



## Auto Trim Design & Sign of Tucson Brings its Services Door-to-Door

**Product Spotlight:**  
GERBER EDGE®  
**Auto Trim Design & Sign  
Tucson, AZ**

Summer in Tucson, Ariz., tends to be an extremely quiet time – at least during the day when temperatures often soar above the 110-degree mark. To escape the intense desert heat, residents either leave town or hide indoors. All but one, that is ... a dedicated professional by the name of Charles Johnson who regularly braves the oven-like conditions outdoors to bring sign making services to his cool-minded and cloistered clients.

President of Auto Trim Design & Sign of Tucson, Inc., Johnson has always offered mobile service as part of his automotive accessories business. So, it seemed only logical to apply that mobility to the sign segment of his business, as well. Thus it was that in 1994, he outfitted his existing mobile van with a computer, scanner, and printer, as well as Gerber design software and a GSxplusT 15-inch sprocket-feed plotter from Gerber Scientific Products. And he has since captured a very unique market niche within Tucson and a 60-mile radius of the city.



In Johnson's estimation, his is the only sign shop in the greater Tucson area to provide mobile service.



"There's a sign shop every square mile, yet I'm not aware of anyone else who carries their equipment with them," he said. "Because I can take a job from concept to completion on-site, I have a competitive advantage.

"Most company executives are too busy to stop what they're doing, drive to a sign shop, explain everything, and go back two or three times to approve design concepts. I just drive up,

get out, and invite customers into the van – especially if I've cleaned it recently.

I then show the customer what's available, and he or she can select what they want right off of the computer screen.

If it's

a job that we can finish then and there, we make it on the spot and deliver it immediately."



Johnson can generate any basic lettering job in the van.

However, if a design is particularly elaborate or requires output on a more sophisticated printing device than the one he carries with him, i.e. the GERBER EDGE® digital color printer, he takes it to a Tucson sign shop by the name of Alternative Signs & Banners with whom he has

a working agreement. There, Johnson maintains his own personal inventory of Gerber vinyls and foils, and runs the EDGE™ himself. Sharing capabilities in this way allows Johnson the freedom to use the equipment on an as-needed basis. He simply predesigns each job and creates a spool file which he outputs to the EDGE at his convenience. After printing, he saves the job file with all of the cut information embedded, so that he can plot the design on his Gerber GSxplus plotter.

"I would love to have my own EDGE," confessed Johnson, "but at this point, the arrangement with Alternative Signs & Banners (see sidebar for more details) is working really well. I'm there pretty much every day or every other day to output my more intricate work."

Prior to acquiring his computerized sign making equipment, Johnson would go out to a customer's location, obtain the job specs, drive to a local sign shop, drop off the job, wait for the sign to be finished, return to pick it up, and then deliver it to the client for installation. At best, this method of conducting business proved time-consuming and inefficient. Now that he is mobile, however, it doesn't matter where a customer or prospective customer is situated; he will travel there.

Yet despite the miles he accumulates on his van week to week, Johnson manages to average five jobs a day- some small, some large. He attributes this volume to Gerber's design and output capabilities, and the reliability of the GSxplus plotter.

Reporting that he has encountered zero problems with his software and plotter in nearly four years – this despite the equipment being bolted into a van and exposed to bumpy roads and radical changes in temperature for most of that time – Johnson said, "If a plotter can get banged around all day for years without any problems, that's a pretty good testament to its ruggedness. You don't have to worry about something breaking down in the middle of a job when you've got quality equipment that you can rely on."

Gerber's software and plotter also save him from having to do everything by hand or subcontracting it to another shop.

#### **Designer and EDGE Owner Make a Great Team**

As soon as Charles Johnson heard that a sign shop in his area had acquired the GERBER EDGE, he called to see if the owner could run the decals he designed on Gerber design software. That was more than a year ago, and he has been paying regular visits ever since to Alternative Signs & Banners, also in Tucson, Ariz., whenever he needs to output his designs on the EDGE.

He is unique among the shop's other wholesale clients in that he keeps his own inventory of vinyls and foils there, and runs the EDGE himself. Having learned how to use it, he just pays for his time on the machine and for any of the shop's materials he may use.

Lisa Garner, vice president and treasurer of Alternative Signs & Banners explained, "We borrow each other's foils if we run out, which is nice. We work out a schedule to make sure that he can run his jobs to meet his deadlines. Running the jobs has started to take a lot of time because his art has become so intricate. He does incredible auto graphics."

In addition to his own work, Johnson performs color scans for Garner's shop, and because he's proficient at altering images on the computer, he often makes adjustments such as pulling out an unwanted background. Consequently, the two have exchanged a lot of information about shortcuts, tricks, and how to get better results from the EDGE or from plotting.

Garner declared, "It's a perfect arrangement. He has the color scanner. We can just give him an image, he'll fix it up for us to be ready for the EDGE, and we'll run it. In turn, he comes in and uses our EDGE machine for his projects."

She attributed Johnson's elaborate designs to the fact that he specializes in automotive graphics. He has been known to take video photos of the sides of a vehicle and create a whole file for a scene across the side of a van; whereas Garner's group is more likely to do jobs with company logos or graphics for application on the sides of vans or trucks. "We get along so well, and I really like his quality of work," she said. "The craftsmanship is excellent. He's a really great person to work with."

"The turnaround time is good, especially since I can carry the equipment with me," he stated. "Our productivity has increased tremendously since we computerized with Gerber; jobs go much more smoothly."

In addition to increased productivity, Gerber's advanced software has made it easier and more cost-effective for him to create high quality work. Especially in the realm of custom 3D-look logos.

#### Designs with Impact

"Gerber design software affords unlimited capability as far as custom fonts and images go," Johnson remarked. "The software is so versatile as a design station, you can create just about anything."

Johnson is especially proud of a vehicle graphic he recently completed on behalf of The Adobe Doctor, a company that repairs the adobe walls so popular in Arizona. The truck logo, designed to emulate an adobe brick wall with the company name built into the blocks, transforms into a desert scene of Monument Valley—a scene that stretches across most of the vehicle's side.

"The wall features three-dimensional shading of each brick; it looks as though you could reach out and touch the bricks," he said.

In explaining how he developed the logo, Johnson noted that the original outline of the company name and the brick pattern were created in Composer, the Windows®-based design environment of GRAPHIX ADVANTAGE. That shape was exported into another program for 3D-extrusion wireframing and texture mapping, and then imported back into Composer for final output to the EDGE for printing and to the GSxplus for plotting.

"With GRAPHIX ADVANTAGE, I can create a picture with a cutline so tight, it looks like I've actually painted it on the vehicle with an airbrush," he observed. "The finished artwork does not look like a decal."

The Adobe Doctor truck made such an impression on the client and his customers, the company subsequently approached Auto Trim Design & Sign to request banners and business cards showcasing the new logo. According to Johnson, such requests are not unusual.



"We usually start out with a vehicle, but once the design and layout is complete, a lot of customers ask us to transfer the design to exterior signage, banners, and business cards – especially if we've created something new and unique that the average sign shop wouldn't be able to do. In such cases, we've pretty much got them locked in as a future customer."

"Gerber makes it easy to win the confidence of a hesitant customer," he continued. "Some of the newer companies in Tucson have small fleets, and will start out by requesting graphics for only one vehicle. But by the time that one is finished, they're impressed enough with the quality of the output to suddenly produce two or three more for us to work on."

Johnson also places great faith in the dependability of Gerber vinyls.

"I've never been satisfied with the way other brands of material handle, and their adhesion is just not as good as Gerber's," he commented. "We've had customers who actually request hand painting, despite the extra expense, because they've seen vinyl graphics that don't hold up.

"Not every sign shop uses Gerber's quality 3M™ products. Many substitute inferior brands that don't last. That's why I use the good stuff."

But it's the GERBER EDGE that makes the picture complete in Johnson's mind.

"The EDGE, and its ability to produce full-color images, plays an important role in making my designs come alive. Especially custom designs, because we're not limited to solid vinyl colors." It's these types of capabilities, discovered through his Gerber software and sign making equipment, that have kept Johnson's job exciting – and his customers happy.

"We've always accepted various kinds of little bread-and-butter jobs, but Gerber gives us the versatility to create elaborate, detailed graphics and that's what keeps me going mentally," he said. "You can get tired of just cutting out letters; but when you can create something really impressive, it ensures that a customer's company is remembered. And that's why our clients come back."

Contact Charles Johnson at:

Auto Trim Design & Sign of Tucson, Inc.

5602 South Mission Rd.

Tucson, AZ 85746

Phone: (520) 578-1790

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