

My Journey to Success

This is a recap of my journey from a career in law enforcement to a late life career in garment decoration and sales and finally into custom rhinestone design and template creation.

After retiring and looking around, I opened an auto repair shop...boy was that drudgery! And too many times trying to explain to a customer why his motor was shot. I wanted to do something that was fun, creative and made people smile.

The early days

In 1997, I started in sublimation of garments and hard surface products and found it rewarding, but still lacking what I wanted. I had purchased a vinyl cutter that I used for heat press vinyl applications. I saw that I could use a desktop rotary engraver to drill the holes for rhinestones and brush in the stones for a completed design. It was almost love at first sight. It all looked very easy and quick. But what I found out later, the demonstration only showed small designs, one, maybe two words and it was extremely slow. After purchase and practice, I found the rotary engraving method impractical in a production environment. A normal design of about 7x7...not full design, but just outline and single line fonts would take up to 40-50 minutes to complete. In addition, it was messy with the stuff that was drilled out. It had to go someplace and even with a vacuum attached, a lot ended up on the desk/floor. This was not a lot of fun!



Finding Digital Art Solutions

I had been a customer of Digital Art Solutions out of Tempe, AZ and stopped at their booth at a show...just to visit my money... and saw Craig Mertens, the President, demonstrating the technique they developed for producing rhinestone transfers with a vinyl cutter and a material they developed. Not only was it faster, cleaner, easier but even an old man like myself could do it. I already had a vinyl cutter and I was already using Digital Art Solutions software for designing and cutting my vinyl graphics. I upgraded my software to SmartCutPro 2, purchased the Stone Stencil Rhinestone Heat Transfer system and proceeded to learn the system. I hit a snag with my existing cutter. It was the most popular model from a major Japanese supplier. I found that just because a model is popular, does not mean it will perform well. My "popular" cutter was not capable of producing precise holes in the stencil material, it was slow and it could not process long lengths of material. The output was very inconsistent, so I sold my cutter on Ebay and purchased the GCC vinyl cutter. Digital Art Solutions sells GCC cutters and this is what they recommended for rhinestone stencil production. The GCC cutter made all the difference in the world, it was faster, easier to operate, very precise and the material tracking was amazing. There are other cutters available, but I have yet to find a better machine for the money or a company that provided a better training and support experience than Digital Art Solutions.



Switching to the GCC Cutter

After switching to the GCC cutter, I was on my way. Designs that took 40-50 minutes to make with the desktop rotary engraver, now take less than 10 minutes. The Smart Cut Pro software and GCC cutter are working seamlessly and I could not be happier. I have customers from Florida to Washington State. The only challenges I have experienced are from my own "Operator Error". The Stone Stencil System and GCC cutter have made all the difference for me. With this cutter and software, I have done several items for weddings, special occasions and one-offs that the client cannot find any other way. I have produced apparel for reunions, schools, fund raisers and corporate events.

Support and Training

With GCC and Digital Art Solutions, all one needs is the initiative to take on the sales and marketing. Digital Art Solutions has taught me marketing skills, not just the production side of the business. They support their product with videos, webinars, phone support and they just recently held their first 'Bling Camp'. Bling Camp was a truly awesome experience and I know that this has already helped me to take my business to another level. It was well worth the time and money for those who attended.

Graphics and Software are the Key

With the Stone Stencil System, the GCC cutter, I have recouped my investment many times over. The clip art and template packages that are offered by Digital Art Solutions are a godsend to those of us who are a bit graphically challenged. My software allows me to take the DAS design templates and create completely custom graphics that my customer's can't find anywhere else. This technique has proven very profitable, I have been able to open new accounts and sell more to my existing accounts. Producing graphics is the number one challenge in a rhinestone apparel decoration business. With the DAS software and art products, I have a huge advantage over my competition. A rhinestone design that might take me several hours to produce in CorelDRAW or Illustrator, I can produce in less than 10 minutes with the Smart Cut Pro software. Because I can quickly produce custom designs, it's practical for me to produce a sample or proof. Personalized samples had made all the difference in signing on new clients.

Summing it Up

In summary, I have found a combination that works for me. Support after the sale is superb and the documentation provided is outstanding. In just a year, Digital Art Solution has re-issued their training and marketing guide for the system, even though the original one was very good. This just shows they are constantly improving their system. After attending Bling Camp, I can tell that the Digital Art Solutions employees are just as committed as the owners, Craig and Nicole. It is nice to know that I can get training and support when needed. I am more convinced than ever that I made the right choice going with the GCC cutter and the Stone Stencil System.

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