

# IN THE AISLES

Covering temporary signage systems for P.O.P., retail, display, banners, tradeshows and more.



If done correctly, trade show graphics can be a big moneymaker.

## Trade Show *AND* Event Graphics



*Are they the true gold mine?*

BY DAVE KING

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I HAVE BEEN SPEAKING at the NBM shows now for more than six years, and one of the most popular questions I get is, "Where can I make the most amount of money?" Six years ago the answer was trade show and event graphics, and today the answer is still the same. I know that many people are excited about vehicle wraps, but let me tell you that nothing compares with trade show and event graphics. Here are a few points for you to consider about these graphics:

- ♦ Most show graphics are used only for a few days and then thrown away.
- ♦ All show graphics must be of the best quality, and as a result are the highest price.
- ♦ Most show people wait until the last minute to order them, and many times this gets into rush charges.

- ♦ Most companies love the crystal laminate used on the prints, so your failure rate with this overlaminate is almost zero percent.
- ♦ Most companies spend more than \$1,000 for show graphics and the margin on show graphics is huge.

There are two types of trade show clients: the companies that attend the show, and the company that puts on the show. The companies that puts on the show will have the largest orders because they are responsible for all the graphics for the aisles, the directional signs, the welcome banners, and so many graphics for events, training and the works. These clients are like gold if you can get them, but be on your toes because they are being chased by everyone, so there is a good chance they are getting very good prices. The clients that attend the shows are a much better bet and easier to secure as a client. Plus many of them do more than one show per year, so the chances of you getting more than one order per year for show graphics are great. I have worked with clients in the past that did more than

30 shows a year; these clients are the true gold.

Trade shows are the only way most companies can reach their clients in the same place and at the same time. Think if you could have every one of your clients and prospects in a room for a few days. You would be in heaven! So these companies must put on the best show, present the best products and do something better than the next booth to make the people at the show stop and take notice. Now this puts you at a little bit of a disadvantage because if the graphics they ask you to print were not designed well enough to deliver the message to the people at the show, then the booth will not be busy and the show will not be a success for the company.

This will, in many cases, cause the company to spend less money on graphics for the next show or not attend all together. If you can have some influence on the graphics or booth layout and you understand shows and events, then you are in a much better position to make a lot more money. First, you can charge for the design services, and along with the design you will get the graphics.

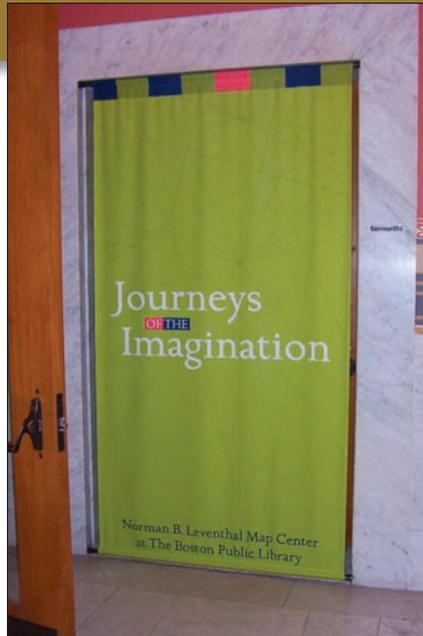
I clearly do not have enough time in this article to tell you how to design trade show and event graphics, but here are a few pointers that should help you be more successful:

People at a trade show or event will not read—they will walk up to a booth that has a sign that says “I make water pumps” and most people will say, “So what do you do?” Hello! So, the more obvious the sign and graphics are as to what the company offers the better.

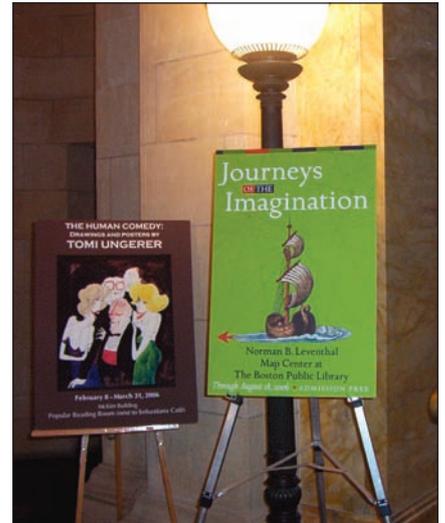
The second point to remember is that no one really cares how great the company is, or how large they are, or how many clients they have, they only want to know what the company will do for them. Make sure you delivery this message.

Along with the message of what the company does for the person, it is also important not to make the offerings too generic because you could say, “We make the lowest cost water pumps,” and this would make everyone at the show that was

CONTINUED



**Fabric for displays, which is nice because they do not wrinkle and do not curl.**



**Easel back graphics need to be stiff but somewhat disposable. If they are long term, use a board that will not damage if it falls over. If short term, use a low-cost board.**



**Floor decal at 12' x 12'; Wall fabric at 14' x 8'.**



**This booth uses prints laminated with 30 mil Lexan plus PVC panels, .040 polystyrene and flexible graphics that are hung from tracks.**

interested in a water pump stop and take up the time of the people working the booth. But if your client does water pumps for just shallow wells and sumps, then you need to say this. The reason for this is that a person stopping and taking up time of the people at the booth that has no interest in the pumps your client offers takes away from the clients that are truly interested in your clients' products. Most people will wait for about 30 seconds at a show and then just walk away. This hurts!

Finally, understand that the lights at a show are bad and will not make the booth stand out, your client should invest in lights for the booth. Lights will make the booth stand out from the others and the more lights the better. But don't make it a tanning booth.

**SELLING SHOW GRAPHIC SERVICES TO YOUR CLIENT**

With the information above, you should be able to talk to the marketing or show manager for the company and demonstrate to them that you have a good understanding of what works at shows and that you are the right company to make their booth more successful at the show. Oh yeah... you need to deliver on this promise. Don't talk about price, because if you do, you are cheapening the sale and it will be a downhill

slide. Talk about the value of the show, ask questions such as:

- How many people attend the show?
- How many sales must you secure at the show to pay for the expenses of the show?
- Will you be offering a prize or a giveaway at the booth to collect business cards?
- Will your staff be all dressed in the same outfits with your logo?
- Do you have enough brochures for the show?
- Are you going to hand out something that helps the people remember your company?
- Do you want to make a huge statement at the show and really put a hurt on the competition?
- When is the show?
- When must you ship the booth and graphics?
- What other things can I help you with for your show?

This opens up doors for apparel, offset printing, design services and much more. Let's say the answers are, "Yes, we want to kick butt at the show and have everyone talk about us." Then I would recommend something off the wall like a large fun hat in a real bright color with pump graphics on it. Like a message that says, "We pump harder

for less," and put this on a bright yellow top hat and give them away. No one can put this in a bag, so they will have to wear it. This will upset the competition when they see everyone walking around with the competition's hat and logo. All the other answers should lead to a much better relationship with your client and allow you to sell a lot more products and services.

**BEST PRODUCTS**

Show graphics are, in most cases, very simple. They consist of only a few solutions. Here are some of the products I like best for show graphics:

**Carpet Booth**—If your client has a booth that has carpet on the walls, then just about everything you make must attach to the carpet. Velcro is the answer. Do not make heavy graphics because this will cause the graphics to fall after a while. I like Sintra 3mm for a lot of show graphics, it is easy to cut, well known by most people and will not bend if you drop it. If the carpet booth is curved, then I use polystyrene .040 because it curves nicely and does not have a memory (will always go flat).

**Hard wall booth**—These typically are designed for booth spaces of 20' x 20' and are much more work to install. Again you can use Velcro, but you must warn the client that Velcro has a permanent adhesive



MGE used sheer as a booth panel to give it a professional look with the light weight of fabric.



8' x 30" panels on the roof done with Gatorboard. Fabric table cloths, roll banners, table top displays with easel backs.

and the glue will be very difficult to get off and can damage the booth. Small nails are very successful because they only put a small hole in the booth and look nice. You can use V-Cleats to hang the graphics on the booth suspended out from the wall, or museum clips to mount directly to the wall without seeing the hardware. 3M makes adhesive pads you can get at your local hardware store that will allow you to remove the adhesive without any damage. Most hard wall booths need lightweight graphics, so MightyCore is an ideal product because it has a white skin with a black core and looks great from the side, other popular products are Gatorboard at 3/16", and PVC (Sintra, Komatex, etc.) is also very popular.

**Hanging Graphics**—Most ask for banners, but they do not really want vinyl banners, they want fabric banners. Fabric will not curl and weighs much less than vinyl. Fabric looks better, does not have the shine and will not look kinked when hanging. Fabric is more valuable, but not that much more expensive. Vinyl banner is about \$.25 per sq. ft. and solvent printable fabric is about \$.60. But banners sell for about \$6 per foot and fabric you can get \$10-12 all day. Trust me, you want to offer fabric. You cannot use banner tape on fabric, so you must sew it. Most are done with pole pockets.

**Backlit**—Show backlit graphics are always lit from behind so you can double strike the graphic or use just about any method for making them as long as they look good to you. Keep in mind, you must review the printed graphics under the same light conditions as they use at the show. If they have cool florescent bulbs, then you must also match the color to this same light. Cool bulbs can throw off the reds and greens. I always recommend that clients and

you use 5000k T8 bulbs in your office, your light table and all backlit cases. This way, the colors will be consistent and very accurate.

**Easel Signs**—Here you must be careful as the easels get hit and the graphics tend to fall off. If you use Fome-Cor or Gator, they will be damaged the first time they hit the ground. I recommend Sintra for easel signs, but keep in mind most easel signs are great at 20" x 30" and much larger they tend to bow if you are using Sintra.

**Short Term Signs**—Many signs at shows are up for a few days as they are dated and the show people do not want to pay the money for Sintra, so they ask for Fome-Cor. I recommend you use Coroplast with the crystal laminate, you will not see the flutes in the product, it is low cost and will not damage if it falls. Keep in mind you must cut it so the flutes are vertical so the people at the show do not see the flutes. Use a Coroplast cutter to make sure you have the graphics cut straight.

**Full Graphic Curved Wall Booths**—Wow, are these difficult to make. I recommend that you do not do these because you are bound to fail if you have not done them before. Call a company that does these for a living and outsource the job. You will thank me later.

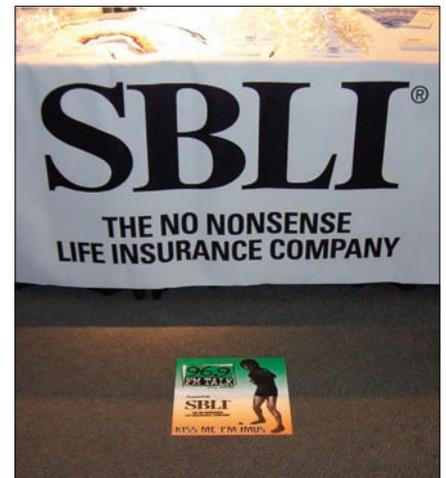
Other items for shows that might work for your client are floor decals, printed carpet, etc.

If you are looking for a more 3D or a support graphic for TV screens, computers or a great setup for tables or pedestals, use Xanita. This product is a corrugated cardboard with a skin that you can print to directly, laminate to or screen print to and then cut it so you can curve it, bend it or make just about any structural display.

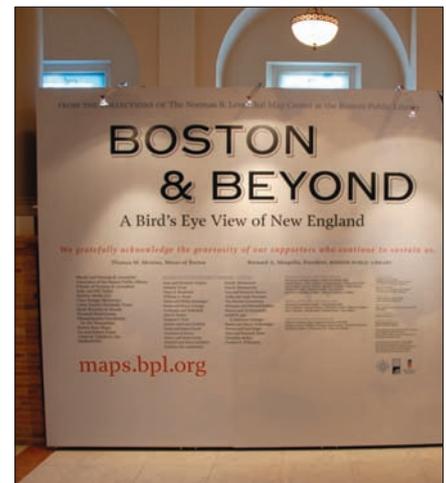
Remember to be creative. A different

booth sells clients and makes people want to come to the booth. So put on your wild and creative hats and get selling.

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



Floor decals all over the show floor.



This wall graphic uses 12' x 8' adhesive-backed vinyl with a crystal laminate mounted to the show wall.

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