

Finding work beyond your neighborhood

The Internet makes the whole world your market

By Dan Antonelli, President and Chief Creative Officer, KickCharge Creative

The biggest challenge most sign companies have today is trying to be competitive in a tough competitive landscape, which is enabling more and more people to outsource work outside of their local community. For my business, 15 years ago, nearly 85% of my work was located within 30 miles of my business. Today, it's the total opposite, with only 15% of our revenue being derived from clients within New Jersey, and the rest mainly throughout the country and across the globe.

Fifteen years ago, if you had said the majority of our business would be based on designing brands, truck wraps and marketing solutions to people we'd never met, I might have thought you were a little crazy. Even today, the idea of designing a logo and truck wrap for a client in Australia from our office here in New Jersey seems a little crazy.

But that's what's happening in a global economy—even if you're primarily selling your goods in a local one. But why couldn't you sell your work elsewhere? What would it take and how would you go about it?

Excel at something, then market it One of the interesting things that occurred for us is that we became very well known for doing great brands, and then truck wrap designs, for service businesses. I wish I could say it was a planned strategy, but it all really started when I noticed more and more people were interested in retro branding. So I decided to try to market that specialty. Soon enough, we were number one on Google for "Retro Logo Design". Then we did a few heating and air companies with retro brands. And I began to notice that there was a really good market in that vertical—and that tons of people wanted retro brands. So what started out as a novelty became a mainstay source of business for us.

Of course, with the brands, came the truck wraps because every service business needs a truck wrap. Soon enough, we became known as one of the premier commercial wrap design companies. That reputation came from repeated industry exposure in trade magazines and speaking at national trade shows. Of



Larry Williams [Williams Graphics, www.larrywilliamsgraphics.com] has carved out quite a niche in custom automotive illustrations and t-shirt design work—essentially establishing himself as one of the best in this genre. This was done for a client in Tennessee who owns a hot rod shop. This is his personal car. The art became a symbol for his company and was featured on many of his products. Larry also created their official logo.



Another example of Larry's work, which was done for a client in California. The client does all of the screen printing and event sales for the XDRL.

course, publishing a book on branding a small business was a big help.

We continue to market ourselves aggressively in that vertical. We've joined their trade groups and speak at various shows specific to that market. In doing such, we've built a name for us as the go-to agency for branding and truck wraps, in addition to the web and design work we do.

Niche marketing limits competition The nice thing about establishing a niche for yourself is that it limits who your competition is. So when I get a call from someone across the globe to design their logo and truck wrap, I know they've probably already tried to go local and have failed, or they have been unable to find anyone else who can do what we do. As such, we immediately have a distinct advantage over anyone else.

Find your niche When I wanted a sign for my new building, I wish I could have gone local, but I wanted the best in the business to create something amazing for me. So I chose Roger Cox from House of Signs all the way in Colorado. There's a perfect case in point. In my view, his company is one of the best in the world at dimensional signs. I didn't get quotes from anyone else, because my feeling was no one else could do what he and his team do.

The key there, is that if I wanted the best, I literally felt like I had no choice but to hire his company.

What are you the best at? There are certain

people who continue to excel in different aspects of the sign business. They become known as the go-to people for certain types of work. Maybe you're awesome at wall murals. Or maybe it's custom airbrushing and pinstriping. Whatever the case may be, think about what you're great at and then work harder to be even better. The folks who are on top of their game didn't get there by accident—they continue to perfect their craft each and every day. And their dedication to their craft is reflected in the quality they produce.

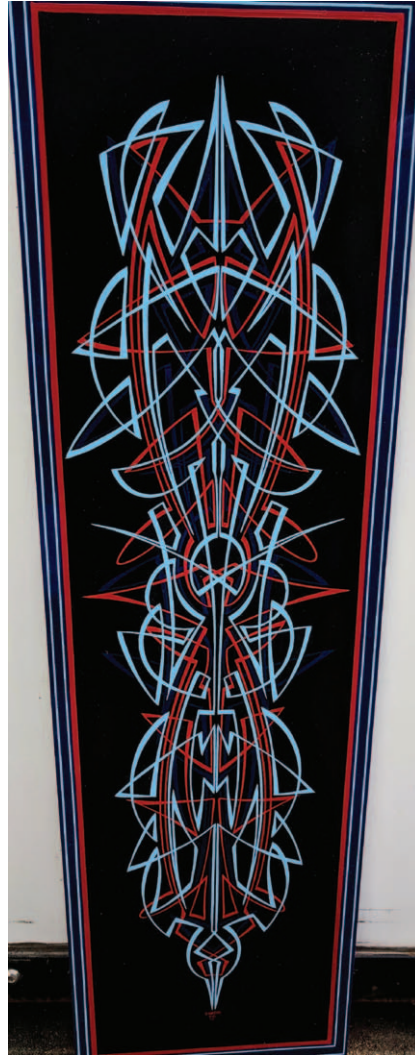
Todd Hanson has established himself as



Colonial and Comfortemp were both clients we met at a trade show for the heating and air conditioning industry. Neither client is local to us, and all communications after first meeting in person at the show were done via phone.



These two panels by Todd Hanson [Hanson Graphix, www.hansondidit.com] were shipped to clients all the way in Australia.



the go-to guy for amazing, hand-painted pinstripping work around the country. Todd ships pinstripping panels and signs all over the globe. He's famous for saying "Worldwide Famous. Locally Unknown." And that's probably true!

Marketing is the bigger piece of the equation

So while your endless pursuit of excellence is admirable, and will certainly make you good at your craft, it's pointless if no one knows about those skills. That's where the marketing comes in.

Facebook: Let's face it, nearly everyone is on Facebook. It's a great place for you to post your work and let people who might not otherwise know you discover who you are and what you do. Use not only your personal page, but related group pages to share some of your work. And, of course, create a business page for your company. Facebook Ads also allow you to target very specific audiences.

• **Pinterest:** Pinterest has become not only a great source of inspiration for many, but also a place to find artists who can produce a style you're looking for. Set up a virtual pinboard there and post examples of your work. We get a lot of work from Pinterest, and it's actually our second highest source of inbound traffic to our site.

• **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn allows you to connect professionally with individuals all over the world. Sharing some of your work there puts you in view of people who may be able to use your services down the road. Additionally, participating on various group pages also keeps your name in front of people who might never have heard of you.

• **Instagram:** This social media platform is perfect for sharing your work and developing an audience of fans. It has good engagement, and by using hashtags, you can potentially get your work in front of a lot of people.

• **Google:** Of course, there's Google. Not only does search engine optimization (SEO) get your work in front of people, but Google image searches can also drive a lot of traffic to your site. Make sure every image on your site and in your site's portfolio are tagged and captioned with relevant keywords you think people will search for.

• **Etsy Store:** Etsy has given everyone an easy platform to sell their art. It takes only minutes to set up, and then people can buy your existing art or request new ones.

• **Publish content:** Publishing content, not only on your site but also for various publications, is a great way to increase your exposure. Editors are always looking for fresh content.

By putting your best work in front of the right audience, you can increase your exposure beyond your local market. It won't happen overnight, but take the steps to build an audience and you never know where your next job might come from! **SC**



Dan Antonelli owns KickCharge Creative (formerly Graphic D-Signs, Inc.) in Washington, New Jersey. His latest book, *Building a Big Small Business Brand*, joins his *Logo Design for Small Business I and II*. He can be reached at dan@kickcharge.com. Dan also offers consulting and business coaching services to sign companies. For more information, visit danantonelli.com. On Instagram: [@danantonelli_kickcharge](https://www.instagram.com/danantonelli_kickcharge).