

New lighting technology driving growth for Tripp

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The next time you're walking down one of the concourses at Reno-Tahoe International Airport, take a minute to look closely at one of the lighted display panels with their advertising for casinos and other attractions.

The technology that brings vibrant lighting to the thin panels promises to bring manufacturing jobs to northern Nevada. Tripp Enterprises, the long-established Sparks company that created the display panels, expects to develop multiple products that use the new technology.

But first, you need to understand how it all works.

The vibrant lighting in the wall-mounted advertising display panels at the airport is generated by strips of specially developed LED lights mounted along the edges of their aluminum frames.

The light is distributed evenly and brightly across the entire plastic panel, which has been treated with a patented technique known as Diamond Sunburst Engraving — essentially, sandblasting with industrial diamonds. Tripp Enterprises holds the U.S. license for that technology.

It's a big deal in the advertising business.

"We've looked long and hard for a new, brighter, more energy efficiency display over the past few years," says Liz Younger, whose Reno-based Younger Agency handles the advertising concessions at airports across the West.

While other manufacturers have created edge-lit systems, they've struggled to find ways to provide even lighting across display panels — especially large panels such as those that line the airport corridors.

The Younger Agency first installed one of Tripp's edge-lit LED display panels for an advertiser at Elko Regional Airport, followed by installations in Reno and other airports.

A 6-foot by 19-foot panel installed above the baggage claim area at the Reno airport is believed to be the largest in the world using the edge-lit technology on a single panel.

A big selling point, Younger says, is the energy savings of the new panels compared with older models.

An analysis by NV Energy finds the new sign technology will save the Reno airport

about \$36,000 a year compared with older fluorescent-lamp signage. Forty-six of the display panels are installed at the Reno airport.

"They're much brighter and vivid, and people are really noticing them," says Younger.

Frank Terrasas Jr., who handles marketing and business development for Tripp

Enterprises, says the display panels are only the first in what the company expects to be a large family of products using the technology.

Already, the display panels have moved from airport installations into loca-

tions such as theater lobbies and shopping malls. A basic 6-foot by 6-foot snap-frame panel sells for a bit less than \$2,300.

The edge-lit LED technology also can be used for low-voltage lighting systems for under-counter and ceiling installations in homes and businesses, says Terrasas. That product line, which takes advantage of the very thin profile of the lighting system, is set for introduction this autumn.

Another potential application: Automated quality-control systems in electronics plants

that rely on backlighting to highlight potential defects in parts.

"It's going to be a huge growth sector for us," says Terrasas.

In the first year since its launch, the lighting product has generated about \$1 million in sales for Tripp Enterprises. That could grow ten-fold within less than five years, the company projects

And with the rapid sales growth and creation of new markets, Tripp Enterprises plans to launch manufacturing operations at its 200,000-square-foot facility on Greg Street.

"It's not our goal to ship manufacturing overseas. Our goal is to manufacture in Reno. Our roots are in Reno," says Terrasas.

Tripp, launched in 1950, made its name as a manufacturer of plastics components for slot machines.

Today, however, the company provides custom manufacturing, engineering, logistics and related services for customers in industries ranging from mining to medical.

The lighting products, Terrasas says, fit into the company's strategic template. It looks to develop products for large, fast-growing market. It wants to deliver products whose patents keep potential competitors at bay. And Tripp wants to avoid competing with any of its existing customers.

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