



Welcome to the Computer Age

Product Spotlight:
GRAPHIX ADVANTAGE® ELITE™
Monument Edition
GS750™ Plotter

Hudson Monuments
Hudson, NH

David Cote, principal, Hudson Monuments, Hudson, N.H., operates a complete Gerber monument production system -- which consists of the GRAPHIX ADVANTAGE® ELITE™ Monument Edition software, a Gerber GS750plus™ plotter, a Hewlett Packard ScanJet® and a Gerber digitizer.



"We investigated a number of CAD systems prior to selecting Gerber, and our decision was based primarily on ease of use and superior technology," he reported, indicating that he and his parents, Jean and Mariette, considered the idea of computerization for two years before settling on Gerber. "Gerber's software is really practical; there aren't a lot of key commands to learn. Basically, you just point the mouse and make your selection. It only took three days for me to become reasonably proficient with ELITE Monument Edition;

and by the end of the first week, I was off and running!

"Also, it's very quick. Once I digitize an image, which generally takes an hour or two, I can physically produce a stencil in as little as 10 minutes -- and that includes cutting. Before we computerized, the same process would have taken at least four hours. The bottom line is that we've cut our manufacturing time in half since going on-line.

"Of course, the speed would be meaningless if the technology didn't support it," Cote observed. "The precision of the software and plotter is what makes Gerber's system so superior. Centering and justification of designs ... the hairline accuracy of the finished stencil ... everything is pen-plotted and cut to the exact specifications of the original design -- automatically and consistently. The difference between Gerber-cut stencils and hand-cut stencils or stamped letters is the difference between night and day. Even my father, who initially balked at spending the money on a computerized monument production system, admits that our Gerber system has made his job a whole lot easier. Today, he raves about the accuracy and speed of Gerber and says, 'It's the best investment we ever made!'"

The senior Cote, who does most of the engraving at Hudson Monuments, is particularly enamored with the precision of Gerber-cut stencils, said his son.

"He refuses to sandblast anything that has not been cut on the GS750plus plotter," Cote chuckled.

The way of the future

As with most East Coast monument shops, shape carving constitutes the bulk of Hudson Monuments' work. While Cote acknowledges that some jobs still require hand cutting, particularly veins in flowers, a full 85 percent of the flat- and shape-carved jobs he and his parents have completed since taking delivery of their Gerber system in September 1995, have been designed, plotted and cut by the computer. This leap into the realm of electronic media has dramatically altered the complexion of the business, he said, by allowing him to take a more active role in monument design and sales.

"Prior to September, my mother, who is a professional draftsman, did every drawing by hand. I worked in the shop with my father. And we all were involved in the sales process -- whoever happened to be available when a customer called or stopped by handled the order.



"At one point, we were so busy, we were ready to hire another engraver. Then along came Gerber. Now, I do all of the design work and most of the sales, as well. So my parents are under less stress, and I'm building a business based on technology that will carry us into the future."

"Computers are the way of the future in this industry," he stated. "Younger generations are continuing the tradition of the family business ... preserving the craftsmanship, but augmenting it with automation technologies. Although we're one of the first shops in the area to embrace computerization, we anticipate that everyone will jump on the bandwagon sooner or later -- if they want to survive. In our business, time is money. It stands to reason that if you have more time to sell and produce, you can make more money."

That's a key benefit of Gerber cited by Cote.

"I've noticed a definite change in the amount of time I spend in the office responding to customers. Whereas before I spent 70 percent of my day in the shop engraving and 30 percent up front selling and designing, I now spend 70 percent in the office and 30 percent in the shop. Consequently, I'm providing a better level of service to customers. I can listen to their requests and concerns, and respond almost immediately. Especially during the design phase.

"With Gerber's ELITE Monument Edition software, I can do virtually anything -- edit designs, manipulate images, combine fonts and shapes -- to create whatever look a customer is seeking. And once I've finalized a specific composition, I can save it in my custom library for later use -- which means I never have to create it again.

"The best part is, I can show clients a variety of choices, each customized to their specifications, either on-screen or via a pen plotted full-size proof. Then, I make whatever changes are necessary, as many times as necessary, and cut the stencil -- all at the touch of a button. Compare that to the approval cycle of old that required repeated and time-consuming hand-drawn revisions, and it's like we've come out of the dark ages. It's great!"

A quiet revolution

Cote's enthusiasm for Gerber's GRAPHIX ADVANTAGE ELITE Monument Edition production system extends beyond time-savings, precision, and speed to embrace what he described as an "on-going commitment to product development and technical support".

"These people know the ins and outs of automated graphics and lettering systems, and they're applying that expertise to the monument industry with amazing results," he said. "Gerber is continually updating its software to meet the special demands of our industry. I love feeling like I'm on the leading edge of technology with Gerber."

He also likes the company's technical support.

"Gerber's engineering and technical support is fantastic," he declared. "A few months ago, I thought I had a plotter problem and called for help. Someone returned my call within two hours and sent out a new plotter almost immediately. By the time it arrived, I'd figured out, with Gerber's help, that the problem was me -- not the equipment -- so I just shipped the replacement unit back."

Cote, who selected the Gerber GS750plus 30-inch plotter from a field of four high-performance, high-precision Gerber models, is very complimentary of the equipment's versatility. "Whether you're looking for a 15-inch or 30-inch unit, you can cut and plot with the same machine. When you want to produce a drawing or proof for client approval, you place a pen in the control tool head; when you want to cut a stencil you simply pop out the pen and insert the knife. It couldn't be easier."

So what words of wisdom does Cote offer to those contemplating computerization of their family monument operations? "Anyone interested in growing a monument business should invest in Gerber Scientific Products," he said. "The company has served as a technological innovator in automated graphics and lettering systems and precision plotting/cutting equipment for well over a decade. With 14 years of trend-setting plotting and material technology behind it, Gerber's Monument Products have taken an industry marked by master craftsmen and labor intensive hand work, and introduced it to the computer age."

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