

## Profile

# SignKiosk

Marrickville, NSW, Australia

By Tom McLlrot

**Shop size:** 5500 sq. ft. **Ages:** Greg 48, Brett 46, Shane 41, Moyle 25, Michael 24  
**Graphics equipment:** two Epson GS6000 printers, Summa S160D Cutter, GBC 64 Laminator, Tekcel CNC Router, Gretag Spectolino/Spectroscan for color calibration, PC and Mac computers **Software:** FlexiSign, Signlab, Corel, Xara Xtreme, Ergosoft RIP **Web site:** [www.signkiosk.com](http://www.signkiosk.com)

The 5500 sq. ft. shop that is home to SignKiosk in Marrickville, NSW, Australia, is the result of four generations of sign making. Built on traditional skills, the business relies on everything from gilding on glass to state-of-the-art digital printing to service its clients, who have come to count on SignKiosk to handle any project thrown at them.



Greg, Brett, Moyle and Michael

Three of the shop's staff of five are brothers Greg, Brett and Shane Bolan whose father and grandfather were signwriters before them. They're joined by Brett's sons, Moyle and Michael.

Greg and Brett came up through the traditional sign writing apprenticeship program

and Shane is a veteran tube bender. As technology made its way into the industry, they chose to use it to keep their business viable.

"Many signwriters had a negative attitude towards technology from the start," says Brett, "but we couldn't wait to put it to work. We've not abandoned one for the other; we try to take advantage of the strengths of both. In the sign business, you have to be open and press yourself into new areas. You have to be a cabinetmaker and welder and a designer and whatever. If you don't grab the new tools and show what sign work can be done with them, somebody else will."

Brett says they find it ironic that sign people who came into the business with vinyl cutting are often resistant to digital printing—much like those whose roots were in traditional sign writing and resisted vinyl cutting.

Customers have changed as a result of technology. Many expect to see the sign before it's made—maybe even in a photo of their storefront or vehicle. If you can't satisfy this need, you stand to lose a certain amount of business.

"Pricing has become more aggressive, too," says Brett. "A lot of customers are looking for the low-cost option now, saying they'll 'get a better sign when times are better.' We can't compete with that using old production techniques."

**Changes in digital printing** In the past 15 years, the shop has had four digital printers. Greg says it was good training, but there were lots of hassles along the way. Last year, they bought an Epson GS6000.

"The technology is really there now with







this one.” he says. “It really liberates us in our designs. We just know we can print anything we want and it will look good. Before we avoided ‘problem colors,’ but not anymore.

“The GS6000 gives us the quality of the 12-color water-based printers,” says Greg, “and great durability. It’s changed our business—we can print anything, even backlit graphics. There are none of the color limitations of cut vinyl film.

“There’s no problem with matching PMS colors, or any color for that matter. With past printers, we had to use cut vinyl when we needed powerful colors for lettering, and combine it with a print. Now we can print it all.

“I’m so confident that I haven’t even printed

a test sample for a job yet. I create the file, check it and print it. I never worry how it’s going to come out.”

With past printers, cleaning and service was ongoing. Greg used to plan on spending an hour a day cleaning their previous printer—losing the equivalent of one day per week on maintenance. He says that’s been eliminated with the GS6000, along with problems like ink starvation. The prints are proving to be durable, too.

“We print a lot of banners for the back of trucks for Coca-Cola and they change about every month. With our old printer, we noticed that the banners were scratched and beginning to fade a bit by the time they came back in. That’s not so with the Epson.”

What do they print? “Lots of outdoor signage—banners, vehicles, wraps, backlit signs, flat panels, even A-frame sidewalk signs—plus some trade show signage and displays. We do a lot of glass graphics, too—panels and panels of windows. That’s because we get no visible banding or distracting patterns. You don’t see any of those strange patterns on a window like you can with other printing.”

**Marketing their work** The Bolans find that their Web site is an essential tool for marketing their work—particularly the digital printing. Theirs is a very large country with a population that is quite spread out. The site helps them reach a broader market.

Over the past two years they’ve put a lot of time and effort into developing and improving their Web site. The goal has been to show prospective customers the possibilities. They tried using Google AdWords to increase site traffic, but found that wasn’t as effective as putting the time into making the site a com-



prehensive display of what the shop does. Lately the focus has been making it easy for people to use. “We find a lot of customers don’t really know what they want or need,” says Brett. “The site shows what we can do. We’ve got a lot of graphic designers here in Australia, too, and we do a lot of work for them. That usually comes from word-of-mouth. Once they hear of us, the site shows them what we can do. It’s a powerful marketing tool.”

The Bolans say they work hard to communicate with the customer at their level. They say that since the customers aren’t sign designers, it’s not fair to expect them to understand what really goes into the work.

“We try to find what the customer wants and needs,” Brett says, “then show them how we can help them get there. I think communication is the hardest part. We take the customer’s vision and transform that into a sign or creative that works visually, and is do-able.”

**Working together** They find that working together—brothers, uncles, sons and nephews—has few challenges and plenty of benefits. Each has their strengths and they try to capitalize on that.

“No one is really the boss,” says Brett. “Each has his spot, and all of us want to be here. If one of us won the lottery tomorrow, he’d probably still come back to work. It’s just part of us.”

Brett says Michael has strong computer skills and likes shop management more than the rest of them, while Moyle is a very skilled hands-on production man. Shane handles the neon work. Greg’s years of experience mastering design and the digital mediums gives the shop a sure footing in the Australian sign industry.

“And me,” says Brett, “I guess I’m what you’d call the mortar—I get both blunt and sharp technologies and join it all together. Sometimes with nails! [Laughing.]



Talking with the Bolans, you get the sense that there’s a lot of laughing that goes along with all the work. The difference of their team-like approach shows in just about every aspect of how they run the shop.

“We don’t really have set hours,” says Brett, “which is a big difference from many shops—where people would likely be keeping track of their hours and waiting to go home. It’s usually the opposite here. We often have to tell each other it’s time to call it a day.”

You can see more of the Bolan’s work at [www.signkiosk.com](http://www.signkiosk.com).