

Saving Those Valuable Substrates

Practical advice on reducing rigid substrate waste.

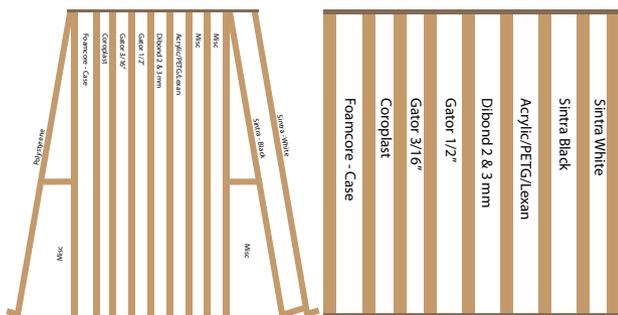
By Dave King



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existing business and help them grow, and help integrate new equipment in an existing business. For more information go to www.themarketking.com or e-mail him at david@themarketking.com.

Substrate waste is — well, it's such a *waste!* Today we will be discussing ways to reduce waste of rigid substrates. Some shops mount graphics to rigid boards, and some use flatbed printers to print directly to rigid boards. Following are some tips on reducing rigid substrate waste in both situations.



1) Build a good vertical rack system. Smaller shops strapped for space should construct two vertical racks — one 100" x 96" x 44" deep for storing large sheets; and a smaller one, about 48" x 44" x 50", for boards that are less than half of a sheet. Divide the racks into slots 3" to 5" or wider for storing your uncut rigid boards, with wider slots for your best selling boards, such as foam board. For soft materials that are prone to warping, such as Sintra and polystyrene, you can create a slanted rack using a piece of Dibond mounted to two pieces of 2" x 4" that can be attached at an angle (about 15 degrees). This will keep the material flat and not eat up too much floor space.



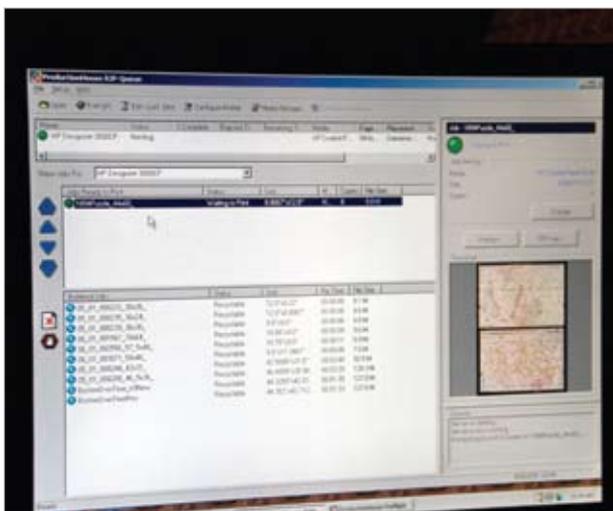
2) Flatbed media storage rack. When it comes to flatbed printers, the larger issue for board storage is keeping the board flat. A warped board under a moving printhead with .060" head clearance will result in head strikes and wasted boards. Horizontal racks will save you here. You will need two sizes of steel racks — 98" x 48" (for your 4' x 8' boards) and 122" x 60" (for your 5' x 10' boards). In most cases you need to have these custom made and ask for "light load" shelving, as they are thinner. Keep heavy and/or flexible substrates down low and lighter substrates high on the rack for easier handling.



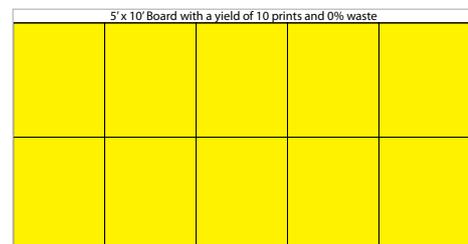
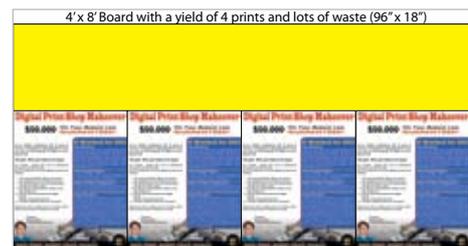
3) Order by the case, wear gloves. Not only will this save money (bulk order), but your substrates will be less likely to arrive at your shop with dents and dings or dirty. These issues are less crucial when mounting a vinyl print, but when printing with a flatbed, dinged substrates will cost you. Dibond and Gator are especially susceptible. Also, handle each board as few times as possible or use cotton gloves. Every time you touch the board you are asking for problems (PVC boards are the most susceptible) since fingerprints, though invisible on an unprinted board, will become obvious after printing and likely result in a wasted board.



4) Over-size prints, and use a light table. If you are over-sizing your board, then mounting the print onto the board, then cutting the board again, you are wasting a huge amount of boards and time. Instead, cut the board to size and oversize the *print* (on the RIP by one percent) and, using a light table for added preciseness, trim off the extra vinyl. Here's an example: take a job for 18 (golf event) 24" x 24" Coroplast signs. If you over-size the board, you will need six sheets of Coroplast, but if you use a light table and cut the board into 24" x 24" pieces, you will only use 2.2 sheets.



5) Gang print jobs at the RIP. If your RIP can do so, gang (nest) multiple jobs onto a single sheet size at the RIP station. And if you have a digital die cutter, you can increase your productivity by printing whole sheets of graphics and mounting the whole sheet on a board and then have the digital die cutter cut out the prints. This way you can send jobs over to the RIP based on the board they are to be mounted to, and at some point in the day, you can choose the board type and run all the jobs out on 4' x 8' sections on the vinyl with all the images nested together.



6) Purchase the right board for the job. So many jobs require you to think about how to get the best yield from the sheet. For example, you might get a job that calls for a number of 30" x 24" printed boards — if you used a 4' x 8' sheet, your yield would be four out of the sheet; with a sheet cost of \$24 your cost is \$6 per 30" x 24" board. However, if you used a 5' x 10' sheet, your yield would be 10 out of the sheet, with a sheet cost of \$35. Now your cost goes down to \$3.50 per 30" x 24" board. You get the idea.

How To:

Reduce Rigid Substrate Waste



7) Create “rigid rules” for your staff. When my shop upgraded to a flatbed printer, our rigid board waste paradoxically increased. To help prevent waste, make sure employees use cut off pieces first, before reaching for a new sheet. Make sure they put back the sheets when done, and they must put away new inventory properly (and not just rest it against the wall, as it will warp). Try to develop systems and rules, such as wearing cotton gloves and workflows that minimize handling of sheets — the less handling, the less chance of costly reprints due to fingerprints. These instructions could be included in your shop’s employee handbook.

VERY FEW ITEMS in your company cost as much as boards and since you and your employees have full control over the waste, you need to make sure they all understand the value of the substrates. Remember, the one who cares the most about your bottom line is you, and in many cases, you are the only one who cares.

Good luck, and be smart with your money,
and I will see you on the show floor!

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