

Products and Processes for Profit

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SPECIAL SECTION:

SUBLIMATION REPORT

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BY DAVID GROSS



Go for **Big Profits** with a **Mobile Pop-Up Shop**

ROAD TO SUBLIMATION SUCCESS

During the many classes I've taught for GRAPHICS PRO EXPO (formerly THE NBM SHOW), I've explained that it's the business owner's job to maximize the profit potential of their sublimation system. In that context, I would always ask class attendees if they were currently producing a broad mix of imprintable substrates that included older, tried-and-true products as well as newer, trendier products. Unfortunately, the most common response has always been that folks instead pick and choose the items they produce based on their own personal likes and preferences. No curiosity, no experimenting, and no communicating with customers to find something new. To that, my frustrated response will always be, "Don't let your personal opinions get in the way of making money!"

For the past eight years, we've set up

our sublimation kiosk on the show floor so that we could produce an assortment of free personalized products for show attendees right before their eyes. Tremendously popular with the crowd and successful for us, I've often suggested to our clients that they, too, set up their own kiosk at events to sell photo gifts. The most common negative responses have ranged from wanting to maintain the familiarity of their current way of doing business to fearing what some may consider a far more stressful approach. While I understand the desire to avoid stress and risk, you've got to step out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself to learn, grow and try new things!

GO BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

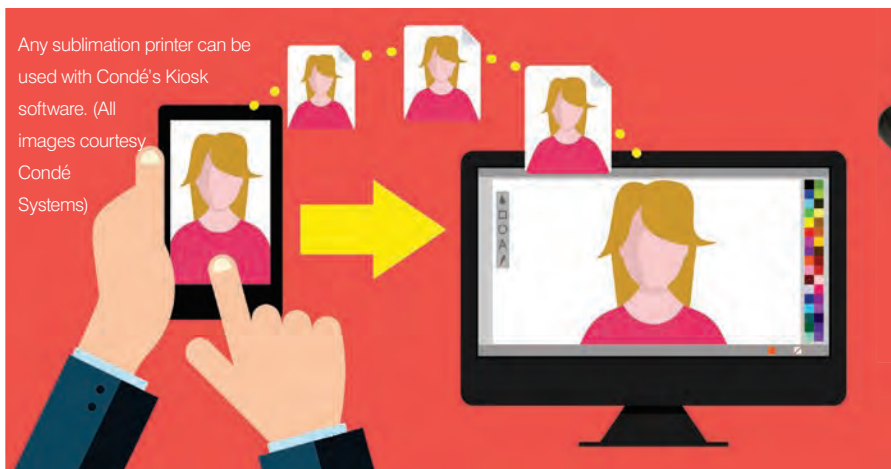
How do you step out of your comfort zone? After all, taking risks is what helps

us grow. I suggest offering a larger variety of unique products to your existing clients and finding new, profitable clients. Introducing your customers to new products not only generates more sales, but it also really shows them the diversity you can provide as a sublimator. Are you an engraver producing wedding items? Offer beverage insulators with full-color, photo quality images on them. Are you a screen printer producing T-shirts for family reunions? Suggest metal photo panels that will turn reunion photos into treasured keepsakes. You will be amazed at the synergy that sublimation provides to your existing business.

The second, far more open-ended way to step out of your comfort



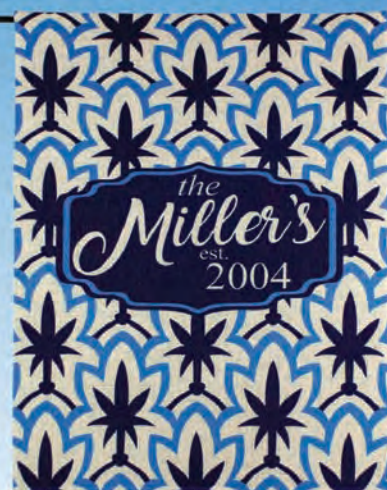
For a sublimation pop-up shop, typically you need about 12-15 amps at 110 volts for the operation of a computer, sublimation printer, and heat press.



Any sublimation printer can be used with Condé's Kiosk software. (All images courtesy Condé Systems)



Condé Kiosk allows you to set up shop almost anywhere.



With fixed graphic designs, customers will be able to pick out their favorite product and design for you to then produce for them at the event.

STRATEGIES FOR PRODUCTS & ARTWORK

Planning for an event starts with the selection of a handful of high-value products. I suggest you go through our catalog and select products that fit the event that you'll be working. With such a large assortment to choose from, you'll see that some products are obviously a good fit and others are not. But as I mentioned earlier, don't pick and choose based on your own personal likes and preferences. Try your best to keep an open mind on products and seek the opinions of others if needed. A few of my favorites include phone stands, ColorLyte glass panels, and, of course, Christmas ornaments during the holidays. Some important

zone is to find new clients outside of your everyday business dealings. Some of my favorite ways include wholesale fundraising, partnering with pet groomers, and mobile pop-up shops. While I have previously written about fundraising and pet groomers in some of my TRTSS books (currently available from Condé and Amazon), today I'll be discussing the quick profit opportunities of pop-up shops. Why a pop-up shop? People attending events love to spend money! From craft shows, bridal shows, flower shows, music festivals, sporting events, dog shows, church events, fraternity/sorority events, and Christmas bazaars, there is just no end to the profit opportunities available for those sublimators willing to set up their shop at a remote event.

WHAT IS A POP-UP SHOP?

Pop-up shop is just a cute term for temporarily setting up business at remote events. Typically, a minimal sublimation pop-up shop consists of two tables: one for your sublimation system (i.e., computer, printer, and heat press) and the other for displaying your product samples and a company sign that explains the items you'll be producing at the event. For the sign, I highly recommend making yourself a totally unique chalkboard sign from ChromaLuxe textured metal. The textured surface is easy to write on with standard chalk and wipe clean with a damp cloth. Some folks upgrade their pop-up shop to include a tent for use at outdoor

events and some larger indoor events. If this seems a little much to start with, keep in mind that you can always upgrade your pop-up shop as you go along. Of course, the most essential item for your pop-up shop is electricity. Although printers don't require much power, heat presses require lots. Because of this, you will absolutely have to call ahead to verify outlet availability. Typically, you need about 12-15 amps at 110 volts for the operation of a computer, sublimation printer, and heat press (e.g., Geo Knight DK14S). For outdoor events, you may have the option of using a quiet generator. If you do so, I recommend also getting a UPS (uninterruptible power supply) for everything except the heat press.



The SG500's built-in paper tray supports a maximum paper size of 8.5" X 14".

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factors to consider when choosing products are length of time to produce, including extra prep time, single-sided vs double-sided, length of time in heat press, and cooling time, plus your own level of skill with any product. In other words, you don't want to learn how to make an unfamiliar product while at an event.

Next, you need to decide on your decorating strategy. Here are four approaches to try:

1 Photo products: In what I consider the default strategy, your customer uploads their favorite photo from their phone to your laptop via Condé Kiosk (outlined below) and then you use that image to decorate their chosen item. One point to remember is that photos are either

portrait or landscape, so you should include substrates for both orientations. I've found that most photos are landscape. This simple, yet effective decorating approach produces beautiful products that focus on your customers' cherished images.

2 Products with event graphics: In this strategy, you'll need to pre-design an event template that can be later combined with the customer's uploaded photo or even a photo that you take yourself. This approach results in a higher-value keepsake that's appropriate for wedding

receptions and larger events like an Oshkosh Fly-In and Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Hybrid strategies include taking customer photos using a prop, backdrop, or green screen.

3 Personalized designs: This strategy also requires you to pre-make product designs, but with a blank space remaining for later adding the customer's name, monogram, or funny saying. A great example is a welcome door sign with your customer's last name imprinted on it. I even made one for my bathroom that says, "It's Gross not to wash your hands!"

PHOTO GIFTS AND AWARDS

Condé Systems offers everything screen printers, sign makers, embroiderers, engravers, photographers, and artists need to succeed in the personalized photo gift business including sublimation and digital heat transfer systems, blank imprintable products, design software, and production supplies.

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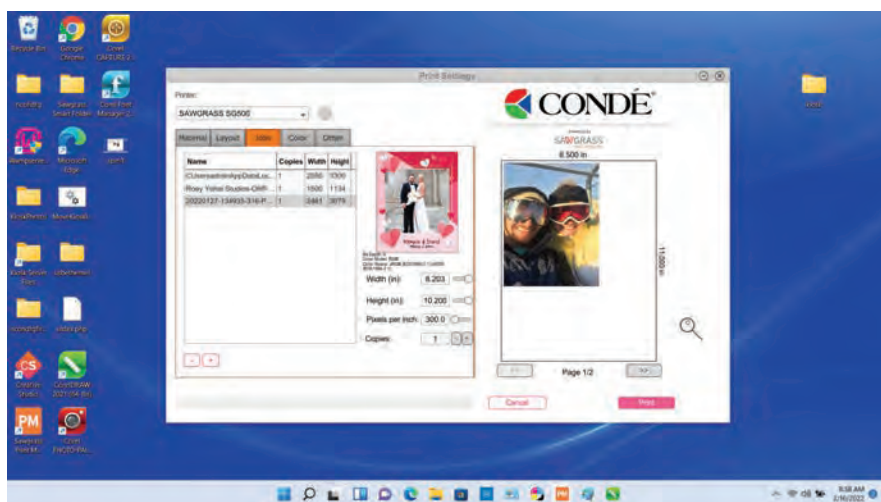
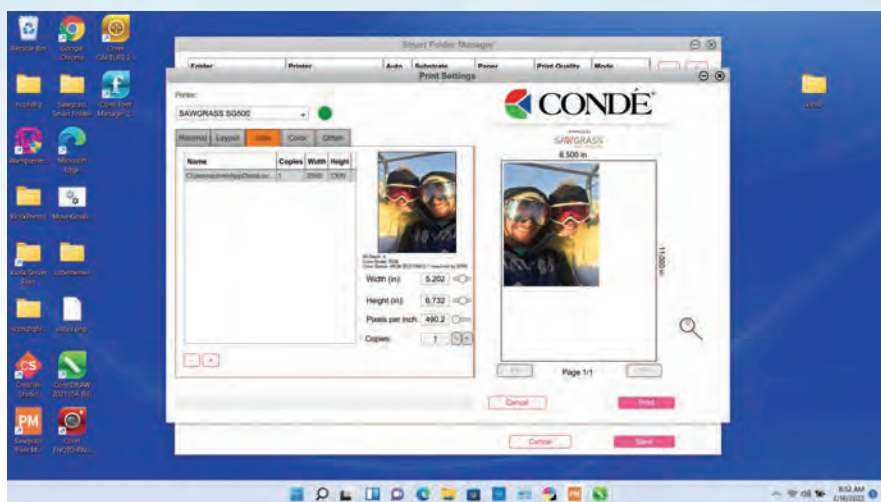


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With this software installed on your laptop and your laptop hooked up to a Wi-Fi router, your customers will be able to walk up, connect to your Wi-Fi network, and upload their favorite photo(s) with just a few clicks.

photo(s) with just a few button clicks. The hardest part is waiting for your customer to pick out the photo they want to use. In most cases, no internet is needed. The one exception is when the desired photograph is in cloud storage instead of on the customer's phone. In this case, they will need to download the photo to their phone before connecting to your kiosk. Important note: unlike emailing or texting a photo, the Condé Kiosk will always receive the full-resolution image.

PROCESSING PHOTOS

Once uploaded, Condé's Kiosk software places the photos into a folder on your laptop. Those images can then be resized by you to fit your customers' selected products. While on your computer screen, show those adjusted images to your customers for approval before printing and pressing. If you are handling lots of orders, a second monitor to face the crowd may help speed the process along. Keep in mind if you are using an event template, you will need to place photos into the event template using graphics software such as Photoshop, Illustrator, or CorelDRAW. For Sawgrass Print Manager (SPM) users, Condé offers a custom version of SPM that includes many bonus features helpful for kiosk printing such as managing multi jobs, resizing images, and multiple hot folders for automatic printing. The Sawgrass Printer Manager allows you to resize images on the fly directly from the kiosk

4 Fixed graphic designs: With this strategy, you'll need to design all your product artwork ahead of time and simply make a few products for displaying on your table(s). Customers will be able to pick out their favorite product and design for you to then produce for them at the event. This brings up the concept of virtual inventory. Typical gift shops buy decorated inventory that may or may not sell. So, at the end of the season it needs to be

liquidated. With virtual inventory, you decorate inventory as needed with the flexibility of adding or changing designs.

CONDÉ KIOSK

Condé Kiosk allows you to set up shop almost anywhere. With this software installed on your laptop and your laptop hooked up to a Wi-Fi router, your customers will be able to walk up, connect to your Wi-Fi network, and upload their favorite

folder. This really makes training a new print operator easy.

SUBLIMATION PRINTERS

Any sublimation printer can be used with Condé's Kiosk software. With that said, I recommend the Sawgrass SG500. The SG500's built-in paper tray supports a maximum paper size of 8.5" X 14", making it qualified to be a pop-up shop workhorse. Further, up to two additional bottom paper feed trays and a bypass tray can be added to provide the media options you need for more efficient, lower cost printing. The larger of the two printers, the Sawgrass SG1000 can print up to 11.75" X 17" paper from the bottom built-in tray and optional bottom paper feed tray and up to 13" X 21" from its optional multi-bypass tray. The 13" X 21" paper size is versatile since it maximizes the transfer area of 16" X 20" heat presses and therefore increases the number of products that can be produced.

PRICING

Perhaps the most difficult task of a digital decorator is to determine the selling price of their decorated products. You may ask yourself if setting up shop at an event allows you to charge a higher price. After all, the customers are getting the products in real time. Sometimes, however, overpricing your products makes them unsellable while underpricing gives the impression that they're cheap. So, what do you do? Condé has put together a free pricing spreadsheet that lets you determine your product costs and experiment with prices to select your desired profit level. It even provides a survey of pricing for most products. This is the same kind of spreadsheet many big companies use to determine the price of their products. Now you can use the same tool yourself without having to create your own. To receive your copy, call your Condé account manager to have them send it to you.

SELLING

Your booth should look professional and



The Sawgrass Printer Manager provides the ability to resize images on the fly directly from the kiosk folder.

This really makes training a new print operator easy.

well organized. Use labeled plastic bins under the table for storage, as this makes your area look better as well as setup and teardown go much faster. I recommend you have a dedicated person to greet prospects and help them understand what you are doing. Once they have selected a product, you'll need to help them with selecting a photo and uploading it. For folks that are not tech savvy, you'll find that it's simply easier to do it for them. You'll of course need a cash box for making change and a credit card reader for your phone (also check with local authorities regarding a business license and sales tax). Be wary of offering too many products, as customers may not be able to make up their mind! Be sure to promote your participation ahead of time by posting the event to your Facebook or Instagram page — you could even offer a discount for mentioning your post. And finally, be sure to produce great-looking sublimated name badges for you and your staff.

REFERRAL SYSTEM

Every product you sell should have your company information on it so that the

ultimate end-user will know where to buy more of your great products. For shirts, you can sublimates your information on the bottom tail of the shirt. For others, sublimates the backside or place a label in an inconspicuous spot. This method can also include a job code to expedite reorders.

TECH SUPPORT

We all know how critically important tech support can be when your printer or heat press stops working properly. Very often the issues are simple but without help, they are literal showstoppers. Most events are held on the weekend, which is a big reason our tech support staff is available seven days a week. Prepare yourself for events the best you can with a backup set of inks, extra paper, waste ink tank collection unit, and a digital pyrometer for your press. When the big problems happen, however, you'll definitely want to talk with an expert.

Although my description of a sublimation pop-up shop may have been a brief one, I hope it has tickled your curiosity enough to go out and try something new. Stepping out of your comfort zone even once makes it easier and more likely that you'll do it again. And if you can keep expanding your comfort zone, you'll open yourself up to growing your sublimation business and expanding your customer base. Feel free to give me a call at 800-826-6332 or email dgross@conde.com with any questions you may have. I'm here to help your sublimation business succeed! **SR**

David Gross is the president of Condé Systems Inc. For more than 25 years, he has developed and built the Mobile, Alabama-based company into the premier source for printers, substrates, and consumables serving the graphic art, photography, prepress, and desktop publishing industries.