



Sign of the Times

Couple Seeks Safety, Courtesy on Hoosier Highways

By Matt L. Ottinger

A Goodwill of Central Indiana employee lays out the circuit on a Road Rage Fun Signs display that will soon illuminate a Hoosier vehicle. Goodwill is just one of the many companies that has had a hand in the production of the signs.

Most Hoosiers understand the valuable role truck drivers play in the commerce process. For some, however, getting stuck behind an 18-wheeler on a highway can be a momentum-stopping, vision-blocking, blood-boiling experience. But technology from one upstart Indiana business could transform the situation into a boon for driver safety.

Road Rage Fun Signs, a woman/veteran-owned Indianapolis company, develops signs that can be attached to any vehicle and can light up or flash at the click of a remote control. Two current designs read “Caution” and “Thank You,” so drivers can warn others about dangers or extend courtesies. The company is named as such because it’s working to prevent road rage – not promote it.

“We both have experience driving trucks, and Patricia got the idea years ago that when truck drivers blinked their lights, there should be a sign to say ‘thank you,’” Road Rage Fun Signs CEO Dean Graham says of his wife, who is the company’s president/owner. “Or if there was a sign that said ‘Caution Ahead,’ it could help to stop pile-ups down the road.”

He explains that was the impetus for the company’s product, adding that the signs can still be seen in fog.

Bright idea

Road Rage Fun Signs offers other signs with messages such as “Slow Down” and “Accident Ahead,” or a custom message can be applied. When the driver presses a button on a remote control (that is synced to one specific message), it illuminates the acrylic sign, which features patent-pending LED technology. The signs run on AA batteries, and there are no wires to attach. However, there are signs for general use that plug into walls and feature an on/off switch.

Graham explains they’ve worked with engineers and other partners to develop the technology, which allows the remote control to function as far as 75 feet away from the sign. Via powerful Velcro, the signs can be adhered to the outside of a vehicle, which is most appropriate for large semis and trucks. (The signs can also be affixed to the windows from the interior.)

“It would take an act of Congress to get them off (when you’re driving),” he contends. “I’ve driven mine through a car wash and taken the car at high speeds, and they don’t fall off.”

The company has had many partners in the development process, including Info-Lite, an Indianapolis-based electronic signage supplier, which has provided circuit boards for the signs.



Hoosiers working for Hoosiers

A key goal of Road Rage Fun Signs is to ultimately benefit the Indiana economy by providing jobs and business to the state. Graham explains he's been willing to pay a little more for assembly of the signs to keep the work in Indiana.

"I've been told by many people that we could have these made cheaper if we had it made in China," he explains. "But we want to stand behind Indiana workers, and we want people to support us because we support Indiana."

"Over a quarter of the hits on our web site are from China, so I'm sure they're looking at what we're doing," he notes.

But he believes focusing on a teamwork approach in the state will be most beneficial to Hoosiers.

"We were formed in November 2008, and there are probably 30 or 40 companies that have benefited somehow from what we're doing," he says. "As we grow, we really want to take a lot of companies with us."

He hopes that Indiana's government is as dedicated as he is to the state's business community.

"I wrote a letter to Gov. (Mitch) Daniels explaining that free trade is a great thing, but they should be looking at helping the companies here who got (Small Business Administration) loans," Graham asserts. "Those are the companies that should be focused on first."

After initially charging \$245 per sign, Graham explains the company has reduced the price point to \$175, which has sparked an increase in orders. He adds that they are working on producing a plastic sign, which will sell for less, and they currently offer message plates for \$25.

But for the Grahams, the project is about much more than turning a quick buck.

"We can't call ourselves a non-profit, but we're the closest thing to it," he says.

Graham's ultimate goal is to not only help other businesses in the state, but to also use profits from the company to help those less fortunate by making more food available via soup kitchens and donor sites.

"There's no reason anybody should be going hungry in Indiana," he asserts.

Signs of goodwill

Building on the company's theme of benevolence is its involvement with Goodwill of Central Indiana. Road Rage has outsourced the assembly of its signs to the non-profit's



CEO Dean Graham and his wife, president/owner Patricia Graham, believe their company can one day improve safety on the roads as well as security for their partners and the many causes they hope to support.

commercial services division, which allows people to develop skills for the workforce.

"Ninety percent (of commercial services division) employees have some type of barrier to employment," explains Goodwill Marketing Vice President Cindy Graham, noting that they may have physical or mental disabilities, or prior convictions.

"Some learn skills and move on to other organizations, but we also have some people who have worked here for 30 years."

Goodwill Commercial Services Division Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Jim Humphrey explains the project was an ideal fit.

"Goodwill provides supply chain solutions," he says. "We don't work with a lot of entrepreneurs, but we do work with some."

Humphrey adds there are a couple of reasons they are on board with Road Rage.

"It's an assembly project that's repeatable," he offers. "Also, it's not really simple, but it helps people we employ develop skills."

Goodwill's on-staff engineers have also added suggestions to maximize the efficiency of the signs and the process.

"You don't enter a business with all your questions answered," Humphrey surmises.

All told, Dean Graham deems the opportunity to work with Goodwill to be a blessing.

"I'm really impressed by their work," he praises. "One key goal with our business is that we want to work with companies that lend a hand up. What better company for that than Goodwill?"

Power of messaging

The company now offers more than just signs that promote safety; it has added a patriotic "God Bless America" message, as well as messages that promote sports teams.

In fact, Graham explains he recently hand-delivered a "Happy Birthday" sign to a customer in Lebanon.

In many ways, Road Rage Fun Signs' end product may not just be messages of warning, but also of inspiration and good tidings.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Dean and Patricia Graham, Road Rage Fun Signs, at www.roadragefunsigns.com

Jim Humphrey and Cindy Graham, Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana, at www.goodwill-indy.org

It Takes a Village ...

Chain of companies involved in the production of Road Rage Fun Signs

- Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana (Indianapolis)
- ISF Sign Specialists (Indianapolis)
- Info-Lite (Indianapolis)
- Banks Machine & Engineering (Edinburgh)
- Edinburgh Signs & Graphics (Edinburgh)
- Beacon Industries (Edinburgh)
- EZ Tool (Columbus)