



## PLAQUES&LETTERS.COM

Don Baker dba Designs&Signs aka Plaques&Letters.com  
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False Advertising Complaint Against: Metallic Arts, 914 North Lake Road, Spokane Valley, WA 99212. Ph: 800.541.3200 Fax: 509.483.1759 website: <http://www.metallicarts.com/index.html> email: [sales@metallicarts.com](mailto:sales@metallicarts.com). Contact: Ron Erbele

Federal Trade Commission  
Consumer Response Center  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear FTC:

There's a dynamic that lies run rampant in the architectural signage industry—*False Advertising by my competitors*—particularly as it relates to cast and etched plaques, and cast & flat cut metal letters offerings. If people choose to work with liars, that's their option... **but they should be able to know who they're dealing with.** Please visit <http://www.plaquesandletters.com/FTC/THE%20TRUTH%20ABOUT%20ARCHITECTURAL%20PLAQUES%20&%20LETTERS%20ACQUISITION.pdf> for more. It is a simple fact that Matthews Bronze, A.R.K. Ramos, Gemini, Southwellco, International Bronze & Trigard are the major, reputable manufacturers in the bronze & aluminum plaques industry. (The first four also produce letters.)

Metallic Arts (hereafter identified as "MA") is engaged in false advertising. They clearly post on their homepage <http://www.metallicarts.com/index.html> that they are manufacturers by **any normal reading**: "Utilizing only the finest materials available, Metallic Arts **creates** plaques, metal letters and architectural graphics that stand the test of time... Bronze, aluminum and brass - these are the building blocks upon which we've assembled an **unbroken history of more than 100 years of quality** and satisfaction. Our dedication to detail and commitment to excellence has made Metallic Arts **the most respected name in architectural signage**. [NOTE: A fantasy.] We invite inquires [sic] from architects, engineers, designers and sign professionals." "**Utilizing only the finest materials available, Metallic Arts creates...**" & "**unbroken history of more than 100 years of quality...**" **are clear signs. This leads people to believe that they are getting some manufacturer-direct "bargain"**.

Again on their homepage they offer that they are "Members of ARCAT". People or companies don't become "members" of Arcat. Arcat isn't an organization where people with common interests trade ideas, etc., but rather more of an industry "Yellow Pages". <http://www.arcat.com/> was primarily a print-cum-internet marketing tool, where you pay to have your info disseminated to mostly architects. This is no "*mark of distinction*", and is NO

indication that they're even manufacturers. (My mom could list there if she wanted to throw away \$15,000.)

Most architectural signage manufacturers belong at least to ISI—the International Sign Association—as well as USSC—the United States Sign Council, and often ISI—Advertising Specialties Incorporated. One good example of a legit manufacturer who does is Matthews Bronze: <http://www.matthewsbronze.net/welcome.htm> Metallic Arts does not.

**PLAQUES:** <http://www.metallicarts.com/plaques.html> offers: "Bronze, the metal of the ages since the dawn of civilization, is arguably the finest metal employed for the production of plaques and metal signage. ...The journey from concept to reality starts with prime bronze ingots that are free of lead and mercury. Using your design, **we craft** the genesis of a masterpiece in a variety of borders, letter styles, textures, background colors and almost unlimited variety of shapes. Once the letters, words, and logos **are produced**; the faces are stroke sanded, with baked enamel backgrounds before being clear-coated and oven-baked with a two-part hardened acrylic polyurethane.... **Each aluminum plaque we make** is created from your designs and specifications in a variety of textures and borders.....Today, few commemorative markers have as noble and classic looks as a **finely crafted Metallic Arts brass plaque crafted from the highest quality materials.**" [Note to MA: Give the hyperbole & the word "crafted " a rest.]

People don't use jargon like "The journey from concept to reality starts with prime bronze ingots that are free of lead and mercury." & "we craft" & "we make"...**unless they're portraying themselves as manufacturers. Yet, e.g., MA's mounting rosettes 1-7 are actually Gemini's own 1-7. MA simply precedes theirs with a "M" instead of an "R".**

**Gemini's Rosettes:**

<http://www.signletters.com/USpro09/Metal%20Plaques/mounting.html>

It requires a login I will provide on a separate page. This is scanned from their Catalog:



**"Metallic Arts's" Rosettes:**

<http://www.metallicarts.com/plaques/mounting.html>



**CAST LETTERS:** [http://www.metallicarts.com/cast\\_letters.html](http://www.metallicarts.com/cast_letters.html) offers: "To make sure your letters stand out, always use Metallic Arts Cast Letters. Using only prime aluminum and bronze ingots that are mercury and lead free, Metallic Arts Cast Letters are head and shoulders above other metal letters...Cast Letters from Metallic Arts are second to none. **Manufactured** with exacting precision, finish and durability, **our** Cast Aluminum & Bronze Letters come in 44 standard letter styles and 11 standard finishes...In addition, **we can easily manufacture** your custom letter styles and logos." "There they go again" with their "ingots". Again, people don't offer that, and use jargon like "we can **easily manufacture**" "..." **unless they're portraying themselves as manufacturers.** "Cast Letters from Metallic Arts" "...are the SAME cast metal letters available from Gemini's several hundreds of other retailers nationwide, <http://www.signletters.com/>, the actual manufacturer, which MA uses as their true resource.

Please see enclosed font list from MA [http://www.metallicarts.com/cast\\_letters.html](http://www.metallicarts.com/cast_letters.html), as well as Gemini's. While MA's "44 standard letter styles" is fewer than Gemini's 60, notice the identical three-column formatting & identical symbols graphic, lower right page. Both entities offer the same baked enamel colors. MA precedes Gemini's <http://www.signletters.com/Plastic/minnesota-colors.html> (that link's for Gem's Injection Molded letters but it's the same set of colors) numerical nomenclature with a "9" (prints enclosed), as well as eight identical finishes for these cast aluminum letters: MA's: <http://www.metallicarts.com/Cast/finishes.htm> Gemini's: [http://www.signletters.com/Metal/cast/cast\\_finishes.html](http://www.signletters.com/Metal/cast/cast_finishes.html) MA offers six finishes for cast bronze letters...the same number & finishes as Gemini. "Coincidence?" There is no "industry norm" for the number of finishes true manufacturers offer; it's whatever they are capable of. [Matthews Bronze also uses eight for their cast aluminum letters: <http://www.matthewsbronze.net/techinfo/LET-finish.htm> ...but instead of Nouveau Patina & Gold Anodized, they offer Light Bronze Anodized and Polished, which Gem. & MA don't.]

Even MA's letters mounting specs and verbiage are precisely the same as Gemini's for Flush Mount, Projected Jam Mount, Projected Spacer Mount, and Wall Mount/Flat Metal Wall Mount. For both MA's & Gemini's Bottom Mount/ Bottom Rail/ Bottom Stud they offer: "Letters are drilled and tapped from the bottom...Available on letters 4" to 24" ...aluminum bar for aluminum letters and stainless steel bar for bronze letters...Minimum 3/8" thick/3/8" and thicker letters only... Maximum rail length/piece is 8'...Large letters/greater than 8" letters require tiebacks..." **The laws of physics are constant yes, but there are no "coincidences" in this business.**

**CAST LETTERS MOUNTING:** It's telling that while MA deigns to NOT copy Gemini's mounting diagrams, as seen on MA's <http://www.metallicarts.com/mountings.htm> page, they elect to **mimic ours:** [http://www.plaquesandletters.com/plastic\\_letters\\_installation.htm](http://www.plaquesandletters.com/plastic_letters_installation.htm). **You won't see similar "craft paper/'Your Letters'" concept ANYWHERE else.** We hadn't...until MA posted their version of ours. I surmise MA wants to **further distance themselves from any known connection to Gemini...by using our—or any other— graphic concept of letter mounting templates, as opposed to Gemini's.** Below Left is what most Gemini distributors offer as their mounting template diagram, easily identifiable as Gemini's:

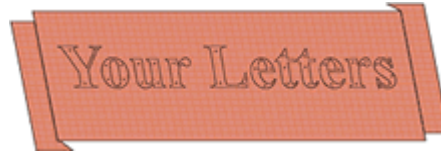


On the right is what MA posted online in 2007, as well as used in their print catalogs (which I've since discarded but retain an image of on my harddrive; more later):





After a schism with Gemini, I crafted and now post this:



MA's 2009 mimicked version of ours is now in use:

MA's "distancing" here is doubtless the same reason that, while they offer the same letter mounting methods, *along with their precise verbiage*, they provide a different graphic representation than Gemini's. The same applies to identical 8 aluminum letters finishes, but with different graphic models...but **NO actual "manufacturer" mimics a "mere distributor's" fundamental graphics.**

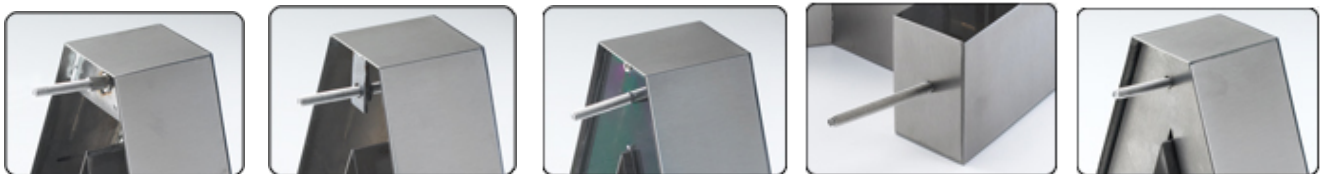
**FABRICATED LETTERS:** <http://www.metallicarts.com/fabricated.html> "Whether the materials you request are single-directional polished 304 stainless, 1052 alloy aluminum, or our top of the line titanium coated stainless; **Metallic Arts will reproduce** your letters or designs to exact specifications." They're clearly offering Gemini there (I'll provide you the "Pro" login on a separate page): <http://www.signletters.com/USpro09/index.shtml> <http://www.signletters.com/USpro09/Fabricated/fabricated.html> <http://www.signletters.com/USpro09/Fabricated/images/MountingOptions.jpg> ...which are identical mounting images. *Here MA has dropped their ruse.*

### Gemini's:

#### Mounting Options



### MA's cropped versions of the very same images:



The common refrain from all "manufacturer-pretenders" has been: "Why should we 'recreate the wheel' by posting our own work and making our own specification diagrams, when we can use someone else's?" My reply as it relates to MA is: **If they've been in business for a century as they claim, far longer than Gemini's been in business (est. 1960)...they'd already have their own.**

### Other ways of knowing MA is not a foundry:

We used to even buy from them beginning January '07 (see enclosures), believing that they were. I can only conclude that Gemini was providing MA "super-distributor" pricing as they sometimes do, for it to have been worth MA's while. They were struggling in oblivion online at the time and wanted our imprimatur & exposure. For example:

[http://www.google.com/search?](http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SUNA_enUS274US274&q=cast+plaques)

[sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SUNA\\_enUS274US274&q=cast+plaques](http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SUNA_enUS274US274&q=cast+plaques) When I asked MA:

1. If I could come visit their plant in WA, I was told that's not allowed. Most actual manufacturers would invite a distributor's visit if they truly had a viable plant facility.
2. If I could have a UPS tracking number for a shipped project, Ron Erbele told me that's not allowed because "people can find out your UPS account number that way." UPS refutes that is even possible. [PS: One UPS rep stated that. Another said it was indeed "embedded" in the tracking number". We've worked with many manufacturers and NONE have ever withheld either UPS or FedEx tracking info. More than one even supplies it automatically via email when a project ships. I determined:] MA didn't want the ID & locale of the true maker/shipper known.
3. Why some customers were telling us they were receiving Gemini plaques when we'd ordered them from MA, Ron Erbele replied: "Well, they do some of our some of our plaques when we're too busy..." MA must remain busy because they're still sourcing others as well. One foundry we now use informed me this month that they had made some of MA's plaques. Same foundry (which regularly visits trade shows) informed that they thought MA had actually even been purchased by Gemini. (I can only conclude that Gemini wanted a direct retail outlet...even though their stance is that they sell only to sign companies & Distributors.) Another foundry we have do our work was purportedly making some for MA as well. When I asked their sales manager about it, he would only offer: "We don't divulge the names of our customers. I can only say 'I've heard of' Metallic Arts." (If one wonders: "If Metallic Arts is so tight with Gemini, why don't they make all of their plaques...?", the answer is: Gemini doesn't actually cast their own "cast plaques"; they're routed, which Gemini categorizes a "Architectural Plaques". You can't "router" a true bas relief plaque. Plus, routed plaques have size limitations.) The "most respected name in architectural signage" does not outsource most if not all of their product. [PS: They also don't pay for Google's Sponsored Links Results.]

### Here's why all of this matters:

1. From experience, buyers like to know who they are buying from, and disdain being hoodwinked, regardless of the price or product they receive(d).
2. Distributors masquerading as manufacturers put honest distributors at a significant competitive disadvantage, and,
3. For those end users thinking they "hit the jackpot" by ostensibly buying "manufacturer-direct", looking no further, they may never realize they might have received a better deal elsewhere.

True, "It's a Free Country." People are allowed to lie. Others are allowed...to call them on it. Metallic Arts should be compelled to tell the truth online: 1) They will NOT be making the cast plaques and letters or etched plaques that customers order from them, and 2) They likely

didn't make any of the samples that they already post. They may have had manufacturing capabilities in the past, as is likely (Gemini many years ago actually referred us to MA for "tough projects"; MA does post a Gallery of work not posted elsewhere).

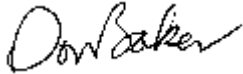
However...Customers aren't interested in what someone "used to do", perhaps decades ago. Ideally some "powers that be"—either you or WA & LA States' Attorney's General— will be inclined to act upon this.

Production Note: A digital copy of this letter is included. Upon usage, you can click on the hyperlinks found there and immediately access the webpages offered here.

Actual Manufacturer Contacts for Reference:

Gemini Inc.: 103 Mensing Way, Cannon Falls, MN. 55009 ph: 1-800/538-8377 fax:  
1-800/421-1256 Website: <http://www.signletters.com/>

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Baker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "D" and "B".

Don Baker