



## Fluorescent Sublimation Inks: The Future is Bright

Developments in full color sublimation technology have continued at a rapid pace in the less restrictive wide-format market. Wide-format printing applications are more demanding, requiring constant quality improvements and fair price/performance. Several licensed ink suppliers intensely compete in this lucrative and growing arena.

During the past several months I have had the opportunity to test two sublimation inks from Westar Systems located in Colorado Springs. The first of these is FLR. FLR is a black light reflective fluorescent sublimation ink. The second ink is named SLF. This stands for Super Light Fast. This ink is claimed to provide substantial improvements in UV lightfastness when compared to standard sublimation inks.

In this article I will cover the FLR ink. Next month I will review the SLF inks once our Xenon UV testing is complete.

### How Fluorescent Inks Work

Fluorescent inks provide an unusually bright, vibrant image. The chemistry of these inks brings high energy UV light that is normally invisible into the visible light spectrum. This allows intense color to be reflected to our eyes (normal visible + high intensity UV reflected light).

The brightness of fluorescent yellow and magenta can be 2-3 times greater than the brightness of normal sublimated colors. While an obvious use of the inks is in black light displays, applications in normal light conditions are numerous when high impact images and effects are required.



Westar FLR inks add bright detail colors to this closeup of the butterfly on a Unisub substrate.



The FLR inks used with discretion produce a strong visual impact on these floral and spring landscape tiles.



Fluorescent sublimation allows you to create fabrics with brilliant color.



Fluorescent inks improve visibility of traffic and street signs.

**How To Use Them**

The FLR inks work best with intense pastel and tropical colors (Yellow, Magenta combinations), and with large, solid areas of color. You will lose much of the effect if you use darker images with a great deal of shadows or lowlights.

Fabrics with the FLR inks can be particularly stunning and are well suited to the youth and tourist markets. The inks will work great for commercial signs and displays where vibrant visual impact is required. In addition, the FLR ink's reflective properties make them ideal for a variety of safety applications.

In low light interior environments the inks can be used to create unusual artwork, murals, banners and signs illuminated by black light bulbs.

Fluorescent inks can be a bit tricky to use. They are difficult to color manage. A degree of trial and error may be required to obtain the best results. Often they are utilized as additional spot colors managed effectively by RIP software.

**Conclusion**

The FLR inks work great when used in a black light environment or more commonly where very bright images are required in normal light conditions. When used properly, the effects can be exceptional. Ink cost is only slightly higher than that of standard sublimation inks and UV resistance has been improved. These inks are definitely worth considering. You may find some new fabric and hard substrate market opportunities that will expand your product offerings.

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The same warning sign illuminated with a 60-watt blacklight bulb in a darkened room.



Vibrant colors catch your eye in this restoration of an antique hotel sign.

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