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RAMPING UP

**NEW EQUIPMENT,
TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY
TAKE INDUSTRY
TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

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At left, Hartung Glass Industries, hartung-glass.com, provided the digitally printed glass wall at Hotel Eastlund in Portland, Oregon.

Continued Profitability in ‘Going Decorative’

By Alysa Hoffmeister

The glass industry has undergone a decorative revolution in the last decade, with more and more glass companies offering a widening range of decorative glass products—from digitally printed to acid-etched, and specialty laminated to back-painted, and more. Correspondingly, the industry has witnessed a sharp increase in companies offering decorative glass products.

The decorative capabilities of North American glass fabricators have grown, with 62 percent of North American fab-

ricators offering some decorative glass products, according to Glass Magazine’s 2015 Top Glass Fabricators Report. The number of North American companies offering digital printing capabilities, specifically, has more than doubled between 2012 and 2014, jumping from 25 companies to 55.

With this rise of glass companies offering decorative products, fabricators that have not yet entered the market increasingly ask the question: Is ‘going decorative’ still profitable? According to market statistics, absolutely.

Market data shows that the increased availability of, and options for, decorative glass products corresponds with increasing demand from the architectural community. The decorative glass market has seen growing project demand, along with a paradigm shift in how projects are being specified by architects, value engineered by general contractors, quoted by fabricators, and installed by glaziers.

The number of projects that specified decorative glass products increased more than three-fold from 2012 to 2014, rising from 1,893 to 6,974. The number of projects that specified digitally printed glass increased nearly five-fold, from 98 in 2012 to 480 in 2014.

A comparison of the North American digital printing decorative glass market to the more mature European market shows additional opportunity for growth for North American companies. For example, utilizing European glass printer statistics to determine a benchmark for the number of printers, per capita, there are approximately 673 million people per 115 digital printers using ceramic ink. This equates to one printer per 5.8 million people.

In the United States and Canada, there are approximately 356 million people per 45 digital printers using ce-

Decorative Glass Projects Specified in North America, 2012-2014

Post Bid Project by Year	Number of Projects Containing Glass	Number of Projects Specified for Various Decorative Glass Technologies	Number of Projects that Could be Digitally Ceramic Printed	Number of Projects Specified for Digitally Printed Glass
2012	10,201	1,893	671	98
2013	27,772	5,678	2,050	342
2014	33,202	6,974	2,583	480

SOURCE: CMD Construction Market Data, cmdgroup.com.

ramic ink. This amounts to one printer per 7.9 million people. Based on these statistics, North America is trailing behind Europe when it comes to offering digitally printed glass.

In addition to market trends, glass companies should also consider the specific profit potential of these value-added projects, which offer greater margins than more traditional glass projects. Fabricators can weigh that against the potential investment to calculate the return on investment.

For example, according to officials from one North American digitally printed glass supplier, the average sale for the digital ceramic printing charge of the glass (not including the glass or the fabrication) runs between \$12 and \$50 per square foot, depending on the size and complexity of the job. If the average printing charge is sold at \$20 per square foot, and capital equipment (mid-range ceramic ink printer and cleanroom) totals \$375,000, return on investment will be realized once 23,000 square feet of printed glass is complete. (This assumes \$2 for ink/consumables and \$38,000 per year to hire a dedicated machine operator.)

With a heightened focus from fabricators and equipment manufacturers to educate architects and designers about the increasing capabilities of decorative glass, the demand will continue to grow and the industry will experience a prolific rise in profits. In fact, many in the glass industry are already optimistic about the potential growth of decorative glass—73 percent of fabricators surveyed in the 2015 Top Glass Fabricators Report projected that decorative glass would provide the most opportunities for growth during 2015. 

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