



## Choosing the Best Artist

*Whether it's for a large company or small shop, the right artist is critical.*

No matter how large or small the shop, hiring an artist can be a daunting task. In an industry where artwork is the key to success, printers need to hire artists that will make the company stand out. Sure, being able to produce top quality prints is essential, but the artwork is the first step. Regardless of the production method, without art, there's nothing to print.

When price is the only factor separating a printer from the competition, there's always the worry about being at a lower price point than the other guy to get the job. Providing artwork that the competition can't is a competitive edge. Having the right people ready with strong designs separates better printers from the competition and increases sales and profits.

Unfortunately, too often people think all they need is a computer and some stock art and they'll be good to go. Anyone can add some type to a piece of clip art. To succeed, invest in people who are capable

of conceptualizing what the client's needs are and have the necessary skills to meet those needs. The artist is one of the most important assets for making a business grow.

But how? What should a printer look for in an artist? First, consider the situation and specific needs. Is it a small shop that may require someone to wear many hats, or is it a larger shop that can hire artists for specific tasks, such as illustration work or graphic design? Will the artist be required to handle art production as well?

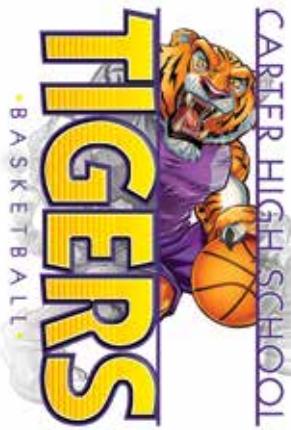
In general, there are two types of artists — creative artists and production artists. The creative artist is the one who conceptualizes the design based on the customer's requests, does any illustrating, creates the layout, and does whatever else is needed to create the final design.

Skills obviously vary from person to person. Some may not have strong illustration skills, but their graphic design skills give them the ability to manipulate

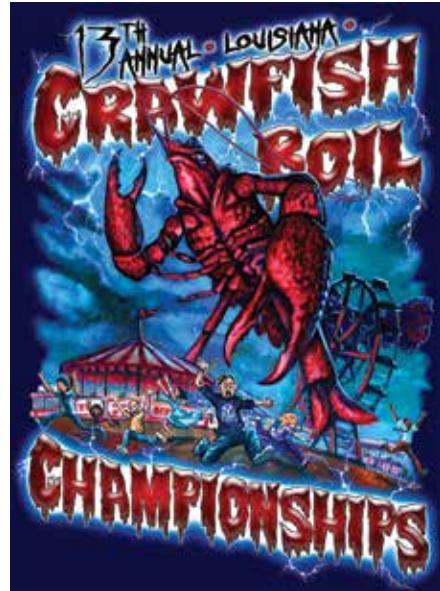
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By Dane Clement, President, Great Dane Graphics

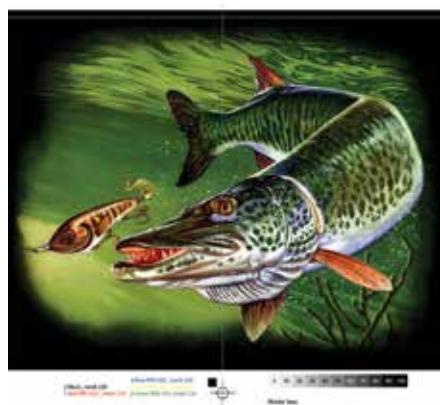




The top layout, which uses a piece of clip art with some type added to the bottom, gets the job done. But to really set the shop apart from its competitors, use artists who can create unique designs that will catch customers' attention. Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.



Creative artists translate the specifications requested by a client using illustration, stock art, text and any other graphic or artistic means to create the final design. Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics



A production artist readies the design created by the creative artist for the appropriate production process. In the case of screen printing, the production artist will need to know how to separate a design and set it up on a template to print out the film separations for burning screens. Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.

stock art and create basic illustrations that they can combine with text and their eye for color to create compelling layouts that are superior to simple type combined with clip art.

On the flip side, you can have an artist with illustration skills who can create a beautiful drawing or painting, but has little ability to combine that image with other elements to create a layout that's appealing to the eye.

The production artist's tasks vary with the decorating process. Basically, it's their job to take the artwork from the creative artist and make it usable for the application at hand. Whether it's print/cut, screen printing or direct to garment, the

production artist must know how the files work and optimize them, so production runs smoothly and results in a premium print.

For example, a production artist for a screen printer should know how to separate a design and set it up on a template to print out the film separations to burn onto screens.

For print/cut, the artist needs to take the artwork and add a bleed if necessary, and to create the cut line with the appropriate specifications for the design to print and cut without problems.

The ideal situation would be to find an artist with the skills and knowledge of both sides, but that may be a difficult

task. Keep in mind, it's harder to teach someone to draw and paint than it is to teach someone the production side of things. You can teach someone how to do separations or how to add a cut line or optimize an image. Still, remember what's needed for the specific situation.

Is there time to train someone, or does the shop need someone who can pretty much take the reins and roll with it? If time and ability to train coincides with finding the rare gem with the artistic ability that matches the criteria, snatch them up.

#### **Review the Portfolio**

It's the artwork itself that speaks to an artist's talent and ability. This is why



The single best way to evaluate an artist is to view their portfolio. Look for a candidate who can work in a range of art styles to meet the varying needs of the shop. Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.

viewing a portfolio is necessary in judging if a candidate truly has the skills, and if their work is a fit for the shop.

A portfolio shows artistic skill as well as the artist's strengths. Is everything graphic design related, such as logo or brochure design? Are there any illustrations? Are they done in different styles? Does everything look the same? Knowing what's required in an artist will help determine if the candidate will fit with the job.

When looking for a creative artist, if you can't find the right candidate with strong illustration skills, choose the artist with strong design skills. Layouts in the portfolio should be strong with

a good sense of composition, good use of color and type, and a flair for design. They should also demonstrate some basic drawing ability.

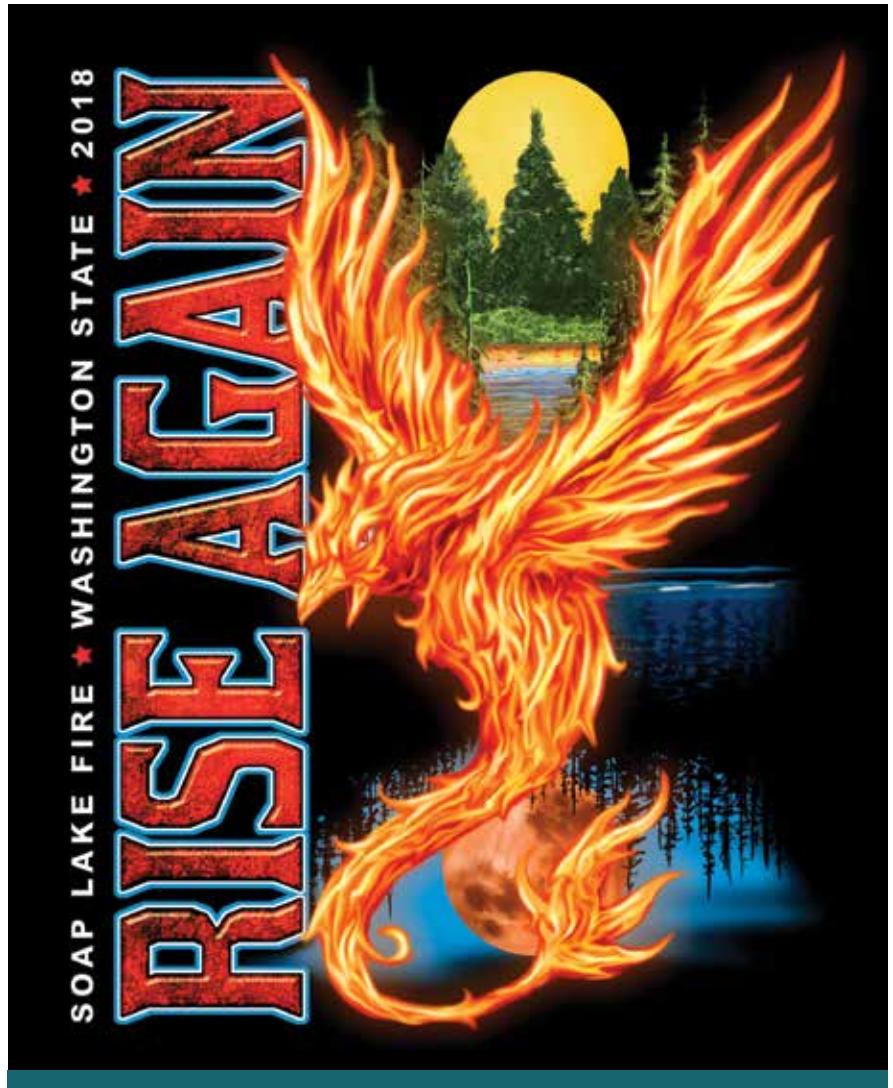
In today's world, computers are everywhere, including the art department. So, it is good if the candidate has basic computer knowledge. But what if they don't? Computer skills and software can be taught. Traditional art skills will easily transfer over to the digital world once the artist learns software such as Adobe Photoshop or Corel Painter. Knowing how to use a computer and design software is a plus, but is not always a must.

A strong designer can use stock art to create layouts that will give the designs an

edge over the competitor who is simply adding type to clip art. Graphic designers benefit from knowledge of the different design software such as the Adobe® Creative Cloud Suite and CorelDRAW. It's not necessary to know all the different programs, but the more the better, as it will allow your artist to work with customers across different platforms.

When hiring someone who is strictly a creative artist or a production artist, familiarize them with how the other side works. A production artist doesn't necessarily need to know how to draw and paint, but to see how the creative artist starts and creates the artwork is beneficial.

Likewise, a creative artist should be



Not all creative artists have the same strengths. Illustrators may not have strong graphic design skills, and graphic designers may not have strong illustration skills. However, an artist with strong design skills and some basic illustration skills can use stock art along with other graphic elements to create new, unique layouts. Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.

familiar with how the production artist prepares the artwork for printing. Both sides should also sit in on the actual production process and have a general understanding of the different processes the shop uses.

When everyone is aware of how all the areas work, the artwork can be set up correctly from the beginning, creating a smoother workflow as it moves from one department to the other.

#### **Reliability**

Make expectations clear, and while references aren't always reliable, contacting a former employer can give some insight into the potential employee's work ethic.

Try a trial run with artists to get an idea of how they work. A portfolio won't indicate how long it took to complete a piece or if it was entirely done by them. Give them a small job to do — nothing with a strict deadline, but something they can take home to work on and bring back to you. How long does it take? Do they take criticism well and make any revisions in a timely manner? How is the end result? Regardless of the outcome, they should be compensated for their time, at a rate discussed when initially presenting them the job.

If it works out, you are ready to move forward. If not, then you'll know now before you waste time you could have spent looking for better applicants.

Remember that the most important asset in your art department is your artist. All the top-notch computer equipment in the world isn't going to set you apart if you don't have someone with the art, design and/or production skills to create images that your customers want to pay for. The shop that succeeds is the shop that invests in true artists.

*Dane Clement is President of Great Dane Graphics, a GroupeStahl company specializing in the creation of production-ready stock art for the apparel decorating industry. He is also GroupeSTAHL's Vice President of Art and Creative Process. Speaking and writing for the decorated apparel industry since 1987, he is considered an expert on computer graphics and color separations for textile screen printing, dye sublimation, digital direct-to-garment and heat-applied graphics. He is the author of "Artwork for Vinyl Cutting for Adobe® or Corel® users," and "T-Shirt Artwork Simplified." Visit [greatdanographics.com](http://greatdanographics.com) or email him at [info@greatdanographics.com](mailto:info@greatdanographics.com).*