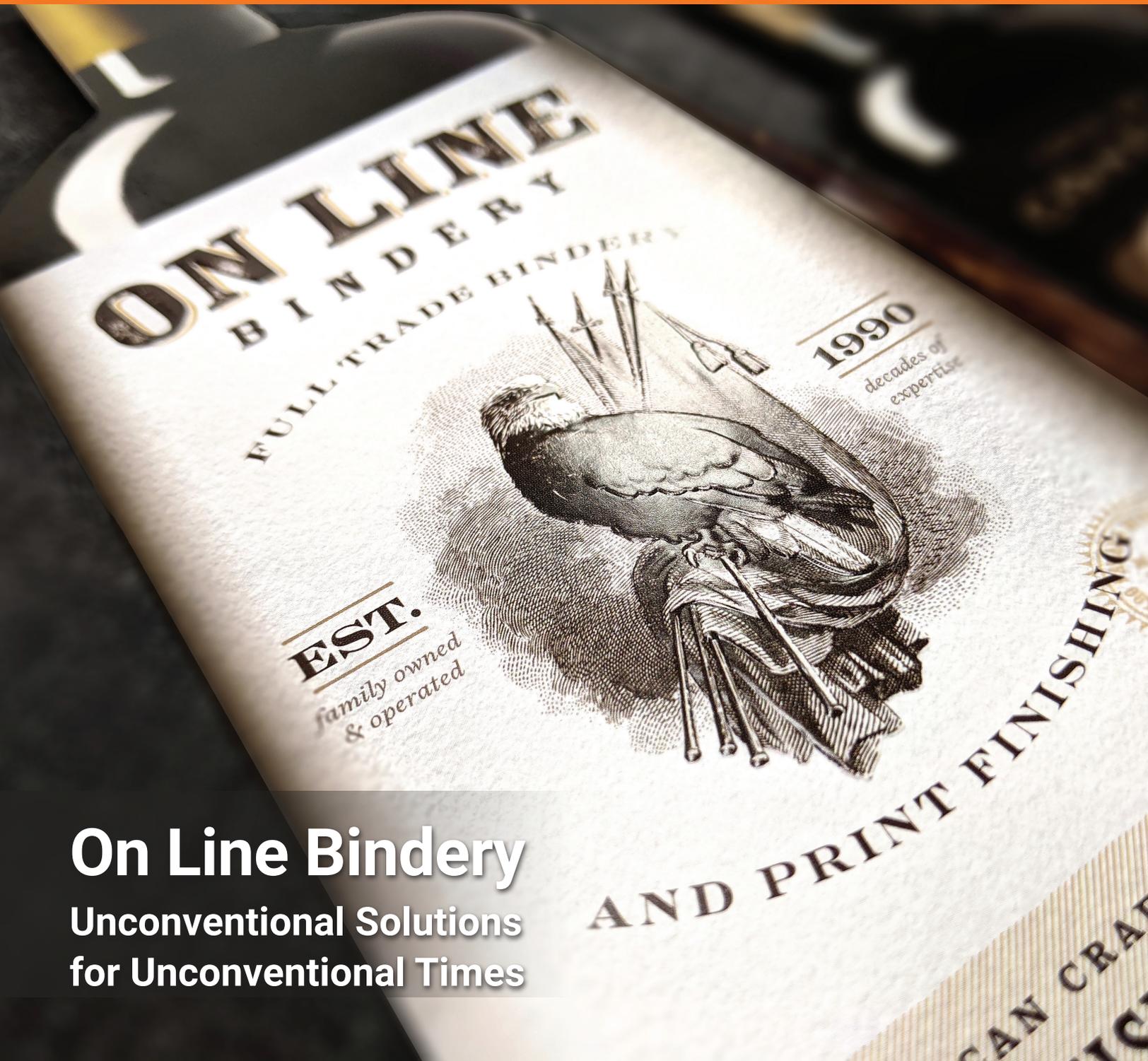


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VISUAL MEDIA ALLIANCE

SUMMER 2021



On Line Bindery Unconventional Solutions for Unconventional Times

CONTENTS

03

Letter from the President

08

From the Experts: Getting to the Light at the End of the Tunnel

10

Positive Pivot. Blattel Communications Capitalizing on Challenges to Create Opportunities

12

On Line Bindery is Forging Ahead with Positivity

04 VMA Insider

06 Member News

07 New Members

14 Ask the Experts



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Visual Media Alliance is non-profit trade association serving Northern California visual media industry. By providing events, education, discounts, advocacy, industry promotion and insurance programs, we help our 550 member firms become more successful and profitable.

ON THE COVER

An award-winning self-promotional piece produced by On Line Bindery at their facilities using seven embellishment processes.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings Valued Members,

The great post-COVID reset is here. The next 12-18 months is about rebuilding our industry.

Throughout the pandemic there have been pockets of strength in label, packaging, and other specialized niches. It's time for the rest of our industry and personal lives to catch up as we pivot back to traveling, eating out at restaurants, taking trips on airplanes, and going to see movies, concerts, sports, and other live events. With improved confidence in the economy, I am certain that demand for our creative and printed services will return.

In this issue of *Connected* we hear from some of our most respected industry colleagues on what they think the future might hold. Perseverance, persistence, and patience are the keywords for the recovery.

VMA can help in a lot of ways. Looking for a new employee? Take advantage of our online jobs center and post an opening. We are happy to assist with the job descriptions. Every ad posted on VMA is also posted on the job website Indeed.

Looking to promote your company and connect with old and new customers? Join one of our online events such as Collective Conversations or our new virtual networking referral group SalesCircle or come to VMA's 2021 Golf Tournament and Barbeque on September 23. This will be our first live events in over a year, and we are looking forward to seeing everyone. And stay tuned for more in-person events this fall.

Want to up your marketing game? Our in-house marketing expert Sonali Shah has hosted several webinars on branding, messaging, and social media with more to follow. For more specific company advice, Sonali is available for a free 30-minute consulting call for members.

For my part, I am ready to get out and meet more of you in your offices and shops in order to better understand how our association can help you prosper. Let me know how we can help. Please reach out to me anytime at ian@vma.bz.



Sincerely,

Ian Flynn

Ian Flynn
President, Visual Media Alliance



“The pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world.”

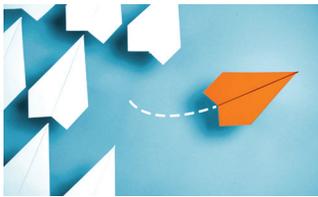
– Professor Klaus Schwab
Founder and Executive Chairman
World Economic Forum



VMA Works to Protect Our Industry

VMA looks out for the industry's best interest in the state legislature. Our lobbyist, RJ Cervantes, works towards our best interest when proposed bills come up, such as single-use packaging tax, the anti-direct mail bill, and others that may hurt our members' profits. Currently, a state ballot initiative and six separate bills affecting the packaging and graphic arts industry could have a significant impact on VMA members. VMA will keep its members in the loop on all our efforts to shape this legislation with legislative updates and webinars.

Print Industry Regional Associations Become Independent



As of June of this year, VMA has ended our contractual relationship with PRINTING United Alliance (PrUA). At the same time, VMA

has expanded our long partnerships with 19 other former Printing Industries of America (PIA) affiliates across the country to continue to bring our members more services.

The separation results from PrUA's new leadership direction that no longer supports local affiliate programs. It won't affect most of our members as more than 90% of all services utilized by members are local. Benefits like Visual Media Access (VMAccess.org) and Wage & Benefits Survey and Report are in combination with our fellow affiliates.

We're increasing sales training and networking opportunities with programs like Sales Vault, SalesCircle, and Collective Conversations. We are also working on creating new graphic arts educational programs.

VMA has served the industry since 1935, and our relationship with our valued members has never been more important. Our programs and services will only continue to expand to meet the needs of our members.



ThinkHR Rebrands As Mineral

In case you didn't already know, VMA members get access to a free HR portal to help your small businesses with many HR activities. There is an employee handbook creation tool, helpful forms and documents, library of common HR questions and answers, and even access to a live HR expert via phone or chat.

Now all those helpful services are available through Mineral, formerly known as ThinkHR. The thinking behind the rebrand: A mineral is an essential building block for a healthy system, and their new name Mineral reflects that HR and compliance—and the people at the center of them—are the essential building blocks for a healthy and successful organization.

You can use your same login. If you need your login info, please contact jessica@vma.bz or visit vma.bz/hr-support/mineral.

As Things Re-Open, Make Sure Your Business Is Covered



Now that everything is re-opening, it's a good time to have a check-up to confirm your business is well protected from risks. VMA currently writes \$30 million in insurance and provides the full range of commercial insurance products.

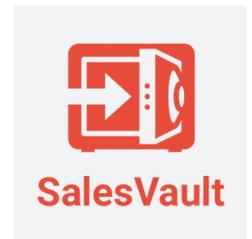
Additionally, as the graphic arts industry association since 1935 in Northern California, we are uniquely qualified to provide you with the best counsel specific to the print and agency small business environment. Now's a good time to ask us about property, liability, umbrella, errors & omissions, workers' comp, and cyber liability insurance.

For example, cyber liability is on the rise with small businesses being the target of choice. We can help with coverage that protects your business up to \$100 million from risk. Contact shannon@vma.bz.

Sales Made Easy with New Sales Vault Portal

We're excited to announce the launch of Bill Farquharson's new online sales portal. The site is a sales resource and community featuring a calendar of ongoing workshops, on-demand courses, and live peer-to-peer discussion. Content is even searchable by sales challenge. **VMA members get the first month free.** After that, you pay a discounted rate of only \$30 per month per participant and can cancel any time.

Sign up for a workshop, drop in on an "Office Hour" peer call, and take in the seemingly endless amount of material available. vma.bz/discounts/sales-vault

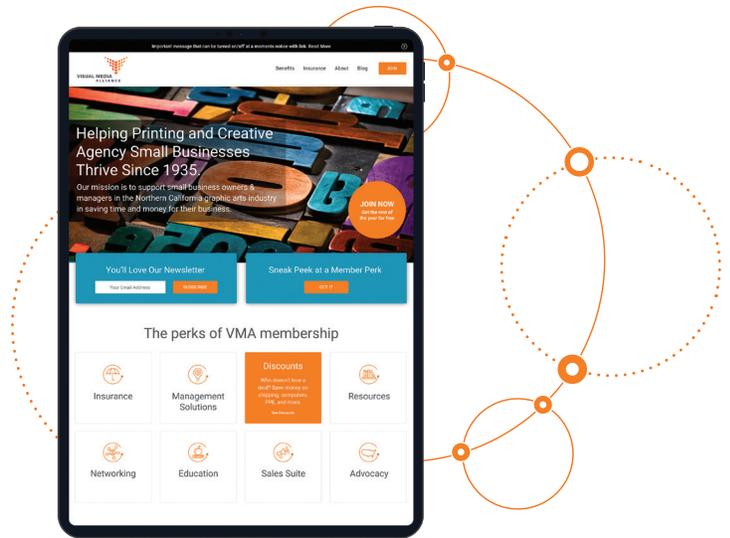


NEW VMA Website Coming Soon

VMA is currently working to update our website. We've engaged VMA member, Adduci Studios (adducistudios.com) for the project.

Adduci Studios is a creative agency centered in the San Francisco Bay Area with team members all over the world. They provide the gamut of services from brand identities to web development.

Adduci Studios is implementing VMA's new brand look to create a design that clearly demonstrates on first glance what VMA is all about. The design is stunning and we hope it helps other printers and agency owners understand who we are and how we can help. For members, it will have an easy user interface and provide you with helpful information on benefits like discounts to business resources to help your business thrive.



UPCOMING VMA EVENTS



Collective Conversations

We continue with the popular Collective Conversations group. This series is a virtual round table discussion with VMA members featuring different topics. We launched last May at the start of COVID and it has been well attended. Business topics have included "Small Business Recovery," "Health Insurance Q&A," "HR Legal Issues," "Managing Your Workforce," and "Marketing Tips." We've also had events focused on HR, marketing, sales technology, cybersecurity, and more. You can see upcoming events at vma.bz/cc.



Golf Tournament

At last, we can meet again safely in-person! Come join your colleagues on September 23rd for VMA's 2021 Golf Tournament. The event will be at the Metropolitan Golf Links in the centrally located East Bay near the Oakland airport. You'll want to join us for the golf tournament and BBQ or just the BBQ for networking and fun. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Stay tuned for the email invite or contact shannon@vma.bz for more information.



Pop Up Events

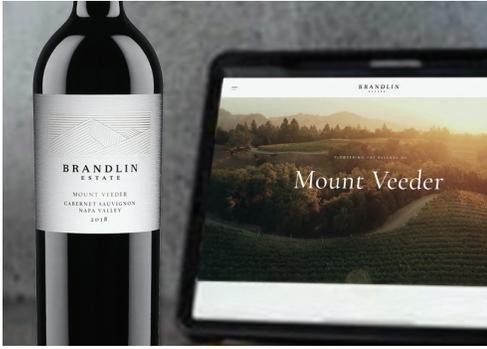
We're also adding in some fun pop-up events starting this fall at different locations across the region to make it easier for folks to attend. There will be an educational component, as well as networking option that we all missed, and these will be a great way to re-connect and network in-person!



SalesCircle

Join your colleagues and fellow VMA members at a monthly industry referral networking group. We'll have a mix of virtual and in-person events. Our second event had 17 attendees with lots of enthusiasm, connections, and referrals. We hope you come join us! Visit vma.bz/salescircle or contact shannon@vma.bz.

MEMBER NEWS



Affinity Creative Rebrands Napa Valley's Brandlin Estate

Located in the heart of Napa Valley's famed Mount Veeder AVA, Brandlin Winery has been renamed Brandlin Estate, with the help of Affinity Creative Group. Brandlin Estate's parent company, Two Estates Wine Collective, engaged the agency to accomplish the rebranding program that included new packaging and wine labels, as well as a redesigned website.

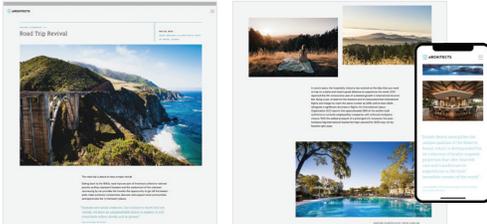
Brandlin Estate's crisp new packaging system features a modern reinterpretation of the winery's previous mountain logo. Artfully rendered as a geometric representation of Mount Veeder, the agency used embossed parallel lines and patterns to subtly suggest mountain vine rows. The new website and online wine shop are now active at brandlinestate.com.



Kelly Spicers Acquires California Supply North, Expanding NorCal Packaging Footprint

This spring, Kelly Spicers (kellyspicers.com) acquired California Supply North (calsupply.com), a specialty packaging distributor that serves the Northern California region. Known as Cal Supply North, the company was founded in 1987 to serve the region's sizable apparel industry. Since then, it has built a broad portfolio of customized packaging solutions for the food and beverage, medical devices, and electronics industries while continuing to grow in the footwear and apparel space.

The acquisition of Cal Supply North is part of an overall strategic push by Kelly Spicers to expand its growing industrial and retail packaging business, which has a solid presence in both Northern and Southern California serving the Western U.S.



Chen Design Creates An Immersive Website Experience

Chen Design helped SB Architects mark 60 years of acclaimed architectural work, from custom homes to global destinations. Chen Design worked to strategically guide them to maximize their brand potential. They created the design framework for a new website, setting them up for success well into the future. The result is an immersive, inspiring, and relevant web experience worthy of their award-winning work. chendesign.com



Copa Wins Silicon Valley Business Journal Latinx award

The *Silicon Valley Business Journal*, the most prominent and trusted business news source in the Silicon Valley, recognized Copa Design as one of the area's top Latinx Business Leaders.

The Latinx Business Leadership Awards was launched in 2019 to honor Latinx business professionals and companies who have demonstrated both professional success and a dedication to helping others in the Latinx community. The Business Journal also awards companies for their track record in hiring, retaining, and promoting Latinx directors and executives. Other criteria include the strength of a company's employee resource group, its external outreach and messaging, and the makeup of its leadership ranks. copa.design



Northern California's First Only Performance J Press Sheetfed Inkjet Press

Spectrum Lithograph has introduced Northern California's first and only high-performance J Press digital sheet fed inkjet press! This will help printers with cost-savings, the ability to provide quick turnarounds, and offer low minimums, all with consistent color and perfect registration. It's a great product for short-run test market cartons and prototypes. spectrumlithograph.com

NEW MEMBERS

EDITION ONE

Edition One

Edition One Books works with design professionals, photographers, artists, and other creative types to manufacture short-run books of unmatched quality and customization. They are focused on building long-term relationships with their customers and strive to offer a more personalized self-publishing and book production service. Their wide selection of fine materials, combined with their beautiful printing, truly custom formatting, and hand-on personal service allow their customers to create the books they envision.

Joe O'Connor
518-986-3054
joe@editiononebooks.com
editiononebooks.com



Kyocera

Kyocera provides award-winning printers, software solutions, and consumables. Customers benefit from smart ideas, lower costs, greater productivity. Their goal is to be a valuable partner that grows together with their customers—the 'Customer-First' principle is their top priority. For more than 20 years, they have minimized environmental impact by developing long-life, low-waste printers and multifunctional products to support their customers.

Steve Michel
415-516-4466
steve.michel@da.kyocera.com
da.kyocera.com



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Printers

Wheeler-Sonoma Printers

Wheeler-Sonoma Printers, is a full-service shop that specializes in commercial printing, including electronic prepress, and binding services since 1948. Baird Conner, whose expertise in printing spans more than 20 years, is the newest owner of Wheeler-Sonoma. Wheeler-Sonoma's product offering has expanded to include engraved stationery to complement the other special processes of foil stamping and letterpress printing. Updates in pre-press machinery and print management software offers convenient online ordering and cloud-based inventory management for their customers.

Baird Conner
707-643-6383
bconner@wheeler-sonoma.com
wheeler-sonoma.com



ZypPages

ZypPages is the simplest way to post a document to the web. ZypPages uploads any document directly from any computer in any format and establishes the owner's mobile number as the online connection link. This can be a business or personal profile, a daily recipe, event details, or just general information. It provides an online presence without tech support. Its sweet spot is the huge under-served market of sole proprietors and service providers who do not or cannot have a conventional web site.

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Getting to the Light at the End of the Tunnel

BY REVA HARRIS

MEET OUR EXPERTS



Michael Hicks is the general manager of Andresen, a Bay Area graphic imaging business that was founded in 1949.



Barbara O. Stephenson is the chief experience officer and owner of 300FeetOut, a San Francisco-based creative studio with over 20 years of experience.

It's safe to say that we've never experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic. And even though we're finally starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel, uncertainty still abounds. We talked to two graphics arts business leaders to get their guidance on how to prepare for the months ahead.

Take a Clear-Headed Approach to the Future

Both Hicks and Stephenson plan to focus on short-term strategies to stay flexible. "Long-term planning in this day and age is like buying green bananas," says Hicks. "You need to be able to pivot and respond as the business starts to come back." Stephenson says her team isn't assuming that things are going back to normal. "We're trying to plan out where we're going to be in two years because that's as far out as we can go," she says. We're assuming things are going to be the way they are now."

And while there is much to be hopeful about, disruption in buyer relationships and supply chains will continue. "Buyers that we had relationships with over the last 15, 20, or 30 years; that has all been disrupted and dislodged in a major way," Hicks says. "It's taken years to build up these relationships.

Some of those people are going to come back, and some are not."

It's not just relationships that may not be there. Inventory that was always expected to be available through local distributors may be in short supply or unavailable completely. Hicks says he had two experiences where materials he thought would be available were not.

"People involved in purchasing materials have to be careful," he says. "A lot of plastic has gone into making personal protective equipment (PPE), and resources are being diverted at the mill level."

Expect those pressures to continue. According to McKinsey, demand for PPE will keep rising over the next few years, and uncertainty around availability of raw materials for plastics will persist.¹



Seize New Opportunities

The rise of remote work is likely to be one of the most lasting impacts of the pandemic. According to LinkedIn, many industry experts predict that more workplaces will take a hybrid approach, with some employees working from home, and others working in the office.² Stephenson points out that, “We need to be prepared to be flexible and we need to look towards options like mailing things to people at home as an opportunity instead of a detriment. There is an opportunity in the next year to send more business direct mail to people’s homes.”

Here’s How Some Companies Are Cracking the Code to Reach Remote Workers:

- 1 Add Some Oomph to Onboarding**
New customers will likely be excited to receive an onboarding kit with swag and collateral that will help them implement a new product or service more easily. In this case, marketers are typically able to ask for addresses outright.
- 2 Use Data Vendors**
Some companies have already found ways to reach remote workers using public sources and third-party contact data to gather home addresses. To improve conversions, recipients receive an email asking them to confirm their address before the mailer is sent.
- 3 Offer Swag in Exchange for Addresses**
Who doesn’t love a free water bottle or t-shirt? Some marketers are getting their prospects to opt in by offering free swag in exchange for completing a survey or attending a demo.

Make Your Employees Feel Safe and Secure

Running a business over the last 18 months has probably made you appreciate your employees more than ever. It’s important to make sure they feel safe and secure in their roles so they don’t run out of steam. Hicks foresees ongoing infection control practices: “We’re going to need to continue the practices that we’ve implemented over the last year well into the future. Three months from now, and even a year from now, I still see us using social distancing, face masks, and good hygiene to keep people healthy.”

Stephenson says a smart approach to compensation can give employees a sense of security, even though revenue may continue to be unsteady. “Instead of giving raises, give bonuses. Raises make you financially on the hook, no matter how well the business does.” She recommends that businesses offer bonuses quarterly instead of yearly so that the payout can reflect actual cash flow. “I’ve broken it down into smaller chunks so that I can monitor the health of the company. That way I’m not on the hook for a large bonus at the end of the year.”

Be Optimistic, But Cautious

There may be a light at the end of the tunnel, but there’s no reason to go full steam ahead towards it. Concerns about transmitting COVID-19 will persist. Budget and supply chain uncertainties will endure. And maintaining employee morale will be an ongoing challenge. These aren’t reasons to give up; instead they’re a call to keep on pushing. Hicks sums it up well: “Be persistent to persevere.”

Sources:

- <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/advanced-electronics/our-insights/navigating-opportunity-in-the-us-personal-protective-equipment-market>
- <https://blog.linkedin.com/2020/december/15/reimagining-the-workplace-predictions-for-2021-and-beyond>

A

Positive Pivot

Capitalizing on Challenges to Create Opportunities

BY TAMMY TROUT

Communications. Marketing. Business development. All these were tough to accomplish during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Blattel Communications is fully prepared to move forward and get back to the business of helping businesses. The 30-year-old, San Francisco-based agency specializes in public relations and marketing for professional services companies such as lawyers, accountants, real estate, and construction companies.

As an agency with an ongoing retainer-based business that requires momentum and continuous care and feeding to deliver results, the pause during 2020 was a major challenge for the company and its clients. Traci Stuart, president of Blattel Communications, says the agency was well positioned to find ways for clients to stay relevant and visible through owned-media channels, blogs, podcasts, newsletters, etc. She believes those high-demand industries are doing well, with all signs pointing to a positive for a recovery in the next 18 months or so.

By maintaining open communications with clients that were willing to plan for recovery, Stuart says the agency stayed busy as well. A prior technology

upgrade, being open to virtual communication, and an eagerness to capitalize on the full potential of digital tools all played a role in allowing the agency to prosper post-pandemic.

A Remote Shift

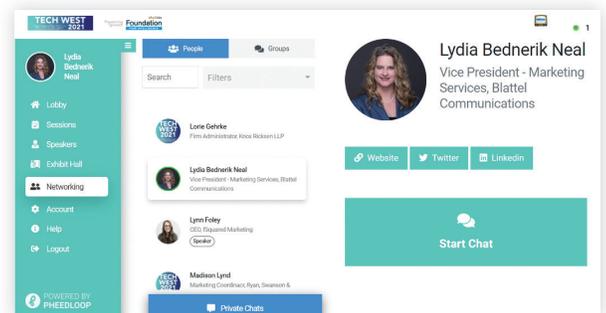
Although she's wearied of using the word "unprecedented," Stuart fully understands the toll the pandemic took on the PR and marketing industry. But, she and her team of eight full-time employees and several part-time contractors have adapted and adopted tools and processes that will become part of their future.

They use a SaaS tool as well as in-house systems for tracking media and took what could have been downtime to delve deeper into the products to become more proficient and learn to maximize efficiency. This is facilitating them to better leverage the available data to help clients understand the full impact of their visibility. The agency has used those results as part of their sales outreach.

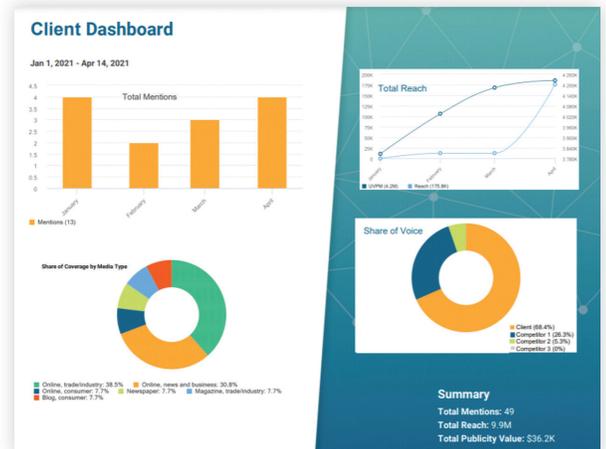
Stuart also instituted more regular interactions with employees to help combat the isolation of working remotely. "We wanted people to feel connected," she says. "I probably

communicate directly with team members more now than when we were all in the office together because it was so easy to take it for granted that someone would be around when you walk through the office."

Working remotely wasn't unheard of for the company before COVID-19, but the challenges of 2020



Blattel networking during virtual conference



Blattel Client Dashboard



“I feel like we all navigated this, and it's been such a big growth experience”

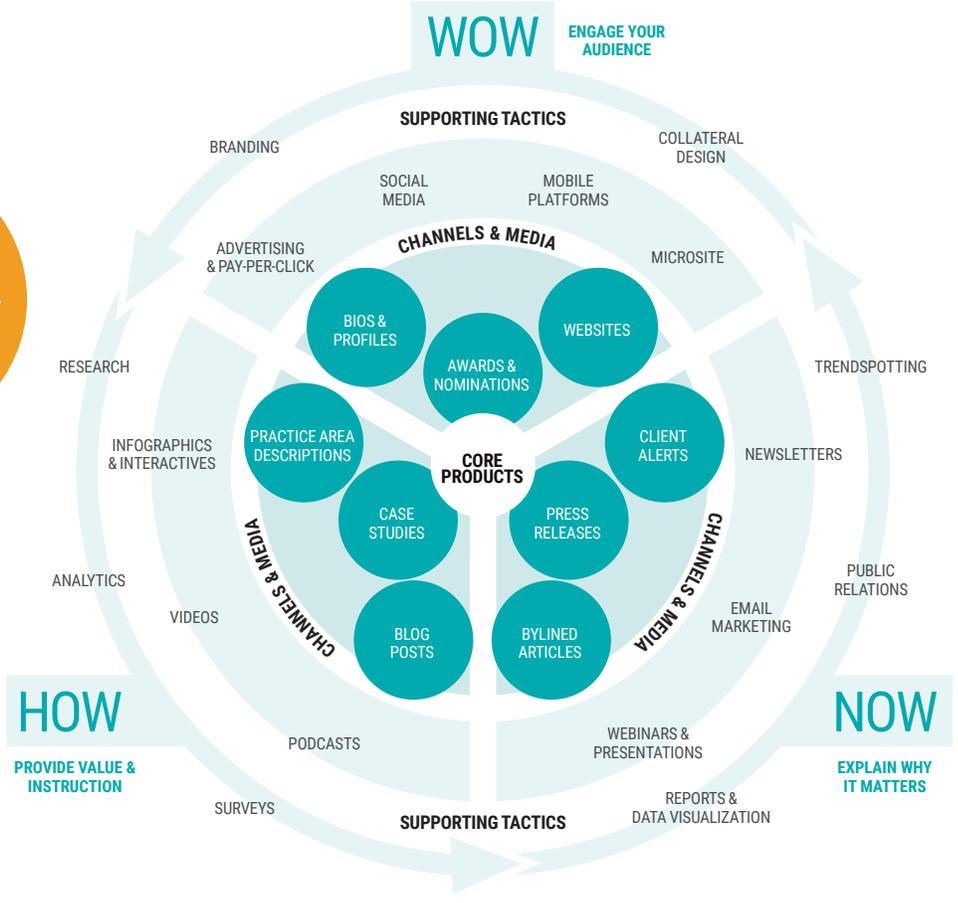
accelerated the evolution that would have taken five years into about six months. For many of knowledge-based workers, a new hybrid reality with a much more individualized approach to work environments and work setups is more common than traditional scenarios. “We’re certainly going to embrace it in the long-term, especially to be open to other geographies to find employees in the next couple of years,” says Stuart.

A Digital Model

The importance of virtual connection was also leveraged to help their clients connect with new media opportunities. Reporters, editors, and producers were hungry for content, so instead of having to pull an expert into a studio to do a video interview as they had in the past, the agency helped clients and media pivot to video interviews, which helped build relationships. That yielded significant media results for traditional and owned channels because everyone needed to develop content, and the Blattel team used technology to help both media and its clients.

Being able to provide those added value pieces digitally and remotely enabled the agency to serve existing clients as well as potential clients which is translating to additional professional opportunities. She says clients are more open to virtual experiences in general, which extends to pitch meetings and digital conferences.

“We’ve done a lot of pivoting for clients so that they can present in the virtual environment, but also so they’re exhibiting and maximizing their conference experience,” she says. Instead of just placing clients on an industry-specific speaking platform, they’re comfortable with a digital platform including virtual trade show booths and networking online.



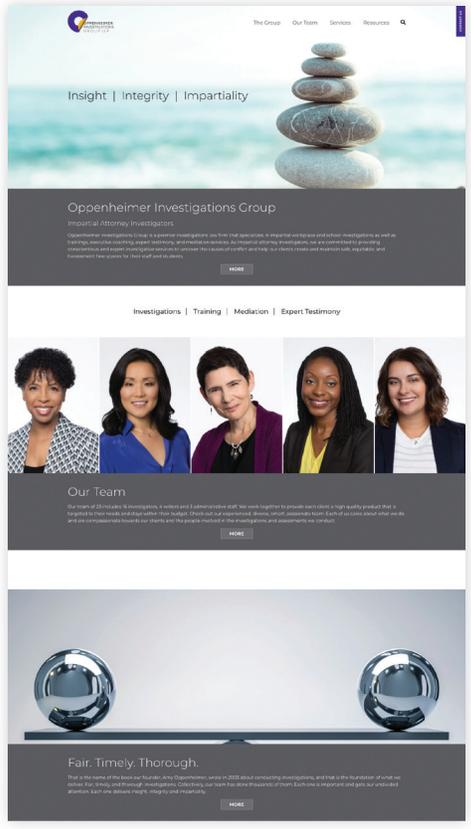
“Content is Our World” is an Infographic on core products, channels and media, and supporting tactics to provide marketing opportunities that Blattel Communications provides to their clientele.

A Growth Mindset

The agency invested in a major cloud technology transformation in 2019 which positioned it well going forward. That enabled the team to be nimble and focus on other tasks when many of their clients were scrambling to adapt to the new circumstances. Stuart says they were able to do more in-depth research and planning that served them especially well as business returns.

“I feel like we all navigated this, and it’s been such a big growth experience,” she says. “It’s always good to stretch and evolve. I work with a lot of senior level professionals who can be entrenched in their processes and ways. But 2020 showed us all that there are a lot of different ways we can do business.

“I hope this spirit continues across the board in the business environment—the willingness to take risks, try new things, and do things differently. There are so many possible rewards from being willing to expand and to grow. I know this mindset will continue for our agency.”



Some Blattel clients, like Oppenheimer Investigations Group, used the pandemic period to work on branding and website relaunches.

On Line Bindery is Forging Ahead with Positivity

and Not Being Afraid to Get a Little Weird

BY REVA HARRIS

Like so many business owners, Ernest Lompa, President of On Line Bindery in Richmond, CA, has mastered the art of pivoting his business to stay afloat through the pandemic. Lompa says, "It's been an extremely hard road, but we're coming out way stronger as a company on the other side." He has always relied on a positive outlook to rally his close-knit group of 75 employees: "We think of ourselves as a family and not so much as a company. We keep our relationships on a positive note with our employees to hold them accountable, as they keep us accountable for moving the company forward in a positive way."

That sunny-side-up attitude has served the team at On Line Bindery well over the past 18 months. And they've implemented practices that will continue to serve the business as we all face the uncertainties of recovery in the months ahead.

Connecting With Customers in New Ways

Lompa takes pride in On Line Bindery offering a neutral space, where various designers, printers, and their customers can visit and discuss new ideas. But even with widespread vaccine availability, some visitors are still hesitant to come into the office. Lompa's plan is to continue some of the out-of-the-box solutions he initiated during the pandemic. One solution started as an employee break area and has evolved into an outdoor venue for hosting customers who are wary of face-to-face meetings.

The "Hangout Zone" was built to accommodate On Line Bindery's need for a new employee break area after the old break room was turned into an office for its envelope department. Featuring 18 microwaves, marble counters, a misting system, and all the fixings of a great place to kick back and relax, the new break area was built inside a shipping container and includes an outdoor seating area. Best of all, On Line Bindery's employees got to participate in its construction,



Ernest Lompa, President, On Line Bindery, invites designers to visit his shop so he can share inspirational pieces hot off the press. Pictured here a self-promotional printed piece using an astonishing seven presses to complete including: die cut, accordion fold, foil stamp, embossing, debossing, and various coatings and films.

since there was a lull in customer projects during the pandemic. Now, the employees have a great new place to hang out and customers can enjoy a modern, safe meeting area with refreshments nearby.

Getting Weird to Stay Relevant

When those customers come in to visit, Lompa doesn't want them to see the same old, same old. He's a big proponent of offering unconventional solutions like antimicrobial film coatings, laser etching, and foil stamping to his customers. "Digital is cool in one sense, but it pushes fast and cheap too much and there's nothing new," he says. "We're trying to push

“It’s been an extremely hard road, but we’re coming out way stronger as a company on the other side”

people outside of the normal saddle-stitch or folded brochure. You’ve got to get into something that’s weird and stands out way above the standard stuff that people have been doing forever.”

In pre-pandemic times, he relied on trade shows to learn about new, interesting offerings. Now, he tries to think of things outside of his trade. For example, he takes a lot of inspiration from the wine industry, since it’s constantly trying to attract high-value buyers with discerning tastes. With that insight he creates personalized samples, such as laser-etched cutting boards and oversized candy bars with custom foil stamped and embossed wraparound sleeves, to send to customers.

To get buy-in for his “weird” new finds, Lompa invites designers to see what’s new at On Line Bindery. Even though the designer isn’t the buyer, their decisions impact the printing process. By establishing a relationship with them, On Line Bindery stays top of mind when designers are seeking out new creative printing solutions. They also have an office where they keep samples of their weird projects and designers can bring their customers to get ideas. “If you can get a customer’s customer to see value in new things, you can inspire them to invest more,” Lompa says.



On Line Bindery’s COVID-19 Mobile Outdoor Showroom to show ideas to inspire the customers’ customer in the safety of the outdoors for a visit.

Keeping Employees Engaged

Lompa’s engaged employee base has been vital to raising the bar of On Line Bindery’s service and bringing fresh perspectives to the table. “We’ve got 75 families that this company supports,” he says, and he sees them as equals across the board. “It doesn’t matter what they’re doing for the company, they’re doing it to support the 75 families, and all the customers’ families.” For example, with so many guests coming to their facility, Lompa understands how much the business is judged by its restroom. Three years ago, he renovated the restrooms, and a member of their staff, Rosa, keeps them looking “as good as Nordstrom’s.” He also has several former business owners on staff. They bring personal relationships and an entrepreneurial perspective that helps attract and retain customers.

Across the board, employees are cross-trained in everything—from estimating to case binding—so team members can take time off without stressing about work piling up while they’re gone. It also makes them more valuable. “Employees are the number one focus. We like to jazz them up and get them to step up and challenge themselves.”

Looking Into the Crystal Ball

In terms of opportunity, Lompa advises fellow graphic arts business owners to keep their eyes on the packaging, cannabis, and alcohol industries, as well as pharmaceuticals. But most importantly he encourages them to take the advice his father gave him when he was a young business owner: “Do not worry about what the competition is doing. Forget everybody outside your building. You’re your own competition based on what you’re doing to better yourself every day.”



Sample of On Line Bindery’s laser-etched cutting board to show the intricate details that can be created so clients can be inspired.



Antimicrobial film coating can be applied on restaurant menus and anything that is printed. The antimicrobial coating can effectively kill the COVID-19 virus.



MARKETING & THE FUTURE

SONALI SHAH, VMA'S DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Whether you are just starting in marketing your print shop or you are a marketing agency leader or somewhere in between, one thing is for certain, marketing has changed dramatically in recent times as a result of COVID-19 and other factors. And marketing will continue to evolve. Here are three trends graphic arts leaders should consider.

The Continued Rise of Digital

Although online marketing has been growing for years, the events of 2020 led to a significant increase in digital connections. If you don't already have a digital marketing plan, you'll want to add that to your list of "To Do's" as soon as possible.

Creating a digital marketing plan will help you stay on track and committed. You'll want to consider the time you have available, your budget, your customers and prospects, and the right mix of digital tactics—emails, eNewsletters, social media posts, website updates, SEO, blogs, etc.—to meet your objectives.

If you already have the basics down, make a goal to learn more, implement more best practices, incorporate testing, look at your metrics, and make improvements.

If you need help getting started, want to discuss the pro or cons of social media over blog writing, or want eNewsletter best practices, please reach out to me, and I would be happy to help. VMA members get a complimentary half-hour marketing consultation.

Print Marketing Becomes Stronger

Print marketing may have only become stronger due to COVID-19. With people so focused online all day, direct mail stands out. Using fun folds, die cuts, and techniques like shimmering can enhance this ability to catch people's limited attention even further.

If you're a printer, take advantage of your own services by sending a creative direct mail piece to your customers and prospects. If you are a creative agency, design that piece. Consider partnering with another VMA member and work out a fun trade to accomplish this. Check out other VMA members online at [VMAccess.org](https://vmaaccess.org).

Conscientious Customers

With all that has happened globally, the state of the environment, and millennials taking the reins, there is a new emphasis on connecting purchase decisions to what matters to people. This focus on purchasing products and services with diversity, inclusion, and commitment to the environment in mind is greater in B2C, but it trickles up to B2B.

To help differentiate your business, think of ways you can show your support for these critical issues. Consider checking out PrintReleaf, an easy way to increase your sustainability footprint. VMA members receive 25% off published rates. See vma.bz/discounts/printreleaf.

Many more exciting things are coming to marketing in the coming months from mobile-first websites to exciting AI applications. VMA will be hosting some Collective Conversations on marketing topics, from the basics to new trends, so be sure to attend, learn something new, and connect and share with your peers.

Sonali Shah is VMA's Director of Marketing & Communications. She holds an MBA in marketing from the University of Colorado, Boulder and has over 20 years of marketing experience across both agency and in-house and print and digital. She's worked with leading brands like AT&T, Mercedes, Dropbox, startups, and non-profits, and has expertise in B2B marketing. She can be reached at sonali@vma.bz or 415-846-5973.



RESTART FASTER WITH THE RIGHT PRICE

BOB LINDGREN, PRINTING CONSULTANT

After the disaster of 2020, you want to come back and come back fast. If your prices are out of sync with the market, your comeback will be slow and painful. If your pricing matches your client's realities, you'll get the orders without leaving money on the table because you're lower than you need to be.

Your first temptation may be to think of pricing as an exercise in cost accounting. Going down that path leads to spreadsheets that sum up the hours it will take to complete the job, the cost of the materials that will be needed, etc. To that, we add in our overhead and our version of a reasonable profit, and that's our price. Then, we present it to our client who, hopefully, says OK and we're happy campers blissfully ignorant of the reality that we left money on the table. We could have gotten more had we only asked—possibly a lot more.

However, a decent percentage of the time the client says, "I don't think so." Maybe the price is over their budget or they have a lower quote from someone else. At that point we either walk away with nothing or we invent a way to offer a lower price without looking foolish.

Obviously, either way it's a bad outcome. Thus, the challenge is: How can we get out of this box? The source of the problem is that our cost-driven pricing process is focused on us, not on the client and, more importantly, on the value of the project to them. If we knew what it was worth to them, we wouldn't leave money on the table nor lose the order.

The first step is to think "hour prices" not "hour costs." The rates we use should not be what our accounting system thinks are our "costs" but our best guess as the numbers generally prevailing among our competitors. Granted, this is an educated guess, but it's far better than an exercise in bean-counting that ignores the outside world.

The next step is to focus on our relationships with our clients. Some of them give us the work on a regular basis because they trust us and like what we do—these clients should be marked up as they know our value. Others are strict price shoppers and go with the low bid—they should be discounted, as something is better than nothing.

The final step, which should be taken on large or unusual projects, is to focus on the importance of the project to the client. Is this the key to a major new product launch or a throw-away safety booklet? Does the client have lot of time to get it done or are they way behind schedule already?

Bob Lindgren earned an MBA in accounting and finance from the University of Chicago. He then began a lifetime career in printing, ultimately becoming president/CEO of Printing Industry of Southern California. After retiring, he embarked on a career of consulting with printing firms on financial and management issues including pricing policy, sales compensation, machinery acquisition, and mergers/acquisitions. He can be reached at 818-219-3855 and bob.lindgren815@gmail.com.



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