

A graphics firm with

DRIVE

Natick shop creates graphics, sells custom car parts

By Bob Tremblay/Daily News staff
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NATICK -

While on vacation in Vermont, Bryan Winter came across a business that offered graphic design services along with signs and auto parts.

"It's such an odd mix," Winter recalls, "but I know both. Graphic design and signs were something I'd been doing since I was 16 and car parts and souping up cars were a hobby a mine."

While the idea bulb of such a combo had earlier flashed above Winter's head, seeing this business provided confirmation that it could work. So in 2001, he started Intricate Lines, a Natick company that provides handcrafted signs and banners, graphic design, truck lettering, large format and digital printing, Web site development, business stationery, direct mailing, technical drawing, vehicle graphics, custom car and truck accessories and more. In-house manufacturing, on-site installation and free estimates are part of the package.

Winter even offers snow plowing.

Intricate Lines has grown from its modest roots in a closet - yes, a closet - to having a showroom and manufacturing facility in downtown Natick. During its first four years, the company doubled its revenue each year, according to Winter. He says revenue now increases on average 40 percent each year. This spring, Intricate Lines plans to move its manufacturing facility to a new location in Natick while keeping its showroom on Washington Street.

Winter credits this success to friends and family who have spread the good word about Intricate Lines. Family includes his brothers, Michael and David, and his mother, Myrna. "My mom is my best salesman," he says.

Winter also lauds his employees. "Without the support of my experienced staff, I wouldn't have a business," he says.

Winter's wife, Erin, receives kudos as well. Before starting Intricate Lines, Winter worked as a graphic designer for a dot-com company during the boom years in the 1990s. When the bubble burst, Winter lost his job.

He took his 401(k) money to buy equipment and started selling signs online and door-to-door. His headquarters were situated in a back closet in the Paper Mart, a company run by his father, Stan, that sold balloons and party goods in downtown Natick for 25 years. "I cut a desk in half to fit my computer in there," says Winter.

The first few years were lean. "Erin put up with me being broke during that time," says the Natick resident. "Before we were married all she saw was a guy who lost his job, so I said on the phone one day, 'I don't want you to think I'm a loser.' I then told her, 'I'm going to start my own business.'" Her reaction? She said, "OK."

"Throughout the tough times, she's been there for me the whole time," says Winter.

Providing inspiration was his father, who died in 2003 shortly after Winter moved into his current location in 2002. The address had previously housed a nail salon. Interestingly, the business that took over the Paper Mart's South Avenue address is a nail salon.

In addition to his father, Winter credits Richard Rebecchi, who taught commercial graphics at Framingham High School, for helping his career. "He was unbelievable," says the 1995 grad of Rebecchi, who has since retired. "He was one of those teachers who would take guff from the principal and allow me to do a little extra and stay at school and hang out. I learned all the basics (about graphics). Between him and my dad, that was it."

Intricate Lines prides itself on its one-stop shopping capabilities. "We do everything from A to Z," says Winter. "Say you're starting a landscaping business, for example. You come here and you can get your logo designed, your shirts printed, your business cards printed, your Web site created and your truck lettered. Then we can sell you a plow and utility racks.

"That's the idea - take your business to one shop, to one guy you can trust to take care of everything for you and not have to worry about anything. A lot of business comes from this type of client."

Clients include SmartPak, a horse and dog supply company in Plymouth, Boston Paternity, a DNA testing company with offices in Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire and Connecticut, local real estate companies, national auto parts companies and large corporations.

Gross sales are split evenly between the graphics and the automotive sides of the business, according to Winter.

He says the prices for custom car parts are comparable with those on the Internet. What the Internet can't provide, however, is quick service, he points out. A typical auto parts store isn't likely to carry all the products Intricate Lines does either, he adds. The company offers 500 vendor lines and 800,000 custom automotive parts.

"Normally by mail order, it's two weeks to wait plus shipping," says Winter. "I have warehouses that deliver next day."

These products include air intake systems that save on gas, bumpers, exhausts, step bars, truck bed covers and floor liners designed to keep sand and grit from ruining a vehicle's carpet.

All of the company's products come with a warranty of varying length.

Prices range from \$35 for a small banner to \$4,000 for a full vehicle wrap. The latter involves lettering, logo and design work geared to turn the vehicle into a moving billboard. Lettering alone, meanwhile, costs \$125, 1,000 business cards go for \$35, a logo design costs \$125 and Web site development starts at \$450. Built in-house, this site comes with a basic brochure style with e-mail services and hosting.

Intricate Lines also makes signs for yard sales, political campaigns and small businesses such as plumbers and electricians. "We have full identity packages for businesses," says Winter. "From the sign out front to the business cards to the truck lettering."

The company describes itself as "the premier pit stop" for custom graphics and automotive parts. It does have a certain "autographic" ring to it.

INTRICATE LINES

Owner: Bryan Winter

Employees: Four

Industry: Custom graphics and auto accessories

Company background: Based in Natick, Intricate Lines is a full-service commercial graphics business with a side specialty in custom vehicle parts.

Its Web site is www.intricatelines.com.