

Alpine Graphics Productions

Alpine Graphic Productions Ltd. manufacturers graphics for large customers in the fleet, interior, and exterior graphics industries.

Headquarters	34 Magnum Drive, Schomberg, ON, L0G 1T0
Year Established	1948
NAICS	323113 - Commercial screen printing
Employees	20
Major Expansions	N/A
Exports	US, Mexico
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	N/A

Organization

Achieving success in Ontario's manufacturing industry requires not only quality products and efficient manufacturing processes, but exceptional project management as well. Alpine Graphic Productions Ltd. (Alpine) is a perfect example of a company that clearly understands these requirements. As a leader in the custom signage and graphics industry, Alpine takes pride in maintaining its reputation for competitive prices, superior product performance, and on-time delivery.

At its location in Schomberg, Ontario, roughly a 30-minute drive from Toronto Pearson International Airport, Alpine manufactures fleet, interior, and exterior graphics primarily for businesses and government. The graphics are typically printed on vinyl at Alpine's facility, using either screen or digital printers, then shipped out and installed in the field by industry-certified installers. The process from start to finish requires artists, advanced manufacturing technology, skilled tradespeople, and extensive project management.

History

When Alpine was founded over 70 years ago, it specialized in safety graphics for emergency vehicles. As the years passed, graphics production technology improved and customers began to realize that graphics were a better option than paint for a variety of applications like vehicles and business signage. One of the

company's current co-owners, Ian MacRitchie, hoped to take advantage of this market trend by purchasing Alpine in 1998. He was joined by his friend-turned-business partner Ian Middleton in 1999. Together, they co-own and operate the business today.

Performance

What differentiates Alpine from a smaller wrap shop is its ability to take on large projects. Instead of wrapping individual cars (the main line of business for a typical wrap shop), it wraps fleets of vehicles and other bulk apparatus for larger customers. These customers are not just looking for a company that can produce high-quality graphics, but one that can also serve as a partner to effectively manage their fleet. Take Landstar, for instance, one of Alpine's major fleet customers. Landstar is a transportation services company with vehicles transporting goods 24/7. Each minute that these vehicles are out of operation to install graphics (instead of on the roads) corresponds to thousands of dollars in lost revenue. Landstar needs a partner it can rely on to consistently deliver graphics on time and without incident.

Ian Middleton notes that in an industry that relies so heavily on reputation and word of mouth, stakeholders must "earn the right to sit at the table" with customers like Landstar. Alpine was able to build up its reputation by investing in the best technology the industry has to offer. Its manufacturing facility contains both screen and digital printers, as well as other machines that help cut, laminate, and prepare the graphics. The screen printing technology that Alpine uses has been around for years, but no other machines match their quality when it comes to printing graphics with solid colours. Digital printers are relatively newer and more flexible when it comes to printing complex images. By having both screen and digital capabilities, Alpine is able to cater to its customers' diverse needs.

Another factor that helped Alpine gain its reputation as a consistent, high-quality partner is its strong workforce. The 20 individuals working for Alpine are split between the production team and office staff. On the manufacturing side, a university-educated artist helps design graphics, while various skilled tradespeople manage all of the other production-related facets.

Employees in the office help coordinate the logistical details of project management—business development, production, delivery, and customer service—which are crucial to Alpine's success. Their skill comes from both business acumen and the experience gained over years of working for a dominant player in the graphics industry. Whether wrapping an entire VIA Rail car in only two days or managing Alectra Utilities' time-critical 750-vehicle re-brand, these individuals work diligently to ensure that Alpine's customers remain satisfied and competitive.

Challenges

Although Alpine's sustained success is partly due to its ability to maintain a steady workflow, installing graphics is a seasonal business (fewer graphics are installed during the Canadian winter) and largely contract based. For this reason, workflow remains an ongoing challenge for all graphics manufacturers, including Alpine.

A second challenge that Alpine deals with is the need for qualified workers, especially those with experience

in the right skilled trades for manufacturing graphics. The pool of such individuals is not large and finding people who are the right fit at Alpine can be difficult. The company overcomes this challenge by taking certain initiatives to help attract new employees and retain its current ones, such as hosting company barbecues, hiring locally, being located in a community which is easy to commute to, and offering competitive salaries.

Prospects

In both the short and long term, Alpine will continue relying on the premium project management business strategy that has brought it so much success. Another aspect of the business that will not change moving forward is its commitment to the local community. For many years, Alpine has sponsored hockey teams, school robotics competitions, and various local charities. Alpine's staff members recognize that Ontario continues to be a great place to live, work, and do business, and that by being involved in the community, they can help keep it that way.

The team at Alpine realizes that most trends in the industry will come directly from its customers. Accordingly, the company works intensively with customers and responds to their needs, making it well aware of the directions that stakeholders are going in. By maintaining its reputation as a first-class project manager, Alpine will be the first company that customers approach for trusted advice and well-planned implementation when they are looking to try something new.

As Middleton and MacRitchie each note, the graphics industry has expanded over the years to include non-traditional wrapping applications like bridges, automated teller machines, interior walls and windows, electrical boxes, and many others. Customers are realizing that graphics are more affordable than painting, can offer both short and long-term applications and can provide more aesthetically appealing solutions. An example of an interesting project that Alpine completed in exterior graphics is wrapping post boxes for Canada Post with anti-graffiti graphics, which can be quickly and effectively cleaned when graffitied. Alpine expects such new, compelling applications to increase as more people become aware of the capabilities and benefits of graphics—and when they do, this outstanding company will be ready to capitalize on the opportunity.