

Going NATIONAL

Secrets to running
a successful fleet
graphics business.

"To be successful you gotta be having fun."

— Jed Sheppard, NGSi President

By DUANE EAST



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Canada-based National Graphic Solutions is a full-service fleet graphics firm that has taken its business to an international level.



One of the earliest uses for large-format digital graphics was to cover the sides of delivery trucks with spectacular images. Breaking into the fleet graphics business was, and still is, the holy grail for many digital print producers. While thousands of production houses handle some local fleet accounts, very few have managed to successfully spread their tentacles fully across North America. And the big national accounts don't want to hire a different supplier in every

city; they want one solution for their entire fleet.

National Graphic Solutions Inc., based on Annacis Island near Vancouver, B.C., Canada, is one of the few companies to have made that important transition from regional to international supplier. From its headquarters in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, NGSI has grown from humble beginnings in 1993 into one of the largest fleet graphics firms in North America. What are the secrets of their success? How is it that they succeeded where so many

others have failed? NGSI President Jed Sheppard recently shared some of that wisdom with *Digital Graphics* magazine.

ONGOING TRAINING

NGSI believes that a highly trained staff is one of a biggest assets. Sean Sheppard (yes he is Jed's little brother) is an internationally known graphics installation trainer who shares his secrets by giving seminars for 3M and other manufacturers. Having an in-house asset like Sean is invaluable, as he can provide





Fleet graphics aren't just about large trailers. Fleets can consist of any number of different vehicle types. (photos by Adam O'Shea)



National Graphic Solutions Inc.

ongoing training for the installation crew.

But it is not only the installation crew that gets trained. No expense is spared in this area. Everyone at NGSi attends regular courses and seminars geared to their particular areas of expertise, making them one of the best trained corporate groups in the industry.

HAPPY EMPLOYEES

Companies like NGSi that spend a lot of time and money on staff training also worry

about staff retention. And the best way to keep employees is to keep them happy.

Corporate philosophy relies on an easy-going relationship between staff and management. No heavy-handed top-down management style here; just a lot of trust and respect. Couple that with top-tier medical, dental and retirement plans, and you end up with a group of happy, loyal, long-term employees.

Happy employees also mean happy customers. After all, the client interface with the company staff, and they represent





When you are in the fleet graphics business, your own trucks and vans have to be flawless. NGSi replaces their company vehicle graphics regularly.



NGSi keeps spare parts kits for all of its fleet clients as a part of their customer service plan.



Professional brochures and client promotional items, like hats, T-shirts and model trucks, all help NGSi to promote its name and grow its business.

the corporate image. NGSi believes that employee relations are just as important as customer relations.

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

Another unique aspect of National Graphic Solutions' success is its vertical integration. They believe in total product concept and can handle all aspects of a national fleet program using in-house facilities. A typical fleet program will begin with staff marketing consultants attending client meetings to determine the project requirements. Then the creative department gets involved, with designers and an in-house photographer. The sophisticated pre-press department can supply color proofs to satisfy even the most Pantone-fussy client.

A whole array of large-format Mimaki



inkjets are housed in a clean, well-ventilated room, providing the engine that powers the company.

It's common that some trucks in a fleet might not be in the best shape. Not a problem for NGSI. They take care of body and paint work needed to bring the vehicles up to top quality standards before the graphics are applied. And finally, NGSI has top-notch 3M-certified installation crews located all over North America.

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LOGISTICS

A large national fleet graphics program is a nightmare of logistics. Hundreds or even thousands of trucks located in almost as many locations must be identified, measured, repaired and wrapped. Each vehicle has to be individually scheduled and serviced. NGSI considers this to be one of its strongest points. Managers devised systems that make these complicated logistics easy to understand and implement. And they can be implemented 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

ONLY THE BEST

Another key to success is an insistence on quality products. Specializing in 3M quality matched inks, substrates and





NGSI can take a fleet program from creative through to finished product.

The firm serves clients all over North America. Each client gets a territory map to help in implementation.



Wrapping large trailers with full-color digital graphics is the core of fleet graphics business. (photo by Adam O'Shea)



laminates, NGSi takes great pride in the longevity of finished products. They provide a complete warranty for the first five years and a pro-rated one for the next two years. They are also unique in that they print all of their fleet graphics at 720 dpi, for close-up quality all the time.

NGSi is also a 3M-authorized warranty shop and can handle any potential warranty issues quickly and efficiently.

GO THE EXTRA MILE

The customer is king at National. We've heard this many times and on many slogans, but at NGSi everyone buys into it, from the president to the janitor. The highest quality products, top level services, 24/7 implementation and excellent organization are all admirable corporate traits, but there are other, less tangible forms of client relations. There are also the myriad of small things that NGSi does, like offering T-shirts and hats, or the scale model trucks with the customer graphics on it. It is about friendship and respect.

HARD WORK

So why has NGSi taken North America by storm? There are no secrets here that everybody didn't already know. It all boils down to several key factors- a good attitude, attention to detail and old-fashioned hard work. But a select few companies have integrated those philosophies more successfully than their competitors have and have grown to become international success stories. ©



Spread The Word

Making in-house promotional items for fun and profit.

By Duane Fast



*“The codfish lays ten thousand eggs,
The homely hen lays one.
The codfish never cackles
To tell you what she’s done.
And so we scorn the codfish,
While the humble hen we prize,
Which only goes to show you
That it pays to advertise.”*

—Anonymous

National Graphics Solutions Inc. (NGSI) is a fleet graphics company that believes in promotions. Company president Jed Sheppard personally supervises the choices. Hat and t-shirt sets are very popular with their customers. NGSI buys them from a textile supplier, but screen printer and digital printers could easily print their own.

They print their own fine art reproductions on canvas and have them professionally framed. These classic works of art are highly prized by favored clients.

But their most popular promotional item is the model trucks. These high-end die cast models feature each clients' own vehicle graphics. It is a perfect way to cement a relationship with a continuing customer.



Everybody needs more advertising. Advertising brings in more clients. But we not only need more advertising for new clients, we need to ensure that we are not forgotten by our existing customers. One of the best ways to keep their attention is to have some regular promotional pieces on hand to distribute. This promo will also be more relevant if the print shop has created it themselves.

PRINT IT

Promotional items should be something that clients will want to keep. Humor always works well. Stickers and fridge magnets are popular ways to achieve this. And if a series of desirable, cute promos can be created, clients will want to collect them all. That makes the salesperson a welcome figure in the customer's office when he goes to drop off this month's special item. Some ideas for a themed series might be vacations, sports, family life, holidays or historical figures.

Calendars are also very popular, especially magnetic pages that people can mount to their fridges or filing cabinets. And it is a perfect "monthly" item that gives salespeople an excuse to call on clients.

Printing these promotional items doesn't have to strain the budget either. There is always a significant amount of wasted space when printing client projects. By using the nesting feature in your RIP, you can easily fill the unused space on decal or printable magnetic runs with small promotional items. You don't realize how quickly this pile of promo material grows. A print-and-cut machine, such as those sold by Roland DGA,



Fine art Canvas Prints

Promotional Items



Die-cast Model Trucks

It's always a good idea to give clients choices when offering a promo as personal as a painting that will hang on their wall. Cars, pets, travel scenery and flowers are all good places to start. The final result when printed on the appropriate media is strikingly realistic.

makes life easier for these applications as well.

GO FOR IT

National Graphics Solutions Inc. (NGSI), Delta, BC, Canada, is a graphic service provider that takes promotions seriously. Company president Jed Sheppard personally supervises the choices. Hat and t-shirt sets are very popular with their customers. NGSI buys them from a textile supplier, but screen printers and digital printers could easily print their own.

On promotional item that NGSI prints themselves is fine art. Inkjet printer on canvas and professionally framed, these classic works of art are highly prized by their favored tier-one clients.

But NGSI is in the fleet graphics business and its most popular promotional item is the model truck. These high-end die cast models feature graphics from each clients' own advertising program. It is a perfect way to cement a relationship with a continuing customer.

CREATE IT

Snap Art from Alien Skin is a piece of software that allows ordinary digital photos to be turned into "works

of art" that are perfect for promotional giveaways. It functions as a plug-in module for Photoshop, Elements or Corel PhotoPaint.

Any type of artwork can be replicated as well, such as oil painting, watercolor, ink, pastels and many others. Using this software allows digital print shops to be creative in their offerings. And there is no better way to publicize a new service than to offer promotional prints.

It's always a good idea to give clients choices when offering a promo as personal as a painting that will hang on their wall. Cars, pets, travel scenery and flowers are all good places to start. The final result when printed on the appropriate media is strikingly realistic. Oil paintings could be printed on canvas and watercolors on Arches digital print media.

Special clients often need more personalized promos. If the salesperson see a family photo on the customer's desk, they can ask to borrow it for a day to create a personalized surprise. The photo can be turned into a painting that will take pride of place in the client's office for many years to come. No other promotional piece will have that kind of staying power or that kind of personal connection.

Promotional Items

Floor graphics can be another great promotional item. They can provide your client with a unique “welcome mat”. Floor graphics are an exciting way to communicate messages in high traffic areas and stop consumers in their tracks. A few people have jumped over a floor graphic with the bold image of a newspaper printed onto it, thinking it was the real thing!

Floor graphics are highly effective in retail merchandising by directing customers to specific products.

A fabulous item for product launches and advertising specials!

Retail outlets are not the only venue for floor graphics - museums, airports, nightclubs, shopping centres.

Exhibition halls were made for floor graphics a must in providing directions or promoting your products.

Other uses include health and safety warnings in factories or temporary branding of sports events by sponsors.

All in all, whether it's floor graphics or model trucks the idea is to have a promotional piece that your existing clients and new clients will remember you by and when they pick up the phone to place an order, it's you that they call.



Brochures, Baseball Hats and T-Shirts in various colours

A few people have jumped over a floor graphic with the bold image of a newspaper printed onto it, thinking it was the real thing!