

What's it cost to produce this 3-by-4 site sign?

Tracking costs for a site sign with a digital print

By Mike Jackson

We do quite a few projects similar to this one throughout the year. Thank goodness for the Gerber Edge@2! I used to have to hand paint them, and though they might look nice, the jobs took forever and we never really felt we made enough money on them. This project had the typical snags, but it went generally smooth and profitable.

The real-estate company has an in-house graphics department and they supply the design, fonts and scans. Unfortunately, they do their layouts in Quark Xpress®, and we have to re-create

the layout on our sign layout program. If I could ever convince them to create the text and artwork in Adobe® Illustrator® or

Freehand, some of the time to duplicate their layout could be eliminated.

Layout: 30 minutes It took me only 30 minutes to re-create the graphics on this project. Realistically it would have taken half that to convert and adjust Illustrator or Freehand files, had they provided one of those formats instead.

Pick up and cut: 25 minutes The sign was only 36 by 48 in., done on 3/4-in. overlaid plywood, so I would only figure a half sheet of materials. Around here a sheet costs \$50, and it takes about 15 minutes to pick up a sheet down the street. I usually cut several panels at the same time, as in this case, but I probably have another 10 minutes making the cut and sanding the edges.

Materials:

Overlaid plywood	\$25
Vinyl	\$42
Rollers, mask and misc.	\$15
Paint, primer	\$15
Total	\$97

(Approximate costs without markup)



Prep and coat: 40 minutes Darla sanded the sealed edges and gave it a first coat of block-out white primer in about 15 minutes, followed by another coat later that night, which took 10 minutes. Lastly, we sanded the face and gave it a finish coat of enamel, mixed to their normal custom color, which took another 15 minutes.



Print graphic: 40 minutes From the time I was ready to print the graphic until I rolled it up, I had a grand total of 40 minutes. That included prepping the bitmap image and running it through my Edge®2. The image used 8 feet of white vinyl and 32 feet of Edge foils—or about \$38 worth of materials. During the 40 minutes of printing, I could have been cutting the lettering on the plotter, but I was busy doing other small projects.



Cut and weed: 40 minutes Darla opened the same file in the shop later and cut the top line of copy and the smaller copy at the bottom. Weeding this small lettering was probably the hardest part of the project. She had 30 minutes cutting and weeding 4 feet of green vinyl.



Apply graphics: 60 minutes When it was time for the application of all the graphics, I clocked the entire process at 45 minutes. That was with two of us doing the work, but actually she did most of the work. I was taking photos and notes. I helped with laying down the two large strips of pictorial graphics and some with measurements, so you could realistically figure there was one “man-hour” here for the application.



All the text on the lower section was applied as one unit, including the green moose graphic. Once the green version was applied, we drew around it with a blue Stabilo and then removed it. A medium brown one was cut and applied in the original position.

Backup: 20 minutes The last step on this project was to paint the back with three coats of cream-colored latex paint. I’d hate to say we had 10 minutes per coat, because it doesn’t take long on a 3-by-4-ft. panel. Besides the major parts already listed, we had 48 feet of masking and three rollers at around \$15.

Total time The total time spent on this job was 4 hours and 15 minutes. Just for perspec-

tive, we priced this sign at \$475 plus tax. If you subtract the materials off the top and divide by the time, it works out to roughly \$88 per hour. At the same time we were doing this job, we also had a 4-by-7 sign with a large pictorial and a 4-by-8 project sign with a mid-sized pictorial. I printed all three sets on the Edge®2 in one afternoon. •SC

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