



For the Love of Sign Making - An Artist with Heart ... and EDGE

Product Spotlight:

GERBER EDGE®

**Ronnie Dion Signs
South Hadley, MA**

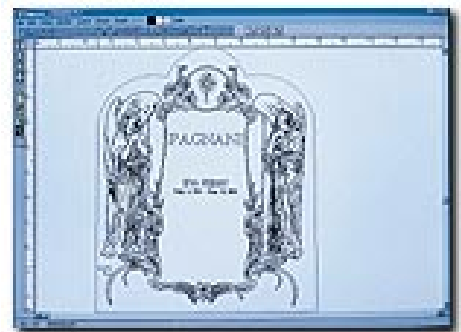
For Ronnie Dion, owner of Ronnie Dion Signs in South Hadley, Mass., sign making is truly a labor of love. He has practiced his craft for thirty-five years. It has taken him all over the country, to Mexico and back. Even with decades of experience behind him, Dion says he is constantly learning how to do his craft. His latest accomplishment is mastering the GERBER EDGE® Digital Color Imaging System from Gerber Scientific Products. This system is completely computerized, and Dion admits he was completely computer illiterate.



Dion stays informed of all the latest techniques and tricks of the trade by attending regular meetings of other sign makers. His first big step toward computerization was making the decision to purchase Gerber's graphic design and output software and a GS15plusT sprocket-fed plotter from Gerber. It was at one of these meetings where he and his esteemed business partner first saw the EDGE.

He says, "My wife saw the EDGE, and she said I really needed to get it. I trust her. She's my friend and my business partner. For two days, my wife made me crazy wanting me to get this thing. My wife has a good sense about her. She's a very smart person, so I decided to invest in one. I'm very pleased that I have an EDGE."

Making his transition to computers, Dion was driven by determination and a healthy dose of natural curiosity. "I've painted pictures my whole life a certain way, and with the EDGE I had to learn how to do what I've done all my life through the computer. When I first sat down at the computer, I was completely intimidated. When I purchased all this equipment, I told my wife right from the get-go that all I was interested in was learning how to function with the Gerber design software. I really wasn't interested in the EDGE machine until later. Obviously, I kind of wanted to find out what it would do if I pushed its buttons." Now Dion even does work at home, experimenting with increasingly sophisticated layouts.



He has a good analogy that helps him maintain his patience with himself as he masters the new equipment. "It's a lot to learn at once. I think anybody could learn to fly a plane, but you

couldn't do it the first time you sat in the cockpit." According to Dion, his 28 year-old son has more experience with computers and loves the new system. For him, flying this "plane" has been easy.

Customer Satisfaction

Dion maintains a close relationship with his customers and wanted to break them in to this new way of doing things, too. He says, "When I first introduced it to my client base, I tried very hard to educate them as to what this was and what it would look like. At first, they were concerned about the longevity, and I explained to them the things that had been told to me. Sometimes, I went out and showed them the graphics on my truck because they've been there a long time. Of course, 'new' made them skeptical, but my clients love it. They think it's great! Everybody has embraced it because it really is a wonderful thing. I just do the work on the EDGE, my customers like it, they pay me, and I go about my business."



For Dion, his own satisfaction with his work and that of his customers are closely linked and all-important to him. "I need to be happy and pleased with what I'm putting out for my customers," he says. "That's how I feel once I've said to myself, 'Gee, this is a nice one. I like this.' Overall, when I can look at it and be proud of what I did, my customers are usually happy with that.

"My focus has always been on the customer. I tell them that my job is to produce a sign that they would paint if they knew how to do what I do. So I spend a lot of time with a customer on a personal basis, trying to pick their brain to find out what it is that they would paint if they could, and then I try and produce that. The EDGE gives me a different way to produce that image. I've been able to do printouts of completed signs so that customers can get a real visual of what it's going to look like and critique it or change it until we get it down to what will represent them best. My whole focus here is not so much money as it is the feeling of satisfaction that I get when my customer goes, 'Yes! That's exactly what I wanted.'"

What the EDGE Can Do

Dion has had to get used to a new way of scheduling work since he got the EDGE. He says that he can complete a job that would normally take two hours to paint in only 15 minutes. He adds, "Once the design is done, I can get a truck in here and get it out of here quickly. I'm almost embarrassed sometimes to know that I'm getting X amount of dollars to do something that only takes three or four minutes to apply. Before, that same job would take me two or three hours!"

He especially appreciates being able to easily alter the size of artwork when it's finished. Citing a few examples, Dion says, "With Gerber design software, I can just take a layout that's, say, 12 inches tall and 24 inches long on the side of a truck, have the guy bring in a different truck two weeks later that has a door that's twice as big, and I don't have to redraw it. I just enter the new dimensions, and the software automatically resizes it.

"I'm also finding that once I make a layout for a particular company, a new logo or something, I tell them that I can make stickers for their tools. I couldn't do that before, but I do a lot of that stuff now, the same logo reduced down to an inch or two by an inch or two. I make bumper

stickers, too. I can take a logo and reproduce it in mass quantity, in different sizes, for different purposes. Before, every logo you painted had to be done individually. Now I can quickly reduce or enlarge a layout to fit nearly any situation. It's worked out to be a really great thing for my customers. Obviously, it doesn't hurt my bottom line any, either."

Every year, Dion handles a large volume of business from a regional fair called the Eastern States Exhibition, or "the Big E". For him, those quantities are no problem. "I can print them out a hundred stickers real easily. They want to be able to stick their logo on anything that moves. Then there's the fact that I can print out signs one right after another, boom, boom, boom," he says. The EDGE is not only a tool for quantity, but for creativity. Dion became acquainted with some entrepreneurs who formulated their own sauces. He designed 18 different layouts for barbecue sauce labels for one gentleman. This man showed them to the other sauce-maker. Dion says, "This fellow spent thousands on layouts elsewhere and wasn't happy. He came right down to me and asked me to do his label design, too. That would have never happened had it not been for the EDGE."



Owner Satisfaction

Dion makes it clear that he is an artist first, and a businessman second. "I've been asked before how long a job took and how much I was paid for it so the person could try to calculate how much I made per hour. My attitude is not like that at all. I decide what I'm going to charge, and I'm not done until I consider myself finished with the job artistically. If I can do it in an hour and make a hundred dollars, fine. If it takes me five hours to make that hundred dollars, I really don't care.

"To me, the EDGE is just another way to produce my artwork. I'm not really concerned about time with respect to money. It might not be good business sense, but, on a personal note, I wouldn't want to be doing what I'm doing for money. I didn't buy the EDGE for the purpose of making my bankroll fatter. I bought it because my wife convinced me that it would be helpful to my customers and useful in my art career. Both have come to be true."

Although he was reluctant to automate at first, Dion is glad he went with Gerber. He says, "I'm an artist. To me, stirring a cup of coffee is a major mechanical task. I'm frightened of machinery. If it doesn't work, I don't want it. I want a new one. Before, all I had to do was make sure I had cans of paint and brushes. If I broke a brush, I picked up a new one and went right back to work. My favorite feature of the EDGE is that it hasn't broken down! Any jitters I get would be from turning that baby on and not having it work. So far, the equipment has been just wonderful. I've not had a single problem.

"I wouldn't buy anything but Gerber materials, either. I know good vinyl from bad vinyl by what I feel when I touch it. I like Gerber's consistent quality. I want very much to be able to reach out and touch Tomato Red and see the same Tomato Red each time. I house a lot of vinyl because I don't like to run out in the middle of a job. I've been working with Gerber materials for so long, and my attitude is that if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Work has never been a daily grind or a rat race for Dion. "I've got a bunch of brothers and

sisters, and they all go to work every day. I go to play every day. Everybody says, 'Look at all this wonderful computer stuff you have,' and to me, it's all toys. A paintbrush to me is a toy. The EDGE machine has just brought me into the future.

"I've said for thirty years that I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I have a great time doing the work, and people pay me. I want that to sound romantic because that's how I feel about it. I'm truly in love with my work."

Note: Ronnie Dion invites other EDGE users, or potential EDGE users, to call him to discuss their equipment. He is always anxious to exchange helpful information with other sign makers.

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