

CASE STUDY

Go wide and grow: AlphaGraphics West Houston thrives with the EFI Pro 30h printer

In 2017, AlphaGraphics® West Houston's vice president, Jim Houd and his wife, Brittany Houd, took the reins of the family-owned franchise from Brittany's grandfather, who founded the company in 2003. It was not an easy transition for Jim, who had previously worked as a heavy equipment operator, but Brittany had spent her entire career in the sales department at AlphaGraphics, and her grandfather stayed on long enough to ensure their success.

That success has included growth in a variety of services and solutions. Not only does the franchise provide an extended range of signage and commercial printing products, but it also has a strong marketing and design offering, making AlphaGraphics West Houston a one-stop shop for businesses seeking the most-effective ways to promote themselves.

Wide-format digital inkjet printing has long been a key offering for the business. Previously, the company used an EFI™ H652 UV hybrid flatbed/roll-to-roll inkjet printer and, more recently, a 65-inch wide EFI H1625 LED hybrid printer to produce rigid and flexible media signage and graphics. The H1625 LED printer AlphaGraphics West Houston had purchased from authorized EFI reseller Ricoh® offered quality imaging on an exceptionally broad range of rigid and roll media. But, with the company seeing increasing success with wide-format print, the Houds found that the time had come to go wider.



CHALLENGE

“We had to pass on a lot of jobs because we just didn't have the capacity to deliver them fast enough.”

– Jim Houd, Owner



After seeing increasing success in wide-format printing, AlphaGraphics West Houston chose the EFI Pro 30h as its newest investment to replace its existing hybrid printer.



AlphaGraphics West Houston is a premier marketing and printing solution serving the Houston market. Founded in 2003 by Craig and Michele Hohler, it is a franchise location of the AlphaGraphics chain. Founded in 2003 and now owned and operated by their granddaughter Brittany and her husband Jim, the business makes its customers' success its biggest priority.

AlphaGraphics West Houston focuses on results and the return-on-investment of its clients marketing dollars. The company's staff are visual marketing and communication experts who truly care about product quality, customer satisfaction and establishing long-term partnerships with clients.

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The wider competitive advantage of the Pro 30h printer

The Houds worked with Ricoh, their most trusted supplier, addressing the overall productivity constraints they faced with an increasing volume of wide-format work. And, in April 2022, AlphaGraphics West Houston's Ricoh rep sold the company a new 126-inch-wide EFI Pro 30h UV LED hybrid printer to replace the H1625 printer.

"We were leaving a lot of work on the table," Jim Houd explains. "A lot of our big clients are retail, school, and event based, so signage has always been a big part of what we do, and it got to where we had to pass on a lot of jobs because we just didn't have the capacity to deliver them fast enough."

Thanks to the Pro 30h printer, that is no longer the case.

The EFI Pro 30h printer is ideal for sign and print shops like AlphaGraphics West Houston – businesses seeking to meet the growing demands for higher quality with quicker turnaround times while extending the types of jobs they can produce. The machine offers increased uptime and productivity with less maintenance, and its powerful instant on/off UV LED curing drives down operating costs.

With the "cool cure" LED capabilities of the printer, there is significantly less energy consumption compared with traditional UV or latex wide-format printers, less waste from trying to find the right cure level, and fewer consumable parts. Those were all key factors for Houd, who found that the Pro 30h printer's capabilities – and its affordable running costs – allow him to maintain a smaller staff while increasing productivity. "I prefer having a staff of just 12 that we can take great care of and pay really well," he explains, "instead of having 30 people that we can't pay as well and still output the same amount of work."

The transition to the new machine was swift and smooth in large part because of AlphaGraphics' long-term relationship with both Ricoh and EFI. Houd has dubbed his shop as "The Ricoh poster child for Houston" and just about every piece of printing equipment in his shop has come through the company. "It was kind of hand in hand with Ricoh and EFI. We were all on the same bus through the entire process, so it was pretty seamless," Houd says of his experience buying the new printer.

SOLUTION

The EFI Pro 30h printer's cost, throughput and capacity, along with its new continuous board feature, helped AlphaGraphics West Houston expand beyond its traditional customer base.

He also attributes the ease with which his operators acclimated to the Pro 30h printer to the company's long history with EFI equipment. "There was very, very little that we had to learn. Our guys were up and running before the machine was technically installed," Houd says.

Faster turnaround times with continuous board printing

The machine's cost, throughput, and capacity were the key selling factors, as was the new continuous board feature on the Pro 30h printer. It is a new, standard feature that enables users to maximize the production of large boards or multiple small boards with speeds of up to 2,477 square feet per hour to meet tight deadlines.

"In the past, if we had to run 100 sheets of corrugated plastic, that was a big deal for our shop and now it's kind of the average," Houd says. "Now, with the continuous board feature, that type of job doesn't stress out the staff, and we keep things flowing at a faster pace. It's all about throughput and volume for us."

The EFI Fiery® digital front end (DFE) on the printer was another important factor for upgrading to the Pro 30h model. In fact, the company also has Ricoh cut-sheet digital printing equipment that uses a Fiery DFE, and Houd says he will not buy any digital print equipment without a Fiery front end. "We have Fiery throughout

the shop. I like its ease of use and not having to train on so many different platforms," he says. "We also can run it through different departments."

There is a familiarity that results in fewer mistakes, and smoother operations overall, using Fiery Command WorkStation®, the common job management interface used for AlphaGraphics West Houston's wide-format and cut-sheet digital printing devices. Plus, the Fiery workflow is integrated with the eProductivity Software PrintSmith™ Vision management information system AlphaGraphics West Houston uses, so there is a seamless link of shared data between the shop's digital printing operations and all its estimating, quoting, scheduling and accounting processes.

The Pro 30h printer has enabled AlphaGraphics West Houston to expand beyond its traditional customer base of local school districts and universities and win new business with large multinational grocery chains.

RESULT

AlphaGraphics West Houston's wide-format sales are up 82% year over year after installing the printer.



The EFI Pro 30h has enabled AlphaGraphics West Houston to take on business it previously had to pass up due to lack of capacity. The speed, lower TCO and increased uptime of the Pro 30h has generated new opportunities for the business.

No longer limited to semi-regional chains with 30-50 locations, the Houds' franchise is now able to handle 300-500 centers at a time "in a time period that works for the client – which is always short," Jim Houd says.

"With the new printer, it has been all about speed," he adds. "People are shortening their time windows and increasing their demands and this printer has allowed us to meet all of those and not stress the departments."

The Pro 30h printer comes with two channels of white ink standard and multilayer printing, and for Houd, it has resulted in better day/night backlit prints with clear, crisp images – something he attributes to the high opacity and quality of EFI's white UV LED ink.

The printer's productivity has had a significant impact on the bottom line. With faster output speeds, better quality and better overall functionality, the company has been able increase the amount of rigid-substrate work it produces, and multilayer and white ink jobs that overall have higher margins.

Now, AlphaGraphics West Houston's wide-format sales are up 82% year over year after installing the printer. In fact, signage work at the franchise grew 53% after just six months, "and we expect that to increase further," says Houd.

Let's be brilliant. Together.

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