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Title: Quick Graphic or Logo Design -Conversations with our clients

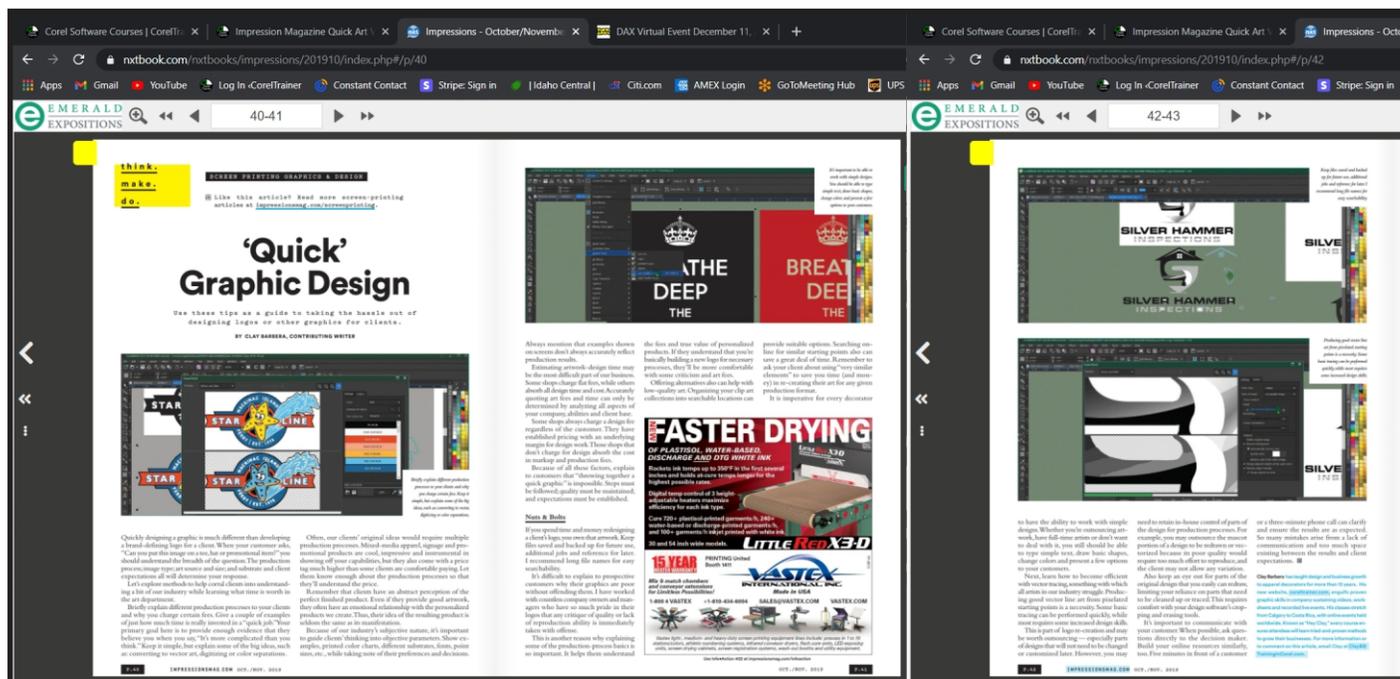
Throwing together a quick graphic is much different than developing a brand-defining logo for a client. When your customer asks “can you put this image on a (tee, sign, hat, promo item, etc.)” we professionals know how wide of a question they are asking. The production process, type of image, quality of source art, size, substrate, and the client's expectations all determine our response. “Yes, but it's more complicated than you think” is our typical answer. We must tread lightly as to how much detail we answer with. Let's explore methods to help corral our clients into understanding a bit of our industry while learning ourselves what time is worth in the art department.

Briefly explain different production processes to your clients, and why certain fees occur. Give a couple of examples of just how much time is really invested in a “quick job”. There is no need to go into detail with your client. Your primary goal here is to provide enough evidence that they believe you when you say “it's more complicated than you think”. They're not going to completely understand, or really care to anyway. Keep it simple, but explain some of the big ideas, such as: Converting to Vector, Digitizing, or the Separation of colors.

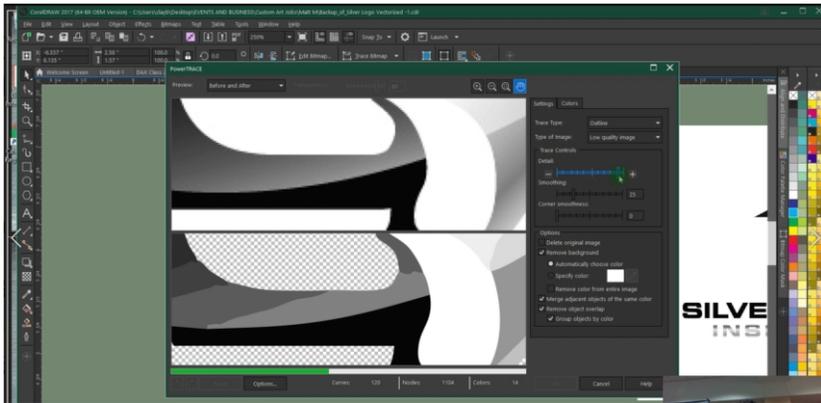
Very often our clients' original idea would require multiple production processes. They simply don't understand, the difference between our decoration processes. Multi-decoration apparel, signage, and promotional products are cool, impressive, and instrumental in showing our capabilities, but more often come with a price tag much higher than clients will be comfortable paying. “Sure, I can sublimate print/cut/sew your team jerseys, then embroider names on the front, plus screenprint sponsors on the sleeves, applique patch the numbers on the back, with special tags...” Let them know enough about production processes so that they'll understand the exorbitant price.

Our clients have an abstract perception of the perfect end-product. Even if they have a logo, or provide good artwork, they often have an emotional relationship with these personalized product(s) we create for them. They may or may-not be creative themselves, they may or may-not love the results, but either way, they're idea of the end-product is seldom the same as its manifestation.

Because of our industry's subjective nature, it is so very important to guide our client's thinking into objective parameters.



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Use tools around your shop, or website, to help. Show examples, printed color charts, different substrates, fonts, point sizes, etc. while taking note of their preferences/decisions. Always notate or mention that examples shown on screens do not perfectly reflect production results. “So, we are going to use this Pantone color, with this pressed vinyl, on these jerseys, and digitally print these banners...”

Estimating the design time for their artwork may be the most difficult and inconsistent part of our businesses. Your eye for the actual quality of the customer's submitted artwork will improve over time. Some shops charge flat fees. Other's absorb all design time/cost into the jobs themselves. Just as your expectations for production time will sharpen, your ability to estimate design 'costs' will as well. Turn away unrealistic jobs by quoting high enough so that if they accept, it is worth your company's time. Accurately quoting art fees/time can only be determined by analyzing all aspects of your company, your abilities, and your client base.

To charge or not to charge art/design fees? Wow, that is a question. Your business demographics will have to answer. Your area, your client base, your competition, and how you've positioned your business in the community as a custom product producer will help. Determine what you can and cannot charge by first establishing what you think your time is worth compared to a typical job. Listen to customers' and prospect's reactions. If they often seem to have excuses to not move forward with the order, or they immediately jump to order, plus increase quantity, take these as signs to nudge your pricing down or up.

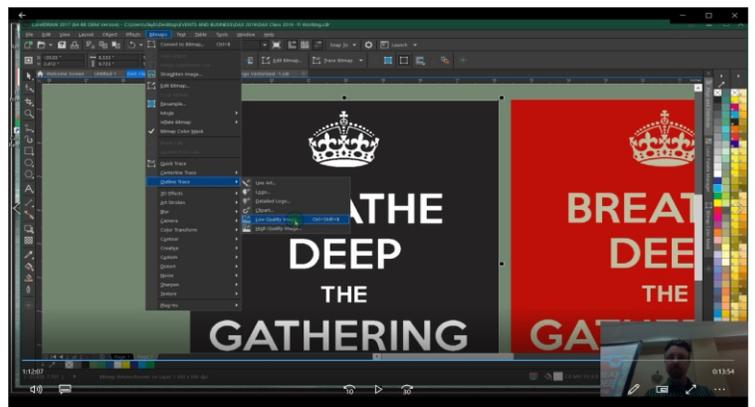
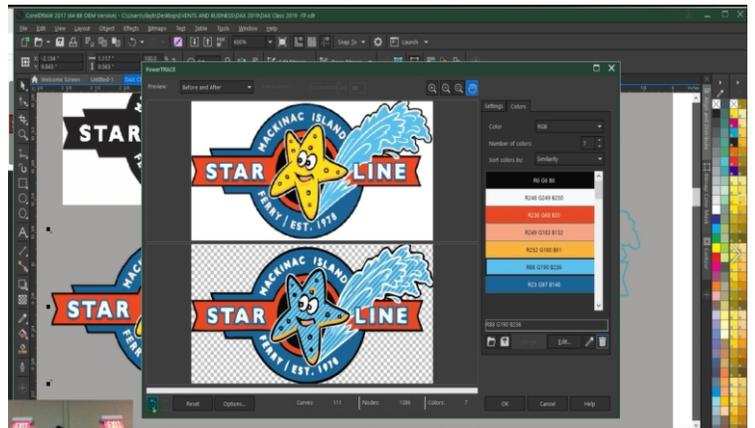
Some shops always charge a design fee. They don't care who the customer is. They have established pricing with an underlying margin for design work. Some shops rationalize a designer on staff, or the cost of their design systems this way. While other imprint-industry companies simply do not charge for design work, those shops absorb the cost in the products' markup and production fees.

Once again, it is imperative that you spend a quick minute explaining to a customer that “throwing together a quick graphic” is simply impossible. Steps need to be followed. Quality needs to be maintained. Expectations must be established.



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Your companies' efforts belong to you. If you spend time, money, tears, re-designing a client's logo, you own that artwork. The art files you produce are yours, so keep them saved and backed up for future use, additional jobs, and reference for later. I recommend long titles/file names for searchability. A logo may be owned by a client, but not the graphics and formats we needed to produce. It is so rare that we receive a production-ready art file from a client that it's typically followed by applause. If a client wants you to give them your art file, of their logo, it is a good sign they want to go somewhere else for future jobs. If they simply recognize the value of having said production files, they will not gawk at your fee of several hundred dollars. We all have been on the other side of this equation. "I have a tee-shirt, and need more like it". "I have a logo on my website and need embroidered shirts". "I have a list of names, and need apparel with our mascot"... All of these situations require your effort, time, and resources to produce, or re-produce, a workable design. Feel free to email me for a copy of "Building Your Client a Logo" worksheet I present to customers and offer as a template to members of my training website. ClayB@TrainingInCorel.com



It is very difficult to explain to a prospective customer why their graphic is poor without offending them. I have worked with countless company owners & managers who have so much pride in their logo that any critique of quality or lack of reproduction ability is taken with offense. This is another reason why explaining some of the basics of our production processes to them is so important. It helps them understand our fees and the true value of personalized products. If they understand that you're basically building them a new brand logo for necessary production processes, they'll be more comfortable with some criticism and art fees.

Offering alternatives to your client can help with their low-quality source art. Organizing your clipart collections into searchable locations can give you some good options. Searching online for similar starting points can also save a great deal of time. Remember to ask your client about using "very similar elements" to save you time (\$) in re-creating their art for a said production format. It is imperative for every imprint industry owner, manager, and increasingly even receptionist, to be able to work with some simple designs. Whether you're outsourcing your artwork, have full-time artists, or don't want to deal with it, you should still be able to type some simple text, draw basic shapes, change colors, and present a few options to your customers.

Your next step in learning a little bit of 'designer' skills is bitmap to vector tracing. This is something all artists in our industry struggle with. Your shop being able to produce good vector line art from pixelated starting points is a necessity. Some basic tracing can be performed quickly, while most require some increased design skills. This is part of our logo re-creation and may be worth outsourcing. Think of using some outsourced resources for the parts of designs that you cannot accomplish easily in house. Outsource parts of designs that will not need to be changed or customized later. You may need to retain control of the design in-house, or parts of it, for production processes. For example, you outsource the mascot portion of a design to be redrawn/vectorized because it is of such poor quality it would simply take too much to re-produce, and the client will not allow any variation. Then you choose to re-type the text in-house in your digitizing software (embroidery) knowing that it will result in perfect lettering. The vector from the outsourced company may be auto-digitized easily, plus used for other imprint processes later. Also keep an eye out for parts of the original design that you can easily redraw, limiting your reliance on parts of the graphic to be 'cleaned up' or traced. You'll need to be comfortable with some cropping & erasing tools in your design software.

I cannot iterate enough the importance of having a real conversation with your customer. When at all possible, ask questions directly to the decision-maker. Build your online resources similarly too. Five minutes in front of a customer, or a three minutes phone call, can clarify and make sure the results you produce are what they expect. So much of our 'mistakes' can be chalked off to a lack of communication, and too much space between our results and the client's expectations.

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<https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/impressions/201910/index.php#/p/40>

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Some of the information in this periodical article may be out dated, including contact vitals.

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