

# Behlmann Sign and Graphics Florissant, MO

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## DuPont™ Cromaprint™ Digital Printing System Inspires New Directions at Sign Firm

### New Technology Promotes Innovation

When you hear Behlmann Sign and Graphics, the traditional mix of layout and lettering for window displays, plastic boards, banners, magnetic and vehicle signage all come to mind. These conventional offerings still remain the foundation of this successful, 12-year-old family-run company in Florissant, MO, just outside St. Louis. Yet something remarkable occurred last year when the firm acquired a new DuPont™ Cromaprint™ 22UV flatbed/roll digital inkjet printing system. "Certain unique attributes of the DuPont system inspired a surge of creativity that resulted in opening new markets and applications outside traditional sign making," says managing partner Jeff Behlmann, who with his father, Harry, two brothers and sister, runs the enterprise.

Today, these novel uses are literally opening profitable new doors to the Behlmans that have a long family history of being opened-minded and opportunistic.

#### Dairyman To Sign Maker in One Generation

The family's business history lays the groundwork for embracing new ideas. "My father was a dairyman who for 16 years operated various local retail stores selling a regionally popular yogurt," Behlmann says. "Sales were good, but to save money, he personally designed and produced 3x4 foot point-of-purchase banners and signs to hang in each stores' large windows. After many compliments on his signage skills, he decided to act on his talent, selling the yogurt stores, and investing in his own sign and graphics business."

It was a big change for the Behlmans. But with Jeff, his brother Tim and sister Mickey supporting him, Harry Behlmann acquired a small sign shop in 1995. Just six years later, the shop was so profitable that a new 4,500 square-foot building was acquired allowing significantly more office space, a custom sign fabrication/wide-format printing area, and a large indoor bay for truck and vehicle lettering. "Space is a great thing!" says Behlmann.

Two large-format solvent printers and one aqueous unit were acquired for all printing, but it was the recent addition of the Cromaprint® 22UV with its vibrant colors, highly stable UV cure ink, and ability to quickly switch between roll and flat printing surfaces up to 86 inches (2.2 m) that have really helped the firm branch out.



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### A Surprise Development

"We initially chose the Cromaprint™ 22UV because of its flexibility, and DuPont's long history and expertise in inkjet systems. We also knew the color gamut and performance of the DuPont UV ink, especially white, would give us a competitive edge in the marketplace" Behlmann says. "Additionally, the support by DuPont has been incredible, not only from a service standpoint, but also having knowledgeable personnel I can consult with on ideas around possible new projects. At first, we didn't appreciate how the Cromaprint™ system could help us enter and win in new markets."

The system was first used to print direct to 1/8 inch thick PVC to produce 4x8 foot point-of-purchase signs for a major telecommunications retailer, a good repeat customer. Similar signs were also made on 84 inch wide scrim (vinyl) outdoor banners for a regional luxury high-rise builder. Other large commissions involved printing direct to substrates like 1/2 inch thick MOD plywood for area realtors.

Each customer wanted high-end digital photography and sharp, colorful graphics on their projects versus simple text on a neutral background. And each sign's color and clarity held up well as weeks and months went by. Then, some of Behlmann's staff—designers Jason and Jennifer, and installer Matt—asked to try something different.

Recalls Behlmann, "I was stunned when they wanted to remove the 2 inch thick, steel front door on our building, take off all the hinges and knobs, and run it through the Cromaprint™ 22UV, printing a jungle animal landscape on it. But since the unit easily switches from roll-to-flat surfaces in minutes, and could accommodate the door's depth, width and length, I agreed. After all, we have a tradition of trying new ideas." After measuring and designing the photo-quality graphic in PDF, the team slowly fed the door through the 22UV, allowing extra time for the UV inks to cure than for traditional substrates. No laminating or varnishing was needed. And the results were astounding. "Customers, visitors and passerby now gave a second look to our brightly colored door with lions, zebras, giraffes and other animals seemingly peering out of the shop," said Behlmann. "The graphics were so lifelike and clear that people asked if we had a still-life artist paint them."

"—The possibilities are endless!"



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Inspired, the firm then purchased some steel doors to test print a variety of wood grain patterns using the 22UV. A newly hired sales representative loaded these prototypes onto a truck and called on a regional retail door supplier. The eventual result was an order for 600 doors/month with a variety of woods and patterns printed on each. "This application was later expanded to ceiling and floor tiles for even more new business," adds Behlmann.

Behlmann's newest venture involves using the 22UV to print colors, graphics or patterns to wood, metal or plastic tables. Behlmann says this application opens up trade show and new point-of-purchase display business. "We've even printed an art deco skyscraper graphic on a long cherry table used in a local company's board room," he adds. "We developed a technique using the 22UV that mimics the feel of an embossed illustration while retaining the table's wood grain beneath for a subtle but noticeable image. Impressive!" New applications keep coming once customers see these results, says Behlmann. "They get excited over new possibilities to make their businesses and properties visually unique. Utilizing the Cromaprint™ system and with the support of the DuPont team, the possibilities for us are endless!"

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