



News and ideas for photographers and artists who want to print, finish, and sell more work.

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Red Wing Digital Sells Photo Panel Prints Online

Some photographers prefer hiring local printmakers to enlarge their best images. That's because they enjoy interacting with printing and framing experts who can advise them on the right options for their work. Other photographers don't mind uploading their images to a website, and waiting for prints to be delivered.

One avid photographer/entrepreneur who understands both these preferences is John Becker of Red Wing Digital. For the past decade, John and his wife Valerie have provided expert printing and framing assistance to photographers and commercial clients who visit their custom-framing shop in the small, historic Mississippi-River town of Red Wing, Minnesota. In addition to producing photo enlargements and offer custom framing services, Red Wing uses two HP Designjet Z6100 printers to produce high-quality visuals, signage, and decorative art for retailers and other local businesses.



Online Storefront

Last fall, Becker launched Red Wing Digital as an online storefront through which they sell Panel Prints. The panel prints give photographers an affordable, attractive, glass-free, frame-free method of displaying large photographs in all of their glory. Becker regards Red Wing Digital as a way to add a new a source of revenue that also enables the company to serve photographers who aren't within driving distance of their brick-and-mortar shop.

After each photograph is printed with HP Vivera pigment inks on an HP Designjet Z6100, it is mounted to an ultra-stiff art board backed with a hanging system that makes the panel appear to float in front of the wall. The Panel Prints are sturdy, easy-to-care-for and create a pleasing drop-shadow effect on the wall.

John and Valerie Becker came up with the panel-print idea when they got involved in a photography competition sponsored by a local radio station. The contest organizers wanted a way to display the winning images in the radio station's offices. The display product the Beckers designed was a big hit—both with photographers and radio-station visitors.



"Moose in Silhouette", Jeff Marous, 16"x24" Panel-Print

The Panel Prints have also proven to be popular with restaurant owners who want to "localize their décor" by showcasing images from area photographers. Because no glass is involved, there is less risk of injury to restaurant patrons if the print should happen to get knocked off the wall.

For the past two years, Red Wing Digital has experimented with different combinations of materials to workflows to ensure that when they started accepting online orders for Panel Prints they would be able to efficiently produce and deliver a quality product. Becker, who is an active member of the 100-member [Red Wing Photography Club](#), turned to fellow members of the club for feedback. He says, "They were very supportive in helping us develop the Panel Print before we launched the online storefront. It has been like having a private test audience."



“Anybody who can take a digital photo can have it made into a Panel Print,” Becker emphasizes. The workflow he developed includes ways to enlarge images from consumer-grade cameras without visual compromise. If any quality issues do arise, Becker will reach out to the customer to figure out ways to resolve them.

Red Wing Digital plans to continue to develop other types of photography-display products that can be ordered either in their framing shop or through their new online store.

Support for Online Art Gallery

While the Beckers regard the development of an online storefront to be a key way of expanding their business, they also value their relationships with people throughout the community. In the gallery adjacent to their studio, the Beckers host live events for their many friends who share their passion for the visual arts.

Last year, Red Wing Framing displayed some of the vintage illustration art in the collection of Dan Murphy. Murphy, who achieved national fame as the founder of the band Soul Asylum, now operates the online gallery Grapefruit Moon which specializes in original paintings, photographs, and prints from the “Grand Age of American Illustration.” This includes pin-up and glamour art, vintage advertising art, and pulp and men’s magazine cover designs. When pulp-magazine cover prints were shown at Red Wing’s gallery, the event was featured on two Minneapolis TV stations.

“Despite all the technology that’s out there,” says Becker. “Business still boils down to people doing business with other people. It’s all about relationships.”

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