10 CorelDRAW tricks for better sublimation

By Johnson Plastics

For close to a decade, we've been teaching the art and science skill sets necessary for successful sublimation businesses. Our students cover the gamut from designers and photographers to start-up businesses and third generation trophy and awards makers. As the industry has improved over the years (especially the past three), printers require less maintenance, sublimation inks are more vibrant, and the quality and range in blank substrates have grown exponentially. This allows us to spend more time teaching the ins and outs of running a sublimation business.

Sublimation success is mainly dependent on the following three simple rules:

1. Only work with high-quality graphics in acceptable formats.

2. Remove unnecessary variables from pre- through post-production.

3. Regiment your approach and operating conditions.

The secret to the kind of vibrant sublimated samples you see at trade shows is starting with good graphics of a quality, size and format conducive to each product. Do that and your product won't need after-press tweaks or cheats—they'll pretty much be done as soon as you peel away the transfer. To get predictable results use the same brands of consumable supplies across multiple substrate groups, print from the same software using the substrate's recommended settings and sublimate all items under calibrated (and often checked) pressing conditions. Follow the same steps to see where you need improvement and to identify workflow bottlenecks.

TRICK 1

SET YOUR WORKING COLOUR SPACE TO ENSURE ACCURATE OUTPUT.

This is essential. To match any colours, you must ensure you're working in the proper colour mode. For desktop sublimation this means all graphic elements (including curves, text and images) should be represented by the RGB colour model. Don't let the CMYK inks you're using fool you—that Ricoh or Epson printer you're putting those inks into is an RGB device. In fact, most of the peripheral digital equipment we use for graphics is RGB whether monitors, cameras, scanners or computers. CMYK or Pantone values will not be properly translated. If the colour black never seems to come out as true or as rich as it should, you may be accidentally using CMYK values. If photographs never seem to pop, it may be that the wrong colour mode is being used.

Adobe and CorelDRAW graphics suites default to CMYK on installation, so it's up to you to make the changes necessary. Your distributor will be happy to walk you through the relevant areas to change based on your software version, operating system, printer, and ink set. If you're among the 75 percent of the embellishment businesses who use CorelDRAW X3 or higher, changes will need to be made in the following areas:

1. Open the palettes toolbar. Make sure the Default RGB palette is open on the right side of your screen. Next, make sure 'Set as Default' has a checkmark beside it (right click above the open palette to toggle).

2. Make sure your working environment uses RGB as its default. For CorelDRAW X3 and earlier, make sure that the "Colour mode used for effects" is set to RGB. For CorelDRAW X4 and above, this means checking two places under your Colour Management settings (Tools/Colour Management). First, ensure default settings use RGB for primary colour mode and spot colours (sublimation usually relies on using the perceptual rendering intent too, which is best for printing RGB images with CMYK inks). Second, check that document settings also use RGB for primary colour mode and perceptual rendering intent.

Speak with your sublimation distributor to ensure you're making the proper changes based on your sublimation system. The steps seem tedious, but the reward will be worth your efforts.

TRICK 2

USE THE COLOUR STYLES DOCKER TO MASTER VECTOR FILL COLOURS.

This is one of those tools we wish we'd known about when we first started working with complex vector artwork. This can be any type of graphic containing multiple curves and elements each with their own fill colour. Think about a graphic of six jelly beans, each a different colour: red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise and purple. See **FIGURE 1**. If each colour in this vector graphic was in CMYK, recolouring each of the six jelly beans to a new RGB colour from an active palette would only require six total moves of your mouse. It might get a little more complicated if each of the jelly beans has a black contour. In this case, it would add another six total mouse clicks to go from a CMYK contour to one filled with RGB black (0:0:0).

It starts to get tricky when you have this same scenario compounded. Imagine a jar filled with 600 jelly beans of six colour groups. Each bean has a black contour border and the placement of the 600 beans requires many layers of overlap. The placement of each bean is random too. See **FIGURE 2**.
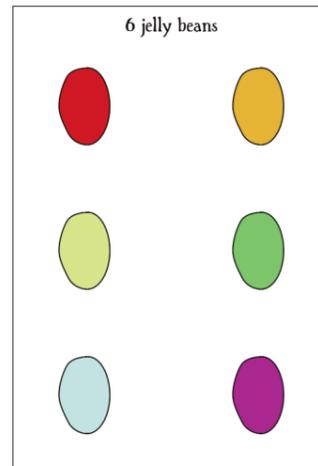
FIGURE 1 - An image of six individually coloured jelly beans is easily manipulated

FIGURE 2 - A more difficult task lies in manipulating 600 multicoloured and randomly placed jelly beans
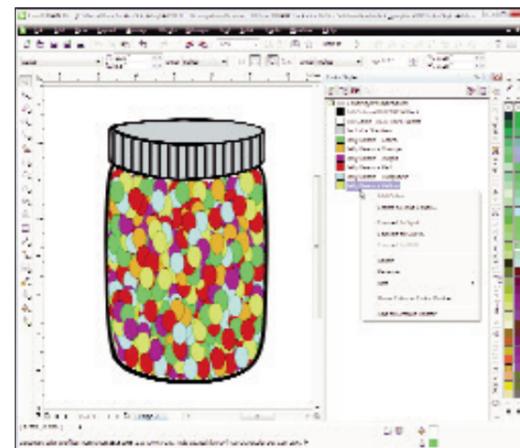
FIGURE 3 - The Colour Styles tool helps you take complete control of all fill colours in your working document

FIGURE 4 - With Colour Styles you can change the colour of an entire group of randomly placed objects with a single click of the mouse

Colour Styles gives you control to change all 600 jelly bean colours to whatever you need without having to move a single bean. By analysing the colours of each separate curve that makes up your working document or those in an imported vector graphic, Colour Styles represents this graphic in easy-to-see palette swatches. You can then merge colours, change the colour model for each individual colour in your document (such as going from CMYK to RGB), and even replace all individual occurrences of one colour with a completely different colour by simply dragging and dropping a new selection from your RGB palette. In the jar of jelly beans, you could change every yellow bean to pink. See **FIGURE 3** and **FIGURE 4**.

In other words, Colour Styles docker gives you complete control over all of the individual colours used.
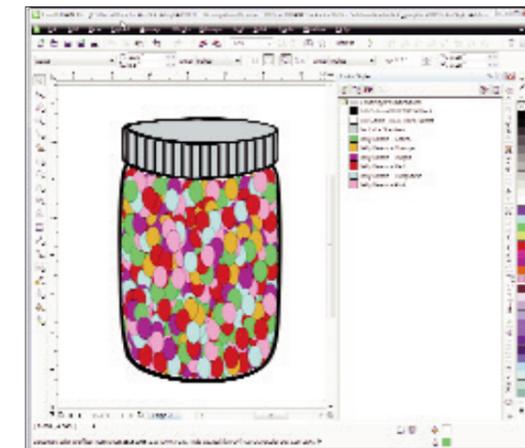
Using Colour Styles

• Go to Windows/Dockers menu

• Select Colour Styles docker

• For use with vector graphics only

• Select objects and drag into window

• Edit colours as needed (also try right-clicking individual colours for more options)

This also is handy when you want to try different colour schemes or create templates with the same design but different colours. You could create a whole league's worth of uniform colour schemes from one template by sampling and swapping out colours for each uniform element from numbers to stitching. Imagine a team uniform vector collection with graphics of a hat, team jersey, pants and other colour-branded accessories. In its simplest form, you can at least make sure all colours used follow the RGB model (right click context). If you want to play with the jelly bean images, this file is available for download at www.johnsonplastics.com/trainingdownloads.

TRICK 3

MAKE GLOBAL COLOUR CHANGES WITH FIND/EDIT/REPLACE.

Another method for checking the colours used in your graphic before printing is the often overlooked find-and-replace tool. You might be used to the feature in other software. Corel's version takes things up a notch. Not only can it do the normal search and replace function for text in your working document, but it can also find and replace colour models for both fills and outlines. Instead of an edit/replace action aimed at text, in

CorelDRAW you can search for all instances where a fill colour is represented by a CMYK value and replace it with the RGB equivalent. The conversion is based on your colour management settings.

Using edit/replace

• Accessible under Edit/Find and Replace Menu

• Choose Replace Objects to search for custom colours

• Choose your search-and-replace parameters (example: Find CMYK; Replace with RGB)

• Repeat above process for Fills and Outlines

You'll still need to ensure that any converted RGB spot colour value is the right one based on your sublimation colour palette swatches, but this function will at least change all improper colour model values to sublimation's preferred RGB model. This tool is useful when working with graphics that might have been designed in CMYK for output through a four-colour process such as offset printing or screen printing.

TRICK 4

ORGANISE LAYERS AND PAGES WITH OBJECT MANAGER.

Use Object Manager every day to get your graphic elements organised. Object Manager helps control all of the elements of a design from conceptualisation through printing. You can rename objects from generic defaults such as 'Curve' to a more specific identification, such as 'license plate container' (see **FIGURE 5**). Use Object Manager to change the order of objects by sampling, dragging and dropping; create new layers and choose whether objects placed on that layer are visible or invisible; rename almost any element of your document; and turn off printing for individual layers. In Figure 5, you'll see that almost every element has been identified specifically and there is a separate layer built that allows the designer to double-check registration and placement (making sure the design doesn't get too close to the edge or the holes). This was done by placing the vector for the actual size and shape of the license on a new layer with a clear fill and contrary outline colour. By turning off the print icon on this overlay layer, you ensure that layer never prints.

Using Object Manager

• Activate under Windows/Dockers menu

• Use it to set only certain pages to print

• Rename objects to better identify them later

• Group and manage separate elements or curves

FIGURE 5 - The Object Manager keeps all elements of your graphic organised and makes editing a breeze

FIGURE 6 - The Custom Calendar tool allows you to create functional promotional items

For access to all features and a view of all graphical elements, make sure you're working in Layer Manager View (in the open Object Manager, it's the third and last menu icon at the top, shown with the eyeball and three sheets of paper). Click on an individual layer's little 'eyeball' and printer icons to toggle between making that layer's contents visible or invisible and printable or not, respectively.

TRICK 5

HIT SPOT COLOURS USING BUILT-IN PALETTE CREATOR MACRO.

This tool can help you better hit spot colours with your sublimation system by giving you the power to make your own custom RGB swatch print files. This built-in macro (versions 12 and above) takes the guesswork out of your colour output by allowing you to create more in-depth sample sublimated colour swatches on metal or fabric along family colour or colour themes. You can turn any of the dozens of Corel-included RGB colour palettes into a working, printable document containing squares of each palette colour as well as the RGB name and value below each square. Corel's RGB palette assortment is vast, from single colour families to themed palettes.

Using Create Colour Swatch macro

- Choose run or play macros under tools menu
- Choose GlobalMacros folder
- Select CreateColourSwatch macro, or more recent versions of Corel, choose 'run'
- Select from active palettes or search for others
- Save, edit and print palette files as you need

You're left with a vector and text graphic file you can manipulate, adding a title, rearranging colour squares, or resizing the swatches. When a customer needs a difficult spot colour, this macro is waiting. Your active RGB palettes will be easily accessible from a pull-down menu. You can also choose to browse the software's included library of palettes. If you choose a non-active palette, after running the macro the palette is automatically activated and accessible with your other active palettes.

TRICK 6

CREATE PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS WITH CALENDAR CREATOR.

Another useful macro in CorelDRAW (versions 12 and above) allows you to create better promotional products by adding a customised calendar graphic. Calendars are practical promotional products that people will use or refer back to, keeping the promotional message in the recipient's mind. The macro allows
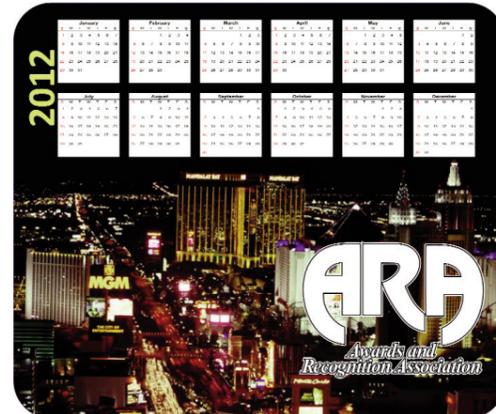
you to customise the output, from choosing the year, how many months will be represented, which day starts the week and much more. You're left with a text- and vector-based calendar graphic you can size or arrange.

Using Create Calendar macro

- Choose to run or play macros under tools menu
- Choose CalendarWizard folder, or more recent versions of Corel, choose 'run'
- Select CreateCalendar macro

TRICK 7

QUICKLY ORGANISE SEPARATE GRAPHIC ELEMENTS WITH ALIGN AND ARRANGE TOOLS.

Another organisation trick is CorelDRAW's align and arrange features. With them, you can arrange multiple objects by row and column, align objects along multiple planes, or provide order to any collection of graphics. Two of the most useful tools in this arsenal are the Distribute Objects Vertically and Distribute Objects Horizontally functions which evenly distribute a row or column of objects across a selection or page. See Figure 7.

Using align and arrange tools

- Located under arrange menu at the top
- Select multiple, separate objects (grouped as necessary)
- Make sure you group each separate graphic or these tools will apply the function across all the separate curves that make up each image
- Don't accidentally select any clear or white background elements or borders when selecting objects to arrange

This is useful for quickly arranging full sheets of product (such as name badges or key tags) with even spacing between each graphic or for creating templates you can use later. Many of the align and distribute tools have shortcuts, such as P to centre on the page or L or R to align left or right.

TRICK 8

ACCESS CUSTOM SPOT COLOURS FROM YOUR WORKING PALETTE.

Do you often work with certain custom spot colours? Do you find yourself having to manually edit fill colours for certain frequently used graphics (such as your own logo) because the colour you need is not a standard on any of your active palettes? Get rid of the sticky notes filled with colour values. Instead, add frequently used custom colours to a working, active palette.
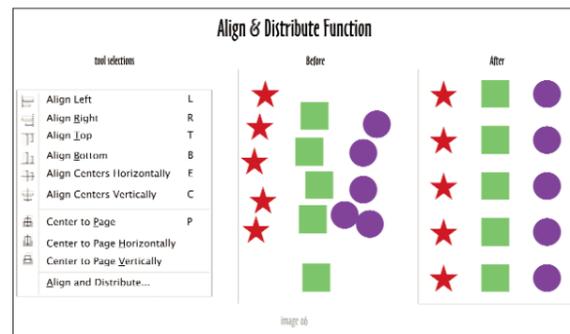
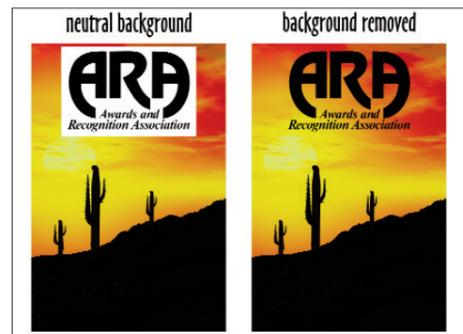*FIGURE 7 - CorelDRAW's Align and Distribute tools keep objects in near rows*

FIGURE 8 - The Bitmap Colour Mask allows you to quickly eliminate a background colour in certain images

Adding colours to palette

• Select element with fill colour you want to save

• Double click element fill colour icon at bottom of screen

• From pull-down menu next to Add to Palette, choose which palette will get custom colour

• Choose Add to Palette

• If necessary, open tools/Palette Editor Menu to rename colour

This will only work if the colour you're attempting to add doesn't already exist within that palette. If you find that you're adding a lot of custom colours to your palette, it might be time to explore the included tool for creating your own entire colour palette.

TRICK 9

GET TO KNOW THE BITMAP MASKING TOOL FOR PHOTO EFFECTS.

This trick works best with higher quality images (less noise and image pollution) and relies on photographs with clearly defined and discernible layers. A photo of a subject in front of a blank wall will be easier to manipulate than a photograph of the same subject in a crowd at a football game. The trick lies in how easy it is to use the Bitmap Masking Tool to knock out the solid background colour of a simple graphic such a logo or clip art or to create advanced graphic effects seen in many high-end photographic reproductions or promotions.

The Bitmap Masking Tool is accessed in Corel PHOTO-PAINT. Right-click the bitmap image after importing or placing it in the CorelDRAW working space, and choose Edit Bitmap which will open that bitmap image in PHOTO-PAINT. We rely heavily on the Magic Wand Mask and the Brush Mask tools when using this trick. Expand the second selection in the tool menu, the Rectangle Mask tool, to show all the masking options. The Magic Wand Mask selects colours and it will automatically select and highlight an entire area of a photograph based on where you click and how you've set your thresholds. For example, if you want to get rid of the white background colour from a logo or scanned graphic, you would simply click on an area of that white background and the entire background will be highlighted (masked to be transparent). The more gradients or noise in the background, the more difficult to select the areas for removal. See Figure 8.

The same can be said of human subjects. If the person is standing in front of a neutral background, is in focus and is in sharp contrast to his or her surroundings, the magic wand can quickly remove the subject for placement in another backdrop or environment. (This tool could be used to remove a person from an office photo and place him or her in a more pleasant tropical

location, for instance.) If the background is not a solid colour or there is a lot of noise, raise the threshold value higher to allow the magic wand to be more flexible.

The Brush Mask allows you to add or remove masking from your selection by using your mouse to highlight areas with a round or square brush (you can size the tool up or down to affect more area per swipe or move). The Brush Mask is also useful for touching up areas accidentally selected by the Magic Wand Mask or for selecting extremely fine details by hand in a high resolution image.

Using Magic Wand and other masking tools

• Select the Magic Wand tool under the Rectangular Mask after opening the image in Corel PHOTO-PAINT.

• Play with the tolerance level before clicking the background

• Invert selection under top menu Mask/Invert (control-shift-I)

• Add to or subtract from your selection

• Edit mask outline to clean it up, apply a feathering around the subject, or clean up jagged edges

• Save and exit

The subject is now surrounded by a transparent layer and can be placed over another image.

This tool can be used for creative photographic effects such as a having a single colour element in a black-and-white photograph. To do this, you'd essentially have two copies of the same colour photograph layered one over the other. The bottom layer would be one of the photographs converted to a grayscale image (and otherwise untouched). The top overlay version of the same photograph would be in full colour and have all but the focal object masked out in PHOTO-PAINT.

TRICK 10

USE THE CONTOUR TOOL TO CREATE DYNAMIC TEXT AND GRAPHIC ENHANCEMENTS.

Creating an outline around text or objects can be problematic when the graphic is scaled or opened with other software. A contour can provide the same effect without the issues. Think of a contour as a slightly heavier copy of the graphic element or text. The popular, borderlike outside contour is created by layering a larger version of the object under itself (or by layering a smaller version over itself when creating an inside contour). By re-creating the object with this additional bleed, a contour is essentially another curve and not affected by resizing. In addition, you can break apart this contour to have full control over the new object created.

Using the contour tool

- Select object or grouped objects (curves or text)

- Choose Contour by expanding the Blend Tool menu toward the bottom of the toolbox

- Choose inside, outside or middle

- Choose level of steps

- Choose colour

- Choose size

By playing with the contour parameters, you can make it easier to read text placed over a busy background image by essentially creating a broad border around the text (separated, the contour resembles a puffy version of that same text or object. You can also create a shadow effect around objects or make graphic elements stand out better on your design. To break the contour away from the object, zoom in on the contour, right-click the contour itself and choose Break Contour Apart. See Figure 6 with the calendar mouse pad to see the ARA logo with two contours applied, giving the graphic better visibility when placed over the busy night scene of Las Vegas.

THE NEXT STEPS

Mastering all of these tricks won't necessarily make you a CorelDRAW expert or end all sublimation mistakes, but they will help you with the overall process. You'll save time creating your sublimation artwork, prevent waste created by outputting the wrong colours, add to your graphics capabilities and improve your offerings. Practice makes perfect, so we've created CorelDRAW files that will allow you to practice some of the tricks highlighted in this article and the original webinar. Go to www.johnsonplastics.com/trainingdownloads to download a specially created collection of CorelDRAW and image files you can use to practice these 10 tricks.

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