



# SUPPLY PAIN

Canada's glass companies show their resiliency

**GLASS CANADA**

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**2021 BUYERS GUIDE • DIGITAL ASSISTANCE • LIFT TECHNOLOGY**



by RICH PORAYKO

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# Thank God for polycarbonate

**W**hen I cut my teeth in the glass industry, I was taught that polycarbonate and acrylic were the enemy. Both materials were inherently inferior to glass on every level. I believed this for 17 years.

When the pandemic hit, I was a few solid weeks ahead of the curve thanks to my early warning family who are all in medicine. My wife would say I was just being paranoid but an eccentric friend with business connections in China texted me over 50 times on Feb. 7 telling me to take the virus seriously and prepare. Seems even a broken clock is right twice a day. When all hell broke loose, people were stunned. They still are. Carnage was everywhere. It still is. Depending on who you talk to, it's actually getting worse. A few weeks into the lockdown, the apocalyptic narrative switched suddenly. On March 24, the team at my longtime customer, Memphis-based Binswanger Glass, brought me into the fold onto a project that was dubbed Retail Shields at the time. What came next was the fastest product launch that I have ever been part of. The full-service glass retailer has 60 locations with over 850 employees and I've honestly never witnessed a team pivot and rally behind a goal so quickly before. It was a textbook case study in speed to market. A product launch that would usually take four months took four days. Design, purchasing, production, logistics, pricing, customer service and marketing. Teamwork coming together, on demand, without a hitch.

Shields were still just a trending product and I don't think many of us had any idea that the partition market was going to explode like it did. The opportunity didn't just stop at checkout shields. As quickly as Binswanger developed a full line of custom and standardized barriers, the

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THAT'S RICH

team began creating new healthcare-related products including custom intubation boxes and ventilator exhaust ports for hospital ICUs. Then, as transit systems began coming back online, so did the demand for bus driver shields. That's when dentists, care homes, healthcare clinics and general retail businesses opened the flood gates and it was clear that guards were a key component to long term prevention and recovery. As luck would have it, 2020 is an election year. Binswanger Glass has fabricated over 2,000 polycarbonate shields for polling locations in Kansas alone to use in the 2020 primary and general elections. The latest surge in breath barrier products has been the educational arena. Anyone with school-aged kids will attest that schools are a hot-button topic. Regardless of the politics, there are a lot of kids and a lot of schools.

Over the years, I've worked with some super-interesting content including celebrities, professional athletes and wounded war heroes, sometimes together in the same post. Almost nothing I've worked on so far has come close to poly, acrylic and glass shields. The first retail shield post we published is still the most successful single social media post that I have ever been part of. At the time of publishing, 81,309 people viewed it on Facebook alone. That was just one of many social media posts that went viral over the following quarter. Altogether, I'd estimate around a half million people viewed Binswanger Glass breath barrier posts across all channels. Largely organically (non-paid). For sneezeguards. It blows my mind.

Glass has been good to me and will always be my main squeeze, but I've realized there is room in my professional life for a side interest. Some applications are just more suitable for plastic. There, I said it. It's lightweight, cheap, easy to fabricate, safe and strong. Plastic is harder to clean, scratches really easily and will degrade over time which means most of what is out there will need to be replaced. Some of it with a permanent glazed solution. Some of it with more polycarbonate or acrylic. Which will also need to be eventually replaced. It's not sexy but it's in demand, keeps people safe and is being incorporated into future design for the foreseeable future.

I will never ever badmouth polycarbonate or acrylic products again. They were there for me and many others during the darkest days of 2020. Concrete on the other hand – don't get me started. •