



JAY MANDARINO
PRINTER of the YEAR

SEE JAY JUMP

The lessons he learned on the ramps and rails keep Mandarinino on top of his printing game

JAY MANDARINO, THE MAN BEHIND C.J. GRAPHICS, is weaving through the equipment on the production floor of the company's digital plant in western Toronto. A Xerox iGen is humming on the left and Jay stops for a second to pick up a sheet that comes sliding out, then puts it down, then quickly snaps it up again for re-examination. He zooms past a couple of Océ machines, cracking wise with a few employees. Now he's scooting past two laser die cutters with dynamic red Zund logos, giving feedback about an opened curtain that should always stay drawn. Zip zip zip.

He halts to show off the scenery and soak in the atmosphere. "Machines are cool," he says, grinning. Then he's off again. He's been at work since 5:30 a.m.

If you've met Jay, you won't be surprised to hear that he has attention deficit hyperactive disorder. He darts around like a pinball, and if you let him talk uninterrupted he tends to lose track of the topic. But that's OK. His tangents are interesting and he always doubles back to answer your question. If he's totally lost his way, he's aware and upfront. "What were we talking about?" he says, and there's that grin again. He's also dyslexic. School was not fun. "I had no self-esteem," he says. "I couldn't read or write. I was told I was stupid and I would go home crying in tears." When he was eight, Jay tried to kill himself. Searching for solutions to their son's distress, Jay's parents found the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, leading to the diagnosis that changed his life. He was far from dumb. He just had learning disabilities—or as Jay prefers to call them, challenges. It turns out Jay Mandarinino likes challenges.

Young Jay moved with his family to New York state, where

PHOTOS: MARGARET MULLIGAN

he attended the Gow School for Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities. With just five kids to a class and teachers who knew what to do with them, Jay flourished, earning top marks. There he developed a passion for skateboarding that would drive him to jump a Ferrari in front of an Eaton Centre crowd at age 15, and would culminate later in life with the launch of a 28,000 sq. ft. not-for-profit indoor skate park, one of 12 companies under the C.J. umbrella.

The trial-and-error tenacity required by skating gave Jay discipline, focus and a straighter spine. He returned to Toronto for high school and continued acing his studies. He also joined every school committee he could and, in his final year, started a part-time venture called C.J. Graphic Images with a friend named Chris (the original “C” in “C.J.”, which Jay now uses to stand for “See Jay.” As in, “If you need something printed...”).

C.J. designed business cards. Chris handled creative and Jay did the wheeling. Eventually someone asked if C.J. could print the cards as well and Jay said yes

without hesitating. He hit up a local print shop, and there he had two epiphanies as he observed other customers shuffling in and out. One, people would always need printing. Two, every job presented a unique challenge, which Jay says really piqued his interest given his ADHD. “I thought it was amazing,” Jay says. “Whether it was a busi-

HOW WE CHOOSE PRINTER OF THE YEAR


The Printer of the Year Award was created to celebrate printers who exemplify the best in this industry.

The Printer of the Year is chosen by the publishers and editors of *Graphic Monthly Canada*. The award is given to an individual who best fits the following criteria: 1. A printer who, in the course of building his or her business, has changed the industry and placed his or her mark upon it; 2. A printer who has also made a contribution to the betterment of the industry as a whole.

ness card, a brochure, a box, everything was different and I was pretty good with spatial concepts. I thought I had some good skill sets that I could work with.” C.J. made \$50 on its first printing job. Chris moved away for school so Jay bought her out for \$650, changing the company’s name to C.J. Graphics.

At university, a friend coached Jay in brokering. His career, like his school life, was ramping up. Then came third year. On January 13, 1983, Jay went skiing and broke his left leg so badly he almost lost it. He was in the hospital for six months (followed by years of rehab three times a week). But by this point he had honed a resilient sense of humour inherited from his father, plus a determination that had him learning telemarketing strategies from the confines of his hospital bed. Convalescing but energetic, Jay continued to broker from the sidelines, farming out printing jobs to a growing number of suppliers. “When I got out of the hospital, I tried to go back to school but I had so much business built up that I couldn’t finish my degree.”

AD GOES HERE

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Leaving his B.A. hanging and armed with a single photocopier, Jay set up a shop in his parent's basement. He would arrange meetings there, which led to funny situations whenever work and home crossed paths. "One of my first accounts was Wells Fargo Alarm Services," he recounts. "I told them to meet me at the house but I was late, so they came to the front door and my mom brought them in and offered them cookies and milk," he says, shaking his head. "They loved it. My mom was amazing, but I was so embarrassed." From there, Jay bought a townhouse. The basement hosted two copiers and a collator and the first floor housed reception. Upstairs there was a room for a Mac operator, another that was rented out to help pay the bills, and one where Jay himself would sleep when he could. The company roster was up to four people.

In 1985, C.J. was able to relocate to a 2,500 sq. ft. near Toronto's Don River. When it rained and river would rise, water seeped into the front lobby. Jay bought his first press for \$8,000 at an auction and C.J.'s complement grew to a Heidelberg 1-colour GTO and a 2-colour Multi. He followed up with a 2-colour GTO, but in 1990 the building got expropriated and C.J.'s progression wobbled.

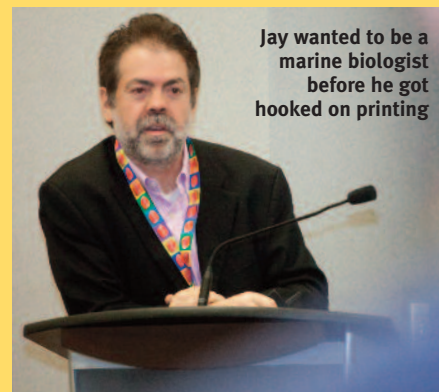
Devastated, Jay took the city's payout and persevered, finding a building that C.J. would renovate and expand over the next 10 years. A second building just up the street was also bought. And then in 2000, the company moved to its headquarters in Toronto's west end, taking over the entire building six years later. C.J. now does \$25-million in sales and, with all its companies combined, employs 140 people. It provides print for corporations small and large, printing everything from movie posters to parking lot signage. It expanded its facilities in 2008 by purchasing a second plant just 10 minutes away to house its subsidiaries like C.J. Digital, Digital Propaganda (for large format), C.J. Interactive and Oyster Publishing. This is where Jay sits now at a boardroom table dressed in black jeans and a black button-up, fiddling with his phone as his story trails off. "Sorry, multitasking," he says. "What were we talking about?"

QUALITY, CONTROL

By its count, C.J. Graphics has won over 6,000 awards for its work, a source of derision from some who say that C.J. only wins the most because it enters the most. "When we first started winning all the awards, everyone was negative," Jay says.

OUT TAKES

Jay on his printing heros, movies, and favourite tricks on the skateboard



Jay wanted to be a marine biologist before he got hooked on printing

What did you want to be when you grew up?

A marine biologist.

What's the coolest thing about printing?

You get to make things. You see a finished product and there's a sense of satisfaction.

What do printers do wrong?

We're the worst promoters. We produce amazing things that people use to market themselves, yet we're not marketing ourselves.

What sets C.J. apart?

We're one of the few printers in the country who really offer one-stop shopping.

Best purchase?

Heidelberg XL-105 6-colour plus coater, for its fast makeready time and high speeds. The quality is unbelievable.

Who are your industry heroes?

Dick Kouwenhoven of Hemlock and Duncan McGregor of Arthurs-Jones.

How do you unwind?

I see three or four movies every week. That's my escape.

Favourite celebs you've met through charity work?

Robin Williams and Sidney Poitier.

Favourite skateboarding trick?

Hang-ten is my go-to move. It's old school.

Does winning awards still feel special?

Yeah, it's pretty cool. Winning awards is not just for us. It's for our clients, staff, partners and suppliers.



Early location near the Don River in Toronto

Nowadays, he thinks C.J. garners more peer respect thanks in part to the time he's invested giving back to the industry, sitting at the head of The Craftsmen's board, joining the PIA, OPIA, and CPIA, lecturing at Ryerson University and giving countless student tours, and more. And besides, he says, regardless of how many competitions he enters, it's not like the judges don't have other options.

"C.J. does some really great work," says Dick Kouwenhoven, chair and chief executive officer of Hemlock Printers. "They're very deeply rooted in design. There are some similarities with Hemlock in that respect; we are both fanatic about doing things really well." Kouwenhoven, based in Burnaby, BC, calls Jay a "brilliant" businessman and regards C.J.'s work as the best in Ontario. ("I don't want to concede that his quality is better than ours!" he laughs.) "They are the highest-quality producer there. I see that very clearly," he says.

"We always dealt with C.J. on the higher end—the really special jobs that required special attention," says Jean-Pierre Veilleux, principal at Nonpareil, a Toronto-

based branding and design firm. Veilleux has dealt with C.J. over three decades, including at past positions with other firms. "When you're trying to push the process to get the result that you want, you have to be working with someone who understands that you don't want the stan-



Both printing and skateboarding are self-taught skills that require a lot of falling down and getting back up

dard run-of-the-mill product," Veilleux says, pointing out that these special projects are not the most lucrative. "You knew that he was working for you, not just to maximize his profit. And that's very comforting for designers to know."

Jay says the company's focus was at one time almost solely driven by designer agencies. That's tapered and C.J. now directly bills clients for the bulk of jobs. "But our

loyalty is to the design community," he says. "We respect design and we will always promote and take the side of the design agency; we will work with them to talk the client into trying different things."

Laural Carr, creative director at Toronto's Impagination Inc., a marketing communications company, says the quality of C.J.'s work is made clear by the care on the floor. "They're super-confident in what they're doing. They always have the most up-to-date equipment. They're on time and that's always appreciated," she says. "I mean, there are times when you feel like a press person is just going through the motions, and I don't feel like that at all at Jay's."

But the press floor climate hasn't always been this warm. I ask Jay what mistakes he's made along the way, and after a deadpan quip ("Talking to the media") and a long 24 seconds of silence he offers this: "I think at the beginning I didn't listen that much to the people here." Deeper into our talk, he cops to having had a temper, to undermining production staff and micromanaging people out the door. "I probably let some people quit that I shouldn't have," he says. "I should have tried to work it out."

C.J. shareholder David Adams has worked at the company for 20 years, currently serving as general manager of colour technologies. As he tells it, "Jay was young and headstrong. Not pushy, but go-go-go style, like a bull in a china shop." Jay is harder on himself. "I was terrible," he says. "I was probably the worst boss in the world." He rationalized this by telling himself he was the one paying the bills, making most of the sales, working 20 hours a day. Staff turnover was high. In the mid-'90s, he realized that he was the reason everyone kept hightailing and knew he had to do something about it. He enrolled in anger management classes and began cultivating a new leadership style.

Now Jay trusts people to do their jobs—Adams confirms this and says the management team has never worked better. He likes to mix hard work with an easygoing atmosphere. He asks for and considers his employees' opinions. He's no longer a one-man team. The company hands out awards for employee appreciation every Christmas and, balancing Jay's reputation for browbeating price negotiations, holds an annual awards dinner to celebrate its suppliers. Not to mention the annual ski trips with close colleagues and clients. And Jay now recognizes that different people need different things from him, be it positive feedback, raises, new titles or more responsibility.



"Back when I was 15, I convinced a man who was trying to sell Lottery tickets to let me jump over the prize Ferrari for publicity. I missed many, many times but finally landed it. I drew quite a crowd of spectators and media, stopped traffic and sold lots of tickets. All I'd ever jumped before was a chain! I like to think that this was one of the first inklings of the business sense that has taken me so far since then. I wish we had YouTube back then!" —Jay Mandarin

"You're in trouble? He stands behind you," Adams says, declining to dish out specifics but making it clear he's speaking from experience. "You can always just walk into his office and tell him you're having difficulties at home, whatever. He'll help you in any way, shape or form he possible can." A key bit of transformational counsel came from George Hurley, C.J.'s senior vice president and partner who passed away last year following a battle with cancer. "George taught me to never make a rush decision," Jay says. "If you're angry, don't decide right then, wait 24 hours. I think that's the best advice anybody ever gave me."

Voices slide down a couple registers when people reminisce over George Hurley. An e-mail from an old client describes him as "cool like John Travolta in *Pulp Fiction*." Adams tells about the day he thinks Jay found out that his partner would probably never return to work. "That was the day that you saw a real sharpness in Jay's voice and in what he was doing. Sharp and hard." In his 20 years, Adams had never seen Jay have a rougher day. "It's been hard. It's still hard," Jay says. "George was only here for six years but he had an impact; he helped increase the sales, he gave me a different perspective, he was one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet. He was amazing." Thankfully, the new Jay Mandarin builds teams. To help shoulder Hurley's absence, plus any number of day-to-day tribulations, Jay has the support of a cadre of other longtime team members. "I am lucky," Jay says, before correcting himself, "sorry, we are lucky—because we have some of the best people in the country."


ON THE BOARD

The end of our tour through C.J.'s facilities ends with the skate park. There's a quiet girl with pink hair sitting by the counter, flipping the pages of a glossy mag as a dozen other young people fly up ramps behind her. Jay asks why she's not on the grind. Maybe she'd rather use a scooter? She says she's nursing a sore wrist. He offers her protective equipment, but she declines, making then dodging eye contact. Jay doesn't prod her, leaving her alone to choose.

"Was she injured?"

"I doubt it," he says. "I think it's low confidence. You know, when everybody else seems to really know what they're doing..." Jay is proud of C.J. and the challenges he's overcome to get it rolling. He's not a legacy printer; he says he started with \$800 and his personal net worth was \$1-million

by his 30th birthday. If running a print business and skateboarding share any pavement—and if you talk to Jay, they do—it's this: both are self-taught skills that require falling down and getting back up.

"Skateboarding was a vehicle for me to jumpstart my whole life," he says. The challenge is getting on board, and making peace with doing things off-kilter. Make your adjustments, then it's zip, zip, zip. 

CHARITY WORK

Over the years, Jay has increasingly dedicated himself to community work. He sponsors school scholarships and learning disability initiatives. He started the not-for-profit C.J. Skateboard Park & School and donates his services as an auctioneer and emcee through his JBM Event Auction Services. This year alone he's emceed events with singers Elton John and Sting and actor Jude Law.

"Jay's a super great, generous contributor," says Craig Morrison, program director and teacher at Oasis Skateboard Factory, a Toronto District School Board student re-engagement program. Jay donates his time and expertise to Oasis, giving entrepreneurship workshops and motivational talks. "We have students who haven't experienced success before, so he talks to them about his experience struggling in school, and overcoming those hurdles himself through skateboarding to become a successful businessman," Morrison says. C.J. also holds free skate days for the students, and provides free printing services for the young entrepreneurs' flyers and brochures.

This year Jay was one of 60,000 Canadians to receive the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, in recognition of his social contributions. "Jay has been dedicated to his community for many years...helping to raise money for disadvantaged children and establishments like the Daily Bread Food Bank" says Laurel Broten, MPP Etobicoke-Lakeshore, who nominated him for the award. For Jay, the medal stands out among his other awards. "It's amazing because it's for my charity work," he says. "That's where a lot of my passion is."

It's that passion that might pave the way for his future. When asked about retirement, Jay says he can eventually see himself maybe selling C.J. and diving head-on into the skateboarding world. He talks about plans to help regulate the scene, keep kids off the street and build more parks in more municipalities. The printing might stop one day, "but I'll never stop working," he says.



Jay, centre, receives his Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal from MPP Laurel Broten, on the right. His wife, Lorena Urrutia, is on the left



Jay donates his services as an auctioneer and emcee for many causes. Here he is at a gala event with Sting in New York