

DIGITAL GRAPHICS

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Illinois-based shop is a full-service fleet graphics dynamo.

By Ethan Elliott

Keep on TRUCKIN'



Ethan Elliott is Managing Editor for Digital Graphics magazine.

"The time to make a friend is not when you need one." So says Bob Jurgens, executive vice president of Modagraphics, a bustling digital print shop in the Rolling Meadows suburb of Chicago, Ill. For the last 33 years (at the same location), the 110,000 square foot, humidity-controlled company has offered a vast array of signage solutions. And with a full design team, screen print

shop, digital print shop, wood and metal sign shop, and an in-house installation crew, the 115-employee company already has plenty of friends who come to them for graphics.

STEADY ROLLERS

Initially a screen printer for truck graphics, the company began creating and installing logos, then soon added pinstriping services, then four-color prints on pressure sensitive vinyl. Over the years, the firm has kept a steady focus on truck graphics, but has also fully embraced the power of high-production digital printing technologies. Members of SGIA since 1973, Modagraphics was an early adopter of digital printing. The

company was a test site for the electrostatic Scotchprint 1 and 3 machines before the technology was purchased by 3M — and for the 60" x 90" Idnit 162 solvent printer which was later sold to Scitex Vision.

Carrying that early Scitex experience forward, the ISO-certified company now runs two HP Scitex TurboJets, an HP XL 1500 printer and their two original Idnit printers, as well as two Thieme screen presses, a Zünd digital UV-curing flatbed printer and a Kongsberg digital die cutter. They also have a giant Hewlett-Packard FB6700 automated flatbed on order.

"We've been in it since the bleeding-edge days," says company CPO Steve Carlson, who adds that the biggest difference



Among Modagraphics' more high-profile clients is Kraft Foods. Here we see a truck decked out for Chips Ahoy cookies. Sweet!



Modagraphics runs two HP Scitex TurboJet solvent printers, one of the fastest machines available today.



today is just print size. While early digital prints focused on 24" and 36" media, most of the shop's prints today are 60". Of course, customers always expect ever-faster turnarounds.

"The most difficult thing is getting the customer to understand digital printing expectations" says Jurgens. "When you go to large-format printing, you have to view it from a distance reflective of what it's intended to be used for. If they look at something litho printed for a cosmetic ad in a magazine and then look at a 53' x 10' billboard from the same distance, they're not going to be happy. But the end user is never intended to get up right next to [billboard prints]."

SHINING EXAMPLES

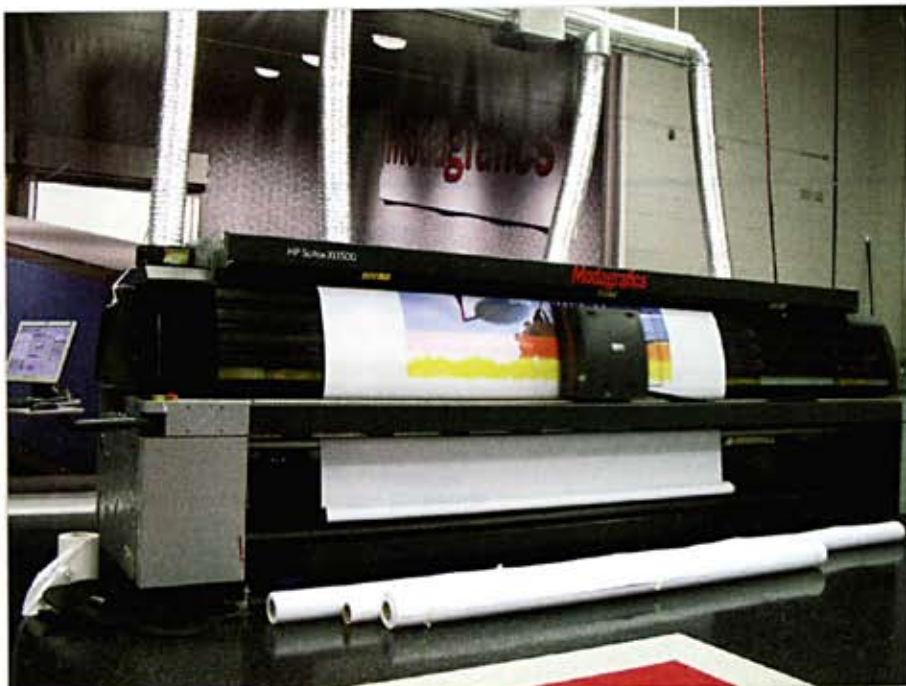
Modagraphics divides its digital graphics work into fleet and retail graphics, and boasts high-profile clients such as Kraft Foods, having developed graphics for Oreo cookies, Planter's Peanuts and more.

The goal for this series was to promote four of the Chicago Tribune's feature sections: Sports, Editorial, Sales and Sunday. The job won an award in Fleet Owner magazine in 2006. Icons on the sports graphic vehicles are changed to correspond with the sport of the season. The step vans were converted from all white to a blue gradient full coverage wrap using Avery's MPI 1010, and printed on the Scitex Idanit press.





As part of a pilot program for Builders First Source, a select number of vehicles were made into marketing pieces. The vehicles were printed on the HP Scitex Turbojet using Avery MPI 1010 film for the digital portion of the project, while FT1002 and NV1500 cut vinyl were used for the logo, company name and text. The reflective portion is featured on the side of the trailer so it is more visible at night.



Another one of Modagraphics' workhorse printers is the solvent-based HP Scitex XL 1500. The firm, still in growth mode, also has a giant HP Scitex FB6700 fully automated rigid substrate flatbed printer on order.

To accomplish their graphics work, the shop employs six G5 Macs in the design department, and several RIP solutions. The Kongsberg runs on I-cut software, while the Idnits feed off a Cheetah RIP. The XL1500 and Turbojets use Onyx Productionhouse RIP systems, all hooked up to Intel Xenon servers.

"Onyx is our primary workhorse for production. You'd like them all to work on one, but the problem becomes where do you run the RIP," says Jurgens.

Yes, "RIPs can run multiple machines, but that's like putting all your eggs in one basket, explains Carlson. "You could have one RIP machine go down and take out one press, or your entire workflow. Computers are cheap."

Another useful piece of equipment at Modagraphics is an I-One color profiling tool. Each press is profiled and



24 Seven Discovere, a Chicago-based litigation technology company, purchased a 2006 H3 as a specialty promotional vehicle. Now the fully wrapped vehicle has become a conversation piece for the company (they even had the roof wrapped for additional exposure from above street level). It was designed and printed in-house by Modagraphics using the HP Scitex Turbojet, Avery's MPI 1010 film and Clear Focus window perf.



Another Kraft Foods truck. This time the wrap promotes Fruity Pebbles — and good old Fred Flintstone.

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color matched against the others using ink matching software from Hunter Laboratories that measures color within one Delta.

"Computers are a really nice tool, but I don't think they'll ever replace the eye of a good color match expert. It's more important to have someone who understands color than to simply have a powerful computer," says Carlson.

BLEEDING EDGE

The team at Modagraphics will always stay on that bleeding edge. The firm continues to beta test equipment for various manufacturers, and the shop is currently working with several partner vendors on new product development. They're even getting research grants from Fortune 500 companies to explore some of the new technologies, according to Jurgens.

So what's his two-year plan? To grow further into retail marketing via in-store, P.O.S., and visual merchandising. Jurgens says he expects the retail graphics sector to grow rapidly as customers become familiar with and learn to accept available products and enhanced machine technology.

"The market's receptive to it, and whenever you see that, people are going to come in, and existing vendors will seek new capabilities with their equipment. We spend a lot of time forward-thinking rather than enjoying what's been brought to us," says Jurgens.

With a plan like this, Modagraphics won't need a three-legged dog named Lucky, but they can always use a few new friends. 96