

# 10 tips for Gerber Graphix Advantage and Omega users

Shortcuts like these let you cash in on the power of software

By Mike Jackson

Most people learn their sign-making software just well enough to get by—or well enough to get jobs out the door. Yet, most programs have menu items that we don't explore. Other times, they are hidden little gems buried in the program that aren't apparent. Unless you read the manuals cover to cover, stumble across them by accident or take a class where someone tells you about them, you may never get to take advantage of their power and timesaving capabilities. Here are a few in Gerber's Graphix Advantage and Omega programs that save me a lot of time.

**Sequence and Direction (Plot program):** When the program is loaded originally, the default position is for this feature to be unchecked or off. Unless this feature is enabled, the plot program will plot the elements of a job in the order they were created. In other words, it might do a few letters in one corner and then slew the vinyl of paper through the plotter and do a few more letters and then slew all the way back to do a few more elements. This not only takes extra time, but also increases the chances of a jam-up, especially on a large job. When the feature is enabled, the plot soft-

ware will start at the left side and work its way across the job (see illustration below).

**Control Select (Composer Screen or Omega Work Surface):** This is one of my favorite tips. Even when elements are "grouped" or "combined," you can hold down the Control key and select an individual item from that group. This can come in handy over and over in a single day. For example, you can select just one shape to determine the height or size of it—or even its absolute position relative to the baseline. It can also be used to select just one letter or shape from an entire job if you had cutter problems or trouble during installation.

**Copy To (under the Edit menu):** This one is simple. With any open job in the Composer of Omega Work Area screen, you can select objects that you want to put into a new file. When you Copy To, the box comes up where you can give the selected elements a new file name and save it. When the new "copied" file is opened, all the selected elements will be there in the exact position from the original job. You could even select all of a certain color of vinyl or foil used in a job by using that



**Sequence and Direction** Under *Layout* in the *Plot* program, check *Sequence Plot*. This instructs the plotter to start at the left section of the job and work its way across the job, saving time and plotter movement.



Under *File* in the *Plot* program, click on the *Save All Preferences* menu item. This will save the *Sequence Plot* settings, along with other adjustments to the *Plot Program*. For example, when plotting a lot of small letters on a project, you might need to slow down the plotter speed. Make the adjustment, then save the preferences. It will plot at this new speed until you need to change the plotter back to full speed.



**Panels in Plot** In this case, the text is 12-in.-tall cap height, to be cut on a 12.75-in. plotter and the software automatically puts in the cut line at 12.75 in. up from the bottom of the descender.



Click and drag the horizontal cut line and drop it in a more convenient location. In this case, a single seam in the descender on the “g” is preferred to having it cut across the “S” and the dot on the “i.”



Say I had an installation problem or flaw in the vinyl on the letter “n.” Instead of going all the way back to the main program to select only the “n,” I dragged in the extra guidelines from the rulers on the left and top. This created 9 individual panels. The “n” is in panel 5.



In *Layout | Plot*, click on Panels. This menu box appears. Clicking on the Summary section and entering 5 will give you information about that individual panel. Change the default in the Panels box from “All” to “5”. This will plot only panel 5 from the current job. This feature also works with Edge colored jobs, allowing you to print/plot only a small part of a larger bitmap or complex graphic.

selection method, and then copy those parts into another file. Additionally, at any time, you can select everything in the current job and use the *Copy To* command to put the current version of your “work in progress” in a separate file as you keep on working on the job on the screen. If you’re creative, you’ll find many uses for this command.

**Panels in Plot (Plot program):** There are a couple of tricks you can do with the Panels feature. First, you can adjust where the panel line cuts by clicking on the cut line and dragging it around. The amount you can adjust the cut line is dependent on the size of the cutter and the size of the job on the screen.

In other words, a 24-in.-tall object or job on a 12-in. plotter will not give you much room for adjustment, but if the piece was 18 in., you will have a couple of inches to adjust the line in either direction from the default center. In some cases, you will be able to move the cut line to a less crucial area of the design to reduce the effects of the overlapping vinyl. Additionally, you can *Add* another cut line by dragging one in from the rulers. This might come in handy when you want more control of the placement of the cut lines. This can save material on some jobs, too.

While it might be apparent that you can add an extra horizontal cut line at any time, you can also drag in vertical cut lines to create additional “panels.” Each panel will be assigned a number and you can instruct the plotter which panel or panels to cut (see illustration above).

You can also use this feature when printing on the Edge or Edge II. You can pick just one area of a much larger job with the extra panel lines and print just that section. It will have all the same attributes, such as overprints,

overlaps, primers and so forth as the original print/plot. Experiment with this one. It can save you a lot of time and money!

**Pointer Tracking** (also located under the *Display Controls* under *Display*): As discussed earlier, if the status bar is turned on, you can see where your mouse is located relative to the baseline origin if the *Pointer Tracking* command is checked. This helps in designing in numerous ways. For example, if the grid is turned on and you are dragging out a guideline or moving a shape, you can see when your cursor is just about over the grid mark you want it to snap to.

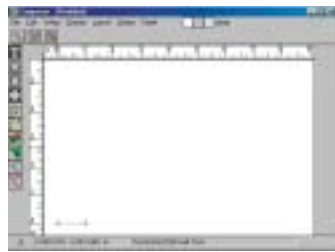
**Insert** (GA Composer screen): This is a nifty and powerful little feature—and easy to use and remember. Once you create a new shape, new text or element, immediately hit the *Insert* key on the keyboard; the new shape will be selected. When I say immediately, I don’t mean you have to be in a hurry, but it means it has to be the next command. Once you click on something else, it’s too late to use this feature.

Normally, when a new element is created, it comes into the screen as unselected or a black outline. You then have to click on it with the pointer tool to select it. That’s not a big deal if you are only dealing with one or two shapes, but if you have a bunch of text with numerous lines, this feature can come in handy. Remember: hit the *Insert* key as your next command!

In Omega, once you have created a shape and hit the pointer key, the last item created will then become selected.



**Display Baseline** Here's the Display Controls menu in Graphix Advantage. (It looks similar in Omega.) The program defaults with several of these unchecked, but this shows settings I use most of the time.



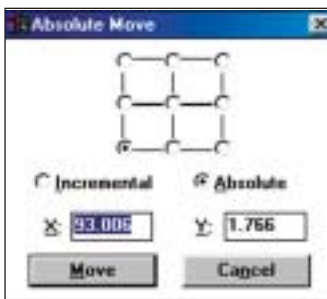
Here's how my screen appears with the Display Controls set as shown at left. Notice the rulers showing the little baseline image at 0,0. You can also see the status bar across the bottom, giving extra information about the size of images, pointer tracking and Constraints.



This 4-by-10 sign was designed with the lower left corner snapped to the origin (0,0). Setting up the design this way allows me to establish distances from that origin position.



Here's a close-up of the baseline. It doesn't cut or print—it's used only as a layout tool, and comes in very handy.



In this case, I selected the phone number and checked the Absolute Move menu. I can see the exact position of the numbers based on their relation to the origin. If I were actually doing this sign, I could measure over 93 in. and 1.75 in. up to place the phone number in the correct location.



Here's the sample working drawing with color added.

### **Display Baseline** (under the Display menu of GA Composer, but not available in Omega):

When I start designing a sign, I like to place my overall panel in a "known" position. That way, I always know where elements in the job are located relative to that baseline. If you remember your geometry days, there is a vertical and horizontal axis and the intersection is located at 0,0. When you move to the right, you are in the positive X area and when you move up, you are in the positive Y position. You are probably already aware of the principle. When the baseline is turned on, there is a dotted blue line starting at 0,0, which extends 1 in. to the right. It has small black boxes at each end. It will be invisible when printing or plotting and is simply a layout aid.

When I design a 4-by-8-ft. sign, I turn on the grid and turn on *Snap to Grid* (G) and start my box at 0,0 and drag it out to roughly 4 by 8. Using the *Absolute Size* command, I assign the image to exactly 48 in. by 96 in. and I know the origin is at 0,0. Every shape within

that new sign design will be relative to the 0,0 origin, too. Using the *Absolute Move* feature, I can see the distances the elements are from the origin, which is the lower left corner on the panel.

To turn on the baseline, pull down the *Display Controls* command under the Display menu (see illustration above). You will see a variety of options. Click on the *Show Baseline* box and save the settings. This will default to showing the baseline on the next job, too, if you save the preferences.

In Omega, you can use the horizontal and vertical guideline to create the same effects. Turn on the grid and drag a line in from the side and down from the top and let each one go when you are at the 0 position. You can also use the *Horizontal Guideline* and *Vertical Guideline* commands under the Layout pull-down menu and type in "0".

**Status** (under the Display menu | Display Controls): If this isn't turned on already, click on the



**Status** With the Status Bar turned on under the Display Controls, you can see several important details. In this case, the phone number is selected and the status bar displays the height and length of the selection.



Again, with the Status Bar turned on, the current Constraints (On-Axis and Grid), the location of the pointer and the current tool are displayed along the bottom of the screen.

check box under the Display Controls and save the preferences. A new bar will appear at the bottom of the screen (see illustration above), which will contain important information as you work on a job. If *Pointer Tracking* is turned on (explained earlier), you can see where your mouse is located relative to the baseline origin, the size of selected elements, the current tool and its shortcut key, and a small icon indicating which constraints might be currently active, such as *Snap to Grid*, *Constrain Movement*, *Snap to Guideline*.

**“Handle” Move** (Hidden Shortcut command in GA Composer): Unless you have the status bar turned on, you may not have seen the shortcut key for this one. Normally, the *Move* command (shortcut key M) lets you click and drag an item as long as your cursor is within the shape. That’s fine if you are randomly moving items around, but if you want precision, try the *Handle Move* tool (shortcut key W). It lets you align the sizes, bottom or top to grids, baselines or other objects easier (see illustration at left).

In Omega, you can do basically the same thing if you hold down the Control key as you click on a corner, side or top/bottom handle. Instead of resizing the shape, the cursor will change to a cross and you will know you are moving instead of resizing.

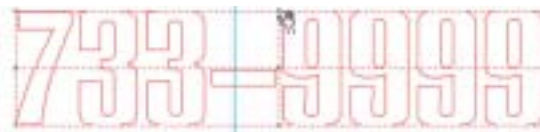
**Undo trick in GA Composer:** In GA Composer, you don’t need to hold down the Shift key as you select additional items on the screen. Did you ever select a dozen individual objects and miss hitting the next item, causing the first group to become unselected? Dang! Simply hit the *Undo* button on the toolbar (or use the *Control-Z* shortcut command) and the first dozen will become selected again. You can continue selecting the desired items. This feature doesn’t work in Omega. •❏



After over 23 years of running his own commercial shop, Mike Jackson and Darla, his wife, now operate Golden Era Studios in Jackson, Wyoming, and do a variety of sign-related projects. His Web site is [www.goldenstudios.com](http://www.goldenstudios.com). His E-mail address is [golden@goldenstudios.com](mailto:golden@goldenstudios.com).



**“Handle” Move** The normal *Move* tool allows the user to grab an item anywhere inside the selection box. The shortcut key is M.



The *Handle Move* tool grabs the closest handle on the selection box. This makes for more accurate positioning. The shortcut key is W.



Here, *Snap to Guideline* (shortcut key N) is enabled. Using the *Handle Move* tool, the handle on this selection will jump to the closest guideline or grid.

## There’s more on [www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com)

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- **Save time with shortcuts and quick keys**, July/August 2001
- **Time-saving shortcuts for the Gerber Edge 2**, September/October 2001
- And, several of Mike’s past articles