

Wide-Format Summit: Big Ideas, Grand Opportunities

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Wide-format Impressions



By [Dan Marx](#)

The first annual Wide-Format Summit, which brings together motivated graphics producers and the vendors whose technologies, materials, and services power them, kicked off the afternoon of Wednesday, July 28 with three powerhouse sessions. The event is sponsored by nearly 20 companies serving the large-format segment, including “Keynote” level sponsors Agfa, EFI, and HP. The audience is comprised of nearly 50 printing professionals motivated to thrive in wide-format graphics production. The event is organized by *Wide-Format Impressions*, PRINTING United Alliance, and NAPCO Media.

Wide-Format: Where It Is and Where It’s Going

Mixing the past, present, and future of the wide-format segment, Marco Boer, Vice President of IT Strategies, presented “Bottom Line: Setting the Stage for Renewed Growth.” He spoke of the current state of the segment, which he reports as producing 1.1

billion square meters of output annually, contributing to nearly \$8 billion dollars of business. During the COVID year, however, output volumes dropped significantly, led by retail closures and the cessation of large-scale events.

Boer provided an update on the primary ink systems used for wide-format: aqueous, eco-solvent and latex, UV-curable, and dye-sublimation, presenting data on the recovery path of these systems over the next several years. While the future is uncertain, and the pandemic is not fully in our rear-view mirror, Boer predicts full or near recovery by 2025.

For graphics producers, Boer said, COVID was an abrupt reset. As the economy reopens, companies should be able to “ride a wave of renewed interest in POP signage.” He offered three suggestions for companies seeking graceful recovery: make it easy to do business with you, explore expansion into application areas adjacent to wide-format graphics (such as décor), and increase efficiency to contend with increased competition expected to come from the commercial segment.



Marco Boer, VP, I.T. Strategies at the 2021 Wide-Format Summit

Four Pertinent Trends

Taking stock of where the wide-format segment is after a challenging and unforgettable year, Denise M. Gustavason, Editor-in-Chief of *Wide-Format Impressions* and Co-Chair of the event, brought forward a panel of wide-format professionals to provide evidence and direction. The panelists – each nominated by one of the event’s Keynote Sponsors – were: Dave Brewer, Chief Technology Officer for Image Options; Dave Gerharter, VP of Operations for Circle Graphics; and Elaine Scrima, VP of Operations for VSP Retail.



Denise Gustavason, Co-Chair and Editorial Director, NAPCO Media, leads a panel session at Wide-Format Summit 2021.

The panel, addressing “Four Key Topics the Wide-Format Industry Can’t Ignore,” discussed post-COVID recovery, new applications for the segment, the supply chain, and finding and keeping good employees. Addressing recovery, the panelists offered a mixed bag of experiences. Some markets, like transit advertising and budget brands, dropped significantly and may not fully recover. Conversely, luxury brands did not drop, and according to Gerharer, building wraps have been “going like gangbusters.” In wide-format applications, the panelists stressed it was very helpful for them to have all major wide-format inkjet platforms in their shops, allowing them the flexibility to explore new opportunities and respond to customer requests. Scrima reported that while GSP’s convenience store food-related work virtually dried up, much of that loss was directly offset with a new need: COVID-oriented directional floor signage. All of the panelists report struggles with their supply chain, which have come as a result of the pandemic’s worldwide effect on production and shipping of materials. Brewer reported that Image Options has had to pass the increased cost on to customers. Addressing current labor shortages, the panel addressed the difficulty of engaging employees during the pandemic, and recruiting willing, dedicated employees during recovery. Gerharer said the industry needs to do a better job of selling itself to potential employees. “You have to show them it’s a career, he said, “not just a job.”

Employment and Engagement

Brian Adam, President of Olympus Group, is something of an employee-engagement guru. In his presentation, “Why People are Your Biggest Challenge and Greatest Opportunity,” he outlined the strategies his multi-location company has undertaken to engage and retain employees, even amid a year of suppressed business and vast uncertainty.

At Olympus Group, says Adam, the company is hell-bet on retaining its employees. This is being done through careful attention to pay rates, offering a variety of non-monetary benefits, getting creative with recruiting. He also stressed the need to share his company’s vision, which serves to give employees a stronger purpose. Among the non-monetary benefits Adam has explored are flexible work, the ability to purchase PTO, and autonomy, which gives a sense of ownership. For recruiting, the company has explored referral bonuses, schools and universities, and even social media blasts. At Olympus, says Brian Adam, the only differentiator they have is their people. Even amid the current labor challenges, he retains that commitment, seeing it as a primary path to success.



Brian Adam, President of Olympus Group, at the 2021 Wide-Format Summit.

The annual Wide-Format Summit – which officially launched as a live event this year, after moving to a virtual experience last year due to COVID – is an invitation-only, hosted-buyer event designed to bring carefully-vetted printing professionals and industry vendors for meaningful connections, purposeful discussions, and top-notch networking. To be considered for a future Wide-Format Summit, visit wideformatsummit.com/attend



Dan Marx [Author's page](#) Dan Marx, Senior Editor of the Impressions Group, holds extensive knowledge of the graphic communications industry, resulting from his nearly E three decades working closely with business owners, equipment and materials developers, and thought leaders. He has been published in industry publications worldwide, presented at industry events across segments, and served as an enthusiastic ambassador for new processes and emerging business directions.