

FASTSIGNS STAYS AHEAD OF THE TIMES—AND THE COMPETITION—WITH HELP FROM HP



In 1985, two young Texas entrepreneurs saw an opportunity. Gary Salomon and Bob Schanbaum noticed a small sign-making business in Austin using computers instead of the labourious, painstaking processes the craft had relied on for decades.

Neither knew much about making signs. Salomon was involved in direct-mail advertising and Schanbaum owned a chain of shoe repair stores, but the pair envisioned that technology could be used to revolutionise the sign business without sacrificing an artisan's eye for quality and detail.

The two put their pioneering model into action when they opened the doors to their first FASTSIGNS store in Dallas in 1985. Since then, FASTSIGNS International has grown into a multinational corporation with more than 530 franchise locations in seven countries—and counting. While the size of the company has changed, its dedication to innovation still prevails.

"We're all about solving our customers' business challenges," says Michael Prewitt, manager of new technology for FASTSIGNS. "To do that, we need equipment that solves different needs and can produce a wide variety of sign and graphics products."

A long-standing partnership with HP has allowed FASTSIGNS to meet those demands using tools such as the new HP Designjet L26500 Printer to stay at the technological forefront of the fiercely competitive, multi-billion-dollar sign and graphics industry.

Cutting-edge collaboration

For years, the innovative spirit of both companies has been intertwined. FASTSIGNS frequently tests new HP technology well before market availability in a symbiotic partnership that allows the two companies to enhance and refine their products and services.

"Our ability to test the HP Designjet L26500 Printer ahead of market allows our franchise partners to be more competitive by implementing new technology faster than their competitors," FASTSIGNS CEO Catherine Monson says. "We see whole new avenues of opportunity for our franchise partners."

Versatility is critical in an industry where every order is customised to meet each customer's needs. Evidence of the HP Designjet L26500 Printer's ability to help meet that challenge can be found at The Beach—otherwise known as the employee lunchroom inside the FASTSIGNS headquarters in Carrollton, Texas.

The large, windowless dining area had long been nondescript. To inject interest into the room, Prewitt turned to the HP Designjet L26500 Printer, HP Latex Inks, and HP PVC-free Wall Paper to make a massive mural depicting a pristine beach scene.

Industry sector:

Large format

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**CHALLENGE**

- FASTSIGNS International needed to maintain its competitive edge by providing its franchise partners with a more versatile, reliable printer that could produce a wider range of applications.

SOLUTION

- The new HP Designjet L26500 Printer with HP Latex Inks allows FASTSIGNS to help the company's more than 530 worldwide franchise centres maintain the quality, durability, and efficiency that its customers demand.
- FASTSIGNS uses HP printing materials, including HP PVC-free Wall Paper and HP Air Release Adhesive Cast Vinyl, to expand the applications available to customers.

RESULTS

- With the versatility of HP Designjet technology, FASTSIGNS is able to offer a wider range of applications and improve efficiency to meet the customers' needs and stay ahead of the competition.

"[Now] we can look out and see the waves and the blue sky," Prewitt says. "It's a nice break from being in the office all day."

With the HP Designjet L26500 Printer's advancements, FASTSIGNS can print on a wider array of materials than is possible with solvent-based printing technology alone. This ability allows the company to offer customers even more applications and break into uncharted territory, such as the soft-signage market.

"If you're stagnant—always selling the same thing, not innovating—you're going to be behind the curve," Prewitt says. "We want to be on the forefront, so we're always looking for new applications and new products."

Raising the bar

FASTSIGNS already relied on the HP Designjet L25500 Printer to meet its output demands before witnessing firsthand the enhanced and expanded capabilities of its successor. One common thread between the two printers is the ability to increase versatility and efficiency while maintaining a high level of quality.

"The quality of the HP Designjet L26500 Printer is everything we expect," Prewitt says. "It's as good as anything else in the marketplace. All the things

that we look for—the quality, the colour gamut, the smoothness of gradations—it does all of those things very well."

In addition, the HP Designjet L26500 Printer can help overcome common quality-control issues, such as banding, with the HP Optical Media Advance Sensor (OMAS). Coupled with prints that come out of the printer dry and ready to use, the HP Designjet L26500 Printer offers the increased efficiency that is critical in a business where a company is judged not only by the quality of its products—but also by how quickly jobs can be produced.

"We are called 'FASTSIGNS' for a reason," Prewitt says. "That's one of the things this printer can help us with. It can help us get work completed and out the door faster."

With the help of HP products such as the HP Designjet L26500 Printer spearheading FASTSIGNS' effort to be the innovative benchmark for its industry, Monson is confident that the company will continue to increase profits while steadily expanding its brand to eventually include hundreds more locations worldwide.

"We see a lot of growth ahead of us," Monson says, "and we know that HP is going to be a great partner in that growth."

"If you're stagnant—always selling the same thing, not innovating—you're going to be behind the curve. We want to be on the forefront."

—Michael Prewitt, Manager of New Technology, FASTSIGNS International

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