

CONNECTED

VISUAL MEDIA ALLIANCE

WINTER 2024



LABELS

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See more information at <https://bit.ly/40k7NuC>

For questions, contact shannon@visualmediaalliance.org.

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**VISUAL MEDIA
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665 Third St, Ste 500
San Francisco, CA 94107
800-659-3363
info@vma.bz

Visual Media Alliance is non-profit trade association serving Northern California printers, packaging, label makers, and design agency and other small business owners. By providing events, education, discounts, advocacy, industry promotion and insurance programs, we help our member firms become more successful and profitable.

ON THE COVER

Display of Labels from Custom Label and Decal

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Valued Member,

I've always found label manufacturing fascinating – the craft of creating labels that look exceptional and serve their purpose seamlessly. Whether it's paper labels, metal labels, or images directly printed onto glass, our label makers here at VMA in Northern California possess unparalleled capability and capacity.

For commercial printers, the allure of investing in a label press might be tempting. However, before making such a decision, consider this: We have top-notch trade-only label shops that can safeguard your accounts, enabling you to focus on your core strengths.

Labels play a vital role – they communicate effectively and leave a lasting impression; the labels chosen for products need to meet the highest creative standards. For your next label project consider exploring the possibilities up close. Perhaps visit a label shop in person to take a plant tour. You will learn what is possible and see how they push the envelope. All the label houses featured in this issue of *Connected* welcome visitors.

Label printing offers many opportunities for your clients to stand out. They are valuable real estate for any brand, from catching attention, to conveying value, to leaving a memorable mark. In our latest issue of *Connected*, you'll discover insights from industry experts and real-world expertise from label houses.

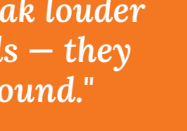
Our goal is to inform and inspire you. Please tell us if we can help set up introductions or make connections.

Feel free to reach out to me anytime at ian@visualmediaalliance.org.



Sincerely,

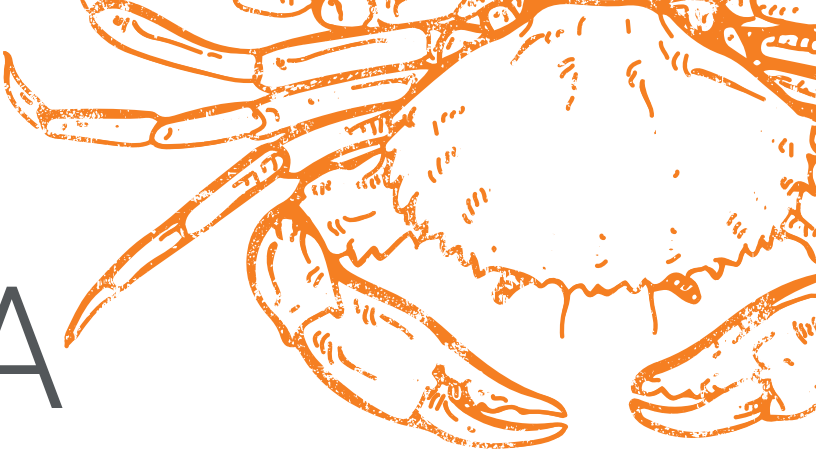
Ian Flynn
VMA President



*"Labels speak louder
than words – they
stick around."*

Anonymous





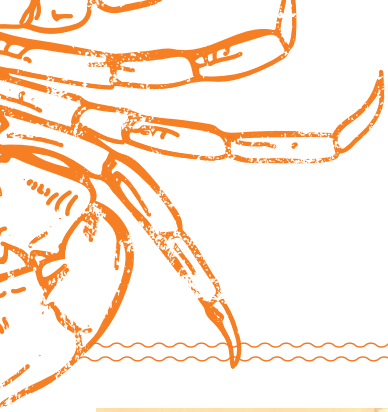
2024 VMA *Claw-some CrabFest*

This February we celebrated our 24th annual Crabfest event, bringing together colleagues in the visual media industries for fun, live music, and connections as crackin' as the delicious Dungeness crab!

Thank you to our sponsors and all those that came out to celebrate. And a special congratulations goes out to Jeff Jarvis for winning the 2024 "Crab-tastic Award"!

Relive the memories below and check out more photos of the event at <https://bit.ly/3ugZLsv>.





CANON CORNER

GREEN IS GOOD

By Rusty Davis, Senior Account Executive, Canon Production Printing Systems

If Gordon Gekko, a character in the 1987 film “Wall Street,” was working in the 21st Century, he would agree that “Green is Good.” It’s good for all of us now, and well into the future. Canon continues to drive this message forward in many facets of the company, from our cultural philosophy of “Kyosei,” to our toner and cartridge recycling program at Canon Virginia, our Production Printing Systems (PPS) in Boca Raton, and going green with our Eco Start Program.

Last year alone, the PPS funded the planting of 230,620 trees on behalf of our customers. Overall, Canon PPS has sponsored the planting of over 2 million trees with the Trees for the Future organization (trees.org). When you become a Canon PPS customer, or add to your fleet, Canon PPS will contribute to the program the first year on behalf of your company based on your number of presses!

Want to learn more? Give me a ring! rudavis@csa.canon.com c: 925-949-3265.



MEMBER NEWS

Andresen Digital School Field Trip

Last fall, we collaborated with Andresen Digital (sf.andresendigital.com) to bring 16 design students from the College of San Mateo on a field trip to Andresen's imaging and brand imagineering print shop in Burlingame. This was a wonderful opportunity for young minds to get inspired by seeing the inner workings of a successful print facility.

See photos of the event below and more at <https://bit.ly/47UyYjC>.

If you are interested in hosting a future student field trip, please contact shannon@visualmediaalliance.org.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Customizable

Customizable/Sticky Holdings

Customizable specializes in the creation of premium labels and packaging. They cater to the discerning needs of the food, beverage, and hospitality sectors, with a particular emphasis on the wine industry. Their expertise lies in crafting labels that aren't just informative, but are works of art.

Ryan Casey
805-269-6785
hello@customizable.com
customizable.com



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Derprosa is a brand of Taghlee Industries. They are considered the leaders in SoftTouch films and manufacture a wide selection of lamination films for a variety of substrates such as signage, book covers, etc. to enhance their durability and style.

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jesse.robinson@tifilms.com
ti-films.com

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Precision Letterpress is a trade print finisher and converter serving California. They excel in foiling, embossing, die-cutting CAD package, and product design with sample making and layout, and more.

Kenneth Barbeiro
916-451-0190
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At Custom Label, Culture Is the Key to Growth

BY REVA HARRIS

When you hear that a business has grown tenfold over twenty years, it's easy to assume that growth came from acquiring new companies or expanding its service offerings. But San Francisco-based Custom Label has taken a different approach. Since Lars Ho-Tseung and his business partner, Scott Dickes, purchased the company in 2002, they haven't tacked on acquisitions or deviated from its core offering. Instead, they've focused on building a culture centered on service and customer relationships.



Dan Crammer, Connie Gouveia, and Lars Ho-Tseung

"Twenty years ago, when we bought the company, we focused on one product segment, which was labels, and then gave our customers exceptional service," says Ho-Tseung. That dedication has led to impressive growth over the last two decades.

Expert guidance comes from within

One of the first things Ho-Tseung did after acquiring the business was to get guidance from existing employees. He asked three key questions. "I went around to every employee and I asked, 'If I gave you a check right now that you could use to buy anything to help our customers and help our business, what would you buy?' The next question was, 'What would be the single dumbest thing we do?' The third question was, 'Who are the best people who have left this company in the last five years?'"

The first two questions helped guide decision-making around investments and process changes. For the third question, everyone named the same person, Connie Gouveia. He reached out to her, took her out to lunch, and she's been back at the company for 20 years. In that time, she and other valued employees have played a pivotal role in constantly revamping the business. "We aren't any one person's Custom Label. We're kind of everybody's blended configuration."

Enabling transformation through technology

Ho-Tseung and the team pride themselves on "blowing up the company" every few years: "We don't go two or three years before looking at everything we do and figuring out how we can do it better."

One of the keys to that constant transformation is technology. Initial technology investments focused on empowering employees with up-to-date information that allowed them to serve customers more effectively. "We built the business by embracing technology and putting in great customer service systems that made customers feel loved."

As Custom Label grew, its customers' demands evolved, which led to more technology and process investments, such as a revamp of the quality management system and the purchase of digital production equipment. Those investments paid off, leading to 2018 being a pivotal year in the company's history. "It was huge because we made a strategic shift to investing very heavily into all the latest technologies...We went through every area from placemaking to artwork systems, to even forklifts." In the middle of that re-birth another key leader, Dan Crammer, joined the team. "Dan brought great ideas and fresh eyes, and he's been a big part of our vision ever since."



Samples of Custom Label's Product Labels

Instead of resting on their laurels, the leadership team decided to deepen their technology investments. For example, they purchased a full servo flexo press with next generation process control. “What we proved to ourselves pretty quickly was we could run the press two to three times as fast and with significantly better quality.” Now, all but one of their presses has been upgraded. Those increased capabilities have played a major part in tripling the size of the business over the last five years.

Never lose sight of where the magic comes from

While technology allows Custom Label to offer customers more and higher levels of service and quality, Ho-Tseung acknowledges that it’s an enabler, not the secret weapon. “The magic for us and the growth for us has come from service. It comes from having awesome people who want to make customers happy, and who are friendly and fast to respond.”

The team at Custom Label prides themselves on delivering what he calls “old-fashioned, answer-the-phone kind of service” and building personal relationships with their customers. “We’re truly more friends with a lot of our customers. We don’t get their business Christmas card; we get their family Christmas card.”

These relationships are fostered through a culture centered on the customer experience. “We have a really tremendous culture where we focus on customers, and every employee feels that they’re part of that process of making the customer happy.” Employees are given the freedom to do whatever it takes to satisfy customers, and they’re rewarded for going the extra mile.

Custom Label offers higher compensation than many of its competitors, along with bonuses, family events, and company trips for sales and service team members. Previous destinations include Hawaii, Nashville, Sedona, and Tahoe. This year, they’re looking at a cruise or a trip to Vancouver.



2023 Livermore Grand Opening



2023 Service Team Trip



Team Members Near a DS3 Press



2023 Holiday Party

“We have a really tremendous culture where we focus on customers, and every employee feels that they're part of that process of making the customer happy.”

The right people deliver the right results

For Ho-Tseung, it comes down to identifying people who are a culture match. “There’s an old quote out there that people are not your best asset, the right people are.” He advises other business owners to keep employees connected to the customer experience. “At any given time, we have everybody involved and fired up about making customers happy . . . Because the culture is all about service.”



Vintage 99 Pours Passion into Every Label

BY REVA HARRIS



Metallic Ink



Faux Foil



Faux Foil

Vintage 99 — named for the year of its inception — was formed at exactly the right time. As a wine label maker, Vintage 99 was perfectly positioned for the turn-of-the-millennium explosion in the U.S. wine industry. With more winemakers competing to stand out on the shelf, the look and feel of wine labels has evolved dramatically over the last 25 years.

The founders of the Northern California-based company saw a void in the region. “Wineries in the Napa, Sonoma, and Livermore areas weren’t getting the level of service and quality that they wanted,” says Brian Lloyd, Vintage 99’s chief marketing officer. The company filled the gap with an unwavering commitment to service: “It’s been 25 years of staying true to the formula of service and viewing labels the way that we know our clients view them.” Today they affectionally refer to this as “High Touch Value,” a term that means more than just selling labels. “It means we provide information, guidance, and technical solutions along with high quality printing.”

Specialization sets Vintage 99 apart

The team at Vintage 99 lives and breathes wine labels. “Our customers put their blood, sweat, and tears into their image, their colors, and all the intricacies that go into a wine label. We have to feel and live that just as much as they do,” Lloyd says. That means Vintage 99 can provide know-how that can be hard to find elsewhere.

For instance, if a client is changing their bottling lines, it’s likely they’ll change the orientation of the rolls with the next job as usual, Vintage 99 knows what to ask upfront to avoid problems downstream. “Being in the industry for a long time, we understand where the pitfalls are, and try to make life easier for our clients.”

Design and print go hand-in-hand

Vintage 99 understands that creating synergy between design and print is essential to making labels that stand out. “The name of the game is

to get the person who is going to buy that bottle of wine interested enough to want to feel it and touch it,” says Lloyd.

For Vintage 99, design and print can also be a package deal. “The best collaboration for a new label project comes when we’re selling labels and design at the same time. Clients actually get better pricing for the design and label printing versus if they did it separately and they get a more streamlined process.”

The company works with designers who specialize in wine and spirits labels for its projects, and clients benefit from their collaborative relationship. “They know the different paper textures, our equipment, and the range of options that we have. That way we are giving the most value to the client and the most shelf impact that we possibly can.” Vintage 99 is always on the lookout for other designers who “know labels and are willing to embrace the production side of label printing.”

“Being in the industry for a long time, we understand where the pitfalls are, and try to make life easier for our clients.”



High Build Varnish



Print Over Foil Stamping



Sculpted Embossed



Sculpted Emboss

Always be innovating

Vintage 99 innovates to give clients access to services that may otherwise be out of reach for small- and mid-sized wineries. Lloyd recalls, “Our clients wanted more intricate embossing and multi-level embossing on smaller digital quantity runs.” The team retrofitted existing equipment to offer sculpted embossing at lower order quantities, a decision that has paid off. Today Vintage 99 offers the same 3D highlights and details as their larger presses but for the smallest of wineries.

Vintage 99 has also created its own proprietary paper. Before the pandemic, bright white felt paper was in high demand. The challenge was that it was hard to find an option that wouldn't wrinkle or turn gray in an ice bucket or refrigerator. “We pushed our vendors to listen to what our market was saying, and we developed this paper called 'Pristine Felt.' It is, by far, the best performing in terms of ice bucket and other moisture resistance.”

Ironically, when the pandemic-caused supply chain issues hit, Vintage 99 was forced to use Pristine Felt for many of its clients and it's since been in popular demand. “It just been a complete knockout. After the supply chain issues died down, we expected some people might want to switch back to the previous paper. Most clients were really happy with it and loved its unique look and performance, at a better price point than the BWF alternative.”

“Sometimes we'll pioneer technology before clients even ask us for it,” Lloyd notes.

For example, Vintage 99 retrofitted its presses and finishing equipment with defect detection systems to catch quality issues faster, which reduces costs, and promotes better quality. The inspection software flags print anomalies that are difficult to see, especially at high speeds and allows the operators to assess immediately if there are defects that need to be addressed during the run. Any print defects are sent digitally to our inspection system where it will automatically stop at the defective labels for removal from the rolls by our Quality Inspector.”

Fine-tune the final product

If there's one thing that underscores Vintage 99's mastery of service, print, and design, it's the proofing and color matching process. Clients can opt to receive actual printed samples using the same paper and printed with the same press that will be used for the final job. This ensures the correct color without surprises. In-person press checks with clients and designers are also encouraged. “We use press checks as a collaborative process.” The press checks are an opportunity to go the extra mile. “We do what's called variations.” The Vintage 99 team will match the colors provided by the designer, but they'll also show other options with variations in color lightness and intensity.

“Sure, that's time and money. But we find in the end, it's worth it,” Lloyd explains. “Because if you're my client or you're my designer, you walk away knowing we explored every single possible variation and option and got the best that we could possibly do.”

Melrose Doesn't Just Make Labels. It Manufactures Solutions.

BY REVA HARRIS



Variable Data Label Example



Metal Nameplate Example



Digital, Screen, Buttons, and Printed Circuit Label Example



UL Printed Label Example

When you've been in business for 85 years, you've seen some major changes in the evolution of print. In the early days of Melrose, a Silicon Valley-based printer, it helped with America's World War II efforts by making durable labels and nameplates. Today, Melrose still provides labels for industrial applications, working with clients in industries like automotive and aerospace. While technology has dramatically changed the types of labels the company makes and how it makes them, the biggest leap has been in the evolution of Melrose's service approach.

Today's clients want more than just labels

In the past, most companies had in-house engineers to develop specs for the materials and adhesives used for labels. The printer's job was simply to follow instructions. Now, many clients don't have that in-house know-how. They turn to Melrose for guidance on the best label for their application.

According to General Manager David Fabris, "We've seen a change in the way we engage with clients. Now, when a client is designing their product, we want to be part of that conversation." There's a lot to cover in these early conversations, from material selection to aesthetics. "A lot of times, these labels are consumer- or end-user facing. You've got to consider the look and the presentation, and how you're representing the brand."

Being a part of the early stages of a project also ensures the team designs for manufacturability. "If a client is going to need 100 parts this month, 1,000 parts next month, and maybe 100,000 in a year, how do we help design a part that can scale so they get all the benefits of function and aesthetics, as well as cost efficiency?"

Compliance is a competitive advantage

Clients rely on Melrose to help them comply with government and industry standards. Many projects must meet rigorous requirements for safety, quality, and durability. Fabris believes "Compliance and business systems that support compliance are critical to our success, so we invested in the resources to remain compliant."

UL-approved labels make up a significant portion of Melrose's business. And to ensure quality control, the company holds the AS9100D and ISO 9001:2015 certifications.



Digital & Screen Print Example



Screen Print Example



Digital, Screen X-Ray Bracket Labels Example



Digital Screen Print with Functional Embossed Buttons Label Example

“The real emerging trend is how we serve our clients...”

With technology, it’s all about balancing the old with the new

While Melrose invests in the latest business systems to meet compliance standards, its print equipment is made up of a combination of traditional and new technology. “In the past, there was an idea that digital printing and traditional printing like screen printing or flexography were competing technologies. We think they are complementary processes. When we combine the two, we can produce work that is unique, innovative, and difficult for our competitors to replicate,” says Fabris.

For example, one client needed a durable label that would be used on a piece of equipment with buttons and a clear display. The trappings on the buttons need to be perfectly sized to fit the equipment, so they were printed digitally. However, screen printing was used for the clear display portion to make it translucent.

There’s always a solution, even if you must make it yourself

Sometimes, Melrose is presented with a problem that requires a solution from outside the print world. An electric vehicle manufacturer requested labels for equipment housing that needed to have a clear window and a speaker hole. The speaker hole needed to let sound out while preventing moisture and dirt from getting in. On top of that, the equipment would be used at varying altitudes, and needed to allow the internal case to balance air pressure at high elevations.

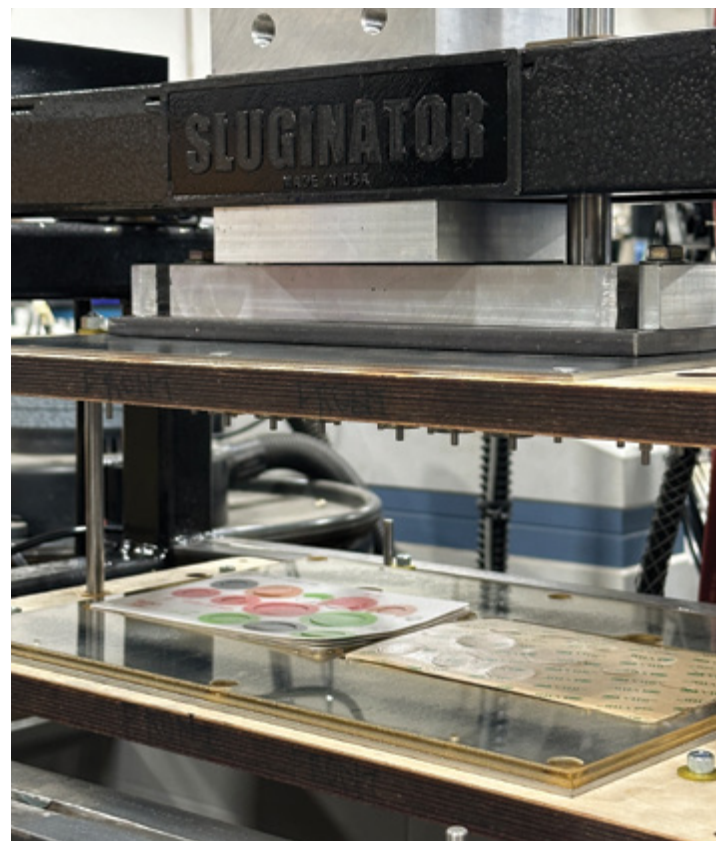
Fabris and the team turned to a new medical film they learned about from 3M. “The same medical tape that’s used to protect wounds – it’s breathable, but it doesn’t let dirt or moisture get in – worked perfectly for sealing the speaker hole.”

Melrose has even built solutions to its own problems. Some projects require labels with numerous cutouts for buttons or other components to go through. Those cut-outs, or slugs, must be removed manually. “If you’re doing that for 20 or 30 parts, it’s not a big deal. If you’re doing that for 20,000 or 30,000 parts, that can be fairly laborious and inefficient. So, we had a press made for us.”

The machine, known as “The Sluginator,” saves the company anywhere from 50 to 90% in labor costs on slug removal. “It takes a job that used to take us 40 hours of labor and reduces that down to about five hours.”

Service evolution, not technology, is the next big thing

For Fabris, the future of label making isn’t shiny new technology. It’s the evolution of the process. “The real emerging trend is how we serve our clients, how we build our expertise in applications and materials, and how we change the conversation from ‘We provide labels’ to ‘We provide solutions. We provide expertise. We provide partnerships.’ And through that expertise, knowledge, and partnership, the output is beautiful labels.”



The “Sluginator” Press



LABELS, OFTEN A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

SANDY FRANZEN, CEO AND FOUNDER, CREATIVE LABELS

Labels play a pivotal role today from providing critical product information to fostering brand recognition to serving various other functions.

The importance of labels throughout history has undergone a remarkable transformation. Initially, labels served a primary function of identification and marking ownership. However, as trade expanded, labels became essential for distinguishing products and ensuring quality, especially in industries like textiles and food.

Into the 20th century, labels became a prominent marketing tool. With the rise of mass production and consumerism, labels evolved from simple tags to intricate designs. Brands began realizing the impact labels could have on consumer perceptions and started investing in memorable designs.

In recent decades, the role of labels has expanded to include ensuring global compliance, addressing environmental concerns, and providing even more eye-catching visual options as the marketplace becomes increasingly crowded.

Labels have in fact become a dynamic part of a brand's narrative. Unique designs and distinctive packaging contribute to a product's individuality, setting it apart from competitors and attracting consumer attention.

Creating a label involves numerous decisions regarding substrate material, ink and printing technologies, color and design, finishing and coatings, adhesives and backings, sizes and shapes, environmental application, and compliance considerations, all while meeting your budget. The intricacies require a nuanced understanding; this is where working with an experienced label printer becomes indispensable.

Label creation today offers almost unlimited choices, from embossed or soft touch labels that add a tactile dimension to polyester or vinyl labels for durability. A guide can help you simplify the complex and help you and your clients meet your goals by presenting various options and price points. Traceability for brand protection and safety, or foil stamping with embossing to help create a high-end look, are just some options.

Recognizing labels as a multifaceted opportunity can empower print and design businesses to guide clients effectively, turning your label into a strategic asset that contributes to the overall success of a brand.

The true potential of labels lies in embracing their versatility and making them an integral part of your business's success, evolving with the times as they have throughout history.

Sandy Franzen has over 40 years of experience guiding customers through successful label projects. Creative Labels owns their 18,000-square-foot production facility with both flexo and digital label manufacturing in-house.
sandyf@creativelabels.com | creativelabels.com



PRINTING SAFE IN 2024: NEW RULES, ZERO ACCIDENTS

STEVE BROOKS, OWNER & OPERATOR, SAFETYNET INC.

In the world of printing, staying updated on safety is crucial for a smooth and accident-free operation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) plays a pivotal role in maintaining workplace safety standards. Here are key changes for 2024 and how you can seamlessly integrate them into your printing processes:

Ensure machine safety: New regulations require that proper guards and interlocks are in place to prevent accidental machine activation. Similarly, guillotine cutters now come with enhanced guarding to keep fingers safe.

Chemical safety is called out: The revised HazCom standard brings a global safety language, making warning labels clearer. And PPE guidelines have been expanded to ensure you have the right gloves, goggles, and respirators for each chemical encounter.

Workplace ergonomics: For enhanced productivity and to combat hunched backs and tired wrists, make sure workstations have an ergonomic design. Another nuance in the workplace is sound, and there are updated noise exposure limits to ensure a quieter work environment and to protect workers.

Indoor heat illness focus: OSHA addresses heat-related hazards through a National Emphasis Program (NEP) in various workplaces, including printing facilities. There is an emphasis on heat monitoring, hydration, rest breaks, and worker education to prevent heat stress.

Accident reduction: Foster a proactive safety culture through training, open communication, proper PPE usage, and continuous improvement. Don't forget to track near misses and incidents, investigate root causes, and proactively implement solutions to prevent recurrence.

By embracing these updates and prioritizing safety, you're not merely ticking boxes, you're investing in a productive, accident-free printing ecosystem. Prevention is always more cost-effective than dealing with post-accident clean-ups.

Consider partnering with safety consultants for a mock OSHA audit and investing in supervisor safety management training to ensure your printing haven is OSHA-ready. This approach ensures a seamless integration of safety measures into your daily operations, promoting a secure and efficient printing environment.

Steve Brooks is the owner and operator of SafetyNet Inc. He has 23 years of prior general industry experience in plant management, production management and as a Journeymen Lithographer. safetynetinc.com | 951-530-1814



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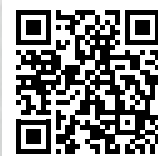


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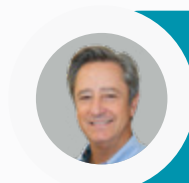


Some things you should be aware of:

- Workers' comp rates can vary between carriers.
- Each carrier has an "appetite" for certain types of business and VMA has strong relationships with insurance carriers that provide the most competitive rates for our industry's classes of business.
- It's easy and quick – in just 3 simple questions, we can let you know if you can save money!
- We are successful in reducing workers' compensation costs 75% of the time.

Besides potential savings, you will be in good hands with our dedicated customer service team that has extensive knowledge of California's workers' comp system.

**Call today and benefit from
the "power in numbers."**



Contact David Katz at
david@visualmediaalliance.org
or 415-495-8242 Ext. 703