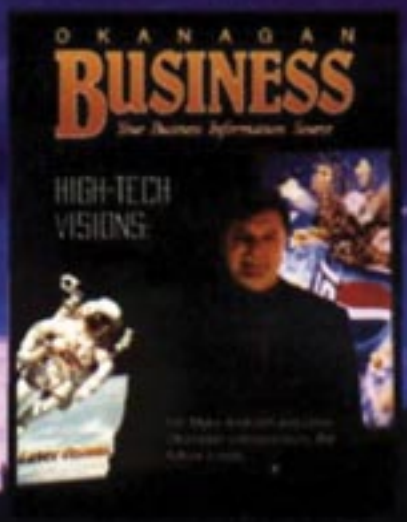
november/december

Okanagan Life

THE MAGAZINE THE OKANAGAN LIVES BY

BEST of the OKANAGAN



Okanagan Business Inside

Nov/Dec 2001 3.50

www.okanaganlife.com

OKANAGAN
BUSINESS
Your Business Information Source

HIGH-TECH VISIONS:

For Myke Andriash and other Okanagan entrepreneurs, the future is now.

BUSINESS PROFILE

Bring on the Light

By Stan Sauerwein

It's almost classic. When a cartoon character inventor makes a discovery, a light bulb appears over his head.

For local inventor Myke Andriash, also the CEO of Electric Vinyl Inc., that image is the real thing. His Per'f-a-Lite is basically a new *flat* light bulb.

In the course of only four years, the Kelowna inventor has taken his notion about advertising at night from a sketch to award-winning status as a patented invention. He hopes his product may some day be in every home in the western world.

If you think that's a grandiose notion, you'd better think again because his invention is just the kind of thing that could qualify as a universal tool. Just like a light bulb.

Electric Vinyl Technology currently has 12 employees involved in the sale and manufacture of several products either invented or developed by Myke. The firm has evolved from an intellectual property company, with a utility patent on a unique product, to a company that is geared up to become a high volume production facility.

Per'F-a-Lite, an electric imageable vinyl, is essentially the new flat light bulb without a light bulb. It's similar to electric paper that illuminates the same as a fluorescent sign would or fluorescent light box might. Thinner than a credit card, it comes in sheet sizes up to approximately one-by-two metres (four to six feet) in size. Wire attached to a corner of the sheet feeds power through an inverter that Myke has developed.

When activated, power is converted from the normal frequency of 60 Hertz to 600 Hertz. This, in turn, activates an electro-luminescent phospher that is sandwiched into the sheet construction. Essentially it turns that phospher into a bright light.

"The entire sheet is lit from edge-to-edge and end-to-end with perfect homogenous light scattering and without the hot and cold spots normally associated with fluorescent signage due to the bulbs," says Myke.

Electro-luminescent technology is not new. In fact, it has been around for 40 years, but Myke's applications were unique enough to earn his product a 20-year US patent.

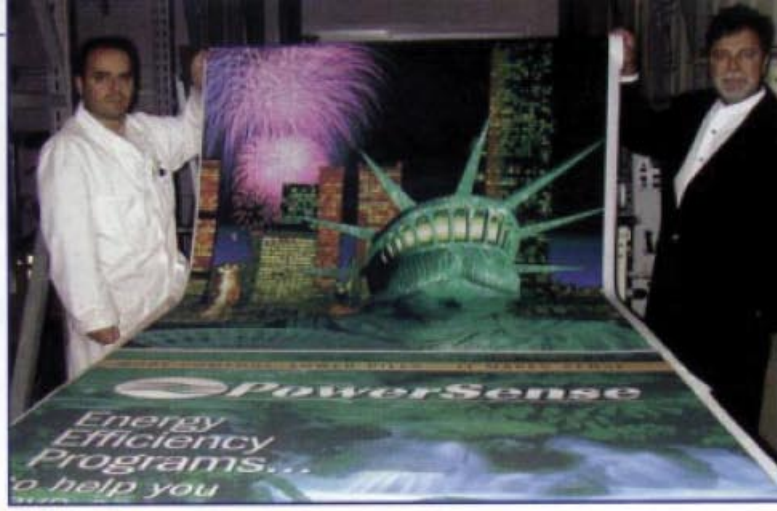
He began working on his invention four years ago, he says. When it was first introduced to the signage industry in 1999, the Digital Printing Industry awarded Myke's company their Vision Award. It was also given the DPI Product of the Year recognition in 2000 and 2001, judged to be the product to have the most substantial affect on that industry as a whole in those years. The small Kelowna company competed with the likes of Xerox and 3M to get the accolade which is no small feat on its own.

Electric Vinyl had received the DPI Product of the Year award in 1999 as well, for another of their products called Retro Reflective Vision Control Panels, pre-formatted and highly retro reflective film that's used for bus wraps and fleet markings on vehicles. It allows passengers to see out windows while those outside see an advertising message.

Myke says the primary market for the electric vinyl has been the advertising and signage industry, as a complimentary illuminating light box – without the light box. The difference is that the material can be rolled up in a tube for shipping, and advertisers can print onto an overlay which is in turn adhesively secured to the vinyl.

Don't look for examples in the Okanagan. Myke says there aren't any advertisers using his product here but he adds, "we do ship around the world."

His company has recently received a patent on the product for a new method he developed to manufacture the vinyl at 40 per cent less cost.



Myke Andriash, President (right) shown here with an Electric Vinyl Sign of the Statue of Liberty bound for the Disney Corporation

A Lux is a measurement of the light produced by something. When ElectricVinyl first began development of their product they were achieving 390 Lux of illumination. "Today we have sheet that is lighting up in excess of 1,100 to 1,200 Lux," he says, "which is about as bright as a sunshine ceiling in your kitchen would be."

Myke won't divulge Electric Vinyl sales, but he hopes it will go up dramatically in the future because of an application he hadn't considered when he began the process of developing his product.

Independently conducted longevity tests on Per'f-a-Lite indicate the product's "half-life" luminescence is between 10,000 and 15,000 hours at the traditional 400 Lux level. That means the product will constantly light up at the same level for almost two years. Used intermittently, this could mean decades of life – one reason why international manufacturers are looking at the product with covetous eyes.

ElectricVinyl now has the ability to manufacture the sheet in any shape required by a customer. It could be put inside refrigerators, for example, to replace incandescent lighting.

"There's a lot of advantages to it in that there is no heat, the bulb never burns out and you get more fridge space because you don't have a diffuser panel," Myke says. The product could also be used for things like lighting the valence on a stove top or as a night light, in the shape of popular cartoon characters, for a child's room. That gives Per'f-a-Lite truly universal application – at least anywhere on the planet with electricity.

"We invested in Canada's second largest laser which we have here in our facility to create this particular line," he states.

ElectricVinyl's retro reflective product is all about having better visibility for graphics in the evenings. When the retro reflective product is used on the exterior of a bus or van for example, an approaching vehicle's headlights strike the sign, lighting it up for anyone seeing it within the cone of light.

Mykes background is business and marketing. He calls himself an inventor but he has no specialized engineering training and is self-taught on the subject of optics. He hasn't let any of that stop his progress or that of ElectricVinyl.

In the immediate future he says the company will continue to work on improving the Per'f-a-Lite product in terms of breaking new boundaries for brightness and longevity. Market-wise, he sees the immediate advertising opportunities for the product in window advertising. With his manufacturing know-how, he can produce it in a see-through version. "There is 18-billion square feet of flat glass out there today," he says gleefully. "That's a big market."

He counsels other inventors to be careful about their market research.

"You want to look for a neglected market segment. You want a segment of your market grid where there would be a demand but where there currently is no supply – and then specialize."

Or, you could always offer something revolutionary to an existing market, like a flat light bulb.