

# Selling by Signage

## Ohio Firm Erects Nation's Largest Digital Garage Door Sign

Many companies cut back their advertising expenses in a recession.

Not PDQ Doors of Milford, Ohio. On Sept. 19, PDQ erected probably the nation's largest digital sign owned by a garage door company.

The digital board alone measures 30' wide and 14' tall (415 sq. ft.), about the size of four 16' x 7' garage doors. With the company name perched above and the phone number below, the total sign commands 673 sq. ft., as large as the front of many homes.

No, PDQ is not a huge company. Operating since 1999, PDQ has nine employees and five service vehicles. To learn more about the company's aggressive marketing strategy, we talked to Casey McCreadie, PDQ's general manager.

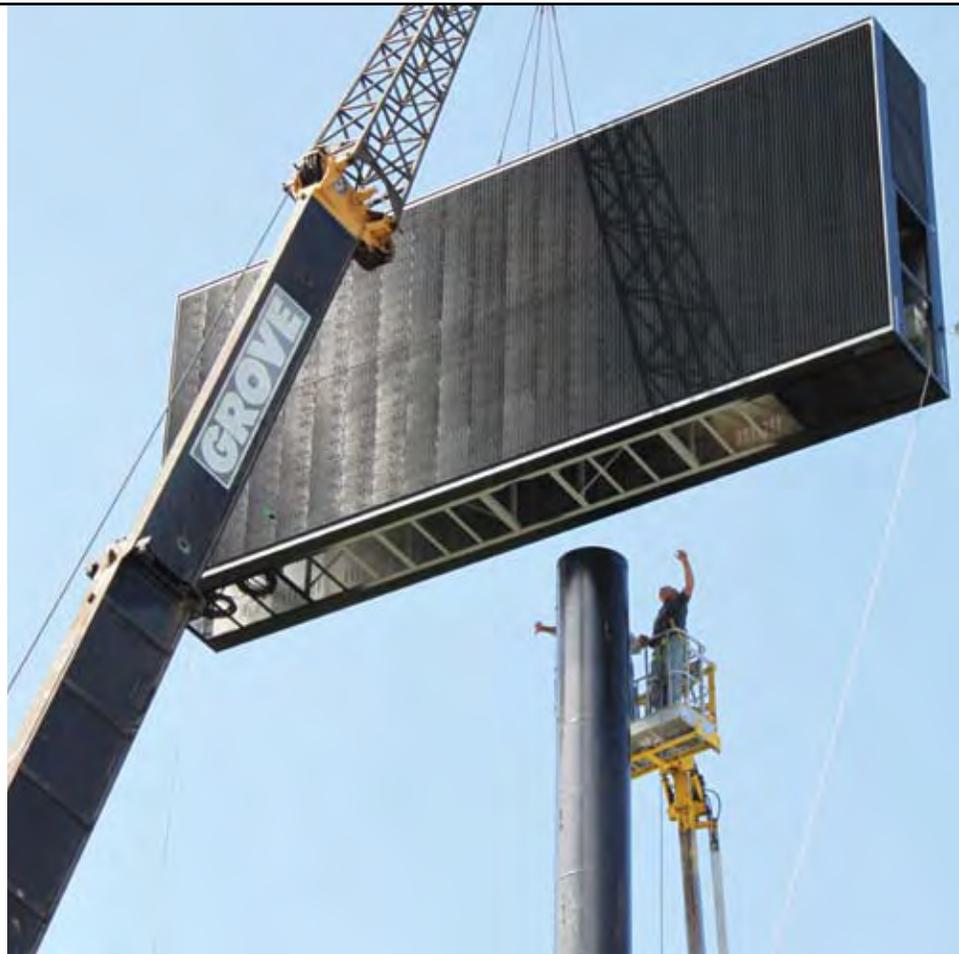
### What makes this sign different from the typical billboard?

This sign can display anything you can put on a computer screen, such as text, pictures, time and temperature, digital graphics, and so on. The sign can be updated and changed in minutes, with just a few clicks of a mouse from any location with an Internet connection.

Since it's continuously lit, it works for us 24/7. We feel that its impact increases dramatically at night. In the winter months, morning and evening rush-hour traffic is mostly in darkness. We hope it generates more higher-margin service work during these months when business is typically slower.

### What competitive advantages does the sign give you?

This sign gives PDQ Doors the ability to get new products or services in front of the customer at the click of a mouse. Our ad can be put in front of the consumer in minutes, rather than the weeks or months it can take with mailers, radio, or television.



**DWARFED:** The size of the sign can't be appreciated until you see a man next to it.

For example, the sign now advertises "Same Day Service" if a customer calls by noon. When noon hits, we can quickly change the message to "Service still available for tomorrow if you call by noon."

We also have the ability to trade advertising to community events in exchange for a free banner or a free booth. The marketing potential is huge.

### It appears that your location is a key element that makes the sign worthwhile.

Its location is definitely the most important feature. It hovers over the southeast side of Cincinnati on I-275, where more than 70,000 vehicles pass by daily.

When we moved in 2001, we wanted a building located near a major highway. We planned to erect the sign several years ago, but we finally got serious about a year ago.

**TOPPING IT OFF:** The PDQ portion of the sign takes up 155 of the total 673 square feet.



### **It's early, but can you tell if it has already increased sales?**

If you compare October 2009 sales with the average month of July to September 2009, our garage door opener sales jumped 76 percent. Total revenue had a good increase as well. We're pleased.

### **I bet your electric bill jumped, too.**

Sure. Our monthly electric bill for the sign is almost double the electric bill for our entire facility.

I should point out that we have two companies here, the door company and a pole building company. Both are sharing the exposure and expenses on the sign. So, half of the sign's messages are not garage door related.

### **You obviously believe in the power of advertising. How would you describe your approach to advertising?**

We have always been very aggressive advertisers. We typically spend 10 to 12 percent of our sales dollars on marketing.

You can't grow without a good marketing investment plan. During rough times, a company has to be more vigilant where they spend their money, but you shouldn't cut the marketing

budget. Now is the time to spend more in the right places.

We strive to find new ways to emphasize our marketing advantage. Every year we allocate 20 percent of our marketing budget to something new. We never tire of taking a phone call from a "marketing salesperson" to see what new thing they might have to offer.

### **What advice would you give to dealers who want to get creative with a smaller budget?**

Innovate. Invest where other people haven't.

You can't compete with

the big guys by playing the same game they play.

Negotiate. When we started, some ads cost us \$2,000. Those same ads today cost only \$1,000.

Prioritize. If you have \$5,000 to spend in marketing, find five places to spend it. Research all five and select the one that is the best choice for your business. ■

*To comment on this story, send an e-mail to the editor at [trw@tomwadsworth.com](mailto:trw@tomwadsworth.com).*



**DRIVE-BY SIGNING:** The sign is visible to 70,000 vehicles that pass this stretch of I-275 daily. To see many of the sign's messages, go to [mypdqdoor.com](http://mypdqdoor.com).

### **Did you have any problems with zoning?**

Yes, we did. Since current zoning allows only 60 sq. ft. of signage, we applied for a zoning variance. After two months of meetings with city officials, we finally gained approval. But they forced us to reduce its size to 70 percent of our original plan.

### **What kind of investment did this require?**

I'd prefer not to say the specific cost, but it was the equivalent of five years of our marketing budget or the equivalent of our 20,000-sq.-ft. warehouse. But we believe it will pay off.