



How They Put the Magic in the Magic School Bus

Children's Public Television Show Makes Science Fun

Product Spotlight:

GERBER EDGE®

**Vernon & Son
Monee, IL**



The namesake of the popular and acclaimed animated TV series "Scholastic's the Magic School Bus™" has been brought to life with the help of Vernon & Son, Inc. in Monee, Ill., 35 miles south of Chicago. Since 1934, Vernon & Son has specialized in fleet graphics, working on fleets of as many as 800 vehicles. In this case, they worked on one very special vehicle.

Bob Vernon, president of Vernon & Son, is familiar with the Magic School Bus because his grandchildren watch it on public television. He's familiar with the bus itself for a different reason.

"We did a bus for Scholastic which is used for promotional purposes. It's a full size 45-foot school bus. They take it to kindergarten classes for the kids to see. We did all the outdoor full color process work with the GERBER EDGE®. We design in CorelDRAW®, transfer it into the EDGE computer, and print and cut. This job included 350 process color decals ranging in size from 1" x 1" to 22" x 180". About 200 of them were inside the bus. It was a project and a half!" said Vernon.

The GERBER EDGE was their secret weapon for this challenging job. With this digital color printing system, all they have to do is design, size up or down, output, and contour cut. The final output is outdoor durable and ready to apply.

Get On the Bus!

Any appearance of the Magic School Bus on its nationwide tour is an eagerly anticipated event. Thousands of fans are expected to visit on this, its second tour, as the bus goes to schools, libraries, museums, PBS stations, malls, and retailers. Both the bus and the show have plenty to offer growing young minds.

The customized bus, with the EDGE-created images of the show's characters on its windows, is designed to be completely interactive. It features demonstrations, books, CD-ROMs, computer games, software, home videos, toys, and more - all for the purpose of fun, adventure, and science.

In the television show, which is based on a series of children's books, a teacher named Ms. Frizzle and her lizard companion Liz take a multicultural group of students on science-related

adventures in a school bus which can transform into almost anything. For example, a field trip to a weather station leads to a ride into the middle of a hurricane when the bus becomes a hot air balloon; and when it changes into a weather plane, they get a close look at a tornado, too. By the time the class reaches the weather station, they're already weather "experts."

In its first season, this weekly half-hour show for six-to-nine year-olds received an Emmy Award for its star Lily Tomlin (Ms. Frizzle), an Emmy nomination, and eight other awards. It was also named one of the top ten kids' shows by TV Guide, Parenting, and Entertainment Weekly.

The show is packed with celebrities. Little Richard sings the theme song. Malcolm-Jamal Warner appears regularly as the voice of The Producer, answering kids' questions at the end of the show. Cameos have been performed by Edward James Olmos, Elliot Gould, and Rita Moreno, to name a few.

Why Gerber?

Gerber provided the first and only computerized system that Vernon & Son ever used. Prior to computerization, the shop did all silk screen printing; but now they reserve that process mostly for large runs. Bob Vernon recalls, "Before, you had to move through the expensive color separations and making screens. Now it's all electronic. It's far more efficient, especially on the short runs. For short runs, you can't beat the EDGE, especially in multicolor work."

He has realized a cost savings in labor because the EDGE requires only one operator. There has also been less use of materials. "Use of materials is much more efficient now. If you want to make one decal, you make one decal. You don't make forty. You get one good one," he says. "Being able to save money and make money at the same time with the EDGE has added up to a very good return on investment."

The EDGE has allowed Vernon to get more creative with design. He says, "We have more freedom of color. We were married to spot color, and now we have the process colors and the blends and fades that we can use. Fortunately, learning these new capabilities was not difficult. We haven't had any trouble at all learning how to work with the EDGE. It's user friendly. We had about two days of training that went with it. After that, we were on our own. We didn't have to call for help. I think there were one or two questions that came up within the first two or three months, but they were easily resolved."

Having used the EDGE for about a year, Vernon says that it has proved quite reliable without a single failure. This dependability and ease of use has been evident from the moment the equipment was delivered. "We haven't needed any service or tech support except in the beginning to get it running, and setup wasn't difficult at all", he says. "It came out of the box and plugged into the wall."

All of this comes as no surprise to Vernon. He has been using Gerber equipment since the company started making plotters. "We only use Gerber plotters. We also use Gerber foils and cutting blades for the EDGE. At the time the EDGE was shown to us, it was the only thing on the market of its capability. We've been using Gerber's stuff for eons."

When the work is good, a customer may be so happy with the result that they don't care about how it was created. Scholastic liked the bus enough to request a second one almost exactly like the first.

Most important of all, kids love the Magic School Bus. With a combination of humor and fast-paced action, the series shows all children, especially girls and minorities, that science is for everyone. With a little help from Vernon & Son and the GERBER EDGE, children can get on board the Magic School Bus and see for themselves.

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