

FASTSIGNS of Windsor

FastSigns of Windsor offers full-service solutions in graphic design, signs, promotional products and custom solutions to fit every clients' marketing needs.

Headquarters	2591 Howard Avenue, Windsor, Ontario, N8X 3W4
Year Established	2000
NAICS	339950 - Sign manufacturing
Employees	-
Major Expansions	N/A
Exports	N/A
Parent Company	FASTSIGNS International
Other Locations	Headquarters - Texas

It all started with two friends who wanted to fulfill a dream of owning and running a business together. In 2000, Donna Bilodeau and Jackie Raymond realized that vision by taking over the existing FastSigns Windsor location. FastSigns is an international franchise providing sign solutions at each of its 675 locations across nine different countries. With their shared backgrounds in customer service, management, graphic design and printing, the two friends were excited about the challenge and freedom that business ownership provided. Quickly, they learned that this experience would put their skills to the test.

For years, with just two other employees, Donna and Jackie poured all of their time and energy into growing FastSigns. Donna focused on the production side of the business while Jackie split her time managing sales during the day and designing in the evenings. The reward for their hard work was achieving \$189,000 in sales during their first year. With sales growing steadily, the 2008 recession presented a unique learning opportunity. As they watched the lines at the local malls thin out and experienced a sudden silencing of their office phones by an unseen force, Donna and Jackie focused on running an extremely lean and efficient operation. Their relentless pursuit of learning, improvement, and steadfast faith in one another soon brought them out of the recession and placed them in the position of reaching almost \$1,000,000 in sales for 2017. Throughout this process, these co-owners learned to thrive under pressure and serve as each other's foundation and support.

The FastSigns franchise model allows the franchisee and its small business owners to benefit from the branding, supplier relationships, R&D, training, legal, and accounting strengths of the parent company. This streamlined model allows owners like Donna and Jackie to dedicate more time and energy to driving growth while maintaining the focus of their business. When you go to FastSigns Windsor, Donna and Jackie

want to know what your business challenges are and will help you to become a more profitable operation with their marketing approach.

Multi-national corporations like Apple are known for their streamlined and minimal product lines. FastSigns Windsor takes the opposite approach, offering a wide range of products and services to provide custom solutions to clients. FastSigns' niche is in full-colour graphics, particularly donor recognition displays, but they are growing rapidly in their accessibility product lines such as braille and tactile signs. Additionally, customers can enlist the team at FastSigns to help with interior décor, promotional products, print and mail, and signs and graphics. All graphics are done in-house, which aligns with the company's focus on serving as a one-stop shop for top-quality holistic marketing solutions. Looking to the future, FastSigns is doubling its efforts into diversifying its product mix by adding more digital and static signage options.

Quality service is the major differentiating factor for FastSigns. As the company continues to grow, Donna and Jackie are always looking for ways to increase sales volume while maintaining the high standards their reputation represents. Thus, they have been looking into methods that would improve operational efficiency, such as leveraging centralized resources provided by the FastSigns parent company, learning from shared institutional knowledge, and implementing a paperless system. These solutions help break down information silos and facilitate better sharing of best practices and learning amongst its employees. Another change to be adopted includes being more proactive with market research, understanding industry cycles, and increase pre-call planning are also contributing to improved client acquisition and retention.

Providing quality service is only effective if it meets customers' needs. Over the years, FastSigns Windsor continues to pay close attention to the problems its customers are trying to solve and strives to provide the right solutions at the right time. Their largest market has always been the large manufacturing plants of companies such as Siemens and Chrysler where they create graphics for signs on the plant floors.

The 2008 recession taught FastSigns the importance of constant evolution, leading the company to diversify into the education and healthcare markets. For example, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) provided a new market opportunity for FastSigns to provide braille signage to various businesses and institutions. FastSigns' customers value high customization when it comes to their signage, as well as consultative expertise regarding incorporation of these products into their marketing strategies. All FastSigns' employees are cross-trained to understand the entire production process, which enables sale consultations to deliver the best, on-budget solutions to serve clients' needs.

As important as understanding customers' needs are, Donna and Jackie place an equal emphasis on their employees. Not only are employees cross-trained to provide added-value services and build strong relationships with clients, but also the co-owners have created an employee-centric culture where the company stands behind its employees and the work they do. FastSigns stands firmly by its belief that "employees are our best assets". Every morning at FastSigns begins with a touchpoint meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page and ready to tackle the day's challenges together. The company looks for candidates with a graduate diploma from an accredited college. New trainees are required to complete a full suite of training from the University of FastSigns before starting their roles. The company takes employees from all backgrounds and teaches them the skills they need. Out-of-town vendor training is another part of the training regimen for FastSigns employees. FastSigns Windsor also partners with local colleges to provide internships for interested students.

Subsidies and grants dedicated to employee training provided by the government have contributed to the growth of FastSigns Windsor. These government grants have helped provide FastSigns employees with

training in vital skills including bookkeeping and other competencies.

With two community-minded owners, FastSigns Windsor itself is heavily invested in supporting and giving back to the Windsor community. From participating in Chamber of Commerce events to providing feedback to City of Windsor signage bylaws, supporting the annual CIBC Run for the Cure, sponsoring local baseball teams, assisting Habitat for Humanity, and collecting toys for Sparky's Toy Drive, FastSigns Windsor tirelessly supports the people and the city that made its success possible.

So what's next for Donna and Jackie? The continued satisfaction of their customers is their top priority while ensuring FastSigns' sustainable, long-term growth. However, with each owner investing nearly two decades into their business, Donna and Jackie would like to continue building their team so that they can share more of their responsibilities. This will allow them to spend more time with their families, travel, and go into their communities to develop more relationships so that they provide even better services and solutions to the clients who have relied on them all these years.