

Profile

Rich Hailstone

Canton, Ohio

Shop name: Dr. Wraps® **Shop size:** 2000 sq. ft. **Age:** 40 **Graphics equipment:** Mimaki JV3-130SPII printer, Mimaki CG-130FX cutter, Anagraph AE-75E cutter and a Royal Sovereign RSC-1400C laminator **Web site:** www.drwraps.com

There are three of us here at Dr. Wraps®—my wife, Debbie, our good friend Mike Greavu, and me—and we really enjoy what we do. We focus specifically on vehicle wraps. To us that's the most exciting part of the industry today.



I've been in the sign industry for 21 years, and Mike has about the same amount of experience as I do. We grew up together and went to high school together, and in the past two decades have seen a lot of changes in the industry. Right after high school I got a job at a local sign shop, and then about six months later Mike got a job at the same sign shop. So we worked together there for about seven years until 1997, which is when I left that job and started my own shop in my basement.

At the time I was going by the name of Custom Signs & Graphics and ran the shop from my home until 2008. I didn't have

a printer, of course, just a vinyl cutter. Nearly all of my work was vehicle lettering. Then when I got the printer in 2008, that's when I got really crazy about wrapping. We moved the shop at the same time, so there were a lot of changes.

I changed the name of my shop, too, due to a dispute with a shop in another town over the name. As it turned out, the name change was one of the best things I could have done. I had done some reading about marketing and branding. I was getting better at the business side of what I do, and I felt like my business was still small enough that a name change wouldn't hurt.

One of the most important decisions we make as a business owner is the name of our business. The more I thought about it, I realized that Custom Signs & Graphics wasn't really a name at all, but rather a description of the service we offer. Dr. Wraps gave me something to create a brand from. Later, I called the guy at the other shop and thanked him.

Our shop is small—2000 square feet. It is



divided in half; one half is office and production, and the other half is the 20-by-50-ft. bay where we do wrap installations. I technically had more production space in my basement, but now I have a legitimate business atmosphere. The main thing I needed, of course, was the bay. That was a must.

I never advertise Dr. Wraps as a sign shop, since that's not what we're about. I've been doing this for 21 years, so of course I can make a banner or a sign. The same machine that prints a wrap can easily print a banner, so we end up doing some of that work. Usually it's an add-on to the vehicle wrap, something extra that the customer needs. It doesn't make any sense to turn some of that work away, but it's nice to be able to pick and choose what types of sign work I want to do.

My bread and butter has always been doing vehicles. In the early days, I went to the truck sales places and lettered owner-operator semis. I liked not worrying about stocking substrates and that sort of thing.

We run Flexi software on both PCs and Macs, with output going to the Mimaki JV3 printer or the cutter. I'm really interested in watching what happens with the whole latex thing, so I'll probably hold off on making any upgrade decisions until that's all settled. I'm not in a hurry to upgrade anyway.

We don't do any outsourcing. My philosophy has always been that if I can't do it myself, I shouldn't be messing with it. I care about my clients, so I just refer them to somebody rather than making myself



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“Maybe we can do without that background....”

When it comes to design I try to prioritize the message. The name of the business is usually most important, so that and the logo have to be easy to read. The message—what the client is selling—that’s important, too, of course.

The contact information is the last thing. Many clients just want to direct people to their website. We don’t use our phone number on our shop trucks, either, just our Web address. The less that has to be on there, the more likely you are to get a pleasing design.

It can be tough when a client insists on including some sort of photograph or artwork or background, but that’s something that everyone who does wraps has to deal with. I’ve joked with Debbie and Mike that maybe there should be some kind of disclaimer in our portfolio for those jobs, something like “This client insisted on . . .”

But it’s just part of being a commercial artist. We are, in a sense, paid to satisfy our customers. To me, a lot of it is learning how to deal with people and give them your professional opinion, but ultimately it’s up to them. It’s about communication and showing them that you’re trying to get them the most effective use of their advertising dollars.—RH

a middleman. I probably could have gotten into wraps sooner if I had been okay with outsourcing, but I feel you can’t control the process and the product in that situation. If I want control, I have to do it all myself.

Taking the leap—moving into this shop, buying the printer, and adding the staff—has turned out to be another one of the best things we could have done. Last year, we doubled our sales. But you need to put that in perspective, because we were so small before that there was nowhere else for us to go but up. It was still a big step, though.

My wife, Debbie, had a full-time job while I was running the shop from our home. When we started making plans to create Dr. Wraps, the economy was still pretty stable. It didn’t really tank until after we had a lot of stuff in motion. We were forced to decide whether



to go forward or chicken out.

We decided to go forward, so Debbie quit her job and came aboard. After that we took Mike on full-time. Now I'm ready to think about bringing on an entry-level person, someone to learn the ropes the way Mike and I learned 20 years ago.

I really believe that it was the wraps that carried us through the slump. They took up the slack when the other types of work faltered. When money tightens up, everyone cuts back on advertising—and our customers certainly did. But the wraps kept us going.

In a way, that's kind of surprising to me. Being a sign guy, I've always felt that people don't really realize how much signs can do for their business. I'd have thought they would cut back on what they don't value.

But it was just the opposite. The economy forced people to look at their advertising and how they were promoting their business. People started realizing what a good market-



ing tool their vehicle graphics can be. I made it my mission to talk to people about that and it paid off. •\$€

—From an interview with John McIltrout