

Road To Sublimation Success:

Decorating Covers For Smart Phones and Tablets

By David Gross

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

—Lewis Carroll, Alice Through the Looking Glass



iPhone4 covers using CondeDesign background design elements.

It is not very often that our Road to Sublimation Success encounters a true game-changing product category, but that is exactly what has happened in the last year with the introduction of sublimatable covers for smart phones, tablets, e-readers, and other popular electronic devices. In a short time, sublimated device covers and cases have gone viral like no products that I have ever seen, while also providing an impressive profit margin for digital decorators.

As I write this article, the iPhone 5 has been out about a month, and its sales have broken all previous records. Next week, Apple will introduce the iPad Mini that, with a lower price point, will also set new records. And, yes, there are many other smart phones and tablets that we support! This is why I am so excited about this new market for sublimation decorating.

When I teach, I often tell the story of an imaginary conversation with a reporter and Thomas Edison. The reporter is visiting Tom in his lab in Menlo Park and is very excited about what new breakthrough products he will get to see. After a tour of the lab, the reporter asks Tom, "I know you have had great success with the light bulb and electricity, but what's the next new technology after electricity?"

Tom looks at the reporter in disbelief and says, "We are just scratching the surface of what we can do with electricity. There is no way we can have a clue about what electricity will be used for in 100 years! But I am confident that those millions of uses will continue to surprise us every day!" Well, that's how I feel about sublimation decorating technology. I think that, just like electricity, sublimation is constantly looking for and finding new uses and markets!

DEVICE COVERS FOR SMART PHONES AND TABLETS

What is a device cover? It is an add-on to personalize electronic devices like smart phones and tablets. It can be a cover, case, sleeve, or skin. Sometimes the product itself is sublimated, as in the iPad sleeve or cover, while other products like the iPhone or iPad case require an insert of metal, fabric, or plastic that is sublimated. Sublimation turns out to be the ideal decorating technology for all sorts of accessories for smart phones and tablets.

MEET THE FAMILY: SMART PHONES

Apple started the revolution with the iPhone and has had continued success with its recently released iPhone 5. The initial sales can only be described as Ginormous! The good news for our industry is that the vast majority of iPhone owners will purchase a case for their phone. These cases are often purchased to be unique and colorful fashion statements in and of themselves—something that fits perfectly into the dye-sub industry's strategy of providing full-color, on-demand personalized products.

Like shopping at Best Buy, there are many different styles and colors of cases for the iPhone 4/4s. By my count, there are at least six different styles to choose from. I recommend getting samples of each case (they are inexpensive) and letting your clients decide which they prefer.

ONE-PIECE PLASTIC CASES

The popular one-piece plastic cases (the first style to be introduced) are available in white, black, and clear, and are decorated with separate metal, fabric, or plastic inserts. For the metal insert, I rec-



Hard plastic covers for iPhone 5.



Rubber covers for iPhone 4/4S.

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**Bumper covers
for iPhone 4.**

**Capsule covers
for iPhone 4.**



ommend either the USA-made DynaSub or ChromaLuxe inserts. Avoid the China metals, as they will fade rapidly, have poor image quality, and lack scratch resistance. Both metals come in white and silver, with the DynaSub also available in gold. White fabric and plastic inserts are new and provide an interesting look and feel.

SILICONE RUBBER CASES

Silicone cases are available in a variety of colors and provide a degree of protection for the iPhone. The silicone case inserts are slightly smaller than the one-

piece case inserts and are available in metal, fabric, and plastic.

BUMPER CASES

One of my favorites is the bumper case. This is for folks that want a minimal case that adds almost zero to the size of the iPhone while providing an excellent feel to the hand. A unique feature of this style is that the metal insert is held in place by the bumpers against the iPhone. This means that the insert can be changed easily—providing the opportunity to interchange multiple inserts and cases! These bumper covers also come in a variety of attractive colors.

CHROMALUXE FLEX FRAME CASES

This attractive two-piece plastic case is available in a variety of colors and allows the metal insert to be changed by the owner, allowing add-on sales with additional inserts like the bumper case.

CAPSULE TOUGH CASES

This new two-piece plastic case comes with a removable inner rubber cradle. This inner cradle provides protection for the phone in the event of a fall.

SUBLIWRAP PHONE SKIN DECALS

For folks that don't want a case, this precut material is sublimated and then stuck to the back and sides of the iPhone. It leaves no residue and is re-positional.

WHAT'S NEW FOR THE IPHONE 5?

The iPhone 5 is taller and thinner than the iPhone 4. Most of the iPhone 4 cases have been retooled to fit the 5 along with two very exciting new cases: the Jubilee Tough Case and the Brookley Tough Case.

JUBILEE TOUGH CASES

This cutting-edge two-piece tough case consists of a black rubber cradle for the phone and a white or black slide-on cover. The rubber cradle has beefed-up corners for surviving those tough falls. This is the cover I have on my iPhone 5.

BROOKLEY TOUGH CASES

This one-piece case has an integrated rubber cradle built into the plastic cover and is available in black or white.

SAMSUNG SMART PHONES

In the USA, we support the very popular Galaxy S3 smart phone (all carriers) along with the AT&T version of the Galaxy Note with plastic and rubber one-piece cases with metal and fabric inserts. In addition,



Pre-scored vinyl skins for iPhone 4.

for the S3 is the ChromaLuxe Flex case allowing interchangeable inserts. As I write this, Samsung has announced the Galaxy S3 Mini. We have already begun work on cases for this new smart phone.

HTC ONE X

The last of our currently supported smartphones is the HTC One X. This one-piece plastic cover is available in black and white, and supports a metal or fabric insert.

TABLETS AND E-READERS

The first wildly successful tablet was the original iPad. Now in its third version, we have three styles of covers that support the iPad 2/3. All three types can be printed with a smaller sublimation printer like the Ricoh GXe3300 or SG3110.

First is a plastic snap-on case available with or without magnetic flap. Available in a variety of colors, this cover uses a metal, fabric, or plastic insert. When closed, this innovative flap puts the iPad to sleep and wakes it up when opened.

Next is the iPad case. This notebook style leather and faux suede case sports



a large white fabric panel built in to the cover for decorating and is available in several colors. Be sure to follow our instructions for pressing this product, as it requires pressing with very heavy pressure to flatten the transfer area.

Last is the neoprene sleeve. This can be bundled with the iPad case, to provide additional protection when traveling. One side of the sleeve is white for imprinting.

As I write, the iPad mini is about to be released. We have finished our development of all three types of cases. This will certainly be another gold rush!



Jubilee tough case.

Brookley tough case.

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Leather and faux suede case for iPad.



Magnetic flip cases for iPad.



Neoprene sleeve for iPad.

CondeTV

CondeTV.com is a treasure trove of well over 600 free videos to help navigate the Road to Sublimation Success. These videos will teach, explain, grow, and motivate you. Also features great CorelDRAW tips and tricks.

OTHER TABLETS

In addition to the iPad, we support four other tablet manufacturers. They are: Samsung Galaxy Tab II (7" and 10.1"), Kindle Touch, Fire and new HD models, Nook, and Google Nexus 7.

Last but not least in our family of device cases is Apple's iPod touch. We provide covers for both the 4th and 5th generation iPod touch devices.

SUBLIMATING THE INSERT

Sublimating the fabric or metal insert is very straightforward. Of course, you need to print your transfers using sublimation ink onto sublimation release paper. For single covers, I use DyeTrans pre-cut mug paper, as this provides a great way to save wasted paper.

For metal, I recommend pressing with the transfer paper face up, metal face down (remember to remove the plastic peel coat) and placing a cover sheet on top. Press at 400 degrees F for 45 seconds. For pressing multiple covers, you may need to add extra time. Use light pressure with the DynaSub metal, as too much pressure can cause "water marks" in the metal.

For the fabric inserts: press with the fabric face up/transfer paper face down at 400° F with medium (two-handed) pressure for 45 seconds. For cases with external inserts, remove the protective film from

the case exposing the adhesive. Next align the insert to the case and press evenly and securely. That's it! You can watch our training videos at www.condetv.com.

DECORATION CHOICES

Unlike other products, I think designs for device covers break new ground. We have created an extremely large collection of backgrounds and design templates to allow you, the digital decorator, to deliver professional, high-value device covers with minimal effort. We provide these as digital downloads for a minimal charge, and new collections are always being added. For those digital decorators that create their designs from scratch, we provide product templates in our PartnerNet section on our website.

In the demographics of designs, ladies often prefer a monogrammed cover with decorative background. To my shock, when I asked my daughter what she wanted on her cover, she said her monogram with a black & white houndstooth background.

MY IPHONE KIOSK

For our Open House this year, I put together an innovative way for customers to produce a cover directly from their own iPhone! Also a great idea for retail environments, the station consisted of my laptop (running Photoshop Elements), a



Printing transfers using pre-cut mug paper.



CondeDesign backgrounds.

Ricoh SG3110 printer equipped with dye-sub inks, and a heat press.

To use the kiosk, a customer simply walks up with their iPhone and connects to the laptop's wireless network. The customer then selects an image from their phone's photo album and sends it to the computer where it's automatically opened in Photoshop Elements. You can see how it will look in the print preview and can easily adjust as needed. You then print the photo using a custom paper size defined in the printer driver. In seconds, the transfer comes out of the printer on our mug/iPhone paper. Then press!

I have all the instructions and videos for helping you set up your very own iPhone kiosk. I also created a point of purchase display to help your customer to print. And of course, you can use this system for things other than iPhone covers!

HOW TO MATCH THAT SPECIAL COLOR

If you need to match school colors, a color on a business card, or a specific Pantone color, keep reading! I recommend buying large sheets of metal (the same metal that inserts are cut from) to produce wall-mounted color charts. The charts, which reflect the color palette(s) found within your software, make it easy to match existing printed colors—simply

hold a color up to the chart to select a match. You're then able to select the same color found within your software. My favorite color palette today is Pantone Goe (it first appeared in CorelDRAW X5).

MARKETING AND SALES RESOURCES

I have put together some excellent resources and suggestions to help those with storefronts.

First is a Point of Purchase Display (POP) sign that tells the story of what you are selling. You can download the editable sign artwork and then print and press it onto ChromaLuxe metal. If you do not have a large printer or press, our Print Services department is always available to help.

Next, I recommend installing a flat screen TV or digital photo frame with a USB port. Using a flash drive, this will allow you to show images of products and artwork you can provide. We have a collection of images and also recommend you photograph all of the products you produce. This is an excellent way to show clients a greater variety of products without cluttering your showroom.

We also have unbranded videos that will complement the images that can be played with or without sound on your showroom flat screen.

Beat A Path To Your Door!

For all the devices covers, I strongly recommend a tip from my now famous "101 Tips and Tricks for Sublimation Success". Tip number 71, "Put your contact information on every product you sell". For most device covers, you can affix a label on the inside of the cover or when possible on the back of the metal insert. I suggest you put your contact information along with a re-order code that could be the artwork file name. This would allow you to handle reorders smoothly.

If you are doing wholesale fulfillment (which I highly recommend), then the reorder info would reflect whoever would handle reorders. Wholesale fulfillment is a great way to grow your business. My best example would be a Pet Groomer. You would make a great Point of Purchase display with samples to set up at the Pet Groomer. They would take orders, and you would do the fulfillment. Device cases with pictures of their favorite dog or cat are a clear winner!

Images are also available for our huge collection of backgrounds and design templates. For each collection of our backgrounds, design templates, and monogram fonts, we provide a flier that can be placed in a clear sleeve inside a three-ring binder for your clients to look through.

Check out www.dummyphones.com. These folks sell non-working models of all these smartphones for your in-store displays. Priced at about \$40 to \$50 per phone, they are not cheap, but I think they really will increase your sales closing ratio, as the client can really see, touch, and feel the end product.

Well, I hope this article has helped with your success! I welcome your feedback and suggestions as we travel on the Road to Sublimation Success! You can email me at dgross@conde.com. **A&E**

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