

Artistry Behind the Scenes



Customer Successes

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Showman Fabricators

What do the Nightly News, a Broadway show, and a museum exhibit all have in common? Scenery engineered and constructed by Showman Fabricators, Inc. and expertly machined on a bridge-style OMAX JetMachining Center®. With an impressive project list that has included sets for the newly launched FOX Business Network, the CNN Communication Center, the GORE Capabilities and Visitor Center, and stage design for the new Broadway musical The Little Mermaid, this 21-year old company has continued to outpace the competition by crafting stunningly realistic sets that combine sound construction principles and technical expertise with the best elements of scenic design.

Showman founders Bob Usdin and Michael Cioffi were fresh out of the SUNY Purchase College Technical Theater program when they established their company in 1986. During that time, the entertainment world was experiencing significant changes that would prove integral to the new company's success and shape the business philosophy of the two young entrepreneurs. With the debut of Phantom of the Opera, Broadway was moving toward more technical stage productions while corporations sought more dramatic ways to capture the fickle attentions of the American consumer. These changes, coupled with the increasing popularity of cable television, convinced Showman that in order to remain competitive, they would need to engage the ever shifting interests and attention of a public hungry for novelty.

Headquartered in Long Island City, New York, Showman offers a variety of services to Broadway, the movie industry, museums, corporations, restaurants and retail. Employing a diversely talented staff of over 100, their shop is fully equipped to handle any number of carpentry, metalwork, and engineering challenges. In nearly every area, the OMAX abrasive waterjet has proven itself as an essential complimentary technology for Showman. "Before the waterjet, we weren't really looking at projects the same way," says Showman head of Design and Engineering, Mike Riccio.

Adds owner Bob Usdin, "The key for us is versatility. One minute we can be cutting steel, then aluminum, then acrylic with no tool changes or down time. We use so many different types of material: steel, aluminum, stainless steel, wood, plastic, glass, stone and foam, which we cut using water only. That the waterjet can handle virtually any material has been such a tremendous benefit to us."

Prior to the OMAX, Showman started out with a small 4 x 4 CNC router in 1990 which they used primarily for wood and plastic, while they sent most of the metal-work to outside fabricators. Then, as the company expanded, they were able to graduate to a 5 x 12 router. However, it became clear that extra technology was still required to bring their metal work in house, streamline their operations, and increase overall productivity. Before finally choosing OMAX in February of 2006, they looked hard at several companies.

"Mike and I looked closely at one particular OMAX competitor," explains Usdin. "At that point, we wanted a large table. But their cantilever arm gave us concerns with respect to how practical it was for our usage. We liked the design of OMAX better. We also appreciated that fact that we didn't feel overly sold. The sales reps were more about listening to us and showing us how well the machine would fit our needs. The local support was terrific."

Mike Riccio concurs. "The physical design of the OMAX made some engineering sense to us, as did the proximity of a service technician." But in the end, it was the innovative, patented OMAX software with its ease of use and unlimited upgrades for the life of the machine that finally sold Showman. "OMAX's free software upgrades factored heavily into our decision," says Riccio. The OMAX has benefited Showman from a design perspective as well. Usdin explains: "Being able to finesse edge quality on the waterjet has allowed us to make different design choices. The tightness of the kerf on the waterjet means we can do more intricate corners in addition to the very delicate filigree work we're not able to do on a CNC router."

Going forward, Showman is poised to leverage its considerable expertise to meet even more technical and artistic challenges. "Our plans are to obtain more work on Broadway fabricating automation equipment," says Usdin. This is the equipment that helps to move scenery around on stage. "Also, now that HDTV is more prevalent, the industry is demanding more detail oriented and realistic materials."

With viewers now able to focus in on every detail of a set, Showman has begun to hone their capabilities in the machining of stone, laminates, and glass, materials that the OMAX excels at cutting. Could this mean that another OMAX might play a future role at Showman? "We have just one OMAX at the moment," says Riccio. "I wish we had more."

Showman Fabricators Inc.

Owner: Bob Usdin

Location: Long Island City, NY

Specializes in: Scenic Design

Founded: 1986

Website: www.showfab.com/

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