



## Can Vinyl Graphics Take the Heat?

**Product Spotlight:**

GERBER EDGE®

**Alternative Signs & Banners  
Tucson, AZ**

That's the burning question on the lips of customers with hand-painted vehicle graphics. And it's a question that Alternative Signs & Banners, Tucson, Ariz., is uniquely qualified to answer – courtesy of its GERBER EDGE® digital color printing system (complete with Gerber design and output software and an HS 15™ sprocket plotter, all from Gerber Scientific Products).

The shop, which acquired the EDGE® system in 1994, relies on it to design and generate high-performance vinyl graphics. In the last three years, Alternative Signs has had more than one opportunity to find out first-hand just how much abuse EDGE vinyl graphics can withstand.

Case in point is the six-color graphic produced on behalf of Tucson's Northwest Fire Department. Printed on blue reflective vinyl, the design features yellow and white letters, a saguaro cactus, a snake, and a sunrise over blue mountains. Three years later, the graphic still looks great, despite exposure to the punishing desert sun and the intense heat of raging flames.

"When we first tried to output the design in screen print, it didn't print very well on the blue reflective vinyl," recalled Lisa Garner, vice president and treasurer, Alternative Signs & Banners. "But when we tried it on the EDGE, the image came out crisp, clean, and bright."

While decision-makers at the fire department expressed initial misgivings about the longevity of EDGE-generated graphics (versus screen printed graphics), Garner reassured them; and, to prove her point, went so far as to apply an EDGE-printed graphic to the roof of a fire engine just to see how much direct sun it could handle. Today, 36 months after the fact, it remains crisp, clean, and bright.

"It was important that we expose at least one truck graphic to really hard use," Garner explained, "because these trucks are subjected to the stress of UV rays, heat from fires, and frequent washings. We felt that if the graphic didn't blister and peel under those conditions, then we'd never have to worry about other applications."

Alternative Signs & Banners also designed graphics for Tucson's new police fleet two years ago, using the EDGE and Gerber's design software to quickly and easily create several different layouts for client review and approval.

"Without Gerber, this process would have proven tedious and time-consuming," advised Garner. "The flexibility of Gerber design software allowed me to treat the entire drawing as an EDGE print. By replicating a fleet vehicle and dropping in each logo design, I was able to show the customer exactly what the finished car would look like."

The final design, that of a badge bearing the Tucson city seal, was EDGE printed onto white reflective vinyl. As a result of these and other vehicle design successes, Garner's shop is gaining quite a reputation in and around Tucson for its automotive graphics.

Why Gerber?

While Garner appreciates many of the EDGE system's features and benefits, she is a real fan of Gerber's design software.

"The software is very user friendly and versatile," she stated. It offers the best software icons, techniques, and capabilities – like the stroke command and fitting text to path.

"Gerber obviously put a great deal of thought into how sign makers use computer graphics and designed its software to meet their needs," she added. "No other desktop software works as well."

As for the EDGE output, Garner definitely enjoys the ease and efficiency of working with only one layer of vinyl when creating outlines, fades, and other special effects that previously required multiple layers.

"At one time, it took many hours to create these effects in layers of cut vinyls. Now we can make better use of our time."

In addition, the EDGE allows Alternative Signs & Banners to avoid the time-consuming, frustrating task of weeding tiny letters. It also enables shop designers to enlarge actual or photographed pen and ink drawings, color scans of watercolor illustrations, or color photographs. Adjusting the dot screen is another advantage.

"Sometimes, when working with larger size signs, the image develops a moiré pattern or simply is not as crisp as it should be. With the EDGE, we can adjust the type of dot and size of the dot screen to get a really perfect print."

However, Garner's favorite features are the tight color registration and contour decal cutting afforded by the EDGE system. The shop often produces contour cut decals, many of which, said Garner, "You wouldn't even dream of trying to create in cut vinyl."

But best of all, she acknowledged that the shop is busier than ever before.

"Our area of expertise is quickly becoming that we're a last resort," she laughed. "If no one else can do a job, people call us and we figure out a way to get it done. It's kind of crazy! And it wouldn't be possible without the EDGE."

"Not a day goes by when the EDGE doesn't come to the rescue!"

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