

Add the Versatility of a CO2 Laser System

Innovation is the Key

Innovation is the key to your business's success. By offering services that your competitors can not provide, you are able to become a one-stop-shop for far more than just signage. We talked to Mike Dean, Sales and Marketing director of Epilog Laser about how a small format CO2 laser system can help sign businesses expand their product lines.

"Every business dreams of knowing that when a customer walks into your business, you will be able to tell them that you have the ability to complete almost any job in-house. There is nothing more frustrating than having to turn down jobs or send projects to third parties where you can't control the quality or timeframe of the project because you lack the ability to work with a wide variety of materials," said Dean. "CO2 laser systems, like Epilog's Legend EX, TT, and Epilog Mini systems provide the tools to diversify your business and add the services customers are looking for."

Engraveable Materials

According to Dean, versatility is the key benefit of expanding your business with a CO₂ laser. The list of engraveable materials is seemingly never ending. In addition to the traditional materials like wood, acrylic, glass, coated metals, etc, Epilog hears daily from customers who have developed new and unique uses for their laser. Whether it is engraving on a colorful agate stone, inlaying Corian® in wood, or cutting matte board for art projects, the ability to work with so many different materials allows their customers to come up with new and interesting applications constantly.

"The laser manufacturers had equipment that worked with a small number of products," explained Dean. "The consumable suppliers created a wider variety of products once they saw what the lasers were capable of. They also produced products that they said would be great for the laser if the laser manufacturers would make some minor modifications to their equipment. So, in a sense, machine manufactures and consumable manufactures both feed off of, and push each other to make their products better and more versatile. In this industry there has been a very good synergy between the two."

The large number of engraveable products that are compatible with a CO₂ laser are growing every day. Suppliers are providing engraving businesses with new tools to provide customized products for their customers. One of the most exciting new products is Lasertile from 3Score, Inc. The specially made glaze on the tile is laser sensitive, so engraving with a CO₂ laser creates rich black tones that are perfect for photos, text and graphics. LaserTile is a floor quality tile so it is durable and suitable for indoor or outdoor applications.

AlumaMARK™ is a new CO₂ laser engraveable aluminum media that is either silver or gold coated and has the exclusive characteristic of engraving black when exposed to a CO₂ laser beam. The lasered aluminum sheets feel smooth to the touch, the image has impressive resolution quality, and the gold/black or silver/black color combination adds a rich look that is not available with any other CO₂ laser compatible materials.

A great way to expand the number of materials you can engrave is by using CerMark™ metal marking spray. In a simple, three step process you can permanently mark stainless steel, titanium

and chrome with company logos, personalized names and bar codes. Available in a spray can or in a mixable powder, coat the piece you are working with, engrave your image, and wash off the excess. You are left with a permanent black mark that will survive scratching, lubricants, salt water spray and abrasion tests. Adding the ability to engrave metal with a low-cost CO₂ laser is an excellent way to expand your business by targeting manufacturing companies that want to outsource etching logos, P/N's or bar codes on their products.

Dean pointed out that these additional products have helped expand the variety of industries using laser systems. No longer do you just find laser systems in awards and trophy shops. The markets have grown to include architectural model makers, woodworking shops, and many sign businesses.

There are so many different materials that a CO₂ laser works with that Epilog offers potential customers an Applications Lab. This valuable resource allows experienced laser technicians to test customer's materials on various models to find out exactly how the material engraves, the engraving time, and the best laser wattage to achieve the desired results. "With so many different engravable materials available, even the most knowledgeable laser distributors can't keep up with all of the different materials that can be engraved, so the Applications Lab is a great tool for potential laser owners to test the materials they are looking to work with," said Dean.

Developing Technology

As technology has developed, changes in the laser systems are coming quickly. The biggest advances are in speed, image quality, smaller size formats and affordability. The introduction of Epilog's HyperDrive™ technology, which is an integration of software, mechanics and laser technology, has allowed Epilog to produce a broad range of very high performing laser systems at very low prices.

"Epilog has always worked to be the leader in new laser developments," said Dean. "The biggest advantage of Epilog's new technology is speed and image quality." The systems that Epilog produces today are about twice as fast as the systems they sold just a few years ago, and speed translates into profit. If your laser products are in high demand, and you can produce twice as much product with new technology, you should be able to make twice as much profit.

"Our new Epilog Mini laser systems has been a great addition to our product line," said Dean. "It has allowed many businesses to get into laser engraving without a large output of capital." The 18" x 12" engraving area of the Epilog Mini, combined with features like an Integrated Vector Cutting Table and Vacuum Table provide businesses with a great opportunity to move into the laser engraving and cutting field.

Dean explained his suggestions when customers ask when they should buy new equipment. "I tell our customers that they need a compelling reason to buy new equipment. If it's going to improve their business in some way, if it allows them to move ahead (or sometimes, just stay even) with their competition, then it's probably worth it. Although, some people like to buy new equipment just to be on the leading edge of technology."

Easy to Use

The laser system is not only more affordable than you may think; it is also very easy to use. Anyone with a little computer experience can learn to produce simple, professional looking

artwork using CorelDraw in a few hours. Many of Epilog's customers that are first time laser owners are also first time users of CorelDraw.

As an example, the sign at the right (Photo A) was created using an Epilog laser system. By importing a vectorized company logo into CorelDraw, the sign was created in three easy steps using two colors of acrylic. First the "S" shape was selected and printed to the laser. By having the outline of the image set to ".001", the laser knows that this was a line to cut. Using settings from the manual, a speed and power was set in the print driver, then sent over to the laser to be cut out of a yellow acrylic. Next the outer area of the logo was selected and printed using the same settings that were used in step one and cut out of a piece of black acrylic. Finally the two pieces were mounted together.

Summary

Many small and large companies have significantly increased their sign-making business by using laser engravers for promotional signs/displays, badges, industrial signs for use in commercial construction, and many other applications. Almost every person is in the market for laser engraved products. Whether it is an engraved souvenir, a corporate award or a special gift for a family member, at one point or another, everyone has purchased a laser engraved item. One of the biggest challenges that businesses face is taking advantage of the many new technologies that are available to them to provide these services to their customers. Businesses are under a lot of pressure because there are a lot of new and emerging technologies they could use, but they may be afraid they don't have the resources to absorb them. With the new low cost, smaller format laser systems, like the Epilog Mini, businesses are finding a new way to take advantage of the additional revenues that the latest laser technology can bring to their companies by allowing them to expand their product lines and customize their products.