

TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

SignTracker

A complete sign-company management system

There comes a time when a small signshop must move from the seat-of-its-pants to the no-stone-unturned management approach, in order to grow. SignTracker sign-management software actually organizes and supplies any large or small sign company with all the components needed to properly manage the sign process. In addition, if a new company wants to minimize the pitfalls that hit many growing shops, SignTracker provides all the components it'll need.

SignTracker's creators should know. This module-driven tracking package was developed by a sign company, Sign Tech Intl. (Austin, TX), and they seemingly thought of everything. The proof can surely be its own success story.

A successful company is measured by its profit line, but how does it achieve that profit? By not only carefully tracking expenses, but also planning effectively.

With one or two employees, you can probably get by with a quote or estimate sheet, fax form, a couple of vendors, QuickBooks for accounting and Microsoft Excel as a spreadsheet. But you'll always be relying on your checking account to see if you're making money.

On the other hand, you might want to increase your business by nabbing those larger clients and landing those bigger jobs.

To do this, most signmakers think they need more machines or employees. Without an extensive analysis, it's difficult to make intelligent decisions, but this software package guides those decisions. The management system includes scheduling, project-management, design-standardization, estimate and job-costing, employee-management, sales-training and performance-measurement tools.

From subcontracting and liability



forms to shipping labels, it's all inclusive with SignTracker. Just follow the flow, and every needed form can be produced, printed and readied for signature. Let's call it standardizing the shop.

Regardless of what you think you need, SignTracker leaves no questions unanswered. Power is in the numbers, and SignTracker is based on Excel's spreadsheet concept. If you have Excel and Word on your PC or Mac, you can streamline your signshop with a \$1,950 nominal fee. This includes all the modules we'll be discussing.

SignTracker allows you to choose the modules you need, but also makes all of them – more than 16, all button-menu driven – available. We can't cover all of them, but we'll touch on enough to wet your whistle.

Project-management module

After 10 years of development, the project-management module allows you to manage every stage of a sign project(s) through one single template. By entering the client and project information just once, you'll access more than 40 documents – survey sheets, art-request documents, shop and install requests, code-research guides, engineering-request sheets, change-order tracking sheets, credit-card acceptance forms, fax cover sheets, live links to launch research websites and a whole section on project management for all your national customers.

Key Information

SignTracker

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Company Background: In 1997, sign salesmen Joe Arenella and Robert McDonald launched Sign Tech Intl. They soon developed their own sign-management software, SignTracker.

List Price: \$1,950

Contact: Joe Arenella, president

At a Glance: SignTracker sign-management software is a module-driven, Excel-based, tracking package developed by a sign company. The 16 modules include scheduling; project management; design standardization; estimates and job costing; employee management; sales and training, and performance measurement.

Estimate module

To launch the Estimator module (Fig. 1), just click on a template, and select such choices as channel letters, cabinets and awnings. Also, a custom estimate allows you to include vinyl signs or vehicle graphics. Again, a long list of items can be accessed, all menu driven. The module also includes client contracts, customizable introduction letters and pricing presentation pages.

Master formula

You can view all the calculations involved under the master-formula module: labor plus materials plus sign size and type, or you can calculate exact materials and labor. The program has a 500-item material list. The list can be customized for your market.

To test your formula estimates, SignTracker suggests you submit a quote request to at least three sign-wholesale companies in your area and compare the results. Also, to



Fig. 1: SignTracker allows you to choose the modules you need, but also makes all of them – more than 16, all button-menu driven – available.



Fig. 2: The color-coded feature in the Project Tracking module makes reading and tracking easy.

help set up your vendor material information, e-mail your supplier with a copy of the Excel supply sheet and ask him/her to fill in your purchase history and pricing. This simple cut-and-paste step will save an incredible amount of time.

Sales commissions and house-mark-up rates can be adjusted to match your company's standard rates. Choices between local and national projects are taken into account, along with spiffs, permits, shipping and the like. All of this falls under the project totals using drag-down lists.

From the estimate sheet, the information pours into the quote and purchase contract. SignTracker includes a "Terms and Conditions" portion that was reviewed by an attorney, but the program suggests your attorney review the contents. It also offers suggestions on how to name your files for accountability. Estimate files can be password protected so the support staff can view and print with no changes, and only the initiator can make the changes.

Trying to organize your employee files can be extremely time-consuming, and many of the components may be missing.

SignTracker's Human Resources portion includes employee handbooks, contracts, commission tracking and employee-review forms.

The Accounting Tracker tracks the activity of sold contracts – if payments and commissions have been paid. Once a sign is sold, the sales rep or project manager turns in the signed contract, along with the matching estimate sheet. Accounting can then track the project payments, close-outs and commissions due.

Of course, accounting can produce numerous forms, such as invoices, vendor pay, company credit cards, and then the ugly stuff, such as collection letters and seriously past-due accounts.

The module also provides customer-credit applications, office-supply forms, overnight-shipping forms, internal payment requests and many more.

SignTracker warns when accounting issues can affect the profit report, but you must first tie back all expenses to the individual projects.

Scheduling module

This module tracks individual jobs, and the built-in, shop-capacity tools make it extremely easy (Fig. 2). First, you must know how long it takes to fabricate every component. Then, a monthly calendar can be produced and printed at any time. A "daily happenings" report alerts the staff when a job, including creation, installation, or shipping, should commence to meet the delivery

date. No more dry-erase boards needed. Each job can be color coded for each reference.

Job tracker

This intensive module gives you a check-off list of a complete sign job, such as site-survey completion, delivered to art department, proofread, contract preparation, drawing approvals, engineering drawings, permits and many more. It would be very difficult for any job to fall through the cracks using this system.

We must admit, we barely scratched SignTracker's surface. What we've covered is powerfully incredible, but there's more. A design module offers more than 200 vector-formatted templates, ready for any designer. The designs, which conform to UL specifications, include channel letters, cabinets, message centers, banners and architectural elements. They're saved in PDF, AI and EPS formats

Everything your company needs to automate the workflow, from soup to nuts, is included in SignTracker -- design, contracts, sales commissions, work in process, pricing guides, permit requirements, inventory or training manuals. All these elements are here to get you organized, for a nominal fee of \$1,950. Take a look at SignTracker; it would be well worth your time. ■