

CANVAS

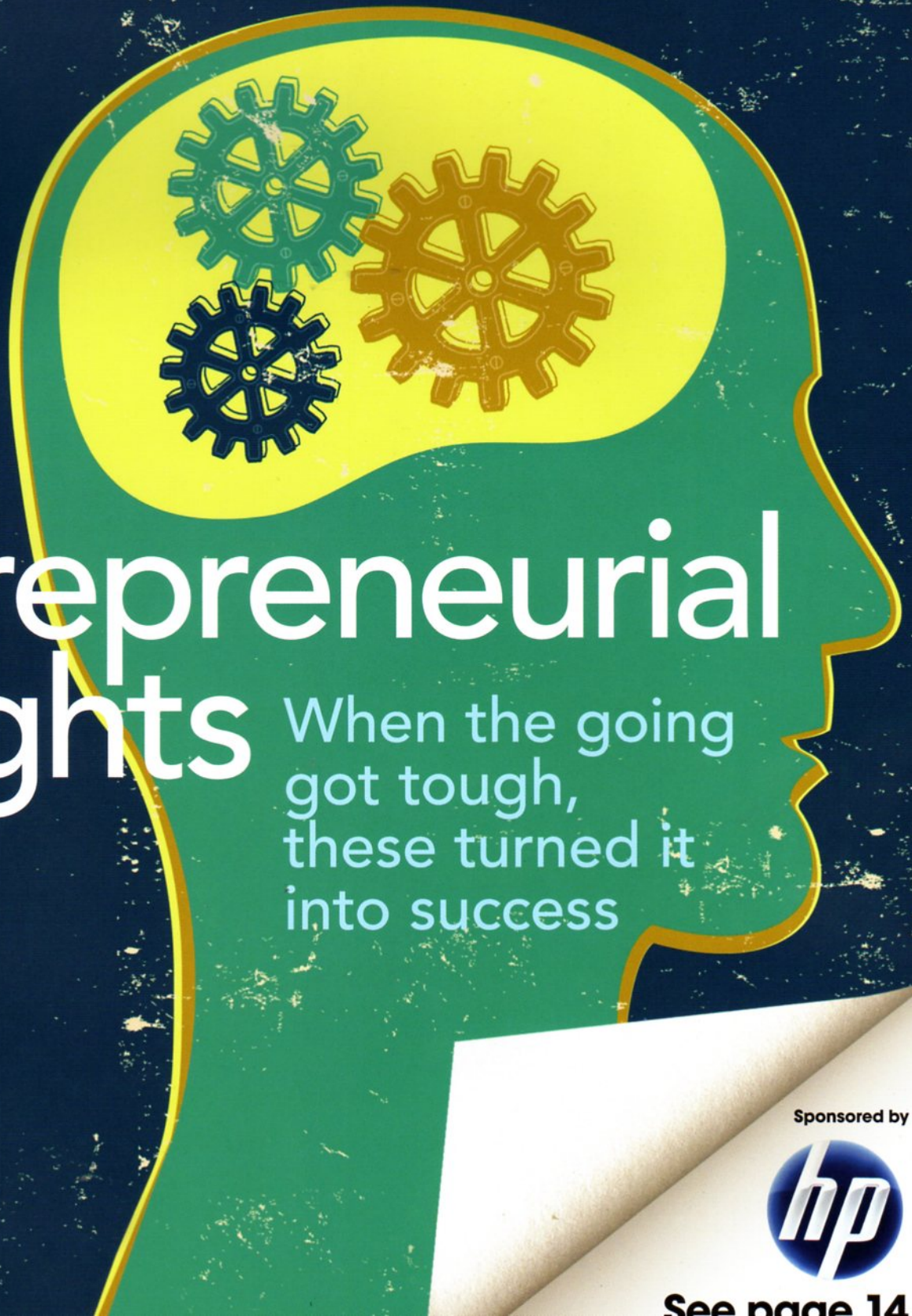
SUPPORTING THE
PRINT SALES &
MARKETING
PROFESSIONAL

AUGUST 2009

P24 Stop Driving Your Customers Crazy

P30 One of a Kind

P36 As Seen on TV



Entrepreneurial Insights

When the going
got tough,
these turned it
into success

Sponsored by



See page 14

Go-to Resource

For years, Sabine Lenz and other designers lamented – if only there was a database for speced paper that designers could use, to compare and contrast, and at the very least, to stay current on whether a paper line was available or discontinued. Finally, Lenz decided to do something about it. So about eight years ago, she put together a plan for an online database and pitched it to paper mills.

“Nobody believed that this was an option,” Lenz says of the initial response. “You look at it today and think ‘What do you mean they didn’t believe in it?’”

Indeed, the industry has come a long way in its acceptance of the Internet as a resource. So has Lenz’s PaperSpecs, of which she is the founder. While planning the database, she had to change the business model a number of times to accommodate the market, and also technology. At the time of the startup, Internet speed was iffy and a database like PaperSpecs might not run smoothly. One idea for the business model included whether or not to use the Internet or do CD-ROM updates.

Today, designers and print buyers can search from over 4,300 papers from more than 70 mills by brand name, color, weight, FSC-certification (to name a few) making the evaluation process that much easier. The database has information on price ranges, envelope availability, digital press compatibility and sizes. There’s also a color simulation feature that provides the closest PMS number as well as LAB and RGB percentages allowing designers to visualize an approximation of the paper color.

“People are so overpowered with the amount of information they receive these days, it’s very hard to know which one is the right one and which one is not.”

Building the database and finding the right technology was one thing. Getting the mills to trust the idea, and buy in to the format, took a little bit of convincing, Lenz says. Some mills were skeptical, wanting designers to come to them for everything, while others may have had 10 lines, but wanted one emphasized more than another in the database.

Lenz says that most mills have “really embraced the concept so they’re happy to keep us up to date with the content.” The database gets paper products out to a national audience. With paper companies having fewer spec reps to cover larger territories, they may not have the reach they once had with customers, so an online presence is paramount.

“People are so overpowered with the amount of information they receive these days, it’s very hard to know which one is the right one and which one is not,” Lenz says. “And no one has the spare time to go back and check everything – that’s where we come in.”

