

New Age Printing ‘The Medium is the Message’

by David Heller

Sitting bleary eyed at an early morning meeting about HP printers I sipped my third cup of coffee anticipating a dull overview of yet another large format printer presentation. A printer’s a printer I thought as I squirmed uncomfortably in my seat, ‘what could be interesting about this?’

Then they showed the video, and on the screen I watched a construction foreman outfitted with hardhat and heavy-duty boots slosh through the mud looking down at architectural plans and not looking where he was going. This was an accident waiting to happen I thought, and precisely at that moment he tripped and the plans went flying straight into a gaping mud filled puddle at his feet. To add insult to injury a super-sized earth mover edged into the scene, headed directly for the mud-encrusted plans and rolled its enormous deep treaded wheels over the already crumpled and stained paper turning it into an unreadable mess.

Then, the miracle happened. The foreman picked up the plans, hosed them down, shook them off and voila, no mud, no wrinkles, the plans were completely restored and usable. Now, my interest was piqued and I forgot about the coffee, I didn’t need it anymore, I was wide awake.

Of course it really wasn’t a ‘miracle,’ but science, engineering and manufacturing tasked to produce a ‘paper’ that prints out as waterproof and resilient coupled with a large format HP DesignJet printer that’s capable of processing this new media.

As the presentation moved forward I was shown more and more compelling ‘printing’ examples, all with a wow factor that made me rethink what was possible.



The examples ran the gamut from point of sale signs that retailers can printout immediately when they need them, to CG artwork on canvas, super-sized photo realistic posters, a hand-drawn one-of-a-kind lamp shade printed on heavy flexible plastic, and even a customized mail box decked out with a colorful laminate. It is indeed a brave new world of creative possibilities.

But, for me, the ability to print full-color on fabric was the most exciting part of the presentation. HP sponsors Project Runway, a popular reality fashion show that pits sixteen designers against each other in their quest to have their designs worn on the runway during Fashion Week in New York. In this season's [Episode-10: Hey, That's My Fabric](#), HP provided each contestant with an [HP TouchSmart](#) desktop computer and challenged them to make an outfit by drawing and painting their unique fabric designs right on the computer's screen.

The designers went into creative mode using paint brush and pencil (directly on the HP TouchSmart's screen) and first printed proofs of their designs on paper. Once they were satisfied with their designs' look the data was sent to an HP DesignJet printer that spewed out their finished fabric ready for stitching.



The contestants were ecstatic - designing and printing their own fabric and seeing it happen this fast amazed them, and the designs were beautiful, the colors were alive, and in one case 'electric.' (You have to [watch this episode](#) to see what I mean.)

What HP has done here is a true coupling of creativity and technology allowing just about anyone to realize their dreams in a material way. As with all the 'printing' examples I saw, the whole process is digital, but it sure doesn't feel that way. In this case one contestant used a paint brush just as she would on paper while others drew their designs, but none of them were painting or drawing on paper, they'd all gone digital and the results were stunning and the process was fast.

My hat's off to the creative people at HP and to the talented and creative Project Runway contestants, who went from design to fabric to finished dress in just twelve hours. HP technology plus creativity = stunning work, what a combo!

I'd like to do a more in-depth article about printing possibilities on new media so I can fill you in on the details – types of media available, printer recommendations and more detailed examples. But, this is a blog and I'm more than happy to do this if I've got an audience that wants to learn more about it. So, please let me know and I'll start researching and writing. I'm jazzed and want to learn more. I hope you do too! 😊