



Goes

DIGITAL

DANNY SCHNEIDER

You may have come across the term MCFT in seminars, advertisements, articles and other publications and found your self wondering: What exactly is a modular curved frame technology (MCFT) system?

A clear distinction existed in the past between custom-made signs and modular sign systems. The custom-made signs offered unique, one-of-a-kind products while modular sign systems offered standard, off-the-shelf products available in a limited number of finishes and sizes. Naturally, the two alternatives were very different since the custom-made signs are expensive, less flexible and usually require long delivery time. In contrast, modular sign systems are moderately priced—allowing for swift delivery and easy content maintenance, but are of minimal design flexibility and prestige.

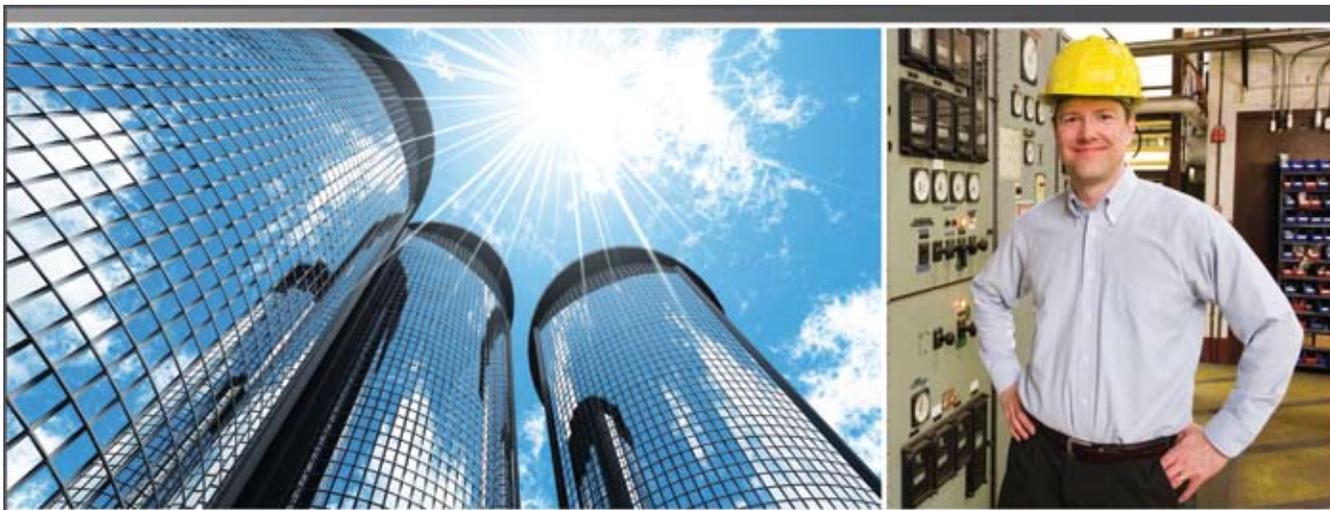
Here's where MCFT, a collaboration of the two systems, comes into play. MCFT is a frame-based system and allows for an endless array of substrates, methods and materials to be applied. In addition, its curved shape offers a contemporary look as well as ease of installation as the substrate is held in place by the tension created by the shape of the curve. MCFT-based systems offer a wide range of elements that may be joined together to create a huge amount of options—all made possible due to the assistance and guidance of the sign system manufacturer.

MCFT is a relatively new concept in which the sign manufacturer allows the sign industry to endlessly develop the system, thereby transforming it into a custom-ordered modular sign system.

Who developed MCFT?

While some inventions are completely new ideas, others are the result of a slow ongoing process which someone happened to recognize and be the first to name it. MCFT is of the second, as it has been evolving for several years through customer requests, increasing manufacturing abilities and decreasing manufacturing costs.

One must take into consideration that in the past, the cost of continuous development would have cost a considerable amount of money; therefore making customization unthinkable. The first generation of modular sign systems included a wide variety of manufacturers, who all suffered the same drawback—they could only offer an extremely limited number of solutions. Gradually, as manufacturing technologies became more accessible, the sign manufacturers adjusted their offerings to match the needs of customers taking on large scale projects. Each new project led to a new series of products that would eventually become a standard item



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in the overall system. The name of the game had switched from manufacturing excellence to service and customer experience. The first company to recognize this transition as a leading trend was Vista System—coining the phrase MCFT.

Why shift to MCFT technology?

The emphasis is moving away from product excellence and manufacturing excellence to providing excellent service. Products are becoming more and more similar each day. Obviously, there are still levels with entry barriers, but within each level the similarity is so close that differentiation no longer exists. This process can be seen in many fields and industries and the only remaining differentiation is the customer's shopping experience—including the level of service offered.

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However, differentiation within the realm of service has also risen, leading companies to continuously search for new ways to differentiate themselves. The latest differentiation is personalizing the product to the consumer's needs while absorbing the development cost. This is the new name of the game—further developing as customers learn their way around, just as it has been done in other segments in the past. The leading companies in the industry have recognized the new reality and are adjusting themselves accordingly in order to differentiate themselves in the eyes of their customers.

How do you keep the evolving system from reaching unmanageable proportions?

One must realize that this sign system will continue to evolve as customers place their demands for personalized development. The

secret to maintaining a healthy size system is stocking basic components; maintaining a fast and well-organized manufacturing process; and efficient cataloguing of components and products.

In practice, you would keep basic components available of the shelf and manufacture the unique elements upon acceptance of an order. This process requires tight working relationships with suppliers as the only way to keep the lead time to a minimum.

How does the end user fit in?

The end user is mostly concerned with the following three issues:

Product design and uniqueness

Way-finding signs are not only a means of directing people, but also serve as a decorative element. This explains the logic behind the unproportional investments made in custom-ordered designs, as well as the low popularity of the mundane modular systems. MCFT has altered the rules of the game, allowing the customer to adapt the products to suit the space and customize the materials and substance used within the framework.



Ease and cost of sign maintenance

Way-finding signage may be characterized as a segment which requires frequent replacement of the information presented. Therefore, custom-made signs are not the best choice if you want to avoid the image of handwritten directions posted on your fabulous custom-made sign using paper and duct tape. MCFT systems offer an amazing solution as they allow for swift and cost effective updating.

Overall cost

The cost of custom-made signage can not compare to that of an MCFT system. In addition, the last remaining advantage of the custom-made signs is design superiority which has been decreasing dramatically as the MCFT systems have been developing—leading the end user to choose an MCFT solution over a custom-made sign.

Conforming to standards while adding value

The innovation in the past decade has been incredible, even more so due to the fact that the previous period of way-finding innovation was more than 20 years ago when the first flat modular systems emerged. These first systems had been created as an answer to the consumer's demand for a self-maintained sign system solution. Overtime however, the offered solution was found to be insufficient and the need for innovation had become essential for sign system manufacturers. The answer became quite clear—MCFT became an essential part of the way-finding industry and it is only a matter of time before everyone starts requesting it. **FMJ**



Danny Schneider, director of business development for Vista System, has worked in the sign industry for the past five years.

During 2008, Schneider focused on promoting Vista System and green awareness worldwide. He has been working closely with SEGD, the U.S. Green Building Council, Green Business Partnership and several other groups in an effort to educate others on how they can operate and manufacture greener products.

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