



FASTSIGNS® and the Gerber Solara ion™ Team Up for Success

It has been sixteen years since Kevin Mengel, president of FASTSIGNS opened his doors for business in Berwyn, Pennsylvania and he hasn't regretted it once. "Purchasing a FASTSIGNS franchise was a step into the great unknown," explained Mengel. "I was investigating other business opportunities when I found out about the sign making business. Up until that time, I didn't know anything about sign making, the market, the equipment, or the customers. I had decades of business savvy under my belt," he continued, "so I took that leap of faith needed to run my own business. Of course the FASTSIGNS comprehensive franchise model really helped me be successful from day one."

FASTSIGNS, (now with a second facility located in Exton, PA), has been a Gerber customer from the very beginning; investing first in vinyl cutting equipment and then in the GERBER EDGE® thermal printer. "I have been happy with the quality of Gerber equipment and the high level of customer service that GSP® provides," said Mengel, "but printing technology was advancing and I needed to keep pace. When I began to research flat bed, UV ink jet printers, I looked at the competition, but really wanted to stick with Gerber. The Gerber Solara ion was introduced just in the nick of time."

Kevin Mengel and his son, Chris Mengel were at the ISA show in March of 2008 to possibly purchase an Océ® ink jet printer when they saw the Gerber Solara ion. "The Gerber Solara ion had all of the features we were looking for at a better price point than the competition," said Mengel. "Plus, I felt more comfortable going with a Gerber product. We had many years of positive experience with their software, equipment and service." Mengel said, "I also liked that the printer was a true flat bed design that did not try to push the material through the printer. The integrated, roll-to-roll printer setup, along with vibrant GerberCAT™ UV inks, and range of versatile printing speeds made the Gerber Solara ion a much better value for the dollar."

The installation of the Gerber Solara ion went smoothly and FASTSIGNS was up and running in just a couple of days. "It is a very easy printer to use," said Chris Mengel, printer operator, "it is almost idiot-proof! After very brief training we were producing sellable output on all kinds of materials."

The speed of the Gerber Solara ion has opened up new markets for this FASTSIGNS franchise. They now compete easily with short-run production jobs that would have been outsourced in the past. “The Gerber Solara ion allows us to cost-effectively produce 200-300 piece jobs,” explained Mengel, “so our profitability has risen dramatically. Whether we are printing on pre-cut stock or ganging up multiple jobs on a 4' x 8' sheet of material, the Gerber Solara ion does it efficiently and with consistently excellent results.”

The low temperature, Cold Fire Cure™ technology also expands the range of compatible materials that can be printed by the Gerber Solara ion. “We print on all kinds of rigid materials including Coroplast™, acrylic, polystyrene, foam board, and corrugated cardboard,” said Mengel. “Virtually every material we have tried has been successful. We have been experimenting with pre-finished banner and other fabrics and are excited about the prospects of printing on unusual materials.”

The Gerber Solara ion has improved over-all productivity at FASTSIGNS. “When the Solara ion is printing we go off to do other things,” stated Chris Mengel. “We can truly multitask because the printer does not need to be monitored. Frequently we are not waiting for the printer to finish; it is waiting for us to feed it more jobs.”

Printing directly on the substrate also eliminates many of FASTSIGNS’ traditional sign making procedures. “Our customary method for creating full-color graphics from our solvent ink jet printer involved printing on vinyl, laminating the print, cutting it out, and applying the print to the substrate,” explained Mengel. “There was a lot of hand work required to create each job which translated into many labor hours and higher customer costs. With the Gerber Solara ion, most of those steps are eliminated and those free hours are reinvested in other jobs or other tasks. The potential labor savings is huge,” he continued, “turn-around time is reduced and our profit margin increases. We can be much more competitive, which in turn brings us more business.”

The Gerber Solara ion has significantly reduced the waste produced at FASTSIGNS. Not only does the printer produce less waste ink than competitive printers, the Solara ion trims down waste by printing directly on the substrate. “We have actually decreased the size of our waste container because of the Gerber Solara ion,” said Mengel. “We have eliminated the waste of vinyl and laminating backing sheets, so we just have less to throw away. Now we are more environmentally friendly while enjoying lower monthly disposal costs.”

FASTSIGNS uses the 2-pass and 4-pass printing modes to produce great quality prints while drastically reducing turn-around time. “We also do a lot of 8-pass printing on aluminum stock and are very pleased with the exceptional quality,” explained Chris Mengel. In addition, FASTSIGNS frequently uses the roll-to-roll capability to print banners and other flexible substrates. “After just a few weeks in-house, the Gerber Solara ion is the ‘go to’ printer for almost every job that comes through our doors, both rigid and flexible,” exclaimed Mengel.

FASTSIGNS has recently investigated eco-friendly materials that would permit the Solara ion prints to be recycled. Once cured, the GerberCAT inks are considered recyclable as long as the substrate that they are printed on is also recyclable. This is a big advantage for FASTSIGNS’ environmentally-conscious clients. “We do business with a financial institution that turns over quite a bit of signage on a regular basis,” said Mengel. “They are extremely interested in creating graphics that can be recycled. This kind of ‘green initiative’ is becoming more and more common among our corporate clients, so the Gerber Solara ion is also a great business generator for FASTSIGNS.”

Faster speed, lower labor costs, reduced waste, and innovative materials—these are the benefits of owning a Gerber Solara ion. “Clearly, the Solara ion changes many things about the way we do business,” stated Mengel. “The wide variety of jobs, the possibilities of new materials and applications, and the resulting cost savings all add up! I am excited about the opportunities that the Gerber Solara ion creates for me to grow my business. Purchasing the Gerber Solara ion was another leap of faith for FASTSIGNS, but it has already proven to be the right decision for us.”

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