

How To Do Waterslide Decals Using Your Inkjet Printer.

By John Rumming
Clinic for the 2009 ACT N Scale Convention

Outline:

This clinic describes how to do waterslide decals using your standard home inkjet printer. The same way applies to Laser printers using laser decal paper, but no clear top is required as far as I know. Using MGI PhotoSuite 2 which I have had since 1995, this program has an excellent project feature in which you can change and add photos, names, numbers and other items. I have not tried any other programs as this one runs nicely. You have to watch other programs as they sometimes provide updates or next versions where the projects you have done are not compatible, so basically you have to start all over again with new versions, even updates. That is why I have stuck to the one program as is.

Limitations:

One limitation is that they should be put onto a light background only. If not, colours will disappear like yellow on a dark blue background. This is using the clear backed decal paper.

One exception to this rule is if you use the colour black. Black will go onto any colour.

Can't print white? There is a Walkaround:

Sometimes you can cheat and use the other decal paper that Micromark sell. It has a white background and this means that you can use anything with it and all colours will come out correct. One drawback is that you sometimes have to leave a small white edge around the decal. I will cover this in a while.

Items required:

1. Waterslide Decal sheets from Micromark.
2. Inkjet Printer
3. Computer (laptop or tower)
4. Graphics editing program with a function so you can change the numbers or wordings for future decals.
5. White Knight Crystal Clear Acrylic craft spray (or similar clear coat but **MUST BE NON-YELLOWING!**)
6. Newspaper
7. Scissors for cutting and trimming.

1. Micromark is an American company that offers all types of different tools and useful items. This is a great source of hard to find and unusual types of tools. They sell decal paper for inkjet and laser printers. Their website is at www.micromark.com .

2. Inkjet printer – I use a Lexmark all in one 1170 series and find that this is great when you use the correct settings. I am yet to try other printers. A printer that takes paper in the back and out the front is usually the best to use, as this keeps the decal sheet straight.

3. A tower computer or laptop is fine as long as it can run your program that you are going to use.

4. Graphics program – see above. I use MGI PhotoSuite 2

5. White knight spray – I have found that the White Knight brand of spray acrylic called ‘Crystal Clear’ is a terrific item for the topcoat spray. It states on the can that it is Non Yellowing, which is important for this project. If it is just a varnish, it yellows and makes the decal look bad.

6. Newspaper is required to spray the clear coat onto the decal.

NOTE! DO NOT TOUCH THE DECAL SIDE OF THE DECAL PAPER. THIS WILL PUT OIL FROM YOUR FINGERS ON THE SURFACE AND YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PRINT PROPERLY ON IT!

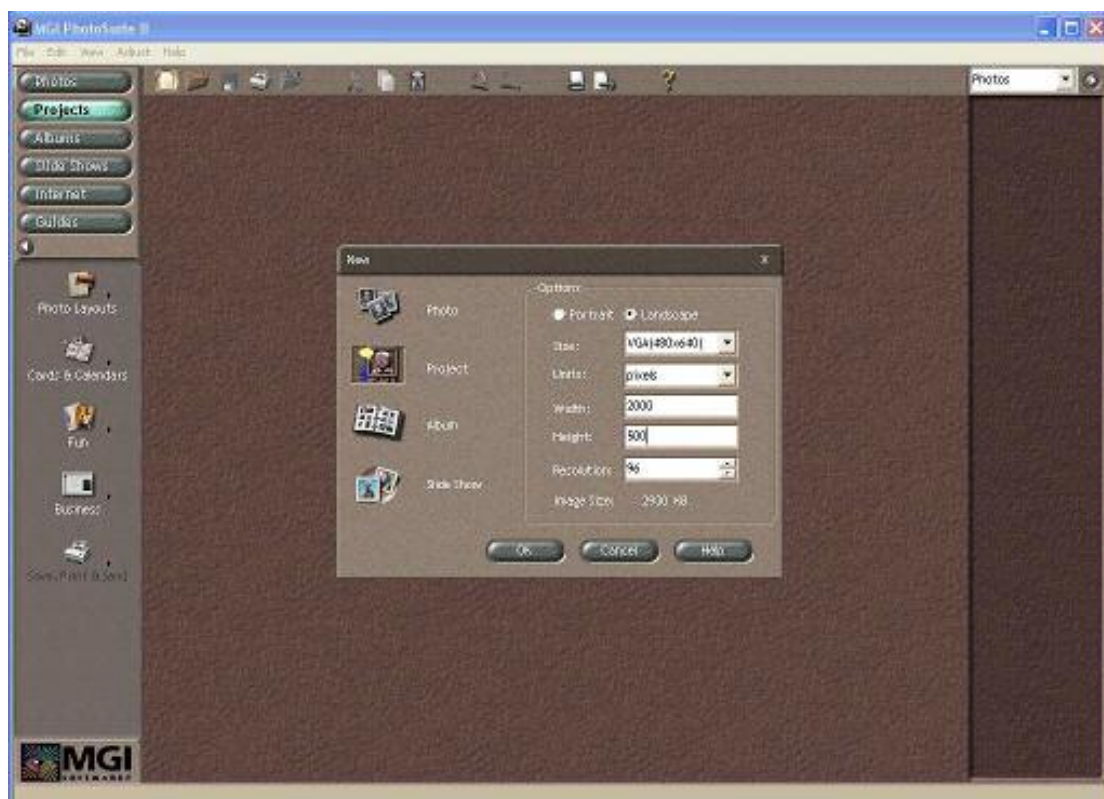
I will be using MGI Photosuite 2 as my graphics program.

Start by finding a graphic or picture that you want to use. If you 'rip' a picture off the net, ensure that it is ok for use. If you rip a copy off the net and you sell the decals without getting the authorization, you can get into a lot of trouble, and possibly a court case. It's always best to try and make your own. Note that all monitors may display colours differently, so what is on the screen may print out a slightly different colour.

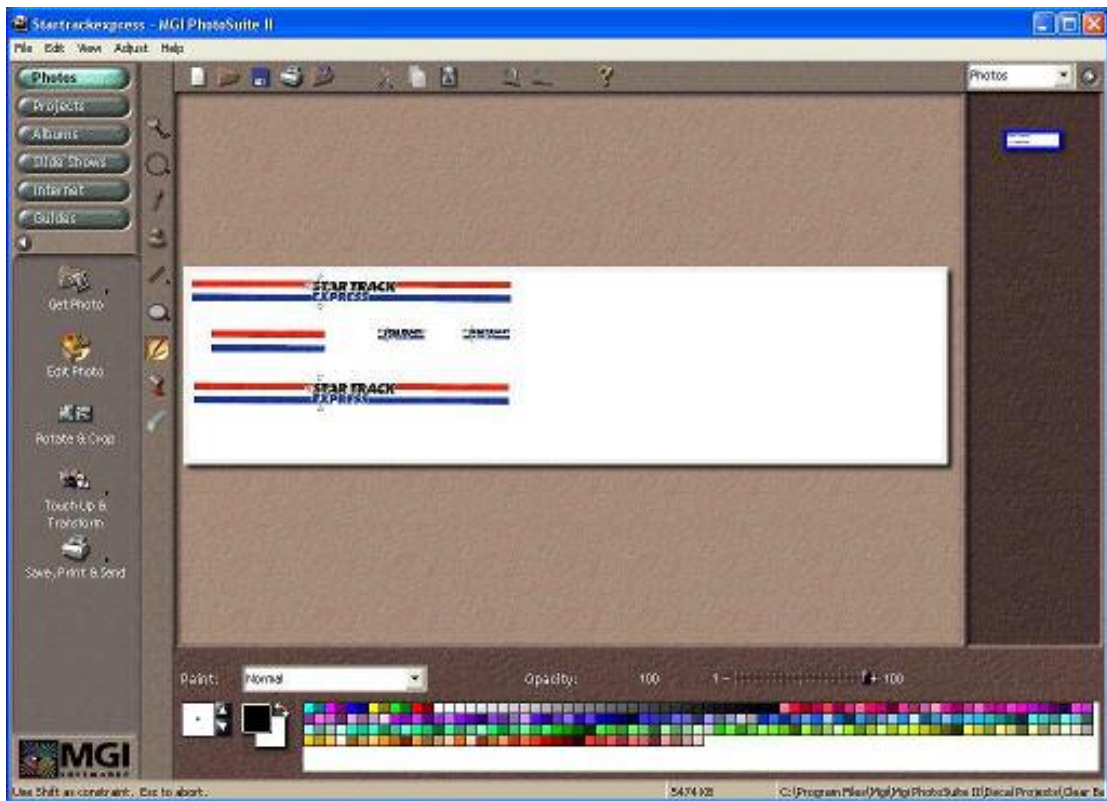
Edit the picture so all the areas you don't want are deleted. These will become clear under the decal when slid off. (White background decal sheet excepted)

Open the MGI PhotoSuite 2 program and import the graphics you want to use. You can add as many pictures as you want to the sidebar, and use them in whatever order you want.

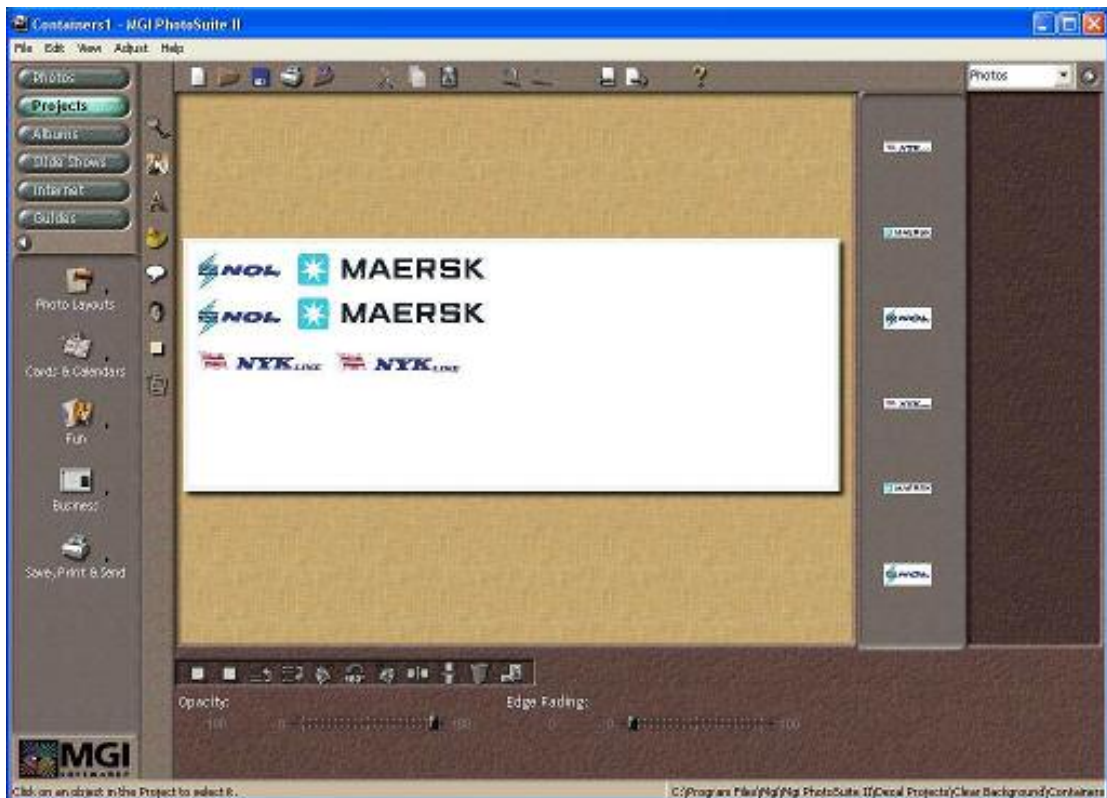
Go to the project tab and start a new project.



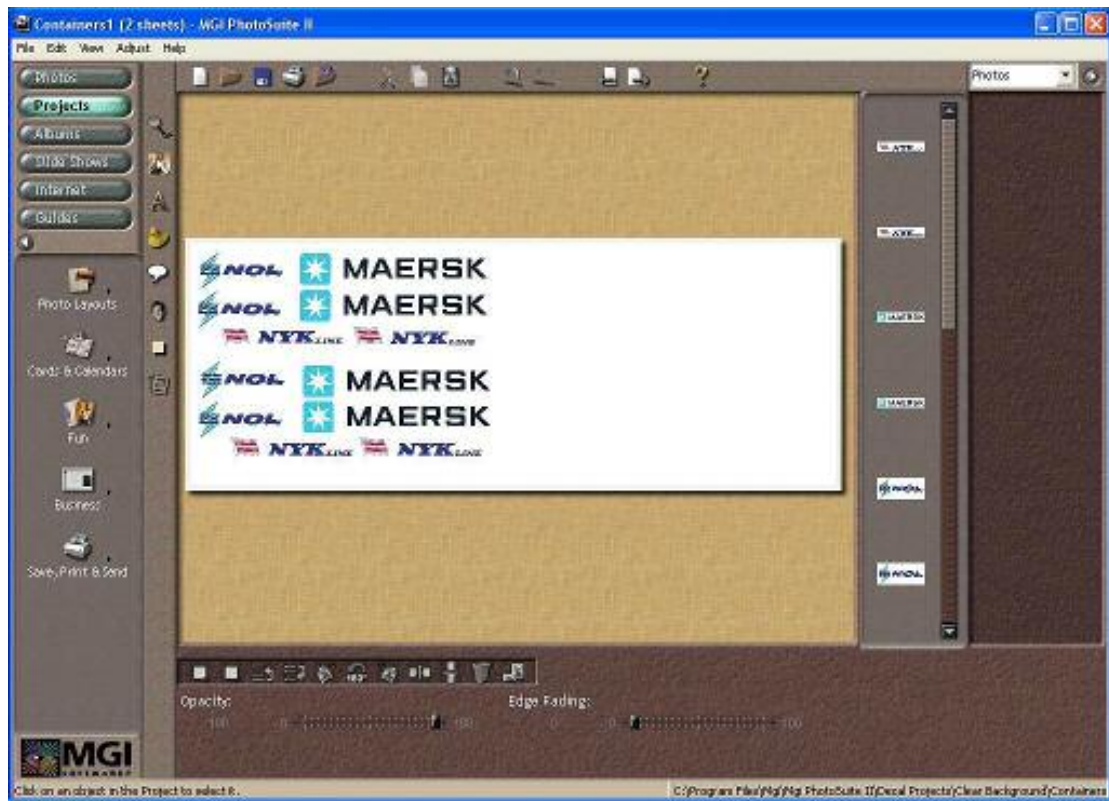
Make the new project bigger than what you want the decals to be. This is because you will need most of the time the decal to be done for both sides of the project. See the next two pictures to see what I mean.



Drag the picture you want into the project area. You can resize them to any size, and put them anywhere. I try and put the decal pictures within the first half of the projects screen. This is so if you know what size you will be printing the decal, you can put it in and when you are finished, just print it.



If you want 2 lots, just duplicate the decal pictures twice on the same sheet.



Another way of doing it is to use the whole area and print it sized down. What is meant by that is put all the decal pictures in, then test print and find the best size reduction for it. Return to the project and add a font box saying what size to reduce it to. Then every time you go to re-print it, you already have the correct scale to print it to.



Using other Paint Programs.

Open the Paint program of your choice. As there are many different ones, they should all do approximately the same sequence.

Import the picture/s you want to use. Using a blank background, move the pictures onto the blank area and size them to what you will require. Once all the pictures are on, continue with the following instructions.

OK. Now that you have your decal ready, print it. Firstly, print one out on a piece of paper for the correct sizing. When you are printing on the decal paper, you will have to do a trial and error on different settings to find the best one. I have found that 'better' and 'coated paper' on the 1170 Lexmark is the best.

If it is a plain black decal, put the settings to 'print in black only'. This will make sure that the decal will be printed in pure black, not a mixture of colours. If the mixture of colours is not quite correct, the decal will start to turn green after a while.

TIP: As most decals will be only half a page wide or less, cut the sheet in half from top to bottom. That way you do not waste the other part of the sheet.

After the decal has come through, do not touch the printed area. It will smudge! Cut the excess off the bottom, and put the unused piece back in a safe place. Place it on the newspaper and coat it with the spray. If you do one quick spray it will not seal the ink in properly. I find that a hefty coat is better. The spray can be purchased in 3 types: Matt (which is best), Satin (good also) and gloss. Gloss can be overpowering and does not look right, so I would recommend Matt or Satin. Leave to dry (about 20 minutes) and re-coat if you feel it is necessary.

When printing on the white background decal sheet, the same rules apply.

I printed the following on a white background decal sheet.



When I cut them out, I was very careful with the outline. Sometimes this can be a help if you want white wording. Also, sometimes the decal may call for a white background edging anyway. Since the white decal shows white underneath the area, the following decals can be achieved.



You can see the white lines with Mt Newman Joint Venture written. Also, on the original it has the white shadow around the symbol. You can also read the BHP Iron Ore wording on the side. I colour matched the area around the words to the train colour so when I put them on, it ‘disappeared’ into the colour of the train. Trust me – this takes some time to do but can be worthwhile!

Another trick with using the MGI PhotoSuite 2 is doing numbers and classification letters. Every wagon has a different number, and many companies make wagons with all the same numbers. How boring, and you can not separate dodgy wagons. Was it this one with 65 on or these 3 with 65 on?

I used the idea on all my wagons. If I get an order for 10 wagons of one type, then I number them from 1 to 10. If I get another order from the same person for more of the same wagons, then I number them 11 to 20.

All I do is start another project. I put the classification letters in, and enough room to do the numbers. If you need to change the numbers later, just click on the font tab and click the numbers. Now simply renumber then. See the following example.



The A's on the right are each row of the numbers and letters. As you can see, I have already put the words WWA 323 in one row. In the next row I have numbers. If you look at the bottom near the MGI wording, you can see the numbers that I have highlighted using the Font icon on the left. Just highlight them and type new numbers in. If I was doing this row again, I would type 81 81 82 82 83 83 84 84 85 85 with returns where the spaces are. It's that easy!

There is one thing to point out. If you are saving these projects, save them as the project extension in the graphics program you are using, such as a .pzp in MGI Photosuite 2 because if you don't, the project will save as a picture. If this happens, then you will not be able to edit numbers again.

Really, that is all there is to it. It took lots of trial and error before I got to this stage, but trust me, a little patience and it will work. I have not purchased decals for over 4 years and you can also produce one of a kind decals too.

Tip: 1. When you want to apply these decals, use hot water and they will release from the backing paper quickly. This is good for the decal so it will not create any problems.

Tip: 2. Once the decals are on the wagon or loco, then spray the loco with the clear coat. This will seal in the decal onto the side of the item, plus give a nice matt/satin coat to the item so it can be weathered.

Hints:

Spray a hefty coat of clear on the decal.

Do no touch the front of the decal sheet.

Your screen may print the colours slightly differently to your printer.

John Rumming.