



Best of the Best

Top Print Providers

By Denise M. Gustavson

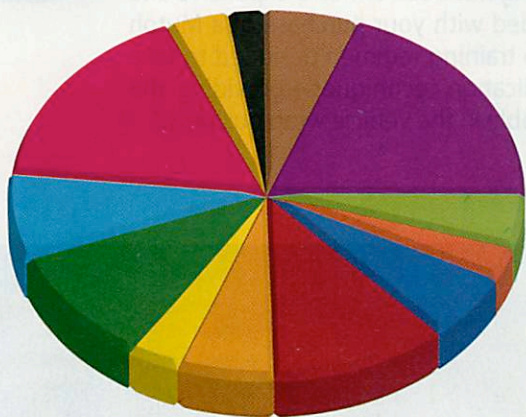
No matter what industry you were in, 2009 was one of the most difficult years in recent history. We saw record numbers of unemployment, the bottoming out of consumer confidence, and cost-cutting measures within both businesses and families. But despite the difficulties, some businesses survived and even thrived. While the majority of the Top Shops saw a distinct impact on their 2009 revenue figures, many—if not all—remain optimistic about the future of the industry and their business.

While we see a number of the same shops from previous years, this year we have expanded the list to include 40 shops. They come from all walks of life—digital color shops, reprographic shops, photo labs, service bureaus, production facilities—and from all over the U.S. Some have a single location, while others do business out of multiple locations over a wide geography. Some are focused primarily on black-

and-white or color images, while others do a little bit of everything.

The shops offer a range of capabilities and services—depending on what their customers need. As an average, 51.98 percent of their output is wide-format (36-96 inches in width) up from 49.40 percent in 2008. Grand-format (96-inches plus) grabs the next largest share with 22.30 percent, down from 23.36 percent the previous year. Medium-format (24-35 inches) runs closely behind with 17.38 percent, up a few ticks from 16.44 percent. The remaining 8.35 percent is in small-format (14-inches and smaller) up from 7.8 percent.

Much like last year, banners and signs (19.65 percent) make up the largest application, with retail and POP displays (17.07 percent) pulling in a close second. Exhibit and trade-show graphics (11.10 percent) and fleet and vehicle wraps (10.09 percent) pull in the next largest segment of business. Posters (7.43 percent), fabric and textile printing (6.04), backlit graphics (5.84), engineering drawings (5.76 percent), billboards (4.68 percent), specialty graphics (3.82), fine art and museum graphics (3.57 percent), décor (2.81 percent) and other applications (2.15 percent) round out the applications.



Backlit Display Graphics	5.84%
Banners and Signs	19.65%
Billboards and Building Wraps	4.68%
Decor Printing	2.81%
Engineering Drawings	5.76%
Exhibit and Trade Show Graphics	11.10%
Fabric and Textile Graphics	6.04%
Fine Art and Museum Graphics	3.57%
Fleet and Vehicle Graphics	10.09%
Posters	7.43%
Retail and POP Displays and Signs	17.07%
Specialty Printing & Graphics	3.82%
Other	2.15%

Economically Speaking

Like last year, the economy is foremost on everyone's minds and nearly all of our top shops said it would be the biggest challenge for them through the next 12 months. But even though things look grim, many have a positive outlook for the future and are planning on investing in their businesses this year.

New equipment—in the form of flatbed printers, dye-sublimation printers, and digital cutting and routing systems—are considerations for many of the top shops within the next 12 months. Electronic signage also came up more and more. Some shops are looking at expanding into this market segment and combine it with the digital print portion of their business to offer a more complete package—especially for retail environments. Additionally, shops are still looking for ways to automate processes with Web-to-print applications, CRM systems, and workflow management systems.

"The economy will continue to be a challenge in the year ahead," said Paul Anstett, president/owner of Fargo, ND-based Mathison's. "Companies will expect their limited marketing dollars to produce results. Many have down-sized their in-house advertising and marketing departments to reduce costs. Printers who can help fill those gaps by providing top



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	COMPANY	OWNER/PRESIDENT	LOCATION	WEBSITE
1	Thomas Reprographics, Inc.	Bryan Thomas	Richardson, TX	www.thomasrepro.com
2	Graphic Tech	Jim Blee & Jim Hamel	Fullerton, CA	www.graphictech.net
3	Graphic Systems Group	Ken Madsen	New York, NY	www.gsgnyc.com
4	Crush Creative	John Davies, Sr. VP and General Manager; Barry Polan, VP of Sales; & Kathy Lencki, VP of Operations	Burbank, CA	www.crushcreative.com
5	Ferrari Color	Kirk Green	Salt Lake City, UT	www.ferraricolor.com
6	Gigantic Color	John & Kathy Bowers	Dallas, TX	www.giganticcolor.com
7	Source One Digital	Randy A. Crow	Norton Shores, WI	www.sourceonedigital.com
8	Andres Imaging & Graphics, Inc.	Richard Cappelletti	Chicago, IL	www.andresimaging.com
9	Point Imaging	Kevin Huseman	Hobart, IN	www.pointimaging.com
10	Sharpe Images	Greg Sharpe	Winston-Salem, NC	www.sharpeimages.com
11	LSI	Mason Ezzell	Memphis, TN	www.yourlsi.com
12	reproHAUS Corp.	Tito Taing	San Diego, CA	www.reprohaus.net
13	ImageKing Visuals	Ira Hefter	New York, NY	www.imagekingvs.com
14	The Composing Room	Mark Shocker	St. Louis, MO	www.composingroom.com
15	Pictura Graphics	Paul Lilienthal	Minneapolis, MN	www.picturagraphics.com
16	Graphics House	Brent McKinnon	Muskegon, MI	www.ghimaging.com
17	Art Digital Tech	Daniel Bright	New York, NY	www.Artdigitaltech.com
18	Inkjet International Ltd	Jittu Sarna	Dallas, TX	www.inkjetintl.com
19	Filmet	Richard Bachelder	Cheswick, PA	www.filmet.com
20	Mathison Company	Paul Anstett	Fargo, ND	www.mathisons.com
21	Colorchrome Atlanta, Inc.	John Rhodes	Atlanta, GA	www.colorchrome.com
22	TPM Inc., the Color Lab Division	Jerry Cooper	Greenville, SC	www.tpm.com
23	Precision Color Digital Imaging	Keith Lahman	Las Vegas, NV	www.pcoloridi.com
24	BIG INK Display Graphics	Tom Trutna	Eagan, MN	www.inkbig.com
25	Dimensional Silk Screen	Mike Tardy	San Diego, CA	www.dimensionalsilkscreen.com
26	F.W. Haxel Co.	Phillip F. Haxel, Jr.	Baltimore, MD	www.fwhaxel.com
27	Fastsigns	Scott Snoyer	Antioch, TN	www.fastsigns.com/210
28	FASTSIGNS of Glendale	Robb Schmit	Glendale, WI	www.fastsigns.com/88
29	MegaPrint Inc.	Jay Buckley	Plymouth, NH	www.megaprint.com
30	Academy Reprographics	Kevin O'Hea	Albuquerque, NM	www.acadepro.com
31	Express Graphics	Mitchell Termotto	Winston Salem, NC	www.exgraphics.com
32	Custom Printed Graphics	Ken Ennis & Larry Ennis	Pittsburgh, PA	www.cpgink.com
33	Harmonic Media, Inc.	Gary Paulin	Englewood, CO	www.getharmonic.com
34	Spectra Images	Tim Golden	Minneapolis, MN	www.spectrainages.com
35	Solar Imaging	Jeff Burt	Gahanna, OH	www.solarimaging.com
36	Road Rage, Inc.	Mike Grillo	Spring Grove, IL	www.roadragedesigns.com
37	Massive Graphics Displays Exhibits	Sterling Keays	Fredericton, NB, Canada	www.massivegraphics.ca
38	Graphix Connection	Matthew Doniger	Oldsmar, FL	www.graphixconnection.com
39	Vivid Print	Belinda Waeland	Edmonton, AB, Canada	www.vividprint.ca
40	The Sign Shop of Waseca	Phillip Wright & Amanda Kanewischer	Waseca, MN	www.wrapuup.com



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quality design services will be invaluable. It will be important to work in an increasingly consultative way, staying on top of new products and bringing information and solutions to the table. Helping customers get the most for their marketing dollar will be crucial. Being able to produce quality results at every stage of a project from design through finishing and installation will continue to be essential."

"Our biggest immediate challenge is increasing our order volumes while driving cost out of our business," said Kevin Huseman, president of Hobart, IN-based Point Imaging. "With the very challenging business environment we are currently navigating, we have worked diligently at reducing all unnecessary expenses. Additionally, we have performed a comprehensive review of our complete staff. Our performers have stepped up to increased authority and accountability, non-performers are no longer with us. We will continue to stay focused on delighting our clients with every opportunity and selling into our core competencies."

"Our biggest challenge moving forward this year, as most would probably say these days, is working within such a challenging economy. More specifically, companies are now much more risk-averse, and less willing to take on big projects without an even higher reassurance of ROI," said Matthew Doniger, president of Graphix Connection based in Oldsmar, FL. "Another issue related to this is the lack of inventory suppliers are keeping on hand. Supplies that once arrived same

or next day when ordered, now arrive three days later. This can cause a domino effect for us. When we have to wait on supplies, it has potential of lengthening our turn-around times, from which our customers have come to expect very high standards."

"Changing the way we sell print is our biggest challenge," said Zach Sharpe, vice president of sales and marketing, Sharpe Images, Winston-Salem, NC. "Printing is such a commodity and there is so much competition out there that we have to start identifying the customers that can really make a difference to our bottom line. Once we research and identify those clients then we try and approach them with ideas or solutions that are measurable, produce a ROI, and just happen to include printing. A packaged solution yields much higher margins than printing alone."

"Price erosion from struggling competitors seems to be a significant issue for all high-value companies. We see companies that are struggling willing to produce work—most often inferior quality—at never before seen low prices. They are doing this in a desperate attempt to keep the machines busy, but it has a negative effect on the perceived value of all graphic output," said Barry Polan, vice president of sales for Burbank, CA-based Crush Creative. "Our challenge is to continually educate and demonstrate the added value and differentiation of service by working with a company such as Crush. This is not usually a difficult challenge, but it is something we need to keep stressing."

"As the delivery model for projects shift in design and build, so must our delivery method change in the reprographics industry," said Tito Taing, president, reproHAUS. "The technological contention and pricing erosion that the industry had experienced throughout the past decade must be replaced with innovations in profitable services as well as a fundamental focus to work together as a cohesive industry. In such a depressed economic environment, I believe Darwinian rules will apply to the weaker players, especially those that constantly erode price for the sake of survival, while the profitable companies will come out of this troubled economy well poised to dominate their respective local market share."

