A GUIDE TO PRINT EMBELLISHMENT AND SPECIALTY APPLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Printing is, and always will be, a form of manufacturing, but the days when printers could think of themselves strictly as manufacturers are long gone. Today, print shops increasingly find themselves cast in the role of creative advisors to customers whose quest for competitive differentiation and heightened brand awareness is never-ending.

Technology is partly responsible for this new mandate. Once upon a time, printers fulfilled their missions by laying down ink on sheets or rolls of paper that they then cut, folded, and bound. Anything a job might require in the way of special effects probably would have to be supplied by an outside trade shop—most printers weren't equipped to deliver more than the basic product.

Today, thanks to the widespread availability of integrated, digitally controlled production systems and workflows, a shop that wants to have a complete range of capabilities under one roof can have them—and will be expected to provide them. Customers seeking maximum ROI for their print spends will gravitate naturally to shops that have the most to offer in terms of value-adding techniques and processes.

This white paper aims to stimulate thinking on the part of print service providers about how to capitalize on the demand for value-added print manufacturing. The first of its two parts looks at embellishing the appearance of print with foiling, diecutting, embossing, and overprinting with UV coatings and other fluids. The second part reviews a sampling of specialized print applications that can help printers' customers achieve their marketing objectives—and help printers keep partnerships with their customers strong.

PART I: PRINT EMBELLISHMENT

YOU PRINTED IT – NOW EMBELLISH IT

Although not many people in the printing industry remember it nowadays, there was a time when the only thing needed to make a printed piece stand out was a dash of color.

Because color was hard to control and expensive to reproduce, its appearance on a brochure or in a magazine advertisement was a mark of distinction for whoever had paid a premium to see it there. In commercial and publication printing, black-and-white pages predominated; color was the value-adding differentiator that everyone wanted but few had the luxury of specifying.

Steady advances in print technology changed that. Today, color is everywhere in print—richly, accurately, and economically reproduced by all the major printing processes. It's become difficult, in fact, to buy conventional or digital printing that's anything less than first-class in terms of color reproduction quality.

This is good news for print as a medium—but a serious business challenge for shops whose profits depend on staying out of the print "commodity trap" of me-too printing.

Many printers have found that trying to maintain their profit margins just on the basis of print quality is a losing proposition. As a result, there's been a growing appreciation of the value that the techniques of embellishment are proven to add.

Embellishments such as foil stamping, diecutting, embossing, and specialty coating aren't new; commercial lithographers and packaging printers have offered them for years. Now, however, they're also available to digital printing for short-run, customized, and personalized applications.

Embellishment heightens visual appeal, but it adds much more than an eye-catching surface appearance. It also delivers measurable, profit-driving results: an outcome that the industry's packaging segment knows well.

The Foil & Specialty Effects Association (FSEA) describes a study in which researchers from the Sonoco Institute of Packaging Design and Graphics at Clemson University created an unknown brand of disposable single-serve coffee packaging and compared it to name brand packaging on a retail shelf. They found that stamping the cartons with gold foil induced shoppers to purchase the unknown coffee brand just as often or more frequently than well-known name brands. What works in packaging can work just as satisfyingly in other applications. A yearbook printer using a spot UV coater was able to charge one customer double what had been spent on the previous printing. The client loved the UV special effect and was glad to pay the upcharge for the embellishment on the yearbook cover.

A ready market exists for the value that print embellishment adds. Writing in Printing Impressions, an analyst for InfoTrends reported that interviews with more than 100 print customers demonstrated "an appetite and a willingness" on their part to pay premiums of 24% to 89% over CMYK-only printing for special effects. The customers also indicated that print embellishment could apply to a significant amount of their work.

Embellishment belongs to postpress, the stage of production in which flat sheets or rolls of printed substrates are turned into finished products. Postpress used to be fairly simple. Today, it's a complex combination of basic operations and high-end techniques that add the kind of value sought by customers who expect their print service providers to create both mass-produced runs and one-of-a-kind, customized pieces for individual recipients.

Value is precisely what embellishment is made to deliver, and there are many varieties to offer. One print shop promoting itself on Pinterest, for example, says the print finishing and embellishment options it provides include "hot foil stamping, spot gloss UV, embossing, debossing, letterpress, diecut shapes, lamination, duplex, triplex, gold foil, silver foil, copper foil, white foil, black foil, clear foil, etching, and laser cutting techniques."

In some projects, the high-end finishing steps are so extensive that the printing may be the job's smallest cost component. This is why it's not unusual to see a plant that buys a digital press investing just as much money, if not more, on the finishing equipment needed to obtain the most value from digital production.

In conventional printing, embellishment processes such as varnishing, UV coating, and foiling take place either inline (on the press itself) or offline (on separate finishing equipment). Digital presses also can be integrated with finishing equipment for complete, one-pass production, a capability most often seen in digital presses for labeling. The finishing devices feature plug-and-play, electronic, and mechanical interfaces that enable them to connect and operate in tandem with print engines.

For digital presses that produce books, periodicals, commercial work, and other types of jobs in which formats frequently change, offline or near-line finishing is often the better bet. That way, the print engine can proceed from one job to the next without having to wait for corresponding adjustments in attached finishing modules. In an offline arrangement, the stand-alone finishing equipment can accept output from multiple presses instead of just one.

Most of the leading digital press manufacturers have partnered with post-press suppliers to offer finishing and embellishment systems that are designed for compatibility with the presses. That way, the post-print processing can be as cost-efficient as the printing in even the smallest of runs. The presses themselves can be equipped for embellishment with additional color stations that dispense specialty inks and coatings.

Also available are dedicated digital embellishment systems that apply special effects to both printed and unprinted substrates. Like digital presses, these devices have variable-output capability that lets them customize and personalize the items they're embellishing. Among the decorative enhancements they can produce are 2D and 3D coatings, textures, foiling, glitter and metallic effects, holography, Braille, and cutting and creasing.

No matter how it's brought into the picture, embellishment adds production costs that have to be factored into the price given to the customer. This leads to questions about how these high-end services should be marketed. Experience suggests, however, that the ROI on embellished items is usually sufficient to overcome any price objections that may arise.

This is because embellishment gets results. As the example from the Clemson study indicates, a product presented in an attractively enhanced package is a product a shopper will want to reach out and touch—and take home. Embellishment heightens perceptions of value, status, and brand prestige in marketing collateral and customer communications of all kinds.

Print that is handsomely embellished bespeaks high quality, and not just about the printed piece itself. The perception of quality extends to the business or organization that's using the piece as a marketing tool. The look says it all about the originator's characteristics and values—and says it with style.

Something else embellishment communicates and reinforces is the place of print in multichannel marketing strategies. Print that adds results-getting value in this way is print that won't have to be sold on the basis of price. Nothing decommoditizes print more effectively than the techniques described in the sections that follow.

ENRICH WITH EMBELLISHMENT: FOILING

From the ancient art of gold beating to the radiant surfaces increasingly seen on substrates of all kinds today, nothing says "upscale" more convincingly than adding reflective highlights in gold, silver, holographic, and other metallic finishes to two-dimensional print. Some digital presses can deposit metallic toners as part of the print run. However, metallizing digital print more commonly takes place as an offline process that achieves the effect by applying foil.

The technique isn't complicated—foiling can be bonded to individual pieces of print using desktop laminators. For production in quantity, however, hot stamping and cold foiling are the established methods. Hot stamping typically takes place separately from the printing. Cold foiling is performed inline as part of the conventional press run. It can be added to digital output along with other embellishments after printing.

In a hot stamping machine, a metal die made in the pattern of the artwork to be foiled presses the foil against the substrate under intense pressure and high heat. Then the excess foil (the portion not intended to highlight anything) is stripped away, leaving only the foil that's been bonded to the selected areas of the printed image.

The same thing happens in cold foiling, but this process uses adhesive instead of pressure and heat to transfer the foil to the substrate. Both methods lay down foil in correct register over the parts of the image to be highlighted. For double embellishment, the foiling can be overprinted with additional inks that add color to the metallic effects.

Cold foiling is not compatible with as many different types of substrates as hot foil stamping. A point in its favor is the fact that it eliminates the expense of diemaking and the extra step of processing on a separate machine when performed inline.

Another option for this type of embellishment is foil fusing, a process that applies foil to areas of toner images produced on laser printers or toner-based copy machines. No dies or foil stamping equipment are needed. The foil, which adheres only to toner image areas, is available in gold, silver, metallic and pigment colors, glitter, and holographic patterns for decoration and security.

ENRICH WITH EMBELLISHMENT: DIECUTTING

Presswork imparts content to a printed piece. Diecutting adds shape that gives both subtle and explicit clues to the message the piece is meant to deliver. Decorative "sculpting" with cut-out windows, filigree outlines, and other fancy alterations connotes sophistication, luxury, and distinctiveness—all calculated to heighten engagement with the piece and reinforce the call to action it contains.

Unlike other forms of embellishment, diecutting is a subtractive process: its visual impact comes from what it takes away from the initial printed piece, not from anything it adds. Nevertheless, in order to achieve the desired effect, the application of diecutting must be as precise and creatively flexible as any other embellishment technique.

Three basic diecutting methods satisfy these requirements. The most "industrial" of them is flatbed diecutting, accomplished with massive machines typically found in packaging converting and commercial printing plants. Using dies consisting of strips of metal in the outline of the shape to be cut, these machines stamp out packaging forms, labels, and other items under thousands of pounds of pressure. They may also be equipped for stripping (removing the excess substrate from the diecuts) and blanking (stacking the finished pieces).

A simpler and less expensive alternative is rotary diecutting, which can be adapted for inline operation with digital presses. It uses "male" (raised) and "female" (intaglio) die plates, sometimes magnetically mounted, to impress cuts into the substrate at high speeds. The plates cost less to prepare than standard dies, making the process economical for shorter runs.

The newest type of diecutting substitutes a laser beam for a physical cutting edge, eliminating all costs of diemaking. Laser diecutting is precise and fast, although the heat of the process rules out its use with certain substrates.

A diecutting system can be a stand-alone unit, or it can be a part of an integrated finishing line that also includes lamination, coating, foiling, embossing, and other functions. The options now available put precision diecutting within the reach of almost every printing business.

ENRICH WITH EMBELLISHMENT: EMBOSSING

Marketers increasingly recognize haptics—the branch of neuroscience concerned with the sense of touch—as a key to consumer engagement. Research indicates that someone who picks up and reads a printed piece probably will recall its contents better than someone who gets the same information from a screen. Retailers know that a shopper who grasps an item on a store shelf is more than likely to buy it because to touch something is to mentally take ownership of it.

Surface texture is what arouses the sense of touch in printed matter. Specialty substrates represent one way to leverage its power, but for most digital printers, a more practical and cost-effective approach is embossing. This simple but potent embellishment technique creates raised and recessed surfaces that can be felt as well as seen for true, multisensory experiences in print.

Embossing is similar to diecutting in that it uses dies or rotary plates to achieve the desired effect. The difference is that instead of cutting entirely through the substrate as a diecutting edge does, the embossing tool presses into it only far enough to raise surface by a few thousandths of an inch. Debossing, the opposite technique, depresses the image into the surface for an intaglio look.

Business cards and wedding invitations are traditional favorites for embossing, but almost any printed piece can be given an extra dimension of sensory appeal in this way. Many different paper and board stocks can be embossed, and the technique can be combined with foiling and other kinds of embellishment for a broad range of special effects. Digital presses can be equipped for inline embossing, or offline embossing systems may be used.

ENRICH WITH EMBELLISHMENT: SPECIALTY FLUID OVERPRINTING

Ink or toner on paper supplies the image. Specialty fluids laid down over the colorant add the pizzazz. They also protect printed surfaces, enabling printed products to stand up better to handling and (if they're postal pieces) to their journey through the mailstream.

Printers use a variety of specialty fluids to make finished pieces scratchproof and rub-resistant. The fluids also create surface effects that enhance appearance with gloss, matte, and dull finishes. Gloss reflects light, matte scatters it, and dull subtly tones down color and contrast. The finishes can be used in combination to make the effects even more visually interesting.

In digital presswork, coating and varnishing are done offline on machines that apply fluid to the prints, either by confining it to selected areas (spot mode) or flooding the entire sheet. Water-based (aqueous) coatings are popular for their quick-drying quality, pleasing surface appearance, and environmental friendliness.

But for the ultimate in protection and special effects, overprinting with UV-curable fluids is the method of choice. Duplo, a manufacturer of offline UV coating systems and other finishing equipment, puts it this way:

"Digital spot UV coating adds an element of touch and feel to the printed product. It adds a layer of texture and depth to the images printed on the flat sheet. It's the creation of a gritty sand beach, the grip of a football, and the dimpled water drops on a beer bottle. It's the textures and patterns that bring images to life and elicit a reaction from the target audience that sells."

The technique, sometimes referred to as dimensional printing or chemical embossing, creates textural surfaces that give the print an eye-catching layer of protection against wear and tear. Spot UV coating can be applied like ink to create letterforms and other designs that stand out in high, clear relief above the surface of the substrate. Because exposure to UV (ultraviolet) radiation in a spot coating unit hardens the fluid instantly, there's no waiting time for drying.

UV embellishment does more than make print ruggedly handsome. It makes print more profitable to sell. The visual and tactile interest it adds represents unique value for which customers are willing to pay extra. As Duplo says, "The intangible impact is in the printing company's overall increase in sales revenue that occurs when offering customers something new and exciting to drive print demand and improve brand equity." UV embellishment accomplishes all of this par excellence.

IF YOU DON'T …

A fact for print service providers to keep in mind is that they aren't necessarily the only customers for embellishment solutions. The design studio, branding agency, or marketing communications firm that installs a digital press will want to enhance the output with the help of embellishment solutions that fit their environments and are easy and affordable to operate.

The message to printers who don't want to see clients like these turn into do-it-yourselfers—or who don't want to lose them to the competition—is clear: be equipped to offer them both digital printing and the added value of embellishment. Be prepared to educate them about how embellishing their print can bring them closer to achieving their marketing objectives. Show them samples of applications that make the point and, as a result, help you make the sale.

PART II: SPECIALTY APPLICATIONS

WHAT TO PRINT AND WHY

It's a question that printers should never stop asking themselves: what can I make for my customers that they'll keep on wanting me to make for them? The answer is specialty applications: useful printed pieces that command attention, deliver brand messaging, and drive response. Their "specialty" is getting results in a practical and profitable way.

The following section reviews selected examples of specialty applications with well-established track records of getting the job done for customers who depend on them as marketing and promotional tools. Most are relatively simple in terms of design and production, demonstrating that a printed piece doesn't have to be elaborate to be effective. But, they all can be enhanced with the embellishment techniques outlined in the previous section as the customer's promotional objectives require (and budget permits).

It's important for shops to help their customers understand how much they have to gain from using specialty print applications and how affordable they can be. Today's print buyers expect this kind of guidance from their print service providers, and they increasingly base their spending decisions on the quality of the advice they receive. This is yet another indication of how the role of the printer has moved beyond simple manufacturing into consultative partnering with customers.

When it comes to specialty projects, print shops don't have to search for inspiration all by themselves. Their paper suppliers, for example, can be rich sources of information about making print applications practical as well as creative.

A case in point is Mohawk Paper's Specialty Digital Materials Swatchbook, full of application ideas for five categories of the company's specialty substrates. Mohawk also offers a Dimensional Portfolio of packaging, promotional, photo, and presentation products, perforated and scored for short-run digital printing.

In reviewing the specialty application examples that follow, remember that they aren't marketing solutions for customers only: printers can use most of them to promote their own businesses as well.

BANNERS

A shop with a wide-format inkjet printing device is almost certain to be a shop that produces banners—and probably a lot of them. Because this type of signage can be displayed in almost any indoor or outdoor setting, it's a medium that will be seen by large numbers of people over extended periods of time. Businesses, particularly small ones, like banners for their cost-effectiveness and brand-building high visibility.

With banners, location is everything. They're most effective when placed in spots where people can't avoid noticing them: for instance, on bridges and pedestrian overpasses spanning heavily-traveled roads. Entrances to stores, transportation terminals, and event venues, such as concert halls, are other natural environments for banners.

Design and durability also factor into the success of banner advertising. As a general rule, because banners are meant to be viewed at a distance, large text and graphics should do most of the messaging; small type and imagery should be used sparingly, if at all. The advertiser's contact information should always be prominent as should whatever call-to-action the banner is trying to convey.

How long a banner retains its visual impact is determined by the type of material it's printed on and the inks used to decorate it. Here again, location comes into play. Indoor banners that aren't exposed to sunlight and the elements can use substrates and inks that wouldn't be suitable for outdoor banners, which need raw materials (such as vinyl and solvent-based inks) that are long-lasting, waterproof, and fade- resistant.

Vendors of wide-format printing equipment are good sources of information about consumable supplies. Remember also that printing banners also means investing in design software, a cutter, and hardware for mounting, finishing, and hanging the prints. Wide-format production needs ample room for equipment and media storage, so plan ahead for this requirement as well.

BOOKMARKS

Bookmarks first appeared in the sixteenth century, and these printed place holders have been essential accessories for book lovers ever since. With a bit of creativity applied, they can serve an additional purpose as long-running marketing vehicles for products and services of nearly every type.

This is because people keep and re-use bookmarks, continuously revisiting the messaging they carry. The ongoing exposure can add up to strong brand awareness at a fraction of the cost of what other print media, such as billboards and transit advertising, charge for the repeat impressions they deliver.

In fact, think of a bookmark as a miniature billboard between covers: familiar and user-friendly, simple and straightforward in content, and out there in plain sight every day. A bookmark's special effectiveness comes from the fact that people regularly see it when they're sitting down to enjoy a good book. This puts them in a relaxed, receptive mood that makes the promotional content on the bookmark part of the pleasant experience.

The content should be brief and to the point, with contact information clearly displayed. A tear-off perforation can turn a section of the bookmark into a coupon, ticket, or some other kind of special offer. Printing on both sides doubles the amount of promotional "real estate" the bookmark can utilize.

Because simply designed bookmarks can be printed in large quantities at low cost, they're natural giveaways for owners of small businesses (who should be encouraged to take advantage of the printer's volume discounts when ordering). But, with the addition of the embellishment techniques described in the first part of this white paper, bookmarks can also be produced as high-end "keepers" that bibliophiles and others will pay premiums to add to their collections.

BUMPER STICKERS

Although they're not as ubiquitous as they used to be, bumper stickers still have a respectable role to play as a form of out-of-home (OOH) advertising. Unlike most other types of OOH, bumper stickers aren't static: they move around continuously, introducing themselves and their messaging to new audiences wherever they go.

The first bumper stickers appeared a few years before the start of World War II, attached to bumpers with wires rather than the pressure-sensitive adhesives that were eventually adopted. Screen printing has been the traditional process for making them, although wide-format inkjet systems work equally well for production in smaller quantities.

No good statistics on bumper sticker production exist, but some companies routinely deliver hundreds of thousands or even millions of them—especially during campaigns preceding political elections, the events with which bumper stickers are most readily identified. They also continue to be popular as mementos of tourist destinations and as fan tributes to sports teams.

A small business that has most of its customer base in one town or region gets good exposure to those customers from bumper stickers on vehicles driven locally within the area. A name, a tagline, and a logo are all that's needed to establish a basic brand identity that the business can reinforce with other kinds of promotion. The best part of the deal is that the advertising space—the spot on the car where the sticker goes—is absolutely free.

Printers can sell bumper stickers by bundling them with related items such as decals, signage, and point-of-purchase (POP) materials. Together, these items deliver a consistent brand presentation with the bumper stickers as the mobile element.
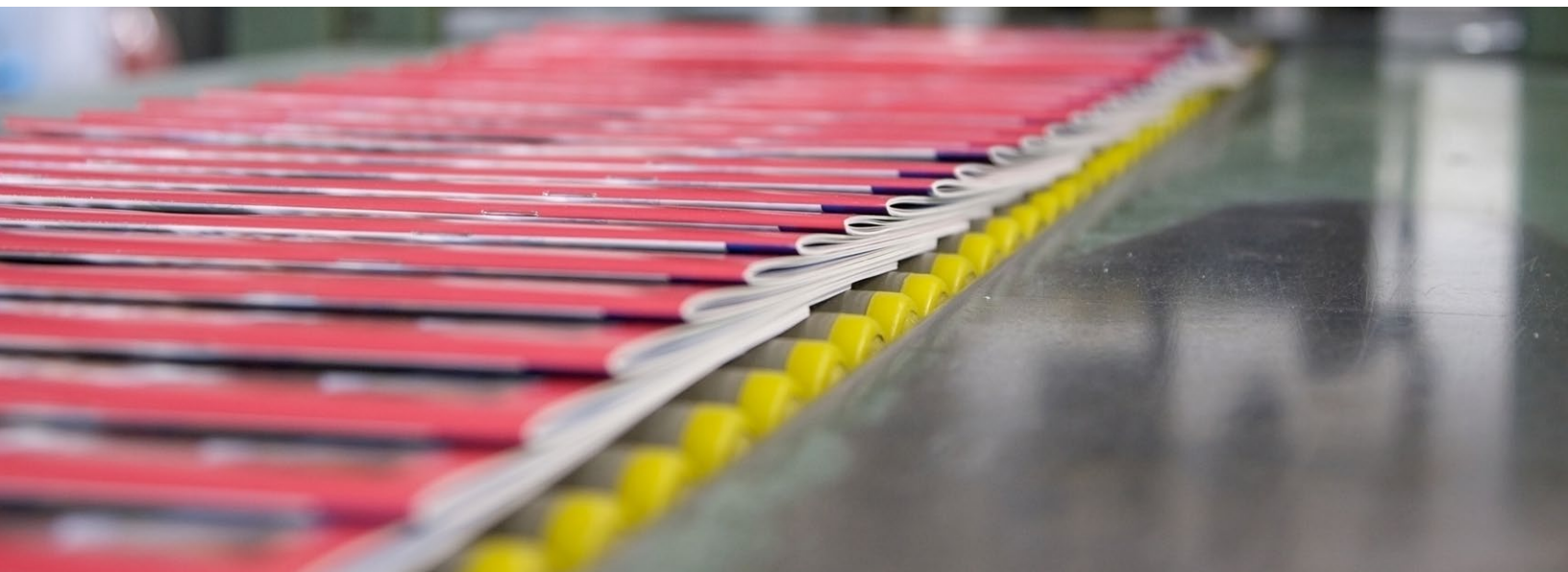
COUNTER CARDS

Also known as easel backs, counter cards are quick, inexpensive miniature signs that can grab attention and trigger sales wherever they're displayed. Placed at checkout desks and cash registers, counter cards are especially good at driving last-minute impulse purchases.

Although they're most frequently seen in retail settings, standup counter cards are also a good choice for presenting visual information in classrooms, conference rooms, and courtrooms. The 8-1/2" x 11" format of most counter cards is easy to scale up to whatever dimension the application requires.

Counter cards have to stand up to a fair amount of handling, so for best results, print them on thick card stock with an aqueous or a UV coating. Support them with heavy-duty easel backs to keep them standing tall at all times. Adding a pad of tear-off coupons or a pocket for business cards multiplies a counter card's potential as a sales stimulator.

DOOR HANGERS

In postal parlance, "the last mile" is the distance between a distribution hub and the final delivery destination typically someone's residence. Letters and packages aren't the only items that can traverse the last mile to reach consumers. Door hangers have been doing the same thing for years, often with highly rewarding results for the advertisers represented on them.

A door hanger is what the name indicates: a printed piece with a slot or a cut-out that enables it to be suspended from a door handle. Displayed this way, a door hanger probably will be the first thing a person sees when she or he returns home. The day's mail is still out of sight inside the mailbox or, if it was dropped through a door with a mail slot, on the floor behind it. The door hanger snags the invaluable first impression by default.

Door hangers work like direct mail, but without the high expense and complicated logistics of that medium. Like direct mail, they can be used to target specific neighborhoods and districts with messages tailored to the people living there. The fact that a door hanger will be picked up and removed by the person receiving it increases the likelihood that the messaging on it will be read. This gives door hangers a better "open rate" than many pieces of direct mail.

But, because door hangers are unsolicited by their recipients, care must be taken to keep them from being perceived as "junk mail." The best way to accomplish this is to make sure they carry offers that recipients will find relevant and desirable, together with a clear call-to-action. The content doesn't need to go into deep detail as long as it captivates interest and tells how to take the next step for obtaining more information about the product or service being promoted.

Designing door hangers to include coded, redeemable tear-off coupons drives sales and creates a mechanism for tracking response. Double-sided printing in color will make for an attractive piece that can be further enhanced with diecutting, coating, and other high-end touches. Whatever engages a few precious additional seconds of the recipient's attention will be worth the extra effort.

HEADER CARDS

There's no simpler or more economical form of packaging than a clear plastic bag or pouch topped by a header card. The header card, also known as a bag topper, has three functions: to seal the bag by being folded and stapled over the open end; to provide the punched hole for the shelf hook from which the bag will hang in the store; and, to furnish printable space for brand messaging and product information.

Candy, dry foods, toys, decorations, and hardware (nuts, bolts, and screws) are just a few of the items that package well in card-topped plastic bags. They're ideal for small businesses because they're simple to fill and seal (In small batches, sealing can be done with an ordinary office stapler).

The bag toppers are equally simple to design, especially from the thousands of header card templates that are free to download from online sources. Like hang tags (discussed on page 12), they're the primary sources of information about the products to which they're attached. Printing them on both sides provides ample room for details about ingredients, safe use, and other consumer need-to-knows. Durable stocks and eye-catching graphics help header cards achieve their retail marketing objectives.

Header cards and plastic bags usually go together, but there are exceptions. If the card can be stapled or affixed directly to a product that doesn't require the protection of a plastic wrap, the need for the bag goes away. Socks, gloves, kitchen gadgets, and small tools are among the items that can be seen hanging happily by their header cards in store displays.

MAGNETS

How many times a day does the average person visit his or her home refrigerator? No one knows for certain, but best guesstimates put the number somewhere between 12 and 20. Multiplying the guess by the number of days in a year gives a rough but reliable estimate of how many exposures to the advertising on the magnets clinging to the refrigerator will take place during that time.

Virtually every American household has a refrigerator, and many have more than one. In 2013, a CBS News Poll revealed that more than eight in 10 Americans (87%) have magnets on their refrigerators, more than half having five or more.

All this indicates that any business overlooking printable magnets as a promotional opportunity is missing a lucrative bet. Magnets get their ROI-generating potential from their permanence: once they're placed on a refrigerator or some other often-seen indoor surface, they stay there. Visibility and brand engagement are continuous: a marketer's dream come true.

Substrates for promotional magnets consist of a magnetizable element compounded with vinyl or a similar material for printing on one side. Mohawk Paper, for example, offers a flexible, magnetic product coated with a printable surface that's optimized for solvent, eco-solvent, Latex, and UV-cured printing.

Printable magnets are most effective as marketing tools when they contain information that people will refer to repeatedly, such as calendars, sports team schedules, telephone numbers, addresses, and URLs. They're popular as handouts, but their light weight and small size also make them great for envelope stuffers in direct mail campaigns. Diecutting them into shapes other than oblong adds distinctiveness and visual appeal.

TAGS

Hang tags aren't the same thing as packaging, but they're as close as some products ever come. The fact is that some items don't need to be enclosed in containers and may even be better off at retail without them, such as a bottle of Bordeaux in a wine shop, or a hockey stick in a sporting goods emporium.

But, shoppers still need information that describes non-packaged goods and tells how to use them. That's the job of the hang tag: part business card, part label, part brochure, and part invitation to purchase. No other single printed piece carries as many responsibilities in retailing environments as hang tag. In fact, for a product on a rack or a shelf with many others like it, this is the only form of promotion it will receive.

This means that hang tags must differentiate their products from others competing for shoppers' attention. Creative ingenuity provides the eye appeal and triggers the buying impulse. In designing them, consider using heavy stocks and embellishments such as UV coating and foil. Print on both sides to convey detailed product information, or configure the hang tag as a booklet.

Photos, artwork, logos, diecut shapes, and QR codes also have their place in hang tag design. The look of the finished tag should be consistent with the quality of the product and the image projected by the brand. (The same rule that applies to forms of packaging that surround the entire product, but on a much more compact scale.)

TICKETS

If a ticket sold to a movie theatre patron or a concertgoer contains only admission information, the ticket is doing only half its job. As a printed piece engaging the attention of the person holding it, a ticket is a natural vehicle for promotional content. And, it's not necessarily just a one-time opportunity; in many cases, people hold onto their ticket stubs after the event is over, taking the messaging home with them.

This is why event tickets represent the same kind of chargeable advertising space as billboards, posters, and magazine pages do. Think, for example, of a restaurant in a theatre district that wants to attract a post-show crowd. There's no better place to display its name and address than on the backs of the ticket stubs that scores of these patrons are carrying out of the theatre with them.

Adding promotional content to tickets increases the cost effectiveness of the order, since the customer is already paying for the basic cost of printing them. Revenues generated by back-of-ticket advertising may be enough to offset the entire cost of production.

Print shops can work with their ticket-ordering customers to sell this valuable advertising space to local retailers, restaurants, and service providers. A tear-off portion printed as a coupon makes the offer even more attractive.

As marketers are discovering, event tickets integrate well with non-print technologies for mobile communications. Examples include tickets imprinted with smartphone-scannable QR codes; contactless "smart tickets" containing NFC (near field communication) tags; and tickets that trigger AR (augmented reality) experiences when captured by phones running AR mobile apps.

WIDE-FORMAT APPLICATIONS

As the white paper entitled "Getting More Out of Your Large Format Color Printer" makes clear, shops with wide-format devices are better equipped than they may realize to profit from specialty print production. It explains that, with the proper media selection, wide-format print systems "offer an opportunity for you and your customers to get as creative as you can imagine" with applications like the following:

- *Creative signage* on wood, glass, plastic, vinyl, and metal.

- *Imitation stained glass* that simulates the look of stained glass by covering a window with a wide-format print resembling the real thing.

- *Pop-up display stands* for trade shows, seminar rooms, retail venues, and wherever else high-visibility, portable signage is needed.

- *Floor graphics,* both for promotional display and sprucing up old, worn floors with attractive, low-cost new coverings.

- *Packaging* in very short, customized runs or for prototyping; Production on wide-format equipment is often the best point of entry for commercial shops wishing to break into the packaging market.

Additional opportunities:

- Retail point-of-sale/point-of-purchase signage
- Outdoor displays
- Wrapping paper
- Wallpaper
- Apparel and wearable accessories
- Inflatables
- Smartphone cases

What makes wide-format devices so versatile is the remarkably broad range of rigid and non-rigid substrates they can handle. Basically, any material that the machine can feed without jamming the transport mechanism or damaging the print heads can be brought to life in brilliant color with pigment, dye-based, or UV-curable inks.

The irony, according to the white paper cited above, is that "printing capabilities frequently remain underutilized in even the most basic, four-color CAD printers let alone the most advanced UV, flatbed display graphics systems that integrate a host of innovative features such as white ink and digital cutters."

To unlock all the specialty printing powers of their wide-format devices, printers should consult with their vendors for technical advice. Then, invite customers to let their imaginations run free with ideas for graphic applications that will help them promote their businesses. Chances are good that whatever they dream up can be executed on the shop's wide-format equipment.

CONCLUSION

As stated at the beginning of this report, printing businesses that have not yet diversified beyond basic services should seriously consider expanding their portfolios with value-adding print embellishment processes and specialty applications. Although it remains vital, printing by itself is no longer enough to sustain the graphic communications business model. The market's expectations have changed, and so must printers' conception of their roles on customers' behalf. Canon is committed to helping printers identify and implement solutions for reinventing their businesses and giving new relevance to the products and services they offer.

ABOUT PRINTING IMPRESSIONS

Printing Impressions publishes authoritative coverage of industry trends, emerging technologies and the news in the graphic arts industry, with a specific focus on the commercial print segment. Its core audiences include commercial printers, package printers and in-plant printers. Part of the NAPCO Media Printing & Packaging, Publishing Group, Printing Impressions provides C-level managers, production managers, and operations and sales/marketing managers with critical information and news, cutting-edge technology features, case studies, and company profiles (www.piworld.com).

ABOUT IN-PLANT GRAPHICS

In-Plant Graphics provides authoritative coverage of industry trends, emerging technologies, and news in the graphic arts industry, with a specific focus on the in-plant print segment. Part of the NAPCO Media Printing & Packaging, Publishing Group, In-Plant Graphics connects readers with cutting-edge solutions and provides stories of success that will drive the future goals of their organizations (www.inplantgraphics.com).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Patrick Henry, a Senior Editor in NAPCO Media's Printing and Packaging, Publishing Group, has covered the graphic communications industry for more than 30 years. He has written for most of the industry's principal trade media and has been chief editor of several of its leading publications. Henry holds numerous awards for editorial excellence and has been recognized for exceptional service to the industry, particularly in education.

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This analysis was commissioned by Canon and NAPCO Media to help commercial and in-plant printing managers better understand how today's technology can optimize their capabilities and how they can benefit by adopting the proven best practices described herein.

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