

Your single source for signage solutions

May 2026

SIGNmedia

CANADA

CNC: Routing for success
The new realities of merch
A precision approach
to lasers

LEDs SHOW OFF TOURIST ATTRACTION



IF UNDELIVERABLE, RETURN TO:
KENILWORTH MEDIA INC.
201-30 LEEK CRESCENT,
RICHMOND HILL ON L4B 4N4

CANADA - SAVE BIG ON WRAP BUNDLES

ORAJET® & ORAGUARD® Wrap Bundles

54" x 50 yds.

MATCHED. TESTED. READY TO INSTALL.

**IN STOCK,
NOW SHIPPING**



Image courtesy of @cmykggrafix featuring ORAJET 3751RA+PS.

ORAJET®

3551RA+PS

+ ORAGUARD® 215



GOOD

Reliable, Everyday Performance

- Flat surfaces & mild contours
- Also available with **RapidAir®** for high-performance signage

ORAJET®

3951RA+PS

+ ORAGUARD® 290



BEST

Premium Wrap Performance

- Deep recesses & contours
- Maximum lifespan
- Also available with **RapidAir®** for premium signage

ORAJET®

3751RA+PS

+ ORAGUARD® 294



BETTER

Fleet & Commercial Cast Wraps

- Excellent conformability
- Long-term durability

Available through your local

ORAFOL 
PREMIER
DISTRIBUTOR

SHOP NOW



LEARN
MORE

CONNECT

(888) 727-3374
sales-canada@orafol.com

WWW.ORAFOL.COM



Contents



05

The science of immersion

At Niagara Takes Flight, Media Resources delivered immersive LED installations that extend storytelling beyond the simulation itself—blending technology, precision engineering, and design to transform the visitor experience.

09

Metal meets its match

As laser technology becomes more accessible, sign shops are rethinking fabrication workflows. This article outlines how welding and cutting innovations are improving precision, efficiency, and production flexibility.

13

The silent moneymaker

New business owners often overlook signage as a strategic investment. This guide shows how signmakers can position signs as capital assets that drive measurable return-on-investment and build client trust.

17

Signs and strategy

Signage can quickly shift from asset to liability when context changes. Learn how proactive monitoring and smarter planning can prevent brand messaging from becoming reputational “ground clutter.”

20

The reinvention of digital signage in '26

Digital signage is maturing in Canada, making the focus shift from specs to reliability and scalability. This in-depth article explores how evolving technologies are redefining LED as intelligent, resilient infrastructure.

25

Routing revenue

As costs increase and deadlines tighten, sign shops need to optimize CNC efficiency. But how can smarter routing workflows minimize waste, boost utilization, and enhance profitability? Learn the approach.

27

The new print playground

Brands are leaning into experiential marketing to build real-world connections. This feature dives into the world of customized merchandise and tactile engagement that are reshaping brand experiences—and opening new opportunities for print providers.

SIGNmedia
CANADA

MAY 2026
VOLUME 21 • NO. 3



IN THIS ISSUE

04

Editor's Note

31

Marketplace

34

Last Impression

ON THE COVER

This cover showcases an element within the Niagara Takes Flight experience, a series of immersive LED displays that guide visitors from pre-show to post-ride, combining storytelling, technology, and design for an unforgettable Niagara Falls adventure.

Photo courtesy Media Resources





Here's lookin' at you!

When I first watched *Casablanca* at home on TV—released in 1942 and a classic through and through—I was maybe 18 years old. I was struck by how deliberate movies once were, each frame designed to command attention. At the time, I didn't really understand the world of pixels and light, or how such a massive story could fit onto my little LED screen.

Fast forward to 2024, and I stepped into the Illuminarium experience in Toronto's Distillery District—whose entrance sign we featured last year. From the moment I entered, I was immersed, moving through light, sound, and design, slowly becoming part of the experience. It reminded me of something essential: this is the same power our industry wields every day. Whether it's a larger-than-life display at Sankofa Square, transit ads that make you do a double-take, or a storefront that turns a street corner into a landmark, every project is a testament to the signmakers who work behind the scenes.

This issue is about immersion, storytelling, and the craft that turns ideas into experiences. On page five, we explore how Media Resources' Niagara Takes Flight installations extend storytelling through immersive LED design. Page nine dives into metal fabrication innovations, showing that precision and creativity behind the scenes are as crucial as what the public sees.

Pages 13 and 17 examine the strategic side of signage—from positioning signs as ROI-driving assets to preventing brand messaging from becoming reputational hazards in a fast-paced world. On page 20, digital signage in Canada is shown evolving into intelligent infrastructure. This, if you take a minute today, is something to marvel at. How many digital screens do you see on your way to and from work? Count them, let us know. And pages 25 and 27 remind us that operational excellence and experiential creativity go hand-in-hand, from smarter CNC workflows to tactile brand engagement that expands the world of digital printing as we know it.





To everyone in this industry: your impact is everywhere. You are shaping how people experience our cities, how brands connect with audiences, and how stories are told in ways generations before could only dream of. If you've gotten this far in my note, take it as your sign to sit back and realize the influence of what you do—because every pixel, every curve, every carefully considered detail is part of the magic. So much has changed in the last few decades. So much lies ahead—all thanks to an industry in motion.


Here's lookin' at you. ●

Signed, sealed, delivered.



Marika Gabriel
EDITOR

 @signmediacanada_mag
 @signmediacanada
 @signmediacanada
 Sign Media Canada magazine



Your single source for signage solutions

EDITORIAL

Editorial Director
Blair Adams
Editor
Marika Gabriel

DESIGN

Senior Graphic Designer
Catherine Howlett
Graphic Designers
Elaina Adams
Alfi Ichwanditio
Lisa Greco
Steve Maver

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Amanda Dorenberg, president,
Canadian Out Of Home
Measurement Bureau (COMMB)
Dawn Hohl, technical trainer and consultant, **Uncommon Enterprises**
Matthew Lavery, sales representative, **Spectra Advertising**
Lee Murphy, director of business development, **Access Signs Inc.**
Adam Fine, director of experiential graphic design, **Fathom Studio**

KENILWORTH MEDIA INC.

CEO
Erik Tolles
Chief Financial Officer
Philip Hartung
Vice-President of Operations
Krista Taylor
Director of Business Development
John MacPherson
Accounting Manager
Bochao Shi
Accounting Assistant
Audrey Tang
Administrative Assistant
Helen McAuley

SIGNMEDIA.CA

Andrei Kurpatov
Hon Mun Mak
Krina Li
Sanjeev Deshar

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Mei Hong
Camille Garcia
Catherine Ho
Irene Yu
Sonam Bhardwaj

PRODUCTION

Director of Digital Operations
Matthew Buckstein
Senior Production Co-ordinator
Melissa Vukicevic
Production Co-ordinators
Falon Folkes
Heather Donnelly
Digital and Marketing Specialist
Alvan Au
Administrative Assistant
Bess Cheung

ADVERTISING SALES

(800) 409-8688
sales@kenilworth.com
Vice-President of Sales
Joseph Galea
Publisher
Heidi AlBarbary
Account Manager
Ethan Love
Sales Operations Manager
Tim Broderick
Sales Co-ordinator
Ines Abbey

HOW TO REACH US

30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4N4
(905) 771-7333

SPEAK TO THE EDITOR

We want to hear from you! Please email editorial inquiries, story pitches, press releases, and letters to the editor to: mgabriel@signmedia.ca.

SUBSCRIPTION

To subscribe to *Sign Media Canada*, call: (800) 409-8688;
Email: circulation@signmedia.ca

RATES

Canada 1 year: \$49.00 (incl. taxes)
U.S. 1 year: \$77.00 US
Foreign 1 year: \$98.00 US

Publications Mail Agreement #40663030

Postmaster: Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Kenilworth Media Inc. 30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4N4
Tel: (905) 771-7333; Fax: (905) 771-7336

Sign Media Canada (ISSN 1718-3006) is published eight times a year, including an annual Buyers' Guide, by Kenilworth Media Inc., 30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4N4

Contents of *Sign Media Canada* are copyrighted and may not be reproduced without written consent of Kenilworth Media Inc. The publisher shall not be liable for any of the views expressed by the authors of articles or letters published in *Sign Media Canada*, nor shall these opinions necessarily reflect those of the publisher. This magazine is strictly for information purposes only. The content and expert advice presented are not intended as a substitute for informed professional advice. No action should be taken on information contained in this magazine without first seeking specific advice from a qualified professional. The electronic addresses contained in this magazine are for inquiring about a company's products and/or services or to contact an author, and not to be used for sending unsolicited promotional messages.

Printed in Canada





NIAGARA TAKES FLIGHT

The science of immersion

The LED engineering behind 'Niagara Takes Flight'

By Tony Da Silva and Sidney Brownell

This is a project that lit the way to adventure. Media Resources partnered with Branch Audiovisual, whose client was Niagara Parks, to deliver a series of high-performance LED display systems for the immersive attraction of Niagara Takes Flight located at the Table Rock Centre in Niagara Falls, Ont. The project involved supplying and installing indoor LED displays across both the pre-show and post-show environments, as well as throughout key transition areas, including installations within the Table Rock Centre and connecting hallways. These displays play a critical role in shaping the visitor's journey, helping to build anticipation prior to the ride experience and extending the storytelling beyond the main attraction. By integrating advanced digital display technology into the physical environment, the project enhances the overall guest experience through dynamic visual engagement, seamless content delivery, and immersive storytelling.

Control, quality, responsiveness

Media Resources was engaged by Branch Audiovisual, who selected our team based on our ability to deliver a fully integrated LED solution, from design and engineering through to manufacturing and installation. As a Canadian

company with in-house engineering, module plant, and manufacturing capabilities, we offer a level of control, quality assurance, and responsiveness that is highly valued on complex projects of this scale. Our local presence also provides a significant advantage in terms of ongoing service, maintenance, and rapid support, particularly for high-traffic, year-round tourist destinations like Niagara Falls. Branch Audiovisual recognized our ability to deliver not only high-performance LED technology with our TruVIEW Fine Pixel Pitch product, but also a turnkey execution model, ensuring consistency from concept through to final commissioning. This combination of technical capability and local support made us a strong partner for their project.

Co-ordination and engineering

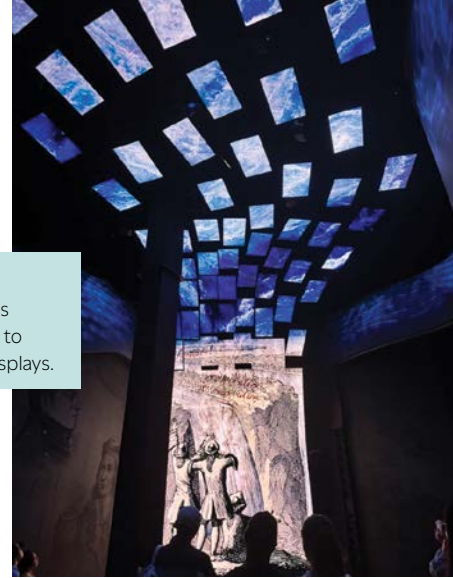
The project timeline began in the summer of 2024, with early co-ordination, engineering, and planning phases aligning with the broader development of the attraction. Fabrication and system preparation progressed alongside construction, ensuring that all display components were ready for integration within the evolving site conditions. Installation and commissioning were completed by the

The Niagara Takes Flight project is a strong example of what can be achieved through collaboration between project partners, technology providers, and client stakeholders.

Photos courtesy
Media Resources



The 'waterfall room' required a continuous visual flow from walls to suspended ceiling displays.



Each display was manufactured with a focus on durability, alignment accuracy, and long-term performance.



- The installations included:
- Curved LED walls/marquee displays
 - Full and partial column wrap displays
 - Ceiling-mounted displays
 - Traditional wall-mounted displays

Each application required a tailored engineering approach to ensure seamless integration into the architectural design. The variety of display types highlights the complexity of the project and demonstrates the ability to adapt LED technology to non-traditional surfaces and immersive environments.

spring of 2025, in alignment with the final stages of the attraction buildout and prior to opening.

Fine pixel pitch

The scope of the project included the delivery of a diverse range of fine pixel pitch indoor LED display solutions across multiple areas of the attraction, each with unique spatial and experiential requirements. Within the Table Rock Centre, located just outside the main attraction, Media Resources installed five TruVIEW Flip Chip COB LED displays, designed to capture attention and engage visitors as they enter and exit the experience. Inside the Niagara Takes Flight attraction itself, a total of 11 LED displays were deployed, varying in size, configuration, and pixel pitch. These displays ranged from 1.56 to 1.87 mm (0.061 to 0.073 in.) pixel pitch, along with the integration of flex technology, allowing for creative freedom in shaping the displays to the environment.

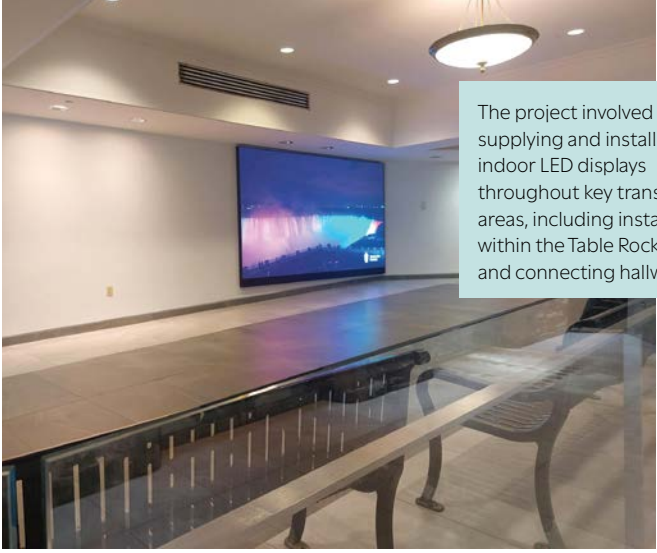
Creativity and technology

The creative and experiential design for the project was developed by Branch Audiovisual's design team, who established the visual direction and layout for the attraction.

Media Resources worked closely with Branch Audiovisual to translate these concepts into fully engineered LED solutions, ensuring that each display met both the creative intent and the technical requirements of the space. This collaborative approach allowed for precise alignment between design vision and execution, particularly in areas requiring custom shapes and complex integrations.

Precision engineering

Fabrication of the LED systems was completed using a combination of advanced LED display technology and precision-engineered structural components.



The project involved supplying and installing indoor LED displays throughout key transition areas, including installations within the Table Rock Centre and connecting hallways.



The displays were constructed using:

- High-resolution LED modules
- Aluminum and steel extrusion frameworks for structural integrity
- Integrated NovaStar control systems for signal processing and content management

Each display was manufactured with a focus on durability, alignment accuracy, and long-term performance, ensuring consistent image quality across all installations. From a tooling and assembly perspective, the process involved the use of:

- Scissor lifts for access and positioning
- General hand tools for assembly and fastening
- Digital and laser levelling tools to ensure precise alignment across all display surfaces

Given the variety of display shapes and mounting conditions, fabrication and preparation required careful co-ordination to ensure that each system could be installed efficiently within the constraints of the site.

Adaptability and cohesion

As a highly customized and immersive installation, the project presented several challenges that required adaptability and close co-ordination across all teams involved.

One of the primary challenges was working within non-uniform architectural conditions, including uneven wall surfaces and varying structural materials behind finished drywall. These conditions require site adjustments to mounting strategies to ensure secure and accurate installation.

Additionally, design modifications during installation introduced the need for real-time problem-solving and flexibility. The team worked closely with Branch Audiovisual and Niagara Parks, Media Resources to adapt to these changes while maintaining the integrity of the overall design.

Complex transitions between surfaces also presented challenges, particularly in areas where:

- Two walls met at an inside corner requiring a seamless LED finish
- Displays transitioned from vertical wall surfaces to overhead ceiling-mounted elements



Working alongside Branch Audiovisual and Niagara Parks, Media Resources was able to deliver a solution that meets the technical demands of a complex installation.





This project highlights the growing role of fine pixel pitch LED technology in experiential environments, where flexibility, reliability, and visual performance are critical to success.

Photos courtesy Branch Audiovisual

- The “waterfall room” required a continuous visual flow from walls to suspended ceiling displays

Maintaining a consistent visual experience across these transitions required precise alignment and careful calibration. Other challenges included:

- Tight working spaces with multiple trades operating simultaneously
- Navigating equipment and materials through multi-level environments
- Co-ordinating installation within a high-traffic public-facing tourist destination

These challenges were addressed through detailed planning and strong communication between teams, and leveraging the experience of both Media Resources and Branch Audiovisual in delivering complex, multi-stakeholder projects.

Attention to detail

The installation process followed a structured approach, beginning with the preparation of mounting surfaces and structural supports, followed by the staged installation of LED cabinets.

Using a combination of scissor lifts and precision levelling tools, each cabinet was carefully positioned and secured to ensure proper alignment across the display surface. Given the complexity of curved, column-wrapped, and ceiling-mounted displays, installation required a high level of attention to detail at every stage.

Once physically installed, all displays were connected through integrated power and data systems, followed by system configuration using NovaStar control technology.

The final phase involved:

- Calibration of brightness and colour uniformity
- Signal testing across all display sections
- Content verification to ensure seamless playback

This process ensured that each display performed reliably and delivered a consistent visual experience across the entire attraction.

Partners, providers, stakeholders

The Niagara Takes Flight project represents a strong example of what can be achieved through collaboration between project partners, technology providers, and client stakeholders.

Working alongside Branch Audiovisual and Niagara Parks, Media Resources was able to deliver a solution that not only meets the technical demands of a complex installation but also enhances the storytelling and overall guest experience.

This project highlights the growing role of fine pixel pitch LED technology in experiential environments, where flexibility, reliability, and visual performance are critical to success. ●

Tony Da Silva is a senior manager of marketing and demand generation. Sidney Brownell is a marketing assistant for Media Resources Inc. Da Silva and Brownell drive Media Resources' marketing and branding initiatives with a blend of experience and creativity.

With more than 30 years in the signage and communications industry, Da Silva leads strategic marketing and demand generation efforts, drawing from a diverse background, including national advertising campaigns and multimillion-dollar fundraising initiatives. Brownell brings a fresh, design-forward approach to the company's digital presence, managing social media, content creation, and storytelling. Together, they align strategy with execution, amplifying Media Resources' visibility and showcasing its technological innovations across North America.

Laser cutters offer advantages over routers in precision, speed, and the ability to cut complex shapes with non-contact, debris-free cutting.

Photo © Scanrail/courtesy bigstockphoto.com

Metal meets its match

How laser tech is rewriting the rules of sign fabrication

By Dave Rom

In the early days of industrial laser equipment, only large, well-established companies could afford it. However, in recent years, decreasing prices have made laser equipment accessible to medium-sized and even small companies. This shift has not only broadened adoption across the industry but also introduced a wider range of laser technologies tailored to different production needs and budgets.

Laser welders

Traditional welding techniques such as metal inert gas (MIG) welding, tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding, and arc welding have long dominated the industry. While effective, these methods often require highly skilled operators, produce significant heat distortion, and demand extensive post-

processing. In contrast, handheld laser welders offer a more efficient solution that addresses these drawbacks and enhances productivity.

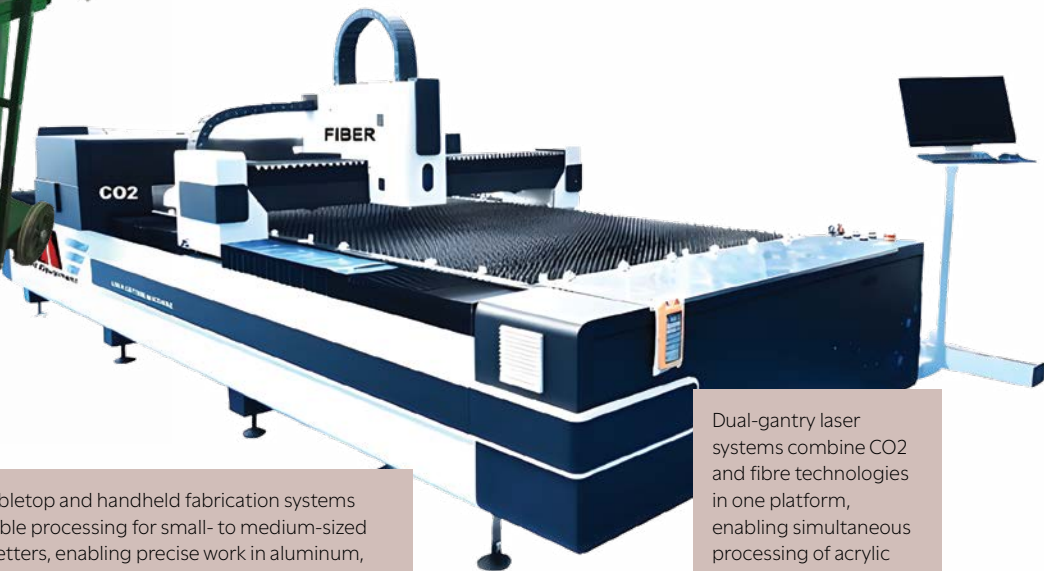
The handheld laser welder is suitable for reverse/halo medium- to large-sized channel letters, logos made from 0.76 mm (0.030 in.), 1.60 mm (0.063 in.), and 2.03 mm (0.080 in.) aluminum or stainless steel, and structures made from aluminum extrusions, up to 6.35 mm (¼ in.) material thickness.

We suggest that sign companies switch to a laser welder. This will lead to the following advantages:

- Ease of use.
- High precision and speed, minimal distortion, and a reduced heat-affected zone due to the concentrated laser beam.



Modern fibre laser welders offer a precise, versatile alternative to TIG and MIG, and are capable of welding steel, aluminum, stainless steel, and other metals. These systems are designed to be intuitive, with a relatively simple setup and operation.
Photos courtesy Dave Rom, Ascent Equipment



Hybrid tabletop and handheld fabrication systems offer flexible processing for small- to medium-sized channel letters, enabling precise work in aluminum, galvanized steel, brass, and stainless steel with minimal setup and training.

Dual-gantry laser systems combine CO2 and fibre technologies in one platform, enabling simultaneous processing of acrylic and wood, along with metals such as aluminum and stainless steel with efficiency and precision.



but they struggled to weld aluminum effectively. QCW laser welding uses a high-peak-power laser to weld materials using short pulses. This method features a smaller heat-affected zone and greater flexibility than continuous-wave (CW) laser welding.

A QCW laser operates in high-peak-power pulse modes, providing peak power up to 10 times the average power.

Advantages of QCW laser welding

- In less than four hours, an operator with no prior experience can learn how to weld 0.76 mm (0.030 in.) aluminum.
- A 2000W fibre laser welder can weld aluminum from 0.76 mm (0.030 in.) to 0.68 mm (0.27 in.).
- The laser can weld carbon steel, aluminum, stainless steel, copper, brass, and titanium.
- A refrigeration heat pump has been introduced, which lets the laser work 24/7.
- A dual wire feeder is available for bridging gaps between the materials when needed.
- Different thicknesses of material can be welded together.

- 0.76 mm (0.030 in.), 300W is equivalent to 3000W of other laser types.
- Features a pulsed laser beam, ideal for the narrow strokes of channel letters.

However, one limitation of the handheld laser welder is its inability to weld small channel letters.

To address this, the quasi-continuous wave (QCW) laser was introduced as a solution for small- to medium-sized channel letters.

In the early days, yttrium aluminum garnet (YAG) lasers, using a neodymium-aluminum garnet crystal, were used,

QCW lasers deliver energy in pulses, allowing the material to cool between pulses. This approach reduces thermal input and minimizes the heat-affected zone, making it suitable for thin materials.

The reduced thermal input makes 300W QCW welding ideal for aluminum ranging from 0.50 mm (0.020 in.) to 1.01 mm (0.040 in.), as well as stainless steel up to 1.01 mm (0.040 in.).

This type of machine can function as a standalone, handheld, or tabletop unit with CCTV capabilities. It is the ideal solution for small- to medium-sized channel letters, made from aluminum or stainless steel.



Following basic safety protocols is essential for the safe operation of industrial lasers.

Laser cutters

Laser cutters are typically categorized into two types: CO2 laser sources for cutting non-metals and fibre lasers for cutting metals. Each technology is optimized for specific material interactions, making the distinction critical when selecting equipment for production workflows.

Laser cutters offer advantages over routers in precision, speed, and the ability to cut complex shapes with non-contact, debris-free cutting. This

results in cleaner edges, tighter tolerances, and reduced material stress. Usually, there is no need for a secondary operation, which streamlines production and reduces labour costs.

For sign companies, the laser cutter is an addition to the router, not a replacement. Routers remain essential for certain applications—particularly thicker substrates and three-dimensional carving—while lasers excel in fine detail work and rapid, repeatable cutting. Many companies cannot afford a fibre laser cutter due to its high cost and space requirements. To overcome the space limitation, some manufacturers introduced the Dual Gantry CO2 system and fibre laser cutters. Here are their benefits:

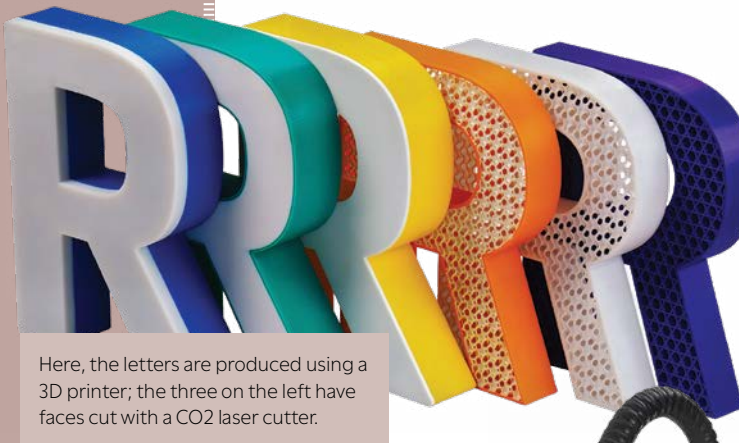
- Separate gantries for CO2 and fibre lasers, allowing for simultaneous processing of different materials and improved workflow efficiency.
- CO2 laser at 500W and fibre laser at 3,000W.
- Capable of cutting a diverse range of materials, including metals, acrylic, and wood, supporting greater production versatility.

ULINE

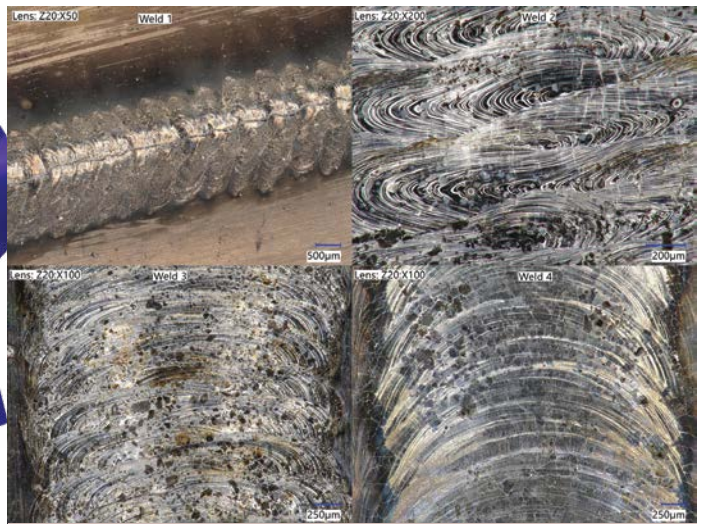
ROLL, BOX OR WRAP – WE HAVE IT

ORDER BY 6 PM FOR SAME DAY SHIPPING

COMPLETE CATALOG **1-800-295-5510** uline.ca



Here, the letters are produced using a 3D printer; the three on the left have faces cut with a CO2 laser cutter.



Microscopic comparison of weld seams under varying lens magnifications, revealing differences in bead structure, surface texture, and material flow across four weld samples.



A quasi-continuous wave (QCW) laser operates in high-peak-power pulse modes, providing peak power up to 10 times the average power.

A portable laser fume extractor.

Compact tabletop laser cutting system with enclosed workspace and gantry-mounted head, designed for precise processing of small-format materials.



- Consists of a working area of 1.5 m x 3 m (5 ft x 10 ft), accommodating standard sheet sizes used in sign fabrication.

This machine is ideal for sign companies with high-volume production needs. It can cut a wide range of materials, including acrylic, wood, aluminum, and stainless steel, eliminating the need for two separate machines, reducing handling time, and saving valuable floor space.

Small companies aiming to enter the channel letter and logo business can invest in a tabletop CO2 laser cutter and a 3D printer. This relatively small investment allows the company to cut both the front and back with the laser, while the side return can be produced on the 3D printer—offering

an accessible entry point into dimensional signage without the upfront cost of larger industrial systems.

Safety concerns

Following basic safety protocols is essential for the safe operation of industrial lasers. Class 4 (IV) lasers are hazardous to the eyes and can cause skin burns.

We recommend:

- Safety goggles with an optical density (OD) rating of 7–8 for 1,064 nanometres (nm) wavelengths, or a fibre laser welding helmet.
- Wear gloves and protect your arms, neck, and any exposed skin while welding, using flame-resistant clothing where possible.
- Follow the laser safety Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) at all times, including proper training, signage, and restricted access to the work area.
- Enclose the machine area with specialized laser partitions (standard welding partitions are not adequate) or solid walls to contain reflections and stray beams.
- The laser cutter may be fitted with an optional housing to reduce exposure risks further and improve operator safety.
- For managing fumes and dust generated during welding, use dedicated fume extraction systems with appropriate filtration.
- The laser cutter must be exhausted to the outside, in accordance with local ventilation and environmental regulations. ●

Dave Rom, B.Sc. Eng, MBA, is the president and chief engineer of Ascent Equipment. He has extensive experience in all aspects of machine manufacturing, with a specialization in computer-numerical control (CNC) and laser equipment. For more information, please email a request to dov@ascentge.com. Visit us at <https://www.ascentequipment.com/>



As signmakers, when we take the time to understand a client's financial pressures and offer real-world solutions, we show that our priority is their success, not just making a sale.

Photos courtesy Signs Galore

The silent moneymaker

New to signage? How to position yourself as a reliable, client-focused partner

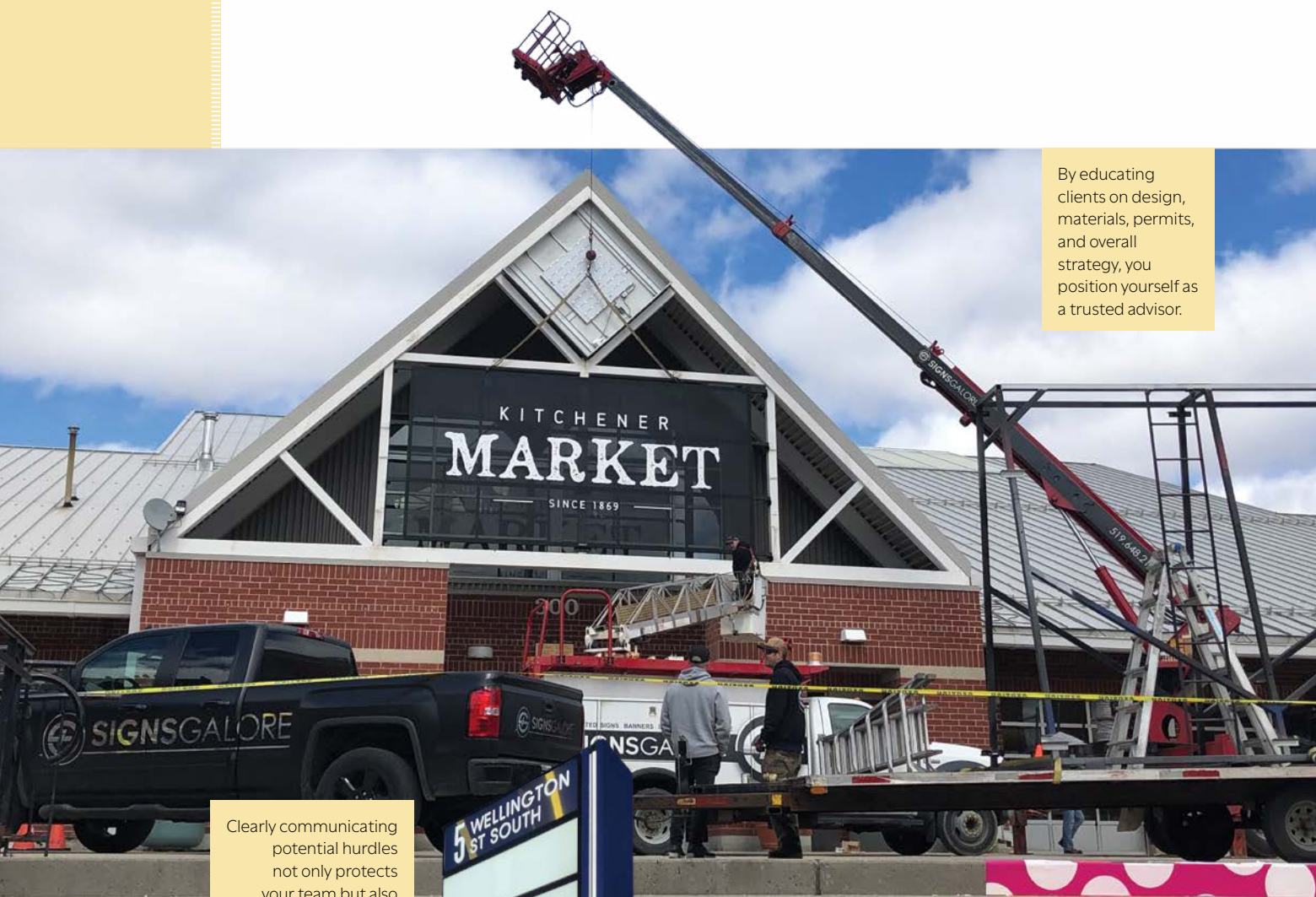
By Garry and Laurie Fitz-Henry

Most businesses start with a great idea. We find something we love to do, and if we are entrepreneurial, we start a new business. There are so many things to consider when starting out, but we generally begin with what we know and love. In that sense, the business is started from the inside out.

We remember when we first started our business back in 1983. Knocking on doors, trying to sell our craft to strangers, and hoping they would trust us with their signage needs—first, the idea, then sales, production, and finally, accounting. Branding was not the first thing on our minds. So, we understand that when many businesses start, many don't

see the value in a sign. Let's face it, good signs are not cheap, and finances are usually very limited at the time. So, the fundamental challenge remains: How do we sell the value of a custom, quality sign?

All of us travel around our cities daily, and we navigate our way without even realizing we rely on signs. Street signs are not always that exciting, but they get us where we want to go. If you think about that for a minute, signs have the power to bring new customers to your door every single day. That potential alone makes a sign purchase invaluable to a new business—and a compelling return on investment (ROI) story for any signmaker building their client base.



By educating clients on design, materials, permits, and overall strategy, you position yourself as a trusted advisor.

Clearly communicating potential hurdles not only protects your team but also builds credibility as a knowledgeable partner in the signage process.



So, if you're a new signmaker thinking of building your own business, here's a guide to help sell signage as a measurable ROI for your clients.

Selling the asset, not the expense

We have served thousands of clients at this stage of our business, and it never ceases to amaze us at the variety of misunderstandings about the cost versus the value of a sign. When looking for the right company to design and produce new signage, a cost-only view can be detrimental to your client's business and, ultimately, their chequebook.

Signs that will last are built with quality materials and craftsmanship. Materials and labour are the staples of quoting and executing any sign project. We invest in our employees, and we invest in quality materials because, in the long run, the sign must represent the quality and longevity we want our clients to project. We know the temptation is always to go for the lowest bid, but in the signage world, a cheap sign rarely lasts, and a fading or peeling sign is worse than no sign at all; it sends a bad message about the business behind it.

Any new client has many expenses they will need to consider. A new restaurant will need to invest in high-quality ovens, refrigerators, dishwashers, and freezers. A fabrication shop must purchase welders, cutters, computer-numerical control (CNC) machines, tools, cranes, and trucks.



How many clients see their new sign as a capital investment? Not many, which is why it's up to us to open their eyes to its value in boosting visibility and foot traffic.



These expenses are considered capital expenses and assets that will become their moneymakers. On a bookkeeping side, these items will depreciate over time, which will ultimately help on their income statements.

How many clients consider their new sign as a capital investment? So often, they come with what is left over from their business budget, with dreams of having the showstopper sign that will reflect their pride in their own business. For new signmakers starting out, understanding this perspective is key—it allows you to position yourself as a partner in helping new businesses invest wisely. We have often stretched the new business owners' budget, but we have never had them come back to us and say they regretted that decision. Why? Because the sign that draws people in has become the silent moneymaker they didn't account for. That's a value that far exceeds its initial cost.

Understanding the investment

The concept of a sign as a depreciable asset is a powerful piece of information we must share. It's not just a beautiful expense; it's a piece of equipment, a marketing tool that can be accounted for intelligently. As signmakers, we are responsible for educating our clients not just on design but on the financial strategy of their purchase. This means we must go the extra mile—and so, mastering this conversation is a critical skill for building credibility with clients.

To assist our clients with their financial planning, we have partnered with leasing companies that will work directly with them to manage their new sign investment. This is a crucial element that frees up cash flow for other operational needs. Many cities also offer fascia or façade grants for new businesses, as they are invested in maintaining a beautiful downtown shopping area. This is also worth recommending and exploring.

This is when the relationship goes beyond just a transaction. When we take the time to understand their financial pressures and offer real-world solutions—such as leasing or grant advice—we show that our priority is their success, not just making a sale.

Helping clients plan smarter

Whether in the boardroom or working with customers at a computer, it's an effective way to brainstorm ideas, discuss likes and dislikes, review budgets, and collaborate on projects. This level of planning with clients establishes trust and demonstrates your value from the first interaction.

We can share and lead from our expertise and experience and help them make informed decisions about their signage needs. For example, what will the city allow in their location, what fees are involved in the permit process, and how long will the entire project take? Being transparent about the time involved to get permission to start the project is crucial.

THE SIGNMAKER'S FINANCIAL PLAYBOOK

To improve strategic financial advising



Based on our experience, we can provide guidance on the appropriate sign size and the amount of information to include, as drivers only have seconds to read signs. We also advise on colour combinations that may not work well together and overall visibility strategies. Offering our materials and workmanship warranty is crucial for building client confidence. Maintaining transparency throughout the entire process—from beginning to end—fosters strong relationships and trust.

Avoiding costly surprises

It is important to be upfront with new clients about all the possible issues that may delay the process of building and installing new signage. Permits and landlord sign-offs are two processes that most often lead to delays. If they are not taken care of, the client may face fines from the city for erecting a sign without a permit, and they may be in trouble with their landlord if they do not follow tenant guidelines.

Locates—ground markings identifying the position of utility lines—can also cause delays. This process can be time-consuming. However, they are a necessary precaution to ensure the safety of our crews and compliance with utility regulations. Clearly communicating these potential hurdles to clients not only protects your team but also builds

FIVE WAYS TO POSITION SIGNAGE AS A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT



credibility as a knowledgeable partner in the signage process. After giving the customer the information they need regarding these items and supplying them with layouts and pricing for their approval, the next step is having them sign off with DocuSign or a physical signature. This is the best way to avoid unwanted surprises, for both the signmaker and the client.

Building long-term partnerships

Spending extra time, being thorough, and staying engaged when working with a client is never wasted. This collaborative approach transforms the relationship from a simple vendor-client exchange to a strategic partnership. Approaching every client interaction with this mindset lays the foundation for long-term success and repeat business.

You are not just delivering a product—you are showing your clients that you understand their business and are invested in their success. By educating them on design, materials, permits, and overall strategy, you position yourself as a trusted advisor. By consistently positioning the sign as a strategic asset, you secure your role not just as a supplier of goods but as a key partner focused on the client's marketing and financial success. This level of care and expertise will help you develop long-term relationships, earn repeat business, and establish the credibility that is essential as a business owner yourself. ●

Garry and Laurie Fitz-Henry have owned and operated their family business, Signs Galore, since 1983—a business built on quality, craftsmanship, and integrity. In the early years, they were also a busy family raising four sons: Robert, Justin, Stephen, and Kevin. The boys (now men) each have played an important role in the company's ongoing success. Even the name tells their story, with "Galore" being a meaningful blend of Garry and Laurie. Signs Galore channels that same passion into providing top-quality custom signage solutions for storefronts, fleets, and national franchises, establishing a strong reputation for operational excellence in the industry.



Signs and strategy

Has the line between signmaking and reputation management blurred?

By James Rubec

In military radar systems, operators talk about “ground clutter,” which is the static, unchanging objects that get filtered out so you can focus on what’s actually moving toward you. However, those static objects sometimes become threats. In other words, the thing you stopped watching is the thing that gets you.

Both brand signage and out-of-home (OOH) advertising, when not actively managed or planned in alignment with broader messaging—*i.e.*, without “reading the room”—have the potential to become ground clutter. The roadside billboard, too, can create reputational risk, though responsibility differs. OOH advertisers control their campaigns, while brand signage is managed by the client and the sign professional.

The static asset problem

I’ve spent years studying how threats emerge and propagate across media environments—and how often physical signage becomes part of that story. This pattern is clear for OOH media, while brand signage faces similar risks if messaging isn’t updated or context aware. I even managed some OOH ads when working at Randstad in a PR capacity years ago. I loved it. With the added context of a short-form video on TikTok, I’d have loved it even more, aside from the risk.

The mechanism is simple. Public sentiment shifts constantly, potentially hourly, during major news events. Brand messaging, particularly visual messaging in physical spaces, changes on cycles measured in weeks or months.

Brand messaging, particularly visual messaging in physical spaces, changes on cycles measured in weeks or months. That gap between sentiment velocity and asset velocity is where reputational damage happens.

Photo © viteethumb studio/courtesy BigStock



Signmakers are seen as strategic partners, offering insight and expert advice on content, messaging, and how to best communicate a brand's identity.
Photo © artursfoto/ courtesy BigStock

That gap between sentiment velocity and asset velocity is where reputational damage happens and affects both OOH campaigns and signage, though the latter can be adjusted proactively by signage operators.

OOH case studies

The dating app Bumble walked right into a crisis with a 2024 OOH campaign that attempted to target dating fatigue. Instead, the brand angered women (its target audience). The rebrand was unsuccessful, and the campaign prompted an apology.

At the same time, bad ad writing gets annihilated for being just that—bad. You can't always blame the prevailing winds for missing your drive from the fairway. Realtors in Ontario learned this the hard way in 2020, with their Real Estate Ninja's ad, which generated headlines for the wrong reasons. These OOH case studies illustrate context risks that can also inform brand signage strategy.

Threat surface expansion

In cybersecurity, "attack surface" refers to the number of access points where something can go wrong. In signage terms, it's the number of places your client's message shows up in public—and can be photographed, shared, or misinterpreted.

Brand signage has expanded its attack surface significantly over the past decade, and organizations must update their defensive posture to keep pace.

Consider the threat vectors that now apply to standard signage installation:

- **Direct photography and social sharing.** Every sign exists simultaneously in physical space and as potential viral content. A single smartphone turns any display into a broadcast.

- **Context collision.** Messaging designed for one circumstance encounters an entirely different circumstance. The cheerful "We're cooking with gas!" restaurant promotion lands during pipeline explosion coverage.
- **Temporal mismatch.** Campaign timing that made sense during planning becomes problematic at execution. Think holiday messaging installed too early or left up too long can feel dated, while celebratory displays that overlap with a tragedy can quickly appear tone-deaf.
- **Geographic sensitivity.** National messaging can read differently in specific local contexts. What works for Mississauga, Ont., transit display ads may not be effective in other markets.
- **Permanence as evidence.** Unlike digital communications that can be deleted or modified, physical signage creates durable evidence of brand positioning that critics can document and reference indefinitely.

Each of these vectors represents a monitoring requirement that most organizations haven't assigned to anyone. PR watches media mentions. Marketing watches campaign performance. Facilities manages physical assets. If no one is connecting PR, marketing, and on-site signage, who's keeping an eye on signs? As immersive installations become bigger and more intricate, this challenge moves front and centre.

Early warning systems

The solution isn't to treat every sign as a potential crisis. That's operationally impossible. The solution is to build early warning capability, the ability to detect when conditions are shifting in ways that might affect how existing visual assets are perceived.

Think of it like radar coverage. You're not trying to track every object in the sky. The goal is spotting which signs could draw attention for the wrong reasons before they become a bigger issue. What messages are live in the market, and what challenges could they present, if something changes?

For both OOH campaigns and brand signage, those signatures include:

- **Narrative or sentiment emergence.** When certain themes begin to consolidate in media coverage narrative patterns (such as corporate greed, environmental negligence, and labour exploitation), any visual messaging that could be interpreted through that lens becomes a liability. The sign didn't change. The interpretive framework around it did. The same applies to brand-specific sentiment. Even a playful sign can backfire if public perception of the brand changes.

- **Local event triggers.** National monitoring often misses hyperlocal developments that affect specific installations. A facility announcement, a community incident, or a regional news story can significantly impact how local audiences perceive nearby signage.
- **Calendar convergence.** Predictable events, such as elections, holidays, awareness months, and earnings cycles, create windows when certain messaging is more sensitive. Viral news, public health emergencies, and natural disasters require real-time threat detection and a clear playbook to ensure relevant creatives are updated quickly.

Sign professionals know their local markets better than corporate communications teams. They are on site. They see what's happening in the community. That ground-level awareness has monitoring value that must be formalized into client relationships.

The detection-to-response gap

Identifying a threat is only valuable if you can respond before it has an impact. A typical scenario starts with someone in PR seeing a problematic juxtaposition between current events and existing signage. They flag it internally. A discussion begins about whether to take action. Approvals are sought. By the time a decision is made, the social media damage is done.

The problem isn't detection speed. Modern media monitoring can identify emerging issues in near real-time. The problem is response architecture.

This is where sign professionals can protect their clients—and their own work—by spotting potential issues early and keeping messaging aligned.

Before installation of on-premise digital signage, governance must be defined—though the responsibility differs by role. For fabricators and installers, content control may sit entirely with the client. For sign companies that manage digital networks, lease displays, or handle client content, consider:

Modification authority. Who can authorize changes to the content? What circumstances trigger that authority?

Response messaging. What alternative content is available to deploy if the primary messaging becomes problematic?

Escalation protocols. How does information about potential visual asset liabilities reach the people who can act on it? Does your team have a direct line to the client's crisis function? *Takedown thresholds.* What triggers can lead to an automatic review of related visual assets?

The benefit of this preparation is the ability to act opportunistically.



The goal is spotting which signs could draw attention for the wrong reasons before they become a bigger issue.
Photo © AlexImx/courtesy Dreamstime.com

Predictive positioning

The most sophisticated threat detection is predictive. No magic ball needed, just a pen and paper exercise to help build more resilient messaging.

Ask yourself a few extra questions in your planning phase:

- What events would make this message read as tone-deaf?
- What is this campaign's shelf-life? Longer installations need more durable messaging. When clients partner with sign professionals, think buttercream instead of whipped cream.
- What's the worst interpretation a hostile observer could make? Imagine someone reading the sign with a critical eye—what could they misinterpret about your work, and how might it reflect on your client? This adversarial review catches vulnerabilities that friendly eyes miss.

Integration, not replacement

I'm not suggesting signage professionals need to become crisis communications experts. That's a specialized discipline with its own training and experience requirements. However, lessons from OOH monitoring inform best practices, particularly for brand signage, where signmakers have direct control. I suggest the traditional separation between people who make signs and people who manage reputation no longer reflects how brand risk actually operates.

Signmakers are increasingly seen as strategic partners, offering insight and expert advice on content, messaging, and how to best communicate a brand's identity across everything from commercial signage to immersive environments.

This shift positions them as essential collaborators in managing brand perception from the outset. The brands that survive reputational turbulence aren't the ones that never face criticism; instead, they are the ones that manage it effectively. The radar works better when everyone is watching the same screen. ●

James Rubec is vice-president of Products at Fullintel, specializing in crisis management and AI-driven threat detection. He collaborates with clients on the Fullintel Hub with AI functions like PredictiveAI—a machine-learning solution for predicting media virality. He is an industry leader in innovative data storytelling on media influence. With experience as senior director of Product Management and director of Content and Licensing at Cision, he excels in designing PR technology workflows that save time. Rubec has used data to predict elections, uncover trends and improve business processes, with work featured in outlets including The Financial Post, Yahoo Finance, Variety and the CBC.



The reinvention of digital signage in 2026

By Carl Breau

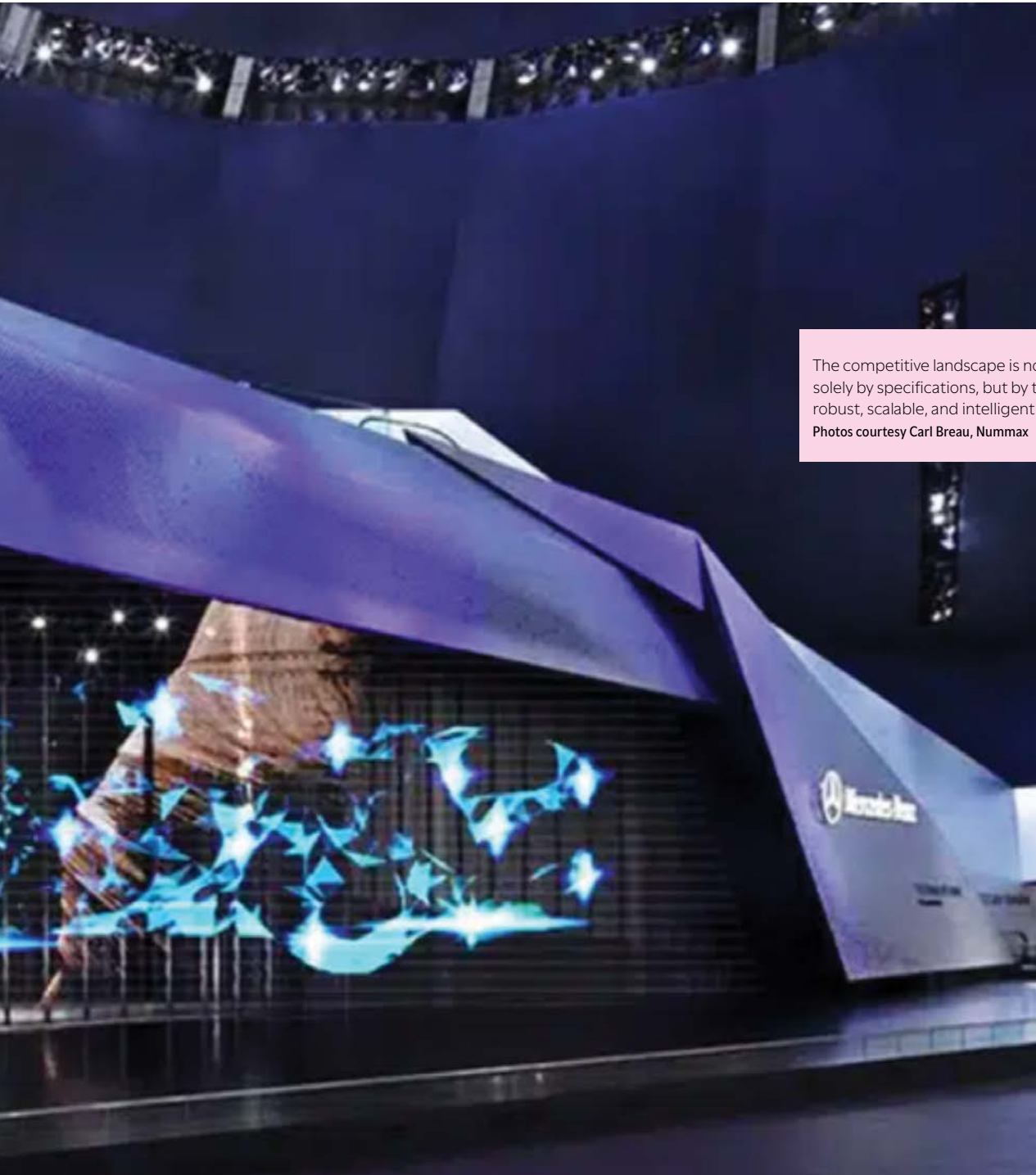
The Canadian digital signage industry is entering a new phase of maturity in 2026. After more than a decade of rapid hardware evolution, the sector is shifting towards other considerations, such as better reliability, scalability, and integration.

Canadian projects bring both challenges and opportunities. Long deployment distances, extreme weather conditions, and limited availability of skilled labour increase complexity. At the same time, there is strong

untapped demand in secondary markets and a growing advantage for local players capable of supporting projects across the country.

This creates a unique context for Canadian manufacturers and integrators. The emphasis is increasingly on reliability, serviceability, and weather resistance, rather than on deploying unproven, cutting-edge display technologies.

While LED performance continues to improve in areas such as resolution and brightness, the most meaningful



The competitive landscape is no longer defined solely by specifications, but by the ability to deliver robust, scalable, and intelligent display ecosystems.
Photos courtesy Carl Breau, Nummax

changes for Canadian sign manufacturers are happening elsewhere: in deployment models, Artificial Intelligence (AI), remote management, architectural integration, and energy efficiency.

For manufacturers, integrators, and installers, understanding these shifts is essential. The competitive landscape is no longer defined solely by specifications, but by the ability to deliver robust, scalable, and intelligent display ecosystems.

1. The decentralization of LED

From flagship installations to national networks

One of the most significant transformations in recent years is the decentralization of direct-view LED (DV-LED), a trend particularly relevant in Canada given the country's geographic scale.

Historically, LED displays were reserved for large, iconic installations such as stadiums, flagship retail locations, or major outdoor advertising sites. Today, improved reliability,



Digital signage is no longer simply installed—it is engineered into the built environment.



lower costs, and simplified deployment are enabling LED to expand into distributed, network-based applications.

National rollouts are becoming common across sectors such as fuel station networks, quick-service restaurants (QSRs), retail chains, and automotive dealerships. Instead of a few large installations, organizations are deploying hundreds or thousands of standardized units across multiple locations.

This shift has several implications:

- **Certification and compliance are critical**

Large-scale deployments require strict adherence to CSA Group, UL, and other regulatory standards. Buyers are less willing to accept risk when installations are replicated across entire networks.

- **Local presence is a competitive advantage**

Clients increasingly expect local support for installation and service. Canadian-based manufacturers and integrators benefit from proximity, especially compared to foreign competitors entering the market.

- **Standardization drives efficiency**

Modular designs, repeatable configurations, and simplified installation processes are essential to scaling deployments profitably.

LED is no longer a niche solution—it is becoming infrastructure.

2. Resolution and brightness

Incremental gains, strategic optimization

Despite ongoing improvements, resolution and brightness are no longer the primary differentiators they once were.

Pixel pitches continue to decrease, and brightness levels remain strong, particularly for outdoor applications. However, these gains are increasingly constrained by cost considerations. For most use cases, performance has reached a “good enough” threshold.

The industry is now focusing on optimization rather than maximum specifications.

Key developments include:

- **Closer viewer proximity**

Higher resolution allows displays to be installed closer to audiences, particularly in retail environments, but also in public transit and other applications.

- **Directional brightness control**

Optical solutions such as louvres and lenses improve light efficiency and reduce spillover. This is particularly important



With installations often located far from service centres, each intervention carries a high cost and delay. As a result, redundancy and remote monitoring are now central to system design.

in Canada, where lower ambient light levels in less dense areas make light pollution a more sensitive issue. Controlled brightness can also help secure permits by limiting impact on nearby residential zones.

- **Environmental considerations**

Electromagnetic emissions, waterproofing, and durability continue to influence design, especially for outdoor installations.

The result is a more balanced approach—where performance is tailored to the application rather than pushed to technical extremes.

3. Interactivity and AI

From content to systems

AI is rapidly transforming digital signage, with impacts extending far beyond content creation.

While AI-driven content generation is already well established, the next wave of innovation focuses on interactivity and system optimization.

Emerging applications include:

- **Audience-aware displays**

AI enables real-time analysis of audience demographics and behaviour, allowing content to adapt dynamically.

- **Monetization optimization**

Advertising networks use AI to optimize scheduling based on performance, time of day, and engagement.

- **Enhanced interactivity**

Touchless interfaces, gesture recognition, and personalized experiences are increasing engagement.

- **Design and manufacturing support**

AI is also influencing upstream processes, including product design optimization, predictive maintenance, and increased factory automation.

For manufacturers, this represents a shift toward more intelligent production systems. For integrators, it means

delivering solutions that function as responsive platforms rather than static displays.

4. Redundancy and remote monitoring

Toward zero downtime

As LED deployments scale across large geographic areas, uptime becomes critical—particularly in Canada.

A failure at a single location may be manageable, but when it's across a national network, it becomes a systemic issue. With installations often located far from service centres, each intervention carries a high cost and delay.

As a result, redundancy and remote monitoring are now central to system design.

Key capabilities include:

- **Real-time diagnostics and alerts**

Systems detect faults instantly, allowing rapid response before issues escalate.

- **Remote intervention**

Many problems can be resolved without on-site visits, reducing downtime and operational costs.

- **Predictive maintenance and route optimization**

Data-driven scheduling allows service teams to plan interventions efficiently across large territories.

These capabilities are driving a shift from reactive to proactive service models. For integrators, this opens opportunities for long-term service contracts and value-added offerings.

5. Architectural Integration

When displays become buildings

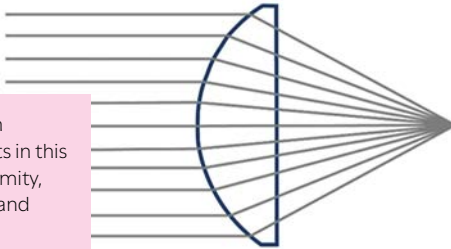
LED displays are increasingly being integrated into architecture rather than treated as standalone elements.

Displays can now be incorporated directly into building envelopes, including façade systems and even glass curtain walls.



Energy efficiency has become a central design priority, driven by rising energy costs, environmental regulations, and sustainability goals. This is particularly relevant in Canada, where climate conditions and energy demands can be significant.

The industry is now focusing on optimization. Key developments in this area include closer viewer proximity, directional brightness control, and environmental considerations.



Key developments include:

- **Curved and custom forms**

Advances in cabinet design and flexible modules enable non-standard shapes.

- **Seamless façade integration**

LED is being embedded into architectural skins, particularly in high-visibility environments such as automotive dealerships.

- **Early-stage collaboration**

Projects increasingly require co-ordination between signage providers, architects, and engineers from the design phase.

In Canada, this integration must also account for environmental factors such as snow accumulation, wind loads, and thermal expansion. Structural integrity and durability are as important as visual performance.

Digital signage is no longer simply installed—it is engineered into the built environment.

6. Energy efficiency

From constraint to competitive advantage

Energy efficiency has become a central design priority, driven by rising energy costs, environmental regulations, and sustainability goals.

This is particularly relevant in Canada, where climate conditions and energy demands can be significant.

Key innovations include:

- **Component optimization**

Operating components below maximum capacity improves efficiency and lifespan.

- **Advanced chip design**

High-efficiency LEDs and driver integrated circuits (ICs) reduce power consumption.

- **Common cathode architecture**

This approach significantly improves efficiency compared to traditional designs.

- **Content optimization**

Reducing white content and optimizing colour usage lowers energy consumption.

- **Passive heat dissipation**

In colder climates, passive cooling can reduce the need for energy-intensive systems.

- **Renewable energy integration**

Solar-powered solutions are emerging in remote or off-grid applications.

Energy efficiency is no longer just a cost consideration—it is a key factor in competitive positioning.

From displays to intelligent infrastructure—a Canadian perspective

The digital signage industry in 2026 is no longer defined solely by display technology. It is shaped by the convergence of AI, networked systems, architecture, and energy management. In Canada, this evolution is further influenced by geography, climate, and operational realities.

Canada is not just another market—it is a demanding test environment.

Reliability is a non-negotiable requirement. With installations often located hundreds or thousands of kilometres from service centres, downtime carries a significant operational and financial impact. This places a premium on redundancy, remote diagnostics, and predictive maintenance.

Climate adds another layer of complexity. Outdoor systems must withstand extreme cold, snow, moisture, and rapid temperature changes. Displays not specifically engineered for these conditions face increased risk of failure due to material stress, moisture ingress, and thermal cycling.

As a result, there is a clear distinction between products that are simply outdoor-rated and those designed specifically for Canadian winters. The latter incorporate robust sealing, cold-resistant materials, and structural designs capable of handling wind and snow loads. It is important to have designs made by people who have experienced snow firsthand!

The Canadian market also reinforces the importance of long-term performance over short-term innovation. Systems must operate reliably across all conditions—not just under ideal circumstances.

Ultimately, Canada rewards engineering excellence. It exposes weaknesses in design and execution more quickly than milder markets, but it also validates solutions that are truly robust.

As digital signage continues to evolve into intelligent infrastructure, the key question is no longer what a display can do—but how reliably it can perform over time.

In Canada, success will depend not only on innovation but on resilience. ●

Carl Breau is the CEO of Nummax and a business mentor with NextAI since 2021, supporting Canadian AI startups. A version of this article was presented by Breau at the Quebec Sign Association (Association Québécoise de l'Industrie de l'Enseigne/AQIE) conference in March 2026.

Routing revenue: How smart CNC routers boost profit

By Stuart Fox

Sign shops continue to navigate a challenging landscape driven by evolving customer demands, faster and more complex workflows, new sustainability regulations, and rising costs. All of these have a significant impact on operations, labour time, and revenue. As a result, maximizing efficiency and machine utilization are more important than ever.

To support these demands, sign shops are looking at all areas of production, including their routing workflows. Paying close attention to small inefficiencies is also critical, as they can have a real impact on improving production, reducing waste, and, importantly, maximizing profitability.

Measure what matters

To start off the process, it is useful to build a clear picture of what basic performance metrics are available to guide decisions and highlight where exactly in the routing process inefficiencies are stemming from. This can include metrics on machine uptime, material yield per sheet, average setup time per job, and scrap and remake frequency.

Building this understanding can help to highlight where workflow changes can be made to maximize machine utilization, remove manual intervention steps that aren't required, and minimize material waste. In my experience, we see that undertaking this exercise often brings up the same recurring workflow challenges for our sign shop customers.

But the good news is that small steps can be taken to resolve workflow inefficiencies and ensure sign shops are getting the best out of their computer numerical control (CNC) routers.

First, one of the biggest efficiency gains comes before the CNC machine even starts routing—in file preparation, tool changes, and manual intervention steps.

Rather than viewing CNC efficiency as a simple technology upgrade, leading sign shops are treating it as a process mindset shift.

Photo © Iulius Costache/courtesy Dreamstime.com



Modern CNC systems are compatible with widely used software, enabling sign shops to go from design to routing with minimal rework or file conversion. This reduces handling errors, decreases setup time, and keeps machines running smoothly. Photo courtesy MultiCam

By addressing job flow and unnecessary handling, sign shops can reduce time wasted on these processes, and since, ultimately, time lost between jobs is unbillable, streamlining this element of the workflow can keep CNC routers performing more consistently, which directly impacts revenue.

Modern CNC routers, like the MultiCam Apex3R Evo, aim to address this. They are designed to reduce bottlenecks by supporting end-to-end workflow continuity. Software and file format compatibility is also crucial here. These systems are often compatible with widely used software, allowing sign shops to move from design to routing with minimal rework or file conversion. This, therefore, reduces handling errors, shortens setup time, and helps keep machines running consistently rather than sitting idle.

Smarter planning = reduced waste

Once workflow has been addressed, waste is the next area to look at. Material waste has one of the most visible impacts on profit in sign production, especially when working with premium materials such as aluminum composite, acrylic, and wood panels.

The best way to address this is to ensure that sufficient upfront planning and nesting optimization are in place to maximize sheet usage and reduce offcuts. True-shape and mixed-job nesting also enables jobs to share cut lines and use leftover space effectively.

Here again, the Apex3R Evo has several advantages. Nesting software included in the elevated Coreo Command Advanced package runs alongside the router to ensure the material is being fully utilized to minimize waste. It also offers a range of table sizes, providing flexibility for users to select a product that suits their size needs based on the signage they are regularly producing and the material size.

We also recommend that sign shops consider investing in a machine with a larger working area, which provides

versatility to handle a wider variety of projects and work with a more diverse range of materials, which is beneficial for business growth. What's more, a longer machine enables "pendulum processing." This is a setup where a machine operates on one table while an operator loads and unloads parts on another table. This allows operators to set up two standard sheet sizes on a table simultaneously. As a result, one sheet can be actively worked on while parts can be removed, or new sheets can be loaded at the other end of the machine.

The power of flexible tooling

Sign shops rarely work with the same material all day, and inefficiencies appear when machines need to be constantly reconfigured to work with different substrates. Therefore, to maximize CNC machine utilization, flexible tooling is critical.

Enhancing finish quality, flexible tooling is also important for achieving cleaner finishes, which correlate to less hand-finishing requirements, fewer remakes, and faster turnarounds. Here again, this links to lower manual intervention requirements and reduced waste.

Modern CNC routers address this with spindle options, with some ranging up to 13.3 HP, suitable for dense materials and high-quality edge finishes. A condensed knife system, including electric oscillating knives with adjustable stroke lengths, also allows for fast transitions between routing and knife cutting. Flexible tooling options also mean that sign shops can add tooling as applications evolve, rather than replacing the machine.

Furthermore, an automatic tool changer (ATC) increases efficiency in the tool changing process, reducing sheet-to-sheet time and boosting productivity. It also offers support for multiple tool types in a single job, again reducing machine downtime.

When workflow efficiency, waste reduction, and machine utilization are addressed together, the financial impact becomes clear. More routing time equates to more billable hours per day. Less waste means there is a lower material cost per job. And more efficiency leads to faster turnarounds and improved customer satisfaction.

By investing in flexible, highly-precise CNC routing platforms, sign shops can make the most of their equipment, aligning smarter workflows, materials, and making the most of their key resources—their people.

This makes looking at maximizing machine utilization in a new light for business owners, *i.e.*, as a resource that can significantly improve profitability without increasing production pressure. Rather than viewing CNC efficiency as a simple technology upgrade, leading sign shops are treating it as a process mindset shift. I strongly believe that more sign shops should be following their lead. ●

Stuart Fox is president and CEO of Kongsberg Precision Cutting Systems and MultiCam.



Promotional products are not just a great 'upsell' opportunity; they also help deepen customer relationships by positioning your business as an experiential marketing partner rather than a graphics supplier.

Photos courtesy Spector & Co

The new print playground

Why sign and graphics pros should tap into the merch boom

By Jessica Makrinos

Nineties nostalgia is everywhere, reflected across fashion, music, and social media as consumers look back to the last pre-digital era. And from a look at trends, it seems marketers are riffing on the '90s, too, tapping into experiential marketing and looking for physical touchpoints to cut through the digital noise.

Real-world connection

Whether through email overload, social media binges, or triple-screening as they unwind on the couch, every generation is experiencing unprecedented levels of digital fatigue, with more than



As experiential marketing grows in popularity, branded merchandise may be the offering that enables wide-format specialists to differentiate themselves by offering all-in-one solutions that bring their clients' brands to life.



three-quarters of Gen-Z and Millennials reporting that they often wish to digitally disconnect.¹ Indeed, growing numbers of TikTok and Instagram videos are popping up extolling the virtues of going “chronically offline,”² and even printed holiday shopping catalogues are making a comeback.³

Consumers are looking for real-world connection, and marketers are adapting their strategies to meet them where they are, with a 2024 report from *Event Marketer* magazine having found that 74 per cent of marketers were planning to increase their spending on experiential marketing.⁴ This is hardly surprising when you consider that the same research also found that two-thirds of event attendees feel more favourable towards a brand after engaging with them in a live event.⁵ Additionally, some 2025 research into holiday shopping by market research firm, The Harris Poll, for marketing experience company Quad found that 71 per cent of respondents feel more present and less distracted by their phones when shopping in-store, and 74 per cent prefer in-store shopping for getting into the holiday spirit.⁶

Brands are quickly capitalizing on this return to the real world with pop-up stores and in-store events designed to increase customer engagement and potentially garner social media shares along the way. In the December 2025 holiday season, for example, cosmetics brand Lush Cosmetics invited shoppers in Boston, Mass., to customize their shower gel purchases live in-store. Using Antigo Designer software paired with Inkcup's Helix ONE cylindrical inkjet direct-to-object printer, shoppers were able to add a name or a phrase to their chosen shower gel bottle, and the design was then printed on the spot. This wasn't mass customized packaging, but live, on-demand personalization that allowed shoppers to create unique gifts and the brand to create an “Instagrammable” in-store experience.

Naturally, the growth of experiential marketing is great news for the signage and wide-format print specialists who create the graphics and environments needed for brand



activations and live events. It also creates an opportunity for these same businesses to expand their service offering into promotional merchandise, packaging, and the myriad other products that are becoming part of experience design. Here's how.

A touchpoint in the branded experience

There may be a lot of '90s throwbacks around, but just as event graphics are a world away from what they were then, promotional products in 2026 look nothing like they did three decades ago. The days of bulk-buying inexpensive items, adding a logo, and using

them for every event and promotion are long gone. Today's brand owners and consumers expect a more tailored approach, and merchandise has become about premium, custom pieces that are part of the overall experience.

While writing this article, we spoke with Alan Meinstein, CEO of Spector & Co, a Montreal-based trade supplier of promotional products and an Inkcups customer. He said: "Historically, the industry was associated with 'trinkets and trash'—cheap, disposable items—and even the term 'swag' reflects that mindset. Now, there's much more thought and intention behind merchandise. We're seeing more sophisticated decoration, with subtle, elegant branding, and the line between promotional merchandise and retail has blurred significantly. Brands are looking for products that align with their identity, and which let them tell a story through merchandise, rather than just handing out random items."

Part of this stems from a rediscovery of the importance of physical touchpoints in experiential marketing as people tire of time in digital worlds. Human beings want tactile experiences, and in many cases, branded merchandise is an opportunity to connect with people by giving them a way to feel or experience a brand that engages more senses than purely the visual. It is even suggested by some research that touch can increase valuation and sense of ownership,⁷ which in turn could lead people to value a brand more highly just by virtue of holding its merchandise.

If you visit any tradeshow or conference today, you can clearly see this playing out among brands that are trying to build connections. Branded items are being thoughtfully curated as a reward for participation in an experience, an unusual item to drive social media engagement in real time, or even an enticement to spend more time interacting with



Today's brand owners and consumers expect a tailored approach, and merchandise has become about premium, custom pieces that are part of the overall experience. Photos courtesy Inkcups



an installation. For example, one of our customers recently used direct-to-object printing to brand and personalize cans of soda live at a trade show. And in 2024, visitors to the Inkcups booth at PRINTING United Expo were able to use Antigro Designer software to personalize latte cups with cut-outs of their own face before having them printed on our booth instantly.

This experiential shift is something our promotional merchandise customers are seeing a lot of, too. Spector & Co, for example, is often asked to put together drinkware alongside a journal, pen, or bag, all packaged together in a gift box to create an unboxing experience that might be used at an internal company event, at trade shows, or in other experiential activations.



For those looking to capitalize on the growing demand for customized merchandise, a good first step may be to consider building partnerships with providers that offer promotional product decoration.

object UV printer, for example, lowers barriers to entry into drinkware printing by opening up the possibility of photo-quality, full-colour, 360-degree graphics on everything from shot glasses, pint glasses, and reusable coffee cups to candle holders and spirits bottles. Technologies such as this make it possible to scale up capabilities in a modular way, based on customer demand.

In recent years, wide-format print has often been touted as a golden ticket in the industry, but as experiential marketing grows in popularity and the worlds of print and promo converge, branded merchandise may be the offering that enables wide-format specialists to move beyond job-by-job selling and

differentiate themselves by offering all-in-one solutions that bring their clients' brands to life. ●

Convergence creates opportunities

Signage and wide-format print service providers operating in events, retail, and display graphics will be only too familiar with the experience-first environment. And as so much of the print industry begins to overlap and even converge, many are exploring ways to integrate merchandise into their offerings. Not only are promotional products an excellent “upsell” opportunity, but they can also be a way to deepen customer relationships by becoming more of an experiential marketing partner than a graphics supplier.

Skilled signage and graphics practitioners are already well versed in working with brand guidelines and understand the importance of colour accuracy. Many are also already accustomed to working with creative agencies and brand managers. Some may even be able to leverage some of their existing technology, such as using wide-format flatbed printers to decorate blank promotional items if the surface is rigid and the item is only a few inches tall.

However, for those looking to capitalize on the growing demand for premium and customized merchandise to enhance their experiential and activation work, a good first step may be to consider building partnerships with providers that offer promotional product decoration. This not only gives access to a wider range of technology but also enables businesses to tap into these partners' skillsets and supplier networks, immediately expanding the options they can offer customers.

There are also entry-level technologies that enable businesses to decorate promotional merchandise in-house more easily. The Helix ONE benchtop cylindrical direct-to-

Notes

¹ Read Arielle Feger's *Younger generations are feeling digital fatigue*. eMarketer. June 25, 2025. <https://content-naf.emarketer.com/gen-z-millennials-feeling-digital-fatigue>

² Learn more about Sawdah Bhaimiya's insights on *A 'quiet revolution': Why young people are swapping social media for lunch dates, vinyl records and brick phones*. CNBC. February 7, 2026. <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/02/07/young-people-quiet-revolution-social-media.html>

³ Discover The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected. May 13, 2025. <https://www.quad.com/resources/research-and-tools/return-of-touch-consumer-engagement-has-an-omnichannel-revival>

⁴ Read more: EventTrack 2025. Event Marketer. October 24, 2024. <https://www.eventmarketer.com/article/eventtrack25/>

⁵ Read more: EventTrack 2025. Event Marketer. October 24, 2024. <https://www.eventmarketer.com/article/eventtrack25/>

⁶ Learn more: The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected. The Harris Poll & Quad. October 30, 2025. <https://www.quad.com/insights/consumer-insights/why-consumers-are-turning-to-in-store-shopping-and-catalogs-this-holiday-season>

⁷ Discover Joann Peck, Suzanne B. Shu, 'The Effect of Mere Touch on Perceived Ownership, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 36, Issue 3, October 2009, Pages 434–447, <https://doi.org/10.1086/598614>

Jessica Makrinos is the marketing manager at Inkcups.

CANADA'S TRUSTED WHOLESALE SIGN MANUFACTURING PARTNER

PRECISION-BUILT SIGNAGE FOR TRADE PROFESSIONALS

WHAT WE OFFER:
 CHANNEL LETTERS • DIMENSIONAL SIGNS • ACRYLIC SIGNS
 PYLON & MONUMENT SIGNS • CNC CUT LETTERS
 PUSH-THRU SIGNS • LIGHTBOXES • NEON LED SIGNS • MARQUEE SIGNS

UL CERTIFIED CANADA/US SHIPPING INSTALL-READY PRECISION-BUILT SIGNAGE

CUSTOM SIGN FABRICATION FOR SIGN COMPANIES, BROKERS & FRANCHISE PROJECTS

905-604-3684 | www.atarasigns.com
 UNIT 102 - 65 WEST BEAVER CREEK RD., RICHMOND HILL, ON

Fast Change Frames
 Easiest way to display graphics!

FlipUp™ front load frame
Any Size 1 minimum Low Cost
 Top or side loading through hidden open edge
 Slide-In™ frames

NEW LED edge lit frames
 Any Size, Any Color
 1 Minimum

Acrylic Standoff Frames, any size, any shape

American Owned American Made

1-800-915-2828
sales@fastchangeframes.com
fastchangeframes.com

Brooklyn Hardware
MANUFACTURING Inc.
 1-888-232-1151 www.panelclip.com

Panelclip® Clipz® Kingclip®

BANNER STRETCHING FRAME

Beautifully display any size banner! Patented

bannergrip.com
 1-800-915-2828 sales@bannergrip.com

2 New Banner Stretching Frames

Beautiful Banner Display, Wrinkle free, Drum Tight, Won't blow out in any winds, perfect for Semi Trailer use.

Only our frame offers perfect linear alignment with our included "Joiner Straps." Longer sections join easily and perfectly for the best results!

Call or email us. Our intelligent, informed staff will answer right away. We get you the answers and pricing fast.

MTC Display www.mtcdisplay.com ONLINE

BIG SAVING ON FLAGS! MADE IN CANADA

NEW Double-Sided Flags Up To 16ft Wide Seamless & Superior!

Feather Flag As low as **\$65** /each

Heavy Duty Tent FULL COLOR 10' x 10' **\$650** /each

Rectangle Flag As low as **\$39** /each

Tel: 416-491-3333 / 416-768-9258 E-mail: sherry.young98@gmail.com
 Address: 3796 Victoria Park Ave, North York, ON

Patents Pending. All Rights Reserved. PURE BEAUTY

Available in Silver, Black, and Faux Cherrywood

Create large and beautiful, drum-tight stretched vinyl banner displays!

Any Size • Low Cost • No Minimum • Free Shipping

We Love Canada!

Flip top snaps down completely covering all screws and stretcher bar. Clean, perfect look!

bannergrip.com
sales@bannergrip.com
 1-800-915-2828

This month's **Featured PRODUCT**

CHANNEL LETTERS

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS:

- Printing Products (Trade only)
- Rollup stands
- Vinyl
- Wholesale Channel Letters
- Face-lit channel letters
- Halo-lit letters
- Acrylic letters
- Blade sign
- Light box
- Pylon Signs
- Braille Signs

Muiz Graphics Inc. <https://www.muizgraphics.com>



OMNIMARK AWNINGS

NEW FRAMES • REPAIRS • NEW FABRIC



tel. 905-670-5744
toll free 1-888-990-9971 fax: 905-670-2370
123omnmark@gmail.com

1050 Britannia Rd. East Unit # 14 Mississauga

MAX MEDIA

Graphic Supplies Inc.
www.maxmediagraphicssupplies.com
www.jetbest.ca

Wide Format Imaging Supplies:

- *Aqueous Inkjet Media.
- *Latex / Eco-Sol / Solvent / UV Curable Printer Media.
- *Pressure Sensitive Laminating and Mounting Films
- *Banner Stand and Tradeshow Show Displays.
- *Low Cost Premium Quality Comparable inks.

Jetbest Inks



Jetbest Authorised Jetbest Dealer
Easy Refill System

3375 14th Avenue, Unit 5, ON, L3R 0H2 Tel: 905-474-9128 Fax: 905-474-9987 maxmedia@rogers.com



Wholesale Wood Signs

*Sandblasted Wood & V-Carved
Finished or Unfinished
Western Red Cedar & HDU*

the Sign Depot inc.
We'll look after the dust while you look after your clients

samples of our work
www.sign-depot.on.ca  sales@sign-depot.on.ca

FOR OVER 32 YEARS
Serving Southern Ontario
info@CanadaLightingandSign.com

•SERVICE •FABRICATION
•INSTALLS
...done right



Licence No. 7010017
309A-28640

519-969-0419
24 Hr. Emerg.
519-562-2573

• SINCE 1992 •

GAS PUMP FRAMES

Sell more in your store!™



Eye level mini ads at pump to entice gas pumpers and passengers in the cars to buy in your stores. Easily changeable 5 x 7 and 8 1/2 x 11 size ads.

gaspumpframes.com

Call: 1-800-675-2975 **Wholesale-Trade**



Large Format + white ink
Digital & Screen Printing

Alupanel, Banners, Coroplast, Styrene, PVC, HDPE, Window Decals, ABS, PetG, Die Cutting & More.

Prevent pole banner loss and destruction!

www.ban45.com
See this amazing 62 second video

A modern-engineered, pivoting pole banner system to preserve banners in high-wind events!

Patents Pending. All Rights Reserved.

We Love Canada!
Alpina Manufacturing
Chicago, Illinois
1-800-915-2828
sales@fastchangeframes.com
ban45.com • gaspumpframes.com




Wholesale Channel Letters

Trimless Signs / Metal Signs / Marquee Signs
3D Printing Signs / Push Thru Signs / Epoxy Signs



 UL LISTED
UL Certified CSA equivalent

info@signhouse.ca www.signhouse.ca
220 Viceroy Rd. Unit 9, ON L4K 3C2 905-760-2020





BOCSies

YOUR chance TO shine

The Best of Canada's Sign Industry Awards (BOCSies) honours the top work of sign companies, related organizations, and individuals across the country.

Awards are handed out in 10 categories, plus the prestigious Sign Company of the Year (SCOTY).

ENTER NOW
at **bocsi.ca**
DEADLINE JULY 31

SIGNmedia
CANADA

sac  **ace**
SIGN ASSOCIATION OF CANADA ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE L'ENSEIGNE

The Best of Canada's Sign Industry Awards



A sip of celebration

What would one say is a universal sign of moms? Well, we're not sure, but a life-sized teacup comes pretty close. Last year, in May (the month that hosts Mother's Day), a giant teacup brought smiles at Orchard Park Mall in Kelowna, B.C.

Designed by WildeSigns and crafted—dare we say, brewed—in Vernon, B.C., each curve of the cup was hand-carved, sanded, and painted by Nancy Wilde using large styrofoam blocks. The saucer and cup slabs, cut from foam by a foam supplier using a computer-numerical control (CNC) machine, were made in two parts for easy movement. The handle, guided by custom jigs and an old-fashioned compass, was cut on a large hot wire built in the shop for this project.

Hand-painted in soft blue and white, the cup features tiny sponsor logos on tea bags adorned with vintage postage stamps. The saucer rotates 360 degrees for different views. Measuring 1.52 m (5 ft) x 1.82 m (6 ft), it's a charming display that invites visitors to pause, smile, and celebrate moms everywhere. ●

~ Marika Gabriel



Cana-Mag Sign Systems

Continous Changing Marketing Tools

- Adhesive Back, Flexible Magnetic Sheeting
- Printable Steel Enriched PET Film for long lasting vibrant prints
- Durable for Indoors & Outdoors



Now Offering!

- Up to 120" Fabric Printing & Finishing
- SEG Frames
- Light Boxes
- Table Covers
- Portable Displays



Adjustable Pole Banner Hardware & Banners

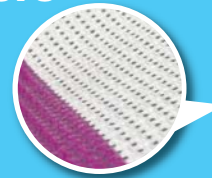


Hardware:

- Canamex Brand Aluminum Brackets
- 7/8" Diameter Fibreglass Rods up to 37" Long
- 3" Vertical adjustment for easy install & taut banner changes
- Tight banners last longer!

Mesh Banners:

- Double Sided Printing
- Mold & mildew resistant
- Fire retardant
- Withstands Extreme Temperatures
- No Wind Slits Required!



**Double Sided
14oz Block Out
Vinyl Mesh
24%
PERFORATION**



SIDE A

SIDE B

**Also Available in
21oz Block Out Vinyl**

**Starting @ \$113.85 /SET
MADE IN CANADA**

Advertising Flags



Traditional and Custom sizes available

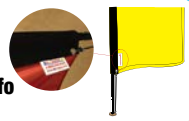
Complete Systems

**Starting @ \$102.35 /SET
MADE IN CANADA**

Complete Systems Include:

- Flag Pole
- Printed Flag
- Proprietary Ground Sleeve or Ground Stand System

All flags private labeled with your company name and info



Fast Turn Around - No Minimums - Volume Discounts

Portable Signs

7", 9", 10 1/2" & 21" Fluorescent & Non Fluorescent Letters

Vandal Guards Available



WWW.CANAMEXPROMOTIONS.COM

WEBSITE WHOLESALE
ACCESS CODE

cana

1-800-266-6674

robert.canamex@gmail.com

flags.canamex@gmail.com

graphics.canamex@gmail.com

CANAMEX
PROMOTIONS

Where Quality is Never Compromised



SAME DAY
PRODUCTION

International **Priority**TM
Overnight/Next Day Shipping To 80% Of Canada

SIGNS³⁶⁵