#### **GENERAL**

- 1. Document everything. Keep a sublimation diary of your print jobs, transfer details, and any problems you experience. This is the best way to minimize waste and get to the bottom of future problems. When you master a product, document in your own words what works. When you need to reprint that one tile from a particular mural, you'll be able to refer back to job details such as the file name, what kind of tile you used, paper used, press settings, etc.
- **2.** Create a "Wall of Shame" that displays some of your past mistakes, e.g. an upside-down plaque or crooked T-shirt image. This will remind you not to make the same mistake again.
  - 3. Test kits (available for hard and soft

- substrates) provide an inexpensive way to check quality and color without having to test on more expensive substrates.
- 4. Keep your sublimation instructions up to date. We revise our instructions every few weeks to keep up with new products, improved transfer techniques, and changes in substrates. Translate our instructions to your words and post these near your heat press. Also, watch our massive collection of free sublimation videos at www.youtube.com/condesystems.
- **5.** Don't turn away business you can't handle! Ask your supplier for help with printing large quantities and/or transferring to substrates too large for your existing equipment.
- **6.** Have a backup plan for when you have equipment or personnel issues. Do you know someone close by that could

- help in an emergency? If not, ask your supplier for help locating someone in your area that might be able to help out in a pinch.
- 7. If you lack graphic design expertise, seek out a graphic artist at a local college or university. Clients will pay for quality work.
- **8.** Take an Adobe Photoshop class! Even a little training will go a very long way. This is also a great way to meet new clients or find a new employee.

#### **PRINTER**

- **9.** Install your printer on a very sturdy, level table that will not shake while printing. Connect a UPS (battery backup) to your computer and your printer (but not the heat press) to avoid potential major interruptions in production. Locate printers in a temperature-controlled environment and avoid low humidity. Use a humidifier if needed to maintain at least 25% RH.
- 10. Keep a log for your printer. Documenting when the ink cartridges are replaced in relation to the printer's page count can help keep track of ink costs. Also, documenting error codes and nozzle-check issues will greatly help in solving problems yourself or with the help of technical support.
- 11. Buy plastic airtight containers for your sublimation papers. This will prevent the paper from absorbing moisture as well as keeping things organized by size and type.
- 12. Choose the right media for the right application to ensure superb transfer quality. Choosing the right paper depends on the type of substrate being transferred to. Standard paper provides superb image clarity and color on hard substrates such





"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"-so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

-Lewis Carrol, from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland



as ceramic tiles, award plaques, name badges and coffee mugs. High-release paper is designed to release more sublimation ink in the transfer process, resulting in incredibly vibrant transfers on soft (thirsty) substrates, including T-shirts, mousepads, towels and tote bags. Also consider pre-cut mug paper. This simple change can help digital decorators at all levels of production eliminate paper waste and drastically reduce the time and effort involved in producing mugs in an oven or traditional mug press.

13. All inkjet printers have a waste ink tank that will eventually become full. An Epson printer's message reads, "parts are near end life". For printers that do *not* have replaceable tanks, a software program is available from your supplier that will reset it (look on our website under support/special utilities). For printers that have replaceable tanks, ask your supplier for available options.

**14.** Hide non-sublimation inks so that it is not possible to install one by accident.

**15.** Ask your supplier for advice on how to maintain the health of your printer, e.g. learning to clean a transport belt or a capping station.

**16.** Buy extended warranties for your printer(s) when possible.

17. Raising an Epson printer's print

head to its highest position will prevent ink smears—especially on larger paper sizes. This is not needed on the Ricoh GX printers.

18. Ask your supplier how much your printer costs to print. A good way to reduce a printer's ink cost is to recycle empty sublimation cartridges, as we provide a \$5 credit per cartridge.

19. Call your supplier (before calling Epson or Ricoh) when your printer appears to be dying. There are often simple fixes that can help bring a printer back to life. Your supplier should be highly motivated to get yours back on track.

20. Consider purchasing a backup/spare printer. This is a great way to get back on track fast when a primary printer fails. If you wait until an emergency occurs, you may not be able to find an exact replacement for your printer, as models become obsolete over time. Be aware that changing to a different printer will always introduce slight variations in spot colors.

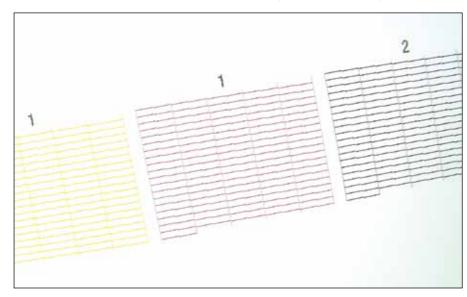
21. Perform a nozzle check at the

beginning of each day and when printed transfers have visible banding problems. This printed test pattern checks the condition of the printer's ink nozzles. If the test pattern is complete, then the printer is ready to print transfers. An incomplete test pattern represents clogged nozzles and should be followed up with a head-cleaning and nozzle check. If the head-cleaning fails to produce a complete test pattern, do an "auto nozzle check". If that fails, call your supplier's tech support department for assistance. Don't waste ink by performing repeated head-cleanings!

**22.** Get a copy of Harvey Head cleaner. This inexpensive software utility for Windows will automatically send a nozzle check to your printer once a day to help keep it healthy.

**23.** Leave your printer turned on. Turning your printer off and on only serves to waste ink.

**24.** Prints should always be transferred within a few days to ensure superb image clarity and color vibrancy.



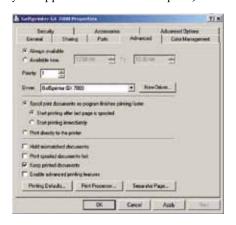
# My Best 101 Tips & Tricks

#### **COMPUTER**

25. Use the <Shift> <Print Screen> command to document important settings and printing preferences including Corel-DRAW's "Tools/Color Management" and "Print Preview" screens. These "screen captures" can be pasted into Photoshop or CorelDRAW for saving and printing. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, you'll be very thankful to have these easy-to-reference images when you have to rein-stall your software or move to a new PC.



**26.** For PC folks, go into the Printer's Properties, select the "Advance" tab, and check the "Keep printed documents" box. This hidden treasure allows you to re-print any job from the print folder without using your application. Great for repeat jobs.



**27.** Use Windows' restore feature to overcome major computer problems. This feature returns Windows to a point before the problem occurred. This has saved me many times.

**28.** For future orders, remember to archive all artwork and important files on an external USB hard drive. Rotate

drives for off-site storage in the event of fire or theft.

29. Should you go with 64-bit windows? I say a qualified "yes" to those with new computers that do not need to run old software applications. It has a much higher RAM limit and delivers better performance. ArTainium and Gel ink customers are all set since we can use our ICC profiles with the native printer drivers. Those with very old Epson printers and those that use PowerDriver should check first. For instance, Epson 3000 folks are out of luck as there is no 64-bit driver. No problem for Epson 4000 series printers.

**30.** Max out your RAM on your PC or Mac. This is the least costly performance booster.

**31.** Of course, everyone should install virus/spyware/firewall software. I like Microsoft's Security Essentials and it's *free*! Visit: www.microsoft.com/security\_essentials for more information.

**32.** Don't bother buying monitor calibration equipment or software unless you have a nice new monitor like a Sony brand. If you think you have a nice monitor, then install and use the ICC profile for it.

## **HEAT PRESS**

33. Keep your press area clean, organized and well ventilated. Have a place for all your transfer accessories and know what the power requirements are for each press. If possible, have a dedicated 20 Amp circuit for your heat press (multiple presses may require additional circuits).

**34.** Always use protective paper on the top and bottom of a substrate while it is being pressed. I recommend a roll of uncoated, white butcher paper available at Sam's Club and office supply stores. The paper, thrown away after each use, protects your heat platen, bottom pad, and substrate from ink and other debris.

I seldom recommend Teflon sheets, as it traps moisture and will transfer sublimation ink to the next substrate. I do, however, recommend it for products with adhesive backs such as Rowmark's MATES material and our fabric patches.

**35.** Used as a "buffer" between the heat platen of the press and the substrate being pressed, heat conductive rubber pads distribute heat slowly and evenly over substrates. A must when pressing glass products.

**36.** Heat Insulating Felt Pads have excellent insulating properties and help keep the heat next to the item being transferred to. Placing a substrate between the heat platen and the felt pad will contain the heat, therefore reducing pressing time. A must when pressing ceramic tiles.

**37.** Lubricate your press every month with high-temp grease to ensure smooth operation and long life.

**38.** Pressing small, medium, or large quantities of substrates requires a clean, flat, and appropriately sized cooling table/counter located near the heat press. Several unimaged glass floor tiles or a sheet of aluminum can do the job for most products and a filing cabinet makes an excellent surface for cooling flexible magnets.

39. Check that your press closes evenly by cutting a sheet of paper into four squares and placing 1/2 of each square under each corner of the press. Then close with light pressure. Verify that each square pulls with the same resistance. If not, the press may need to be adjusted.

**40.** Check to see if a shuttle attachment is available for your press. This is an awe-some productivity enhancer that allows you to press a product while prepping for the next.

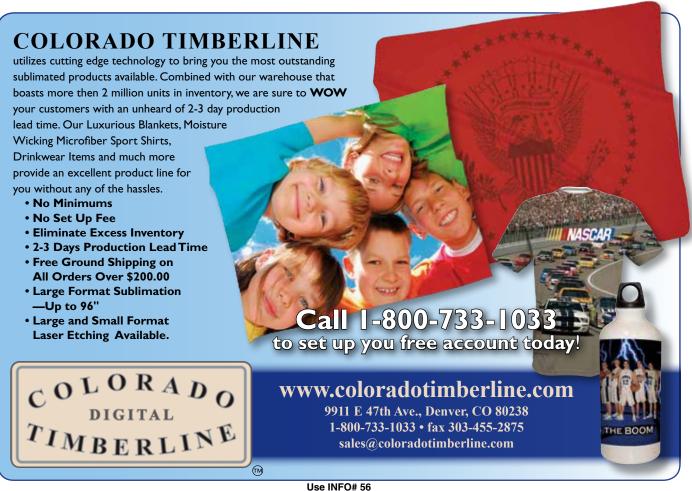


- **41.** Remember a bigger pot boils slower. When pressing several items at a time, you must (in most cases) increase the overall transfer time. Document your times. You might also want to increase your pressure slightly to insure even contact.
- 42. A small convection oven and an assortment of dye wraps (a dye wrap holds the transfer to the substrate) can produce multiple mugs, shot glasses, latte mugs, large steins, and dog bowls easily and inexpensively. I like the Cuisinart Brick Oven that's good for up to six 11oz. mugs. Place a thermometer in the oven to accurately set the temperature. Only use this oven for sublimation, not for food preparation.
- **43.** Use a lint roller to remove loose fibers and debris from T-shirts and other fabric products before pressing. This usually removes the blue lint that sometimes shows up after sublimation. If you have major static issues, wipe the substrate with

an unscented drier sheet before pressing.

- **44.** Heat tape and DyeTrans Pro Spray make it easy to align and secure the printed transfer to hard and soft substrates for consistent, ghost-free results. Ghosting is a result of the printed transfer shifting/ moving during the heating process. When applying Pro Spray, it's wise to spray over a large trash can or dedicated cardboard box to prevent a sticky work area.
- 45. Most fabrics will shrink in the heat press. If this occurs with a transfer attached, a ghost-like image will result. Pre-pressing (pressing the fabric for a short period of time without a transfer attached) will get the shrinking out of the way and provide excellent transfer results.
- 46. Ceramic mugs retain heat very well and can stay hot long after being removed from a mug press or oven. Allowing a mug to cool slowly can result in a degraded image due to outgassing—the evaporation

- of ink from the mug's surface. Dipping an imaged mug into a bucket of roomtemperature water (don't dip a hot mug into cold water!) will quickly lower the mug's temperature and prevent this from occurring.
- **47.** Prevent unsightly transfer creases and marks on fabric by using a foamfilled Teflon-covered pillow (available in a variety of sizes) or Vapor Foam Kit (13.5 sq feet of ready-to-cut foam). Placing a pillow or foam under garments with heavy seams or buttons allows even platen pressure during the transfer process.
- 48. Learn to use jigs for increasing productivity on larger orders. Ask your supplier which products can be produced using jigs.
- **49.** Measure your heat press' temperature at least twice a year. I recommend a low-tech solution: a metal candy thermometer or a wired pyrometer. If you



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determine the press is out of calibration, ask your supplier which "magic buttons" will fix the problem.

**50.** Use a metal shear to easily produce your own custom aluminum pieces ondemand and inexpensively.

### CorelDRAW/Photoshop

- **51.** To reset CorelDRAW® to its default menus, press F8 as you are launching the program.
- **52.** Learn to use CorelDRAW's Print Merge Wizard. The Print Merge Wizard can automatically generate name badges from a specified list of names—without having to create them individually! Detailed instructions are available on our website.



- 53. Resolution: I recommend a minimum of 200dpi for hard substrates and 150dpi for soft substrates. Let's say that you are scanning an 8"x10" photograph for the production of an 80"x100" tile mural. Scan at 2,000dpi (200dpi x 10). Once scanned, resize using the tip below and your image will be around 200dpi (Tip 54).
- 54. Resizing images: Uncheck the resample box in Adobe Photoshop under "image > image size" or for elements "image > image size > resize image." In Corel PHOTO-PAINT, check the box "Maintain Original File size". Used incorrectly, these features can really screw up your image. When resizing an image, you want to either push the dots closer or spread them out. Used improperly, these features cause the software to either add dots out of thin air or delete them by maintaining the current resolution.
  - 55. Use Genuine Fractals to add more

resolution when a higher-resolution image is not available. This inexpensive plug-in for Adobe Photoshop/Photoshop Elements is a great band-aid for adding more apparent resolution.

- **56.** Yes, you really need both Corel-DRAW and Photoshop. CorelDRAW is an excellent illustration (vector) tool, while Adobe Photoshop is a superb photo-editing (raster) tool. For most things, I prefer Adobe Photoshop to Corel PHOTO-PAINT. Adobe Photoshop Elements is an inexpensive alternative to Photoshop that still gets the job done.
- **57.** When printing black & white photos, be sure to convert the image to RGB before printing; otherwise, it will likely print with a strange tint.
- **58.** Upgrade your CorelDRAW to a more current version. The cost is low, and installing a newer version won't affect your old version. This is really necessary if your clients send you PDF artwork.
- **59.** Check out Smart Designer from Digital Art Solutions. It is an excellent add-on for CorelDRAW that simplifies complex actions.
- **60.** For Photoshop Elements users, I suggest Photoshop Essentials from www. ononesoftware.com. It is an inexpensive bundle that includes Genuine Fractals.
- **61.** Check out www.vectormagic.com for converting raster graphics to vector. This software and on-line tool works better than anything I have ever used.
- **62.** Join www.istockphoto.com. This is the best collection of photos, vector art, and backgrounds.
- 63. A good design should always begin with an accurate software template. Available in a variety of file formats to ensure compatibility with your chosen graphics software package, templates give you an on-the-screen view of what the finished product will look like. Whether it's a heart-shaped mousepad, oval key chain, or a megaphone-shaped award plaque, designers can position photographs, graphics, and text with confidence the first time, not through trial and error. We also have some excellent videos to assist you in using these templates.
  - 64. For Photoshop users: When

- opening a file, I see the message "This file does not have an embedded profile". What should I do? You should assign SRGB and convert to workspace, which I suggest should be Adobe RGB 1998.
- **65.** Why do my scans look so bad compared to my digital camera? Scanners cannot detect what is the correct white balance of the scan. You must do this step in Photoshop under "Image adjust levels" or "enhance lighting levels". A quick fix is to try "Auto Contrast".
- **66.** Verify that CorelDRAW's "fountain steps" are set to 256. Some versions are set to 64, which prints poorly. Look in "print preview: setting: Misc."

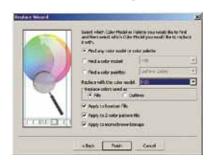
## MATCHING COLORS

- 67. For "no surprise color matching," print your color palettes using Corel's undocumented "create color swatch macro" feature. (See my articles from 2005/2007 Sublimation Almanac, posted at www.conde.com/support for full details.) Color matching is the No. 1 issue, and this amazing free feature in CorelDRAW is the best solution I know of. For other programs like Photoshop and Illustrator, drop me an email at dgross@conde.com.
- **68.** If you need to match Pantone colors, buy a Pantone swatch book. Most large corporations specify their colors with a Pantone solid-coated color. You must have the Pantone swatch book to know what that color should look like; then you can use Tip #67 to nail the proper color.



**69.** Should I use RGB or CMYK colors? For photos, we really want to work in the RGB world since the devices that produce photos (like digital cameras and scanners) produce RGB colors. Both work for graphics, but you can achieve a much larger color space (color gamut) with RGB compared with CMYK.

70. In CorelDRAW, the Replace Wizard can easily convert all of the spot colors used in a graphic (Pantone, CMYK, etc.) to RGB for printing. When in Corel-DRAW, choose Edit > Find and Replace > Replace Objects. The Replace Wizard menu will pop-up. Select "Replace a color model or palette" > Next. Select "Find any color model or color palette" and next to "Replace with the color model:", select RGB. A Find & Replace box will pop-up. Push the "Replace All" button. Depending on the image's complexity, it'll take a few moments for CorelDRAW to search the entire page and replace any non-RGB colors with their RGB equivalents.



# MARKETING/SALES

71. Put your contact information on every product you sell, i.e., sublimating re-order info (your contact info plus the artwork filename) on the back of name badges or at the bottom of shirts. I suggest placing Rowmark MATES oval stickers on the bottom of mugs.

72. Sublimated products will fade outdoors depending on the ambient temperature and amount of exposure to direct sunlight. Always inform your customers that products will have a limited outdoor life (typically fading in 18-24 months). Do not install ceramic or glass tiles outdoors or any environment that receives strong



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direct sunlight. For car tags and signage, be sure to use Unisub metal or FRP featuring the yellow peel coat. This yellow peel coat signifies an outdoor coating.

- 73. Also try to date your designs with the year, theme or other message that would promote new designs.
- 74. Sell name badges! Schools, churches, and businesses always need traditional or slotted name badges. Without a doubt, this is my favorite sublimation product... profits are excellent!
- **75.** Always sell and promote product bundles. If the customer buys a mug, offer a discount if he/she also buys a mousepad.
- **76.** Three things often determine pricing: who you are selling to, the selling environment, and what's on the product, i.e. including "Ask me about tax credits" on a real estate agent's name badge. It makes it more valuable to them and increases your volume as themes change.
- 77. Plant seeds! Provide targeted prospects with samples personalized for them. This is a great way to open doors to new clients. Join your local chamber of commerce and send a name badge or

desk plate to selected members.

Network!

- **78.** Get involved with silent auctions for charities. This is an amazing way to get great PR for almost nothing. Give away something appropriate for the event.
- **79.** Tap into event-driven opportunities like car shows, sports, hobbies, and pet shows. These provide great impulse buying opportunities.
- **80.** Install a free tile mural for charity in a public or high traffic area and use this as your calling card to show others what you can do.
- 81. Sell closing gifts and promotional products to real estate agents. This is just one of the tips in the great book "125 Ways to Make Money with Sublimation".
- 82. Use glossy FRP sheet stock as dryerase boards.
- **83.** Promote green products such as
- **84.** Use a digital photo frame to display samples of your products. Be sure to take a

photograph of every product you produce to add to your photo frame.

- 85. Make sales calls to museum gift shops and other tourist attractions. You can provide these folks with custom imprinted products like mugs and mousepads. With local delivery and small order quantities, how can they say no?
- **86.** Make a set of personalized mugs for the local TV morning show. Amazing PR.
- **87.** Save your clients images; let them know that they can come back for reprints.
- 88. Collect your community and Chamber of Commerce calendars and look for Sales and PR opportunities.
- 89. Market to special occasions like weddings, Valentine's Day, First Communion, and graduations.
- **90.** Expand your product offering. Ask your partner to automatically send you samples of any new products. This is a great way to keep your customers excited. In addition, add larger products such as ChromaLuxe panels, ceiling tiles, and floor mats. Have us create a PartnerNet floor mat for you to promote



your business.

- **91.** Always ask photographers for permission to use their images. This is also a great way to build partnerships for wholesale business and referrals.
- **92.** Display your samples. Show folks what you can do! You won't sell it if your customers don't know you offer it. Try all products; let your customers decide what products they like. Your goal should be to maximize the profit on every client. If you need a quick start, we can provide you a samples kit with imaged products

for you to show immediately.

- 93. Download our free unbranded product catalog. You can customize it with your company's logo for printing, emailing, and placing on your own website. It is excellent!
- **94.** Get web images of products from your supplier partners for use on your website.
- 95. Plant seeds. When possible, include a sample product with a customer's order. Often that sample will find its way to someone new.
- **96.** Display several different products using the same artwork/graphic, i.e. a ceramic mug, mousepad, T-shirt, and key chain made for a major corporate or church event.
- 97. Remember what you can do: full color, personalized, no minimum quantity and on-demand products!

#### **SUPPORT**

- **98.** Choose a partner that focuses on your success. Look for phone support, email support, remote access, YouTube videos, instructions, templates, after hours and weekend support.
- 99. Download, print, and transfer our test image called "tweak image," the default RGB palette, and your nozzle check. Then store this away. If you ever think your system is no longer working properly, you can print and transfer again to compare. You would be surprised how often colors get out of order, inks mixed, and so forth. Be sure to document on the back of the substrate your print and transfer settings.
- **100.** Call your supplier for help and training sooner than later.
- 101. Keep reading great publications like this one!

If you have a great tip please email me at dgross@conde.com



David Gross is president of Condé Systems Inc., of Mobile, Ala. He can be reached by email at dgross@conde.com.