

Creative workshop

# Create a promo pack

Prolific Orlando-based designer **Hydro74** talks through the process of producing high-quality vinyl stickers and prints

**Self-promotion is vital if you want to stay connected with people you've worked for, and reach out to and impress others.** I don't personally do this as often as I should, but when I do, I want something that'll get a response from creative directors. For 2010, I teamed up with Sticker Robot out of California, and Vahalla Studios out of Missouri. Both vendors do high-quality silk-screen work, which really gives my self-promo that extra kick.

So how do you create something that sticks around on clients' desks as a reminder of you? Many designers neglect to think about this aspect, and their work is shuffled down to the bottom of a drawer and forgotten about. There should always be inspirational value in the work you show, and it should feature your own personal techniques that set you apart. This year's challenge was to produce something that will stick with a potential client, and get them excited enough to develop a further relationship.

If you'd like to explore the professional screenprinting process in more detail, you'll also find an exclusive behind-the-scenes video from Sticker Robot on your cover disc.



#### Hydro74

Orlando-based designer Hydro74, AKA Joshua Smith, works across apparel design, illustration, editorial design and custom typography. His diverse client list includes Nike, Levi's Billabong, Hasbro and Burton Snowboards. [www.hydro74.com](http://www.hydro74.com)



#### Zoltron

Known for Shepard Fairey's high-profile campaigns, including 2008's Obama: Hope and more recently Prosecute BP, Zoltron – founder of Sticker Robot – also supplied custom stickers to the Sea Shepherd and Sea No Evil art shows. [www.stickerrobot.com](http://www.stickerrobot.com)



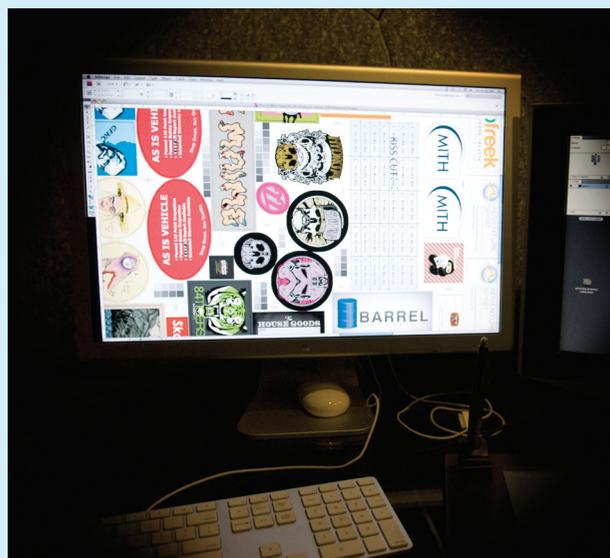
#### Dan Padavic

Kansas City's Vahalla Studios is the art and design of Dan Padavic and Tad Carpenter. Initially run out of a mechanic's shop, it now operates as a studio, gallery and print shop working with numerous bands and record labels. [www.vahallastudios.com](http://www.vahallastudios.com)



## Case study one: Sticker pack

**Sticker Robot** were my first port of call. Silk-screened on high-quality vinyl, their stickers last for five years or more, and should turn a few heads. Here, they share their process and top tips for preparing artwork for this type of print



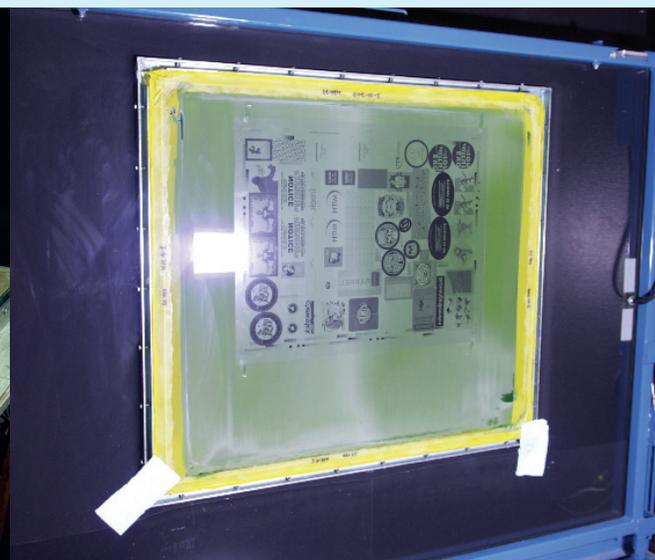
**01** Begin by adjusting your art files for the correct CMYK colour and grey balance (see margin note, below). Create die-lines to mark where your stickers should be cut, as well as any back-prints, and then lay out the sheet using InDesign. Your printer will then output AGFA film positives using an image setter. Colours, kiss cuts and file groupings all have to be taken into special consideration when laying out gang-run sheets.

### How to provide your artwork

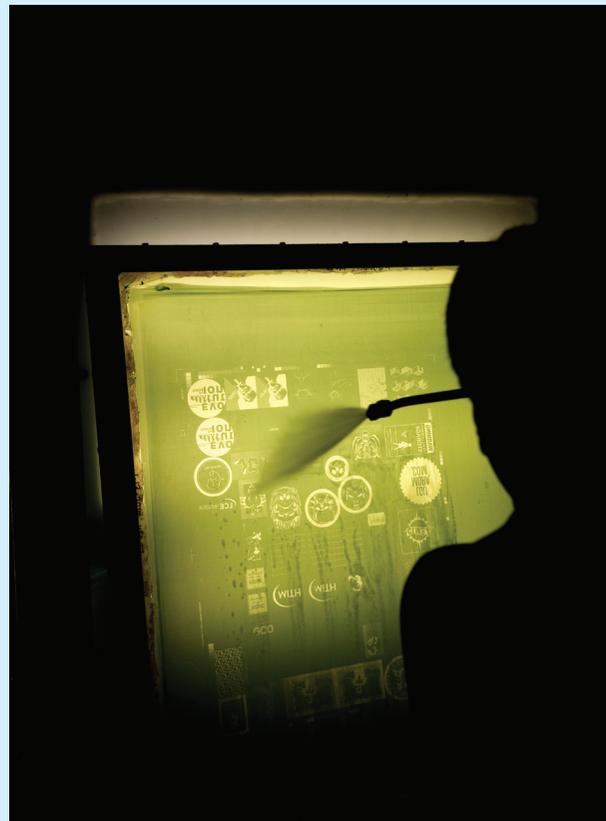
When you're preparing artwork for your stickers, always make sure it's created in CMYK colour. Preparing artwork in RGB mode is not recommended, as colour matching is problematic.

When preparing your stickers, convert all fonts to outlines whenever possible – otherwise, include both screen and printer fonts. Be sure to also include any fonts used in placed EPS files, and include all embedded (placed) images with your artwork. All pixel-based art should be prepared at a minimum of 300dpi, and one-bit images should be prepared at a minimum of 600dpi (1200dpi is recommended).

You can also print on clear vinyl to take your designs to the next level – here, artwork must clearly indicate any areas to be backed with white ink. Clear stickers can be backed with a white basecoat overall, leaving a clear border, or extended into the clear border to create a white pin-line – you can even back specific areas to create a certain desired effect. Keep all areas to be printed clear transparent.



**02** Tape the film positive onto the emulsion-coated screen. Then place the screen, with the film, into a vacuum exposure table. Expose the screens using a high output UV lamp – the UV light hardens the photosensitive emulsion that's not blocked by the film positive. The screens are coated with photosensitive emulsion – this table creates a sealed environment that holds the film completely flat to the screen. Each colour gets its own film positive and screen.



**03** Wash out the unexposed emulsion with water and an industrial pressure washer. This leaves the screen open where the ink supposed to pass through onto the vinyl sheets. When emulsion is applied and cured correctly, it is possible for these screens to print halftone dots up to 150lpi (lines per inch), for photo-realistic and fine art printing.

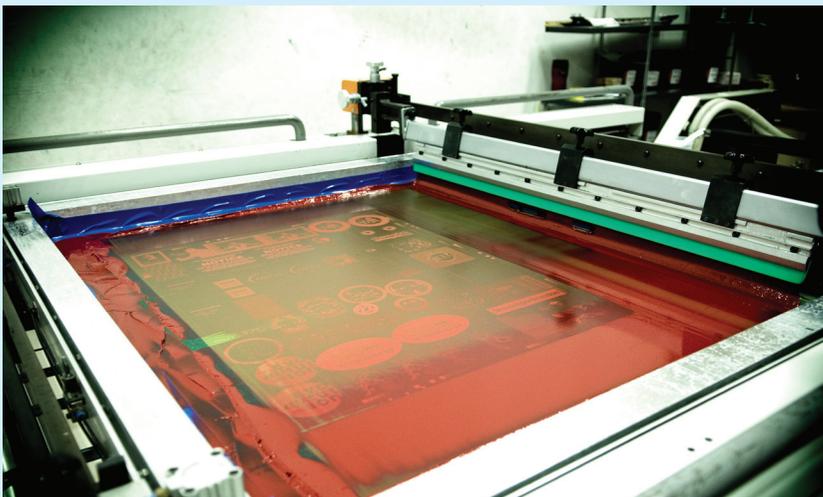


**04** The prepared screen is then placed into our Sakurai cylinder screenprinting press, and we pour UV ink directly onto the screen. Then the screen is registered for printing the vinyl sheets – this happens for each colour. We also use three coats of clear gloss ink, which gives the stickers extra protection outdoors and provides an ultra glossy finish.

### Silk-screen versus digital

It's important to understand the enormous difference in quality between digitally printed and screenprinted stickers. Screenprinted ink is generally 10 to 20 times thicker than digitally printed inks, while screenprinted materials have an effective outdoor capability that can be 2,000 to 3,000 per cent higher than conventional digitally printed materials.

Digitally printed stickers are only recommended for indoor use. Screenprinted materials are weatherproof and waterproof, and may be used indoors and outdoors.



**05** This gang run was done using process colour CMYK. We print one colour at a time using UV inks rather than solvent inks. Screen-printing enables us to put the thickest deposit of ink down (you can feel how thick it is). We only use high grade FujiFilm three-to-five-year fade-resistant inks, for the highest quality outdoor stickers. The ink is pressed through the open parts of the screen mesh using a squeegee. This press uses a vacuum cylinder to grip and pull vinyl sheets across the squeegee. Unlike most screen-printing presses, the squeegee stays in one place as the screen moves back and forth. This enables us to accomplish highly accurate colour registration.

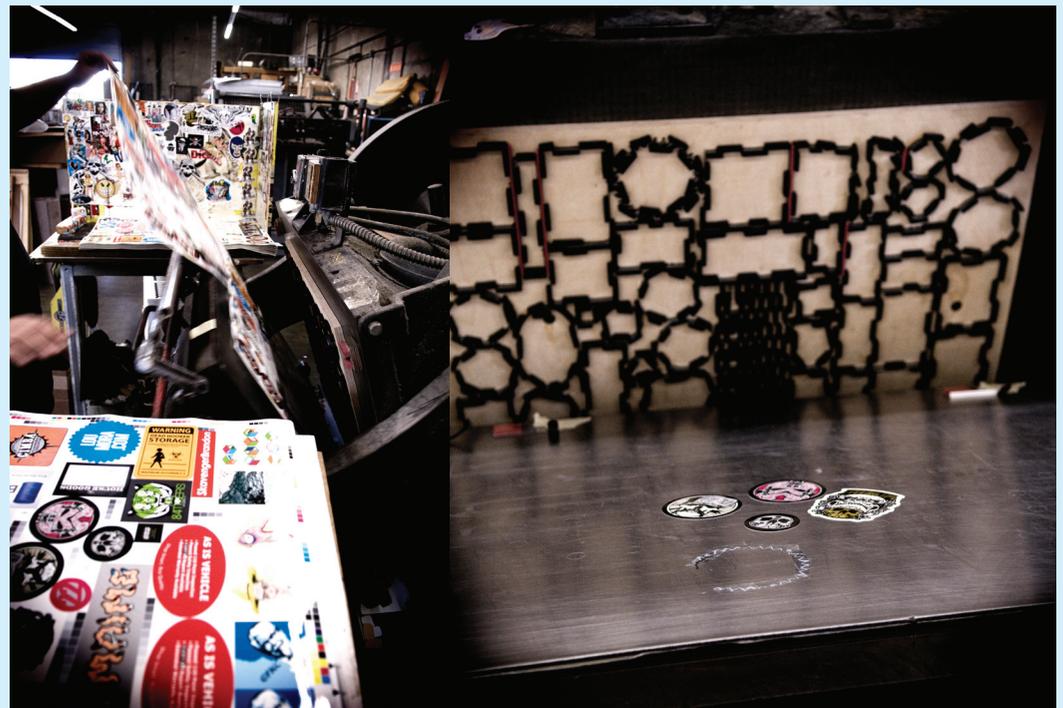
### Die-cuts, kiss cuts and hole punches

We can die-cut your stickers into any size and any shape (within reason). Die-cuts are represented by a one- or two-pixel stroke on a separate layer. We use it as a guide for cutting, and remove the layer prior to going to press. A 'kiss cut' cuts through the vinyl, but not the backing. You need to make sure you leave 1/4-inch between multiple kiss cuts. If you want to get tricky, you can make a die-cut sticker with several kiss cuts, add a 'hole punch' and use it for a clothing hang-tag.

Submit artwork at 100%, and indicate the die-cut shape and position with a one- or two-pixel stroke on a separate layer. Artwork must bleed 1/8-inch beyond the die-cut on all sides, so if you have a 4 x 4-inch sticker, your file should be 4.25 x 4.25 inches. Live area (safety margin) is 1/8-inch within the die-cut. Keep all important text (legal, etc) and graphics within the live (safety) area, so if you have a 4 x 4-inch sticker, your art and graphics should be within 3.75 x 3.75 inches.



**07** Now that we have our complete range of stickers in varying designs finished and ready to roll, the finished die-cut stickers are stacked and ready to be organised into packs.



**06** All of our dies are made by hand, conforming to any custom size and shape. The dies are made by cutting the sticker shapes into a sheet of wood. Then the die blade is shaped and pounded into the wood. Ejection foam is glued all around the blade. This keeps the stickers from clogging the die by pushing the cut sticker back out of the blade. The die is mounted into a die press, and printed sheets are cut one at a time. For kiss cuts, shorter blades are used that only cut through the sticker itself and not the paper backing.



**08** Once the stickers are organised into their relevant groups, the packs are sealed. Placards are stapled onto each pack, and then the sticker packs are boxed up and shipped out. Our screen-printed stickers last outdoors for years, unlike most digital stickers. Screenprinting gives you a certain quality and amount of options that you just can't get with any other type of printing. You'll also find an in-depth video of the process on your cover disc.

## Case study two: Mini-prints

To round off my promo pack, I worked with **Vahalla Studios** to produce a batch of postcard-sized black-and-gold promo prints. Here, we go behind the scenes to reveal how the process works, and how you can follow a similar example

**01** I selected nine prints that best show different variables in my work, from general skull-based work to some pieces I did for Nike (college basketball illustrations), as well as some styleguide illustrations for Hasbro and Lucas Films. I wanted to show a range of complex detail within my work, as well as some well-known, iconic figures that people can easily identify with.



### Registration and trapping

Semi-automatic presses make it easy to lock in registration where the press bed is moved to align layers. Trapping is the amount that colours creep under each other, and ensures there are no white lines between colours. On a manual press, the screen is usually adjusted, which can cause issues making layers line up.

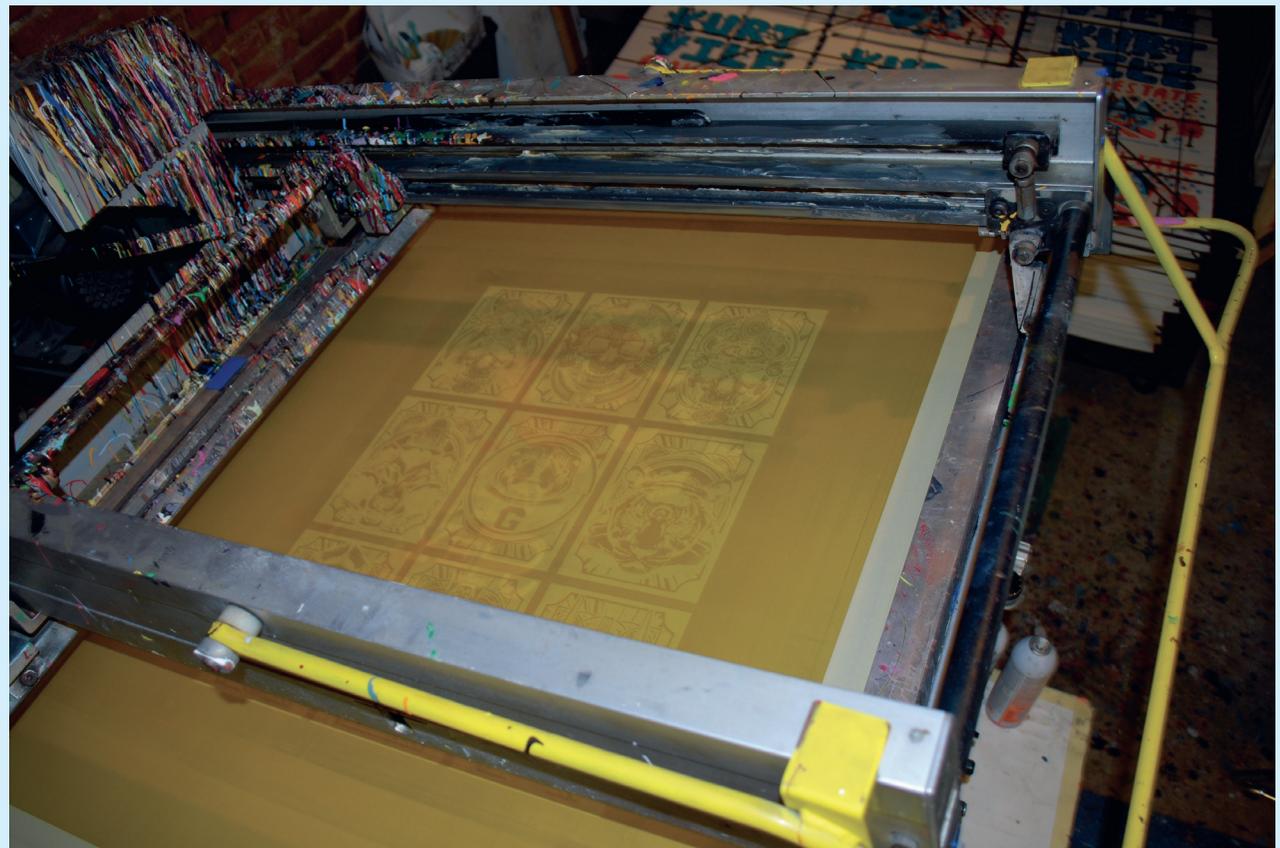


**02** I am well known for the type treatments I produce, but in this case I wanted to focus on my illustration work as bait for potential clients to take a moment to view my website and get further insight on what I offer. None of the pieces have any client names on them, since again this is about me and my work, not who I've worked with. In the end, the goal is to create something that shows off what skills I have, and open up dialogue with various clients I send these to.

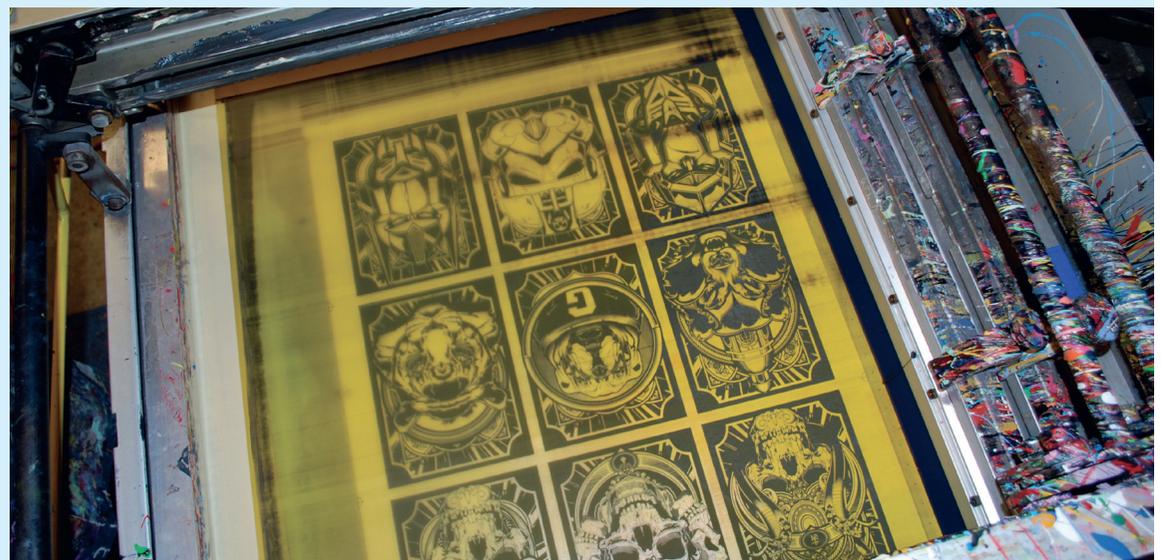
**03** I sent Vahalla Studios my Illustrator file, with some guides to tell them exactly what I wanted to accomplish. Dan from Vahalla Studios suggested a bellyband to wrap the pieces, adding a classy element that binds them together.



**04** Instead of hand-pulled prints, I wanted Vahalla to use their automatic press for absolute precision. I do enjoy hand-pulled silk-screening, but it allows for uneven coverage at times, where the automatic press guarantees complete coverage with only limited flaws. In the end, each sheet was cut down to create a set of 74 pieces for each of the nine designs. I chose the number 74 for obvious reasons.



**05** Screenprinting is basically an advanced stencil process. The image to be printed is output on to Mylar films, then burned into a photo-sensitive emulsion that is thinly applied to a silk mesh. The film is placed between the emulsions and a light table. When the emulsion is exposed to light, it hardens. Where the light is not enabled to hit the emulsion (for instance, behind the printing on the Mylar film) it is washed away with water and we are left with a stencil. The large screen with the stencil is then placed into what is called a 'clam shell' press. The pull of the squeegee arm is automated to ensure a high-quality print.



**06** The machine is operated by two press men, who load and unload the prints while checking registration of the colours. Each colour is laid down one at a time, with drying time in between. We use 100 per cent recycled paper and water-based inks to make the prints as eco-friendly as possible. No harsh chemicals are used in the process.

### The rules

A couple of general rules for making good screen prints are: always work from light colours to dark colours (unless transparency and overprinting are desired effects); and always remember that orange, yellow and red are not opaque colours. They will, most likely, always show what is printed beneath them.

**07** Self-promotion is extremely important for growth, as well as for maintaining good client relationships. It is a way for you to show off what you can do with the resources that are available, but also a way for you to build relationships with vendors. Each vendor always has a deal or two out there, so if you collaborate with them enough, they will let you know if they have a surplus of something to maybe cut down your costs a little.



**08** In the end, I really believe that creating unique pieces to promote yourself will pay for itself in the end. For example, even if I am only able to get two projects commissioned off the back of all of the print collections I give out, I've already made my money back plus some more. Not only that, but out of the pieces I've given, I've gained at least half the number of new contacts, and have already started the process of building relationships. Even if the client never contacts you, you will be on their radar and they may pass your name on to another client, which in the end is what I want to achieve. It's all about networking. Feel free to reach out to each of the vendors I use and see what's possible. They are artists doing a service for other artists, and the result will be worth the investment!

