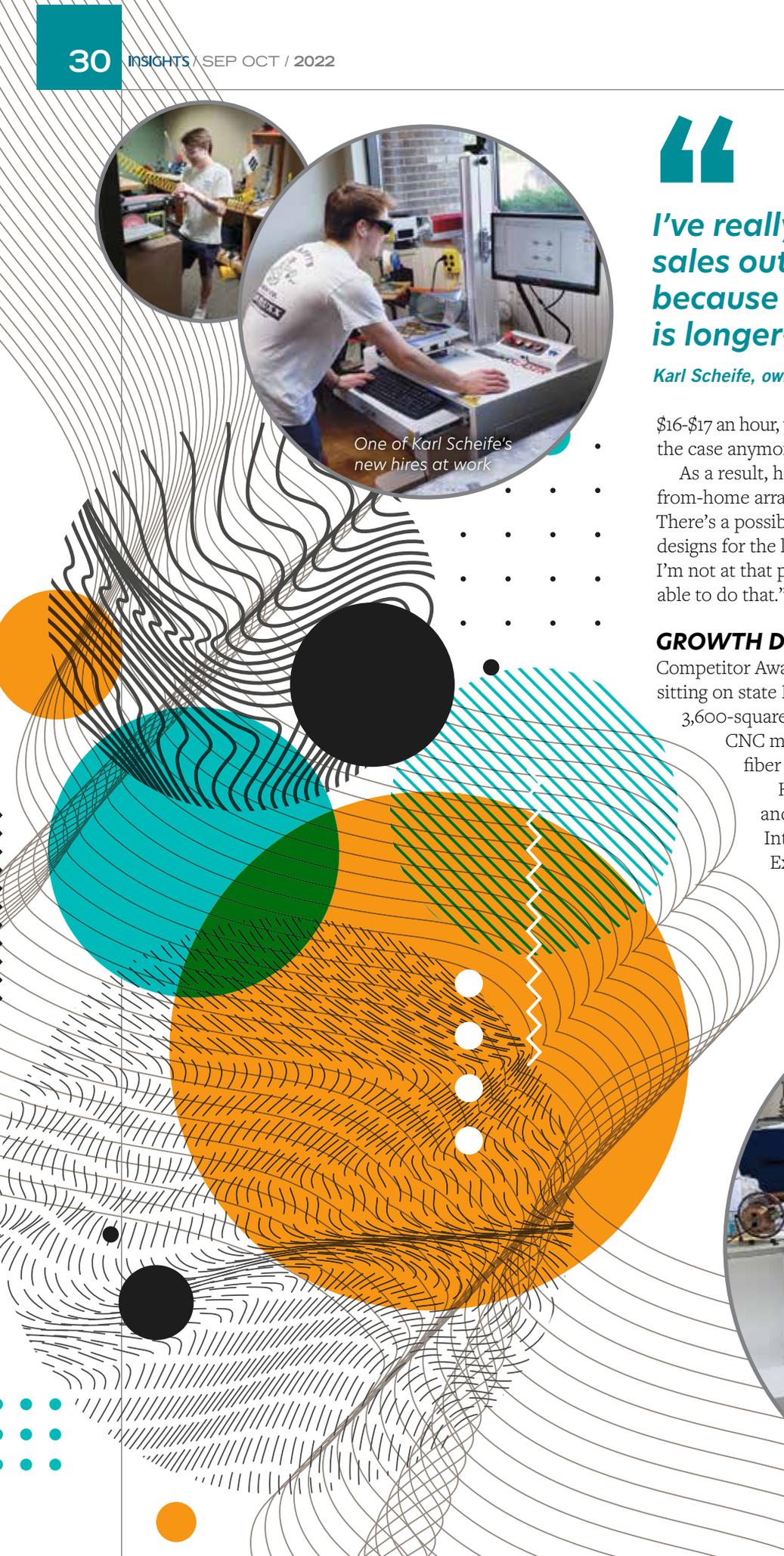
GROWTH DRIVERS

Competitor Awards is in its fifth location, this time sitting on state Highway 83 in Hartland, Wisconsin. The 3,600-square-foot standalone building houses Karl's six CNC mechanical engravers, four CO2 lasers, one fiber laser and two UV printers.

He's recently invested in a new fiber laser and UV printer, having seen both at APA's International Personalization & Awards Expo. "For both products and equipment, there's no place else you can see it all," he says. "The show gives you a chance to see how things work. It's invaluable."



Karl Scheife invested in two new pieces of equipment to meet rising demand.



I mean, you're not going to get a rep to drive out to your location, set up a UV printer and let you demo it for a day." But the Expo provides that exact opportunity, he says.

The new equipment is part of what's driving Karl's recent growth, with his company increasing year-over-year sales by roughly 15% halfway through the year. Buying the new equipment, he says, was a way to "position myself to the point where, if you want engraving done, we are the place to go. A lot of places have gone out of business, and I want to make sure we can offer various services."

In particular, Karl says that the fiber laser is one of the coolest pieces of equipment he's purchased. Initially, he bought the laser strictly to engrave firearms, but he's since found many uses for it. "It's such a versatile piece of equipment that we use it all the time—there's not a day that goes by that we don't use it."

When engraving products in the past, it'd take time to figure out how to hold the item, register the item and then engrave it. "It can be very time-consuming," Karl says. "Recently, a customer brought in a baby spoon to be engraved. It was a very odd shape—it had a curled handle—and it could have taken us 10-15 minutes to get it into a vice, and I'd have to hold it firmly to engrave it. But with the fiber laser, we just put it in a piece of modeling clay, got it registered, hit laser and boom—it's done. It's really a great piece of equipment."

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Over 50% of Karl's sales come from outside the awards space, with a lot of his work coming from industrial customers, including work for trailer manufacturers and agricultural implement manufacturers. "We do a lot of VIN plates for different manufacturers. We've been doing that since 2007. It's really our bread and butter," Karl says. "We have a lot of laser-engraved plates, kind of higher-end, durable plates. We do quite a bit of UV-printed plates and sublimated plates for indoor use. But all of that is for smaller manufacturers. If you're John Deere, and you're making VIN plates for everything you make, you're doing it in-house. But

if there's a trailer manufacturer, and they're building 100 or 200 trailers a year, those are my customers."

His customers are about a 50-50 split between national and local, with all the machine plates being national customers. "I think so many trophy companies have bought lasers and replaced their mechanical engravers, which seriously limits what they can offer. We're still trying to be a complete full-service shop. We do a lot of local awards because people are starting to run out of the smaller trophy shops."

With online marketing, Karl uses a combination of paying for a company that runs his SEO every month while also dabbling with Google Ads. "When we're starting to slow down, I'll spend a little money on ads. It's a very effective way to get people to your website. In the last year, we had a big period of growth through the machine plates and organic traffic because of the SEO. We had so many requests coming in that I stopped paying for advertising."

Equally important for sales—and also to stay connected to the community—is getting involved with local associations and people. At one point, Karl belonged to seven chambers of commerce. "I'm in an area that has a lot of smaller communities clustered together. I'll be honest, I usually get awards just by joining chambers of commerce, and I usually get enough business to pay for a membership. But also, that networking, I've gotten a lot of local business off it over the years."

He's also been a member of the local Rotary Club for 23 years. Even though he didn't join to increase business, it has. Plus, "My banker's a Rotarian. My investment guy's a Rotarian. It gives you a lot of contacts within the local business community. I'd certainly rather do business with someone I know and trust than throw a dart and hope the person's OK." 



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Insta Crystal | sales@instacrystal.com | 551-261-3400



Marco's Tumbler and Bamboo Sets

Marco Awards Group now offers several styles of tumblers, beverage holders, water bottles and flasks in 19 different colors. The sublimatable products are both white and silver with poly coating to make sublimation a snap. These Marco products are dual-wall insulated to keep drinks and other liquids hot or cold. Tumblers are stocked in all Marco warehouses coast-to-coast.

Marco has also released its newest addition to the gift line. The bamboo wine with tools box and a two-piece bamboo wine tool set are perfect choices for the ultimate gift and/or award. The bamboo and cork toolboxes and coasters are eco-friendly.

The newest Marco bamboo products also include a broad line of bamboo cutting boards and an elegant cheese board. All the genuine bamboo products are laserable.

Marco Awards Group | marcoawardsgroup.com | 800-229-6592

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Johnson Plastics Plus offers thousands of drinkware blanks that are ready to be personalized for your customers. No matter what season or temperature, our drinkware allows you to offer products your customers can use throughout the year. Our drinkware selection includes mugs, tumblers, water bottles, glasses and more for sublimation, engraving, heat transfer or UV-LED printing. With our trendy blanks, find any color you need in any style.

JPP | jpplus.com |
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Rowmark | rowmark.com | 419-425-8974



Custom Bottle Openers

Open your favorite beverages with a variety of custom bottle openers from Catania Medallic Specialty, Inc. The company's openers are available in numerous shapes, sizes, finishes and designs. Spin cast openers are offered without setup or die charges, are laser-engravable and available in as little as five days with express service. Pop2Now products open bottles, pop tabs, paint cans and more. They are available in 4 inches and 7 inches and can be enhanced with full-color printing and domed labels. These custom bottle openers are perfect options for gifts and awards, so contact us today to create your own.



Catania Medallic Specialty, Inc. | cataniainc.com | 800-633-2586



Personalized Pet Gifts

Pets are part of the family, and people love to spoil them with personalized gifts. JDS has pet tags in a large variety of colors, shapes and sizes, and they can be laser engraved or sublimated with a pet's name and owner's contact information. With or without added bling, they're an important part of keeping pets safe and getting them home if they wander off. Sublimated bandanas that tie around the neck or slip over a collar will make a pup the most stylish at the dog park.

We have also added ceramic pet bowls in different sizes that can be personalized with a pet's name or other graphics and Polar Camel pet bowls in a variety of sizes and colors. Personalized photo frames or sublimated photo panels are perfect for preserving and displaying your favorite pet pictures. Although we hate to think about losing them, beautiful pet urns are available when the time comes to say goodbye. You probably already have what you need in your shop to personalize these pet products. People will spend to care for and spoil their pets—show customers what you can offer and be their one-stop shop.

JDS Industries | jdsindustries.com | 800-843-8853

Laser-engravable Stamp Die Materials

If you make custom stamps as a sideline to an existing business, Jackson Marking Products could be your best source for supplies. The company offers equipment and components with no minimum order requirements and easily attained quantity discounts.

Four different types of laser engravable stamp die materials are offered. Photopolymer, vulcanized rubber and the Brother Stampcreator PRO system are all supported.

Stamp mounts including art wood, acrylic, traditional knob handle, self-inking, inspector and pocket styles are available.

Other product categories include custom dye-making services, promotional support products, band and dating stamps, stamp pads and inks, and seals and embossers.

Our website is a useful resource for supplies and information needed to make rubber stamps. Enhanced graphics and expanded product descriptions provide more details on hundreds of product offerings. Order history and customer profile information are retained to make re-ordering supplies quick and easy.

Jackson Marking Products |
rubberstampmaterials.com | 800-782-6722

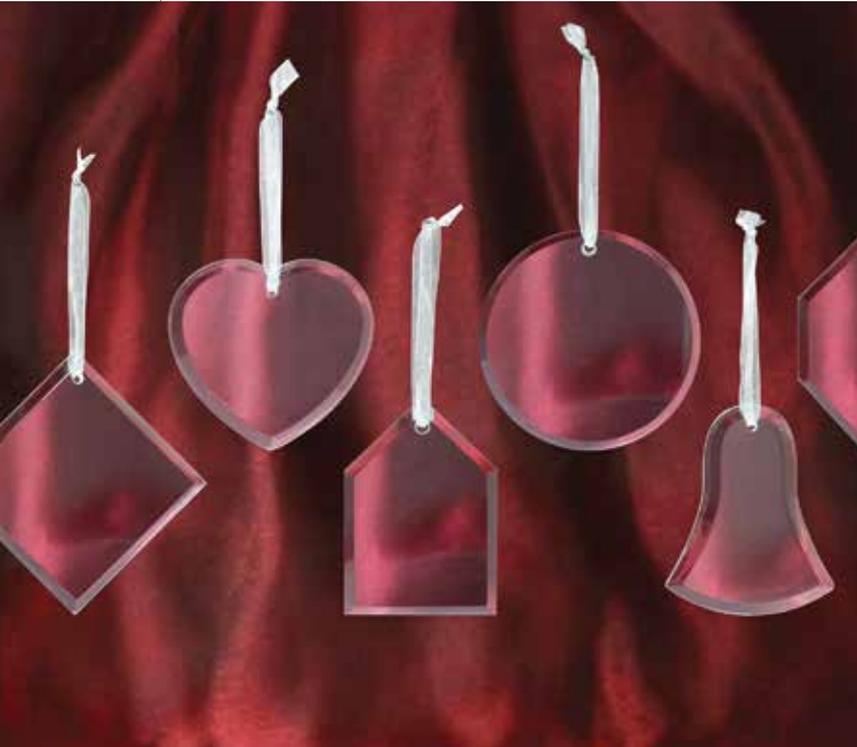


Natural Marble and Onyx Products

N & R International Inc. carries several products made from natural marble/onyx in several different colors that can be used as personalized gifts. Our products are simply the highest quality handmade marble products available. All our marble products are completely natural and can be personalized using laser engraving, sandblasting and color fill or by simply attaching sublimated plates. Products like boxes, coasters, desk accessories, clocks and more can be personalized for an individual gift.

N & R International Inc. |
etchedstone.net// | 678-560-4088





Corporate Products From Time Products International

Time Products International offers numerous types of corporate products: classic and contemporary clocks, awards and recognition products, piano-wood finish and matte-finish plaques, certificate holders, presentation folders, photo frames, glass ornaments, desk accessories, drinkware and more.

Whether you are choosing an upscale product for top corporate executives, a gift for top performers or simply an affordable giveaway to every employee, we have the right product for you. Showcase your logo and personalize the product (available on most items); it's the best way to recognize your valuable team members. Most of our products are individually gift boxed, and all crystal products are nicely packaged in a fabric-lined presentation box. The picture shows our glass ornaments, which can be personalized with the recipient's name.



Time Products International | tpiline.com | 800-722-5201

Tropar's Infused Color Products

Tropar offers a full line of artistically inspired art glass products suitable for achievement, individual excellence, corporate appreciation or any type of recognition. The awards have skillfully infused colors and are available at all five of our locations.

Tropar | airflyte.com | 972-875-5831





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JDS' Rack Star Laser Bed System

The Rack Star modular cutting table system is a unique rail system that incorporates an equally spaced, tapered cone-shaped pin design along the entire rail to minimize contact with materials. Uniform pin spacing allows for flexibility of rotating acrylic risers, acrylic v-blocks, acrylic vise holders and a variety of custom fixtures, giving you the ability to jig several items at once for increased productivity. Check out the Rack Star and available optional accessories and add-ons on our website, or give us a call.

JDS Industries |
jdsindustries.com |
800-843-8853

Clean Engineering: CrystalBlast® Elite 3.0

The CrystalBlast Elite 3.0 is engineered with specifications that make it easy to defend it as the cleanest sandcarver the industry. For starters, the Elite 3.0 has the largest blower size in the industry, with 700 CFM at 1 inch SP. This powerful blower evacuates one cabinet air change per second. That air carries both the nuisance dust and the valuable abrasive through a patented separator-reclaimer centrifuge. This unique design makes it the only separator-reclaimer in the industry able to effectively direct abrasive as fine as 220 mesh away from the filter and into the hopper for reuse.

Meanwhile, the air and nuisance dust continue to pass through the largest dust collector filter surface area (110 square feet) in the industry. Since filtration is most effective when kept clean, the Elite 3.0 offers operators effortless cleaning with a pneumatic vibrator and pull-push air switch.

In clean engineering, spec by spec, the CrystalBlast® Elite 3.0 stands apart. Unmentioned here are the numerous exclusive features engineered for ease of maintenance, comfort and operator control.

Ikonics Imaging | ikonicsimaging.com |
800-643-1037



Full Product-line Solutions with GCC

GCC LaserPro offers full product-line solutions, including desktop, large format, CO₂, fiber and dual-source options. The material database consists of built-in parameter settings for a wide variety of materials, including wood, acrylic, glass, plastic, marble, tile, rubber, coated metal and more. Whether you are customizing tumblers, creating personalized badges or engraving a photo on plaques, GCC LaserPro allows users to quickly and easily bring creativity to one-of-a-kind products to fulfill customers' needs. By using the optional CCD module or AAS Contour Cutting Device, users can produce large quantities of products with incredible accuracy. The lasers feature a broad system of capabilities that allow users to design items that are both individualized and useful. Selecting the appropriate job type (engraving or cutting) and material category is made easy, minimizing wasted time and materials. With numerous patents, GCC LaserPro has gained a great reputation, especially for stability and safety, and is not only an assistant to the processing line but also a product that can increase profits.



GCC World | gccworld.com | 909-718-0248

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Quality One | q1engravers.com | 909-989-3898

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AP Lazer |
aplazer.com |
800-585-8617

Roland DGA's New Engraving Accessory Kit

Roland DGA Corporation has announced the availability of a new engraving accessory kit for its SRM-20 compact milling machine that enables this subtractive 3D mill to engrave a wide variety of substrates and objects with ease. The engraving accessory kit essentially transforms the SRM-20 into a rotary engraving and diamond-scribing device that's ideal for creating everything from plastic signs and awards to personalized gifts and custom circuit boards.

The new engraving accessory kit makes the SRM-20 perfect for engraving in any home, office or classroom. The kit can be added to an existing SRM-20 mill or purchased together with a new SRM-20 to begin engraving right out of the box. Set-up is a breeze, and the included software and accessories makes getting started simple.

State-of-the-art technology optimizes the SRM-20's functionality and ease of use for both milling and engraving. A touch-button VPanel controller regulates feed rate, spindle speed and milling on X, Y and Z axes, while an independent collet system allows for faster setting of the Z-axis base point and quick tool changes.



Roland DGA | rolanddga.com |
800-542-2307

New Features for Trotec's Speedy 400

Personalize gift items for any occasion with the Speedy 400 laser engraver, now equipped with Trotec Vision Design & Position, a feature that allows you to perfectly position your artwork onto your workpiece. The 12-megapixel camera provides a live, full-color image of the working area so that you can quickly create highly detailed designs, including text, logos, images or photos on a wide variety of materials and surface finishes. Streamline your workflow today with the most intelligent laser software on the world's fastest laser engraver.



Trotec | troteclaser.com | 866-226-8505

A promotional graphic for the Awards and Personalization Association. On the left, a laptop screen shows the website's homepage with the heading "Welcome to the Awards and Personalization Association Community" and three main sections: "Engage", "Connect", and "Engage". To the right of the laptop, the text "YOUR MOST VALUABLE BUSINESS TOOL IS RIGHT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS." is written in large, bold, blue capital letters.

Through the Member2Member Forum (M2M), it's simple to network with your fellow peers in the industry and lean on them when needed. With over 20 community groups and a vast member directory, you can easily get connected and find solutions for your business needs.

Join the valuable conversations happening right now at awardspersonalization.org/M2M.



Epilog Laser	epiloglaser.com / 3
Jackson Marking Products	rubberstampmaterials.com / 26
JDS Industries, Inc.	jdsindustries.com / 1
Johnson Plastics Plus	jpplus.com / 37
Laser Research Optics	engraveroptics.com / 31
Marco Awards Group.....	marcoawardsgroup.com / <i>Inside back cover</i>
MUTOH.....	mutoh.com / 5
NetSoft Studio	bizwiziq.com / 23, 27
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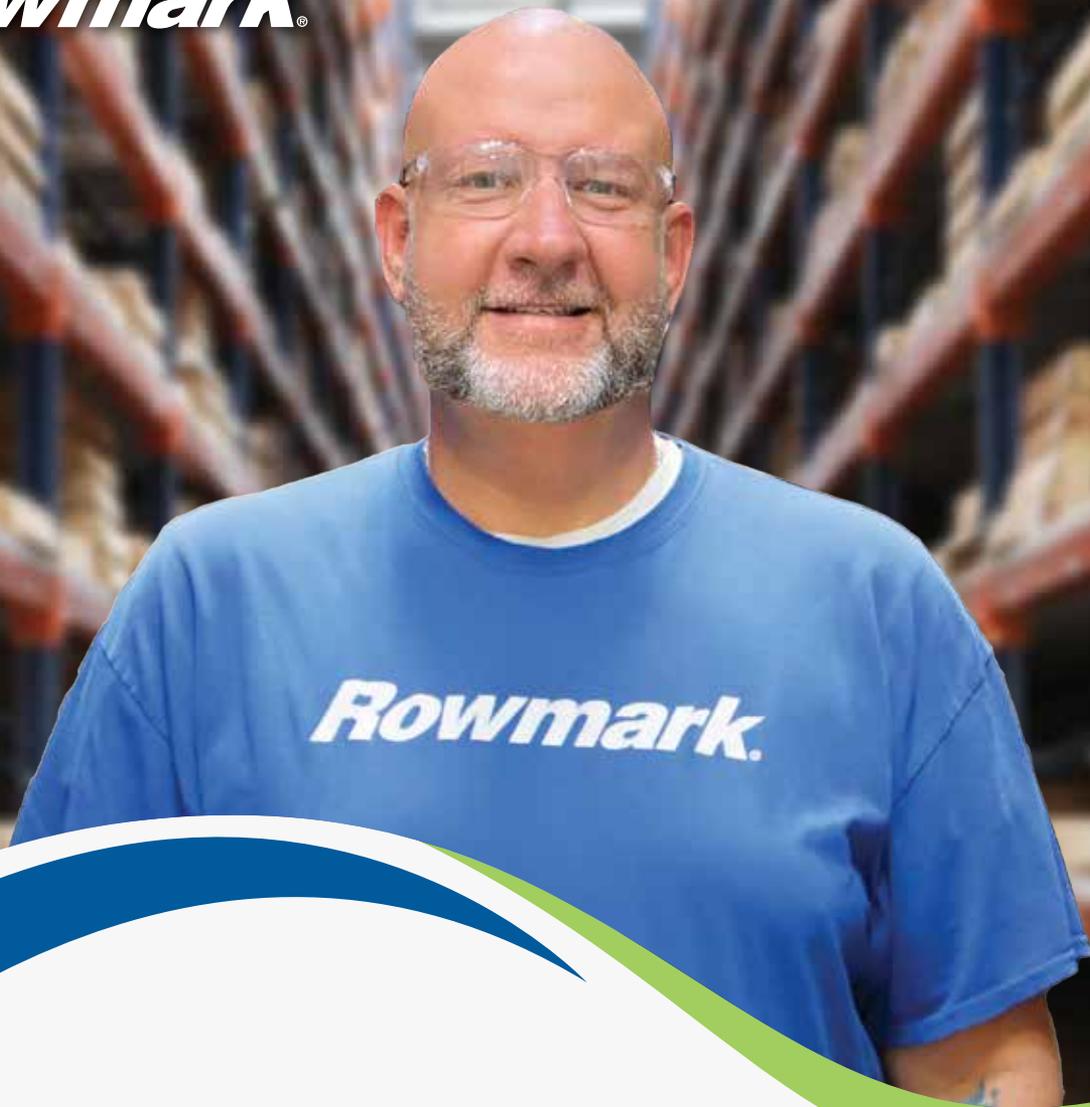
Our online store curates the best training resources for you with easy-to-follow instructions from industry experts. With topics ranging from CorelDRAW and laser engraving to sublimation and UV printing, the online seminars will help you meet your unique small business needs.



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Katie White

Atta-Boy Awards Inc.

North Pole, Alaska

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?

If the weather is nice, I like to go hiking and fishing. I also like to spend time with family and friends. When the weather isn't so good, I like to read books, draw and do puzzles.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS YEAR?

I'm starting my last year of college at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and getting my degree in business administration. I'm also looking forward to traveling—my parents and I are going to Thailand this year to visit family and go to a festival.

WHAT WOULD THE PERFECT VACATION LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

My idea of a perfect vacation is going out and exploring the city I'm in and also doing things outside, like a day at the beach, going for a hike, ziplining or going to amusement parks. I also like trying new foods, especially if I'm in a new country.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE/BOOK/ALBUM/ARTIST?

My favorite book and movie series is the Harry Potter series.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE APP?

Pinterest. If I'm having trouble deciding what to draw or need inspiration for a drawing, I can always find new ideas there. Also, if I'm making a dessert or cooking a meal, finding good recipes is super easy.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL?

My parents. They always encourage and inspire me to do my best and work hard to achieve my goals, and they also give me helpful advice.



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