

P.O.P. (is this Soda?)

The fun and challenge behind point of purchase graphics.

BY DAVE KING



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One of the most commonly used acronyms in our industry is *P.O.P.* — but what does P.O.P. mean to you? For me, it's a message in a retail environment that could cause a customer to purchase something that they might not have thought of when they entered the store — hence the name *Point of Purchase*.

P.O.P. graphics these days are so much more involved both in store and behind the scenes than ever before, you have counter cards, floor graphics, banners, backlits, all the way to backlit lenticular applications. I do not want to take you through *Point of Purchase Marketing 101* as this strays from printing, so let's just jump to the "behind the scenes" graphics for the P.O.P. market and the challenges that are involved.

PERCEPTUAL DISPARITY

Let's start with the money part of P.O.P. graphics. Because P.O.P. graphics evolved from the screen print world the *perception* is that P.O.P. graphics must be on a certain thickness of substrate with a coated stock finish, or that they need to be die cut from rigid substrates. This perception is great for the screen print world, but we digital guys

typically don't own die cutters, we don't often print onto coated stock finish and we don't often print onto the rigid boards (although that is changing with the advent of UV-curable flatbed printers).

To overcome this perceptual disparity we have to change the client's thought process a little bit in order to put them in line with the P.O.P. products that digital printers can realistically create. The exciting thing about digitally produced P.O.P. graphics (and a great selling point) is that the customer has a minimum order of *one unit*. A screen printer's minimum order is typically for *many hundreds of units*.

The digital house will typically charge \$4 - \$16 per square foot for a short-run P.O.P. counter card. A screen printer will typically charge a per-piece price that might be something like \$4 each for 1,000 units.

There are huge differences here. The client often remembers that the screen printer charged \$4 for an 11" x 17" piece that included an easel back and a two-color graphic. The digital person might have to charge as much as \$20 for the same basic solution. This makes for a huge learning curve for the client — and makes for a very difficult sell for the digital house.

Another disparity is that the digital house has to tell the client that he prints with four (or six) colors and that he must mix these colors together to get the blue and green needed for the P.O.P. — and that he might not be able to *produce* this particular Reflex blue and that specific PMS green, but that he will do his best. The client then tells the digital house that the last job was the right colors and that they will only pay for the right color again. Ah yes — color. Here comes the fun and frustration.

COLOR ME P.O.P.

Color is a *huge* part of the P.O.P. world. A good number of clients who purchase P.O.P. graphics want multiple media presentations in the same location — and they want all the colors to match. How do you match colors when you have a vinyl banner, two backlits, 12 counter cards and a fabric flag? Great question... and when you find the answer please call me! (Just kidding.)

Yes you can match colors across different medias, and if you have the right equipment and a clear understanding as to how to make those colors match, you can get all those products very, *very* close in color. The trick is to have a Pantone color pallet file on



Most P.O.P. applications are for indoor use and often involve mounting to a rigid substrate, or more involved finishing requirements, such as framing.



For my shop, we have created P.O.P. demo pieces, such as this one, to let customers see for themselves the kinds of P.O.P. applications we can do.



Some P.O.P. applications, such as this one for WareRite kitchen products, involves affixing actual samples to the printed piece. Remember, the more resources you use to finish the piece, the more you need to charge.

hand that has *all* the Pantone colors in it — and it is a *vector* file (for more on matching Pantone colors check out “Color-Match Madness” in the Sept. 2003 issue of *Digital Graphics*).

The next step in the process is to make sure your equipment has the ability to produce great quality, high-resolution graphics on most of your substrates. Some examples of fine printers good for P.O.P. work include the Roland SolJet II, Mamaki JV3 and the Mutoh Falcon II Outdoor. All of these printers use solvent ink and as a result you can print directly onto uncoated vinyl banners, paper, adhesive-backed vinyl, and in some cases, even fabric. Assuming you are using one device for most (if not all) your printing, you are assured of having the same basic color gamut. And if you have the correct profiles for the media you should be able to produce great and accurate color.

For those of us who work with a higher volume of prints (typically hundreds to thousands a day), we use a number of machines to produce our graphics. This causes a problem because the color gamut will differ from machine to machine. Say we are

printing our counter cards, posters, and backlits on a Durst Lambda photo imager for example. This is an RGB device so the color gamut is much different than for CMYK machines such as the Mimaki JV4 for dye-sub

fabric or the NUR Fresco solvent printer for floor graphics. In these cases our front-end designers must balance the files for each of the different medias being used, and the different file configurations for each printer.

Ninety nine percent the time we can make vector colors (typically PMS — but only if the PMS color can be produced with the 3/4/6 color printer) match perfectly on all media. But pixel-based files (typically Photoshop) are more problematic and require more time on the front end, and even a few test prints to get the files matching just right. Always start with the pixel part of the files first, then go to the vector as this is much easier to achieve color success.

PRINTING AND FINISHING

Once your colors are acceptable and you have printed your images onto your chosen substrate, it's time to finish. This could be easy, like mounting vinyl to a piece of rigid substrate, or more involved, like doing 3D die-cut jobs. Remember, the more complicated the finishing requirements, the more you'll need to charge. For example, if your client wants 600 11" x 17" counter cards

with an easel back, this would typically bring a low margin as the talent to create this P.O.P. is very easy. When the job goes to lenticular and backlit you could be charging a high price per square foot with a more difficult creation, or you could own a flatbed printer and print directly onto the lenticular film.

If you are using an inkjet printer or a photo imager such as the Lambda or an Océ LightJet for your indoor P.O.P. prints, your costs are typically fixed for the inks and media, but your adhesive, laminate, and easel backs are very controllable cost elements. We print more than 30,000 Sam Adams P.O.P. pieces each year and we use a card stock called .040 Bright White. The adhesive used for this board costs 40 percent less than the acrylic adhesive we use for all our PVC boards because the paper boards work great with an inexpensive water-based adhesive.

The easel backs are from Lineco. We order those with the adhesive strip on them so the labor to install the easel backs is very low. We can produce 4000 dpi 11" x 17" P.O.P. graphics with easel backs for less than \$1.50 each. So, if we sell them for \$8 each, the profit on a job of 600 pieces is more than \$3,600. In our shop we can do a job like this with one person in a morning! If we could use a flatbed printer — such as the Inca Spyder 150, Océ Arizona T220 UV, Scitex VEEjet or

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Printing for P.O.P.

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VUTEk PressVu UV 180 — for this same job, the cost would be around 45 cents each and could be finished in four hours on one machine. No mounting or laminating involved. Well, you *will* need someone to put these finished prints into a box, so I guess you will have about one hour of labor to finish this job.

AN IDEAL COMBINATION FOR P.O.P.

One thing we're starting to see these days that makes a lot of sense for P.O.P. graphics is the advent of flatbed printers that work in tandem with automated cutting systems such as the Zünd I-cut.



We print about 30,000 P.O.P. pieces each year for Sam Adams. Here is a typical selection.



Larger cut-out P.O.P. displays often involve more labor. It's tough for the digital guy to compete price-wise with screen printers for larger runs, but for small-run jobs, we've got a lot to offer.



Easel backs, such as this, are often available with their own adhesive strip. This is a relatively easy add-on for table-top P.O.P. applications that can really add on to your bottom line.

P.O.P. graphics are often custom cutouts, such as are seen in this image. An ideal combination to efficiently create custom cutout P.O.P. graphics is to have a flatbed printer working together with an automated cutter. The graphics here were produced using a VUTEk PressVu UV 180 with the Zünd I-cut.



A flatbed printer with an automated cutter is an ideal combination for P.O.P. print production. The price tag is high for these printer/cutter setups, but if you have access to the clients who want and need P.O.P. graphics, you might want to consider it (for ROI information on flatbed/cutter systems, see "Flat-out Getting to the Profits," *Digital Graphics*, Oct. 2003).

For those of us who cannot afford an expensive flatbed solution, the P.O.P. market will become more and more difficult. Zünd cutters can cut any shape on just about any material. However there is no reason that you cannot purchase a Zünd

cutter and use your inkjet/Lambda printer to do P.O.P., because this works great. But you will still have to deal with the mounting and pricing issues of the two solutions.

When you consider that none of your employees will ever work as fast or as hard as a Zünd cutter and will never in a lifetime be as consistent or accurate, the cost of an

employee at \$40k per year (estimated) and a top of the line Zünd at \$120k, after three years your Zünd is paid for — and funny enough, the Zünd did not call in sick once in three years — and you never had to pay it overtime.

Remember, work smart first, then work hard! See you on the show floor. **DG**

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