



SUBLIMATION QUICK STOP WITH MATT & KEVIN

By Matt Woodhouse & Kevin Lumberg

Networking For Sublimators

Why are certain businesses successful and others not? In our opinion, one of the biggest reasons whether a business makes it or not is the strength of the network that the sublimator has. A network can be many things. It can be peers or mentors that you can be called on to help out or answer industry or business questions. It may be a person or persons that you can bounce ideas off, or work out details of a plan. It is important that you trust these people, and they may or may not be in the same industry.

From another point of view, a network can be persons that will refer business to you, or maybe actually facilitate sales for you. There are many ways and places to meet potential additions to your network, and in this article hopefully we can give you ideas on how to expand your network.

WHERE TO MEET SUBLIMATORS

If you are interested in sublimation or if you are already sublimating, you should seek out other sublimators. As you embark, you need to be aware that some people will not want to share their "hard-earned" information with you, but others will be happy to talk and help you out.

Respect the former, and seek out the latter. There are lots of them out there. To meet sublimators, you must go where they "hang out." Your distributor should be able to assist you and point you in the right direction, but here are some avenues to check out.

INTERNET FORUMS AND CHAT ROOMS

These days the internet is everywhere, and it seems everyone has access to it. For this reason, the internet is the quickest and easiest place to start. There are many very informative forums related to sublimation on the internet. Some people participate actively, while many just hang in the background and "lurk", picking up as much information as they can. There is nothing wrong with that, as it allows you to get a feel for the participants.

Among the sites are these examples: Dyesub.org is a free site that has many articles covering many



aspects of sublimation, a directory to find sublimation products, and a forum to ask questions and chat about sublimation. Engravingetc.org is a subscription site, where the primary focus is engraving, but it has a very active sublimation portion where you can ask questions or "lurk".

Cherie Derrick, who is the owner/operator of the Dyesub.org forum, explains how her forum can help with networking. "The DSSI forum at DyeSub.org is not only great for finding out things such as "where can I buy mousepads made in the USA" or "how do I press a can wrap with Velcro closure" but also for networking with other sublimators. These connections can really help when you are in a bind if your printer or press quits working or you need one more medium shirt on a Friday afternoon and have to have your job ready by Monday. Many of

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the sublimators on the forum will come to your aid and do whatever they can to help you get your job out on time.”

While internet forums can be wonderful places to find assistance, and most people that participate on them mean well, you should take everything with a grain of salt. The sites are moderated, but some people have agendas. Anonymity on these sites can sometimes foster misinformation. Further, people make mistakes, and sometimes people that mean well can post the wrong information, which could cause damage to your equipment. Verify information where possible.

TRADE MAGAZINES

Trade magazines like the one you are reading are a great way to find networking opportunities. You can find new products, locations of upcoming trade shows and events, information on seminars and training, and articles containing invaluable information. Trade magazines are a great way to stay in touch with the industry happenings.

INDUSTRY TRADE SHOWS

There are trade shows throughout the country during the year. At a trade show, there are educational classes and seminars, new products to see, as well as a concentration of other sublimators and business people. Be proactive in striking up conver-

sations and meeting people, whether it is distributors or other attendees. Ask a lot of questions to get a feel for the different distributors.

Are they interested in answering your questions? Are they willing to spend the time to find out about your business plans, and consult with you on the pros and cons of the different equipment and product options available? Will they demo the equipment? Will they be your partner as you grow your business, or do they just want to sell you a piece of equipment at the show? Who will answer the phones when you need support?

All of these things are very important when you are building your network of suppliers/distributors. Ask the questions and take the time to make sure you are comfortable.

DISTRIBUTOR OPEN HOUSES

Many distributors have open houses. Other sublimators will attend these functions, and this is a chance to meet them and ask them questions, and also build some relationships. It also gives you a chance to see the actual location of the distributor, and see how they operate. Generally, equipment demos and new products are displayed at these events. Additionally, product-specific vendors often attend and share tips about their products.

SUBLIMATION CLASSES AND SEMINARS

Project Sublimation is a two-day seminar conducted by Sawgrass Technologies, and sponsored by leading sublimation distributors. The seminar program offers a comprehensive overview of sublimation. Some of the topics covered include the science of sublimation, equipment, supplies, color correction, and design. There is also a hands-on component, where attendees actually decorate products themselves.

We have attended many of these seminars, and while a lot of great information is taught, that is only a small portion of the benefits of a classroom environment. If you only want the information, there are books, manuals, and DVDs that can give you the information you need, possibly at a lower cost. But if you go that route, you lose the human

interaction. And that is what networking is about.

John Barker, Program Manager for Project Sublimation, says this about the class, "In addition to receiving comprehensive training and hands-on instruction, students at Project Sublimation workshops take full advantage of the networking opportunities built in to regional events such as these. It is common for business alliances to be forged during a workshop, especially outsourcing partnerships. After all, most of the attendees come from a variety of digital decoration backgrounds such as screen printing, engraving, embroidery, and more. Students take advantage of these networking opportunities to help grow their business and provide additional services for their current customer base." You can find out more information about Project Sublimation at projectsublimation.com.

There are many other classes that have to do with different aspects of sublimation. You can take classes on improving your skills and learning more about your graphics program like CorelDraw or Photoshop, or you could take basic business classes like marketing or accounting at your local community college. Whatever the class, it is another chance to grow your network.

NETWORK WITH OTHER BUSINESSPEOPLE

It is also imperative to the success of a business to network with other businesspeople in your local area. Your local chamber of commerce is a great place to start. They have periodic meetings that are tailored for networking. They also have some unique opportunities for a sublimator. Most need name badges, and it can be an opportunity to sell them to the chamber.

You may also ask to donate them. Of course, you can sublimate your business information on the back side of the name badge. Members need products that a sublimator can provide, and they will have a sample of your work with your business information in their possession.

Another type of local group even has networking in the title. They are business networking groups. A quick Google search should turn up their information. Just search "business networking" and the name of your town, and several will probably pop up. These are generally groups of

about twenty or so local businesspeople, and they act as a networking and referral group. Most allow one person for a given business group or segment—one lawyer, one realtor, one banker, one ad specialty person, and so on.

They will have regular meetings, at which they will highlight one or two of the member businesses, allowing them to have a short presentation about their business. They do this so that each member will know enough about the other members' businesses and be able to confidently refer business leads to the other members during their normal course of business.

As you form relationships with these businesspeople, you will have the chance to learn some of the best practices in the business world. It is helpful to learn from other successful businesspeople as they share their experiences.

GO FORTH AND NETWORK

A healthy expanding network is an essential piece of any successful business. Neglect your network, and your business will suffer. Opportunities to network your business present themselves almost daily, and we have only mentioned a few.

You just have to keep your eyes open and also know where to look. As your network grows, every person in your network has the possibility to plug you into hundreds of other people that you may not have ever had the chance to make a contact with.

IN OUR NEXT QUICK STOP

We will take an in-depth look at the two small-format inks available: SubliJet and ArTainium from Sawgrass Technologies. We will examine the UV life each has in indoor and outdoor environments, and what the color-management solutions are for each product.

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