

# SIGN & Digital Graphics

For the Business of Visual Communications

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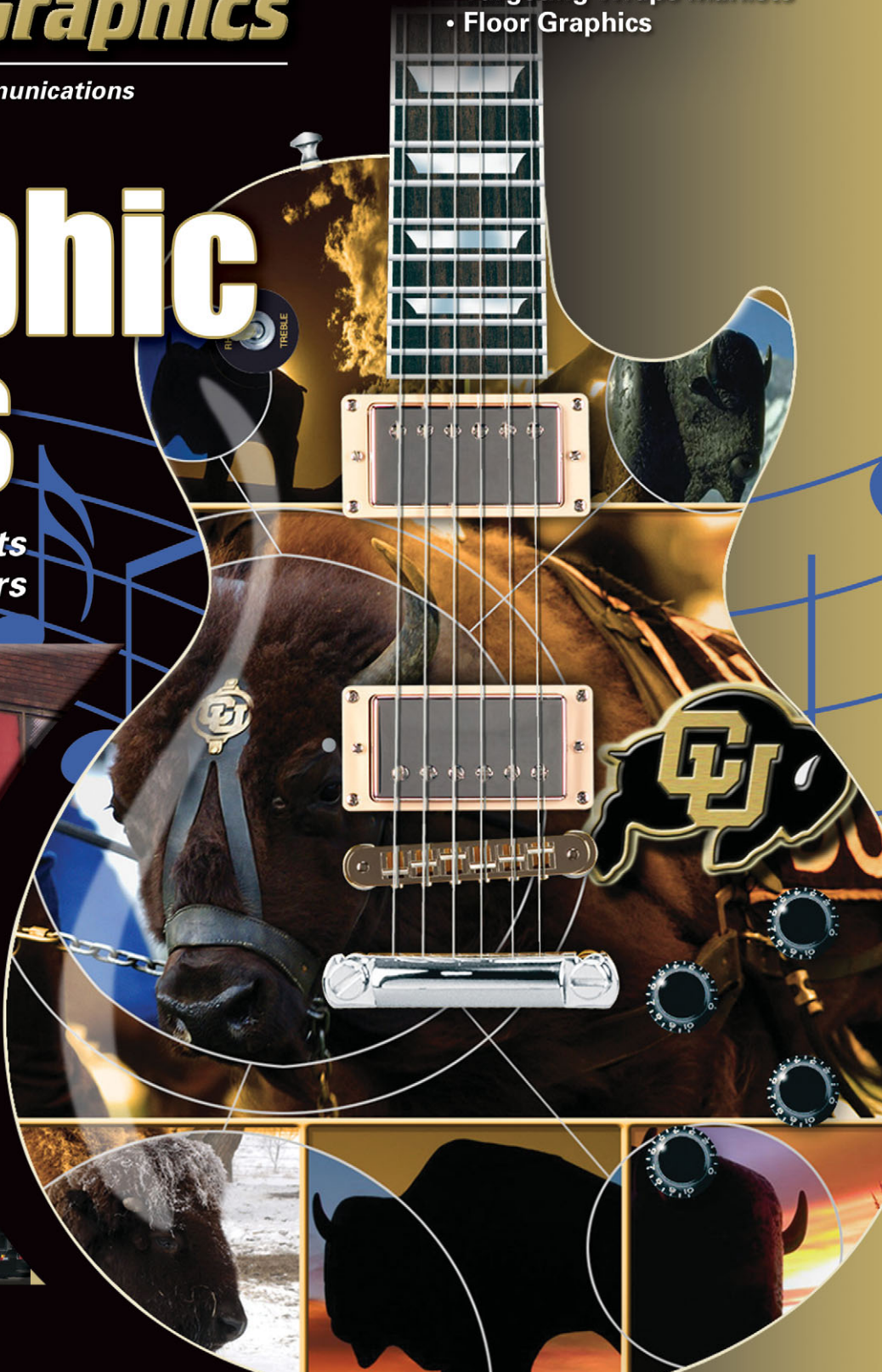
- Signage Enclosures
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## Digital Graphics

- Film Technology
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- Floor Graphics

# Graphic Riffs

Shop digitally prints directly onto guitars



# Boosting Profits with Software

Find the right business software for your shop

BY DAVE KING



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**F**OR MORE THAN 20 YEARS I have been automating business with software that does both customer relationship management (CRM) and financial functions such as quoting jobs and tracking money. However, I find that many shops that want this type of software are not ready for this jump. I feel that before you

look to automation, you must first have your act together regarding a few business basics.

## UNDERSTANDING MEDIA COSTS

In choosing the media you will use in your business, try to use the *fewest* types of media to solve *most* of your needs. This goes for your calendared and cast vinyl laminates, rigid boards, etc. Get a good understanding of the costs involved in typical jobs. Knowing your costs is *very* important. And I believe you should cost out all materials by the linear foot. After this exercise you will have a clear list of products you need and stock for your business. Here are a few examples:

CONTINUED

### CALENDERED VINYL

Product Description	Cost per Sq. Ft.	Cost per Linear Ft.
Ink (liter cost ÷ 750 sq. ft.)	\$ .30	\$1.20
Calendared Vinyl	\$ .30	\$1.35
Calendared Laminate	\$ .35	\$1.60
<b>Total Calendared Product</b>	<b>\$.95</b>	<b>\$4.15</b>

### CAST PREMIUM VINYL

Product Description	Cost per Sq. Ft.	Cost per Linear Ft.
Ink (liter cost ÷ 750 sq. ft.)	\$ .30	\$1.20
Premium Cast Vinyl	\$ .90	\$4.05
Premium Cast Laminate	\$ .80	\$3.60
<b>Total Cast Vinyl Product</b>	<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$8.85</b>

### VINYL BANNER

Product Description	Cost per Sq. Ft.	Cost per Linear Ft.
Ink (liter cost ÷ 750 sq. ft.)	\$ .30	\$1.50
13 oz Banner (63" wide)	\$ .20	\$1.05
<b>Total Banner Product</b>	<b>\$.50</b>	<b>\$2.55</b>

### WALL/SHORT-TERM VINYL PRINTS (typically mounted to boards)

Product Description	Cost per Sq. Ft.	Cost per Linear Ft.
Ink (liter cost ÷ 750 sq. ft.)	\$ .30	\$1.20
Calendared Vinyl	\$ .30	\$1.35
<b>Total Short-Term Vinyl</b>	<b>\$.60</b>	<b>\$2.55</b>

## Sign Tech

Dashboard Calendar Contacts Jobs Admin

View as list

Toggle Backlog Toggle Archives

Open-bids	Pre-Production	Production	Install/Delivery	Close-Out
<a href="#">view 32199 - CB Richard - Plaques</a>	<a href="#">view 10034 - Taco Shack - Channel Letters</a>	<a href="#">view 50099 - City Hospital - Banner</a>	<a href="#">view 10001 - Subway - Face Change</a>	<a href="#">view 44909 - Jack' Pizza - Shirts</a>
<a href="#">view 30002 - SP Real-Estate - Panel Sign</a>	<a href="#">view 88076 - Amy's Ice Cream - Window Graphics</a>	<a href="#">view 30112 - CC's Pizza - Van Wrap</a>		
<a href="#">view 70086 - Austin Java - Lit Box</a>	<a href="#">view 88895 - Buy Cheap - Bandit Signs</a>			
<a href="#">view 33009 - T's Skate Park - Pole Sign</a>				

New Job

Job tracking software, such as Sign Tracker, can be very helpful to a sign shop seeking to organize and get a tight handle on its business.

Then you need to price all your substrates. These are much easier because in most cases they are sold by the sheet. With this information you can, within a few minutes, figure out what each job will cost to create.

### PRINTING SPEED

Next you need to know how fast your printer(s) run based on the linear inches per minute. If you run your printers in a few different modes, you need only the speed at the mode that you would sell most of the time (in most cases, this is the

quality mode). If you have a solvent inkjet printer, you start the printer and make a mark on the vinyl, time 60 seconds, and then make another mark. Measure this distance and this is your inches per minute. Your goal for your printer is six inches per minute. For a flatbed, again do the same setup for mode, but this time start your countdown at the touch of the *Print* key, then stop your stopwatch when the printer has finished printing the whole 4' x 8' sheet, you have removed the sheet and put a new sheet on and are ready to hit the print key again. This will

help you understand how long each job will take the printer and will allow you to calculate your job flow.

### OVERHEAD COST

The final costs you need to know is all your overhead costs that are related to the creating of graphics. This includes labor, benefits, machine lease, electricity, maintenance, outside labor, building lease, etc. Keep in mind all fixed expenses should be on the expense part of your balance sheet, and all costs that are directly related to making graphics should be your Cost Of Goods Sold (COG = material costs, ink, overtime labor, commissions, outside labor).

Now you are very close to turning on the new software, but you should run your business for a while on a manual system first so you can iron out any bugs in your system *before* you get the software. On all job tickets, put the time expected to print the job. Cost the jobs so you can see the difference between what it cost to run the job and what you sold it for, less the commissions paid on the job. Once you have run like this for a few months, you will have a very good handle on your business and what is necessary to automate these processes.

### BUSINESS SOFTWARE

CRM (*Customer Relations Management*)

For the most part, I believe CRM is the most important part, of business software, but that depends on what you want the software to do. CRM software helps you stay in touch with your clients and prospects by tracking your communications with the client/prospect so you know when to ask for the order. Once you have good control over your clients/prospects you can create quotes for possible orders.

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# SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT

To have your company featured, contact Matt Wieber for prices and scheduling:  
mwieber@nbn.com or 800.669.0424 ext.280

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Logos for featured suppliers: CORSTAL ENTERPRISES, MILLER WELDMASTER, Cooley, FASTSIGNS, CRUX VISIONS, AXYZ INTERNATIONAL, ENCORE PRODUCTS, and a circular logo with a sign.

## RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS SOFTWARE

Company	Software Features	Website
ACT	Lead tracking, CRM	www.act.com
Activity Software	Estimating, invoicing, management	www.activitysoftware.com
CRC	Estimating, accounting, inventory, scheduling, CRM	www.crcinfosys.com
Cyrious Software	Job quotes, order entry, job tracking, shipping, invoicing, accounting, marketing, CRM.	www.cyrious.net
dataSIGN (Datacom Intl.)	Estimating, accounting/sales, supply chain management, job cost/tracking, CRM	www.datasignonline.com
EstiMate Software	Job quotes, estimating, invoices, work orders, CRM	www.estimatesoftware.com
MYOB	Accounting, payroll	http://myob.com.au
SalesForce	Cloud-based lead tracking, CRM	www.salesforce.com
Sign Tracker	Job estimates, scheduling and tracking, reporting, CRM, project management	www.sign-tracker.com
QuickBooks (Intuit Inc.)	Accounting, finances	http://quickbooks.intuit.com

### Job Quotes

Job quotes are more complicated because you need to come to grips with what you feel is right to charge the clients, the material they purchase, the waste needed to make their finished product, the mistakes you may make and your administrative time.

### Job Tracking

The part of the software tracking system that seems to get most people excited is the ability to track jobs through the flow of your business. However, some may find the process a bit daunting, especially in shops where people are responsible for multiple jobs. Getting a person to log into multiple jobs, and to track them, and make sure the team logs out when they are done, is not as easy as it sounds. Still, the benefits of tracking jobs are obvious, and for some shops this type of software can be an ideal solution. Tracking the print time, waste, and the job costs are crucial to running a tight ship, and the information can help you discover and correct issues within your workflow.

### ANOTHER PATH

There is another path you can take that will get you all the information you need to succeed. It involves a bit more elbow grease, but some people may find it works as well for them as it did for me. Here's what to do:

- Get a good CRM software package. You can choose a web-based or a local

server based solution. When I started I used ACT as my contact manager and it works great. You can customize the look of the documents you send to clients and get full reports on what is going on in your sales team. You may want to find a package that also has job tracking capabilities

- Create a good quoting system. Here's where the elbow grease comes in. I created my own quoting system using a common spreadsheet program. It took me a long time to get Excel to do what I wanted to do, but it does work well. I set up the spreadsheet so I can copy a section of the spreadsheet and drop it into ACT as the quote. The system can track my cost, volume discounts, customer discounts, and even sales commissions.

- Get a good accounting system. I looked at Quickbooks, but I found it a bit too limiting for my business. I chose MYOB for my accounting system and it did everything I needed it to do to manage a large-format business.

I would love to answer all your business software questions in this article, but that's not really possible because every business has different specific needs. Consider hiring a good consultant to help you determine the best course for your business. There may be a software package just right for you. Business software has come a long way, and a good package can likely fulfill 80 percent of what you need to run your business. Good luck, and be smart with your money, and I will see you on the show floor! **SDG**

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