

Road To Sublimation Success

Device Decorating Update

BY DAVID GROSS

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"How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another."

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*



One-piece plastic case.

CHANGES! IT HAS ONLY BEEN A FEW months ago that I published my first article in A&E Magazine on the viral trend of using sublimation technology to decorate electronic devices such as iPhones and iPads (if you missed it, the first article can be found at www.conde.com/nbm). With so much success and growth, I felt an update was needed and a wakeup call made to all digital decorators that are not profiting from this huge market!

The market for electronic device cases continues to grow at a tremendous rate. Last year Apple stated that roughly 70% of all Apple iPhone users had purchased at least one case for their phone. At this year's CES show in Las Vegas, the halls were packed with hundreds of companies selling nothing but pre-made cases for electronic gadgets! From the dye-sub industry's point of view, it's incredibly exciting to know that a large number of folks are seeking out personalized cases customized with favorite photos, vibrant colors, trendy background patterns, monogram fonts and more—all to reflect their own unique style and personality.

A search on www.etsy.com for "monogram iPhone" will give you a feel for the personalization folks are looking for nowadays. Interestingly, I think the largest demographic for personalized devices is young females (this is further evidenced by my 16-year-old daughter's unstoppable thirst for fashion accessories). The huge number of electronic devices around today

combined with the demand for personalization has presented both veterans and newbies within the dye-sub industry an opportunity that is unequaled!

WHAT IS DYE-SUBLIMATION?

The dye-sublimation process is a flexible and high-value decorating technology that uses a printed image (dye-sub ink printed onto paper), an imprintable product (substrate), and a heat press to produce incredibly vibrant and detailed gifts and awards. Sublimation decorating dates back to the early 1940s when someone accidentally observed special dyes that, when heated, turned into a gas and "dye" acetate film. With the invention of polyester just a few years later, the dye-sublimation industry was born!

In the beginning, the special dyes were screen printed onto paper and then transferred onto polyester fabric. Later, printing presses were used to produce the paper transfers. Fast-forward to today, and piezo inkjet printers like Epson and Ricoh (loaded with dye-sub ink and paper) are the most widely used method of printing transfers for an ever-growing number of high-quality imprintable products including metal photo panels, ceramic tile murals, apparel, indoor signage, award plaques and more. You can check out the thousands of available products at www.dyetrans.com or watch examples of the dye-sub process at www.condetv.com.

HOW DO YOU DECORATE ELECTRONIC DEVICE COVERS?

Even using a small dye-sublimation system, it's easy to personalize electronic gadgets ranging from iPhones to eReaders to Beats™ headphones. Depending on the device, decorating choices include snap-on

Matching Colors

Matching a Pantone color with a transferred swatch chart.



covers, folding cases, protective sleeves and pre-scored sublimatable skins called SubliWrap.

My suggestion for a portable dye-sub system consists of a Ricoh SG 3110DN printer (letter/legal size printing), a set of SubliJet-R ink cartridges, DyeTrans sublimation paper, blank substrates, and a George Knight JP-14 (12" x 14") heat press. The JP-14 is a light-duty heat press that weighs 65 pounds and only requires 10 amps of power—two features that are a must when setting-up at various event sites.

For in-shop installations, I recommend the larger Ricoh GX e7700N (up to 13" x 19" printing) and a heavy-duty George Knight DK20S (16" x 20") heat press. The portable system should come in at under \$1,200, with the shop system costing about \$3,000. Add a little more to that if you don't have graphics software such as Adobe Photoshop Elements and/or CorelDRAW. All of these systems work with a Mac or PC (including Windows 8, 32 & 64 bit).

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO PRODUCE AN IPHONE COVER?

The one-piece plastic iPhone cover costs less than \$3 in materials. This includes about \$.15 for ink and paper, \$2 for the cover, and \$.75 for the metal insert. Selling prices start at \$15 and go up depending on your artwork and selling environment. For those that want to keep an eye on ink costs and usage, watch my video on calculating ink cost at www.condetv.com.

SUCCESSFUL SELLING

In my opinion, being successful at selling device covers boils down to artwork and marketing strategy.

How do I get just that right shade of blue? How do I match that school color? What about matching a Pantone color? If you use your monitor to try to match spot colors, you'll likely fail and become frustrated. To believe that you own the magic monitor that displays exact color is crazy! Go into a Best Buy and just about every monitor or flat screen on display looks different.

So, here's my plan: print a large color swatch chart and transfer it to a family of materials like 12"x24" sheets of Dynasub or ChromaLuxe metal. You then find the color match on the sublimated item and choose that color in your software. I can supply you with a great swatch chart; just send me an email. If you are matching Pantone colors, you'll need to buy a Pantone Solid swatch book on the internet or at an art supply store.

Artwork strategies:

Personal photos. Easy enough. Your customer provides a digital photo that can be printed as is or combined with a design template, name, date or text.

Background patterns. Definitely the most popular option, colorful background patterns make it easy for customers to have the look they're wanting—whether used alone or combined with monogram letters or cherished photo. Check out our selection of patterns at www.conde.com.

Artwork. Sort of like buying a painting for your home or office, there are an endless number of image choices available to those wanting to personalize their device.

Focused market. Pick any subject you have a passion for, and you will likely find artwork for it. Being a big Doctor Who fan (oldest running Sci-Fi TV show), I visited www.etsy.com, searched for "Doctor Who iPhone", and found about 300 Doctor Who custom iPhone covers (most folks just use a generic photo of a London phone booth to avoid legal issues



"Jester" with Folding Stand for iPhone.



“Reveler” Bumper Covers for iPhone.

with the BBC). My son’s Etsy store has a number of designs with engineering (he’s a Mechanical Engineering student) and Catholic/Religious themes. The point is to take a look at your passions, interests, and hobbies to come up with artwork that caters to others with similar interests!

Off-line marketing strategies:

Storefront. If you have a storefront, then by all means show decorated samples of

Selling To Fraternities & Sororities

If you’re lucky enough to live in a college town or just want to market Greek products to fraternities and sororities from your Etsy store, you’ll need a special license. Visit greeklicensing.com for complete details, but I think the application fee is about \$40 per fraternity/sorority (pre-paid) with royalties set at 8.5% of the selling price. So, that might mean you need to pick out a limited number of organizations to start with. I am currently speaking with them on hopefully being able to streamline the process for the typical digital decorator.

device covers along with point of purchase displays. I recommend that you purchase dummy devices to display your covers. Also, install a flat screen monitor on a wall (or electronic picture frame on a table), load it up with product photos, and “play” a slideshow of your offerings. This will be a tremendous asset for closing sales.

Install my iPhone/iPad Kiosk.

This allows your walk-in clients to print their selected photos directly from their iPhones—without installing an app to your computer. Watch my video for details.

Sales Calls. Consider planting seeds by sending existing clients and prospects a personalized sample. If you live in a college town, fraternities and sororities should be a top choice!

Wholesale fulfillment. Sell your products through other businesses like pet groomers or independent cell phone stores. Setup a display with samples and turn those folks into your sales staff! Call on schools and organizations to provide fundraising opportunities—what an exciting alternative to wrapping paper!

Mobile opportunities. Tap into local events like car shows and festivals to produce device covers on-demand. What about a booth at your local Flea Market? See sidebar.

Take advantage of Condé’s huge variety of background designs and monogram fonts.

On-line marketing strategies:

- Set up an Etsy store. Etsy has an incredible following!
- Promote your products through Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest. All three offer different strategies with little or no cost.
- Consider running a Groupon campaign. This can give you instant access to thousands of local and national prospects. Visit www.groupon.com to see how it works.
- Install our on-line designer which will

allow your customers to upload and/or design their own device covers using your website.

DEVICE COVERS: MEET THE EVER-EXPANDING FAMILY

iPhone 4/4S/5

The popularity of covers for iPhones makes this our first and most popular device to decorate. Believe it or not, Apple sold over 47 million iPhones in the last calendar quarter of 2012! With a cover ratio of at least 70%, this is your opportunity to cash in!

There is now an iPhone case style and color for just about anyone’s taste—from the minimal Reveler cover to the Brookley tough case. Each case style has its own unique design characteristics including the way each displays its respective aluminum, fabric or plastic insert. When choosing aluminum, I recommend USA-coated Dynasub or ChromaLuxe metals. Dynasub inserts are available in white, gold and silver while the ChromaLuxe inserts are available in white and silver. Both brands feature a high-quality polyester coating, which is extremely important. I have had discouraging results with Chinese metals including poor image quality and fading. I recommend trying all three colors of aluminum to get familiar with how each complements artwork. Fabric inserts provide a great texture and give the covers a natural look and feel. Let’s review the existing popular styles of iPhone covers:

One-Piece Plastic Case: This popular style case is made of hard plastic and is available in white, black or clear. These cases are adhesive-backed for securing an imaged aluminum, fabric or plastic insert.

Silicone Rubber Case: The durable and soft silicone rubber cases are available in assorted colors, have a nice feel in your hand, and provide a degree of protection from falls. These cases are adhesive-backed for securing an imaged aluminum or fabric insert.

Reveler Bumper Case: My favorite, this

ChromaLuxe Flex Frames: Flex Frames are available in an assortment of colors, and like the Reveler cases, the Flex Frames allow the user to easily change out imaged aluminum inserts. The iPhone 4 version of the Reveler is a two-piece snap-together case while the iPhone 5 version of the Reveler is a one-piece.

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"Jubilee" Tough Case for iPhone.

in black or white and features an adhesive backing for securing an imaged aluminum insert. It consists of an outer hard plastic shell and a snap-in protective rubber bladder. I would recommend this for folks looking for a traditional case with protection.

Jubilee Tough Case: Only available for the iPhone 5, this unique and stylish case has an outer rubber shell with a slip-on plastic frame. I suggest you get a sample of this and other styles for your clients to see and touch.

Jester Rubber Case: Available in black or white, this rubber case features a folding stand for horizontal or vertical hands-free tabletop viewing. They're also adhesive-backed for securing an imaged aluminum insert.

Jazz Fabric Case: This is a small version of our folding iPad fabric case. When closed, it provides protection for the iPhone and screen. Inside, there's slots for credit cards and other personal effects. Instead of an insert, you sublimates directly to the front and rear of the case.

Samsung Galaxy S III

At the time of writing, this is the flagship smart phone from Samsung. It has been a spectacular success in terms of units sold, but the device cover ratio appears to be much lower. This may be due to the lack of covers in the market. Yesterday, I camped out at Best Buy and watched folks shop for covers. There is now a fair amount of retail

space devoted to S3 covers, and the selection has greatly improved for Otterbox and LifeProof cases. So, I think the device cover ratio will grow rapidly—providing digital decorators with an awesome profit opportunity.

Currently, sublimation styles include a hard plastic and rubber type case in a rainbow of finishes and colors. The Flex Frame version allows for easily changing the insert. There is support for the Galaxy Note 2, and Samsung has announced the S4.

What about covers for other brands and models of smart phones? If folks like Best Buy devote retail space to particular phone covers, then it is a good candidate for us. We currently have covers for the HTC One X and some BlackBerry 9900 phones.

iPod Touch 4/5

The fact that Apple sold about 12 million iPods in the last calendar quarter of 2012 qualifies them as another excellent market to explore. Covers are available for the 4th and 5th generation iPods, are available in white or black, and are adhesive-backed for securing an imaged white, gold or silver aluminum insert.

Tablets: iPad 2/3/4 & Mini

Yet another iCraze is the iPad and iPad Mini. Apple sales of iPads were about 22 million for the last calendar quarter of 2012. Digital decorators have four different strategies for selling into this market. The first is a snap-on plastic cover that's available with or without a magnetic protective cover (covers are available for the iPad 2, 3 and 4 and iPad Mini) that can be decorated with a white, gold or silver aluminum insert.

ChromaLuxe Flex Frame allows the user to easily change-out imaged aluminum inserts, and therefore provides the opportunity to sell multiple inserts to each client. Next is a soft, durable, weather-resistant neoprene sleeve with zipper to cushion and protect the iPad from scratches. Third is a leather and faux suede notebook style cover that's available in black, blue or red and features an



Galaxy S III hard plastic cover.

Off-line Case Study: Jeff Butler's Flea Market Story

imprintable canvas panel. Fourth is the Mystic Folding/Rotating Case for iPad and Conti for iPad Mini.

Samsung Tablets

Samsung has two families of tablets: the Note and Tab. Snap-on plastic covers are available for the Note 10.1 and the Tab II: 7.0 and 10.1 models.

Kindle Tablets

Amazon has two types of tablets: Kindle Fire and Kindle e-readers. Like the iPad, all three types of cases are provided.

SubliWrap: No Cover Needed

SubliWrap is a repositionable sublimatable material that allows digital decorators to personalize devices such as Beats Headphones, iPhones, iPhone charger bricks, laptops, mice and keyboards with amazing results. The material is available pre-scored for many common devices.

IT'S ALL IN THE DECORATION

What do folks want on their covers? What you put on the insert, to a large extent, determines the value of the cover. To help in the design process, Condé is now offering an array of stylish background patterns in assorted ready-to-print designs, along with a line sheet (catalog page) that helps communicate design and color options to prospective customers. Using graphics software such as Adobe Photoshop or CorelDRAW, the colorful background designs can be easily customized with customer photos, text or monogram letters—all in a fraction of the time needed to create product artwork from scratch. The included digital line sheet serves as an excellent marketing aid when used electronically on a website or printed and combined with other line sheets in a showroom catalog. We also provide

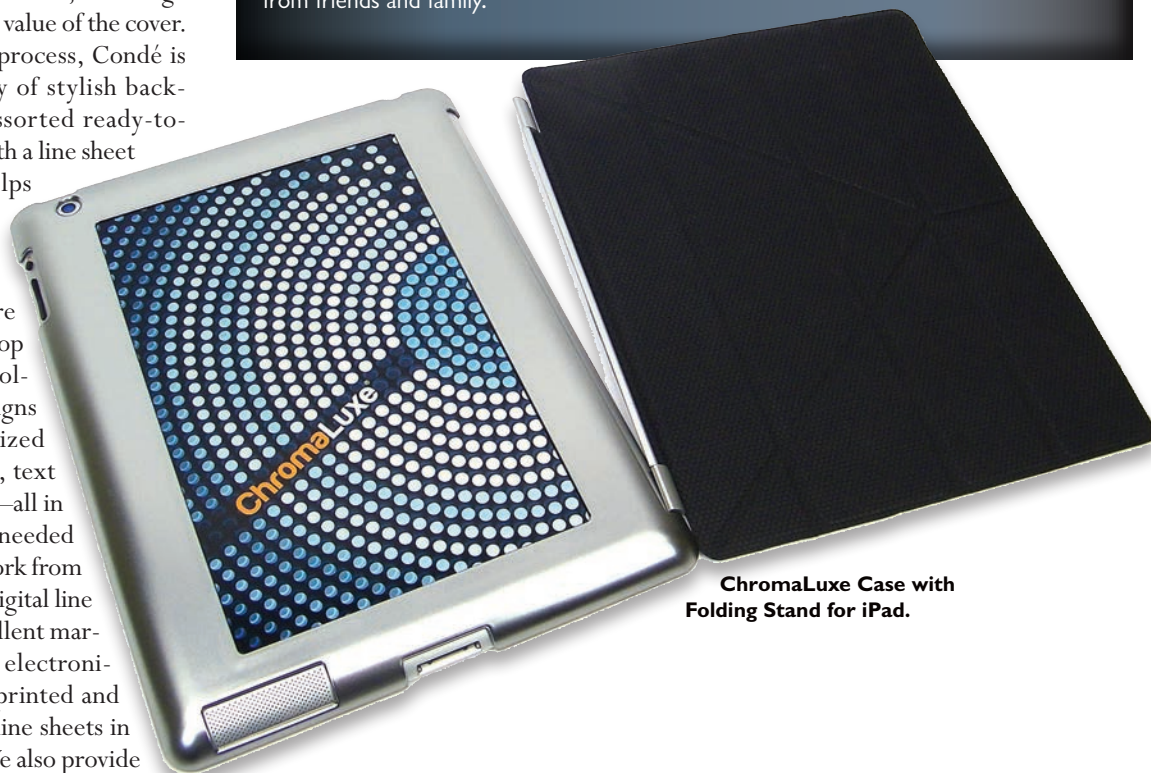
Selling in an open-air market has many rewards and challenges. It's always a great feeling to see the joy in your customers' eyes when you present them with their personalized device cover. If you're in a medium to large city, you should have a great amount of foot traffic to present your products to at your local flea market. It's important to have a good-looking booth with plenty of light, and most important: samples! I generally keep at least 50-75 samples of designs already imprinted onto device covers so the customer can touch and feel exactly what they are paying for. I also keep 3-5 "dummy phones" at close reach to use when making my pitch. It's very important to be proactive with your pitch. By engaging your customers, you create intrigue with other strolling shoppers and before you know it you have a small crowd at your booth.



Flea market display.

This is where having pre-made background images benefits you the most. The goal is volume sales and by having all your designs ready to go, you can quickly layout the customer's case and send them happily on their way. We promote the fact that we can have your fully personalized case done in three minutes. And we do it! Our record was right before Christmas where we did 40 cases in one hour! At the end of each day, I will save the most popular designs from that day and continue to build our collection of art. It's great when you reach a point where you are simply changing the initials on a particular design before sending it to the printer.

Our price points are generally \$15 for a bumper with insert and \$5 for each additional insert. What we find is the customer will come back the next week (some even come back the next day) to purchase an additional insert. The great thing is, they usually bring a friend or two who purchase their very first complete case from us. This is an excellent marketing tool, and we feel that every case we sell is good for 3-5 more additional sales from friends and family.



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a large selection of monogram font sets. With these backgrounds and fonts, you can start producing covers right away!

As I have said in previous articles, sublimation decorating technology is like electricity. It is high value enabling technology. The uses of it will continue to grow at an exponential rate. Electronic device decorating may be the largest market outside of textiles. Please email me with your ques-

tions or comments; I would love to hear your success stories.

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WEB-BASED CASE STUDY:

17-year-old Amanda Opferman's Business: Wallflower Design Co.

I started making cases for fun in June 2012 after noticing that my bedazzled phone case was peeling off, revealing a clear iPhone case. I scribbled down a design and put it between the case and phone. After posting photos on Instagram and getting many hits and followers over the summer, I created an Etsy site to sell them on.

After creating about 100 handmade cases over the summer (which took about an hour and a half each to make) and receiving a large number of orders right before Christmas, I knew I had to find a better way to make cases. I searched the Internet for about four hours until I came across the YouTube video with the iPhone case kiosk. I ran downstairs to my parents and told them what I wanted to do. My biggest challenge was getting their approval. They were skeptical and didn't know if it was a smart idea. After agreeing with me, I took a risk and dug into my college savings to start sublimating. I was eager to start!

After setting up the heat press and printer and taking new photos to put on my website, I got hundreds of sales. In 2013 alone I have received more than 1,000 orders. My only form of advertisement is Instagram! I'm currently operating in the basement of my parent's house. My 15-year-old and 12-year-old sisters both help me; I do not think I would be where I am now without them! (Or Condé for that matter.) I will be coming out with more designs and patterns soon. I plan on lowering prices and trying to sell as many as I can as soon as school lets out for summer. I'm excited to see what is in store for Wallflower Design Co.