



At Teknigrafix, Turnaround Isn't the Only Thing That's Fast

Product Spotlight:

GERBER EDGE
Gerber Design Software
GSx^{plus} Plotter
HS15 Plotter

Teknigrafix
Auburn, CA

When customers of Teknigrafix say they want it fast, they often mean it in more ways than one. Teknigrafix is located in a mecca for enthusiasts of high-speed sports, Auburn, Calif. So when these customers need speed, they want their work to leave the shop fast and the starting line even faster. It's a good thing that Teknigrafix has the tools necessary to keep up the pace.

The 2200-square foot shop, established in 1994, is home to Gerber design and output software, GSxTM and HS15TM plotters, and a GERBER EDGE® digital color printing system - all from Gerber Scientific Products.



The graphics on this 40-ft offshore race boat are a combination of EDGE and straight cut vinyl work. The Eagle is 12 feet long, and its head is about 4 1/2 feet high. A checkered flag design that fades in and out from black to white covers most of the boat's side.

At the Starting Gate

In the midst of all of the boating, skiing, bicycling, auto racing, and snowmobiling, owner Kurt Wilson says, "We're fortunate that these activities all have graphics involved in them. This works to our advantage. We'll do a graphic for a customer. He'll see how neat it looks and tell someone else where he got it done. It sort of snowballs from there."

Annual sales are about a half million dollars, and sales are increasing all the time, according to Kurt. The workload has gone from an average of five jobs a week to 25, especially since Teknigrafix started using Gerber equipment.

When Teknigrafix bought their business, it was an existing sign company. The first thing Kurt and his wife, designer and co-owner Victoria Krug-Wilson, did was buy Gerber equipment.

Victoria had used Gerber software and hardware at the graphics company where she previously worked. The couple went to various seminars put on by other companies before choosing Gerber.

Says Kurt, "The reproduction and ease of Gerber's software far exceeded anybody else's. The definition that can be achieved with Gerber software is a lot better than everything else on the market. When it comes to something like cleaning up a scanned logo, it does a much nicer job. The finished result looks a lot better, with straighter lines and no rough edges. Gerber is

definitely the leader in this technology. The equipment and software are great, but so is the support from Gerber and its distributors.”

Now Teknigrafix is adding another new computer and additional software from Gerber. So the company will have two separate complete workstations; the new one will be used to run EDGE™ and full color jobs, and the existing computer will be for basic vinyl cutting work.

The shop also relies on Gerber supplies like foil cartridges, vinyls, and replacement blades. Since most of their jobs require custom work, they have to use a high performance vinyl, and they’ve discovered that other companies don’t make vinyl of the same quality as the 3M vinyl for Gerber.

Off and Running

Kurt says that his favorite thing about the software is the color reproduction. “The images on the screen are reproduced incredibly on the vinyl. You don’t see one thing on the computer and then run the job and come up with something different. The color match is good; the art matches exactly. And then there’s the speed at which it works.”

Regarding plotters, he says, “I can tell you for a fact that there is no comparison between our other plotter and the Gerber plotters. The other plotter is a friction-feed plotter, and it’s kind of high-maintenance. You have to keep an eye on it and make sure there’s a fresh blade in there. It doesn’t always perform the way we want it to. Basically, we use that plotter for doing big straight cut vinyl letters.

“Any kind of precision cutting or stickers are done on the Gerber plotters. The GSx^{plus} plotter is a lot easier to get lined up. With the friction-feed plotter, you have to feed the vinyl in there and make sure it’s straight. As far as speed and efficiency, the GSx^{plus} plotter is awesome.”

When working with the EDGE, the plotter has to be very precise because it must cut through tricky areas where shaded colors are used. “It’s really phenomenal how this thing actually follows the pattern. A lot of it has to do with when you align the plotter. The little scope that you look through helps you see better,” Kurt says.

Of course, whenever efficiency improves, money is saved. “If it’s easier and quicker to load the material and switch material around, it’s a time savings, and basically, time is money,” he says. “The software and the hardware run very efficiently. We have no problem transferring a job from the EDGE to the plotter and getting everything to work in harmony.”

The speed of the equipment allows Teknigrafix to respond to the quicker orders, many of which require a one- or two-day turnaround - while its cutting precision is especially important for customers who need custom work, and for whom speed is not necessarily an issue.

However, there’s also a noticeable difference in the quality of Gerber hardware as compared to that of other manufacturers. “Gerber equipment is built with sturdy materials, and everything is mounted solidly. It’s just real top quality equipment,” says Kurt. “When you spend money on this equipment, you want it to work! The only way to recoup any money that you spent is to have it up and running. The GSxplus is a wonderful, smooth-running unit. I’ve probably run 300 or 400 jobs on one blade and have never had to swap it out.”

Kurt says that the equipment has definitely brought a lot more customers into the shop in search of eye-catching graphics.

Some Speedy Customers

It's not unusual for a Teknigrafix customer to bring in a design that they've done on a disk. Then Victoria can put it in the computer and work off of their original artwork. She uses a wide variety of design parameters available in Gerber design software, from a basic banner layout to intricate stickers.

When a customer is involved in a high-speed endeavor, it often turns into a high-speed endeavor for Teknigrafix, as well. Kurt remembers cutting decals for 40 hours straight for a land speed car, which would attempt to break the sound barrier. Kurt's equipment was up and running the whole time without stopping. As soon as it finished cutting one series of stickers, more vinyl was fed in.

He says, "It was a huge job with extreme pressure and time constraints. We ran the equipment hard and at maximum speed. It worked real well. If there had been any glitches in that job at all, we would have been in trouble."

Moving right along, the shop just finished a 40-ft. offshore race boat. This project was a combination EDGE and straight cut vinyl job. They applied a 12-foot long eagle on the front of the boat; the eagle's head is about 4 ½ feet high. A 20-foot long checkered flag design that fades in and out from black to white covers the side of the boat.

This boat is used in organized offshore powerboat racing, which is quite popular in the area. The boats can be seen racing in the delta which leads into San Francisco Bay. "We'll see how the vinyl holds up on a boat that's going 110 to 115 miles an hour," says Kurt. "I'm very confident that the product and the installation that we did will perform well."

Prior to installation, the people at Teknigrafix always use isopropyl alcohol or acetone to thoroughly clean the surface. The area that will be covered by vinyl must be free of contaminants such as oils or waxes.

Another customer, an airbrush artist and custom painter of Harley-Davidson® motorcycles comes to Victoria for a lot of his graphics needs. He does motorcycles for the elite of the elite, such as movie stars and athletes. Teknigrafix supplies him with things like stickers with his own logo on them to promote his business, and special stencils which make his work easier.

Help from the Gerber Team

Victoria has worked with Gerber equipment for about nine years, but she still benefited from an advanced EDGE seminar offered by Gerber which she attended in San Francisco.

Kurt says, "The Gerber manuals are very well done. They have step-by-step procedures on how to use the hardware and software. We go out and try to educate ourselves, and we get the latest equipment updates and revisions to stay on the leading edge of technology. We learn new things every day."

He explains that with Gerber, they feel like they have some team support. "You haven't just been sold this equipment, and now you're on your own trying to make it work the best you can. Gerber provides really solid support.

"There's the tech support system. If you get in trouble, you can call these guys up, and they'll do anything they can to help you sort it out. I've witnessed it firsthand. They'll spend however much time it takes with you to solve the problem. We've had a couple questions for them that they actually had to do some research and get back to us on. We can't say enough about tech support. It's a really great thing."

The shop also appreciates the distributor rep who checks up on their software and computers. If they need something quickly, the dealer will ship it overnight so it arrives the next day.

Even the equipment itself is part of the team. "A lot of the jobs that we have are large and time-consuming. We appreciate that the equipment works so well as a system. In a year-and-a-half with the EDGE and the software, we have literally had no problems. In the morning when we come in here and fire everything up, we're very confident that we'll be able to start working right away. We've never had a down day because of equipment failure. It's a good thing because we usually have ten to fifteen jobs going. A down day for us is tragic!" Kurt says.

"It all comes back to Victoria and her artistic ability," he continues. "The fact that we have top-of-the-line equipment and software and the support system that Gerber provides just allows us to do it that much better than everyone else. That's the bottom line really. We've provided her with the best tools possible. To use any other equipment, I feel, would be a step backward for us."

And when you're racing toward success, there is no time for stepping backward.

Visit the Teknigrafix web site at www.teknigrafix.com

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