

Key information

SA International

1490 N. 2200 West

Salt Lake City, UT 84116

Ph: 801.478.1900 or 800.229.9066

www.saintl.biz

Contact: Lyndsay Berry

lberry@saintl.biz)

Company Profile:

SA International (SAi), formally Scanvec, Ltd. founded as an Israeli Corporation in 1990 is one OF THE leading providers of Solutions for the Professional Sign Making, Large Format Digital Printing and CAD/CAM for CNC Machining Industries. The company merged in December 1998 with Amiable Technologies, Inc. and changed its name in July 1999.

Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah

System requirements: Windows XP/Vista or Mac OSX 10.4/Mac G4 or Higher using at least 1 GB RAM, 3GB Working space, 24-bit 1024x768 video, CD-ROM or DVD Drive, and internet connection.

SAi's FlexiSIGN Pro 8.6, SIGN.com and SignTracker

Three winners in any signmakers paddock

As signmakers, we strive to reach a quality level that satisfies our clients. And, even though our prints and banners will eventually be viewed at some distance, our customers generally approve the image from close-up. So, if we can give them strong, smooth colors and good quality at close range, without sinking the shop in costs, it becomes a win-win process.

We've always enjoyed that SAI's software engineers have addressed the full business model of sign and printmaking operations. Over the years, they've carefully studied the countless, everyday tasks their software buyers face and, in turn, designed systems that truly help. Truth is, over our years, we've see signmaking software applications come up with loads of whiz-bang features and, by now, could argue which programs are finest. Or not. However, today, any signmaker's software gauge must begin with ease of operation and helpful, workflow-management systems. Software developers can add various features to these two fundamentals, but, to work well, software must help, not hinder, all things signmaking.

FlexiSign-Pro™ 8.6, which we'll overview here, is a complete sign-design package that also features vinyl cutting, RIPing and printing tools. It's offered in both PC and Mac versions.

We're also presenting SAI's new management package – SignTracker – which has evolved from long hours of industry study by SAI's engineers. It provides numerous management tools -- estimating, sales tracking, costing, business analysis systems and more – that's clearly designed for signshops. Even better, it's in an easy-to-use package that's available at www.SIGN.com, SAI's online store.

It isn't a new marketing device – to know your customer needs and deliver them, but you hear the gurus say it more often in today's economy. SAI, apparently, listened.

We'll have more SignTracker in a minute. First, however, let's see the Flexi 8.6 software, SAI's flagship, updated for 2010.

Any small business, including signshops, must constantly search for faster methods to produce work, because prompt payment helps cash flow, which keeps businesses afloat.

Flexi will easily handle the design-to-finish work on all signage: electric or commercial, printed or cut. We'll example a direct-to-print design, intended for banner material

where, once printed, you must add a hem and grommets to finish, or, perhaps, an intricate layout for a routed, dimensional sign, or, perhaps, a 5-ft. high channel letter set with neon in place, full-size, as an install pattern. Flexi will handle it.

In FlexiSign-PRO 8.6, you'll find all signmaking operations in one system, but don't look for radical interface changes, because, like a first-class race car, the power is under cover. With its faster processing speed and new SO Diffusion system the software remains a leader.

SO diffusion

SO Diffusion is a new dithering technique ((Fig. 1) provides more accurate ink-dot placement, which visibly smoothes transitions and thereby reduces banding. It also minimizes artifacts.

Other improvements are on the color management side. SAI has included over 400 Certified, ICC output profiles; it has also supplied advanced, color-management tools that allow you to customize color linearization ((Fig. 2). This insures that the printed image shows incremental levels (0 to 100%) of a coverage color, which eliminates color over saturation.

Also under the color-management heading, you can adjust the Ink Split Curve by adding points to the curve graph ((Fig. 3). This is a fine-tuning tool, like Curves in Photoshop. And, in line with SAI's philosophy, it's not difficult to use, or a daily requirement. Think of it for critical prints, mainly, or as a part of routine maintenance procedure.

Essentially, the adjustment allows you to tweak the light- and medium-colored ink flow levels, which, in part, lessens the dark inks and, accordingly, reduces light-area banding, the most obvious. Flexi's soft-proof screen helps. It resides on the toolbar, one click away, and provides an color rendition, for your critical evaluation, prior to processing the print.

For example, as cyan and magenta intermingle with light cyan and light magenta – you adjust for a smooth gradation (0 to 100%) and visually decide the final tone.

Flexi includes functionality for today's high-end raster packages. The company's website lists many new drivers. And, SAI provides an online, software update location. It also offers SignTracker management software and Sign.com, SAI's online store for signshops.

SignTracker

SAI says SignTracker is a complete, easy-to-use management system for sign companies, be they a multi-million dollar production firm, a small vinyl shop, or a sign-broker operation. The online software features platforms for customer management, design, estimating, accounting, inventory, project management, sales, scheduling and more.

It's designed to help you manage, analyze and grow your business.

The base price is \$29.00 per month, but it incrementally ascends, depending upon your sales volume. Nonetheless, it's a system you should explore. A 30-day trial is available at www.sign.com.

Once you're logged on, you enter customer information into the system via a help wizard ((Fig. 4) that prompts you for necessary information. This automatically moves you into the estimate sheet ((Fig. 5), which uses a formula-based or time and material estimating system for all types of signs: channel letters, cabinet signs, banners and much more. You'll also find calculators for concrete, pipe, steel and more. The system also considers labor, permit fees and, get this, even single grommet costs.

Your projects can be adjusted by stage, department or task because it evaluates each task via an associated time allotment. A timeline posting will tell you the time required to complete the project, plus you can view and manage the delivery, install and completion dates.

The job-costing section lets you monitor actual costs verses estimated; it also helps you find errors and discrepancies ((Fig. 6).

In the project management zone, you can track projects in process, from design, estimating, fabrication, installation to invoicing. Sign Tracker has built-in forms for surveys, art, engineering, work orders, change orders, subcontracting, legal releases and legal-sold contracts. You can monitor your projects by stage or by task. As the progressive tasks are completed, you can view the projects spent time, materials and progress.

The inventory resource sheet is extremely informative. You can sort by item or supplier to see stock on hand and what's on order.

You may also generated detailed reports that help you monitor your company's growth. You can set goals, review current projects by status, or generate a list of reports, review company sales or one salesperson's sales.

SignTracker is available at a fraction its worth. Our small signshop would be hard pressed to use every report and every template, although many will certainly help, but we challenge all shops to investigate what the software offers. Every Sign shop needs an estimating and project tracking system and this one is ready, able and waiting.

The SAi Flexi family is an excellent way to create graphics quickly and output to a various print or cut devices. The new color management additions are impressive; they'll be well received in the industry. As for the on-line community SAi has developed – SIGN.com and SignTracker -- it's a modern, excellent and easily used system that we recommend you explore today.