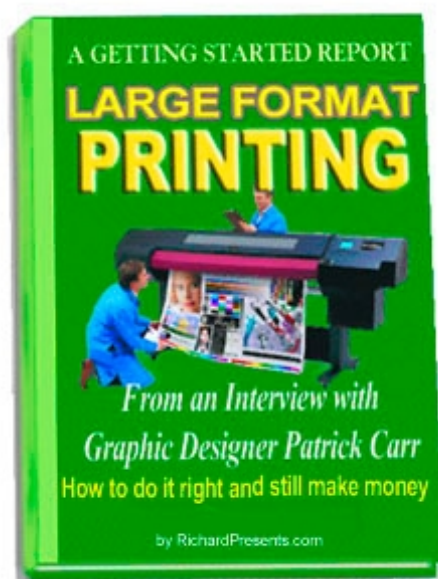


A Special “Getting Started” Report by RichardPresents.com



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**It is one of the Getting Started Report Series
from the RichardPresents.com website**

**Many of the Success Stories have been submitted
by the “people who made it happen”
Everyone is welcome to submit a personal
Getting Started success story.**

**Those that are selected will be spotlighted on the
website with the author’s links back to their
website address.**

**“So, just what is large format printing and
how can it help me?”**

We received an email from one of our readers who has to create a poster larger than he can print on his inkjet printer. Here is what he wrote:

"We have a small printshop where we design and print mostly brochures and flyers for our customers. Recently, we were asked to print a large poster for a local restaurant with a picture they had taken of their special dessert trays. We could scan and edit the picture in our old Photoshop program, but we couldn't print any larger than 12" x 18" on our inkjet printer. The customer said that we probably needed a larger format printer. Since we are just a little shop trying to survive in a very rural town, we've always been able to handle the local work on our A.B.Dick offset press, laser printer and inkjet printer. **So, what is large format printing and how could it help us with this type of work?"**

It would seem that the time has come for our reader to expand beyond the capabilities of his older print shop and to learn as much as he can about some of the more recent activities in his industry. We asked Patrick Carr if he would help our reader and others who may be considering expanding their capabilities by adding Large Format Printing to their print shop services.

Patrick has spent more than 20 years as a graphic Artist and designer, Art Director for various magazines and publications, and has recently added large format printing to his New Mexico Design and Imaging Studio.

Here, in an exclusive interview, Patrick shares what he has learned about selecting, purchasing and installing large format printers, and... probably even more important...the techniques he personally uses to produce the high quality product that both he and his clients demand.

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**RP asked: Patrick, tell us how a person could get started in the Large Format Printing business.**

**Patrick:** Wow, you're starting out with a tough one. I suppose the first thing is to decide is what kind of printing you want to do — commercial, which would include signs, posters, trade show displays etc. or fine art printing. Each requires different equipment and expertise.

Even if a person isn't quite sure of what direction they want to go, there are many fields the beginning printer has to master before a decision needs to be made. For example, since large format printing is primarily digital, an understanding of computers is helpful, and a solid foundation in imagery software a must.

"Color theory and color management" is a complex subject that also has to be tackled. You end up wearing a variety of hats, but all the information is readily available through classes and on the Web. I spent about three years just messing around with color and collecting desktop printers before I finally made the leap to wide format — but I'm a slow learner.

**RP: What special skills and experience does a beginner need?**

**Patrick:** I think more important than skills or experience is interest. Interest will get you through all the reading, all the information on the Web that loads with the same speed that grass grows, and the time it takes to plow through the news groups looking for that answer you can't find anywhere else. A lot of this stuff is just too new; you have to dive in and create experience from scratch.

**RP: Are large format printers expensive?**

**Patrick:** Not necessarily. If you consider anything 24 inches and over as "wide format" you can get started for around \$3000. However, you can spend over \$20,000 on a 72-inch printer. Again, it depends on what you want to do and how big you want to do it.

**RP: How about the cost of supplies?**

**Patrick:** Pretty expensive. Some companies make up for the low cost of their equipment by charging premium prices for the supplies. To replace the seven 220ml cartridges in my largest printer, it costs me almost \$800, which works out to around \$.45 to .75 a square foot, depending on inkcoverage and media. Speaking of media, paper can run anywhere from \$1.00 to \$3.00 a square foot.

This can add up when you consider everything. You have botched images because the color is wrong, or an area of banding shows up, or one of the nozzles clogs resulting in even more banding. You need to figure all this into your final pricing.

**RP: What kinds of software should be in their library?**

**Patrick:** Within reason you'll need to be able to match the software of your clients. This will almost always include image-editing software and Adobe's Photoshop is the standard, although there are other choices.

A good 'draw' program is important. I use both Adobe Illustrator and Macromedia Freehand. Sometimes a 'page-layout' program can help with positioning and output. QuarkXpress, InDesign and PageMaker are the top choices here. A RIP (raster-image processor) is another piece of software that can be of enormous help, particularly if you're doing commercial printing. Other equipment and software I find useful are the ones I use to calibrate my monitors and build profiles for my printers.

**RP: It seems obvious that there are many kinds of media and inks used in this industry. How should a person go about learning what to use and when to use it?**

**Patrick:** Depending on the manufacturer of your printer, you may be stuck using their supplies — good for them, bad for us. Third party inks and papers can be superior to OEM and much less expensive. As to what media and ink choices to make, that comes with many hours of experimentation and reading about what others have done. There are e-mail forums centered around large-format printing and the information available through these forums is priceless!

**RP: In your experience, do you feel that the large format printing machine manufacturers offer adequate training programs for their customers, the printers?**

**Patrick:** In my experience, no. There is one manufacturer that I know of, ColorSpan, that offers a free course in the use of their printers at their headquarters. I believe this to be the exception. You are pretty much on your own with most printers.

**RP: How broad is the market for this service and who are the usual users of large format printing?**

**Patrick:** Big, and getting bigger all the time. Digital Output magazine quoted some figures that indicated huge growth in the next three to five years. I believe this indicates the market is finding more ways to utilize this flexible and beautiful type of output.

On the smaller side of things we have photographers that are giving up their darkrooms to output their work with this technology, and on the other end of the size spectrum I've seen the faces of entire buildings covered with huge banners promoting events and products.

**RP: What are some of the things that a large format print shop can expect to be asked to print?**

**Patrick:** Well, have you seen those ads stuck to the floor of your local grocery? Those are done on wide format. Many billboard images are run off of “grand format” printers. Same technology, larger size. You may have noticed backlit advertising at your local airport—again, these are done on wide format printers. It’s a very flexible tool for producing temporary exterior photo-quality output that can also be set up to run indoor imagery lasting up to 100 years.

**RP: Can anyone make a reasonable return on their investment in equipment, material and time?**

**Patrick:** I think those who invest the time it takes to understand what they are doing have the best chance of building a business in this field. For the person that buys a printer and expects to produce decent output and an income with the push of a button, well, they might have a problem.

But that’s true for most businesses isn’t it?

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Patrick had to break off our conversation to deliver exposition posters for one of his special clients. We picked up this discussion again a few weeks later. In the first part of this interview, we discussed the letter sent to us by a reader who had to create a poster larger than could be printed on his company’s inkjet printer.

Here, in the second part of our exclusive interview, Patrick shared much more of what he has learned about selecting, purchasing and installing large format printers, and even more detailed techniques he personally uses to produce the high quality product that his clients demand, many of whom are artists.

RP asked: What are some of the different types of media used to make large format prints?

Patrick: The choices are nearly limitless. Everything from banner material to semi-transparent media designed to be backlit. All kinds of fabric are now available, generally used for events and trade shows. Some printers can even handle half-inch thick media.

RP asked: Do the Printer manufacturers or media manufacturers have guidelines to help a beginning LF Printer get started?

Patrick: Not that I know of. Most Information coming from printer and media manufacturers is targeted at the professional. Once you’ve reached the point where you’re working with large format printers, it’s assumed you’ve mastered the basics, i.e. file manipulation, color theory and color matching, profiling etc.

RP asked: You advised that replacing ink cartridges on Large Format Printers is very expensive. How many types of ink are there?

Patrick: Inks I'm familiar with are the water-based varieties that include dyes and pigments. Solvent-based inks are also available for those doing work meant to survive outdoors.

Third-party inks are usually cheaper than OEM inks but some printer manufacturers make it very difficult to use other inks - generally by adding a chip to the ink cartridge that says to the printer: Yep, this is the real McCoy, go ahead and start printing.

RP asked: Is there one that is a general-purpose type?

Patrick: No. Each ink has its advantages and disadvantages. Dye inks have a terrific color gamut, but are not considered lightfast. Pigments have a much longer life but color gamut isn't as large as what dyes are capable of. Advances are continually being made and some of the newer pigments can be favorably compared to dyes.

RP asked: Same thing for the print Media?

Patrick: Same thing. The application will always dictate what media to use. For example, a customer walks into your studio and requests a banner to advertise low rents for his apartments. Paper isn't going to work; it's going outside. You ask how long it will be hanging. He says about a year so you know you're going to have to use a banner-type material with pigment or solvent based inks.

Another customer asks for posters for an upcoming gallery show. The images are expressionistic with a variety of subtle colors. Since this is a one-time event and the poster won't be up longer than a couple of weeks you suggest dye-based inks on a high-gloss paper. They'll look great for the short time the posters will be needed.

RP asked: The more we discuss adding this service, the more involved and expensive it sounds. Remembering what our visitor asked in his inquiry, do you think it is practical for the small print shop operator to even consider doing it?

Patrick: It is involved and it is expensive. I think it practical only if the print shop understands that running large inkjets is not the same as printing out snapshots on a desktop printer. You're now responsible for matching the customer's needs to the appropriate materials, understanding color and color management, and have a willingness to tinker with temperamental machines. If this sounds like more fun than eating popcorn and watching a game on TV, then I guess it's a practical move. With proper marketing you can make money.

RP asked: We haven't really discussed the marketing part of the business and there are certainly a lot of potential clients who, themselves, are unfamiliar with large format prints.

Patrick: I'm no expert on marketing-I think I've been hitting the basics pretty hard though. I advertise in magazines read by potential customers and I join clubs and try to mingle with people I want as my clients. I specialize in printing artwork, commonly known as Giclée printing so a lot of my marketing involves education.

This is a relatively new method of creating reproductions so there's plenty of misinformation floating around. I've found if I take the time to explain what I do and why I do it, strangers become customers.

RP asked: A beginner large format printer could have a reasonably large market, but how should they promote the service? It seems to be similar to the chicken and the egg... which comes first - the Client or the Capability?

Patrick: Capability has to come first - the same as with all professional endeavors. Sure, you're going to make mistakes, but if a shop turns out consistently poor quality work, word will get around and customers will go talk to your competition. I can't think of any professional or technical vocation that doesn't require years of training before an individual is allowed to go it alone.

RP: Your Studio is in a fairly large metropolitan area. Do you think that an aggressive printer in a more rural area has a chance to realize a positive return on the investment required to add Large Format Printing to an existing printing service?

Patrick: I would say it depends on who you're trying to appeal to. If you involve yourself in commercial applications, an urban area will provide you with more customers than a rural setting. Of course if you're setting yourself up as a Web-based provider it doesn't matter too much where you are - as long as the supply trucks can make it to your office. I wouldn't recommend this - I think it much safer to establish a 'brick-and-mortar' location before depending on the Web for an income.

I happen to live in an area with an abundance of artists - and since I'm an artist, too, I naturally target this group. There are others doing what I'm doing and living in quite remote areas - which is where many artists also live.

So, if large format printing is the goal, I would look at not only the number of people in an area, but also the needs and interests of those people.

Thank you Patrick, for sharing your experience with us. We look forward to talking with you again, very soon.

There is a lot to know about this Industry. We hope to address more of these issues in future reports. Some of the very exciting aspects include **Fine Art Printing**, or Giclée (sounds like zhee-clay). We plan to pick up that discussion as well.

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Watch for announcements on our website for more of Patrick's expert comments and recommendations. Make sure you don't miss the next installment of this interview with Patrick when he discusses "Fine Art Printing," how he Approaches it and the services he provides for Other Artists.

Send your name and email address to assure receiving the next part of this **Getting Started report**. (It's Safe, we don't share anyone's email address with anyone else because we value your privacy.) Send to <mailto:sendLargeFormatReport@richardPresents.com> . (*)

Until then, we leave you with this question. If you have a 'Brick-and-Mortar' business, do you feel that large format printing could help your business grow? Send us an email with your thoughts. Thanks

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Patrick Carr's new website and portfolio can be viewed at <http://www.PatrickCarrImaging.com> (\*)

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send email to <mailto:pat@PatrickCarrImaging.com> (\*)

(\*) If these links are not active in your browser, simply copy and paste them into the browser address bar.

This interview was conducted by telephone and email in the fall of 2002. The field of Large Format Printing is continually expanding and becoming a much more significant topic among Artists, Printers, and equipment suppliers. The development of better printers, media and ink is un-ending.

Fine Art Digital Inkjet printing is gaining in acceptance as more and more galleries are admitting this work for exhibition and permanent display.

If you are interested in more up-to-date information, there are many forums, websites, newsletters and publications devoted to the subject. We can direct you to a few of them.

Thank you for visiting with us at <http://www.richardpresents.com>

**Richard**



