

COOPERATIVE WORK EXPERIENCE

CWE 111 & 122

Prepared by
Philip Whitehead
For
Instructor Jason Warren
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This semester, I have had the opportunity to work with several small, local businesses as an image and print technician. Using the skills learned in the Commercial Graphics Communication Program at Midlands Technical College, Airport Campus, I have been successfully employed in several aspects of the commercial printing industry. Having the knowledge of advanced printing has helped me maintain a steady employment in multiple businesses, while helping advance and promote their businesses professionally.

CWE 111

For the Cooperative Work Experience at Midlands Technical College (MTC), we were asked to complete CWE111 - professional employment in a field related to Commercial Graphics Communication. For my first Cooperative Work Experience, I had a position working in the printing industry with a local printing company, Signarama. As a class, we took tours during previous semesters, and Signarama appealed to me during the tours because of their always clean, high-output, varied-task shop. They were creating signs of all types, installing large signs, repairing broken signs and designing new signs. This was also appealing to me because of the variety of work being done and the fact that the signs were installed locally. For me, there is a sense of pride riding down the street seeing artwork that I have done, things that I have worked on or signs I have erected.

I worked at Signarama basically for the summer of 2025. While still enrolled for 13 summer hours total in two schools, attending full-time classes at MTC, and one

class at University of South Carolina (USC), I managed roughly 100 hours at Signarama. That summer at Signarama was a great experience. I learned how the production shop made money. In my eyes, all parts of the business have to work together, but for me, the production department is key. Management of resources (especially excess waste) is vital, time is vital, application of software and hardware is vital. I also feel that customer satisfaction is essential, and that can be well-achieved from the production department. While sales and management departments are important - and both represent the business on a professional façade, the production shop is where the money gets justified - **everything else is just talk.**

Signarama had three main production departments: Installation, wraps and production. I was mostly involved with production, and rarely saw installation work. I saw a good bit of wrap being done, but as a novice, and because of the importance of the task, was rarely asked to participate in vehicle-vinyl application. I did apply vinyl lettering on some signs, but never vehicles. I did, however, get a chance to prep the printed cut-vinyl for wraps, and prep the vinyl for signs. I also masked, prepared and organized large vinyl jobs for install. For me, there was a lot of weeding and masking, and I had a chance to learn a little about the Kongsberg router. The Kongsberg router has different blades for different operations, including cutting letters out of substrates from vinyl, plastic, acrylic, aluminum and more. Most of the operations were pre-programmed, so my tasks there were simple; safely and protectively loading, unloading and organizing fresh cuts. There was some painting and assembly, and there was a lot of cleaning to do. When things slowed down, I swept and took out the trash and stayed busy organizing.

I liked my positions at Signarama, but with school as a priority for me, and time being precious, I felt I couldn't provide what the company needed. At just a few available hours a week during the school year, I felt I was more 'in the way' than helpful. I recommended an associate from our program at MTC to apply, and moved on. Again, education was, and is, the priority for me.

CWE 122

During this time, and for my entire duration at MTC, I had a second job. My job is operating as a media manager for small businesses across the state. I own my own company and have been licensed in South Carolina as Southeast Digital since moving back from Miami in 2015. I started doing this professionally in Columbia as PKY Media Group in 2005 after graduating USC Visual Communication, but moved to South Florida for a few years for work of a more technical nature. I currently build websites, manage information technology and work with customer hardware in Columbia and surrounding areas. I keep a steady dozen clients or so, and service their businesses on demand. Together, these small businesses and I, we are a good combination of what can be done and what needs to be done. My tagline is: 'Your Goal Is Our Goal'.

For my second Cooperative Work Experience, CWE-122, I have chosen a client of mine with whom I have worked with for several years. In fairness, I will only refer to the last year with him. His business is 'The Building Guy', and he is located at 849 S. Guignard Drive in Sumter, SC. He sells sheds, barns, cabins, garages and RV Covers, both wood and metal. My job for him is to provide IT and technical services for advertising and public communication. When we meet, I block Fridays on my calendar and drive to his business. The standard Friday is to meet at 8am, get rolling with work by 9am, and get through the day by 6pm. To get there by 8, I have to leave Columbia by 6:45am, and I don't get home some days until 8pm. The money's good, and the work conditions are fine, but I do it because I like it. I like the guy, I like his business and I like what I can do for him.

Some days I create templates for building inventories, some days I take pictures and videos of buildings, some days I work with office technology - printers usually. Not because I'm a professional printer, but because most printers are complicated enough that the average business user has a hard time keeping them working - networked scanning, multi-users, fax/print combos - all of these add risk to a normally mundane operation. Some days we make banners and some days we make business cards. Most days I work on the websites doing updates that require his input. I don't go there

unless there's something to do, and there's always something to do. Lately we have been rebranding his business from 'Graceland on Guignard', his business of many years, to 'The Building Guy'. This rebranding allows him to sell different manufacturer's buildings, instead of just Graceland Buildings, under one roof - metal buildings from different manufacturers and wood buildings from different manufacturers. 'Graceland' is a building manufacturer and was his previous mainstay. This re-labeling to 'The Building Guy' allows him to expand his sales footprint while establishing his identity as authoritative.

Over the last year, I have spent more than ten days at his location in Sumter, often at ten hours or more per trip. During this most recent (current) rebranding, I have made five or six trips in the last two months. These ten+ days account for over 100 hours of on-site service.

We created the logo, well... several of them, which help to establish his new identity. We used bright orange to be seen from the road, we used a handsome 'constructiony' man to imply and suggest well-built, and we made the design easy to recognize and define from far away. We bought the domain names, of which he has nine, built the sites and stocked them with inventory images. We made business cards, banners and shirts for the rebranding, and changed all the letterheads, sales contracts and paperwork to match. For the permanent signs, we are currently using banners, but new ones are coming. Time is occasionally our enemy, and as attributed to Ray Cummings in his 1921 short story, *The Time Professor*, "Time is what keeps everything from happening at once". As bad as we want it done now, time and money are still factors.

Part of my employment with this business is finalizing the ideas or completing the tasks we don't finish in Sumter, from Columbia. Over the last year, I have spent easily 100 hours from home in Columbia creating and finalizing our collective ideas for his business. Oftentimes, I will submit final artwork for templates, banners and business cards from home after the designs 'settle' or when I have more privacy to

focus. It's not just designing and ordering printing that I do, but also loads of image management for inventory postings on the site. These dedications to his business total more than 200 hours for the CWE-122 requirements with one employer.

CONCLUSION

What follows is a small sample of the work achieved this year under the Cooperative Work Experience. Unfortunately, not much of the dedication to Signarama was photographed or videoed, but I assure you, in the production facility, the trash was empty and the floors were clean while I was there, and I didn't break any machines or ruin many graphics. The Signarama images included are from their website.

Attached (following) are some of the examples of my work with The Building Guy. While the keyboard and mouse efforts for creation are mostly mine, design comes from everywhere. When we work on designs, we put our heads together and discuss colors, sizes, locations, audience, purposes and more. In this education at MTC, I have learned the processes of getting the printwork done - the mechanics. Asking the client what colors they want, recommending colors if necessary, sizes, fonts, designs and more. This allows me to turn a customer's idea into something tangible and impressive. I follow good practices derived from Commercial Graphics Communication classes, and can extract something close to what the client envisioned - and I don't just mean on the computer screen. I mean tangible creations - signs, shirts, business cards, letterheads - that describe and promote his business as desired.

An owner's confidence with the proper signage and exploitative printing is priceless as he carries his business into a competitive world.

That's just some of what I learned in the Commercial Graphics Communication Program at Midlands Technical College.