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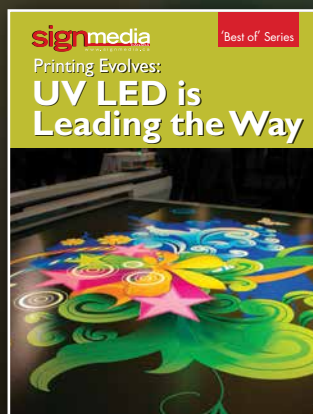
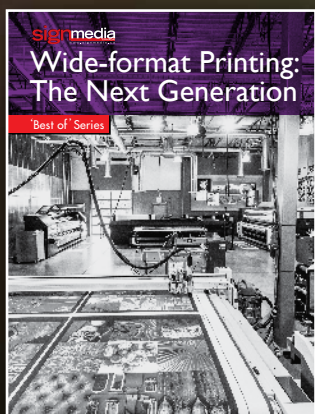
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IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A SIGN, THIS IS IT!

This collection, offered exclusively through *Sign Media Canada*, is the sign industry's ultimate resource. Sign professionals involved in printed graphics, digital imaging, and advertising will benefit immensely from the information contained in these ebooks.



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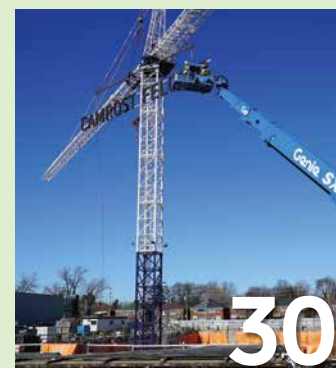
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ON THE COVER

This cover story celebrates our favourite time of the year: the announcement of the Best of Canada's Sign Industry awards. This sign is the winner in the standalone signs category. Submitted by Hi Signs, it is an illuminated monument installation featuring more than 640 white LEDs and 320 precision-cut aluminum tubes.

Photo courtesy Hi Signs



I've been thinking about frames

Lately, I've been thinking about frames—not the gilded ones in galleries, but the invisible ones we walk through every day. A frame can be the doorway that catches your breath before you step inside, the skyline a window carves out of the horizon, or the edge of a sign that makes a message feel larger than itself. They tell us where to look, how to move, what to remember.

Signage, at its heart, is about framing. It takes the intangible—an idea, a brand, a direction—and gives it structure to be seen and understood. Think of a vinyl wall graphic that reshapes an office (page 11). It doesn't just decorate; it frames the culture of the workplace, making the environment feel intentional and unified. Or consider textured printing (page 8), where a raised surface pulls design off the flat plane, reframing an image as something you can feel and see. Frames live in the material choices, the edges, and the layers that make up a crucial part of the sign world.

Technology, too, is shifting the ways we frame displays. The transition from 10 mm to 6 mm pixel pitch in LED displays (page 13) is more than a technical upgrade; it's a sharper, more vibrant frame for storytelling in public space. What once looked like a screen now reads like a canvas and is rich in colour and clarity. In a world that moves quickly, staying ahead of these shifts is essential to ensure digital signs continue to capture attention.

Frames aren't always physical; sometimes they're temporal. Looking back through the eyes of installers (page 30), we see how tools and systems have reframed their trade, making work faster, safer, and more precise. Or in the growing push for sustainability (page 32), we glimpse how framing decisions differently—from material sourcing to circular design—can shift an entire project's impact. These features remind us that the future is already taking shape, and we are sketching its outline.

Community itself can be a frame. On page 5, the Girls Who Print collective reframes leadership, belonging, and opportunity for women in the print world. What began as a LinkedIn group has become a global nonprofit—an evolving framework that supports growth, challenges limits, and expands what's possible for the next generation of leaders.

As you read this issue, I invite you to look for the frames—visible and invisible—that hold the work together. They might be dimensional, structural, digital, or cultural. Some may be quiet borders; others may boldly command attention. What unites them is their power to guide our perspective and give meaning to the spaces around us. And nothing brings us more joy than celebrating this craft, so don't forget to check out our Best of Canada's Sign Industry Awards announcement on page 18. Congrats to all the winners!

Happy reading! ●

Signed, sealed, delivered,

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Girls just wanna PRINT



Girls Who Print is actively building partnerships with signage-focused associations and businesses to spotlight women in the field and is committed to developing content and community spaces that reflect the realities and innovations happening within Canada's signage segment.

Photos courtesy Girls Who Print

How Girls Who Print is reshaping what's possible for women in the print world

By Marika Gabriel

From humble beginnings as a LinkedIn group, Girls Who Print is now a global nonprofit powerhouse that is a key pillar in the print industry. Girls Who Print's mission is to ensure its 11,500 members can access a robust network of incredible women and allies in the printing and graphic communication industry. By empowering women, fostering mentorship, and opening new doors across the globe, the organization is reshaping what's possible for women in the print world.

Deborah Corn, executive director of Girls Who Print, and Joanne Gore, the organization's representative in Canada, share the network's inspiring journey with *Sign Media Canada*.

Sign Media Canada (SMC): How did Girls Who Print get started, and what inspired its transformation into the organization it is today?

Deborah Corn (DC): Girls Who Print started as a simple online group in 2009, built around the idea that girls who print needed a space to connect, share, and be visible. What

inspired its transformation into the organization it is today is the recognition that visibility alone wasn't enough. We needed programs, mentorship, and advocacy to truly move the needle for women in this industry. Over the years, we've grown from a conversation into a nonprofit global organization and the world's largest network of women in print and graphic communications that also offers resources, education, and community support for women at different stages of their careers. And as of this year, Girls Who Print is officially recognized as a nonprofit organization, which allows us to expand our reach and impact even further.

Joanne Gore (JG): Girls Who Print Canada is focused on addressing women's lack of visibility, representation, and leadership opportunities across our country's diverse print landscape. While women make up nearly 48 per cent of the overall Canadian workforce, they represent only about 25-30 per cent of the workforce in the print and graphic communications sector—and far fewer in leadership and technical roles.¹ From coast to coast, women in print are doing incredible work, but their stories are often



Early outcomes in Canada include launching a dedicated LinkedIn page and group and creating a national volunteer advisory group supported by provincial chapters.



underrepresented. We're working to change that by fostering mentorship, building a supportive network, and creating programs tailored to the Canadian market.

SMC: What core challenges in the print and graphic communications industry is Girls Who Print working to address?

DC: We're working to address two big challenges: Representation and retention. Women are underrepresented in leadership roles across the industry, and many leave because they don't see a clear path for advancement or feel isolated in their roles. We also know there's a talent pipeline issue in getting the next generation excited about print. Girls Who Print is helping solve both by creating networks of support, mentorship, and visibility, and by showing students and young professionals that there is a community here ready to lift them up.

JG: In Canada, we want to spotlight women working in all print sectors—packaging, signage, direct mail, commercial, and in-plant—and ensure they have the resources, recognition, and community they need to thrive.

SMC: How do you measure the impact of your work?

DC: Impact for us is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, we look at growth in membership, number of chapters, and engagement in our programs. Qualitatively, it's the success stories: women who land jobs through our network, find mentors through our programs, or gain the confidence to step into leadership roles. Every time a woman says, "I didn't think I could do this until I connected with Girls Who Print," that's impact.

JG: Our intended results in Canada include growing a vibrant LinkedIn community through the Girls Who Print Canada page and group, engaging Canadian women through surveys, webinars, and events, and building partnerships with Canadian print associations, schools, and businesses to support emerging talent.

SMC: How has women's experience in print changed over the years?

DC: The shift is slow, but it's happening. Women are gaining more visibility, stepping into leadership roles, and being recognized for their expertise in ways that weren't common even a decade ago. There's still work to do, but today there's a stronger sense of community, more support systems like Girls Who Print, and greater confidence among women to claim their space in the industry.

JG: Canada's print industry is evolving, and we are seeing a growing appetite for connection, recognition, and leadership development amongst its women. While challenges remain, particularly in overcoming gender bias and generational gaps, there is growing momentum behind initiatives that prioritize inclusivity and equity.

SMC: What key initiatives or programs does Girls Who Print offer for women in print?

DC: Girls Who Print provides a range of programs and resources designed to support women across the industry. We offer skill-building workshops that strengthen professional and leadership abilities, exclusive events and content that help women connect and share ideas, and a global forum where members can collaborate and support each other worldwide. Our 'Ask the Experts' program gives direct access to leaders across specialties like signage, packaging, and marketing, while job listings and resources help members navigate career growth. Importantly, our membership platform and programs are also open to male allies. Men who want to support women in print can join as members, and they can also help through sponsorships and donations that strengthen our initiatives and expand our impact.

JG: We're gathering feedback through a national survey to understand the needs and priorities of Canadian Girls Who Print. Based on that feedback, our plan is to launch virtual events and educational sessions, spotlight interviews, expert panels, mentorship opportunities, and practical learning sessions—culminating in a live meetup that brings together our growing network across the country.

SMC: What are the most significant outcomes your organization has achieved so far?

DC: The most significant outcomes are the stories of career growth and opportunity. We've helped women secure new roles, start businesses, find mentors, and even re-enter the workforce after time away. We've made strides in industry visibility by helping more women get on a stage, into trade magazines, promoted through podcasts, and growing in

company leadership. Beyond that, the sense of belonging that members express, knowing they're not alone, is something we consider a huge win.

JG: Our early outcomes in Canada include launching a dedicated LinkedIn page and group and creating a national volunteer advisory group supported by provincial chapters. We have also laid the groundwork for collaborative programs with Canadian events, associations, and educators.

SMC: What are your plans for expanding chapters and partnerships in the coming years?

DC: We're building a more formal regional structure so local groups can create in-person networks that tie back into the global Girls Who Print community. Partnerships are key. We want to work with associations, schools, and companies that share our vision of equity and opportunity in print. That means more global reach, more cross-collaboration, and more direct connections between women who need support and the resources that can help them thrive.

JG: In Canada, we're focused on collaborating with national print associations, vendors, and post-secondary institutions, as well as developing programs that reflect the unique challenges and innovations across Canadian print markets.

SMC: Signage is a major part of the print industry. How does Girls Who Print support women working in signage?

DC: Women across all print sectors often share similar experiences in navigating a male-dominated industry, so the programs we offer, such as mentorship, networking, visibility, and leadership development, apply to everyone, including those in signage. For specific support in the signage space, we provide a robust global mentoring program where women can connect directly with peers and leaders who understand their challenges. In addition, our membership platform includes an 'Ask the Experts' forum, where dedicated signage experts are available to guide and support members.

JG: Signage is a cornerstone of Canada's print and graphics industry. According to Sign Media Canada's 2024 State of the Industry Report, 78.3 per cent of Canadian sign industry professionals identify as male, while just 20.4 per cent identify as female—highlighting a significant gender gap. We are actively building partnerships with signage-focused associations and businesses to spotlight women in the field, and we are committed to developing content and community spaces that reflect the realities and innovations happening within Canada's signage segment.

SMC: If Girls Who Print could display one sign/message to the world in giant letters, what would it say?

DC: Easy! EMPOWER LONG AND PROSPER! And you must get involved to get empowered!

JG: EMPOWER LONG AND PROSPER! Because when we support girls who print, we support the entire industry's growth and future. ●

Note

¹ Canadian Printing Industries Sector Council (CPISC), Government of Canada labour reports, and industry studies.

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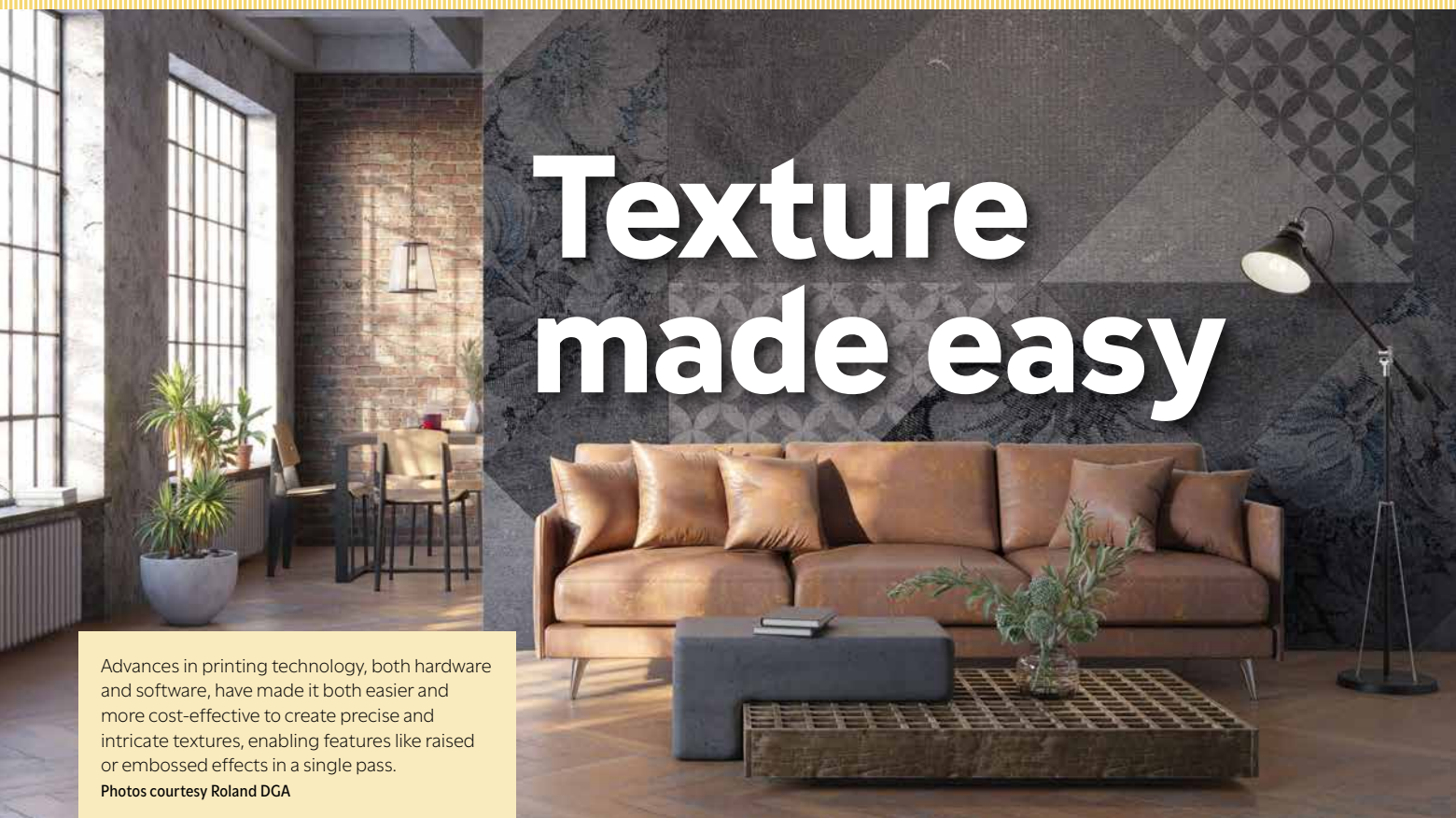
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Texture made easy

Advances in printing technology, both hardware and software, have made it both easier and more cost-effective to create precise and intricate textures, enabling features like raised or embossed effects in a single pass.

Photos courtesy Roland DGA

Adding depth, dimension, and distinction

By Ginny Mumm

Adding texture to digitally printed products is a growing trend, and for good reason. In addition to contributing to brand differentiation and storytelling, texture adds perceived value to prints, conveying a sense of quality, craftsmanship, and luxury.

Advances in printing technology, both hardware and software, have made it easier and more cost-effective to create precise and intricate textures. These advances facilitate texture design and production, and enable features like raised or embossed effects in a single pass.

To better understand this important component of digital printing and the technology that enables it, we sat down with Roland DGA's business development segment manager, DIMENSE and Décor, Kitt Jones.

Ginny Mumm (GM): What are some popular applications for textured or dimensional surface print?

Kitt Jones (KJ): Textured and dimensional surface printing, whether produced with ultraviolet (UV) printing technology or DIMENSE dimensional surface printers, opens the door to a wide range of creative and high-value applications.

- In **wall coverings and murals**, it enables custom wallpaper with raised textures, patterns, or sculpted finishes, perfect for feature walls in hotels, restaurants, and luxury homes.
- **Fine art and canvas prints** can be elevated with gallery-quality reproductions that mimic dimensional brushstrokes or offer texture-only applications for a hand-painted look.
- In **signage and retail displays**, tactile elements enhance point of purchase (POP) and point of sale (POS) installations, while raised lettering or Braille supports indoor wayfinding.
- For **trade show booths and event graphics**, textured panels, backdrops, and dimensional logos create immersive brand experiences that stand out under lighting.
- **Architectural and interior design elements**, such as custom ceiling panels, room dividers, and sculpted wall tiles, bring depth to high-end hospitality and corporate spaces.
- It is also applied to **décor products**, including lamp shades, vases, furniture inlays, and custom accessories.

GM: Why are companies opting to bring dimensional surface printing in-house?

KJ: Companies are increasingly choosing to add dimensional surface printers because having this capability in-house provides greater creative control, faster turnaround times, and a stronger competitive edge. By owning the equipment, they can design, prototype, and produce textured or sculpted prints on demand, eliminating reliance on outside vendors and reducing production delays. In-house capabilities also improve profitability by reducing outsourcing costs, protecting margins, and capturing more of the project's value.

Ultimately, bringing dimensional printing in-house transforms companies from passive buyers into creative producers, setting them apart in crowded markets.

GM: What types of texture can you produce with DIMENSE technology?

KJ: With DIMENSE technology, it's possible to produce a wide variety of textures and sculpted effects in a single, seamless printing process. By controlling the structure of the media surface, DIMENSE allows for both subtle and dramatic tactile finishes that transform the look and feel of any design into stunning surface designs.

The texture is up to the designer and allows for complete custom ability; however, some popular effects include:

- **Embossed patterns**, such as geometric shapes, waves, and floral motifs, are perfect for wallpaper, murals, and décor.
- **Fine art brushstrokes** that replicate the look and feel of oil or acrylic paintings for gallery-quality reproductions.
- **Realistic woodgrain and natural surfaces** that mimic materials like stone, leather, or woven fabrics.

The technology also excels at tactile branding and logos, with raised lettering, symbols, and intricate marks for signage, packaging, and displays.

For a more artistic approach, DIMENSE can also produce texture-only surfaces without colour, allowing for custom painting. Uniquely, it can integrate vibrant full-colour printing with dimensional texture in one pass or create standalone textures for complete creative freedom.

GM: What type of ink is used in dimensional surface printing?

KJ: The DIMENSE DA-640 dimensional surface printer uses eco-friendly, water-based inks for the colour layer, paired with a proprietary sculpting media that reacts to heat during printing. Unlike traditional UV raised printing, which builds up layers of high-viscosity UV-curable ink to create texture, DIMENSE controls the surface structure of

A promotional advertisement for Uline. The background is a collage of various cardboard boxes, some wrapped in twine, and a large spool of twine in the bottom right corner. In the center, there is a white rectangular box with a red border containing the Uline logo and text. At the bottom left, there is a red rectangular box with white text. At the bottom, there is a red horizontal bar with white text.

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Unlike traditional UV raised printing, which builds up layers of high-viscosity UV-curable ink to create texture, DIMENSE controls the surface structure of the media itself, producing deep reliefs, or subtle textures with printed colour applied over or around them.



Besides contributing to brand differentiation and storytelling, texture adds perceived value to prints, conveying a sense of quality, craftsmanship, and luxury.

the media itself, producing deep reliefs, or subtle textures with printed colour applied over or around them.

In contrast, UV dimensional printing relies on specialized UV-curable inks that are jetted in multiple passes and instantly cured with UV light to form rigid, raised surfaces. This method delivers sharp, defined textures such as Braille, embossed lettering, and realistic material simulations like wood, stone, or leather. Both approaches offer unique creative possibilities.

GM: What media can you use with the DA-640 dimensional surface printer?

KJ: Both the technology and the dimensional surface printer were designed to work with a wide range of media, which enables stunning raised textures and comes in various finishes such as matte, gloss, pearl, chameleon, and gold or silver metallic for unique visual effects. This polyvinyl chloride (PVC)-free media reacts to heat during printing, allowing the surface structure to create raised designs. The DA-640 is also compatible with many third-party standard print materials, making it versatile for textured and flat printing applications.

GM: How different is the DA-640's workflow from other types of printers, like eco-solvent, UV, or latex?

KJ: The workflow differs from eco-solvent, UV, and latex printers because it combines colour printing and texture creation in a single, continuous process using proprietary sculpting media. With eco-solvent and latex printers, output is typically limited to flat, full-colour prints—any texture must be added later through separate finishing steps like embossing, layering, or lamination. UV printers can create texture by building layers of UV-curable ink, but this requires multiple passes, longer print times, and careful height management.

In contrast, the DA-640 uses water-based latex inks for colour and heat to activate and shape the media surface,

instantly producing smooth gradients, deep reliefs, or subtle patterns with no post-processing required. Adding to its efficiency, it integrates with DG Connect Designer, enabling a streamlined design-to-print workflow, and uses VersaWorks RIP software, known for its exceptional ease of use. Together, these tools make producing high-quality dimensional prints faster, more intuitive, and far more versatile than traditional print methods.

GM: What do you see ahead for this market?

KJ: Looking ahead, the market for dimensional surface printing is poised for significant growth, driven by both evolution and opportunity. For buyers, this technology offers a clear path to differentiation—adding unique value that sets print service providers (PSPs) apart from the competition. As businesses increasingly seek high-impact, tactile visuals for interiors, signage, packaging, and décor, it positions its owners at the forefront of this demand.

We see this market evolving rapidly with the introduction of new media types, expanded product applications, and growing market acceptance fueled by the unmistakable appeal of high-value, high-return on investment (ROI) prints. Early adopters will benefit most, leveraging the DA-640's ability to merge stunning full-colour imagery with sculpted textures in one pass, enabling them to offer products that not only command premium pricing but also secure long-term client loyalty. In short, this is a technology that meets today's needs and positions users well for the future. We believe it will help to evolve visual communication for years to come. ●

Ginny Mumm is a freelance consultant for digital inkjet printer/cutter provider Roland DGA. For more information, visit www.rolanddga.com.



From initial planning to final installation, the project relied on close collaboration with the client to ensure every detail met their vision.

Photos courtesy Multigraphics Ltd.

Unified graphics

By Sunny Dutta, Rajal Shetiya, and Analhi Sanchez

Matra Construction engaged Multigraphics Ltd. to produce and install custom vinyl graphics to enhance and brand their Delta PSSG Office space.

Timeline

We won the bid for the project, which was approved in September 2024 and completed in May 2025. From initial planning to final installation, the project relied on close collaboration with the client to ensure every detail met their vision.

Scope

The project involved producing and installing various custom vinyl graphics and signage. This included six large wall graphics featuring precision-cut vinyl text to create an impactful visual presence. There were sidelights on the

doors where we installed 14 window graphics applied to the second surface, providing both esthetic appeal and privacy while allowing light to pass through.

For wayfinding and identification, we produced 14 custom door name signs in print-and-cut vinyl and three washroom signs using cut vinyl applications. Ten vinyl-based QR code decals were also installed outside various offices to support digital navigation. The project brought together more than 40 distinct vinyl applications, delivering a cohesive, professional, and functional signage package across the facility.

Design

The client provided the initial design files for all signage elements. Our team refined the artwork, set up correct file formats, and prepared designs for large-format printing and vinyl cutting. By making the designs print-ready in-house,



By making the designs print-ready in-house, the Multigraphics team ensured accuracy, consistency, and quality while staying true to the client's creative direction.



we ensured accuracy, consistency, and quality while staying true to the client's creative direction.

The fabrication involved vinyl printing, precision cutting, and installation preparation. We produced a total coverage of about 371 m² (4,000 sf) for the wall graphics using self-adhesive gloss vinyl, a durable and high-quality material ideal for long-term wall applications. The largest single wall graphic measured about 5.4 m x 3.6 m (18 ft x 12 ft) and required careful panelling and alignment during production and installation. All vinyl was printed in-house on a Canon Colorado M series printer to achieve consistent colour accuracy and sharp detail across the large surfaces. For the finishing process, we used the Graphtec cutter to kiss-cut the vinyl for text and smaller details, while the Zünd digital cutter cut larger panels and custom shapes with precision. We also fabricated window graphics covering 16.7 m² (180 sf) of glazing, with 3M dusted crystal film applied to the second surface, combining design and privacy.

Challenges

Making the graphics print-ready was a challenge, but by planning ahead and maintaining close communication with the client, we achieved the desired high-quality results on time.

The Delta PSSG Office project demonstrates how careful planning, precise production, and collaboration with the client can unite more than 40 individual vinyl applications into a single cohesive and functional signage package. ●

Sunny Dutta, as sales representative, and Rajal Shetiya, as project manager, successfully delivered the project, exemplifying superior project oversight and exceptional client service. Analhi Sanchez, in her capacity as marketing lead, propels Multigraphics' growth through strategic initiatives that keep the company at the forefront of the industry.



6 is the new 10

Sharper, brighter, and more vibrant—why 6 mm LED displays are today's standard

By Bill Shepansky

Not too long ago, 16-mm (0.62-in.) pixel pitch LED signs were considered the gold standard, and sign shops were proud to offer them.

A 2.4-m x 4.8-m (8-ft x 16-ft), 10-mm pixel pitch LED display that has reached its end-of-life, replaced with a new 6.6-mm pixel pitch LED display. Photos courtesy VueTronic

The industry has evolved so fast, so dramatically, that 10 mm (0.39 in.) pixel pitch—once cutting-edge—now feels like yesterday's news. Around the VueTronic shop, we've coined the phrase: "6 is the new 10."

And we're not joking.

With the surge in demand for higher resolution, more vibrant colour, and crystal-clear messaging, the market has moved hard toward 6-mm (0.23-in.) class displays. These days, 6.6 mm (0.25 in.) pixel pitch has become the sweet spot for clients looking for next-level image quality without an out-of-reach price point. And if you're not offering your customers something in the 6 mm range, you're likely underserving them.

What's driving this shift?

Technology has caught up to vision.

Manufacturers have improved diode efficiency, display controller software, and module precision. These advancements mean that tighter pixel spacing no longer has to come with a painful price tag. The cost difference between a 10-mm and a 6.6-mm sign is now small enough that the value proposition of sharper visuals becomes impossible to ignore.

Why it matters

Your client's expectations have changed. That old 16-mm roadside sign they saw five years ago is no longer impressive—not when they're holding a 4K digital screen in the palm of their hand. If your displays look blurry or pixelated from 6 m (20 ft) away, you're doing your client a disservice—content is king. Signage today is even bigger than "sharper graphics." It's a marketing strategy designed to inform, educate, communicate, and promote your brand, ideally delivering a memorable customer experience.

That is how you build brand loyalty, increase sales, achieve return on investment (ROI), and watch your business grow.

A new reality

We have adjusted our approach to match this new reality. We don't keep 16-mm displays in stock anymore; 10 mm is our baseline, and 6.6 mm is now the standard we recommend. For projects where the viewing distance is really close—lobbies,

reception areas, premium retail environments, and so on—we go tighter still. The sweet spot for indoor fine pitch is 2.6 mm (0.10 in.), with 1.9 mm (0.07 in.) close behind. We are immersed in the world of micro-pixels, with a pixel pitch of less than 1 mm (0.03 in.). Each indoor or outdoor project has customizable LED display options in various sizes and pixel pitches.

As a digital display provider, we don't just sell LEDs—we advise, engineer, and support end-to-end solutions that perform and impress. Whether for a busy retail corner, an event centre, or a highway pylon, we help sign companies and end-users deploy screens that turn heads, not just meet specs.

Where do we go from here?

If you're quoting 16 mm, it's time to ask why.

Is it because the client asked for it? As consultants, we help make them aware of better options.

Creative payment solutions, such as small business loans, beautification grants, and leasing options, are also available.

The industry is moving forward quickly, and so should we. Investing in a better pixel pitch today will future-proof your investment by making it relevant for years to come (the lifetime of a sign is usually 10 years or 100,000+ hours). This will maximize the ROI for clients and build long-term trust as providers.

Because in 2025 and beyond, one thing is certain: 6 is the new 10. ●

Bill Shepansky is the owner and managing partner of VueTronic, a provider of LED digital displays headquartered in Edmonton, Alta. He believes true success in LED signage comes from the right balance of smart engineering, thoughtful design, and ongoing support. VueTronic specializes in wholesale indoor and outdoor LED display signage for digital integrators and sign shops across Canada. Over the past decade, the company has grown into a trusted, award-winning brand, serving a wide range of sectors including education, healthcare, municipal infrastructure, entertainment venues, and advertising networks.



Crowds and CREATIVES

An Amazon Prime Video activation around the Osheaga music festival and Budweiser Stage last year.
Photos courtesy Vistar Media

By Marika Gabriel

As Canada's music scene surges, concerts draw record-breaking crowds and transform cities into cultural hotspots. For brands, this presents a unique opportunity: reaching highly engaged audiences inside venues and throughout their entire journey to and from a show.

To understand how brands can maximize out-of-home (OOH) activations in this environment, *Sign Media Canada* spoke with Lorena Forster, sales director at Vistar Media in Toronto and an expert in OOH strategy. She shared insights into personalization, placements, and why the journey is as important as the destination.

Sign Media Canada (SMC): Why should brands see the surge in concerts as an opportunity for immersive activations?

Lorena Forster (LF): This is a time when people are outside, engaged, emotionally connected, and fully present. Out-of-home (OOH) screens go hand in hand with that. The real opportunity is in tailoring—

using data to dynamically change creative. For example, referencing the time of day, the weather, or the artist people are going to see. If the sun is setting or it's a hot day, brands can adapt their messaging in real time, making it super relevant in that engaged moment.

SMC: How can activations be tailored to different genres and fan communities?

LF: A couple of ways. One is understanding the event calendar and which artist is playing, then tailoring the creative directly to that. Beyond just naming artists, it's about speaking to the moment people are in. Dynamic triggers help here—for example, acknowledging the temperature, time of day, or concert start time. Even subtle cues like “get amped for tonight” can make a creative feel immediate and personal.

SMC: What's working especially well today?

LF: Location is key. Anything around the concert venue works—big screens like you see at Scotiabank



Concert activations are primarily awareness-driven, but dynamic creative ensures that awareness is meaningful.
Photos by Farheen Sikandar

Arena, or smaller place-based screens that audiences pass on their way in or out. People move through multiple touchpoints on their journey, and each is an opportunity.

SMC: Can you share standout examples from Canadian cities?

LF: Recently, YSL ran a campaign around Dua Lipa's show at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto. She's the face of their perfume, so the fit was perfect. They had billboards outside, experiential trucks, and were handing out samples. It was a great example of merging traditional OOH with experiential engagement.

SMC: Beyond venues, what role does the consumer journey play?

LF: Take Rogers Stadium in Toronto as an example. From the subway, there's a long walk to the venue—prime space for boards and activations. Brands can reach audiences in a very personal way by acknowledging that journey. On the way home, you can also serve creative that speaks to the after-show mindset. To tie it all together, you can retarget audiences later, on mobile or social, if they were exposed to your digital OOH ads.

SMC: Do demographics influence how brands activate?

LF: Definitely. The Dua Lipa example shows the value of aligning with the right audience. Another example is Amazon Prime Video, which we activated around Osheaga and Budweiser Stage last year. We tied campaigns for their shows to concerts with overlapping audiences. It's about understanding who's attending and speaking directly to that group.





The real opportunity is in tailoring—using data to dynamically change creative. For example, referencing the time of day, the weather, or an artist people are going to see.

Photos courtesy Vistar Media

SMC: What trends are shaping how brands show up at concerts?

LF: Personalization is huge—understanding who's at the show and tailoring messaging to them. Beyond boards, brands are becoming part of the experience: hydration zones, charging stations, behind-the-scenes content. Those elements add real value. The strongest activations merge traditional out-of-home with experiential touchpoints.

SMC: How important are placements in delivering impact?

LF: Context is everything. Messaging should reflect the environment. A subway ad before the concert calls for a different creative than an ad in a bar afterward. Tailoring to the exact placement and daypart makes a big difference.

SMC: And what doesn't work as well?

LF: Generic creative. If you simply reuse a broad campaign message at a concert, you'll get awareness but miss the deeper impact. Tailoring is what makes audiences feel acknowledged—whether it's referencing the event, the journey, or even just saying, "Have fun at the show."

SMC: Concerts attract massive crowds. How can brands make the most of that scale?

LF: It comes back to speaking to emotions in the moment. Concertgoers feel excitement, anticipation, or energy. If a brand can tie into those feelings—whether through refreshment, fun, or retail—it makes the messaging resonate. Dynamic creatives tied to data points like traffic or weather can also acknowledge what audiences are experiencing in real time.

SMC: Overall, are these activations more about awareness than conversion?

LF: Exactly. Concert activations are primarily awareness-driven, but dynamic creative ensures that awareness is meaningful. For example, when traffic is heavy, creatives can acknowledge it, making ads feel responsive to the lived experience. ●



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BOCSI *Winners*

Best of Canada's Sign Industry Awards (BOCSies)

The Best of Canada's Sign Industry Awards (BOCSies) honours the top work of sign companies, related organizations, and individuals across the country. The competition also features the Sign Company of the Year (SCOTY) category. An expert panel of independent judges selected the winners.

Entries to this year's awards program, which *Sign Media Canada* jointly manages with the Sign Association of Canada (SAC), came in from sign professionals across the country. With the judges reviewing hundreds of eligible projects, *Sign Media Canada* and the SAC are proud to showcase the winners of the BOCSI competition.

This year's competition attracted many high-calibre projects, representing the best of the best from all corners of Canada's sign industry. With final scores proving close, all entrants deserve congratulations for the outstanding quality

of their work. In this regard, we include the runners-up in this special showcase.

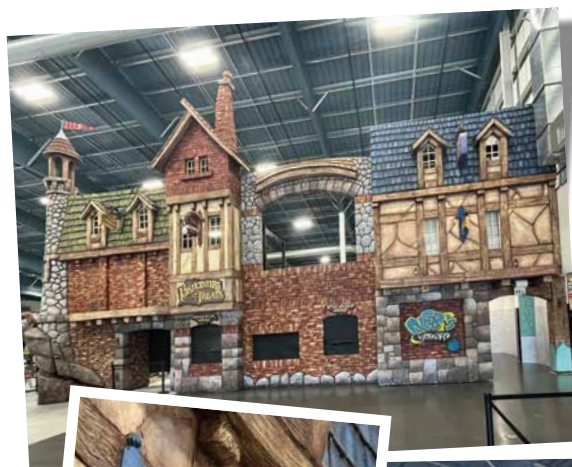
The judges had to consider the merits of each project entry in five different categories: originality, creativity, materials, appearance, and design suitability. For SCOTY entrants, judges based their selections on criteria such as industry involvement and good business practices. The judges selected winners in 10 categories, with the project entry that earned the highest overall score also named Best in Show.

This year, we're also introducing the *People's Choice Award*. Winners from each category will face each other, and you are invited to cast your vote for your #1 project. Simply follow the QR code to vote.

The following pages showcase this year's winners and runners-up. Congratulations to all the winners! ●



SCAN TO VOTE!



BEST IN SHOW!

Sign Systems WINNER

Designer: Dan Sawatzky

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Imagination Corporation

Submitter: Dan Sawatzky

Client: NEB's Fun World

Location: Oshawa, Ont.

Primary Materials & Methods: Hand-sculpted fibreglass, reinforced concrete, precision board high-density urethane (HDU), plasma-cut steel. The entire facade and all signs were fabricated in sections at the shop in B.C., then transported to Oshawa, Ont., and installed by the NEB crew.





Runner-up

Submitter: Dan Sawatzky

Client: Hazelnut Inn

Designer: Peter Sawatzky
and Dan Sawatzky

Manufacturer/Fabricator:
Imagination Corporation

Location: Chilliwack, B.C.

Runner-up

Designer: Free Agency Creative

Manufacturer/Fabricator:
Quarterhorse Solutions

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Matthews West

Location: Squamish, B.C.



Sign Company of the Year

WINNER

Company Name: Knight Signs (Pacific Sign Group Inc.)

Submitter: Vibin Sajjan

Founded in 1968, Knight Signs is a leading Canadian provider of custom signage solutions. With a team of over 60 professionals, the company delivers high-quality signage for retail, hospitality, and commercial sectors. Renowned for its tailored designs, Knight Signs offers traditional and digital signage, creating memorable and dynamic experiences. From design to installation, the company emphasizes sustainability and exceptional customer service, establishing itself as a trusted partner across Canada.

Knight Signs actively supports local communities by providing signage for businesses, schools, and charitable events. It is a Sign Association of Canada (SAC) member, staying connected with industry trends and best practices. These memberships enable Knight Signs to collaborate with industry professionals, advocate for industry standards, and contribute to the community's growth and the signage sector.

Knight Signs demonstrates a strong commitment to employee growth by providing hands-on training programs to develop valuable skills. The company supports ongoing professional development through Human Resources (HR)-led initiatives, ensuring employees align with organizational goals. In addition, it offers a comprehensive benefits package, including

health care and RRSP matching, fostering a supportive environment that encourages career advancement, skill enhancement, and long-term employee satisfaction.



Runner-up

Company Name: Signature Sign & Image

Submitter: Courtney Albanese

The team consists of 16 incredibly hardworking individuals. They operate as a full-service company, handling everything from sales, design, and manufacturing to installation and service. Over the past year, they expanded their print department, sent their vinyl department for 3M vehicle wrap training, and recently implemented RRSP matching for their staff. The team is dedicated to increasing job satisfaction within their shop.

They are actively involved in their community, prioritizing support through sign donations, toy drives, and partnering with companies that have supported them over the years. Their contributions include donations to organizations such as The Boys and Girls Club of Niagara, Project Share, and various local events and charities.

Safety training is a key focus, with all staff completing general safety courses such as working at heights, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), and aerial platform training. Each department has specific training tailored to its roles,



and leaders like Mark and Emily frequently encourage team members to expand their knowledge base through additional courses. The entire vinyl production team recently completed the Vehicle Colour Change course at ND Graphics.

Runner-up

Company Name: Sleek Signs

Submitter: Carl Weger

Sleek Signs is a regional print supplier with locations in Regina, Saskatoon, and Calgary, shipping products nationwide. The company specializes in business-to-business (B2B) print signage rather than traditional pylon or backlit signs, positioning itself as a wholesale partner to other sign companies. Its core values—trust, professionalism, and kaizen (continuous improvement)—guide its operations as a Lean, Certificate of Recognition (COR)-certified team.

Sleek Signs maintains an active presence in several industry organizations, including the Alberta Sign Association (ASA), the International Sign Association (ISA), and the Sign Association of Canada (SAC), where its chief executive officer (CEO) previously served as president. The company is also a Global Print Consortium (GIGA) member and a 3M Platinum Partner.

Beyond industry engagement, Sleek Signs supports more than 40 local charities and fundraisers by donating prizes, providing in-kind printing services, and offering discounted rates. One current initiative involves wrapping hospital rooms with printed graphics to bring comfort and joy to children receiving care.

The company also places a strong emphasis on professional development and training. It has the largest 3M Preferred Installer Training (PIT)-certified team in Canada, more than 10 Lean-trained Yellow Belts, three Lean Green Belts, and a management training



program for all supervisory staff. Its safety and technical credentials include a COR-certified safety team, fall arrest, swing stage, bucket truck training for installers, micro-credentialing through the University of Regina, Dale Carnegie training, and multiple HP Level 2 technicians. Ongoing kaizen practices ensure employees continue developing skills and improving job performance.

Building Signs

WINNER

Designer: Mayhew & Pride Signs

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Pride Signs

Submitter: Brian Hardy

Client: Kubota-Kooy Brothers

Location: North York, Ont.

Primary Materials & Methods:

A fully illuminated cube rises seamlessly from the facade of a commercial building, fusing architectural ambition with contemporary design. The installation goes beyond esthetics, showcasing innovative engineering and precise material selection.

Custom heat-formed polycarbonate panels, each V-grooved and shaped to exact cubic dimensions, generate the cube's radiant glow. Designers chose the vibrant "Kubota orange" hue for its striking intensity, pairing it with 360-degree orange light-emitting diode (LED) illumination. The result is a uniform, deeply saturated glow that shifts subtly with changes in ambient light, creating a dynamic visual effect day and night.

A skeletal framework of steel and aluminum supports the luminous exterior. Engineers relied on steel for structural strength and aluminum for lightweight versatility and intricate detailing.



Integrating both materials produces the illusion of a single monolithic form while concealing the complexity within.

The project team reinforced the roof and structural members using professional design principles to meet building codes and engineering standards, ensuring public safety. The completed feature commands attention from miles away on the ground and remains visible from the air, transforming the facade into a striking and unforgettable sign solution.



Runner-up

Designer: WSP Canada

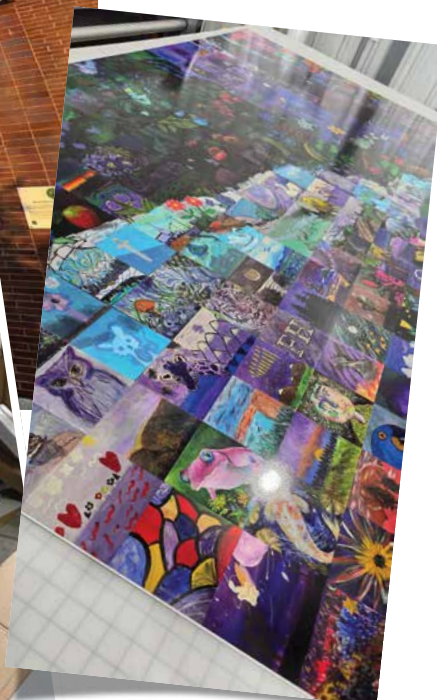
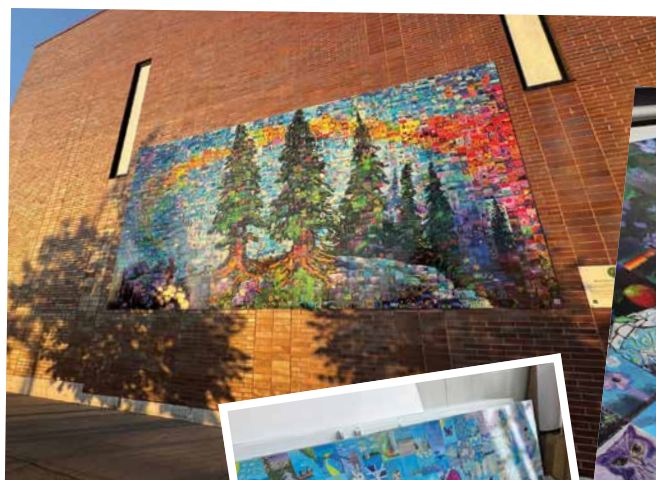
Manufacturer/Fabricator:

SRS Signs & Services

Submitter: Tyler Harris

Client: PCL Construction

Location: Winnipeg, Man.



Runner-up

Designer: Paul Lavoie

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Print Hive Signs

Submitter: Kirtan Patel

Client: Meridian Community
Centre Fonthill

Location: Fonthill, Ont.

Digital Signage

WINNER

Designer: Jewish General Hospital Foundation

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Absen and Samsung; Physical signage: Group BH

Submitter: Elisia Ciancio, iGotcha Media

Client: Jewish General Hospital Foundation

Location: Montreal, Que.

Primary Materials & Methods: The Jewish General Hospital Foundation developed two donor recognition walls to celebrate philanthropic impact while advancing digital storytelling and architectural integration. Each wall combines high-resolution light-emitting diode (LED) display technology with custom physical signage to create immersive and meaningful experiences.

The Research and Innovation Donor Wall at the hospital's main entrance features an anamorphic LED video installation that wraps around a corner. Designers selected this layout to capture attention at a natural pause point where visitors often stop to sanitize or put on a mask, ensuring an ideal vantage point for the optical illusion. High-brightness LED panels maximize visibility in natural light, while the content blends donor names, portraits of leading researchers, and inspiring stories into a synchronized, multidimensional narrative. Above the digital display, brushed aluminum and laser-etched acrylic plaques distinguish major donors contributing \$250,000 or more. Mid-tier donors receive recognition dynamically on screen.

The Digital Health Donor Wall, positioned in a busy hospital corridor, required special attention to durability and traffic flow. The project team installed a low-profile trim kit and a custom-engineered acrylic cover to protect the LED panels from physical contact and minimize glare. Overhead, ceiling-mounted LED displays project soothing natural imagery—fluttering leaves, drifting clouds—that cascade into an adjacent vertical LED wall. This seamless visual flow highlights the Foundation's leadership in advancing digital health.

Both installations relied on precise calibration, content mapping, and material selection to achieve technical reliability and visual harmony. By blending robust physical signage with dynamic digital storytelling, the Jewish General Hospital Foundation transformed its donor walls into monuments honoring generosity and inspiring continued innovation.



Runner-up

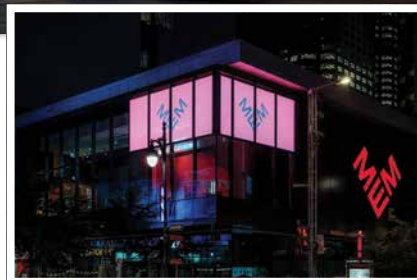
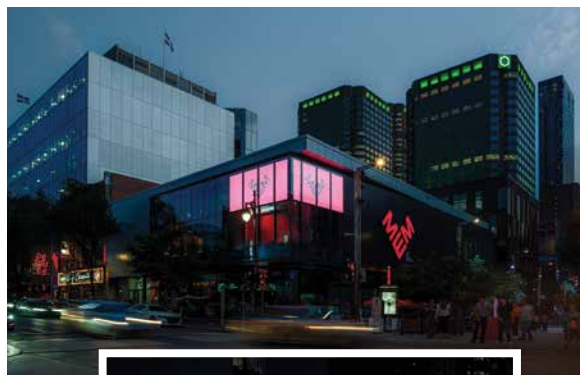
Designer: Arium Design

Manufacturer/Fabricator: LG

Submitter: Elisia Ciancio, iGotcha Media

Client: MEM-Centre des mémoires montréalaises

Location: Montreal, Que.



Runner-up

Designer: Resource Integrated Ltd.

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Resource Integrated Ltd.

Submitter: Antony Rubino

Client: Abbott Laboratories

Location: Mississauga, Ont.



Illuminated Signs

WINNER

Designer: SSDG Interiors & Quarterhorse Solutions

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Quarterhorse Solutions & Stray Arc Metalworks

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Boomi

Location: Vancouver, B.C.

Primary Materials & Methods: The Vancouver office of technology company Boomi commissioned a large, illuminated feature for its reception area to showcase the tagline "Be Bold. Be You. Be Boomi." within a striking circular frame.

Fabricators constructed a circle using top and bottom hollow rails to achieve this design, welding a perforated metal screen between them. Face-lit light-emitting diode (LED) letters, produced in collaboration with project partners, were bolted to the screen. Each of the 66 illuminated components required individual wiring, which technicians carefully routed through the hollow rails and into the supporting structure.

Because of size constraints, the installation was engineered in two sections to fit inside an elevator cab and reach the 14th floor. On site, the team bolted the sections together, suspended the feature from the ceiling with custom hanging supports, and connected the wiring to transformers. Finally, the illuminated ring was integrated into the millwork grille above the reception desk.

Together with the company's logo, the installation creates a dramatic focal point in the reception area—making a bold statement for employees and visitors alike.



Runner-up

Designer: Signex MFG

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Signex MFG

Submitter: Faye Pulido

Client: City of Steinbach

Location: Steinbach, Man.



Runner-up

Designer: Ryan Morrison

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Blanchett Neon

Submitter: Taylor Blanchett

Client: Explore Edmonton/ASA

Location: Edmonton, Alta.



Out-of-home Advertising

WINNER

Designer: Media Resources Inc

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Media Resources Inc

Submitter: Sidney Brownell

Client: Pattison Outdoor

Location: Toronto, Ont.

Primary Materials & Methods: At one of Toronto's busiest intersections, a high-resolution 8-mm surface-mount device (SMD) VISIONiQ™ digital display wraps seamlessly around the corner of 322 Yonge Street with a 90-degree radius. Media Resources designed, manufactured, and installed the display for Pattison Outdoor, combining bold form with vivid visuals to capture attention from both vehicle traffic and pedestrians. This large-format out-of-home installation demonstrates Media Resources' engineering expertise, delivering dynamic brand messaging in the heart of downtown Toronto.



Runner-up

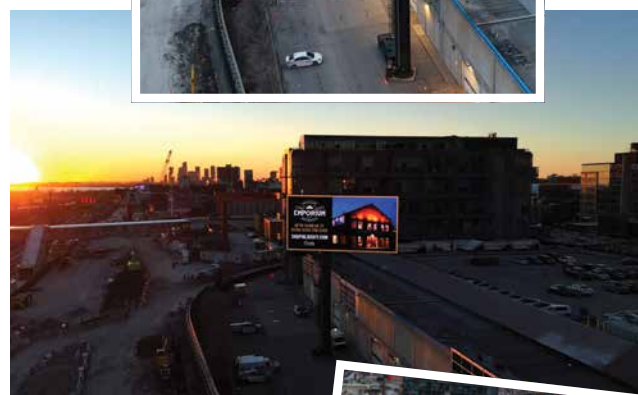
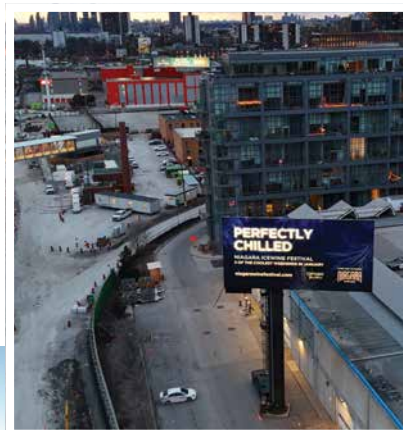
Designer: 123West

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Quarterhorse Solutions

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Zenterra

Location: Langley, B.C.



Runner-up

Designer: Media Resources Inc

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Media Resources Inc

Submitter: Sidney Brownell

Client: Astral

Location: Toronto, Ont.



Unique Signs

WINNER

Designer: Quarterhorse Solutions

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Quarterhorse Solutions

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Site Partners

Location: Abbotsford, B.C.

Primary Materials & Methods: Site Partners, a marketing agency specializing in the industrial sector, commissioned a creative installation for its office to showcase its connection to the industry. Fabricators constructed the letterforms of the company's logo from layered plywood and filled each letter with a different material. To reflect the raw, industrial esthetic, the design incorporated gravel, bark mulch, moss, screws, and concrete. The materials were roughly set in place, then sealed with a thin acrylic layer to secure them while maintaining their textured appearance. The finished piece transforms the Site Partners logo into a tactile expression of the company's brand identity, boldly and playfully reinforcing its ties to the industrial sector.



Runner-up

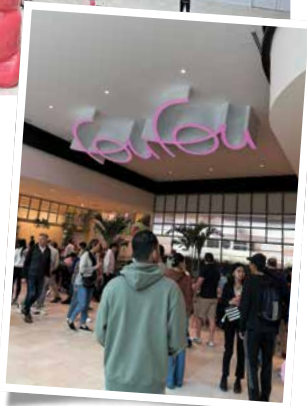
Designer: Lemay Michaud

Manufacturer/Fabricator: iCubic

Submitter: Melanie Bilodeau

Client: Royalmount

Location: Montreal, Que.



Runner-up

Designer: Free Agency Creative

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Quarterhorse Solutions

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Matthews West

Location: Squamish, B.C.



Soft Signage

WINNER

Designer: Free Agency Creative

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Quarterhorse Solutions

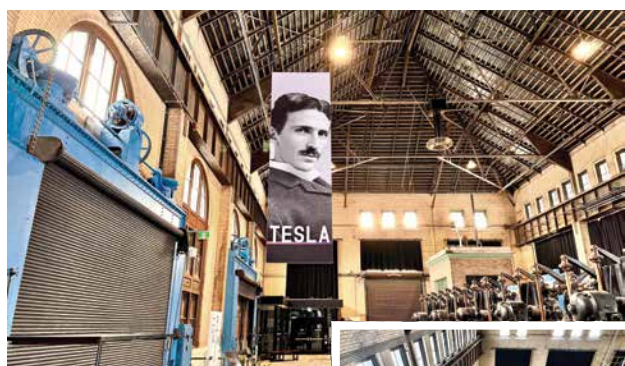
Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Grosvenor

Location: Vancouver, B.C.

Primary Materials & Methods: A large presentation centre in Vancouver required an engaging way to showcase the lifestyle potential buyers could expect. The project team produced high-resolution panoramic photographs to complement the display condominium suites, printed them on fabric, and mounted them in backlit silicone-edge graphic (SEG) frames.

Installers placed the frames along the exterior walls of the suites' balconies and windows. As visitors toured the spaces, the illuminated backdrops created the effect of real, expansive views, delivering an immediate and immersive impression of the surrounding landscape. The result transformed the show suites into compelling sales tools, combining architectural staging with visual storytelling to capture buyers' imaginations.



Runner-up

Designer: Emily, Samantha

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

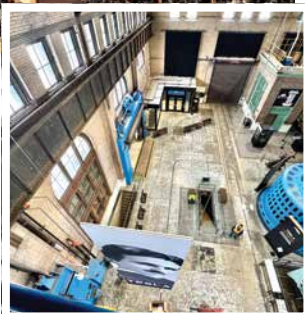
Adam (Frame), Ryan (Paint),

Signature Sign & Image

Submitter: Courtney Albanese

Client: Niagara Parks Power Station

Location: Niagara Falls, Ont.



Runner-up

Designer: Free Agency Creative

Manufacturer/Fabricator:

Quarterhorse Solutions

Submitter: Adam Krahn

Client: Matthews West

Location: Squamish, B.C.



Stand-alone Signs

WINNER

Designer: Hi Signs

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Hi Signs

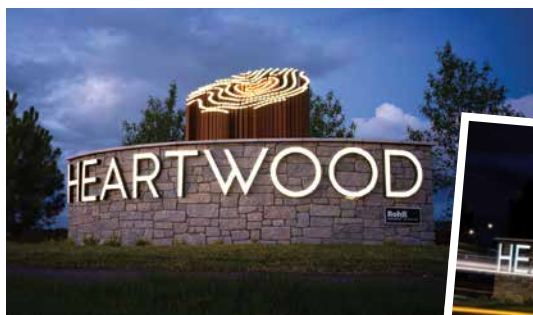
Submitter: Mikayla Balfour

Client: Heartwood

Location: Calgary, Alta.

Primary Materials & Methods: An illuminated monument installation incorporates more than 640 white light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and 320 precision-cut aluminum tubes arranged as a sculptural fingerprint. Designers wrapped the outer tubes in Di-Noc film to simulate a wood grain finish, while the inner "heart" tubes were painted metallic gold and capped with acrylic and translucent vinyl for a luminous effect.

Face-lit channel letters, produced with day/night vinyl, ensure a seamless transition between daytime and nighttime visibility. All components are supported by a reinforced aluminum base structure anchored in a concrete foundation clad with F-type limestone masonry. The result is a striking landmark that blends artistry, material contrast, and engineering precision into a distinctive architectural statement.



Runner-up

Designer: HCMA

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Innovative Signage

Submitter: Blaithin Ruadh

Client: Cowichan Stakeholder Group

Location: Duncan, B.C.



Runner-up

Designer: Marcon

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Multigraphics Ltd.

Submitter: Analhi Sanchez

Client: Marcon Development Ltd.

Location: Langley, B.C.



Vehicle Graphics

WINNER

Designer: Sharon Lee

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Dream Image Signs

Submitter: Sharon Lee

Client: Mt. Sima, Whitehorse, Yukon

Location: Calgary, Alta.

Primary Materials & Methods: Technicians use Avery Cast Vinyl and Cast Laminate, applying the materials with precise hand skills to achieve smooth, bubble-free wraps.



Runner-up

Designer: Sydney Morgan

Manufacturer/Fabricator: M2 Graphix

Submitter: Sydney Morgan

Client: Ocean Volt Solar and EV

Location: Langford, B.C.



Runner-up

Designer: Century Signs

Manufacturer/Fabricator: Century Signs

Submitter: Chris Johnstone

Client: Blue Water Concepts Ltd.

Location: Squamish, B.C.





For installers today, the evolution of the trade is both a challenge and a reward. They must adapt to new technology, broaden their skill sets, and embrace tools that simplify complex tasks.

Photo courtesy Boris Kaminsky

Installation evolution

Tools and tech transforming the trade

Sign installation has always been a craft built on precision, skill, and hands-on problem-solving. In recent years, installers across Canada have seen the landscape shift dramatically. The trade has evolved—making jobs faster, safer, and more precise. We asked installers and team leaders to reflect on the innovations, tools, or technologies that have changed the installation game for them. Their answers reveal a mix of traditional know-how and modern ingenuity that defines today's installation work.

Precision tools make the difference

For Kevin, an installer at Multigraphics Ltd., it's all about precision. "Laser levels have changed the installation game for us," he says. "They help ensure things are truly level with ceilings, floors, or walls, which is rarely the same each time. We write down our 'recipes' for slip solutions, always use a fresh blade to avoid headaches, and never rush the job—it's not worth it. These tools and habits make our work more precise, efficient, and less stressful than a few years ago."

Noah H. from Steel Art Signs echoes the value of laser levels, adding the efficiency of digital layout tools. "As an installer, my biggest game-

changer was when we moved to laser levels and digital layout tools. What used to take hours with tape measures and chalk lines now takes minutes, and the precision is unbeatable. Pair that with modern lifts, and installs today are faster, safer, and straighter than ever." For many installers, these tools are no longer optional; they're essential for maintaining quality and meeting client expectations.

Communication at your fingertips

Other innovations go beyond the physical tools of the trade. Communication technology has become a surprisingly powerful game-changer. Nicole Van Boxtel, managing director at Select Signs, points to WhatsApp as a key development. "There was Skype way back when, but in the last few years, installers have been using WhatsApp for video calls. Issues arise on site, and a phone call or text isn't enough. Being able to talk to the installer face-to-face and have them show you what is going on makes a huge difference and eliminates errors and guesses." The immediacy of video communication on a phone allows teams to resolve problems in real time, cutting down on costly mistakes and reducing frustration for installers and clients alike.

Digital boards and expanding skill sets

Technology has also expanded the scope of skills required in the industry. Miguel Dasilva, installation and operations lead with Media Resources in Alberta, notes the rise of digital boards as a transformational shift. "Installing channel letters or static cabinets was straightforward, mostly mechanical work. With digital, the install side has become a whole new world. It's not just lifting and mounting anymore—it's wiring, data connections, ventilation, and absolute precision when laying out the position of the board."

Dasilva describes how today's installers often straddle multiple trades: electricians, IT specialists, crane operators, riggers, and carpenters all in one job. "In a way, our trade has started to overlap with others. Some days it feels like we're electricians, ensuring power and control systems are wired correctly. Other days, it's more like IT work, with networking and software. At the same time, we're still crane operators, riggers, truckers, welders, and carpenters, making sure the sign looks perfect once it's in place."

He adds, "Compared to a few years ago, installs today require much more planning and a wider skill set. But that's what makes it exciting. When a digital board finally lights up and runs perfectly, or we complete a rollout for a national account, it feels like we've pulled together the best parts of multiple trades into one finished product."

The value of classic tools

Alongside these digital transformations, the right traditional tools remain critical in signage and digital printing. Mackenzie Schultz, installation manager at Sleek Signs, emphasizes the squeegee. "One of the tools I simply could not do without is the squeegee. We use our standard 3M gold squeegee daily, always enhanced with monkey strips to provide optimal protection for both the surface and the vinyl we are installing. However, it's crucial for us to have access to a wide range of squeegees to efficiently complete various jobs. From large floor squeegees for extensive applications to specialized wrap sticks for intricate detailing, each type serves a unique purpose and contributes significantly to making our installations smoother and more precise." Even in a high-tech world, tactile tools are indispensable.

Cloud-based workflows: Smarter installs

Cloud-based technologies are another area reshaping fieldwork. Kenn Leech, senior sign technician and health, safety, and environment (HSE) representative at Tops Lighting Sign Installation & Services in Ottawa, Ont., notes how mobile apps and cloud workflows are changing operations. "Mobile apps now handle work orders, inventory, and job updates directly from the field, cutting down on paperwork and miscommunication. Augmented Reality (AR) measuring tools and mock-up apps let crews capture exact dimensions and show clients how a sign will look before installation. Colour match apps ensure precise brand consistency on-site, while digital checklists and estimating



For many installers, laser levels and other precision tools are no longer optional; they're essential for maintaining quality and meeting client expectations.

Photo © Mithun Chawdhury | Dreamstime.com

tools streamline safety and quoting. Cloud-based project management connects the office, installers, and clients in real time. Work orders, drawings, and site details are shared instantly, and field photos update progress on the spot."

Leech explains that these systems not only save time but also improve safety and client confidence, allowing installers to focus on delivering quality results.

A trade in transition

These sign professionals collectively paint a picture of an industry in transition. Precision tools, communication apps, digital boards, and cloud technology have each contributed to making installation work faster, safer, and more sophisticated. But alongside these innovations, core practices—like careful planning, proper squeegee selection, and measured installation techniques—remain as important as ever. "It's not just about speed; it's about precision and reducing wear and tear on the crew. Instead of spending an hour just setting up access, we can focus directly on the installation itself. That shift has changed how we plan jobs, how our team works together, and ultimately the level of service we can provide to clients," Dasilva concludes.

For installers today, the evolution of the trade is both a challenge and a reward. They must adapt to new technology, broaden their skill sets, and embrace tools that simplify complex tasks. The payoff is clear: Safer jobs, smoother installations, and the satisfaction of seeing a sign come to life, perfectly executed, every time. ●



With clear material knowledge, a bit of structured testing, and straight-talking communication, you can deliver work that meets the brief, protects the margin, and reduces harm—job after job and be sustainable.

Photo © Ideafurniture5 | Dreamstime.com

The sustainable signs handbook

Step-by-step strategies for meeting environmental demands in the signs, print, and display industry

By Steve Lister

Canada's sign, print, and display industry is already busy: Materials are changing, deadlines are tighter, and client questions are getting sharper. The shift is real. The good news is that sustainability doesn't have to slow you down or push up costs. Done properly, it sharpens your specs, reduces waste-handling pain, and strengthens your proposals.

The conversation has shifted. Clients are asking about sustainability up front, and sign-makers must be ready with smart, honest answers. What follows is the practical playbook I share with brands, retailers, and manufacturers—cut straight to the realities of fabrication, installation, and removal in 2025.

Follow the leaders—then get a step ahead

One of the clearest drivers of change is the influence of global brands and retailers. Wherever big players go with sustainability, the rest of the world tends to follow. If you want a preview of tomorrow's briefs, watch what's appearing

in shopfronts, stadiums, grocery chains, and exhibitions today. Those material choices will set expectations for the next tender you see.

In practice, this means two things for Canadian firms:

- **Read the room early.** If you see a national retailer standardizing on fibre-based substrates for in-store displays, expect that preference to show up in your next request for proposal (RFP)—whether you're in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, or Halifax.
- **Align before you're asked.** If you adopt those practices now, you're ready when procurement teams or local councils start asking tougher questions. Prepared suppliers win work while others scramble.

Materials: know what you're buying—and why

One of the biggest gaps I see is material knowledge and the information (or lack thereof) accompanying products. Too often, materials are badged with vague labels without any explanation. That doesn't help anyone.

You don't need buzzwords; you need specifics:

- **What's the substrate made from?** Fibre, plastics, aluminium, composite, metal?
- **What are the performance characteristics?** Durability, printability, impact resistance, outdoor rating, or their sustainability credentials?
- **What happens at the end of life?** Can it be reused, mechanically recycled, taken back, or will it end up in mixed waste?
- **What are the logistics implications?** Weight, packing density, and transport impacts.

If you want clean answers, talk to your suppliers—and talk early. They know the technical details. Ask for data sheets, recovery options in your province, and practical guidance on adhesives, fixings, and coatings that won't block recycling. That's the information your clients can trust, and the information that keeps you out of trouble when claims are challenged.

Two quick rules of thumb:

- **Lighter usually means smarter** for temporary and short-term work—less fuel, easier handling, often better packing density.
- **Simpler constructions** (single-material where possible) make recovery or recycling far more likely.

Sustainability training: The overlooked multiplier

For small and mid-sized sign-making businesses, knowing where to start can be daunting. You don't need a degree; you need a repeatable way to make better decisions on the job ahead of you.

Make time for accessible training and peer learning. Join your local association sessions, attend a webinar, sit on a panel, or set up short internal lunch-and-learns. Training doesn't have to be formal; it has to be frequent. The goal is shared language and confidence across sales, design, production, and install.

This is vital when trialling new materials. Worries about performance are fair—so test them internally first. Run a quick pilot: Print, route, fix, and remove. Record the lessons. Once you've proven what works, you can offer it to customers without risking a live job. Become a quiet hub of innovation. When you've validated a new route, your clients feel the benefit—and you bank the margin.

Packaging: Less theatre, more engineering

Packaging is a blind spot that costs more than it should. You can't ship a premium sign wrapped in brown paper and string; clients expect goods to arrive pristine. But mountains of bubble wrap and polystyrene aren't the answer either.

Start with **fibre-based wraps, paper tapes, honeycomb board, and reusable corner and edge protectors**. Many teams are already reusing shredded delivery boxes as void fill for outgoing shipments. That's

fine—if it protects the product and you're not introducing contamination that fouls recycling streams at the destination.

And yes, legal pressure is building internationally. You don't need to reference chapter and verse to act. Do the engineering: **protect the item with the lightest, most readily recyclable system you can source**, and standardize it. The cost savings show up quickly in material usage and skip charges.

Durable metals: Say the whole truth

Aluminium and steel get a bad rap for their production footprint. Tell the whole story. They last. These are not throwaway materials. For frames, trays, totems, and long-life externals, aluminum and steel often offer the best lifetime performance. When they finally reach end-of-life, they're recyclable at scale. Industry figures often cite that roughly 97 per cent of all steel ever made remains in circulation—the exact number aside, the point stands: durability and recoverability matter.

Use these materials where they make sense. Design them to be **unbolted, not smashed**. Keep coatings and fixings compatible with recovery routes. That turns a cost centre into value.

From skips to circular design

Most signmakers are more circular than they think. Trays get reused. LED systems are moved to the next location. Brackets and posts have second and third lives. Often, it's done quietly to save money. Good. Now, formalize it.

- **Design for disassembly.** Use mechanical fixings instead of "forever adhesives" wherever performance allows. Specify modular components that come apart easily.
- **Keep like with like.** Single-material backers and panels are far more recoverable than composites glued together for life.
- **Write reuse into the brief.** If a client regularly updates campaigns, propose a refreshable system with replaceable faces rather than a full rip-and-replace.

With rising skip costs and tighter compliance, the economics will push the industry this way regardless. Get there early and make it an advantage.

Logistics: Lightweighting and smarter routes

Transport is one of the easiest places to find quick wins—especially for large-format and temporary work.

- **Lightweighting** cuts fuel use and vehicle wear. If the substrate meets performance needs at a lower weight, take it.
- **Flat-pack thinking** reduces trips. Can the sign or display be shipped as a kit and assembled on-site?
- **Routing and consolidation** save money immediately. One firm I worked with re-mapped delivery routes and driver schedules; the fuel and time savings paid for the exercise in weeks.

Electrification will scale unevenly for long-haul, but you don't need to wait for that. Careful planning and design deliver results now.

Stay out of trouble: Avoid greenwashing at all costs!

The biggest reputational risk in sustainability is saying the wrong thing. Words that sound virtuous but mean nothing won't survive in front of a sceptical client—or a regulator.

Here's the safe path:

- **Be specific.** "Fibre-based display using a single-material backer and mechanical fixings; designed for disassembly; recovery route confirmed with [local recycler]."
- **Source your facts.** Use product data sheets and supplier statements you can show on request.
- **Never over-claim.** If the route is "technically recyclable" but no local facility will take it, say so—and offer a real alternative.
- **Keep records.** Store specs, photos, and recovery confirmations. When procurement asks for proof, you have it.

Internationally, penalties for misleading environmental claims are real and growing. You don't need fear to act; just run a professional process that would stand up to scrutiny.

Why we have launched our online bootcamp

We built the Online Sustainability Bootcamp to remove the two biggest barriers to progress: Time and consistency. It's an on-demand program designed for busy sign, print, and display teams who can't spare a full day off the tools.

It's delivered across **10 bite-sized modules** (about **6.5** hours total), we cover the essentials: Shifting mindsets; the changing sustainability landscape; reporting, legislation, and accreditations; communicating with clarity; the business case; deep dives into key materials; packaging and logistics; design for disassembly; supplier alignment; and practical end-of-life solutions.

You'll learn how to set a credible material policy, write a simple recovery plan per job, brief suppliers with the right questions, run a focused shop floor walkaround, and draft client-ready impact notes—without jargon.

It's **online, on demand, and on any device**: watch anytime, anywhere, on any phone, tablet, or laptop. The aim is simple—give every team the same baseline, tools, and language so better decisions become the default on the next job, not the next quarter. ●

What will change fastest?

Over the next five years, expect the quickest shifts in temporary signage and internal displays. Fibre-based and hybrid materials are already replacing plastics in many applications. We're seeing better moisture resistance and strength without the disposal headaches.

Internal retail and events will likely evolve faster than externals. You'll still need the right substrate for the job, but the range of viable, lighter-impact options will continue to expand.

For **permanent signage**, change will be steadier—improvements in LED efficiency, power control, and material lifespan rather than dramatic substrate swaps. Treat these as whole-life projects: serviceable, upgradeable, and easy to refresh without a full rebuild.

Where durable metals and modern fibres meet

There's no single "best" material. There are better choices for the job at hand. For a permanent external sign, aluminium or steel—designed for serviceability and eventual recovery—may be the right call. For a two-month internal display program, a moisture-resistant fibre-based solution with mechanical fixings may be smarter in terms of weight, cost, and disposal. Your role is to match the material to the objective and make the end-of-life outcome intentional.

When you do specify metals, state the full life story. When you specify fibres, state the real recovery route available in your region. When you need polymers, be clear about durability, maintenance and eventual take-back or disposal. Specificity is your best defence and your best sales tool.

Final word

This industry moves fast. Your clients will keep raising the bar; sustainability regulators won't lower it. That's fine. With clear material knowledge, a bit of structured testing, and straight-talking communication, you can deliver work that meets the brief, protects the margin, and reduces harm—job after job and be sustainable.

If you remember nothing else, remember this: design for disassembly, keep constructions simple, talk to suppliers early, and be specific in your sustainability claims. Do that consistently and stay credible, competitive, and proud of the work you put on shop fronts, exhibitions, vehicles, walls, windows, and floors across Canada.

The future isn't about chasing environmental labels. It's about doing the work, proving it, and helping your clients do the same. That's how we move from intent to delivery—at pace, with fewer surprises, and with better results for everyone involved. ●

Steve Lister is a leading sustainability consultant and educator to the sign and display industry with Make it Happen Signage Consultancy. He founded SteveLister.com and is a sustainability consultant to global brands, retailers, and supply chain partners.

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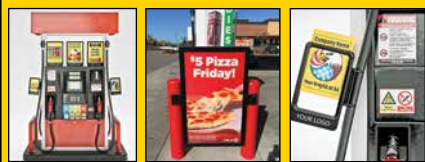
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Form and flow

Photos courtesy Quarterhorse Solutions

One are the days when signage began and ended at the storefront, acting only as a marker that a business existed inside. Today, the sign on the door may still say, “hello, we’re here,” but the systems within now add, “and we have a story to tell.” At the Bassano By Baffo presentation centre in Burnaby, B.C., the walls, hallway, and surfaces contribute to sharing Boffo’s brand narrative.

Working with Free Agency Creative, the project drew inspiration from old Italy to create a presentation centre unified by tone, colour palette, and atmosphere—soft, warm, and welcoming from the moment you step inside.

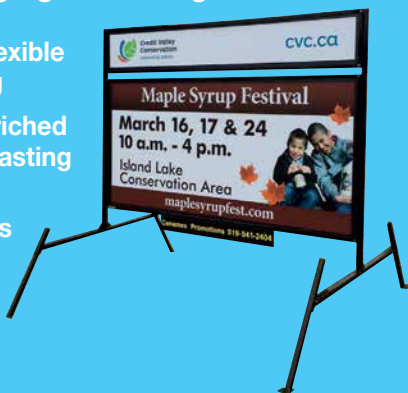
Quarterhorse Solutions executed the vision. The main wall and map features were 3D-carved from medium-density fibreboard (MDF) to resemble stone reliefs, then sanded, primed, and painted, with inset lines and printed imagery. Dimensional lettering, framed displays, fabric scrolls, and illuminated fabric graphics extended the brand through the hallways, while exterior signage—a matte black aluminum panel and a backlit stretch banner—anchored its presence to the street. The result? An immersive brand experience woven through every corner of the space. ●

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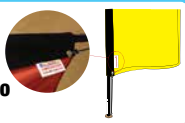
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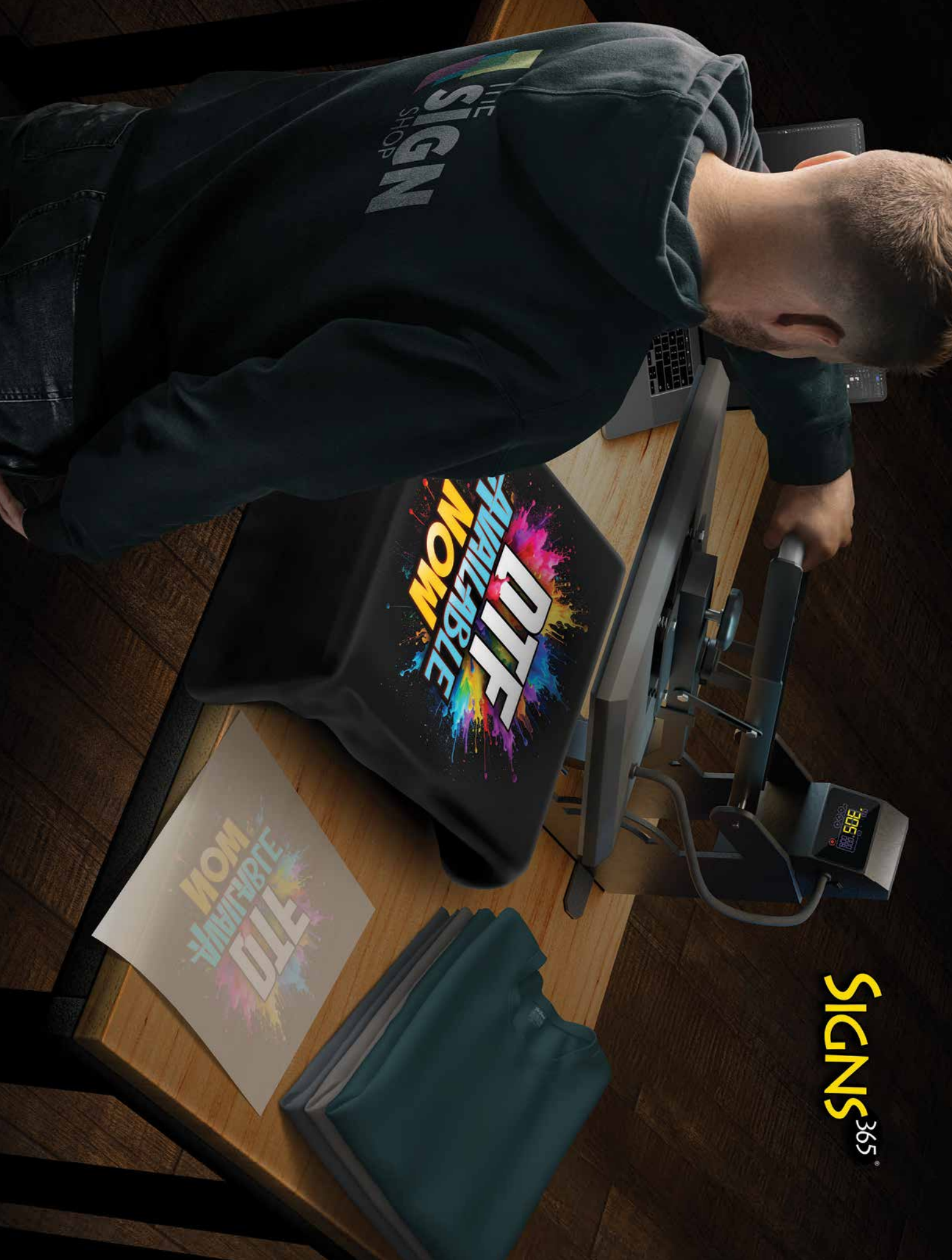
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