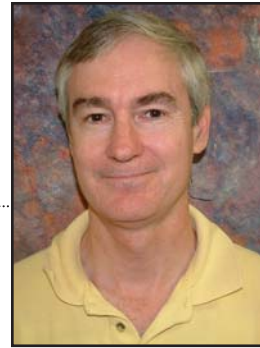


100 Tips & Tricks

by David Gross



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 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, and so forth. Keep a Sharpie Marker handy and, when possible, write a serial number on the back of a product that you can then log in your diary.
2. Always buy a test kit of hard and soft substrates for testing and training. If you are about to transfer to an expensive substrate, first do a test on something inexpensive to check quality and color.
3. Keep your sublimation instructions up to date. We revise our instructions every few weeks to keep up with new products and improved transfer techniques. Translate our instructions to your words and post these near your heat press.
4. Don't turn away business you can't handle! Ask your supplier for help with printing large volumes and/or large substrates.
5. Keep your work area clean, organized, and well ventilated. Have a place for all your transfer accessories (uncoated butcher paper, Pro Spray, heat tape, black paint pen for plaque touch-up, etc.).
6. Always have a back-up plan when equipment fails. Find someone locally that has a heat press that you can use. Ask your supplier for someone in your area.
7. If you lack real graphic design expertise, then partner with a pro. Clients will pay for professional work. Ask around for someone who is great with Illustrator. New versions of CorelDRAW will open an artist's Adobe Illustrator files just fine.
8. Take a Photoshop class.

Printer

9. Install your printer on a very sturdy level table that will not shake while printing. For 4000 series owners, Epson makes an awesome stand with bottom storage capacity. I also recommend connecting a UPS to the printer if you are prone to power outages.
10. Document any problems with your printer such as error codes and nozzle check issues. This will greatly help in solving problems.
11. Buy plastic airtight containers to keep your sublimation papers in. This will prevent the paper from adsorbing moisture as well keeping things organized by size and type.
12. Buy a chip resetter to recycle for the maintenance tanks on 4000, 7000, and 9000 series Epson printers. This is tremendous convenience as well as a great cost savings. Attach the chip resetter to the side of the printer with Velcro.
13. For Epson printers without replaceable maintenance tanks, ask your supplier for the correct utility software needed to reset the "Parts are near end of life" message.

14. Make sure you hide non-sublimation inks so that it is not possible to install one by accident.
15. For Epson printers like the c-series, 1280,1400 learn to do a printhead flush. This is a great way to restore health. Instructions are posted. Call us and we can provide you with the Epson flushing solution.
16. Buy extended warranties for your printers when possible.
17. When possible, raise the printhead up to its highest position. This will keep the printhead from touching the transfer and smearing the ink. Ask your supplier about your printer. So far, not needed on Gel printers.
18. Know what it costs you to print. Check our web site for helpful tools such as my 4000 and 4800 ink cost calculator. Recycling your sublimation ink cartridges can help with overall ink costs... we provide a \$5 credit per cartridge.
19. Call your supplier (before calling Epson or Ricoh) when your printer appears to be dying. Often there are simple fixes that can help bring a printer back to life, and your supplier should be highly motivated to get yours back on track.
20. Consider purchasing a backup/spare printer. Sometimes when a printer finally dies, you find that model has been discontinued-possibly leaving you with incompatible ink.
21. Do a nozzle check on plain paper at the beginning of every print day and when you suspect there might be a problem. Use the "Print" option (for 4000 series printers). If your nozzle check is incomplete use the head-cleaning feature. If that fails do an "auto nozzle check". The auto nozzle check will "work" the printhead unlike the cleaning feature. If that fails, see the tip on cleaning the capping station.
22. For Epson printers, learn to clean the capping/maintenance station and flushing box. We have instructions posted on our web site at www.conde.com. This is the most important maintenance you can do for your printer.
23. Get a copy of Harvey Head cleaner, this inexpensive software utility for Windows will send a nozzle check automatically to your printer once a day to help it stay healthy.
24. Leave your printer turned on. Turning your printer off and on only serves to waste ink.
25. Print on the correct side of the correct paper and refer to your sublimation instructions for which paper is best for your substrate.
26. Printed transfers should be transferred within a few days or else the image(s) will lose vibrancy.
27. When possible, put your paper in your printer long edge first (landscape) and then define a custom paper size. This trick will increase print speeds up to 30% because the printhead does more "interstate driving" (moving longer before stopping) than "city driving."

Computer

28. Use the <Shift> <Print Screen> command to capture your screen at print time to help you remember what it should look like. Paste the screen into Photoshop or CorelDRAW document for saving and printing. Also remember to document your printing preferences, CorelDRAW's "Tools/Color Management" and "Print Preview" screens. You will be very thankful when you have to reinstall your software or move to a new PC.
29. For Microsoft Windows folks, go into the Advance tab of the Printer Properties and check the box "Keep Printed Documents." This hidden treasure allows you to re-print any job from the print folder without using your application. Great for repeat jobs.
30. Use the Windows system's restore feature when your computer has a major problem. This will return Windows to an earlier date before the problem occurred. This has saved me many times.
31. Remember to archive all your artwork files for future orders on an external USB hard drive. Rotate drives for off-site storage in the event of fire or theft.

32. Should you go with 64 bit windows? I say a qualified yes. For new computers that do not need to run old software applications, go with 64 bit versions. It has a much higher RAM limit and delivers better performance. ArTainium and Gel folks are all set since we can use our ICC profiles with the native printer drivers. For very old Epson printers, check first. For instance, Epson 3000 folks are out of luck as there is no 64 bit driver. No problem for 4000 series printers.
33. Max out your RAM. The limit for Vista is 4GB.
34. Of course install virus/spyware/firewall software. I like Microsoft's OneCare... visit www.onecare.live.com for more information.
35. 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

36. Measure your heat press' temperature at least twice a year. I recommend a low-tech solution: a metal candy thermometer. If you determine the press is out of calibration, contact your supplier partner for the "magic buttons" to push.
37. Always use protective paper on the top and bottom of a substrate while it is being pressed. This will protect your heat platen, bottom pad, and substrate. I recommend a roll of uncoated, white butcher paper available at Sam's Club. 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.
38. Lubricate your press every month with high-temp grease to ensure smooth operation and long life.
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 awesome productivity enhancer that allows you to press a product while prepping for the next.
41. If you do lots of double-sided products like bag tags, consider a product like the cool plate. This large "heat sink" cools your substrate in a fraction of the normal time, allowing for increased productivity.
42. Remember a bigger pot boils slower. As you press more stuff at one time, you must (in most cases) increase your transfer time.
43. Invest in a small convection oven for doing larger quantity mugs and other ceramic items like dog bowls and latte mugs (I like the Cuisinart Brick Oven that's good for up to six 11oz. mugs). Be sure to get a thermometer to accurately set your temperature. You will need wraps to hold the transfer to the substrate. Be sure to follow the instructions. Only use this oven for sublimation, not for food preparation.
44. Always use an adhesive lint roller on soft substrates. This usually removes the blue lint that can show up after sublimation.
45. Use Pro Spray to hold the transfer to soft substrates. This prevents the paper from moving when opening the press, which causes a shadow print. I suggest you make a spray box so that the spray does not make a mess on your floor or table.
46. Remember to cool ceramic mugs in room temperature water after pressing. This will stop the sublimation process.
47. Buy a swing away heat press. It closes evenly and will put out a lot more heat.
48. A Teflon pillow will help prevent unsightly transfer marks on fabric during the transfer process and help avoid heavy seams on products such as tote bags.

Graphics

49. To reset CorelDRAW to its default menus, press F8 as you are launching the program.
50. Use Photoshop or Photoshop Elements at the front end to prepare images for CorelDRAW. CorelDRAW will not properly handle resolution. This must be done either in Photoshop or Photo Paint. See tip No. 29 on "resizing images."
51. Resolution: I recommend a minimum of 200dpi at print size. Say you are scanning an 8"x 10" photo to produce an 80"x 100" tile mural. That means you should scan at 2,000 dpi (200 dpi x 10). Once scanned, resize using the tip below and your image will be around 200 dpi. I strongly recommend Genuine Fractals (see No. 30) for scaling images to mural size.
52. 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". These features can really screw up your image. When you are resizing an image, you want to either push the dots closer or spread them out. Using these features improperly makes it so the software will either add dots out of thin air or delete them by maintaining the current resolution.
53. Use Genuine Fractals to add more resolution when a higher-resolution image is not available. This inexpensive plug-in for Photoshop is a great band-aid for low-resolution images.
54. Yes, you really need both CorelDRAW and Photoshop. CorelDRAW is our "Swiss Army knife" for graphics and page layout. Photoshop is our image prep program. For most things, I prefer Adobe Photoshop to Corel PHOTO-PAINT. Most people should buy Photoshop Elements, as it is inexpensive and gets the job done.
55. To make black-and-white (grayscale) images print best, convert the image from grayscale to RGB in Photoshop under Image: Mode: RGB.

Spot Colors

56. For "no surprise color matching," print your color palettes using Corel's undocumented "create color swatch macro" feature. (See my article from 2005 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, drop me an email at dgross@conde.com.
57. 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 my color matching tip above to nail the proper color.
58. 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."
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 a 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 collect of photos, vector art, and backgrounds.
63. Be sure to check out our massive template collection for Photoshop and CorelDRAW users. We also have some excellent videos to assist you in using the 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. 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.
66. 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 CorelDRAW, 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.
67. Why do my scans look so bad compared with 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".

Marketing/Sales

68. Put your contact information on every product you sell. For instance, sublimate the re-order info (your contact info plus the artwork filename) on the back of, say, a Unisub FRP name badge so folks can refer business to you. You can transfer to both sides at the same time. For mugs, I suggest using Rowmark MATES oval stickers on the bottom of the mugs and on the back of products. If you are whole selling the product then put the appropriate contact info.
69. Sell name badges! Without a doubt, this is my favorite sublimation product. Schools, churches, and businesses need either traditional or slotted name badges. Profits are excellent!
70. Always sell and promote product bundles. If the customer buys a mug, offer a discount if he/she also buys a mousepad.
71. 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!
72. 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.
73. Tap into event driven opportunities like car shows, sports, hobbies, and pet shows. These provide impulse buying opportunities.
74. Install a free tile mural in a public or high traffic area and use this as your calling card to show folks what you can do.
75. Sell closing gifts and promotional products to real estate agents.
76. Use glossy FRP sheet stock as dry-erase boards.
77. Tap into the memorial/funeral market.
78. Photo jewelry is hot... dog tags, charms, and bling.
79. Promote green products such as tote bags.
80. Use a digital photo frame to display samples of your products. I have put together a collection of images you can download and use. Be sure to take a photograph of every product you produce to add to your photo frame.
81. Pricing: Don't guess. Do research. Pricing is determined by value, service, quality, and innovativeness.
82. Make a sale call on the gift shop in museums and other tourist attractions. You can provide these folks with custom imprinted products like mugs, mousepads. With local delivery and small order quantities, how can they say no?
83. Make a set of personalized mugs for the local TV morning show. Amazing PR.
84. Save your clients images; let them know that they can come back for "reprints".

85. Collect your community calendars and look for Sales and PR opportunities.
86. Market to special occasions like weddings, Valentine's Day, First communion, and graduations.
87. 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. Get us to do a floor mat for you to promote your business.
88. Always ask photographers for permission to use their images. This is also a great way to build partnerships for wholesale business and referrals.
89. 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. Always carry a sample to show like a Unisub key chain. Plant seeds and then follow up!
90. Download my free unbranded product catalog. You can then customize it with your name for printing and/or emailing. Also place it on your website for downloading. It is excellent!
91. Get Web images of products from your supplier partners for use on your website.
92. Plant seeds. When possible, include a sample product with a customer's order. Often that sample will find its way to someone new.
93. Produce your own custom aluminum pieces cheaply and easily with a cutter.
94. Check out great books like "125 Ways to Make Money with Sublimation". This book details many vertical markets that are highly profitable.

Support

95. Choose a partner that focuses on success. Look to see if they have a full support section on their web site and offers great phone support.
96. Fast install and troubleshooting: Ask your supplier about remote access to your computer to speed up installation and troubleshooting.
97. 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 setting.
98. Call your supplier for help and training sooner than later. I often speak to clients that have wasted a considerable amount of ink before asking for help.
99. Choose a partner that provides after hours and weekend support. I provide an on-call support person for our clients.
100. Keep reading great publications like this one!