



CASE STUDY:

# Universal Sign Systems

**FAST, ACCURATE COLOR RETRIEVAL** wins over sign company



## CHALLENGES

To stay on top of tight turnaround times for incoming site signage projects, Universal Sign Systems needed to:

- Retrieve accurate color formulas faster
- Reduce time from start to stack-and-ship

## SOLUTIONS

Universal Sign Systems was able to “start sooner and finish sooner” as a result of:

- Using the Formula Express 2.0 color retrieval digital library from Sherwin-Williams
- Switching to an ultra-durable automotive finish that accelerated bake time by 66% and eliminated a tacky finish

# “Start sooner, finish sooner” is service mantra for Universal Sign Systems

Site signage is often among the final, if not the very final, piece considered during many commercial construction projects. So architectural sign companies may find themselves with less time than they’d like to deliver a product that is good-looking, dry and free of defects.

For this reason, a savvy production manager will always be open to techniques that can accelerate throughput. Daryl Mowry, who has that role at Universal Sign Systems of Grand Rapids, Michigan, was open to change, and he got more than he bargained for.

A previous paint supplier worked only through distributors, and technical support was limited. When Universal Sign brought painting in-house with a new 12,600 square foot addition, Mowry brought Sherwin-Williams sales representative Walt Szczesny in to do a finishing line audit. Walt’s recommendations started with fast, accurate color formula retrieval software and cloud retention capability, and expanded with new products that had measurable and dramatic impact on speed.

## Just How Fast is Fast?

Universal Sign was in the middle of a 180-location project for Gordon Food Service when Szczesny mentioned that, with Sherwin-Williams, matching and retrieving color could be achieved much more rapidly than they were used to.

Mowry issued him a challenge: “Match this PMS 186 red and we’ll try you.” The customer’s bold signage was a tangible symbol of a valued brand. “It could not be obvious that we’d made a change,” Mowry said.

Szczesny logged into Sherwin-Williams’ Formula Express 2.0 color retrieval database, and located the formula for the red in less than 15 minutes. “Daryl was shocked that I had the match in my hand, on my cell phone,” said Szczesny. “And they could have mixed it right then and there in any quantity if they had wanted to.”

This was a game changer, Mowry said, since the incumbent supplier could take hours to days to calculate the exact amount of each pigment required to achieve a match that would be consistent across substrates and production processes.



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In the coatings business, we know nothing is more crucial than local, on the ground support. That’s why we have a dedicated team of more than 180 sales, technical and R&D personnel located at 76 local facilities in North America to ensure we’re close by when you need us most, no matter where you are.



FormulaExpress® 2.0 Color Formula Retrieval System is a user-friendly, web-based system designed to make color retrieval faster and more manageable. From simple search capabilities to intuitive color sorting and filtering, FormulaExpress 2.0 will help improve cycle time, productivity and profit.



“With a two-thirds reduction in our time from start to stack-and-ship, we have an accelerant that truly accelerates.”

Daryl Mowry  
Universal Sign Systems  
of Grand Rapids, Michigan

## The Digital Library Gets Even Larger With Automotive-Grade Paint

Universal’s next color retrieval advance came about because of a productivity issue; their accelerator product wasn’t accelerating fast enough.

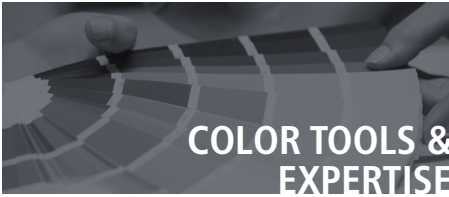
It was still necessary, Mowry said, to let the signs rest for at least 72 hours after a 30-minute bake before stacking could occur. To make matters worse, if the job required affixing vinyl decals, the finishing team had to contend with blistering because the paint continued to off-gas.

Sherwin-Williams had recently enhanced an automotive-grade product line, GENESIS® LV Single Stage System, using a next-generation accelerator additive, GA1100 Super Z. This technology held promise for sign customers like Universal.

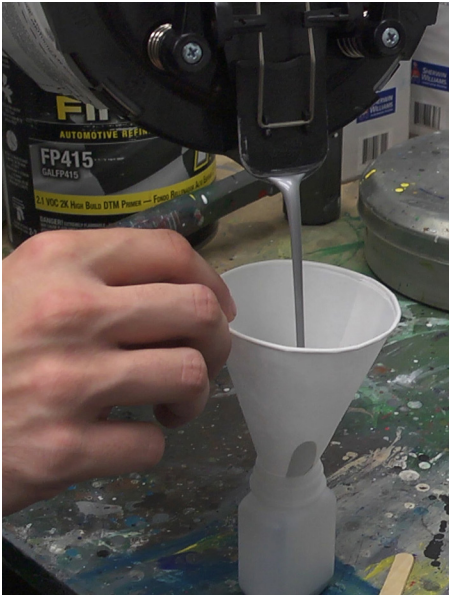
Mowry’s frustrations were quickly addressed when Sherwin-Williams began field trials of the accelerator at Universal. Laboratory bake trials showed that adding as little as three ounces of GA1100 Super Z Accelerator reduced GENESIS LV bake time by as much as 66 percent and eliminated a tacky finish. This meant a dramatic increase in throughput and cycle times while reducing energy consumption in the booth.

Mowry was pleased to see that the finish was indeed tack free coming out of the oven, and bake times reduced to 10 minutes compared to 30 minutes at 160 F. “With a two-thirds reduction in our time from start to stack-and-ship, we have an accelerant that truly accelerates,” Mowry said.





Sherwin-Williams understands that a great finish goes beyond durability – exact color-matching is a critical component to any finishing operation. Our color-matching expertise helps companies in a broad array of industries reduce rework and increase productivity and profitability.



## “What is worth doing is worth doing well”

Since 1866, Sherwin-Williams has provided manufacturers and finishers with the coatings they need to make their products look better and last longer, while helping their operations meet productivity and sustainability goals. For both wood and general industrial markets, our innovative solutions go beyond coatings to include knowledge, tools, equipment, supplies, and industry-leading support.



But with this new product line, fast, accurate color retrieval entered his life in even more colors. This is because an enormous compilation of color fan decks, as well as toners and tints, make up the GENESIS LV system, enabling adjustments or custom colors to be made on the spot instead of going to a Sherwin-Williams store. The GENESIS colors have highly stable chemistries comprised of pigments that won't fade or shift prematurely under harsh conditions.

“Ninety percent of what we're looking for is already in GENESIS,” Mowry said. “There are so many preloaded color formulas, we're getting a match in seconds and human error is removed from the process.

“If we need something that's one of the 10 percent not in there, we get as close as we can relying on our operator's skill and knowledge,” he said. “He'll tweak it for tone and hue on the line if it's not already perfect, and save the exact formula in the password-protected system for the future. Maybe that takes an hour at most.”

Fast, accurate color retrieval isn't the only benefit to Universal Sign of using GENESIS colors, according to Mowry. With Michigan as the company's home base, the product's durability is passing the road salt test, he said. And the GENESIS line is formulated with the lowest solvent levels, making it compliant with the air quality regulations of the most states that govern VOCs.

Color tools and know-how, ultra-durable paint chemistry, and process optimization are the three value pillars that Sherwin-Williams' automotive coatings were built upon. Today Universal Sign Systems' manufacturing line is bringing all of those benefits together to “start sooner and finish sooner” for their customers.

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