Promoting Your Business with Photography: An Interview with Henry Bernstein

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Published by the Association of CorelDRAW® Professionals (ACDRP) / www.coreldrawhelp.com
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In this issue, we have two stories about interfaces.

One is about the various means of entering digital information into a computer system. The interfaces include such things as a mouse, keyboard, tablet, touchscreen, and so on.

The other interface story is the detailed description of the CorelDRAW X7 Workspace. That may not be an entry tool, but it is the screen interface that we use in working with CorelDRAW. But an interface is a bigger word. There are five definitions:

1. a surface regarded as the common boundary of two bodies, spaces, or phases, as between water and land, or gas and liquid.
2. shared facts or procedures of two disciplines, like the interface between chemistry and physics.
3. a common boundary between systems, equipment, concepts, or human beings.
4. communication or interaction between people.
5. an intermediate that helps incompatible things coordinate better, as an organization that is an interface between state government and the public.

The Customer Contact Interface

I believe definition #4 is the most important for our graphic products industry, not the most likely #3. It is the interaction between us and our customers that is the key interface for our businesses. One good way to talk about this critical interface is in terms of contact points. The point at which we make contact, or interface, with a customer or prospect is a direct cause of more sales. The more contact points we manage, the more chances we have to make a good impression. Another term for this is customer relationship management.

I believe these days our business interfaces are on three levels – print, personal, and digital – and all three have to be managed well to keep our business relationships smooth. Here is my list of contact points:

Print
This includes print advertising, flyers, thank-you cards, and even signs. Customers will judge us, or form an impression, by the printed information we make available to them. It needs to convey not only what our business is, but also give an image of who we are. They need to be able to interact smoothly with the information. Note that thank-you cards are a big way to leave a good impression, and our outdoor sign is also important. Pay attention to color, fonts, design – so it mirrors the kind of artwork we’d produce for them.

Personal
This includes meetings, trade shows, phone, networking events, and a physical shop. The personal or physical contact is critical. We only get one chance to make a good first impression. That means good eye contact, a firm handshake, and appropriate dress. A logo on a shirt is a great touch. On the phone, they will judge by voice. How do you answer your phone? Do you sound professional? Or do they get shunted off into voicemail hell? If you have a physical store location, is it clean, attractive, well-designed? Our interfaces all connect, projecting the image of who we are and what we do.

Digital
This includes email, website, blog, and social networking. Now, digital contact points are fairly new, but they also get scrutiny from our customers and prospects. How quickly and professionally do we respond to inquiries by email? If we send out an email newsletter, what does it look like? How about our website? Does it reflect the kind of work we do? If you connect via blogs or social networking sites (like Facebook or LinkedIn), are you conversational, knowledgeable, and often visual, via video?

In business, the interface we have with our customers must be managed. This is real customer relationship management. Don’t restrict yourself to a good-looking screen interface. Put yourself out there in print, personal, and digital contact points!
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More Proofing Tools in CorelDRAW X6

In our last issue, we discussed Proofing Tools and some of the options that are available along with some of the buttons and their uses. We will continue our discussion on Proofing Tools starting with the Auto Start.

Main Spell Check Options
You can adjust how the writing tools work by going to the global Option dialog (CTRL + J).

Perform Automatic Spell Checking - Check this option if you would like to check your spelling as you are typing. Any words that are not recognized will be underlined with a RED line when you are editing text with the Text Tool.

Visibility of Errors - You can have all of your errors underlined in all of the text objects or just the text object being edited.

Display Spelling Suggestions - Here, you can set the number of spelling suggestions that you would like to see in the pop-up menu when you right-click on a word with the Text Tool. The default number is 10.

Show Errors Which Have Been Ignored - When you right-click a word, the pop-up menu will include the Ignore All command. This lets Spell Check know to ignore that particular word.

More Spell Check Options
To select the other Spell Check options, go to the Writing Tools dialog and select the Spell Checker tab and click on the Options button. A drop-down menu will appear with the various additional options available to you.

As you can see, there are several options for you to use including the Spell Check’s language. The language option sets the current language for the Spell Check. CorelDRAW defaults to the language that the operating system is using, so if you need to change the language you are using, you will need to go to the Writing Tools dialog, select Spell Check, click on the Options button and then select Language to open the Language dialog.
Here, you can select the language that you would like Spell Check to use. You can also select “Show Available Languages Only.” This option will then only show those languages that have their dictionaries installed. You can also check “Save As Default Writing Tools”. The selected language will become the default language for the Spell Check and Grammatik.

**User Word Lists** - These are lists of words that have been added by the user. During Spell Check, words can be added to the User Word List by clicking the Add button. Each language has at least one User Word List.

**Main Word Lists** - These are lists that come with CorelDRAW. These lists contain the most common words and spelling for each language. Each language has one Main Word List. These lists are not editable.

**Auto Start** - With the Auto Start enabled, when the Writing Tools dialog is opened or your page is opened in the Writing Tools dialog, the Spell Check and Grammatik will start automatically. You will not have the option to select the range of the check. If you prefer to select your settings each time before a check is begun, then you will need to disable the Auto Start option. This way, a check will not begin until after you have clicked on the Start button.

**Check Words With Numbers** - This checks or ignores words that include numbers.

**Check Duplicate Words** - This option will flag words that appear twice in succession.

**Check Irregular Capitalization** - This option will check for words that have capital letters in places other than the first character.

**Show Phonetic Suggestions** - These are phonetic suggested replacement words that “sound” like the unrecognized word.

In next month’s issue, we will finish our discussion on Writing Tools.
The CorelDRAW workspace is a customizable user interface with the program. It consists of a drawing space, surrounded by tools and reference points to help you quickly create a layout.

**Elements of the Workspace**

Picture 2 (on the following page) shows the default CorelDRAW X7 workspace with most elements labeled. The elements are as follows:

1. The Windows program command bar. This bar contains the file name, and other program controls.
2. Just below the Windows bar is the Menu Bar. The Menu Bar is common to most Windows programs. It presents a drop-down list of commands arranged by category.
3. Below the Menu Bar is the Standard Command Bar. This bar is static for any given workspace. That means, the command icons remain unchanged. That said, the Standard Command Bar can be customized for a particular workspace.
4. Right below the Standard Command Bar is the Property Bar. The Property Bar is dynamic. It presents commands appropriate for the Tool, Object or Objects selected. In CorelDRAW X7 the Property Bar has approximately 89 different states that it can be in.
5. Located at the far right of the Property Bar is a plus sign in a circle. This is a "add command" icon. It can be used to add commands to the Property Bar. More on that next time when we explore modifying the workspace.
6. Number 6 is also a new feature in CorelDRAW X7. It's an Open Document Tab Bar that has all of the open documents listed. To switch from one document to another simply click on the tab. You can also easily close any open document by hovering over the tab and left clicking on the little X that appears to the right of the document name.
7. The little plus symbol on the far right of the Open Documents Bar is a New Document command. This is another new feature of CorelDRAW X7.
8. To the immediate right of the workspace is the Dockers panel. The Dockers panel has tabs identifying open Dockers.
9. Number 9 is also a new feature in CorelDRAW X7. It's a plus symbol at the bottom of the Dockers' tab list. The plus symbol allows the user to easily open a Docker that is not currently on the list. More on that next time when we explore customizing the workspace.
10. To the far right of the workspace is the standard color palette. In all the recent versions of CorelDRAW you can have multiple color palettes open.
11. Number 11 identifies the standard scrollbars. Where the scrollbars meet, in the lower right corner, is a Desktop View Controller. This is very useful tool when zoomed in. You can left click and drag the desktop view wherever you need it.
12. Below the scrollbars is the document color palette. Colors will be automatically added to this bar as they are used in the layout.
13. At the very bottom of the workspace is the Object Information, or Status Bar. This bar has various states that are user selectable.
14. Moving up and to the left, number 14 identifies the rulers. The rulers are graduated in whatever measurement is in use for the layout, inches, millimeters, etc. The default in this case is inches.
15. To the far left of the workspace is the Toolbox. It contains all of the available tools for any given workspace.
16. Number 16 identifies another new feature in CorelDRAW X7. The plus symbol can be used to customize the toolbox by adding tools that are frequently used.

17. Sharing the space with the bottom scrollbar (number 11) is the Page Navigation area. Here there are tabs to move from page to page, and command icons to create new pages.

18. In the center of the workspace is the layout page.

19. All of the open space surrounding the layout page is considered the CorelDRAW Desktop. Objects placed on the desktop are page independent. That means if you want to move an object from one page to another, one way to do it is to move it off the page, then go to the page where you want it, and drag it back onto that page from the desktop.

**Standard Workspaces**

All versions of CorelDRAW come with a default workspace. Newer versions, like X6, also included an Adobe Illustrator workspace.

With the release of CorelDRAW X7, Corel has expanded the number of workspaces they include with the program. The workspaces that come with X7 are:

1. **Lite** – The Lite workspace is designed for new users. It is simple with a minimum number of tools, commands, and Dockers. See picture 3.
2. **Classic** – The Classic workspace is essentially the default workspace that is provided in CorelDRAW X6. See picture 4.
3. **Default** – The Default workspace was redesigned for X7 to include some of...
Picture 3: Lite Workspace

Picture 4: Classic Workspace

Picture 5: CorelDRAW X7 Default Workspace

Picture 6: Adobe Illustrator Workspace
the newer features. See picture 5.

4. Adobe Illustrator – The Adobe Illustrator workspace is categorized as Other (as shown in picture 1). The Other category will also include any custom workspaces you create. See the Adobe Illustrator workspace in picture 6.

5. Illustration – The Illustration workspace is new in X7. It’s designed for users who are creating illustrations for print applications. See picture 7.


**My Custom Workspace.**

**Picture 9** shows my custom workspace. It’s designed for my computer display which has a maximum resolution of 1920 x 1280. In my custom workspace I have…

1. Displayed some toolbars I find useful.
2. Added commands to existing toolbars.
3. Docked some of the Dockers to the left side of the screen.
4. Created and displayed a new custom toolbar.

Keep in mind, all workspaces are customizable.

**Conclusion.**

In the next installment of learning CorelDRAW, we will continue our exploration of the workspace. We will cover some ways to customize a workspace to suit your workflow.
Graphics for Sandblasting

To understand the type of graphics required for sandblasting, we must first understand that sandblasting, as we refer to it, results in surface etching or carving. Therefore, we must understand the basic processes.

Decorative sandblasting has been defined as the controlled disruption of a material's surface. The disruption is accomplished by directing a pressurized stream of abrasive material at the surface of an object. This action causes particles of surface material to be dislodged resulting in an etched appearance. For glass, as an example, the etched area appears frosted while the non-etched area remains clear. In other materials like ceramics or stone, etching may result in color removal and/or surface carving.

To insure the area we want to remain undisrupted does not become frosted or carved, we must protect it from the stream of abrasive material directed at the object. This requires we apply a mask to cover the area we wish to protect. The mask is called a resist, since it resists the action of the abrasive stream. Resists can be made from a variety of materials. They can be hand-cut, machine cut, or created using a laser engraver or with photo development methods.

The most basic etching combines negative and positive areas to create a graphic and/or text image on the object we're working with. Essentially then, for basic etching, we require black and white artwork to create our resist. See illustration 1.

This means that for the basic sandblasting process, grayscale and color images must be reduced to single color black and white graphics. Grayscale images may be sandblasted using photographic halftone methods. Grayscale sandblasting is an advanced method.

The graphic examples shown in illustration 1 are appropriate for either laser or photo resist development. For hand-cut or machine cut resists, outlines are required. Hand-cut resists can use either bitmap or vector artwork; machine cut resists require vector graphics. See illustration 2.
Outline graphics are also suitable for stage carving. Stage carving is a systematic process where part of the object is blasted, then part of the resist is removed, and more of the object is blasted; and so on, until the entire image is completed.

In basic sandblasting, the image is created as a silhouette, with frost and clear areas defining it. In stage carving, the image is created with adjacent areas carved to different depths. For stage carving, outline graphics are necessary, and may be used with any method of resist generation. See illustration 3.

Conclusion
Graphics for sandblasting are black and white and can be:
1. Outlines…which are appropriate for hand or machine cut resists, as well as laser and photo-masks designed for stage carving.
2. Solid or silhouette graphics…which can be used with laser and photo-masking methods, and
3. Photographic halftone resists, which can also be created using either laser or photo-mask methods.

Each graphic type has its own demands on your computer workstation. Therefore, you should have an idea of the type of products you want to produce. This will in turn determine the type or types of mask generation you will be using, and the demands you will be placing on your graphic workstation.
The Human Interface for Artwork

Over the years, as technology has developed, there have been a number of ways we mere humans have had to interface with our computers. Some of these methods are better than others for creating graphic layouts and artwork.

The following are some of the methods currently available to interface with a computer.

**Keyboard and Mouse**
This has been the traditional method most of us have used for creating layouts -- the keyboard to enter text data, and the mouse for drawing.

Some of the drawbacks of using a mouse for drawing include:
1. It lacks the feel of traditional artist’s tools.
2. It requires desk space to move the mouse around.
3. A mouse is a relative position device. That means there is no fixed relationship between the position of the mouse on your desk and the cursor’s position on the screen.
4. There is no pressure sensitivity to drawing with a mouse. No matter how much force you press down on the mouse with, the line you are drawing will always be the same thickness.

**Using a Trackball in Place of a Mouse**
Pairing a Trackball with a Keyboard is another combination that some people use. Once again the keyboard is used for text entry; but the trackball replaces the mouse for line drawing and other graphics.

The trackball suffers the same set of drawbacks as a mouse with the exception that it takes significantly less desk space.

**Touchpad in Place of a Mouse**
With the advent of laptop computers touchpads came on the scene. Most people feel drawing with a touchpad is much more cumbersome than drawing with a mouse. The only advantage a touchpad has is that it requires less real estate for movement.
**Touchscreens**

In recent years, touchscreens have become very popular as input devices. That said, for most of us, on-screen keyboards are not as convenient to use as traditional keyboards. Furthermore, unless the touchscreen has been designed to work with a stylus, and engineered with pressure sensitivity, then using a touchscreen for graphic creation reduces the experience to something akin to finger-painting.

**Keyboard and Drawing Tablet**

Arguably the best combination for creating graphic layouts and artwork would include a keyboard for text entry; a drawing tablet for artwork creation and retouching; and possibly a mouse or trackball.

There are a number of inexpensive drawing tablets currently available that offer pressure sensitivity and absolute positioning.

**Touchscreen Drawing Tablets**

There are a few touchscreen devices available which are designed to work with a stylus and are also pressure sensitive. However, for entering more than a little bit of text, you would still probably want a keyboard.

These devices allow you to draw on-screen, but they tend to be among the most expensive solutions available.

**Conclusion**

In the next installment, we’ll take a look at the advantages of using a drawing tablet in your workflow.
Promoting Your Business With Photography:
An interview with Henry Bernstein

Tips for adding “photo power” to your marketing arsenal
We’re all familiar with the adage “One picture is worth a thousand words,” but ironically, it’s something apparel decorators typically don’t give much thought to, despite the visual nature of the industry. However, as the role of digital and social media in marketing has grown, so has the use of photography, making it a key promotional tool. Understanding the importance of good-quality photos and how to use them for maximum benefit can make or break your business through its impact on its public image.

First and fundamentally, apparel decorating is a visual art form. Whether it’s embroidered or screen printed and promoting a product, business, place or event, or simply offered as fashion, it is made to be seen; and to market it, you have to present it. The best form of presentation is imaging. In today’s electronically based world, information is put out regularly via websites, emails, and social media. There are an unprecedented number of avenues for getting images in front of potential customers. It is critical to take full advantage of them. But the key, as it always has been, is engaging the viewer. This is where quality comes in.

An image not only presents your work, it is perceived as reflecting its quality. A good image shows your work better and also adds to the overall impression of the quality—which can add value to the product and dollars to your bottom line. A photo should show what you do, how well you do it, and how much you care about your business.

In this visual age—especially in the decorated apparel arena—if a website, for instance, has few or weak images, it is likely to be passed over in favor of something that has more visual appeal. The eye is drawn to images; they are what catch the viewer’s attention and stimulate purchase action. So, it’s important that the images you present are of the highest quality. This will give your business an edge over others in terms of perceived quality.

Any decorated apparel shop that wants to put its best foot forward needs to take a hard look at how it is representing itself on the web and in promotional pieces via photography. By investing the time and resources to getting high-quality photos of your shop’s products and services, you can easily catapult your company above many others in terms of perception.

About Henry Bernstein

Henry Bernstein got his start in the industry with the Hershey Levinson Co., a distributor for Freudenberg Non-Woven Textiles. He specialized in men's tailored clothing and worked with designers building the interior of the garment. His father was a tailor so he had grown up around fabrics and sewing.

As computerized embroidery began to take off, Bernstein became involved in developing embroidery stabilizers. He later moved on to work for an embroidery equipment distributor where he began producing marketing materials in the form of brochures, ads, and videos. With photography being a long-time hobby, he now found himself shooting a lot of photos as part of his responsibilities.

Bernstein now owns a consulting/marketing/photography/web design company called Three Driveway Media, located in Solon, Ohio. You can reach Bernstein at Henry@threedrivewaymedia.com or visit his website at http://www.threedrivewaymedia.com/.

A goal when shooting promotional photos is to evoke an emotion or make the shot look like you are capturing a moment in time of a real person living a fun life. You are striving to make people want to emulate the mood or tone of the photo.
It didn’t take much more effort or creativity to add texture to this shirt shot for a lifestyle feel that is used quite extensively in marketing today. On the left, is an example of a typical model-up-against-a-wall shot. On the right is an example that better communicates lifestyle and a message of fun and quality that entice customers to buy.

On the left is an example of an “Ebay” type image. It’s just a shirt on a hanger against a door. On the right, you can see how simply finding a great background indoors or outdoors can really make a photo look more pleasing and give it the perception of higher quality.

On top is a photo of a folded garment. It shows the decoration but that’s about it. On the bottom, the same garment has been styled on a bench. This image creates a feeling of movement and better displays the raw, distressed decoration.
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sends the message that you don’t have much to offer, that you don’t think it’s worth displaying what you have, or that you don’t care enough to show what you do.

Conversely, getting a lot of good images out there tells customers quite a bit about how you approach your business, as well as showcasing the products you offer.

Content and technical elements factor into quality. What you should aim for is establishing a connection.

You can take a product shot on a cell phone, but then you’re relying on the graphics alone to get customers to relate to the image. Oftentimes, we can’t tell why we like a photo, but it’s usually because it evokes an emotion.

Facial expressions can enhance the effect, causing viewers to think, “I would wear that.” If a garment is modeled, it already looks better because it’s presented better, plus it adds this emotional appeal. And if you take your content a step further by adding a background or props, you can give your photo a lifestyle, “magazine” feel.

In addition to making the image more contemporary, this helps customers envision themselves in the garment and gives it added value. Using a photographic fashion treatment can turn a $15 or $20 item into a $49 one. The quality of the image raises the quality of the product in the eyes of the customer.

A well thought-out presentation also can frame the image content to take even the simplest piece of work and expand its market and possibly increase its price point without making a single change to it. For example, done properly, a group photo can turn an ordinary left-chest design into a fun, fashion, corporate look in the eye of the beholder. You’ve got five people wearing that shirt in an inviting setting, and the customer thinks, “I want to be part of that.”

In today’s age of cell phones, it’s all about creating a candid image that looks like it was snapped in the everyday world. Top advertising firms and their clients are tapping into the lifestyle mentality—catching “real” people living a fun life involving their products and selling on that, as opposed to using traditional catalog-type shots. This takes modeling to the next level: giving the garment life.

If you go this direction, though, keep a few tips from the pros in mind. Pay attention to the setup as a whole. Does it evoke a lifestyle? Is there anything in the picture that is going to compete visually with the product? You want to catch the lifestyle, but tell the story in an environment that is inviting while still keeping the focus on the garment or product.

At the end of the day, the goal is to get viewers to relate to the image and want to put themselves in it. You want them to be thinking “I want to buy that. I want to wear that. I want that shirt to do that for me.”

The best type of shop or production shots are ones that educate customers on some of the aspects of what you do, while engaging the viewer. A close-up of an employee doing a specific task is going to have more impact that an overview shot of an area.

When you want to focus on the design itself, this is traditionally done by shooting a close-up of a flat shirt. But this shot shows how you can focus on the design on a model. You can see the detail of the design like you would in a flat shot, but you have the added interest of the woman’s face.
But however effective this approach may be, it’s not the only game in town. Be creative. You can add variety and interest to soccer shirt images by interspersing action shots of models wearing them with nontraditional “flat” shots of jerseys, like ones where they’re slung over a locker door or a rack of balls. Even straight product shots pick up some zip if the garments are draped over an interesting piece of furniture or shown in an unusual setting or light.

Simply zooming in close on intricate stitching or a distinctive feature can gain you entry to a customer’s mind, while highlighting a selling point that might not be visible in a backed-off shot. Coupled with model/lifestyle photos, images like these can flesh out the story you’re trying to tell.

The same principles apply to any images used to promote your company, especially online. The Internet is the greatest equalizer ever. If a business has great imaging, it can attract attention, no matter what its size. Images are particularly critical to smaller operations.

If GM has a not-so-great photo, everyone still knows it’s GM; but if you’re a small business and your images are small time, that’s what viewers take away. The image you project of your work can make customers see your company as one of the big dogs, no matter what its size. It’s important to keep this in mind when selecting and composing non-product images to help tell your story as well.

A common example is shop shots. Unless you have a massive operation with dozens of automatics or a thousand embroidery heads, a photo of the production floor is not likely to be that impressive; and if it’s backed off enough to capture the entire scene, it’s probably not going to be all that engaging and could come across as cold. What you don’t want is for the feel of your company to get lost.

As with images of your work, you want to engage the customer. A few application shots of people inking screens, taking shirts off the dryer belt, or doing quality checks might benefit you more, particularly if you have a small- or mid-size shop. Again, by incorporating people and facial expressions, you’re creating a human connection and inviting viewers to become part of the story you’re telling.

While it’s good to send the message that you have a professional, well-organized shop, showing people at work can take shop shots to a new level by adding emotional appeal.

As far as exteriors, it’s important to consider where the image will be placed and what market you’re appealing to. If your intent is to let your local market know where you are, then a photo of the outside of your shop might have value. But general Internet selling doesn’t require showing your storefront, and it could actually hurt you by calling attention to the size of your shop and taking some of the customers’ focus off your work. If you do decide to use an exterior shot, it might make more sense in promotional venues targeting local business, such as print ads.

In any case, in photographing exteriors, take care to present the best possible image. Check out alternative angles with a critical eye. Does the building come across as too small to do the job, or too quaint—or are you selling quaint? You might need to stand on a ladder or use a
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wide-angle lens to get optimal results.

Once you recognize the importance of quality photographs in promoting your business, the question is how to get it. The alternatives are doing it yourself or having someone else do it.

If you’ve got a good artistic eye, a feel for what people desire, and the inclination, taking your own photos may be a viable option. To do it right, you will need a reasonably good camera with interchangeable lenses and a knowledge of basic photographic techniques.

You will need a macro lens for close-ups and a wide-angle lens to shoot groups, etc. You’ll also need the ability to compose a shot. Good composition is key. Depending on the level of professionalism you’re seeking, you also might consider investing in a light setup to avoid unwanted shadows and achieve better color saturation.

That said, a cell phone or small digital camera may suffice for social media snapshots.

Pictures from events where your company’s name or product is featured are more about capturing the moment than photographic quality.

You can find local photographers by word of mouth as well as on the Internet. Or the answer may be right in your own company—an artist or other employee. Ask around and keep an open mind; a photographer who specializes in one type of work still may have the skills set to meet your needs.

It’s important to ask questions and explain what you’re looking for in your images. A good strategy is to find examples of photos you like online and show them to the photographer. Let those images get across what you want in yours.

But finding someone to take your photos doesn’t end your involvement. As a decorator, you’re the one who understands what’s important to capture in the photo; and you have to communicate that to the photographer if you want the image to achieve your presentation goals.

Good-quality images are worth the time, effort, and investment. In the digital age, the saying “it’s all about image” has taken on new meaning.

If you fill a website with copy and no images, it won’t matter how important and relevant the content is, no one will want to stay and read it. Conversely, if a website were composed solely of images, it’s a fair bet it could tell the story and people would be willing to explore it.

Today people want to be informed in seconds. If your competition isn’t incorporating the best imaging to promote their products, it’s an opening for you. By combining good photos and graphics and solid information, you can step up your presentation and sales. Images, including photos, tell a story. Tell great stories.

When shooting apparel or products without a model, use your creativity to stage a shot that will be more appealing than a shirt on the floor. Even straight product shots pick up some zip if the garments are draped over an interesting piece of furniture or shown in an unusual setting or light.
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According to marketing experts, there are three times a business should be promoting what they do: when business is good, when business is not good, and all the times in between.

Keeping a business “top of mind” for customers and prospects doesn’t have to cost an arm and a leg. Any type of promotional effort that keeps a company in front of its customers is an investment in future business. Big companies now spend about $162 billion each year to keep their businesses in front of their target markets. Small businesses can’t afford huge advertising budgets like that so we look for ways to appeal to our customers and prospects without shelling out big bucks. I’m all about shoestring marketing. My favorite is free PR marketing, which can be done year round.

Much of my job is to educate customers and prospects about what our company can do for them, let them know how our business is an excellent choice, and then help them to find us... all without breaking the bank. When I’m wearing my marketing director hat, I’m planning and orchestrating really cost-effective ways to get our company’s name out there with little or no investment of advertising dollars.

Some years ago, we started cutting down on our local Yellow Pages advertising budget. We found that more and more customers and prospects were letting their fingers do the walking on a keyboard rather than through a phone book. We dropped the big ads and now use small reminder ads so our investment went from many thousands down to the low hundreds. Small ads that keep us visible now direct folks to our web site. In my opinion, this is where today’s customers are looking anyway.

Both big and small companies have to be constantly marketing and promoting themselves, especially to keep existing customers coming back. The relationship between a business and its customers doesn’t end with the sale. Since these clients will most likely need the same products and services again and again, here are some ideas to make sure they keep returning for repeat business:

- Make it easy to buy from you by offering completely no hassle customer service. Go out of the way to help with order taking, processing, keeping the customer posted on order status... all the way through to delivery of the products. To make sure your company is “in sight” and remembered for the next time they order, pack the products in a box with your company’s label/logo on it. Use logo’d bags for smaller orders... plastic bags can be “re-purposed” for holding all kinds of car items.

- Stand behind the company’s products and services... and any promises made. When a customer makes a mistake when placing their order... offer to meet them at least half way on the expense of any re-do.

- Tell customers what your company is doing to stay on the cutting edge for them. Send out messages through news releases to local media, club and organization newsletters, email/eblast bulletins, etc. Just make sure the message is relevant to the target audience. These messages can include flyers on product specials, invitations to events that your company sponsors, and information about changes in products and services. Messages can include a special, personal note directed to the particular customer... this can help grab and keep their attention, especially if coupled with a special offer just for them.

- Write old customers personal, handwritten notes... frequently. Just a quick “thinking of you” along with a personal touch like “I know you were headed to Hawaii last month... hope it was a fabulous trip!” Or... “You had shared that you were moving to a new house. Hope you’re all settled in and loving it!” Or perhaps you ran into a customer in another setting like the movie theater (“Did you enjoy the movie as much as I did?”) or the grocery store, (“It was fun to chat with you at SaveMart today. Did you find any bargains?”) -- or any place or any other tidbit that relates just to that person. And... yes... it does take a little time, effort, and putting on your thinking cap, but the pay-off is huge. They will never forget that you cared enough to show it in a personal note.

- Remember your customer’s special occasions. Send birthday, anniversary, and holiday cards to them know you don’t forget...
them...nor do you take them for granted.

- Use social media like LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. These days, business networking is huge on social networking sites that enable businesses to reach thousands of potential customers/prospects on the Internet. Link to LinkedIn, or become Facebook friends with existing clients. This gives your company access to the extra-curricular activities they are getting involved in, and helps to find out who are their company’s movers and shakers.

- Use the phone. I know...it’s easy to reach out through an email message; however, even “emoticons” can’t show the person on the other end exactly what your meaning is. Your voice, its inflections, the enthusiasm you exude when talking can’t be duplicated in an email. Email can be used as a good follow-up tool to confirm what was discussed in a phone conversation. Let your fingers do the walking on your phones’ dial pad.

- Use the phone part two. Remember to make follow-up calls to make sure everyone “loved” the products and services, and to begin nurturing the next sale. Besides a check in, this is a good time to ask for referrals...when a customer has had a pleasant experience and is ready to share good information.

- Provide referrals for your customers whenever possible. If you know someone looking for a product or service that they can provide, arrange to connect them. When two good customers come into our showroom at the same time, we introduce them in hopes they can connect to do business together. This shows our clients that they are each important to us...and they love it.

- Visit your best customer’s place of business at least once a year. This is a perfect way to drop off a little gift that shows you’re thinking of them. Perhaps a promotional product with your company name and logo...like a 4 X 6 desk note pad...or a coffee mug with some little items in it...or a candy jar that you can stop by and refill every couple months. These kinds of things will hopefully keep your company visible on the recipient’s desk for a long time.

No matter how small (or how big) your business is, you can build awareness and keep your company at the top of your customer’s minds by using a mix of touches. Keep notes on what works best for each customer. It’s worth taking the time to think about the how-to’s...organizing the right approach for each customer...and making the effort to get it done.

Marketing experts have told me that to make and keep a business visible to customer and prospects, one should concentrate on providing exceptional customer service...and the rest will follow. With this kind of constant attention, your business will never be out of sight -- out of mind.
**Mark A Coudray** is a respected and well known industry innovator and strategist. His works have been published in more than 400 papers, columns, features, and articles in every major publication in the US and abroad. Coudray has been an active member of the Academy of Screen Printing and Digital Technology since 1989 and has written for Impressions since 1978. You can contact him directly at coudray@coudray.com or visit http://www.coudray.com.

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**Bill Leek** of Houston, TX has over 30 years experience in computer engineering and graphics design. He has developed several lines of color imprintable products, and does testing on a variety of products for different manufacturers. He can be reached at wfleek@jblgraphics.com or 281-257-0695.

**John and Judy McDaniel** are owners of CorelDRAW® Help, Inc. They started in the personalization business in 1989 with CorelDRAW version 1.0. In their businesses they apply CorelDRAW! They’ve used it with—mechanical and laser engravers—to produce Awards, Gifts, and Industrial Products. They’ve also used it with all types of printers and vinyl cutters—for creating sublimation and other image transfers—for making sandblast masks—screen-printing screens—pad-printing plates—signs and banners—sales literature and flyers. In essence, they have over 20 years of experience in applying CorelDRAW! They have written hundreds of articles and tips; lectured across the country; and have been teaching CorelDRAW since 1991. For information on training and more, call 541-967-4271, or write to mail@CorelDRAWHelp.com.

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Traveling Tidbits

by Otis Veteto

Tahoe, Sacramento Soccer, Networking, and Promo Stars

Visiting Lake Tahoe
Emily and I spent the first week of June at Lake Tahoe. We were fortunate to stay at the Lake Tahoe Vacation Resort. What a great place to relax….close to the lake, close to the casinos and close to restaurants….not too bad! The weather in June is incredible at Lake Tahoe with daytime temperature around 75 degrees, and nighttime around 40-45 degrees.

South Lake Tahoe is building a Convention Center, Hotel, and Retail site that will be located right on the California/Nevada state line. It will be called the “Chateau” and it will be incredible. It will include a hotel/condominium combination, convention center, and retail shopping, all in one spot. It is located across the street from the Heavenly Village hotel/shopping center. Phase 1 was scheduled to open in the summer of 2014, but still has a long way to go before being ready. There are about 4 phases to the project, and when it is finished, it is going to be awesome. I think if you Google Lake Tahoe Chateau Project, it will give you all the information. If you do make a trip to South Lake Tahoe, include a dinner at the Cabo Wabo restaurant in Harvey’s. Great Mexican menu!

Sacramento Soccer
While on the subject of new facility projects….Sacramento has built a new Soccer Stadium. It is called Bonney Field, and is located on the grounds of the California Exposition. It is an 8000-seat sports facility and is home field for the Sacramento Republic FC professional soccer team. Their first few games have already been sold out, and according to their website, almost all the home games are the same way. If you are a soccer (or in soccer vernacular, football) fan, and are going to be in the Sacramento area this summer, go to the Bonney Field Sacramento web site…or the Sacramento Republic FC web site for tickets.

Industry Networking
This week I attended a good old-fashioned “gathering” luncheon in Sacramento. It was just a bunch of people from the Promotional Products Industry and The Awards and Recognition Industry….both suppliers and retailers. Note: the retailers in the Promotional Products Industry are called distributors. We were joined, also, by the Promotional Marketing Association of Northern California executive director, MaryAnne Bobrow, and her assistant. There were about 14 people in attendance, and since it was open discussion, with no agenda, we covered subjects on how to make sure reps get credit for a sale to upcoming trade shows in the region. What a great networking luncheon!

That was on Thursday, followed up on Friday with a golf outing at the Teal Bend Golf Course in Sacramento. John Oda, independent distributor with Onyx World-wide in Oakland, CA, was the un-official golf host for the day. What a great way to end a work week!

Promo Rising Stars
A Traveling Tidbits shout-out to the 12 Promotional Products Business 2014 Rising Stars! They are: Derik Adams, Inkhead Inc; Brittany David, Sugz USA; Jessica Gibbons-Radich, Concord Marketing Solutions; Evan Krofchick, Artmetal; Jenniger Marnajek, JEM Promotional Marketing; Carol Moore, AIA Corp; Jon Norris, Starline USA Inc; Jill Rogers, Trimark Sportswear Group; Jim Socci, Artistic Toy Mfg Inc; Tiffany Tarr, Distributor Central LLC; Briane Towne, Sunrise Identity and Tessa Trumble, J Charles Crystal Works, Inc. Congratulations to you all!

SUMMER…..summer…..summer…..right around the corner! Just out of curiosity, I checked to see what was the most popular song about summer. Billboard has the #1 summer song…CALIFORNIA GURLS by Snoop Dog with SUMMER IN THE CITY by The Lovin’ Spoonful right behind. I always liked…”It’s summertime, and the livin’ is easy…hush little baby, doon’t you cry”. Love those lyrics.

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