

Today, companies are searching for unique ways to increase their profits, without a large outflow of cash. The best way to increase the number of customers coming to your shop is to increase the value of the service you can provide them. There are two ways to add this additional value: by adding a unique touch to the signs that you create, or by expanding and offering related items. With the latest developments in CO2 laser systems, you can now easily enhance your product offerings while increasing the variety of signage you offer with a highly versatile engraving and cutting system from Epilog Laser.

Affordable “desktop” laser engraving systems have been around since 1988, and Epilog has been there since the start. Traditionally, laser systems have been used in the awards and engraving market, but over time an increasing number of industries have been discovering the value that a laser system can add to their shops. From furniture makers, to plastic fabricators, to tool manufacturers, the versatility of a laser system allows companies in numerous fields a low-cost alternative to the large, expensive mechanical engravers of the past.

One of the reasons that laser systems have become so popular is their ability to work with a very wide variety of materials. CO2 laser systems are used to engrave and cut acrylic, wood, plastic, glass, rubber, leather, fabric, matte board, stainless steel, and melamine, but that is just the start. To get an idea of the various materials you can work with when you have a laser system, take a look at the Application section of Epilog’s website at [www.epiloglaser.com/applications.htm](http://www.epiloglaser.com/applications.htm). Epilog also offers a free Applications Lab where you can send any material to be tested with the laser system. An experienced laser technician will experiment with the material on various wattages of lasers to find the right system to meet your needs.

A laser system can add the ability to create signage from marble, stone, wood, plastic, acrylic, glass, ceramics, and fabrics. You can also increase your product line with architectural signage, picture frames, awards, plaques, trophy plates, corporate promotions, decorative tiles, point-of-purchase displays, advertising specialties, and much more. When you combine the list of materials you can work with, and add in all of the possible projects that you can complete with those materials, the possibilities are endless!

Another factor contributing to the popularity of CO2 lasers is their ability to produce stunning graphic images. From clipart to scanned images, a laser can use virtually any artwork to create custom graphic designs that look great on the materials listed above. The learning curve for laser engraving in the sign market is amazingly short. The laser works like a printer – what you set up on your computer screen is what you are going to engrave on your product. The longest portion of the learning curve is learning graphic software, such as CorelDraw or many of the other Windows based graphics packages. Once you know that, you can quickly master the laser system. Many customers that are already operating graphics software start producing revenue within hours of receiving their laser.

Training and education programs are constantly evolving at Epilog. The first part of training starts when you receive your laser. Your local distributor will come to your facility to help setup the laser, and give you training on how the laser runs. For more extensive training, you can also attend one of Epilog's Laser User Clinics held across the country. They are an excellent resource for learning about the latest laser engravable products, system maintenance, and much more. In addition, many of the sign and awards trade shows throughout the country offer a variety of laser seminars.

Personalization of products is definitely a profitable addition to your business. Laser engraved products are perceived as high value products and can be priced accordingly. Since the perceived value is high, but the cost of production is relatively low, the profit margins on lasered products are typically high. Because of this, people that are just getting started in the laser business have questions about pricing, but there are a couple of easy ways that people can establish pricing. One of the most popular is to determine how long the job is going to take and then decide how much they want to charge for machine time. An example of this is as follows:

Your customer wants 50 pieces of an 8 x 10 wooden door signs and each sign is going to take you 30 minutes to engrave. This means that you have 25 hours of engraving to do. Many people know what their machine time is worth. In other words, they know that they want to charge \$60.00 per hour of engraving plus materials. For this job you have 25 hours of engraving multiplied by \$60.00/hour and that means that you want to quote \$1,500.00 plus materials for this job. In the corporate market, this is very reasonable.

The tough part of this equation is how do you know you want \$60.00 per hour for machine time? You take into consideration things like: How much are you paying your employee to do the engraving? How much rent does it cost to keep the machine in your building? How much does your overhead, like utilities, cost? How much profit do you need to make? You can come close to a realistic number by taking into account all of these factors. This number also varies a lot from region to region. Some engraving companies located in affluent areas of the country will charge between \$200 and \$250 per hour, but on average engravers charge between \$50 and \$100 per hour.

The return on investment really depends on how much you are running the laser. Epilog has one customer that paid for their system with the first job they ran! That is rare, of course, but the possibility is definitely there, especially with the internet making it possible to expand nationally, even specializing in just a few specialized products. The most important factor that will affect how quickly you can earn back the money you spend on the laser is the speed of engraving. A laser that can run at 120 inches per second (with excellent engraving quality) will allow you to run twice as many jobs as one running at only 60 inches per second. But remember to compare the quality alongside the speed!

The sign industry is one of the quickest growing markets for acquiring laser technology. In a down turn in the economy, it is important that you continue to increase the value of the products you are able to offer to your clients. Expanding your capabilities with a laser has never been more affordable, or have you been able to reach so many potential

customers. For more information on Epilog Laser and how a CO2 laser engraving and cutting system can help you to increase your profits, call toll free 888-437-4564, visit [www.epiloglaser.com](http://www.epiloglaser.com), or e-mail [sales@epiloglaser.com](mailto:sales@epiloglaser.com).