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Visual Color Assessment

Joseph Marin · Vice President, Education and Training · Printing Industries of America

Reproducing color accurately in print isn't an option—it's an expectation. It begins with capturing the image, typically followed by color adjustments and correction. Whether you're a designer, prepress professional, or a press operator, visually assessing color to determine what adjustments need to be made to an image can be difficult for those who have never had formal color training. Successful visual color assessment, following the three color reproduction requirements as a guide, is the foundation for properly making accurate color adjustments.

Assumptions

Before we talk about visually assessing color, a few assumptions have to be made. The first assumption is that you're not color deficient, which can be easily verified with one of the many color deficiency tests available. The second assumption is that you're actually viewing color under controlled viewing conditions—like in a viewing booth or on a calibrated display. If you can check these two items off of your list, you're ready to properly assess color.

Three Color Reproduction Requirements

There are three color reproduction requirements—three aspects of color image reproduction—that must be considered for successful and accurate color reproduction: tone reproduction, gray balance, and selective color correction. It's also important to realize that if something is going to be wrong with an image from a color standpoint, it's either going to be one of these things, two of them, or all three of them.

Step #1— Is the tone reproduction accurate?

Tone reproduction is described as the relationship between the density of the original and the halftone dot area of the reproduction. Another term that can be used to describe tone reproduction is contrast, or the lightness and darkness of an image. Another way to look at this is to think of a black and white image. A black and white image only has one color, so tone reproduction would be the only consideration needed. If tone reproduction is inaccurate, the images will have a loss of detail in highlights or shadows or they may have poor contrast.

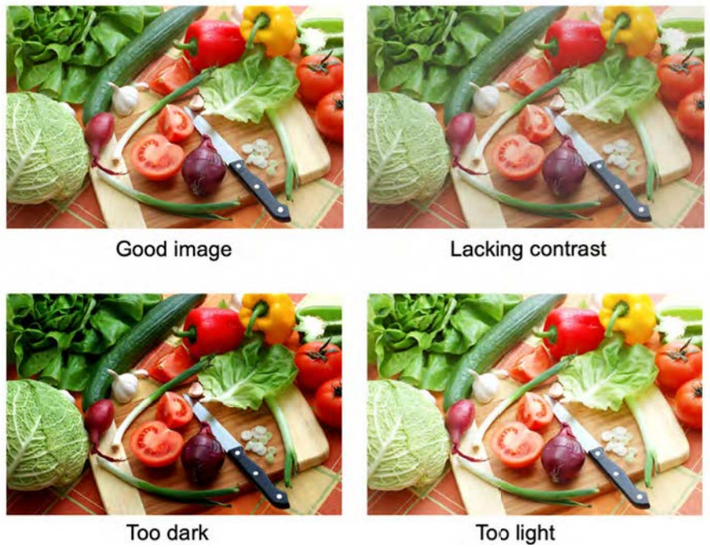

Figure 1

Example of an image with proper tone reproduction (top left) and poor tone reproduction (top right through bottom right).

To correct for tone reproduction, you can use either the Levels or Curves tool in Photoshop. Adjust all three channels (RGB) to ensure proper contrast in the highlight, midtone, and shadow areas of the image.

Step #2—Is the gray balance accurate?

Gray balance refers to using cyan, magenta, and yellow printing inks to produce neutral gray. If the neutrals within an image are faithfully reproduced, then all of the other colors within the image will be reproduced accurately. To reproduce a neutral gray, dot sizes are manipulated using Photoshop in the cyan, magenta, and yellow separations. Poor color reproduction is typically attributed to gray balance, since the eye is much more sensitive to shifts in color versus shifts in contrast. If gray balance is inaccurate, the images will have a color cast and could be too red, too magenta, too blue, and so on.

One way to quickly determine if an image has incorrect gray balance is to pinpoint neutral grays that may be contained within the image. You'd be surprised at how many images have them. Force yourself away from looking at saturated color areas in the image—neutral grays will cast one way or another if the gray balance is inaccurate, and it's very apparent.

To correct for gray balance, you can use either the Levels or Curves tool in Photoshop. Based on the color cast of the image, adjust individual channels (R and/or G and/or B) to ensure proper color balance in the image.

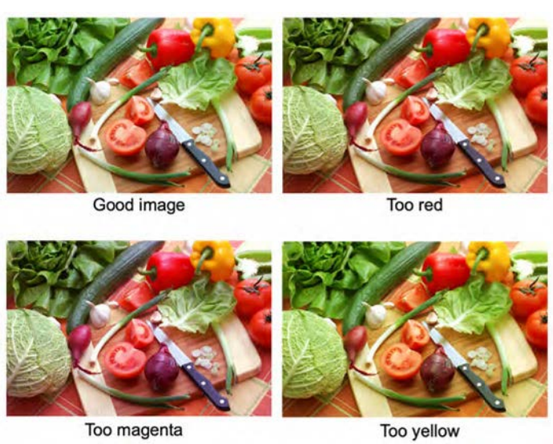

Figure 2

Example of an image with proper gray balance (top left) and poor gray balance (top right through bottom right).

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Step #3—Is selective color correction needed?

Tone reproduction and gray balance need to be assessed and adjusted before color correction. But even the most precise tone reproduction and gray balance cannot achieve accurate hue and realistic color saturation if you don't compensate for the inevitable imperfections in the cyan, magenta, and yellow inks used in print reproduction. These imperfections, plus the substrate's properties, will affect the reproduction of red, green, and blue hues.

Figure 3

Example of an image without color correction (top left and right) and with color correction (bottom).

To compensate for these impurities, the Selective Color tool in Photoshop can be used. The advantage of this tool is that it will only affect the saturated colors within the image and won't affect the neutrals. The pull-down menu in the Selective Color palette will allow you to designate the color to be adjusted, while the cyan, magenta, yellow, and black sliders allow you to correct the selected color.

Summary

A methodical, consistent, step-by-step approach when assessing color images is key. Always look at tone reproduction first, gray balance second, and selective color correction third. Remember, the problem with the image could lie with any (or all) of these elements. Breaking the image down to the three color reproduction requirements for visual color assessment is the ideal method to get the very best results.

To learn more about assessing and correcting images, check out the Photoshop for Prepress course in Printing Industries of America's iLearning Center at www.printing.org/ilearning.

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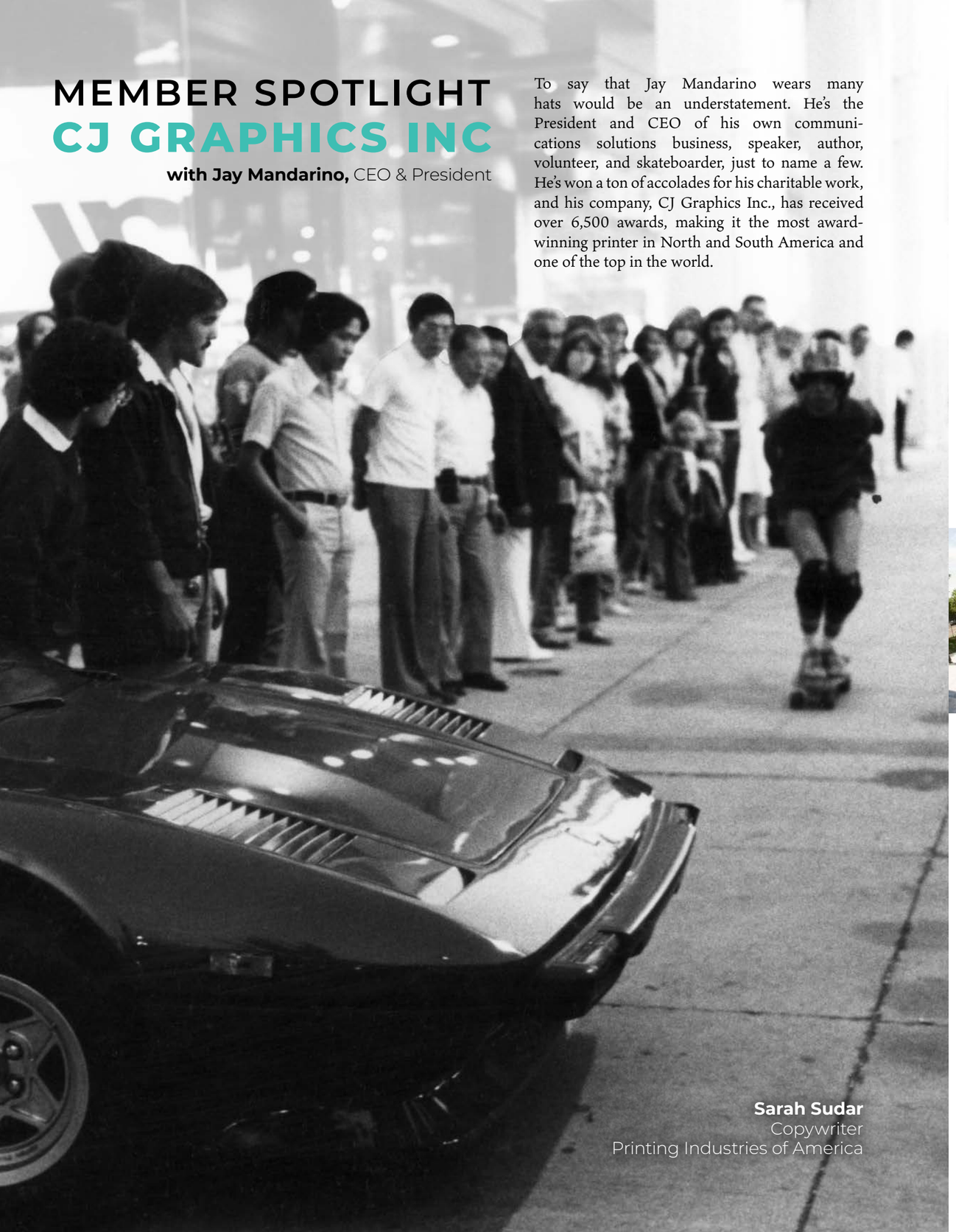
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
CJ GRAPHICS INC
with Jay Mandarino, CEO & President

To say that Jay Mandarino wears many hats would be an understatement. He's the President and CEO of his own communications solutions business, speaker, author, volunteer, and skateboarder, just to name a few. He's won a ton of accolades for his charitable work, and his company, CJ Graphics Inc., has received over 6,500 awards, making it the most award-winning printer in North and South America and one of the top in the world.



Sarah Sudar
Copywriter
Printing Industries of America

In order to finance his education at York University, Mandarino launched the business in 1980 as a print brokerage firm in the basement of his parent's house. He met a friend at university, Jim (whose father was a printer and then a print broker), and he showed Mandarino the ropes. While he was brokering, a client asked him not only to design layouts and business cards, but also wanted to pay him to have them printed. Mandarino interviewed different printers and got the idea that he could definitely do this on his own.

"Printing has always been fascinating—coming up with a product that could be printed is a really cool concept," says Mandarino. "Every job is different and that works well with my ADHD—it keeps me busy."

He grew the company large enough to move out of his parent's basement and into a townhouse, where he used the basement for production, the first floor for reception and meetings, and he lived on the third floor, subletting the second bedroom to a friend to help pay the mortgage. The business continued to grow into a 2,500-square-foot building, a 5,600-square-foot building, then two buildings, three buildings, and now CJ Graphics Inc. is housed in a quarter-million-square-foot facility on eight acres with over 250 employees, making it one of the largest shops in North America.

"People don't want to deal with multiple vendors. They want one-stop solutions," —says Mandarino.

Since day one of the company, Mandarino has stressed the importance of generating quality work, and it is no surprise as to why the company wins countless awards. To him, it's about producing high-quality work; winning awards is just the icing on the cake.

"I have always marketed the company as quality because I believe people will pay more for quality," says Mandarino. "Or they will say, 'This is our budget, what can you do?' and then, at least, you still have the opportunity on the work."

Benjamin Franklin was one of the first printers in North America, and PIA's Benny statue is a pretty recognizable award for that reason alone. Mandarino says that the

BELOW:
Jay Mandarino with pro skateboarder Tony Hawk (left), both speaking at a conference.

foot building, a 5,600-square-foot building, then two buildings, three buildings, and now CJ Graphics Inc. is housed in a quarter-million-square-foot facility on eight acres with over 250 employees, making it one of the largest shops in North America.

The business offers lithography, screen printing, digital printing, large-format printing, traditional letterpress printing with hot foil and embossing, prepress, photo studio, signage and retail display, an art department, proofreading, complete bindery, 3D printing, direct-mail services, prototype department, LED department, holographic displays and virtual greeters, digital laser die cutting, digital UV and foil, a magazine division, media division, interactive solutions, CJ Drive custom online solution portals, fulfillment and logistics solutions, car and truck wrapping with drive in bays, printing museum, and the world's largest indoor not-for-profit climate-controlled skatepark, serving all kids in the community including at-risk youth and those with special needs.

ABOVE:
Teaching and certifying instructors from Brazil, Chile, Educador, and all over Peru.

Premier Print Awards is one of the only competitions in the world that is truly international in scope, with entries from all over the world and a huge panel of judges run by printers.

"If you want to evolve yourself as a world class printer, you have to enter," says Mandarino. "The gala hosted by PIA and emceed by Michael Makin is similar to the Academy Awards of printing—it really doesn't matter how many you win, but meeting with other great printers from around the world and sharing best practices is worth it all."

Mandarino and his team at CJ Graphics currently have 47 Benny statues, and he says he's eagerly trying to catch up to Bob Armstrong from Body of Work Studios in Australia who has 100 Bennies. He hasn't had a specific piece that's won that's been his favorite, but he is amazed by the cool and interesting work that his company is producing, even recently launching something into outer space.

"It's very important to keep pushing the boundaries," says Mandarino.

In addition to winning more than a handful of Bennies, Mandarino has been named Canada's Printing Leader of the Year at the Canadian Printing Awards, Canada's Printer of the Year by Graphic Monthly, and in 2005, Profit Magazine named CJ Graphics one of the 100 Most Profitable Companies in Canada.

Outside of the office, Mandarino serves on various boards, and his philanthropic work has received countless recognitions. He's been awarded the Diamond Jubilee Medal from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, The Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and the Order of International Ambassadors Medal.

You can find him around the world teaching kids how to skate, certifying skateboard instructors, auctioneering at galas to raise money for charities, and at his desk, motivating his team to keep pushing the boundaries with printing and design.

Visit www.cjgraphics.com for more information.

CJ's Skatepark

When Jay Mandarino was a child, he had a very difficult time reading and spelling. As a result of constant bullying, he attempted suicide at nine years old. After years of searching and never giving up, his parents found a doctor who finally diagnosed him with dyslexia and ADHD. His parents sold their house for him to attend a specialized private school in the United States that had five students per class. There he met his first best friend, Kevin, who introduced him to the sport of skateboarding. They are still best friends to this day.

Mandarino fell in love with the individualized sport of skateboarding, practicing eight to nine hours a day. Once graduating school and moving back to Toronto to finish grade 13, his passion for riding on four wheels became even more prevalent. He became famous for being the first person in the world to jump over a red Ferrari in 1976 and later placed third in the Slalom competition and fifth for Freestyle in the 1979 Pepsi Canadian Skateboarding National Championships held at the CNE.

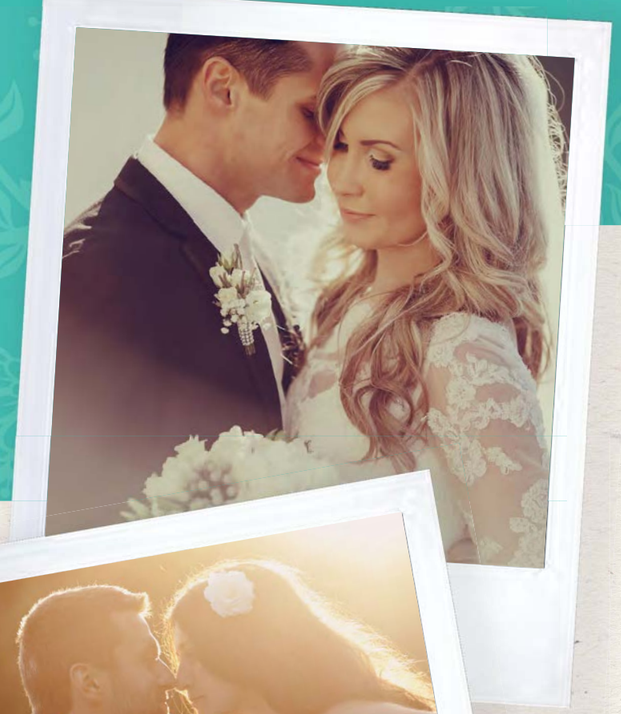
Skateboarding is not only one of his creative outlets, but a way he gives back to the community. In 2006, Mandarino built two small half pipes in one of CJ Graphic's warehouses as a prototype for teaching special needs kids on the weekends with friends and volunteers. Two years later, he opened CJ's Skatepark, which is now the largest not-for-profit indoor climate-controlled skatepark in the world, serving all kids and youth, including those at-risk and with special needs. It's over 50,000 square feet and is in the same facility as CJ Graphics. The facility also includes a mezzanine viewing area overlooking the entire park, a business lounge, party rooms, a Sony PlayStation room, and a snack bar.

"The kids think skateboarding is about skating, but it's a way to empower them, just like it did in my youth," says Mandarino.

The Skatepark is open to all and has specialized programs geared towards kids with autism and Down syndrome. Mandarino teaches every Saturday and tries to skate at least one night during the week.

Visit cjsskatepark.com for more information.

WEDDINGS AND PRINTING



A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

The wedding industry in the U.S. generates roughly $72 billion dollars each year. Whether a wedding is low-key or ultra luxe, they all have one thing in common

— Print!

2.2 MILLION

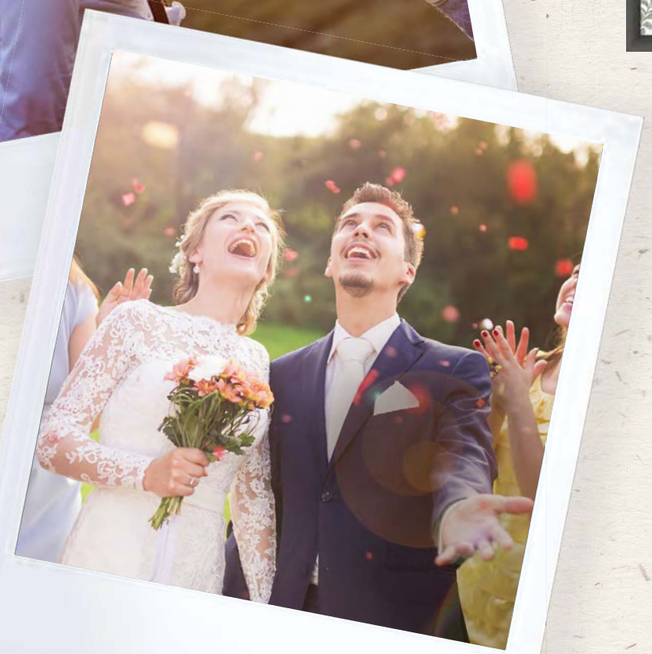
Couples are anticipated to tie the knot this year.

$32,392

The average cost of a wedding in the U.S.

$408

The average amount couples spent on wedding invites in 2017 in the U.S.



TIME-HONORED TRADITIONS

LETTERPRESS PRINTING

remains the most popular technique for invitations.

MEMORABLE CARDS

Thank You cards, Save-the-Date cards, and RSVP cards are also needed.

2019 TRENDS

3D DESIGN

Designed to be a keepsake as well as an invite. These bring the wow factor.

DESIGN-TO-PRINT

Couples feel involved in the design process when utilizing templates to customize their invites.

SPECIALTY LASER/DIE-CUTS

Couples show off their individuality through speciality shapes.

FOIL/METALLICS

Adding a bit of glitz and glamour to the page. Foils and metallics bring a high-shine factor.

GO-TO TRENDS

Or in it. Specialty boxes to send invitations are among the to trends for 2019.

DARK PAPERS

As printing techniques have improved so has the fashionability of these avant garde looks in black, navy, deep green and burgundy.

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Q&A: Daniel Dejan, Judge, Premier Print Awards

Sarah Sudar · Copywriter · Printing Industries of America

Daniel Dejan exudes bravura. Not only in his style, but also his eye for detail. He is one of the most sought-out judges for print and design awards, and the Premier Print Awards are no exception. The Premier Print Awards competition recognizes the highest-quality printed pieces in various categories from around the world. Each year, only the worthiest pieces receive Awards of Recognition, Certificates of Merit, and the highest honor—the Benny statue. We sat down with Daniel to discuss his long history as a judge, what details he looks for, and how designers and printers can continue to push the boundaries.

How did you first get involved in judging?

Many years ago, I was writing for numerous trade publications and was relatively visible in the market, researching and writing about new print techniques. I was also teaching a three-day workshop on print production around the country. Because of this, people thought I had some background and a depth of experience worthy of being able to judge.

I started judging local print and design competitions around the country for the American Advertising Federation, AIGA, and a few of the other graphic arts associations and organizations, which was enormous fun. It was an extraordinary privilege viewing so many design and print entries in one day. There have been competitions where we viewed 1,800–2,400 pieces in a day or two. It's like walking through a museum, although you not only get to see the pieces—you also get to hold, smell, and feel them.

When judging design and print competitions, what are you looking for?

The first thing I'm looking for is whether the piece is technically sound in terms of mechanics. I'm looking at tonal range, color saturation, detail, and contrast. I've been doing this a long time and I am dumbstruck by the technological advancements we've made in printing, paper, and especially inks. I always have to remind myself of where we are in the evolution of the graphic arts in order to truly appreciate the quality of print that I am currently viewing and judging. When you realize the advancements in technologies and what we are able to accomplish now, it's extraordinary.

You've been judging for a long time. What are some design elements that have left an impression on you?

Done well, special effects printing has always made a huge impression on me. Humans are a sensual species—we love to have our senses stimulated. The idea that we could print in four-color then make it feel like a real sand surface is astonishing. I think the use of touch plates is a great enhancement as well. I also value cleverness: there are entries that don't use special effects or print techniques, but rely on clever folding, a die cut, or a simple technique that enhances the piece dramatically and allows us to get to the very core of why the project was done.

How can competitors continue to push the boundaries?

As a judge, I really appreciate a designer and a printer working in partnership. The designer creates a fine design, and, in turn, the printer enhances the design through special print techniques. When they work well together, it's glorious. It becomes a real celebration of print.

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We shouldn't take for granted that great design is great design at its core, just as great printing is great printing. If we look at it from an objective perspective, with all the myriad details a printer must address, it amazes me that print works at all. How you can take life, with its millions of colors, and render it in four colors is astounding.

We recognize digital/online media is incredibly important in sales and marketing. Now, when there is more to say or show, augmented reality allows the viewer to go from printed page to a microsite that provides additional information and imagery. That said, print delivers stimulation through paper choice, design, inks, and breathtaking printing that stimulates all four senses. As convenient as online media can be, only one or two senses can be stimulated. Digital might be more convenient, but the message will have a deeper impact if it's in print. And, it will be far more memorable!

For more information on the Premier Print Awards, visit www.printing.org/ppa.

ABOVE:
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PIA Unveils New Profit Booster Program

Dr. Ron H. Davis
Senior Vice President & Chief Economist
Printing Industries of America

PIA's Center for Print Economics and Management, the preeminent source of accurate, up-to-date analysis on the print economy and management, has announced a new Profit Booster for printers.

The Profit Booster provides printers with an easy-to-use, quick, and effective financial and operational assessment of their company. The Profit Booster is very affordable, with prices ranging from $999 to $1,999 for PIA member printers (depending on annual sales volume).

The key features of the Profit Booster include:

- A comparison and analysis of the printer's key performance metrics with profit-leading firms that are similar in size, business models, and printing processes
- A comprehensive variance analysis examining the underlying reasons for performance issues
- A simplified action plan with recommendations for specific strategic management practices and operational improvements, such as lowering specific costs, saving resources, changing prices, and other actions to stop losses and increase sales and profits
- A short, focused management map providing a clear path to improved profitability
- Ongoing assistance and consultation as needed to help in implementation of the action plan

The Profit Booster program is managed by Dr. Ron Davis, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist with over 30 years of experience in financial and operational analysis in the printing industry. He is assisted by David Wilaj, PIA Economist with an MA in financial economics.

To participate in a Profit Booster, printers need only complete a short confidential questionnaire on their current financials; the Profit Booster report is delivered within six to eight weeks. According to Dr. Davis, "The Profit Booster is a quick and affordable way for printers to promptly determine their strengths and weaknesses and get a template for improved performance." Davis further states that "the average difference between a profit-leading printer and non-profit-leading printers is around 10 percent of sales or $100,000 per million dollars in annual sales. The Profit Booster can help printers bridge this gap and pay for itself many times over."

For more information or to schedule a Profit Booster, contact David Wilaj at dwilaj@printing.org or 412-259-1756 or Dr. Ron Davis at rdavis@printing.org or 434-591-0527.

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Future Forward Networking: Developing Relationships to Support Your Career

Ilise Benun
Founder of Marketing-Mentor.com,
Programming Partner for HOW Design Live

These days, there is no such thing as job security. You must take control of your career and strategically build your network. Developing strong relationships with other creatives will support your career as you navigate an uncertain and fast-paced creative landscape.

HOW Design Live is the ideal opportunity to mingle with graphic designers and creative professionals you admire and to practice the all-important art of networking.

Networking is one of the best things about HOW Design Live—by growing your contact list, you'll create a pipeline of opportunities for your future self. During the conference, you'll learn what other designers are up to and find role models to model your career after. You'll be inspired by designers, and you might even strike up a conversation with someone who needs you now as a resource of their own.

The key to successful networking? All you need is curiosity.

Approach every event as a research expedition, from your company holiday party to professional development conferences. Learn as much as you can about the people, companies, projects, and opportunities you encounter. What do you want to know? What would help you serve your company or clients better? Make a list of questions you want answers to and ask them.

Here are four best practices for networking with curiosity:

1. **Learn something.** You can learn from everyone—find out what they know that you don't.

2. **Give something.** Listen for what they need. Then share what comes to mind. Don't withhold your ideas—they're not precious or original! You can even offer your own services, if appropriate.

3. **Offer to network on their behalf.** Ask the people you meet, "Based on our chat, how will I know if I'm speaking to someone you might want to meet?"

4. **Ask permission to follow up.** Ask their preferred method of communication—some people never do email, others do email only! Then in your follow up, thank them for their time and anything they shared with you.

With professional platforms like LinkedIn, it's easy to network online, but without an opportunity to meet in person, it will usually take longer to develop a relationship and that relationship may not be as solid.

Finally, remember that networking is not about getting—it's about giving and building relationships over time. There's no better time to start than now. And there's no better place to practice than HOW Design Live. We hope to see you in Chicago May 7–10, 2019!

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