



Guest Columnist: Reprinted from GeMiNi with permission.

by Ray Haddad

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## Custom Cards Made Easy

by Ray Haddad

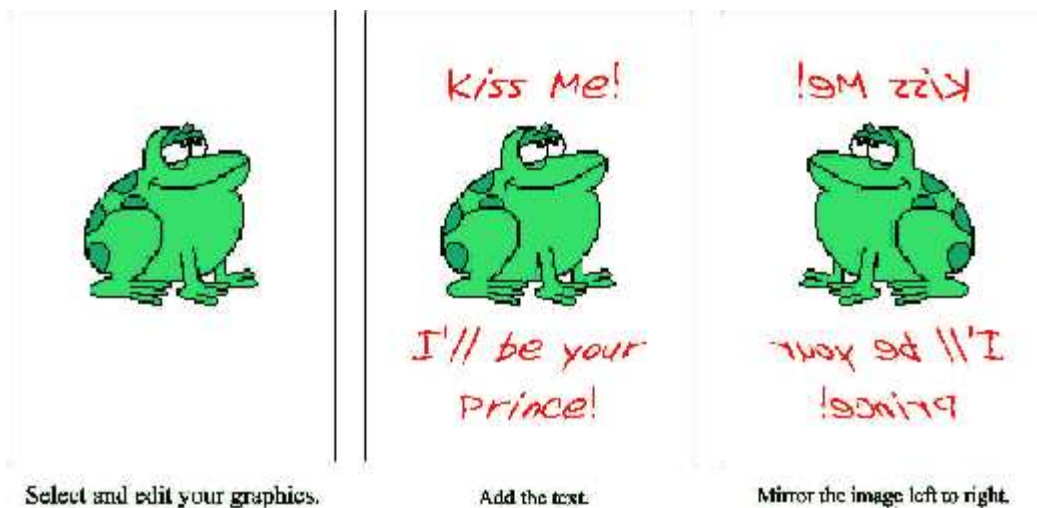
Over the years, I have often wished for a way to make custom playing cards. Sometimes, it was for a client who wanted their message brought to their customer's attention. Other times, I just wanted a better or different way to perform one of those cute little packet tricks. There are always reasons to wish for more.

Making use of the technology we have sitting at our fingertips, I have come up with an easy and economical method to print custom playing cards for our own use. Here's how I do it with great success and not a little bit of fun.

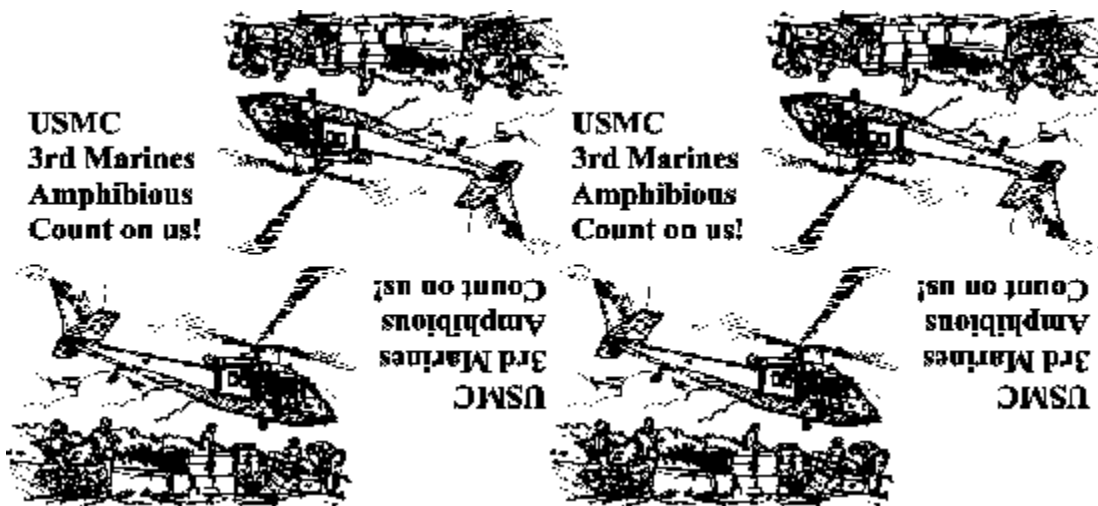
You'll have to gather up some materials and identify some sources of artwork. I use iron-on T-shirt printing paper for making the card images transferable from my computer to the playing cards. You'll need to get some T-shirt printing material for inkjet printers at your office supply house. They cost about \$20.00 per package of 10 sheets. That's enough to make about 250 playing cards if you fill up each sheet before you print it. You can make around 25 cards per sheet. You'll also need a deck of blank faced cards that you can get from any magic dealer. In a pinch, you can use all those extra jokers that are hanging around.

The first step is to prepare the surface of a playing card. I use Bicycle brand linen finish poker sized cards. Take a blank playing card and use very fine sandpaper, 200 grit or better, on the face to remove the surface sheen from the plastic coating. Just a light sanding is all that is required. Be thorough and make sure you don't miss any places. This step is critical to the durability of final image. If you want to use those extra jokers, use acetone to wipe the ink from the face of the card. Be sure not to get a single drop on the back of the cards as the acetone is not forgiving enough to know that you didn't really want to take off the back design as well. If you use acetone to prepare the cards there is no need for sanding as the top layer of the plastic coat will be removed by the acetone.

Now comes the fun part. Using your favorite picture program, make the image you wish to put on the card in mirror image format. That is, left to right mirroring so that text is backwards on the screen but not upside down. You start with a basic graphic or photograph. Then, add your text message. Mirror the entire image and text from left to right to make a mirror image. The mirror image is required since the T-shirt iron on material will be placed image side down later. Figure 1 shows three steps in the process of making a custom image.



Make sure the final image will fit on a playing card. If you make up 25 at once, make the image into a 5 by 5 matrix to match your sheet. If not, you will have many wasted chunks of iron-on material. Try and fill it up even with extras of your original in case you make a mistake in final preparation. That will help you to maximize the material uses. A bridge sized card is 2.25 by 3.5 inches in size. A poker sized card is 2.5 by 3.5 inches. Since letter paper has a printable are of 7.5 by 9.5 inches, you can make 3 across and 3 down for a full sized printed image. I usually don't fill the card completely with an image so 25 images fit quite nicely on a single sheet. See figure 2 for a layout example. Be sure to make a mirror image of the graphic and save it.



After you are finished manipulating your image, print the image on plain paper using your draft print quality. Match it up to the playing card and see how it will look. If you have mirrored the image, you will have to imagine the look at this point but the basic fit on the card will be apparent. Resize the image or edit to fit your needs.

When you are ready for a final print, print the image in the left to right image print or make the image a mirror image in your software. Print at the highest quality on the iron on material. Don't rush the drying process. Let it dry thoroughly before you continue. Cut one picture so it is slightly smaller than a playing card and iron the picture on the card using as low a heat setting as you can. Don't overlap the image on the card. Make sure there is at least 1/16" or 1mm of playing card white space around the image. Also, don't use a soft ironing surface like most ironing boards. Use a fairly stiff piece of wood or cardboard covered with

one layer of cotton cloth. That will keep the card from being wrinkled by the heat.

After it cools, spray coat the surface of your playing card with either Krylon Matte Finish clear coating or Krylon Gloss finish clear coating. Use matte if you want a roughed surface or one without gloss and the gloss for shiny cards that resemble the sheen of an ordinary card. If you need a heavy coating, do it in several steps rather than one thick coat. This will keep the iron on material from running when the paint acts as a solvent, which it does if it is pooled. Many light coats over a 10 minute period are far better than one coat applied too thickly.

I recommend using only the Krylon brand because after many experiments with other brands, Krylon was the only one that could take repeated riffle shuffling and not crack. It remained flexible and coated the card well with excellent sealing.

The finish spray coat does two things. It prevents peeling of the iron-on material since you have left a small exposed area around the image and it makes the image scuff proof. In addition, depending on the brand of iron-on material, it makes the image sharper since it makes the iron on material more transparent as it soaks in.

This method works for photo quality cards or for simple text. For obvious reasons, this is best done for limited runs of the cards. There are companies who specialize in custom playing cards in quantity. I wouldn't even think of trying to make 1000 cards but have a great time making 25 at a time.