



Sign Works, Inc. Has a Need for Speed

Product Spotlight:
Gerber Sabre Router
Gerber Advantage 600 Router

Sign Works, Inc.
Bensenville, IL

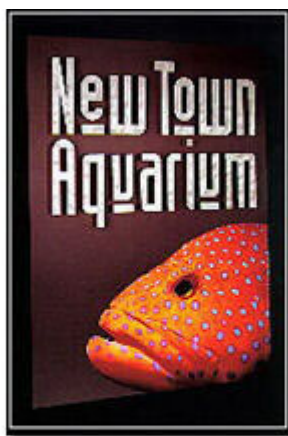
Sign Works, Inc., located on the outskirts of Chicago, is known for getting the job done quickly. This speed, and the variety of sign making services that they offer, has made them hugely successful. Owner Greg Janowiak started the shop in his basement more than 20 years ago in 1976. Sign Works, Inc. has since expanded to more than 25,000 square feet.

Janowiak's shop does a lot of work for other sign companies, as well as display and point-of-purchase work, store interior signage, and fleet graphics. This adds up to over 100 jobs per week! Incredibly, Sign Works has never needed a salesman or a delivery truck.

To keep pace with such a heavy workload - and the resulting profits - the shop relies on an ADVANTAGE® Router 600 from Gerber Scientific Products. This large-bed router has a work area measuring approximately 6 1/2 feet by 10 feet. It is designed for routing and engraving plastics, metals, and woods with a maximum thickness of 3.5 inches.



Behind the scenes - James Ziegler uses the ADVANTAGE Router 600 from Gerber to rout out GATORFOAM letters with a mica face.



The finished product - The dimensional letters are then adhered to a digital color print for a sign with real impact.

Also, the ADVANTAGE Router 600 features Gerber's ART Path™: an open architecture output software that makes it quick and easy to use an automated router even for those who have never used one before. Tool paths can be generated easily, taking the uncertainty out of routing and eliminating material waste.

The shop had the ADVANTAGE Router 600 for six years before buying a second, even faster router - the Sabre® 408 from Gerber. Janowiak's reasoning is apparent. "We get so many rush jobs. People think that just because you have a router, you can do things in one day. Sometimes we can; but if ten jobs come in in one day, it's kind of hard. Every job we get in here has a tight deadline. We're known for quick service and quick response to our customers. That's why we purchased the Gerber Sabre router," he says.

However, the Gerber routers offers more than just speed. For example, Sign Works was never able to "hog out" signs before they invested in a router. Now they have the ability to hog out certain letters, or on a larger sign, hog out the background and leave the letters in.

Recently, in completing an aquarium sign, Sign Works adhered one-inch thick GATORFOAM® letters with a metal mica face onto a digital color print generated from a 50-inch ENCAD® inkjet printer.

Another hogged out dimensional sign, this one part of a portable display promoting a skin care product line, involved mounting a five-foot high color photographic print of a lizard second-surface on Lexan®. The image was accompanied by painted GATORFOAM letters.

Of the sign companies for whom Janowiak does routing work, there are some who have smaller routers. He often helps these customers by doing pierce-cut faces. The sign shops save money by supplying Sign Works with artwork on disk and their own materials. That way, they only pay for actual routing time and do the finishing and setup themselves. The interior signage clients that Sign Works has served run the gamut from cosmetics, food, and toy stores to nightclubs.

Janowiak first heard about Gerber routers through his distributor. He had previously owned another brand of router which he wasn't very happy with after he had purchased it. Then the distributor told him that Gerber and the ADVANTAGE Router 600.

"When we saw it, we bought it and sold our other router. It's a lot easier to use than the old one, and it runs off of our computer equipment. We had to use a separate computer just for the old router because it was incompatible with our Dell™ computers," Janowiak says. "At the time, I got every option that Gerber offered on the router. The company has added features to the router since I bought it - like a vacuum table and a few other smaller options."

"Whenever Gerber comes out with something new, I usually buy it right off the bat," says Janowiak. "I was one of the first shops to buy a router and the EDGE digital color printing system. I go as far back as the first Gerber machine ever made. I bought it sight unseen."

According to Janowiak, "It wasn't hard to learn how to use the router. Our distributor set everything up for us and gave us some initial training. There are some things you don't know until somebody shows you hands-on. We sent a new employee who had never used a router before for three days of training at Gerber Scientific Products. Even though he had already begun using the router at work, he said he learned a lot of things he didn't know."

Before his shop acquired a router, Janowiak and his employees cut with a saw and made paper patterns by hand. In addition, a large amount of work was farmed out to a company in Florida who also did the work by hand. Now Sign Works saves money by doing the dimensional signage in-house.

"My first Gerber router paid for itself in one year. A lot of new jobs opened up for me, as did a lot of wholesale work for other sign companies outside the area," he says.

Sign Works uses only Gerber router bits. The only time they used another brand was before

Gerber made bits. Janowiak says, "They weren't as good as Gerber, and they didn't come with any recommendations for materials. Gerber bits are already tested and approved for use on certain materials, and they come with a chart so there's no second-guessing. It makes it a lot easier to train people to use the router."

The ADVANTAGE Router 600 has been very reliable for the shop. During its first three years, a few router heads burned out, so Janowiak kept a spare on hand. The router may be older now, but it has improved with age. Janowiak says, "Since we updated to a more powerful spindle head about two-and-a-half years ago, we haven't had a single problem."

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