

Printing Rises to a New Level

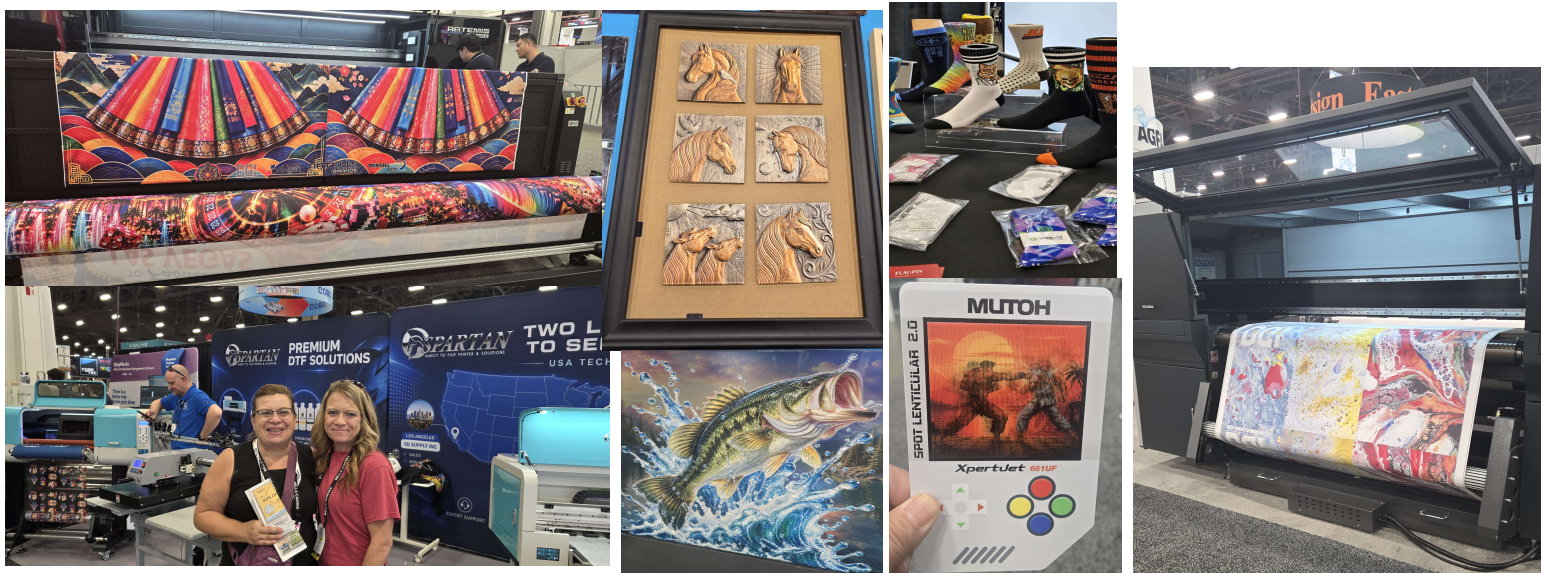
- Story By Paulette Dakuras- Owner / Editor- SOS Classified News

Last week, we had the privilege of covering the **Printing United Expo**, and let me tell you—this thing is huge! The event featured more than 850 vendors and covered over 4.6 million square feet of the *Las Vegas Convention Center*. Attendees and exhibitors represented more than 104 countries. We met people from Nigeria, Australia, the United Kingdom, India, Belgium, and many other countries. The international presence was incredible. The sheer amount of equipment, technology, and materials available for printing was almost impossible to comprehend. The possibilities seem limitless. From wide-format printing for banners and vehicle wraps to embroidery on hats and patches, the industry has evolved far beyond what I ever imagined. There were enormous fabric wall coverings, tiny stickers, 3D printing, puffy embroidery, fuzzy stickers, and so much more. I never realized just how many products and materials fall under the umbrella of “printing.” There were countless varieties of paper, apparel, hardware such as frames and cups, key chains, stuffed animals, custom socks, and even more specialized applications. We saw silk-screening machines, massive hat-embroidery machines, and equipment so large that some machines were literally bigger than our house!

The Future Is Here One of the biggest themes throughout the Expo was automation and artificial intelligence. We saw everything from automated systems capable of loading huge sheets of corrugated material for printing to emerging AI applications designed to simplify the many technical steps involved in producing large print orders. AI is increasingly being used to improve color accuracy, optimize cutting, determine the most efficient production processes, and reduce the amount of time required to complete a job. The goal is not simply to replace people, but to allow employees to spend more time focusing on the intricate details and creative aspects of their work. We also attended several round table discussions covering topics ranging from effective office organization to the challenges businesses face with finding and retaining reliable employees. One thing became very clear: whether we like it or not, AI is here, and it is going to affect virtually every industry in one way or another. One of the most interesting discussions involved something companies are calling “tribal knowledge.” As experienced employees retire, businesses are realizing that they are losing decades of knowledge and expertise that may never have been written down in a standard operating manual. Some companies are developing programs to capture that knowledge and incorporate it into AI systems before those employees leave. The idea is to preserve the experience and expertise that would otherwise walk out the door with them. I can certainly relate to that. Although I have been retired for almost five years, I still receive phone calls from former coworkers who run into situations that simply aren't covered in the standard operating procedures. Sometimes, experience really is the best manual.

And Then There Was Zouk

Last, but certainly not least, we were treated to an incredible experience at **Zouk Nightclub**, an upscale Las Vegas venue where the Printing United Expo treated members of the media, exhibitors and others like royalty. There were five open bars, two pools, private cabanas, music both inside and outside, hors d'oeuvres, complimentary cigars, and even fire dancers. For one night, we got to live like Kardashians! The entire Printing United Expo was an experience I will never forget. From the incredible technology and innovation to the people we met from around the world, it was an eye-opening look at just how far the printing industry has come—and where it is headed next. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience it, and I sincerely hope I have the chance to return next year. Printing United Expo certainly gave a whole new meaning to the words **“printing is everywhere.”**



First Time at Printing United Expo 2026

By Sal Fonseca, Owner / Editor SOS Classified News

This was our first time ever attending a **printing convention**, and we chose **Printing United Expo 2026**. Walking into that space as a small newspaper and printing business based out of a home-scale operation felt both intimidating and exciting. We had no idea how much we would learn—or how much help we would receive just to make the trip workable.

A special recognition has to go to **Amanda Kliegl**, Vice President of Public Relations at **PRINTING UNITED ALLIANCE**. She was amazing in helping us navigate the process and make the Expo actually work for a small operation like ours. Without her support, the logistics and access would have been far more difficult. That kind of practical assistance made a real difference.

Once on the show floor, I made a point of asking nearly every exhibitor that we spoke with, the same question: What can you do for the small start-up printing business entrepreneurs who are just getting started and working from home? The responses were revealing. Most of the largest companies seemed a bit lost when it came to a concrete answer. They acknowledged that small businesses are the foundation of every big business, but they struggled to translate that idea into specific products, programs, or entry points that a home-based startup could actually use. The smaller companies, by contrast, immediately understood the value of DIY and home-based operations like ours. Many of them offered clear advice on which machines would best serve a startup—whether the focus was traditional printing or niche work such as hats, shirts, labels, or decals. Those conversations were practical, grounded, and far more useful than any glossy brochure.

Beyond the startup question, I spent time digging into the technical side of the industry. Conversations with experts and engineers from major manufacturers covered high-speed production systems and the growing role of UV-curable inks—formulations that cure almost instantly under ultraviolet light rather than relying on evaporation, heat or absorption. Understanding the mechanical demands of high-speed lines and the practical realities of UV curing gave me a much clearer picture of both current capabilities and future service needs. One promising outcome of those discussions is the possibility of joining a manufacturer's possible future beta program. It would require signing an NDA, but it could provide access to proprietary technical information useful for diagnosing and repairing our older printers, which might even prove to be another financial opportunity for us.

One of the most unexpected moments came when we ran into our local **EPSON** sales representative, **Jesse Orosco**—President of **A Plus Business Systems Inc.** in Fresno, California—along with his son. The surprise on his face was immediate. “Hey, what are you doing here?” he asked. I told him we are reporting on the show, What else! “After all,” I said, “we are the local hometown newspaper.” He broke into a big smile. Standing there with Jesse, and several of the EPSON staff... the relationship shifted. We were no longer just a customer. In that moment we became industry allies.

Later the Expo treated Media, Exhibitors and Event Guests to a night at **Zouk Nightclub**. Experiencing it firsthand was memorable. The EDM music was the kind you can get lost in, and the whole evening felt like a welcome release after a long day of conversations and floor walking.

What stayed with me most was the people. Like having the pleasure of meeting and befriending **Joju Adekanbi**, **Publisher and CEO of WHERE to Print magazine**—serving Ghana and Nigeria. And of course **Amanda's** practical help, the engineers willing to explain the hard details of high-speed and UV systems, the smaller vendors who actually understood home-based startups, and the unexpected hallway conversation that turned a local sales relationship into something closer to partnership. **Printing United Expo** was an experience I already hope to return to year after year—not only for the technology, but for the connections that make the technology matter. Not to mention that as Media guests we were treated like royalty with breakfast and lunch provide for us everyday, and let me tell you the food was fantastic !

