"Can You Do This 45-Foot Trailer in One Week?"

Product Spotlight:
GERBER EDGE®

Appleton Signs
Southampton, England

Appleton Signs is used to doing huge work - whether you're referring to size, amount, or impact. However, this job even made them nervous. This particular trailer was going on a promotional tour with a definite starting date, so this was a drop-dead deadline.

The 45-foot (13.5 m) vehicle was to be emblazoned with the Mario" character of Nintendo" Super Mario Bros." video game fame, Nintendo logos, and the invitation to "Meet the Challenge". Known as the "Nintendo Challenger", this vehicle would tour computer game exhibitions throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. The trailer opened out to form a stage, and a look inside would reveal groundbreaking, new 64-bit game consoles for visitors to try and high-tech audiovisual equipment.

Impossible Deadline?

This was no ordinary job, but Appleton Signs is no ordinary sign shop. Established 30 years ago, they have 45 employees and average annual sales of $US 4.1 million to 4.9 million. The shop is located in the port city of Southampton, England, 1 ½ hours outside of London.

Let the games begin! It's Monday morning. The artwork and photography on disk is given to production manager Dean Beckett. Can the whole job be done by the weekend? The file formats were converted, and the process colors were printed to vinyl within three days. The trailer was due to arrive Thursday or Friday. Thursday and Friday came and went. Where was the trailer?! It arrived on Saturday. Beckett had allowed two days to apply the artwork to the enormous vehicle. Luckily, it took less than a day. Whew!

How was all this possible? Appleton Signs has a secret weapon to conquer "impossible" deadlines; it's called The GERBER EDGE® digital color printing system. The EDGE prints on durable adhesive vinyl that needs no lamination. In this case, the machine's ability to automatically panel large images in precise registration was invaluable. Beckett remembers starting to work with the system three years ago, "At first, we were nervous about the idea of paneling. We were worried that the

seams would show, but if you stand a short distance back, you can't see them at all. They blend right in."

Appleton Signs produces a large, steady volume of work, in addition to special projects like the Nintendo Challenger. In a typical week, they will complete 30 to 50 vehicles including trailers, vans, and cars - while fulfilling requests for shop fascia signage. Simultaneously, several crews travel the country, fitting out signage for a chain of superstores.

Getting Up to Speed

Even in Appleton's long and successful history, they haven't always been able to keep up with such a dizzying pace. Says Beckett, "We started using Gerber equipment about 15 years ago. Before we purchased Gerber design and output software about five years ago, we were employing someone to run two or three GRAPHIX 4 stations. When we started using Gerber

software, we started to distribute our staff in a different area. They didn't need to be sitting by a machine, putting in information all the time. They were free to stick up signs and weed out the lettering. Gerber software turned what was a three-man job into a one-man job. Once we got a hold of one of these machines and saw what it was capable of, we decided we'd get another one and then another one. We've got about eight Gerber design stations machines in the building at the moment. On the production side, each Gerber design station runs at least two cutting systems. We have one EDGE printing system, but we're looking into buying another one due to the demand. It has become very competitive out there; you have to be able to really produce if you want the business. If you can't, there's always somebody else who can."

Creative Possibilities

Keeping up with demand is only one reason Appleton Signs chose the EDGE. "One of the biggest things that attracted us to the product was how many different things you can do with it, especially the very intricate work like fades, shadows, and fancy lettering or logos. As far as making artwork and screenprinting, it saves so much time. We wanted different lettering styles than the ones that came with the EDGE, so we designed our own and saved them for our future use. Because of this customization, our work has taken on a signature look that's all our own. In addition to having a design resource, we also have a constant record of all our work," Beckett says.

The EDGE has allowed the designers to show customers an impressive preliminary version of what the final sign will look like. Beckett recalls, "It used to be that customers would come in and say, 'Here, here's the work. When will it be done?' Nowadays, they want to see detailed mockups of it before it's done. With the EDGE, we can show them a smaller version of the final output, for example. It'll be printed on vinyl, not on paper, so that the colors will be much truer."

Ease and Reliability

Any shop that decides to get new equipment has to invest in it, learn to use it, and take care of maintenance and supplies. According to Beckett, it's all been easy and worth it. "I learned how to use the EDGE in only 23 hours, so I was pretty proud of myself. Some of the staff went for one day of training, and that was definitely enough to get them going. Whenever we have

needed technical support, they've been very helpful, walking us through the problem on the phone until it's solved."

Appleton Signs has four HS15 plus™ sprocket-feed plotters, one GS750 plus™ sprocket-feed plotter, and three 48" EmbossTrack™ friction-feed plotters. Beckett says, "The equipment has been extremely reliable, especially for the volume of work that we put through it. We only use cast vinyl. Gerber vinyls and foils are always good, and we have some customers who specify that they want them. All of our Gerber equipment has paid for itself many times over because of the sheer amount of work we've been able to do. We always want to be able to offer our customers the best that technology has to offer, so we'll be sticking with Gerber."

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