

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

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THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE AWARDS AND PERSONALIZATION ASSOCIATION

A Gift for Better *Business*

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TO IMPROVE YEAR-ROUND
GIFT SALES**

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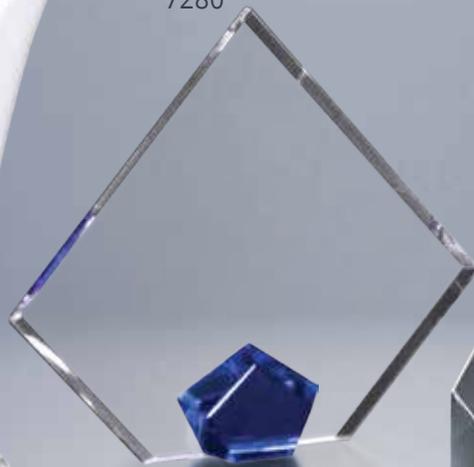
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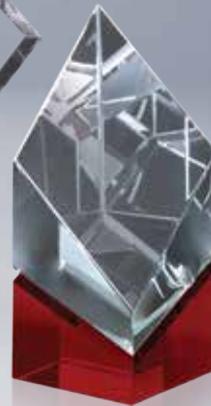
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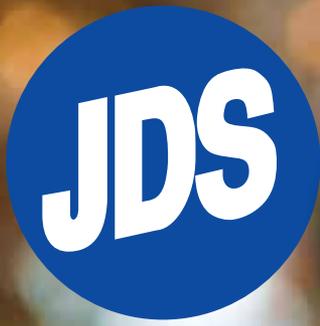


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FROM THE EXPO, TO EDUCATION, TO THE M2M FORUM, APA IS FOCUSED ON HELPING YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS

BY LISA R. HIGGINBOTHAM, CRM, FIVESTAR AWARDS AND ENGRAVING, AND AWARDS AND PERSONALIZATION ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

I just got back from our first live, in-person Awards and Personalization Association Board meeting since the COVID pandemic started. For me, I needed that face time with my board and friends, and not on a computer screen. It was difficult because we had mask regulations indoors, but there was plenty of time without masks to socialize and brainstorm and share wisdom.

That is what I have missed the most this year. In fact, over breakfast, I was able to gain two “nuggets” that I could take back and implement immediately. THAT is the APA “secret sauce.” It felt SO GOOD!

In reflecting on the board meeting, I find that it is important for the membership to know that this board is working very hard to deliver value. From adjustments to the M2M Forum, to webinars, to the International Awards & Personalization Expo, your board is committed. We are hyper-focused on bringing back the Expo in February, and we are very encouraged by a terrific education lineup.

We are also committed to engaging great supplier exhibitors—and new exhibitors—to help our retail members grow their businesses with sources, options, and ideas. Who do YOU know that you want at the show? Make sure to TELL THEM. The floor is already filling up, and I feel strongly that our retail members will be in person in Vegas in better numbers than before.

After a year off, I personally cannot wait to get back! The 2020 show had an outstanding turnout from both new and longtime members, and my hope is that 2022 will be even greater. I have missed my secret sauce time! Suppliers greatly benefit from interacting with retailers in person, and I think it would be a missed opportunity to not exhibit.

I have used the analogy of the buffalo with my board members. It is something I learned from a CEO peer group

I belong to. When the storms come, most animals run from the storm, head to the barn, and hide in their stalls. In contrast, the buffalo head into the storm and run—unwavering, purposeful, together. The herd spends less time in danger because they don’t run away from their circumstances; they face them head on. Leaders will always face uncertainty, but how you respond and who you run with can determine whether you make it through and emerge victorious. BE. THE. BUFFALO.

Another thing I did while I was up north: I drove up to Wisconsin to celebrate the 40th anniversary of an awards business—American Awards & Promotions—belonging to my friends Mark and Lori Warren (see Association News on p. 44). Congratulations! We live and work in an industry where even our competition can be our friends. What?! That is outstanding. And I love it!

On *Sunday Morning* recently, one of the feature stories was about an antique dealer in New Orleans. He talked about how blessed he was to have a job where he thoroughly loved what he did, a job he loved going to every day. I say it all the time. *We get to play with cool toys and make pretty things.* How lucky are we?

I am looking forward to seeing all of you in Las Vegas in February. I cannot wait for all the conversations and all the “nuggets” I will bring home from the show. But mainly, I cannot wait to be with all my friends, to celebrate, to encourage new business owners, to learn new things. #APATHrive

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A Gift for Better Business

IMPROVE YOUR YEAR-ROUND GIFT SALES BY THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE HOLIDAYS

BY DANIELLE LEBER

For awards and personalization professionals, there exist some universal truths—the proud smile of an award recipient will always be contagious; the pickiest clients are always the likeliest to have a low-resolution photo. But if you subscribe to the well-known notion that cooler weather and the coming of fall are the official markers of the gift-giving season, you're likely missing out on the potential benefits focusing on gifts year-round can have for your business.

Whether they're practical items for happy housewarmings or monogrammed gifts for elated grads, presents are a perfect option for personalization no matter the season—you just need a plan of attack. To get you started, we spoke with three successful companies about their gift sales, and they had no shortage of pearls (or presents!) to share about boosting your bottom line with gifts year-round.

GIVE BACK

Another universal truth known to awards and personalization professionals is that an excellent customer experience is the best marketing—but fewer realize the benefits of building a marketing strategy around taking

their can-do attitudes and positive people skills to the streets and social media.

“Our greatest marketing success has been through authentic community involvement,” said Shana Kayne Beach, owner and project lead at Chase Street Accessories & Engraving, which was voted the place for “Baltimore’s Best Gifts” in a reader survey by *The Baltimore Sun*. “We look for opportunities to sponsor local events with an in-kind trade, such as providing the swag bag or awards for the event.”

For example, Chase Street A&E provided gifts, medals, and awards to the virtual Baltimore Children’s Fair in 2020 and recently provided giveaways for the first post-pandemic in-person gathering hosted by the company’s local Chamber of Commerce.

“In exchange, we were given speaking time at the event, which resulted in multiple strong sales leads,” Beach said. “This type of marketing is time-consuming, but it’s inexpensive, productive, and allows us the opportunity to give back at the same time. I think it’s because of this approach that we were so successful in *The Baltimore Sun*’s ‘Best of Baltimore’ reader’s choice poll. Our name



Photo courtesy of Chase Street Accessories & Engraving

recognition and credibility gets stronger every day, even though our business is only a couple years old.”

Amanda Gianotti, president of Allogram, Inc., shares this philosophy, citing genuine engagement as the primary focus of her company’s social media strategy—and an important and necessary step, even when posts can’t necessarily be correlated directly with sales.

“We don’t see a correlation between marketing and sales, per se. We approach marketing as maintaining community awareness; we want to be top of mind,” she said.

Many retailers may start off strong with their social media strategy and then start to let it slide when they don’t see an immediate return on their posts, ad words campaigns, and other marketing. But when it comes to building a booming gift business, ensuring your shop is known for excellent personalized presents is the most important step—and the second most important is consistency of messaging.

The average customer is likely well aware of the winter holidays, but they’re less likely to consider the many other gifts given throughout the year. That’s where the savvy retailer can not only provide reminders about under-the-radar gift giving opportunities but further develop their local relationships, said Keith Pettengill, vice president of sales for Creative Gifts International.

“People always think about Valentine’s Day, Christmas, Mother’s Day, but there are things happening all year round that they don’t think about, like teachers’ gifts,” he said. “Go to your local colleges to see what you can do with college logos. Ask different civic groups what’s going on in your area. Think about things like your town’s 100th anniversary.”



Photo courtesy of Creative Gifts International

Particularly this year, customers have more to consider than ever. Help them stay ahead of the occasion—and informed about your offerings and policies—by not only reminding them about upcoming events but sending the message more than once.

“We try to get about 6 weeks in front of the holiday or event that we’re promoting and we do direct email to our customer base and our prospects,” Gianotti said. “For instance, for Mother’s Day, we would start the end of March and say, ‘Hey, don’t forget Mom; Mother’s Day is coming’ and show a couple of pictures of products. Then a couple weeks later, another reminder, there’s still time to order, and then the week before, place your orders by whatever the date is for the cutoff. We do get replies, and it does generate conversation.”

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

To stay at the top of gift-givers’ shopping lists, you also need to know what the most popular presents are—but everyone we interviewed agreed that to find those ideas, you likely don’t have to look outside your own home.

“We have noticed an uptick in popularity in housewares and home goods, things for the kitchen, wood carving boards and pizza boards, glass jars,” Pettengill said. “For a long time, people went with disposable items, but now they’re spending more time in their houses, and they’re going back to getting nicer glassware and homewares.”

Gianotti also recommends that retailers not overlook the unique home décor items awards and personalization professionals can offer, such as acrylic blocks with full-color UV printing, and items that may be trending because of their association with pop culture, like chess sets (which

experienced an uptick in popularity after the hit Netflix show *The Queen's Gambit* premiered).

Housewares often have a higher-end appearance and greater perceived value than other presents, making them perfect for two of the biggest categories for gifts this year: weddings and corporate giving.

"We've had lots of wedding gifts and wedding party favors lately because a lot of parties were delayed over the last year and were just not being held," Beach said.

"For corporate and organizational customers, everyone's spinning up the trade show circuit again. We've created a lot of small gifts, like personalized bottle openers, for our business clients to hand out during events."



As the world continues to face workforce issues, companies also are leaning hard into gift-giving as a strategy for employee recognition and retention.

Photo courtesy of Creative Gifts International

"We're seeing a lot more corporate-type gifts as people realize their employees have had a lot of stress over the last year," Pettengill said. "Before, they may not have given a gift at all, but now, they are. You hear about people leaving their companies, so managers are trying to hang on to the employees they have."

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

Corporations and far-fetched wedding destinations also present unique opportunities to upsell to customers by offering complementary items to enhance the gift experience.

"Instead of just shipping an award or item, we suggest customers make a party in a box," Gianotti said. "They can provide the items that we'll put in the box, or we'll offer other personalized things, whether it be a mouse pad or a pen or a tumbler. We've had customers bring us champagne splits and then we did engraved champagne flutes. We've had people bring Godiva chocolates, another did a wine and cheese theme where they provided wine and cheese and crackers. It's just that upsell opportunity to sell more of your products and offer that upgrade."

Gianotti also cites an easy solution to a common problem: shipping issues. Rather than stress over ensuring each box arrives at its individual destination at the exact right time,

OPTIMIZE YOUR ONLINE STORE FOR GIFT SALES

1. Present personalized products.

Gianotti notes that customers often focus on the final product—rather than the personalization potential—of items when shopping, so it's important to give them examples of how the blank will look once it's been updated with their own design or artwork.

"Seeing that graphic makes a difference to buyers when they're searching for a product," she said. "They might want your product, but if it's not shown the way they want it, they're not going to buy it."

2. Try to consider your customer's questions and be transparent about the answers.

This includes showcasing the product in use and providing as much information about it as possible in the store, Pettengill said. "We try to consider, as consumers, what would we ask about this product? Then we want to make sure all of that information is in the detail descriptions."

Including transparent, clear, and easily accessible information about pricing also helps motivate customers to head to checkout and builds trust in your brand, encouraging more repeat business.

3. Don't overlook the importance of small details.

When it comes to ensuring your site looks professional and credible—important considerations for online shoppers—the details, including things like image sizes, matter, Beach said.

"The biggest thing I notice when looking at competitors' sites is inconsistent image ratios, which can look amateurish. Use a service that will automatically resize those photos for you!"

Check your site to ensure product descriptions are consistent and correct; images are appropriately sized and showcase the personalization potential of your products; and your checkout process, shipping policies, and other details are consistent across every page.

4. Test your links and checkout process.

The easiest way to lose an online sale is by building (or not noticing!) barriers between the customer and the purchase. To ensure you're aware of and can fix any issues customers may experience before finalizing their order, test your online ordering process regularly. This includes ensuring there are no confusing steps or screens during the order process, checking links throughout your store to verify that they lead where they should, and ensuring any order notifications or follow-up communications are clear, concise, and error free.

create stickers stressing that recipients don't open their packages until a specific time and date. This can help calm corporate customers who want recipients to experience opening their boxes at the same time, such as during a virtual all-company meeting, while eliminating the stress of checking dozens of tracking links.

However, there is a greater shipping issue that has plagued retailers since the start of COVID—inability to get stock in a timely fashion and to get products to customers by promised deadlines. But a little extra customer service, even if delivered via email, may help soothe customers' frustrations and keep them coming back.

"We've already lost or delayed a couple orders due to supply chain issues," Beach said. "Last holiday season, many of the orders we sent out were lost in transit for months, resulting in many upset customers. We found the best way to respond to this was to offer a personalized email/note to the giftee letting them know that the buyer had purchased something custom-made that was delayed, but on its way."

She also noted that they're "much more vigilant about the USPS scanning processes" now, and plan to use alternative shipping options like UPS and FedEx and set earlier deadlines for orders placed during busy periods, like graduation or the holidays, to help mitigate delivery issues.

Gianotti also suggests adjusting your sales strategy to prioritize items you have in stock—and ensuring you're diligent about your inventory management—can help ensure you're not delaying customers. It's not about never selling an item you don't have in stock, she said, but changing the perspective to "think first of selling what you have instead of automatically entering an order without checking if something is available."

Whether it's by incorporating more items from popular television programs into your stock or engaging with your community to encourage better brand recognition, implementing a product strategy that incorporates year-round gifting can help ensure more consistent sales and keep you top of mind with customers.

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Marco Awards Group has expanded its Burst Thru Resin Plate Line. These 7¼-in.-by-5-in. plates are designed to stand (kick stand) or hang on the wall. They are full color and high relief. Burst Thru Resin Plates are offered in more than 30 designs in major sports and activities and are designed to fit a personalized name plate.

The TRIO II Series features fully designed high relief resin plates. They are featured with key major sports themes and room to mount a plate.

The TRIO II Stand-Ups are 5¼-in. by 7-in. tall. Each comes with a kick stand or can be hung on the wall.

Stand-ups in the Custom Stand Up Series are designed in black with a gold accent and perfectly fit the Burst Thru Series of full color resin plates. The TRIO II Series can also be mounted on the 8-in.-by-10-in. Custom Stand-Up.

Any of these Custom Stand-Ups are mounted on a solid black base and are packed 10 per case. They are offered in four different top styles, including radius top, hexagon top, two-notch top, and pentagon top.

Phone: 800.229.6592
Website: marcoawardsgroup.com



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RECOGNIZE TEAMS IN STYLE WITH THIS NEW LITE CHAMP CHAIN



Modeled off the popular Presidential Champ Chain, the new Lite Champ Chain from **Simba** is made entirely of plastic and is finished gold. The material means it is lighter weight, making it easier to wear and lighter on the wallet. This Lite Champ Chain is a prestigious way to celebrate any event! Featuring a 6-in.-by-5¼-in. center plate with an attached bright gold 7/8-in.-by-34-in. chain, this award is customized with a Vibraprint™ poly domed logo.

Website: simbaline.com

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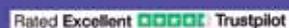
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PRODUCT FEATURE

FREE SHIPPING ON CRYSTAL AWARDS FROM REDWOOD MEMENTOS



Redwood Mementos is dedicated to crystal trophies and has a range of crystal products ranging among different price levels. From elegant desktop pieces to magnificent trophy pieces, customers can always find one for recognition purposes. Redwood Mementos is offering a big-time promotion to retailers and distributors: free shipping for orders of \$50 above. The promotion will take place from September 1, 2021, to March 1, 2022.

Phone: 801.683.5640
Email: karl@redwoodmementos.com
Website: redwoodmementos.com

VERSATILE GIFT CAN SERVE AS A TROPHY OR VASE

Since being introduced in 2020, the Legacy Trophy Vase from **Crystal by Design** has quickly become a bestseller. The beautiful fluid design of the glass gives a look of prestigious high-end elegance, but its best feature is the economical price point. The base provides ample area for personalization. It comes unattached to accommodate smaller machines; just decorate the base and glue the top on afterward.

Besides being presented as a trophy, it can also serve as a vase, making it perfect for other gifting purposes, such as housewarmings. This versatile piece is sure to impress at any occasion.

Website: crystalbydesign.com



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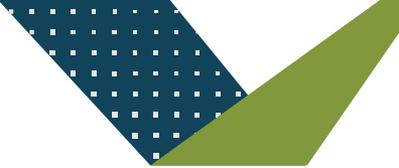
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**EQUIPMENT
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PROTECT YOUR VALUABLE INFORMATION BY FENDING OFF RANSOMWARE AND PHISHING ATTEMPTS

BY BRIAN STANLEY

It's almost impossible to run any business nowadays without using computers, the internet, online ordering, and social media. And although technology has increased customer bases, markets, and product availability with new levels of speed and interaction, technology has also brought its own problems—or rather new levels of speed and interaction for the ancient problem of honest merchants guarding against thieves and scammers.

“In today's world, less-than-adequate cybersecurity puts an entire business at risk,” said Steven Bowcut, editor-in-chief of *Brilliance Security Magazine*, which reports on physical security and cybersecurity issues. “A ransomware attack could literally put you out of business,” Bowcut warned.

“Ransomware” is a type of malware that takes over computers or networks and steals data and blocks files and information from authorized users. The programmers who put the ransomware on the system then demand ransom in exchange for restoring files or network access.

Because no one would intentionally allow such programs to operate on their system, ransomware is disguised as other data—the kind of things people are likely to download or click on.

One Friday in May, an Awards and Personalization Association (APA) member received a message from what appeared to be a relative's Facebook account. The APA

member clicked on the message. When it appeared the page or file was one of the countless broken links on the information superhighway, the member closed the message and went on with the day.

The APA member asked to not be identified, but does hold an executive position at a retailer with many employees. By clicking on the message, this member had planted a ransomware program that was rewriting file names so the computer wouldn't know how to open them.

“And since I have administration rights, it was infecting almost every computer on our server on our network,” the member said. “When I logged in the next day, a few things weren't working right. I thought that might be because I was working remotely, but when I reached out to IT, they found it was ransomware.”

In all, 24 computers on the company network were infected with the ransomware. Those that weren't included four computers that were operating with an older version of Windows, which the ransomware program wasn't compatible with, and one computer used by an employee who had logged off and shut everything down before leaving for the day.

“One employee did the things we're all supposed to do. That stopped that one from getting infected too,” the APA member noted.

According to the FBI, ransomware victims should not go along with what cybercriminals want.

“Paying a ransom doesn’t guarantee you or your organization will get any data back. It also encourages perpetrators to target more victims and offers an incentive for others to get involved in this type of illegal activity,” the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center advises. In 2020, the FBI received 2,474 complaints identified as ransomware with adjusted losses of over \$29.1 million. Bowcut believes this year’s statistics are on track to greatly outpace those numbers.

Because the affected company already had a contract with an IT company and regularly backed up data on a remote cloud system, they did not pay the ransom.

“We back up all the time. And that makes a huge difference. I think we were more prepared than most companies for a cyberattack, but there were still some things we had to deal with,” the APA member acknowledged. The IT company started “rebuilding” computers on the Monday after the cyberattack, which included upgrading some levels of protection.

“It still took a solid two weeks to be back to normal,” the APA member said. “Our computers are hooked up to printer, laser, and other equipment. It took a lot of time to make those connections again.”

The APA member feels the company’s IT contract has definitely paid for itself this year and investing in new desktop anti-virus software was another worthwhile purchase. The member’s personal account will also now use a different login and password from the administration account.

PHISHING EMAILS

Bowcut said most businesses are targeted with “phishing” emails, links, and messages several times a week.

“The goal is to trick someone into putting in their information so they can steal the credentials or download

malware,” Bowcut said. “Ransomware targeted toward individuals is more rare since most people don’t have the same need to get their data back as a business does.”

Bowcut said phishing emails are sent out every day by the millions. “The different groups [of criminals] that do this go after where they can do the most damage or get the most money,” Bowcut said. “With small businesses, it’s usually a shotgun approach, not a targeted attack.”

However, even though small businesses may not be specifically targeted, they do possess valuable information that cybercriminals seek, such as employee and customer records and bank account information.

Bowcut believes cybercrime would be greatly reduced if businesses provided basic training in password management and spotting phishing emails.

“If you’ve had the same password for a few months, it’s (likely) in the hands of cybercriminals,” Bowcut said. “Don’t use the same password for different websites.”

Phishing emails used to be almost comically obvious, with spelling mistakes and odd grammar, but criminals have gotten better about making their communications look legitimate.

“If you get an email that looks like it’s from your bank, don’t click to respond. Get out of that browser. Go into another one if you want to look at your account,” Bowcut said.

Legitimate software manufacturers are constantly working to reduce vulnerability to hacking, so Bowcut also recommends updating programs and apps continually.

“There’s a balance between security and convenience,” he said. “Small businesses have to budget for the cost of data protection. Make sure you’re backing up critical data, so at least you’re not sunk if you have to start over, and keep those backups separate from your network.”

FREE RESOURCES TO KEEP YOUR BUSINESS SAFE

Small businesses may have fewer resources than larger companies when it comes to protecting against cybercrimes. Here are some free tools that can help you and your employees keep your business clear from an attack.

- **Federal Communications Commissions:** fcc.gov/general/cybersecurity-small-business
- **Federal Trade Commission:** ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/small-businesses/cybersecurity
- **Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency:** cisa.gov/publication/stophinkconnect-small-business-resources
- **Small Business Administration:** sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/stay-safe-cybersecurity-threats



BY JEREMIAH JEKICH, EPILOG LASER

One of the versatile and inspiring aspects of a laser is that it can be used to engrave the graphics that will be the focal point of your finished item, and it can also be used to cut out the parts and pieces that will be used to produce the rest of your project. Many projects can make use of the laser's ability to produce crisp, clean, and custom graphics; some can leverage the laser machine as a fabrication tool; and others can make use of both capabilities.

In this project, we look at constructing an LED-lit sign. The steps below illustrate how cut and engraved acrylic, and a laser-cut sheet of plywood, can be used to create a simple but effective display piece.

PREPARING OUR ACRYLIC

We'll start by spray-painting the back side of a 12-in.-by-24-in. (304.8-mm-by-609.6-mm) acrylic sheet. You could use any color paint for this, but we're using black to provide a nice, sharp contrast. If your acrylic is pre-masked, be sure to unmask one side prior to painting (Figure 1).

We used a Fusion Pro 48 120w:

Plywood

Vector—Speed: 25% //
Power: 100% // Frequency:
10%

Acrylic

Vector—Speed: 10% //
Power: 100% // Frequency:
100%

Engraving—Speed: 100% //
Power: 50% // Resolution:
500 dpi

MATERIALS NEEDED

- 1/4" (6.35 mm) plywood—24" x 48" (609.6 mm x 1219.2 mm) sheet
- 1/4" (6.35 mm) acrylic—12" x 24" (304.8 mm x 609.6 mm) sheet
- Foil tape
- Machine screws & nuts
- Wood glue
- Spray paint
- Adhesive, cuttable LED light strip
- USB extension cord (optional)
- USB wall adapter (optional)
- Laser system

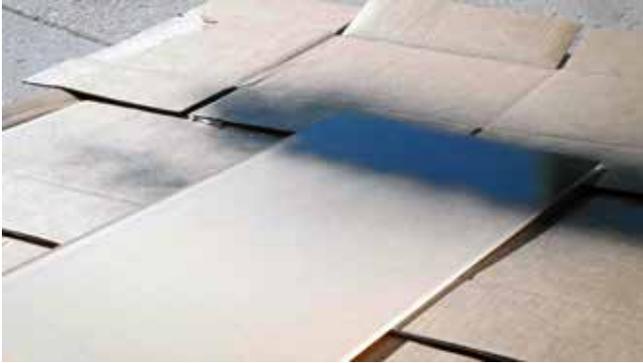


FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

CUTTING OUR PLYWOOD

While the paint is drying, let's cut out the wooden components of our sign. First, we'll load our plywood sheet into the machine. We're using a 120-watt Fusion Pro 48, which fits a standard 24-in.-by-48-in. (609.6-mm-by-1219.2-mm) sheet of plywood from the hardware store quite nicely. If you're using a smaller machine, be sure to use a smaller sheet of wood and possibly cut out the components in multiple batches.

We're using some light ¼-in. (6.35-mm) plywood, but you could use any wood or other laser-safe material you'd like—it will just affect the weight of your finished sign and

the settings you need to use when cutting with the laser. Always refer to your laser manual's list of recommended materials settings for a good place to start honing in your speed and power (Figure 2).

Our ¼-in. (6.35-mm) plywood is close to 0.2 in. (5.08 mm) in thickness, which we've accounted for in the finger joints of our design file. If you're working with a thicker material, you'll need to adjust the artwork accordingly (Figure 3).

All of our pieces fit nicely into about two-thirds of our plywood sheet, so we'll apply our settings of 25% speed,

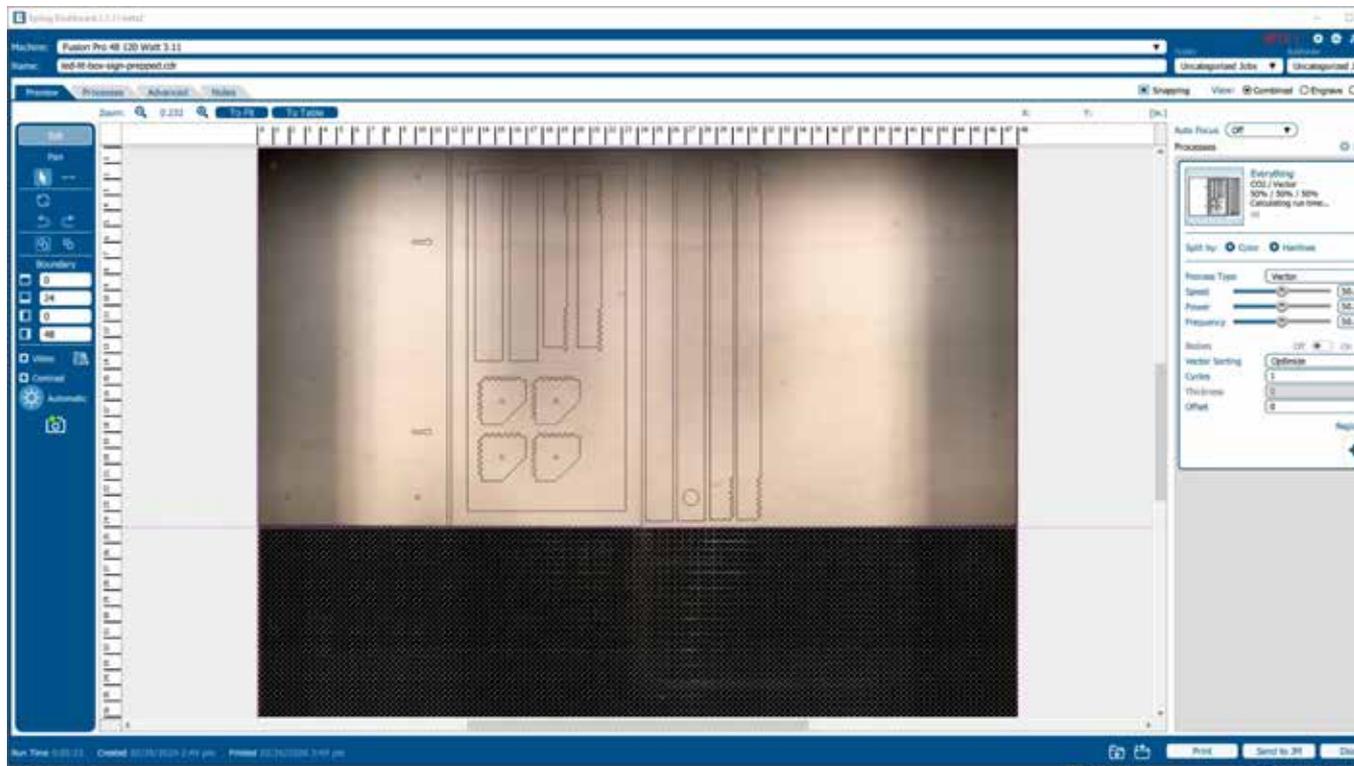


FIGURE 4

100% power, and 10 frequency, and send it to the laser to cut them out (Figures 4 and 5).

PAINTING OUR PLYWOOD COMPONENTS

Once we have our plywood pieces, we'll take the pieces that will be exposed to the outside of the sign and spray paint them black. This includes the front frame, the side faces, and the back panel. Painting them black will help the rest of the sign blend together, leaving the focus on our sign's graphics. Once again, though, you could paint, stain, or otherwise finish the components however you like (Figure 6).

ENGRAVING OUR ACRYLIC

Next, while we wait for those pieces to dry, we'll engrave our painted acrylic with our graphic. We're using a 12-in.-by-24-in. (304.8-mm-by-609.6-mm) sheet, and we'll be cutting out a rectangle slightly smaller than that. We've also made sure our acrylic has rounded corners. These corners will be covered by the front frame of the sign and will help ensure we don't encounter any issues resulting from the fit being too snug.

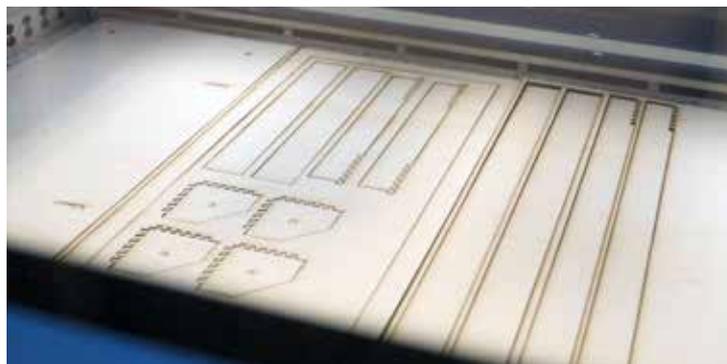


FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

We'll be engraving on the back side of the acrylic, so we'll mirror the graphic to make sure it reads correctly when viewed from the front. We'll print the graphic to the laser and let the machine go to work (Figure 7).

Adjust your settings appropriately—we're using 100% speed, 50% power, and a resolution of 500 dpi for the engraving, and 10% speed, 100% power, and 100% frequency for the cutting (Figure 8).

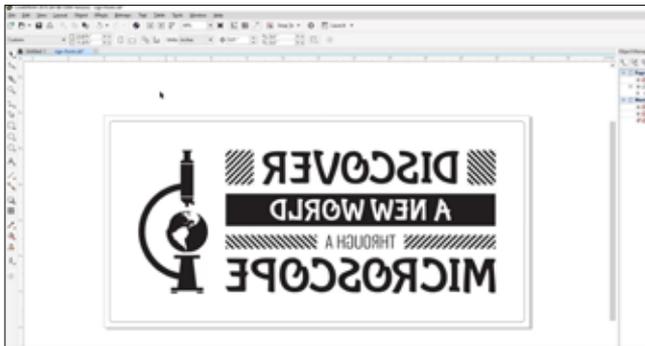


FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8

ASSEMBLING THE SIGN

Now it's time for assembly. We'll start with creating our inner frame by gluing together the corners, using some 1-2-3 blocks to help make sure we're achieving right angles. We'll also glue in our corner faces, which will give us a surface to mount the back panel to (Figures 9 and 10).

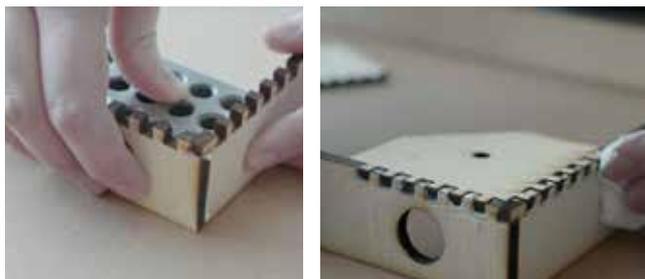


FIGURE 9 & 10

Next, we'll attach the side faces of our outer frame. Be sure to flip the inner frame over so the flat corner faces are on the ground. This will ensure a lip is created on the inside of the outer frame because the inner frame components are not as wide as the outer components. This lip will be where we insert our acrylic front later on (Figures 11, 12, and 13).



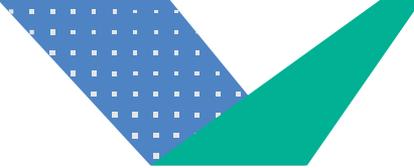
FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12



FIGURE 13



Once that's done, we need to apply some foil tape to the inner surfaces of the frame. We want to cover the inside of the box with reflective material so the light from our LEDs bounces around behind the acrylic and provides some even illumination.

We'll apply the tape to our frame, and then we'll apply it to the interior side of our back panel. We can be a little imprecise with our edges, as they will not be visible on the completed piece (Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17). Then we'll go back with a precision blade and a screwdriver to make sure our various mounting holes are not blocked (Figures 18, 19, and 20).



FIGURE 14



FIGURE 15



FIGURE 16



FIGURE 17



FIGURE 18



FIGURE 19



FIGURE 20

Now it's time to add our adhesive LED light strips (Figures 21, 22, 23, and 24).

Next, we'll lay the frame on its back and lay the acrylic sheet onto the lip created by the inner frame. Test the LEDs to make sure everything's working properly, then glue on the front frame (Figure 25, 26, 27, and 28).

Then we can plug the sign in, and we're good to go. We now have a completed LED-lit sign cut and engraved with an Epilog Laser (see completed LED-Lit sign on page 22).

Hopefully this project has helped inspire you to think about how a laser machine can be used to not only engrave detailed graphics, but also how it can be used in the production of parts and pieces. Until next time, happy lasering!



FIGURE 21



FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23



FIGURE 24



FIGURE 25



FIGURE 26



FIGURE 27



FIGURE 28

Jeremiah Jekich began his tenure at Epilog as a front-end web designer in the sales and marketing department. He has since moved to a new role as a full stack web developer on the information technology services (ITS) team where he works to enhance services and user experiences for Epilog Laser customers.

EQUIPMENT FEATURE

ENGRAVING AND ROUTING

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Website: epiloglaser.com



TROTEC COMBINES SOFTWARE WITH ENGRAVING WITH THE RUN ON RUBY SPEEDY

Ruby® laser software and the Speedy 400 laser engraver from **Trotec** have become one. Ruby offers users the ability to create text, photo, and graphic elements, as well as import a variety of file types without a third-party design software. The Speedy 400 Run on Ruby® includes a touch panel on the machine, which makes it possible to operate the laser in the network via Ethernet or Wi-Fi without an additional PC. With the official release, all Speedy laser owners can upgrade their Speedy lasers to Ruby® for free until October 31, 2021. Downloads are now available on ruby.troteclaser.com.

Website: troteclaser.com

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Rowmark has introduced LaserGloss Exterior, a laser- and rotary-engravable material, featuring a stunning, laser-friendly gloss finish that can stand up to the harshest elements. With a tough, exterior-rated gloss top layer designed for outdoor use, LaserGloss Exterior will keep its finish year after year in virtually any application.

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Website: rowmark.com





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EQUIPMENT FEATURE

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Advanced, yet simple to operate, **Roland**'s new multipurpose LV series laser engraving machines employ state-of-the-art CO₂ laser technology to cut out, engrave, or mark on a wide variety of materials, including acrylic, with incredible ease and accuracy. Two different models are available—the LV-180 (20.4-in. by 14.7-in. table) and the LV-290 (31-in. by 20.9-in. table)—allowing users to choose the machine that best suits the size and thickness of the materials they will be working with.

LV series engravers are ideal to use alongside Roland's VersaUV LEF and LEF2 benchtop flatbed printers for combined laser-cut and direct-print applications.

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The advertisement features a blue background with white and red text. At the top, it reads 'EXCEPTIONAL VERSATILITY & RELIABILITY' and 'Forging Ahead with GCC LaserPro'. Below this, it says 'BEST PERFORMANCE & VALUE'. In the center, there are four different models of GCC LaserPro machines, ranging in size from a small desktop unit to a larger floor-standing unit. At the bottom, there is a GCC logo on the left, the website 'www.GCCworld.com' in the center, and 'GCC America 1-909-718-0248' on the right. A red banner in the top right corner contains the text 'PRINTING United Expo October 6-8, 2021 Booth # 5511, Orlando, FL'.

X500III PRO FEATURES ADVANCED MECHANICAL SYSTEM AND ENHANCED VECTOR AND CUTTING QUALITY

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The added 1.6X beam expander is a key to achieve the uniformity of line width and spot size and the carriage design is upgraded at the same time to elevate the quality of X500III Pro. GCC LaserPro's intuitive and feature-rich Windows driver, which allows direct output from familiar graphic design software, including Corel Draw, Illustrator, AutoCAD, etc. Optional external Interface Control Board allows users to set up GCC laser machines for communication with external peripherals to form an automated workflow.

The vector and cutting quality of X500III Pro is enhanced thanks to an advanced mechanical system. X500III Pro can help you expand market share and meet customers' expectations.

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Website: gccworld.com



/ SETTING NEW STANDARDS

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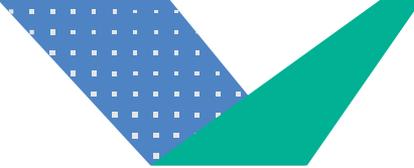
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SELECTING THE RIGHT LENS FOR YOUR LASER APPLICATION

BY DAVID STEVENS, TROTEC LASER INC

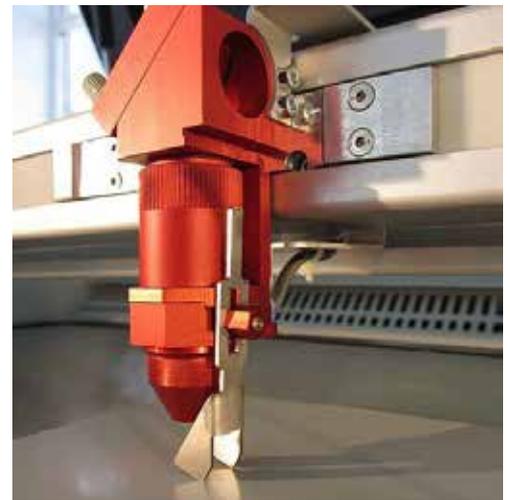
Selecting the right lens can be the key to achieving perfect results with your CO₂ laser system.

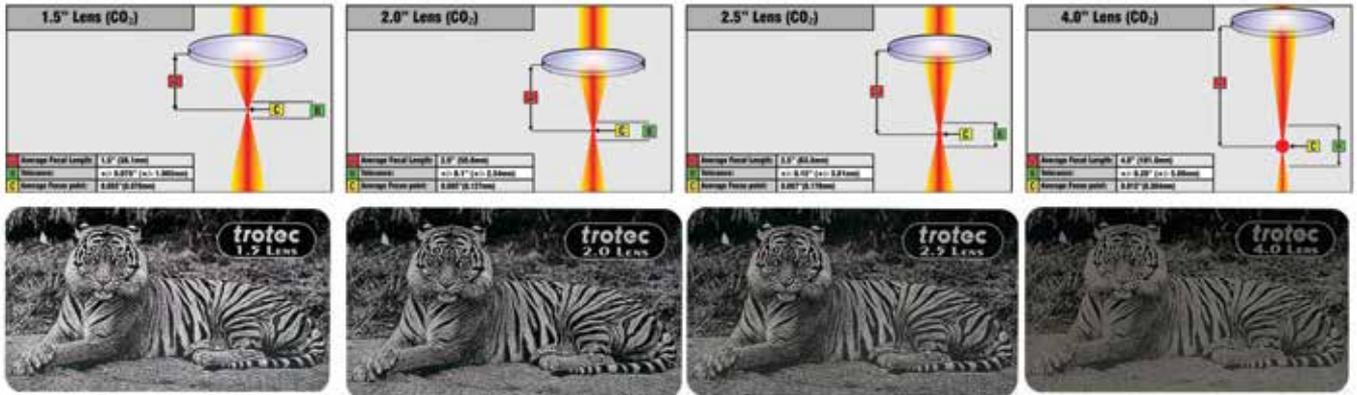
The parameters are set, the focus is adjusted, but somehow the engraving is not precise. Has this ever happened to you? This error is most likely a lens issue. The correct lens is just as essential as the parameters and optimal focus adjustment. To select the proper lens, you must consider the output of the laser device, the material type and thickness that you are processing, and the detail level and resolution (dpi) of the graphics.

As a rule of thumb, when marking or engraving more delicate and detailed graphics, a smaller lens should be used. A 1.5-in. lens is ideal for graphics with a resolution of 500 dpi or higher and for rubber stamps with thin letters, in addition to other graphics with small or intricate details. A 2.0-in. lens will work well for most standard engravings or graphics with medium detail or resolution, while a 2.5-in. lens may be used for heat-sensitive materials that require a large surface to be engraved away. The extra distance between the laser head and the material will prevent the material from overheating or warping.

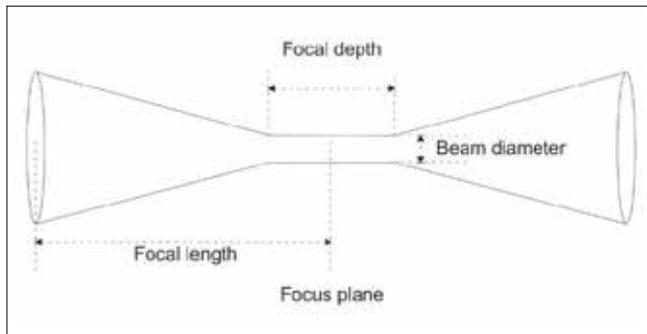
For cutting, ideally a 2.0-in. lens will work with thicknesses up to 3/8 to 1/2 of an inch, but anything thicker may require a 2.5- or 4.0-in. lens. Keep in mind that as the focal distance increases, the amount of energy the laser provides will seem to decrease—so laser power will come into play here, as well. You can also use larger lenses for low-detail engravings with higher laser power.

Not all laser systems offer every lens, so make sure you do your research and talk to your local laser expert so they can make a recommendation based on your material and application.





GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Beam diameter

The diameter of the laser beam, which becomes greater and greater before and behind the focus.

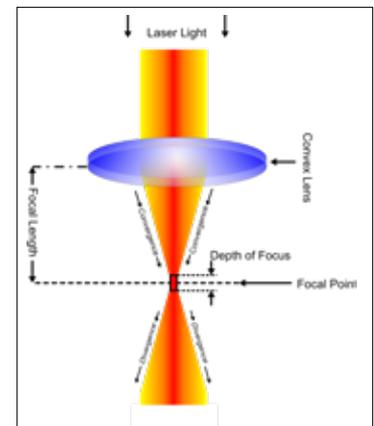
The longer the focal distance of the lens, the greater the beam diameter. The energy of the laser is focused by the lens onto a defined focal point. The greater the focal distance of the lens, the greater also the surface onto which the energy of the laser is applied. This may mean that if you use a large lens, the material is heated rather than cut.



Focus tolerance (depth of focus)

The area in which the beam has the smallest diameter.

The larger the lens (= the larger the focal length of the lens), the longer the focal tolerance. This means that the focus tolerance of a 5-in. lens will be twice that of a 2.5-in. lens. This is especially important if you want to cut through thick materials.



Focal length

The distance between the lens and the point of the smallest beam diameter.

Focus

The area where the laser beam is optimally focused and converges to the smallest possible beam diameter.



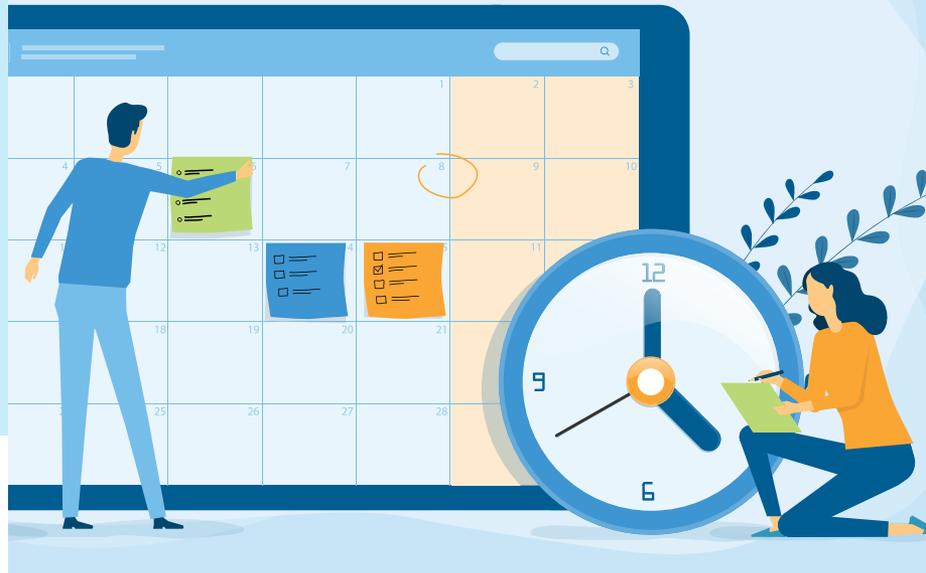
David Stevens has been in the laser industry for more than 20 years and is renowned in the industry for his knowledge, teaching abilities, and helping customers improve their laser processing techniques. He joined Trotec Laser Inc in 2017 as the Industrial Applications Manager and heads the West Coast Training, Applications, & Inspiration Lab.

BUSINESS MATTERS

“If **Plan A** fails, remember there are **25** more letters.”

– Chris Guillebeau

BY FRAN CARVILLE, CRM,
CARCO AWARDS/CARCOAWARDS.COM



BUILDING PLANS THAT WORK FOR YOU

Explore all options for inspiration when forming your next plan

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I developed what I considered to be a brilliant plan to make the shopping experience with our company more enjoyable for our customers. It was a plan to increase sales and grow our customer base. I called it “Plan A” as a joke, never imagining I might need a Plan B or a Plan C.

Plan A took time to develop and implement. It took time to prepare, and then it was launch time. And 6 months later, our business had seen very little return on investment from my fabulous plan.

Now, my first (and second) thought was that this was time wasted for nothing. No more great plans. No more brainstorming. No more using my time to look for new ways to make my business better. Nope. The great Plan A was a big old zero. But after a couple days of feeling defeated, I was reminded of an old quote: “Nothing changes if nothing changes.”

Hmmm ... and so, it was time to get started on a Plan B. To make a long story short (it’s probably too late for that), my Plan B was no better than my Plan A. And Plan C? Well, let’s not go there. After much time spent on complaining that my plans were not yielding the results I wanted, it was time to “pick myself up, dust myself off, and start all over again.” And so, work on Plan D started.

We all have a couple of choices: Keep trying new, well-thought-out plans or do nothing and accept that nothing

will change for the better. With those two choices in mind, ask yourself: Are you 100% satisfied with the status of every part of your business? Are you excited to walk in every day, content that nothing could be improved? Have you used every resource available to you to help your business grow?

For me, the answers to those questions are no, no, maybe, and no. Always working to move forward, but not quite sure how to make something happen. Sound familiar? We all reach a point where we need help. By the time I got to Plan D, I was out of ideas. Was it going to be back to “nothing changes,” or was there another answer?

The great comedian Jonathan Winters once said, “If the ship doesn’t come in, swim out to meet it.” That quotation was the inspiration for my Plan D. This time, rather than just relying on my ideas, I was going to solicit advice from innovative professionals in my own community. And not just retailers, but anyone who seemed to be successfully reaching their goals in unique ways.

THE FURNITURE STORE RETAILER

Competition is fierce in the furniture industry. Advertisements for the big chains are everywhere, and they all seem to be having endless sales. But one locally owned, stand-alone store seemed to be growing by leaps and bounds. I asked the owner how he competed with the big stores and was amazed to learn that his business grew by 22% over the past 2 years. His advice: Be different, be you, be the best at what you do. Don’t

follow a trend without a good reason, and don't apologize for doing things in a different way. He said customers to his store are never greeted by overzealous, commissioned salespeople, but by one of the owners.

He said consumers love dealing with "someone in charge" who seems to have the customer's best interests at heart. Every customer is welcomed and offered a cup of freshly brewed coffee. His showroom is well decorated, and no employee expects the customer to make a quick decision. His staff will come to your house with fabric samples, there is ongoing training to develop the staff's listening skills, and there is never any pressure to purchase. This retailer does not aim to be the cheapest or the biggest. His goal is to give consumers the best shopping experience possible. Good service, good experience, and always in the customer's comfort zone.

THE MINISTER

Many religious leaders have realized that attendance has been dwindling for services, even before the pandemic started. One clergyman decided to conduct a survey with nonactive church members to determine how to better engage former members (customers, in our case). Rewards were offered to return the completed surveys, which increased the rate of return from a normal rate of less than 10% to almost 30%. He called members he had not seen in some time and asked what would get them back in the sanctuary.

He reviewed all results, and two things were mentioned over and over: Members did not want to get dressed up and sit in a stuffy building, and members had no one to leave their children with to attend a service. Changes were made, and today there is an afternoon, casual service held in the activity center. There is free day care during the service. Attendance went from zero to more than 150 members, without losing members from the regular services.

Many times, we take complaints and do the easy thing—we ignore them. To increase participation in his church, the minister took the bold step of opening the door to criticism and doing something to fix the problem. Listen to valid complaints by your customers and do something about the issues, before they find a retailer willing to listen and respond.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

Convincing children to read on a regular basis, just for fun, is not always an easy task. When a new teacher took over the accelerated reading program at her school, there were 12 students participating in the program. The teacher decided to make reading for fun a cool thing to do. She started monthly themed parties, complete with refreshments and awards. The other students noticed that the readers were having fun and wanted to be a part of it. In 1 year, the program went from 12 students to 76 students.

She said that finding new and different ways to encourage the students meant thinking outside the box. Rather than making

the students (customers) think in the same old ways, she looked for ways to engage them. Give potential customers new and exciting reasons to do business with you.

THE HAIR STYLIST

The salon where this young stylist works is dedicated to making every client feel special. From personal telephone calls to remind about appointments to greeting customers by name when they enter the salon, personal service is the focus of this business. Every client is offered a beverage, and every client is treated like the best customer by everyone from the owners down to the housekeeper. "Whatever it takes" is the motto here, and all employees live by this.

Everyone in the salon understands that customers have many choices, and they believe that making clients feel like a valued part of their company keeps them loyal and happy. Treating every customer like the best customer builds loyalty and creates positive word-of-mouth marketing for your business.

THE CPA

My accountant is my partner, always looking to help our business be more profitable, pointing out potential issues before they become problems, and setting meetings on the weekend to accommodate our schedules. He gives me a sense of security, knowing that he is working with me to make my store successful. Oh, and after tax season is over, he hosts a crawfish boil to thank his customers.

Most people don't like going to the CPA, the dentist, or the doctor. This CPA has found ways to ease the pain and make his clients comfortable. Many consumers don't like picking out awards, but if we partner with them and find unique ways to make our customers feel appreciated, they will reward us with their continued business.

There are opportunities to learn how to improve your business around every corner. Throughout the years, I have gotten merchandising ideas from the grocery store, time management ideas from school administrators, and customer service ideas from members of the clergy. You can find ideas on professional websites, in industry magazines, from your employees, and from your fellow Awards and Personalization Association members. Look around your community, your industry, and your association for help with your next plan. Now, back to work on my Plan D.



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, LA.

A CHANGE IN FOCUS

A Corel PHOTO-PAINT Tutorial

BY SHON ROTI, SUBLIMATION CONSULTANT, GRAPHIC DESIGNER

I'd rather show my client a photo of what I can do than explain it. It saves time and does a much better job of revealing what I'm able to accomplish—which is why photos have become such a valuable tool for marketing my business. Every time I create a new or unique item for a client, I make sure to stage and photograph the finished product for social media or post it to my website for potential clients to see.

Although I'm no Ansel Adams, I did take a photography course in college and retained a few concepts from my studies. One of the techniques that I enjoyed employing was called depth of field. Simply put, depth of field is the total area that is in focus in front of and behind the subject matter of the photo, with the remaining portions of the photo left out of focus.

Creating a depth of field allows (potentially) for a more pleasing photo and helps keep the focus on the subject, especially in portrait photography or when photographing a particular object with a wider background. With a digital single-lens reflex camera (DSLR), this is done by using a fast lens with a wide aperture. Although taken from a smartphone camera and not a DSLR, **FIGURE A** and **FIGURE B** are examples of photos with a depth of field and one that keeps most of the image in focus.

I don't use a professional DSLR camera; however, most of today's smartphones have multiple lenses with which to perform a simulated depth of field. This is done artificially through data mapping and edge detection. This technology distinguishes between objects in the foreground and background. Using different lenses, one blurs the background and the other keeps the foreground sharp. The two images are then combined into one image,



FIGURE A



FIGURE B

leaving only the foreground in focus. This option is usually designated as the "Portrait" mode in the camera.

I enjoy creating a depth of field to place all the emphasis on the product. Nobody needs to see random objects that would otherwise distract from the product. But creating a depth of field can still be tricky, even with a smartphone. If the distance from the object needing focus and the smartphone are not optimal, the portrait mode may not function. Likewise, if the background is too close, the camera will probably keep everything in focus. Also, if you forget to use the portrait mode altogether, then you'll have to produce a custom depth of field for yourself.

CREATING A CUSTOM DEPTH OF FIELD

In cases where the portrait mode was not employed correctly (due to the operator or the camera), the photo can be manipulated later to re-create the focus and blurring using some photo editing tools and techniques.

In this tutorial, I will be using Corel PHOTO-PAINT version 2020. However, none of the tools is unique to this version and can be found on the earliest versions of this software.

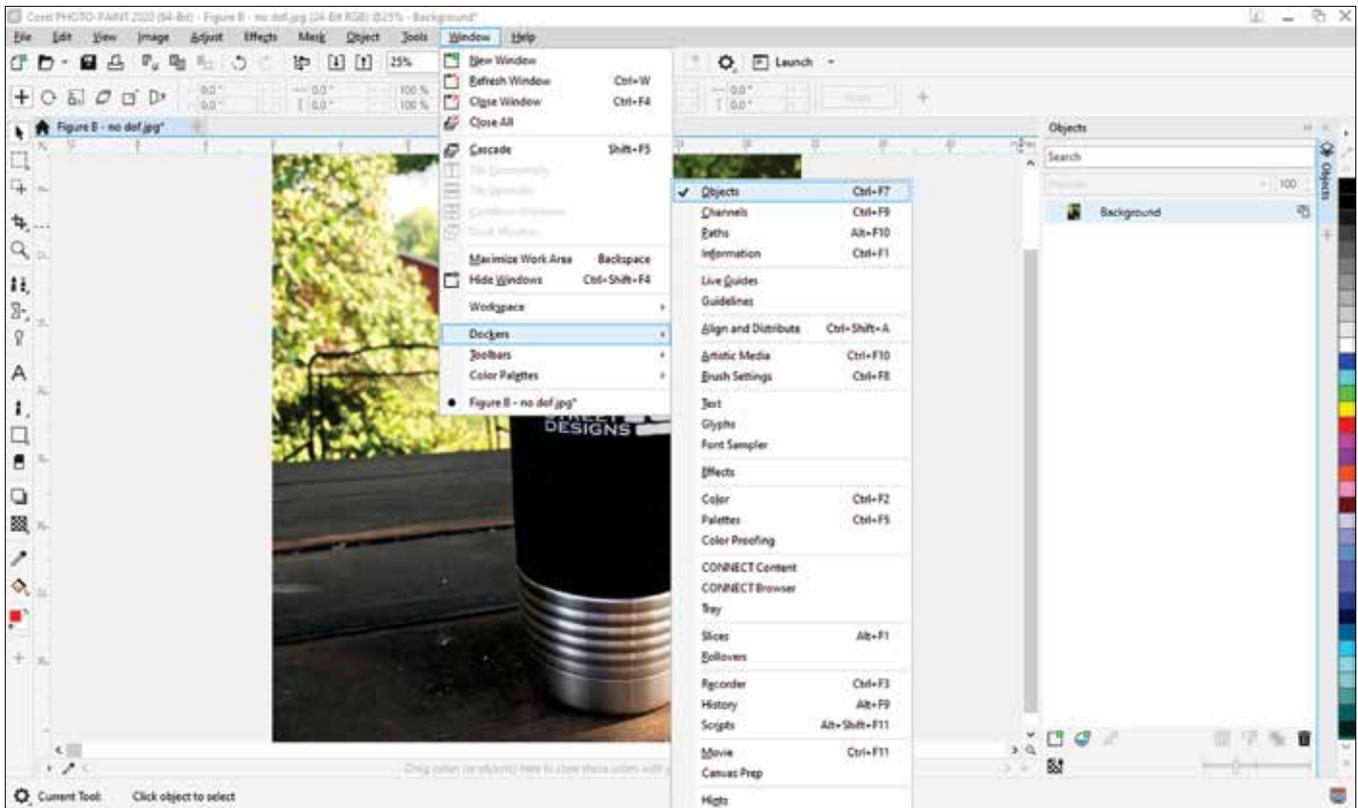


FIGURE C

Creating a custom depth of field can be done in several different ways. I'll demonstrate a couple options: using the Eraser tool and the Object Transparency tool.

FIRST OPTION: THE ERASER TOOL

Open a photo in PHOTO-PAINT. To see the greatest change, start with a photo that has both the foreground and the background in focus. Open the Object docker (Window>Docker>Objects). The shortcut is Ctrl+F7 (FIGURE C). Next, duplicate the background (Ctrl+D). A new object layer will be created above the original image. While in the new object layer, blur the image using Gaussian Blur (Effects>Blur>Gaussian Blur). Move the slider to about 30 pixels and click OK. Now select the Eraser tool (X) and change the nib/brush size to an appropriate size for erasing large sections of the tumbler in the photo.

A smaller nib size can be used later for more precision when erasing the edges. I used a nib size of 250 with a soft edge and transparency set at 0 to fully erase the pixels (FIGURE D). As the Eraser tool is dragged across the tumbler and the foreground, the sharper image of the

tumbler and table in the object layer beneath are revealed (FIGURE E). A big soft brush and a less opaque value (about 90) can be used in this same object layer to create a transitional focus by gradually clicking the eraser into the out-of-focus background.

This is a “cheap and dirty” method, as it relies on the hand’s steadiness and precision of the mouse. But it is simple to do.

SECOND OPTION: OBJECT TRANSPARENCY

The first two steps in this option are the same as the previous—open a photo duplicate and blur the new object layer. Here’s the change: Use the Freehand selection tool to select around the entire tumbler in the original background object layer (FIGURE F). Copy and paste the selection (Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V). This will create an additional new object layer with only the tumbler in it. Deselect the selection. Drag this object layer to the top. Click back onto the blurred object layer and click on the Object Transparency tool from the tool bar on the left side of the workspace (FIGURE G).

COREL CONCEPTS

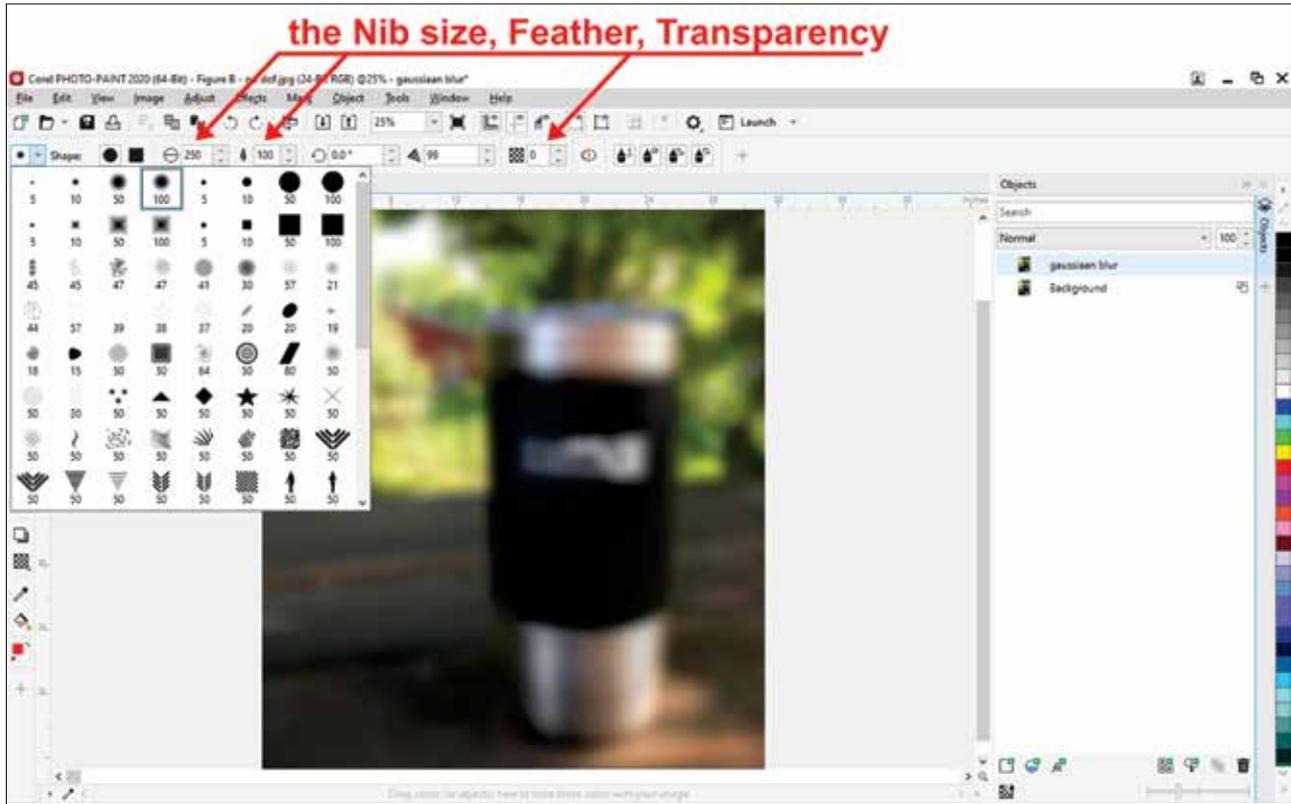


FIGURE D

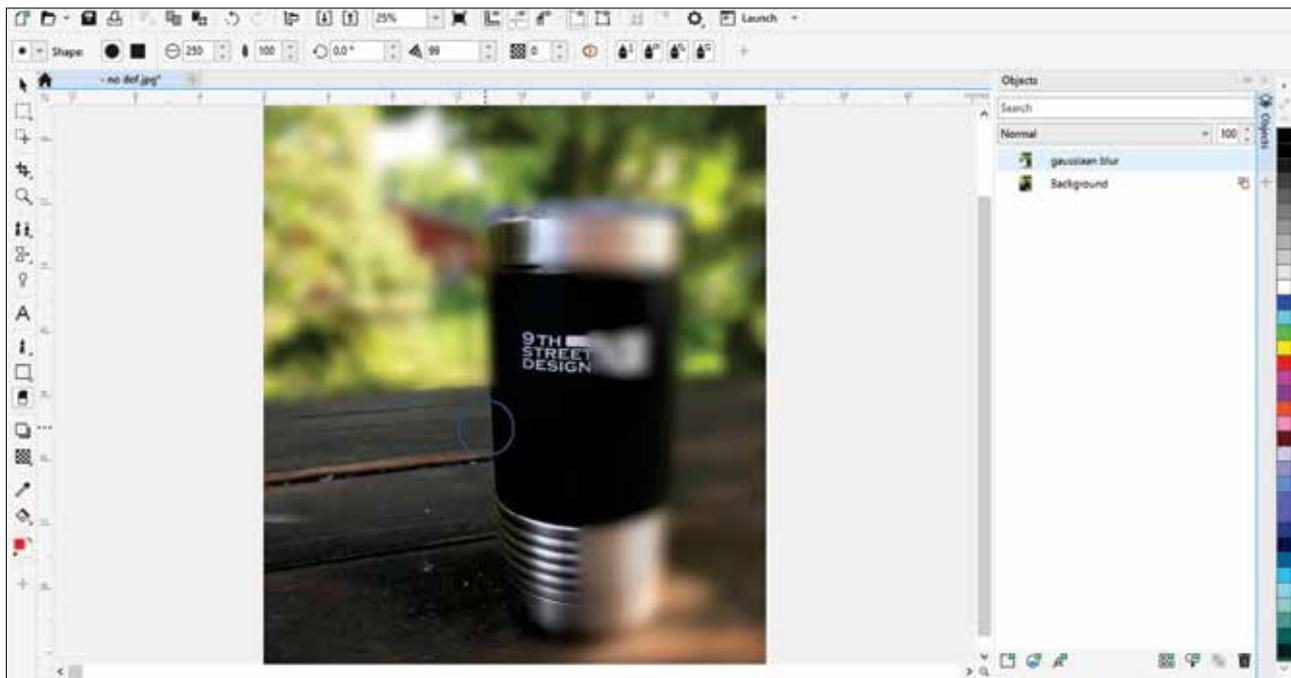


FIGURE E

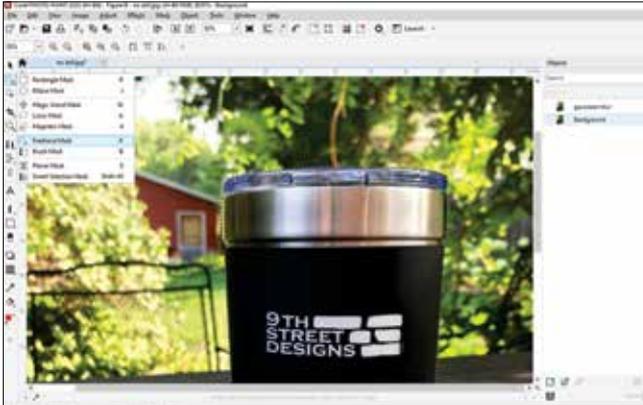


FIGURE F

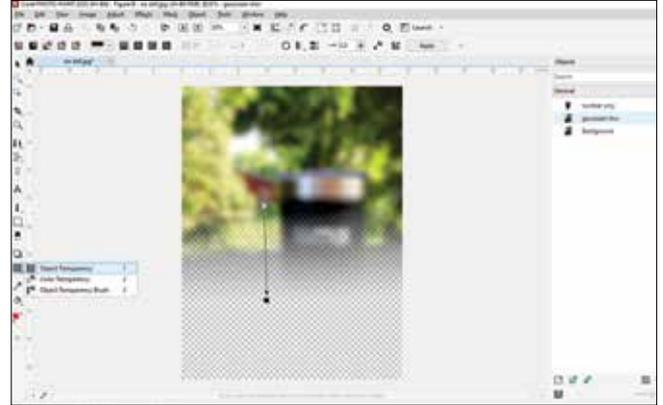


FIGURE H

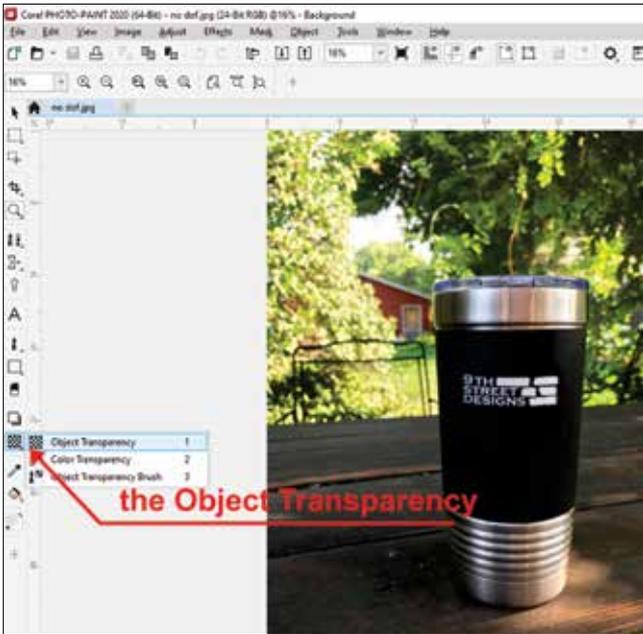


FIGURE G

Click somewhere in the upper background area and drag downward into the foreground area. This will blend the blurred layer from 100% opaque at the top to totally transparent at the bottom (FIGURE H). Adjustments can still be made with this tool's effect after the initial transparency is applied, including the starting, end points, and the mid-point. Clicking on the pick tool will finalize this tool's effect. The result can be seen in combination with the other two object layers visible (FIGURE I). Further adjustments can be made by modifying the opacity layer of the blurred object layer to increase or decrease the effect of the blur.

There is yet another way to create a custom depth of field using the Planar Mask and the Blur options under Effects. But that will have to be the focus for another day.



FIGURE I



Shon Roti is the owner of 9th Street Designs, a sublimation and graphic design consulting and promotional products business. A graphic designer, Roti has spent more than 2 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.

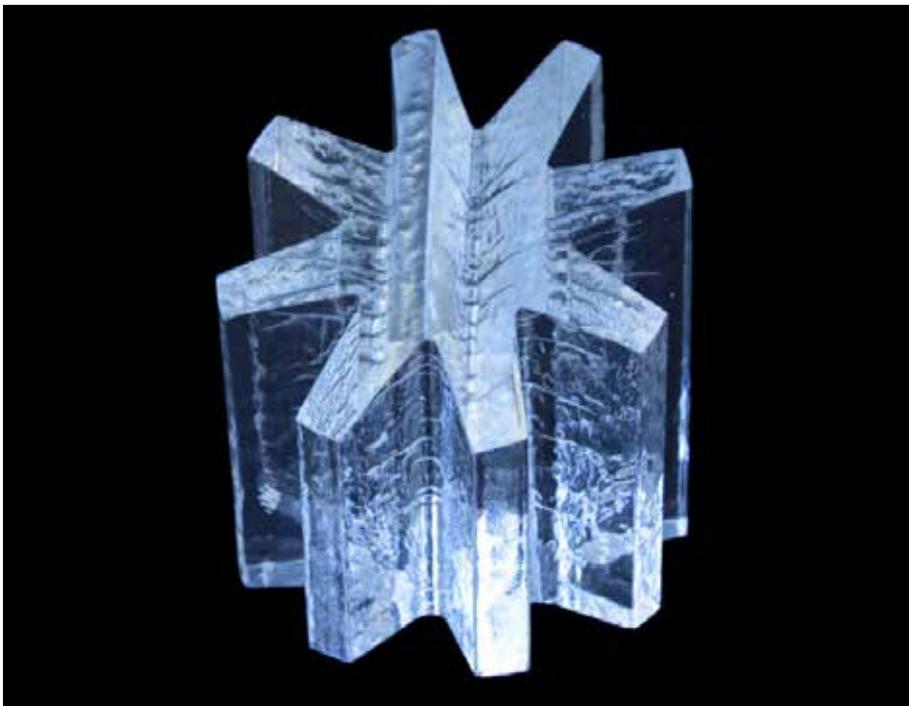
Find him at 9thsd.com or contact him at shon@sublimationconsultant.com.

IN THE PUBLIC EYE

NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS

The National Design Awards program seeks to increase national awareness of the impact of design through education initiatives. It is presented by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, which is the Smithsonian Institution's museum of design.

In addition to recognizing innovation and impact at the annual National Design Awards Gala, the program's National Design Month in October draws attention to how design enriches everyday life with a suite of educational offerings. For the program's NDA Cities, Cooper Hewitt offers hands-on workshops, professional development opportunities, and dynamic panel discussions to bring design literacy to communities around the country.



IMPERFECT BY DESIGN

The Corning Museum of Glass deliberately incorporates distortion, bubbles, and striations into the trophy, giving it a hand-hewn, raw quality. This look was preferred by Cooper Hewitt designers over high-quality, optically pure glass.

50°

Angle at which the top of the trophy is cut. This enables viewers to peer into the glass and see their reflection. It also means the trophy can be displayed with either side upright.

6-8 HOURS

Time to produce each hand-polished trophy

TIMELINE

2000

The National Design Awards were launched as an official product of the White House Millennium Council. The trophy, a twisted asterisk made from silicon carbide, is created by Winterhouse Studio designers William Drenttel and Jessica Helfand and produced by Saint-Gobain Advanced Ceramics.

2006

The National Design Awards program launches National Design Week to spread the message of quality design.

2010

The trophy is re-created in a stainless-steel composite material by Smart Design, the 2010 winner of the National Design Award in the Product Design category.

2011

The glass trophy currently presented to National Design Awards recipients is created through a partnership between The Corning Museum of Glass's GlassLab initiative glass artists and Cooper Hewitt designers.

2020

National Design Week is expanded to National Design Month (observed in October) with a full slate of virtual opportunities.

2021

First Lady Jill Biden serves as the Honorary Patron for this year's National Design Awards.



IN GOOD COMPANY JIM O'NEILL

Pacesetter Awards, Chicago, IL

The best business advice I've ever received is...

"It's about relationships." Transactions can mean money; relationships mean money stream, advice, and longevity.



My favorite movies...Are very diverse: The Godfather and The Sound of Music!

What are your goals for 2022?

Help our team right the ship from the troubles from the past couple of years. I have felt more alive in the past 18 months than in years. I want to continue to tackle challenges to our industry.

My favorite piece of personalization equipment is...I'm dating myself here, but I will go with the Automark machine. Years ago, when these were the standard for marking trophy plates, I used to fix them regularly. Some of the most satisfying times of my career were when the operator would say, "Perfect! You've fixed it!"

What's your favorite app?

Fun Chess Puzzles Pro. It has taken my game much higher in a couple of years.

My secret talent is...

Figuring costs or other calculations in my head. Yesterday, after I saw a pricing calculation needed, I gave a number. My associate proceeded to click away at the calculator, and I had the number right within a few cents. He said, "What are you, Rain Man?"

ASSOCIATION NEWS

47-YEAR INDUSTRY VET MARTY BURKE RETIRES



MARCO SALES REP HELPED CREATE ARIEF AS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Marty Burke retired July 1, 2021, from Marco Awards Group, having created countless treasured relationships with retailers and suppliers alike during his 47 years in the awards and personalization industry.

"I started in this business using a pantograph machine," Burke has told the Awards and Personalization Association. "I then moved onto a typewriter engraver, sublimation, and now the laser engraver."

47 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

Burke joined the industry in 1974, when he was in high school. He worked on the retail side before moving into distribution and then distribution/manufacturing. He was always moving and growing. "I had multiple retail stores from 1974 through 1994. I started a wholesale warehouse in Dallas, TX, in 1992. I opened another one in Houston in 1997 and purchased and moved one in Orlando to a larger location in 2000."

He owned Liberty Supply, a Texas distributor that sold awards and components to retailers. Then, in 2006, he accepted a job with Marco Awards Group and became the awards giant's first sales representative in his territory of Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

His hiring at Marco was praised by retailers who had the pleasure of working with him through Liberty Supply and the Awards and Personalization Association. He used his background as a retailer and distributor to assist his customers—who he considered business partners.

"I really don't try to 'sell' the store's product. I just show it, discuss how best the store owner can market it, and the product usually sells itself," he said. "If I hear of a good tip to help the retailer, I pass it along. Anything that I can do to help the store increase its business is good for all of us."

Burke built up his territory "on thousands of miles traveled," according to Marco, and collaborated with his coworkers "at trade shows, sales meetings, and on the road to bring sales success to Marco."

"Marty—as Marco's number 1 sales representative in his territory of Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi—was the inspiration for Marco's growth and prosperity and a true example of success," said Gregory Kolenut, Marco's national sales manager.

ASSOCIATION SERVICE

If those industry chops weren't enough, Burke also has been active in the Awards and Personalization Association for years, leaving a huge legacy here as well. Burke served on the board and became president of the association—then the Awards and Recognition Association—in February 2002. (His president-elect, Fran Carville, would later be one of his customers when her home state of Louisiana became part of his Marco sales territory.) The theme of his presidency was Racing into the Future.

Burke ushered in many positive changes, including complimentary association magazine subscriptions for supplier member sales representatives, but his most lasting

impact on our association was the creation of the Awards and Recognition Industry Educational Foundation (ARIEF).

Separate and distinct from the association, ARIEF provides financial assistance to advance education for industry members. ARIEF was Burke's vision: a foundation to award scholarships to association-affiliated students and to raise the awareness of careers in the awards and personalization industry. Burke worked tirelessly to make ARIEF a reality: soliciting Cornerstone Donors, establishing the Board of Trustees, developing bylaws, and serving as ARIEF president in the nonprofit's first 2 years. In addition to courting suppliers for large donations to the new effort, Burke challenged his association Board of Directors to each donate \$1,000 and opened his own wallet to help the foundation.

Since that time, the nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization has awarded financial assistance of \$500-\$1,000 to nearly 100 students who were directly affiliated with association member companies (as an employee or the child or grandchild of an employee). Each of those students has Burke to thank for his mission and vision.

It's no wonder that Burke has been recognized by the association with five Gold Obelisk awards, including the one he received when he was inducted into the Awards and Personalization Association Hall of Fame in 2017.

"Serving as president in 2002 was a great time of personal growth," Burke told *Insights* magazine in 2011. "I could have never imagined myself in front of a room full of people giving a speech. I was blessed with a great Board of Directors and management team, and we overcame many obstacles that hit us right after 9/11. Despite some challenges during that

time period, the support of everyone on that board was great. ... It's been gratifying to watch ARIEF grow and how much everyone has contributed to its success. We are helping our next generation. Thanks to everyone for their time, support, and tax-deductible donations!"

AT FULL SPEED

Life won't slow down for Burke in his retirement. His love of cars and racing will keep him behind the wheel at top speeds! His business Marty Burke Motorsports (martyburkemotorsports.com) in Leonard, TX, is already receiving much more of his attention.

"I can't believe it's been 47 years since Marty stepped into the awards business," said Marco President and CEO Marcel Bizier. "Truth be known, I have just a few years on him. I will miss him."

Though Burke will be greatly missed by his colleagues, Marco employees urge him to "enjoy, relax, and be safe as you carve out another lifetime of fun."



MARTY BURKE'S GOLD OBELISK AWARDS

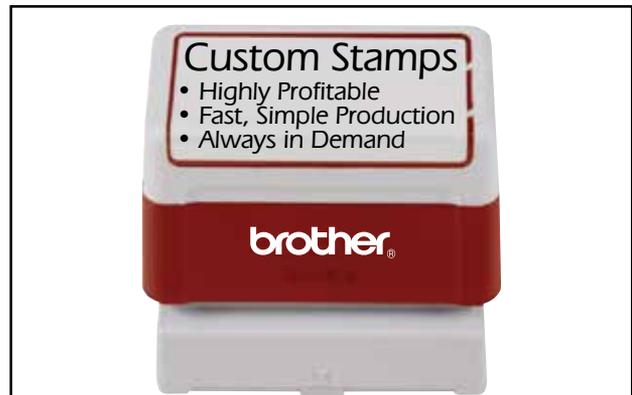
2001 President's Award

2003 Founders Award

2004 President's Award

2010-11 Sales Representative of the Year

2016-17 Hall of Fame



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ASSOCIATION NEWS



From left to right: Jeff Higginbotham and APA President Lisa Higginbotham (5 Star Awards in Cary, NC), Lori and Mark Warren, Theresa and Art Gage (Global Recognition in Green Bay, WI), Diana and Don Gustin (Joan's Trophy & Plaque Co. in Peoria, IL).

AMERICAN AWARDS & PROMOTIONS CELEBRATES 40 YEARS IN BUSINESS

Milton, WI-based **American Awards & Promotions LLC** celebrated its 40th anniversary in style with a giant party this past August.

After a difficult year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, owners Mark and Lori Warren wanted to show their appreciation and celebrate at the same time. "Lori and I decided to take our savings and throw a party for our customers and everyone who's helped us get through the years," Mark Warren told the *Milton Courier*.

Mark estimated about 300 people attended the celebration.

American Awards & Promotions sells a number of recognition products, including apparel, bags, name badges, drinkware, office products, trophies, and more. The awards company works with local schools, corporations, government agencies, law enforcement, and media companies. According to the *Milton Courier*, they've even made awards for two past U.S. presidents: George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.



American Awards & Promotions has been a member of the Awards and Personalization Association since 1985. Learn more about the business at americanawardsonline.com.

KALE WALLNER JOINS **PACESETTER AWARD** SALES TEAM



Chicago-based **Pacesetter Awards** has announced the addition of Kale Wallner to the company's sales team as southeast regional sales manager. He will be responsible for new customer acquisition and growth of recognition and gift products for the southeast region, including California.

The company welcomes Wallner's enthusiasm, passion, and leadership to the Pacesetter sales team and knows he will contribute greatly to growth initiatives.

"We are excited to welcome Kale to the sales team. His network and extensive experience selling recognition will be invaluable as we look to build strong distributor relationships in the southern region," said Kamil Dys, VP of sales.

Wallner comes to Pacesetter with more than 9 years of experiences in the promotional products industry, with a focus on the recognition category.

"We've known Kale as an industry professional with a great reputation for years. Our leadership team is confident that Kale will prove helpful to our distributors with his knowledge of our line and the recognition category," said Jim O'Neill, EVP of Pacesetter Awards.

Wallner is married to his best friend Shelly with five children—Kaylee, Brady, Brooke, Brenden, and Erica—plus three dogs. They are proud parents of four college graduates with careers in the healthcare and business industries. Their youngest starts college soon, and they look forward to the next stage of life as empty nesters. When not traveling for work, Wallner spends most of his free time with family and friends. His hobby is to fish and boat on the plentiful lakes in Minnesota, and he also enjoys cooking, watching sports, and playing softball.

MARCO AWARDS GROUP ACQUIRES WAREHOUSE IN DALLAS, ADDS MANAGER IN OHIO

Marco Awards Group is pleased to announce the acquisition of another warehouse facility in Texas. The new location is more than 52,000 square feet. The added space will allow the company to stock more product and process orders in a more efficient manner.

The new Dallas warehouse began shipping orders on August 2. Texas General Manager David Wall and staff are looking forward to customers picking up orders.



Marco Awards Group also announced the addition of Mike Spohn as the manager of the Middleburg, OH, warehouse. Spohn brings more than 25 years of knowledge of warehousing, distribution, and operations to this position and is responsible for ensuring inventory availability in Middleburg. He represents a long-standing family history when this warehouse was known as Dern Trophy. Spohn can say he was "raised in the awards business."

Mike's familiarity with the business, as well as the long-term Marco customers, creates the best advantage for his success at Marco.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

ROWMARK HAS RELEASED TWO COLOR CHARTS

In June, **Rowmark** announced new Laser and Rotary versions of the Color Charts, including all new Rowmark products.

The updates include:

- Two separate charts, Laser and Rotary, were designed to allow for larger product samples and item codes.
- Brief marketing descriptions for each product line are included to better describe and differentiate Rowmark product lines.
- Because many customers make ADA-compliant signs with a rotary engraver, ADA Alternative/Single Ply is included in both the Laser and Rotary chart.
- To streamline the Color Charts and make them easier to use, usage and capability terms are now featured at rowmark.com/salestools/color-charts.

Select Rowmark products have been removed from the Color Charts due to decreasing demand. These products will still be available as a custom order, but will no longer be stocked for immediate shipment.

Downloadable versions of the new Color Charts are available at rowmark.com/salestools/color-charts.

Are you an Awards and Personalization Association member with an exciting bit of news to share about your company? Please send your press releases to Editor Bryan O'Donnell at bodonnell@awardspersonalization.org.

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INDUSTRY CALENDAR

2022 International Awards & Personalization Expo

February 22–25, 2022

Paris Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV

Virtual Supplier Showcase Series

October 21, 11 am Central

Go to AwardsPersonalization.org/TradeShow/VirtualSupplierShowcaseSeries.aspx for more info.

Webinar: New to CoreIDRAW?

October 28, 1 pm Central

Learn about the presenters and register at AwardsPersonalization.org/Education/Webinars/UpcomingWebinars.

Email calendar items to editor@AwardsPersonalization.org

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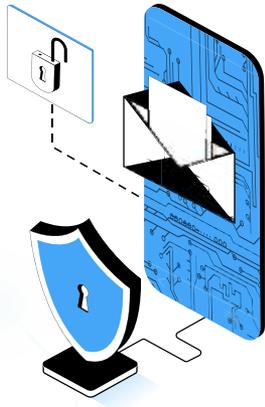
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February 22–25, 2022 | Paris Las Vegas

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INSIGHTFUL



SMOOTH CYBERCRIMINALS

THE AVERAGE U.S. DATA BREACH COST \$8.64 MILLION IN 2020—AND SMALL BUSINESSES CAN BE TARGETS, TOO

Think your business isn't on hackers' radar? Think again. Cybercrime has a wide reach, and anyone with data is a potential target. Check out some of the common cyberattacks used to gain access to data and dollars.

BACKDOOR

Criminals find a secret way to bypass normal security using a "backdoor" that was created by an error, made by people who planned to exploit it, or deliberately added for a legitimate reason.

DENIAL-OF-SERVICE ATTACK

Criminals block people from using a program, computer, network, or website by overwhelming the target with input (like bad passwords or website visitors). When the DoS is distributed (DDoS), the attack comes from many sources at once, making it harder to stop.

EAVESDROPPING

Criminals access communications that your computer sends in packets over a network. This is also known as a sniffing or snooping attack. Eavesdropping attacks even can target spoken communications via VoIP and mobile phones.

MALWARE

Software designed to give criminals access to your sensitive information, to delete your data, or to prevent you from accessing your data until you pay the criminals (ransomware).

PHISHING

Phishing is a type of social engineering in which criminals try to trick users into revealing sensitive information that will give them access to computers, bank accounts, identities, and more. Quality phishing emails, messages, and websites look like legitimate ways to interact with trusted people and organizations, convincing users to type in passwords, reveal credit card numbers, and more.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Phishing is a form of this attack, but social engineering attacks also can happen in person, over the phone, and via text message. Often, the attacker pretends to be someone who has a legitimate need for sensitive information and presses their target to deliver the information quickly, before they can consider the consequences or verify the requester's identity.

SPOOFING

An attacker fakes data to make themselves look like they should have access to data. Examples include altering the sender or recipient data in an email, making a phone call look like it came from another number, or faking an IP address to hide the criminal's location.

DNS HIGHJACKING

Criminals use weaknesses in the Domain Name System (DNS) to send visitors to a malicious webpage instead of the one they intended to visit. The switch may not be immediately obvious if criminals want to collect sensitive information, or the page may be clearly wrong but have already put the user's information at risk.

PRIVILEGE ESCALATION

Also called privilege elevation, this attack sees a user with a lower level of access exploit some vulnerability to give themselves a higher level of access so they can get to restricted information they don't have permission to see.

DIRECT-ACCESS ATTACKS

The criminal directly accesses a computer—usually physically—and can download data or install surveillance programs and malware.

65%

Share of U.S. organizations that were the targets of a successful phishing attempt in 2019



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