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Sign Source



Left: 40-foot bus wrapped with a combination of digitally printed perforated vinyl window film, copper metallic vinyl film, and reflective vinyl letters; Middle: Ten-foot-high sign on Alupalite using a VUTEK PressVu UV 200/600 by EFI; Right: Signs created for Americinn Perk on 1/4-inch-thick white PVC Panels.



Top: Chico's elevator graphic printed with a Mimaki JV3

Bottom: 5x5-foot prints on gatorboard printed with a VUTEK PressVu UV200/600 by EFI

At first glance, there doesn't seem to be anything that Sign Source cannot do. The sign shop, based out of Eden Prairie, MN, has fabrication, electrical, digital printing, laser cutting, and screen printing capabilities all at its fingertips. Its clientele ranges from land developers, hospitality, design firms, and corporate businesses. Randy Herman, president, believes that the breadth of applications keeps Sign Source's customers loyal.

"For example you may be a developer and want large, on-site marketing signs that need to stand up outdoors for a period of a year or two. You may also want some interior marketing materials - printed on standard poster board. And what a customer would really like to be able to do is go to one place, one time, with their artwork and be sure that their standard will be upheld the same way."

Of course the shop was not always this diverse. Back in 1987, Sign Source was a traditional sign shop creating small, classic hand lettered designs. Becoming friendly with ever-changing technology, they purchased their first vinyl plotter, moving away from hand lettering. Then, in 1991 they bought their first digital printer, an Encad.

Although the goal was to expand product offerings, the Encad also increased their efficiency, by printing more at a lesser cost. Herman explains, "Being able to print digitally has saved us a lot. Even if we are printing the same sign at the same volume there is still a cost savings."

Printing at a lesser cost was something that Sign Source's competitors were doing and Herman says that they were losing customers because of it. "As bigger competitors adopted new technologies we knew we had to stay in the game. Pricing in the field of POP has gotten extremely competitive so unless you can print directly to a material you probably can't compete in that world. Some of our customers started to drift away, telling us to call them when we could do a relatively short run at smaller price."

Purchasing a VUTEK PressVu 200/600 by EFI flatbed in March 2006 was what put the sign shop officially back in the game. The biggest reason for adding to their already large collection - two Mimaki JV3s, one Encad 10001, and an Epson - was savings. "Savings in labor and materials because we are now able to print directly to a substrate, rather than printing to something and then applying it to a substrate," Herman continues.

Now he doesn't know what they every did without the flatbed. He refers to it as the lifeblood of the shop. "We sometimes question what we would do if it was down for a day or two."

Sign Source's most popular applications include POP signage and marketing signs for builders and developers and it is heavily involved with electrical signage. The company recently acquired a fairly large electrical sign manufacture in the Twin Cities. Thanks to the broad range of applications offered and how well the shop performs, Herman has been forced to look for a larger location. The old shop is running out of floor space and Herman believes it would be nice to have the newly acquired electrical shop and the current shop all under one roof.

As Sign Source's success continues to grow they have both themselves and their customers to thank. Business is truly through word of mouth. As Herman explains, "the philosophy we have always had is the best advertising is doing a really good job for your existing customers. If you're busy you grow without advertising." This has certainly proven true for one traditional sign shop successful at using its digital technology.