Mastering Mounting

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Trendspotting

The first Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog was printed in 1893. That was more than 30 years prior to the opening of the company's first retail store in Chicago in 1925. The official Sears catalog was discontinued in 1993, lasting 100 years. As far back as everyone today can remember, catalogs have allowed people to shop from small towns and rural areas in every part of the country.

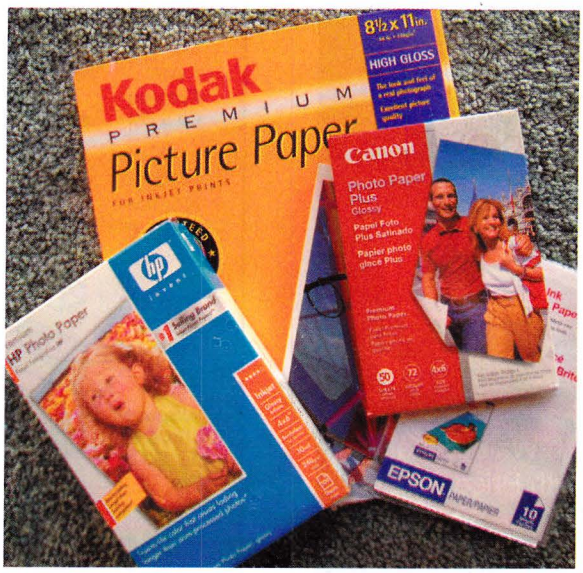

Photo 1: In late 2007 commercial HP, Kodak, Canon, and Epson 4"x6" glossy photo papers designed for use with home and small desktop printers were used to test lightfastness and heat tolerances.

And thanks to mail order, consumers have been able to purchase everything from watches to brides from the comfort of their own homes.

Despite this, people often seem surprised at the current volume of online purchasing, which is no more than a huge electronic catalog. Nearly 45 million people were using the Internet in 1996, and by 1999, worldwide Internet users had reached 150 million. By 2006 there were more than 92 million websites. E-commerce has revolutionized shopping, with billions of dollars being spent daily. Gen-X and -Y'ers are demanding purchases that are uniquely designed for or by them, and they want it today.

Retail has changed. Strolling the mall for home and wall decor has been replaced in many ways by Googling the Internet. Consumers can shop and decorate their homes without leaving home. Framing is changing, too. Simply do a search for the type of art, style of frame, or artist you want and voilà—it's right there! The past year's economic downturn and fluctuating price of oil has taken its toll on independent frame shops by encouraging online shopping even more. It is important than ever for framers to not only be a part of the e-commerce movement by having their own website but also to come up with innovative ways to encourage local consumers to come in and shop.

Desktop Digital Photos

At the end of 2007 I spotted a bobcat casually sitting on the hill across from my office. What a perfect opportunity to shoot a digital image for a comparison study of printers, photo papers, their lightfastness characteristics, and heat mounting tolerances. The digital image was printed on four different commercial 4"x6" photo papers: Kodak Premium Photo Paper–High Gloss, Epson Durabrite Photo Paper–Glossy, Canon Photo Paper Plus–Glossy, and HP Premium Photo Paper–Glossy (Photo 1). Three different printers were used: HPdeskjet 960c, Canon MP530, and Epson Stylus c86 (Photo 2).

The sample shows a subtle difference in color between the printers more than the papers themselves. It is often suggested that using all the manufacturer's suggested products will produce the best image. But that didn't necessarily turn out to be the case in this

Photo 2: The image was printed on each of the four papers using three different printers (top to bottom) HPdeskjet 960c, Canon MP530, and Epson Stylus c86.

Photo 3: After 11 months of sealed, dark storage, the images significantly changed. Upper left, upper right, and center—third from left look most like the originals. Top row (HPdeskjet 960c) has shifted to green, middle row (Canon MP530) is redder, and bottom row (Epson Stylus c86) is bluer and much darker.

test. The most correct colors and crisp image was produced using Kodak Premium Photo Paper printed on the HPdeskjet 960c and HP Premium Photo Paper–Glossy, also on HPdeskjet 960c. These two printers have also been the ones that have held their original color and brightness best over the year.

For the past year the mounted sampler has been wrapped in plastic in dark storage to allow the photos to change without UV, tungsten, or fluorescent lighting or pollution. After 12 months the images have significantly changed. There is a glare reflection on the upper left photo, but upper left, upper right, and center third from left look the most like the originals. The top row (HPdeskjet 960c) shows more green, the middle row (Canon MP530) more magenta, and the bottom row (Epson Stylus c86) more cyan (Photo 3). The color shift is the result of yellow, blue, and red ink fade respectively, which allows the remaining cyan or magenta ink to show through to a greater degree. A general darkening of the Canon MP530 and Epson c86 printer images also occurred in the bottom two rows.

None of these photo prints are fine art images, but they are what consumers might be putting into scrapbooks, photo albums, and photo frames. Though they may be reprinted to restore the original colors, that rarely happens. These were all dry mounted in a mechanical 210M-X using Bainbridge HAF foamboard, and they have not changed since they originally bonded.

It's the Coating

Color shift and darkening are not the only photo issues. Scratching and scuffing may also occur. It's the receptor coating of the base paper—swellable versus porous—and not the printer that is sensitive to change. Swellable coatings are slow to dry and their surfaces do not scratch, but they are heat sensitive (Photo 4). Small mottled surface blotches can occur when dry mounted, as happens with all laser printers. This is the same visual damage that happens when using silicone release paper on traditional high gloss RC photos.

Instant dry, porous coating on Canon photo paper scratched when printed with HP 960c, Canon MP530, and Epson c86 printers, but there was no surface scratching with the other three papers when printed with the HP, as Photo 4 shows. Use of manufacturers' products does not necessarily prevent surface damage. The original bobcat image was printed on Epson photo paper using an Epson c86 desktop printer with Epson inks, yet the manufacturer's products still allowed the inks to scratch, darken, and turn bluer with time (Photo 5).

Clean Area Clean Process

Regardless of paper or photo paper, the phrase "clean area—clean process" is a mounting must. Aside from good lighting to see the dirt, wearing gloves to prevent finger oils, and being careful of scratching images, a dirty press can destroy any mounted photo (Photo 6). The photo clearly illustrates

Photo 4: This image printed using HP Photo Paper on HP960c does not scratch but is heat sensitive and scuffs when printed. Note the small mottled surface blotches.

the indentation of dirt particles from the platen or the release paper that debossed the foamboard with huge ugly indentations. Daily maintenance of wiping the press platen and wiping and inspecting release papers for adhesive residue, creases, and dirt particles are mandatory for successful mountings.

Checking and wiping release papers prior to each mounting with a lint-free soft rag is part of good mounting technique. And routinely cleaning the platen using solvents to remove

Photo 5: Epson photo paper was printed on an Epson c86 desktop printer using Epson inks. The instant dry porous receptor coating still allows the inks to scratch, darken, and turn bluer over time.

Photo 6: Indentations in the foamboard-mounted image were caused by dirt particles that were trapped between the release paper and the image.

adhesive residue and dirt will prevent accidents.

Trendspotting

Spotting digital and Internet trends has become more a question of "What's new?" rather than "Will it last?" Learning how to keep a framing business afloat through e-commerce is a must in this economy. You must also know how to best handle digital photos, canvases, and prints. And where better to get up-to-the-minute education than at The National Conference at the West Coast Art & Frame Show in Las Vegas. I will be teaching numerous sessions on digitals and sensitive mounting challenges as well as creative venues, all of which continue to set the educated and forward thinking framer ahead of the competition. See you in class! ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF GCF CMG, mounting editor, owns Designs Ink in Tehachapi, CA, featuring commercial custom framing, fine art/graphic design, and industry consulting. Specializing in mounting, matting, creative design, and fine art, she routinely teaches at industry trade shows and The National Conference. She has written four books on mounting including *The Mounting and Laminating Handbook* (now in its third edition) and *Creative Mounting, Wrapping, and Laminating*, available from PFM PubCo. She may be contacted through her website, www.designsinkart.com.

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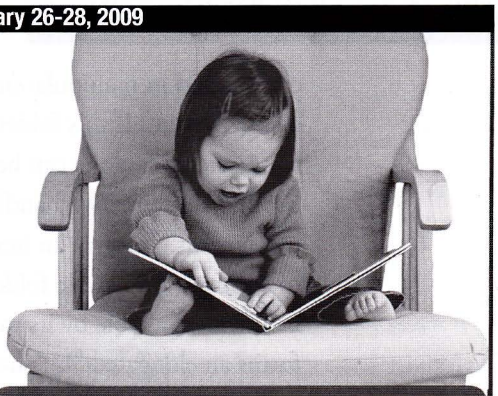

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