



Peabody Museum's Graphics Evolve with New Sign Making Method

Product Spotlight:
GERBER EDGE®

Peabody Museum
New Haven, CT

If you visit the Great Hall of Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History, in New Haven, Conn., you'll see wall-to-wall dinosaurs. If you were to stop by the Exhibits and Graphics Department, you wouldn't see any. The department's old method of silk-screening signs has gone the way of the dinosaurs, and their sign making capabilities have evolved to a new level.



The technology that brought them to this new level is the GERBER EDGE® Digital Color Imaging System from Gerber Scientific Products. The EDGE prints spot color or four-color process images on durable, weatherproof vinyl that's ready to apply.

An Age of Change

Graphic Designer Sally Pallatto has a lot to say about the changes that have taken place. "When I first came here in 1990, they were silk-screening, which was such a long and involved process. Our work level was much lower, and we weren't able to process jobs as quickly. They were doing roughly 70 signs a year. We do about 150 vinyl jobs a year now. That ranges anywhere from a little 3" x 5" placard for our Discovery Room to a 4' x 5' full-color graphic EDGE picture." The Discovery Room is a hands-on room for kids to touch items related to the museum's displays like shells, snakeskins, fur, and a replica of the historic Rosetta stone.

Not only did the volume of work increase, but it's now performed by a staff of only two full-time people instead of the original four. "We've really grown, but with fewer people. So it's less people doing more work, but the technology has made it possible for us to do that. That goes back to why we got the vinyl in the first place. We wanted to increase our productivity and make it easier to get things done on a timely basis," says Pallatto.



"It was more difficult and time-consuming to do work before. Before we got the EDGE, a two- or three-color outside sign would have taken two to three days. It involved getting all the silk-screens made, shooting all the negatives; and you'd have to get everything right the first time because if you didn't, you'd have to repaint your surface and start over again. Now, you just put it on the screen, design it, print it out, and put it down. It's so much easier to accomplish a project," she says. "That's not even mentioning the chemicals we had to use before. That whole cleaning process was more involved. We don't need the reducers and cleaners that we had to

have for silk-screening. We've been able to do a lot more because it's so much quicker to do a Gerber sign."

Of course, speed isn't everything, as Pallatto can attest. "My favorite thing about the EDGE is the ability to customize graphics. You can scan something in and colorize it. I also like to be able to put the graphics outdoors and not have to worry about if it's going to rain or not. We're able to do more colorful things now. If we wanted a four-color job, we used to have to send it out and pay a few hundred dollars for it. Now, we can do that within a day right here at the museum and not have to wait for it. We've been able to update and spruce up the Discovery Room for a lot less than it would cost to send the work out. Plus doing the work ourselves gives us control over what's being done."

The EDGE Makes Its Mark on the Peabody



The EDGE is used extensively in the Discovery Room to reproduce photographs of animals whose skeletons may be on display, to show what the animal would actually look like. For example, two 45" x 47" background scenes were created to go behind two bird cases in the Discovery Room to show what birds can be found during different seasons. The mounted stuffed birds in the foreground give children a close look at the real plumage. Each background panel slides in the case, so they can be changed throughout the year. Two more panels are planned. Says Pallatto, "It just adds a level of understanding. Instead of a metal and glass shelf, the background really helps bring the kids closer to nature."

The EDGE is also used for text panels in the exhibits themselves to show captions and graphics like maps or color photographs. The designers at the Peabody are particularly grateful for the ease with which the EDGE produces small type. Pallatto says, "It has been a lifesaver! Before that, we just had the cut vinyl. Doing text panels was tedious when we knew we couldn't get the letters any smaller than 3/8". When you have multiple panels, like a dozen or more, it gets really old, really fast. But now, being able to use the EDGE on the clear enamel-receptive material is much better."

A four-sided, paneled information kiosk was created to help revamp the museum's lobby. The kiosk's full-bleed graphics inform the public of upcoming exhibits, special events, and membership information. Outdoor, roadside signage also promotes upcoming exhibits and programs.



One such Peabody exhibit is "Fragments of the Sky - The Art of Amazonian Rites of Passage." It showcases a collection of headdresses and ceremonial jewelry and costumes, many of which are made with bright feathers from the birds of the Amazon. These artifacts help tell the story of tribal rites of passage into adulthood. Pallatto's group will be doing text and inset photos on fifteen 2' x 3' panels. The headline title will be six-inch vinyl cut letters.

Enthusiasm for the EDGE is Widespread, and it Pays

According to Pallatto, many people outside of her department appreciate the new sign making equipment, too. "Most people have been really receptive and positive about what we're doing here. They can get the type of things they want. It's easy to change things. It's not a big deal to

change graphics or typefaces. We appreciate the ability to print onto paper to show them, 'This is what it's going to look like.' We tell them it's their time to make changes before we produce it," she says.



"If someone says they have to have a sign today, I can do a sign today. I could never be sure with the silk-screening because of all the camerawork and making up the screen. I can have a sign done in an hour, if need be. The clients have been satisfied because they don't have to wait as long, and they can have the graphic that they want."

Offering sign making services to the university community and beyond has helped them to recoup the cost of the equipment and supplies. They also use a GS15plus' sprocket-fed plotter, Gerber design and output software, 3M™ Scotchcal™ Series 220 vinyl, foils, and reflectives - all from Gerber.

Pallatto is eager to share the wealth, so to speak, of what her department can do. She says, "We've had students and other departments around the university use our services, and it's been kind of neat to be a part of that. They've done parking signs, library signs, health plan banners, signs for seminars or speakers."

The variety of work serves to keep things interesting. Pallatto's group has done exhibit titles for shows at The Yale Center for British Art and the Yale Art Gallery. They've also made signage for non-profit institutions outside of Yale, like The Fairfield Historical Society. Pallatto says, "There have been so many different things, it's hard to list them all. It helps everybody involved. We charge a lot less than other sign making people around, but the money helps pay for our supplies; and it furthers our ability to do more programming or more signage at our end, too. Not that we're not busy enough already!"

Busy or not, she always enjoys passing on knowledge to Yale students and to her two interns from Southern Connecticut State University. "I make some graphic design interns go through the EDGE and vinyl cutting process as one of their projects. We may give them a sign to do. Everyone's always been real excited about having the opportunity to work on it. A couple of the Yale students have picked it up so quickly and are throwing themselves into it, vectoring and colorizing graphics. They're really having a good time. It's fun to watch because they get so excited and are so creative."

The graphic design students at Yale do thesis projects which are displayed together in one big show. Some of the students have done their projects on the EDGE. One example appeared on an entry panel to the show to invite people in. The 12-foot long sign featured an 8-foot car. The car image was made up of many black dots of different sizes. Pallatto says, "I had two or three people tell me that they saw it, and it was just awesome. It added a dimension to their show."

In the Beginning

To find a more productive alternative to silk-screening, Pallatto began to look into different ways of producing signage about five years ago. She says, "There were three or four companies whose information I read through. I actually went through the whole proposal process, outlining all the different companies and really looking closely at what would help us most

with the least amount of frustration as far as the support.

"The reason I chose Gerber is because they're the only one that's all-inclusive. Like, you don't have to buy a plotter here, and software there, and a computer there. You know, it's all available in one place. I didn't want to have to worry about if something went wrong, how I would find out which part wasn't working. Gerber was the one system where there was one 800-number that I could call and say, 'This is happening. What do I do?'"

When Pallatto first began using the EDGE, she felt overwhelmed by the possibilities of what it could do, but she adjusted quickly. "I think the distributor trained us for about four hours when we first got the software. Once you get on there for a while, it's pretty self-explanatory. We've only needed tech support a few times, and they've always been really helpful. It's never been a problem - they always call back within the same day," she says. "We took training for Gerber design software and EDGE six months later, and we actually learned a lot that we didn't know. We had thought we were pretty good at it!"

According to Pallatto, the Gerber equipment has held up its end of the bargain, too. "The equipment has been very reliable. We've only ever needed service for really minor stuff which I can't even recall; it's pretty much been running as well as when we got it. The initial setup was easy, too. You kind of plug it in and let it go."

This is how the Peabody Museum's evolution in sign making began.

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