

Vehicle Graphics: Everything You Need to Know to be Successful

BY DAVID KING

First in a two-part series covering the art of vinyl vehicle graphics and installation. Part I covers pricing, design and fabrication. Part II will cover vehicle prep, installation and finishing.

When we talk about vinyl graphics installation we could be talking about anything from a small decal on a door to a full building wrap with banner vinyl.

For this article we are going to deal with the most difficult of all the installs — vehicle graphics. When you are considering purchasing vehicle graphics, you should have many items on your checklist to consider, all of which contribute to the success or failure of the project. *Assume nothing!* This article will take you through each step of the vehicle graphics design, fabrication, installation, and care.

2: THE VEHICLE

Once you have discussed the project with your client, you both understand the goals, and you both are in agreement on the call to action, then you need to discuss the vehicle that will be used for the promotion.

In most cases the customer has the vehicle and you have to deal with it, but in the best of cases the customer comes to you first and asks what vehicle would be best for the promotion.

VW Bugs are cool, but very small and difficult to wrap. Hummers are very expensive but have lots of area for a message. Vans are good because they are useful and have lots of space for messages.

Large trucks are best because everyone can see them, but the wraps are expensive because the graphics are priced by the square foot and there are many square feet on a truck.

If the vehicle's graphics surface has rivets and/or compound curves, then you need to use a cast film like 3M 8620 or Avery ETM1002. If the graphics surface is flat then you can use a calendared film like 3M 8640 or Avery ETM4201.

We never sell or install anything but a cast film for all vehicle installation unless it is a true *short-term* promotion. If you are going to sell a short-term graphic (we consider short term to be 12 months or less), then you should use a film that is designed to be easily removed within the 12 months.

Short-term film is usually a calendared film and is much less expensive than cast film. Our average selling price for a full 3M Scotchprint five-year cast film is from \$12 to \$4.94 per square foot, depending on the quantity of vinyl and the customer status.

If the customer wants a short-term removable film, the price is from \$9 to \$2.47 per sq. ft. These prices are based on you providing the digital graphics output house with complete files on disk ready to output.

You must add up the total square footage of the graphics surface on the vehicle and multiply this by your cost for the vinyl. Next, you must determine the cost to install the graphics on the vehicle.

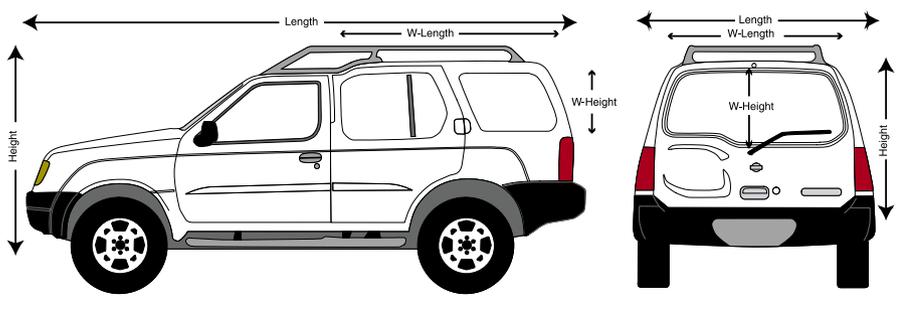
Each vehicle is priced differently (see **Pricing Chart**), so you need to make sure you double check with the installation company.

The next charge you need to discuss is the layout and design of the vehicle. A typical vehicle should take about 10-12 hours to design, if you have the template for the vehicle.

Vehicle templates can be acquired from Digital Auto Library (1-888-843-1325). Now you should have a fairly complete price for your customer that includes the film, installation and design.

4: DESIGN AND TEMPLATES

Now comes design. This is where you either make or lose money on the job, so *don't cut corners!* Make sure you have an accurate template, print out the template



Part of the pricing formula involves adding the total square footage of graphics surface, and multiplying it by the cost of the vinyl.

1: CLEAR GOALS

The first objective in creating a vehicle graphic is to understand the goal. What is this vehicle going to promote and what does the owner of this vehicle want to get from the graphics? *Do not take this goal lightly!*

I have seen too many vehicle graphics that said nothing and had no *call to action*. A call to action is the message that gets the viewer to do something, like buy a product or make a phone call. Even if the vehicle looks very cool, if you don't deliver a message then what's the point?

3: PRICING ISSUES

By this point in the conversations, your customer should be very excited about the prospect of their new vehicle graphics. Now it's time to discuss price.

The price you pay for the materials and installation could vary as much as 50 percent, based on the materials you use and the labor you hire to do the installation.

You need to discuss with your client how long this graphic is expected to last, and the amount of coverage on the vehicle. Will it be decals or a full wrap, and what part of the vehicle will be covered (front, back, sides, roof, windows)?



Once you've completed your design using the vehicle template, print out color comps for your customer to approve.

and take this printout and a digital/Polaroid camera to the vehicle.

Now search the vehicle for items that might disrupt the graphics, but are *not* indicated on the template — items like gas caps, rub rails on the vehicle made of rubber (vinyl does not stick to rubber), hinges, bumpers, name plates, door handles, etc.

There are many items on vehicles that cannot be wrapped with vinyl. Design the graphic so words, pictures and company logos don't fall onto areas where the vinyl will not stick. Take several pictures of the vehicle for future reference.

Once back at your computer, bring up the template and mark all the areas on the template that graphics will not be seen. Your goal is to have the resolution at 100 dpi (maximum) on the vehicle, to as low as 50 dpi at final size!

Final size means that if you have a 4" x 5" picture and you want this picture to be on the side of a van and the van is 72" high by 120" long then you have to scan this 4" x 5" (with some cropping) at between 1400 and 2800 dpi.

In most cases this is a job for a drum scanner. You will end up with a 120- to 200-meg file. Any higher than 100 dpi is a waste of time and disk space.

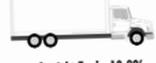
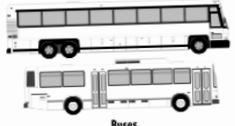
It is always best to use a vector-based program to create vehicle graphics because all vector-based art will scale properly.

The template you are using will be scaled at 20:1, so you want to make sure you understand what 20 to 1 is. In our shop we scale the 20:1 to 12:1 so that every inch in the document equals 1 foot on the vehicle.

Some vehicles make the placement of text so difficult that you may want to consider using cut vinyl for the text areas. This would allow the installers more freedom to work with the vinyl and then place on the cut vinyl text afterwards.

Once your design looks good, print out color comps of the vehicle for your customer to approve. Print two sets — one for your customer to approve, and one for you to keep.

VINYL INSTALLATION & REMOVAL RETAIL PRICE CHART

 <p>Truck Trailers 28'-53'</p> <p>Flat - No Side Doors, Rivets, or Corrugations \$2.30 sq. ft. Flat + Rivets - No Corrugations or Side Doors \$2.75 sq. ft. Flat + Rivets + Doors - Rivets and Doors on Side \$2.95 sq. ft. Skip Corrugations - with/without Side Doors \$2.95 sq. ft.</p>	 <p>Straight Trucks 18'-28'</p> <p>Straight Truck Flat or Rivets (no side doors) \$2.75 sq. ft. Straight Truck Flat or Rivets with Side Doors \$2.85 sq. ft.</p>
 <p>Large RV, Cubo Van or Box Truck (up to 18')</p> <p>Cubo Van or Box Truck with/without Side Doors \$3.50 sq. ft. RV's 30' and Longer \$3.00 sq. ft.</p>	 <p>Medium RV or Utility Trailers</p> <p>RV's 18' to 30' \$3.50 sq. ft. Utility Trailers 16' & Longer with/without Side Doors \$4.00 sq. ft.</p>
 <p>Full Size Vans - Utility and Extended, Small RV's</p> <p>Utility Vans with/without Windows (cargo) \$5.00 sq. ft. Full Size and Extended Vans with/without Flats \$5.00 sq. ft. Suburbans, Utility Trailers less than 16' \$5.00 sq. ft. RV's less than 18' \$5.00 sq. ft.</p>	 <p>Minivans, SUV or Full Size Vehicles</p> <p>Astro and Caravan Type Minivans \$6.00 sq. ft. Hummers - Pickup or Wagon \$6.00 sq. ft. Full Size Pickup Trucks \$6.00 sq. ft. Special Vehicles - Zamboni, Truck Cabs, etc. \$6.00 sq. ft.</p>
 <p>Passenger Vehicles (over 125 sq. ft.)</p> <p>Cars - Full Size, Station Wagons \$8.00 sq. ft. Compact Cars over 125 sq. ft. \$8.00 sq. ft.</p>	 <p>Small Passenger Vehicles (less than 125 sq. ft.)</p> <p>VW Bug, Small Pickup, MG, Cobra, etc. \$9.00 sq. ft.</p>
 <p>Buses</p> <p>Buses 40' and longer with or without window perf. \$2.30 sq. ft. Buses 28' to 39' long with or without window perf. \$3.00 sq. ft. Buses up to 27' long with or without window perf. \$3.50 sq. ft.</p>	<p>Wall & Misc. Graphics (Fleet 4)</p> <p>Walls from 1 to 124 sq. ft. \$300.00 Walls from 125 to 499 sq. ft. \$4.00 sq. ft. Walls from 500 to 2000 sq. ft. \$3.00 sq. ft. Walls from 2000 to 5000 sq. ft. \$2.50 sq. ft. Walls over 5000 sq. ft. \$2.00 sq. ft. Floor Graphics \$4.00 sq. ft.</p> <p>Other Charges</p> <p>SunPrint Installers Bay Charge Per Day \$150.00 per day Prep Charge for all installs \$300 and Less \$95.00 each Vehicle Design and Layout \$120.00 per hour Vehicle Measurements (retained with order) \$75.00 each</p>
<p>Vinyl Removal</p> <p>1-399 400-649 650+</p> <p>3M Vinyl Wraps \$2.00 sq. ft. \$1.50 sq. ft. \$1.20 sq. ft. 3M Cut Vinyl \$3.00 sq. ft. \$2.25 sq. ft. \$1.80 sq. ft. Vinyl Wraps (Not 3M) \$4.00 sq. ft. \$3.00 sq. ft. \$2.40 sq. ft. Cut Vinyl (Not 3M) \$4.00 sq. ft. \$3.00 sq. ft. \$2.40 sq. ft.</p> <p><i>* When a job cannot be defined by the sq. ft. the price will be hourly with a \$300 minimum for the first 4 hours and \$75 per hour for all additional hours. For all jobs that are priced by the sq. ft. where our installer are forced to stop installing due to no fault of the installers, a charge of \$75 per hour will be added to the job. No reseller discounts apply to the minimum (\$300) or the hourly rate.</i></p>	<p>How to Measure and Price a Vinyl WRAP Install (all measurements need to be in inches)</p> <p>If you make a mistake on the height of a vehicle it could cost you hundreds of dollars in re-do's or too much vinyl. Please be careful and if possible provide us with photos of all 4 sides of the vehicle. Please call us if you need help.</p> <p>Width x Height + 144 = Total Sq. Ft.</p> <p>Drivers Side _____ + 144 = _____ Pass Side _____ + 144 = _____ Back _____ + 144 = _____ Hood/Front _____ + 144 = _____ Roof _____ + 144 = _____ Total _____ Window Perf.-Total Sq. Ft. all windows = _____ Use these numbers to calculate the install cost.</p>

RESELLER/DEALER DISCOUNTS APPLY TO ALL PRICES ABOVE (except hourly*)

This document was created by Castle Graphics and uses the vehicle templates provided by Precision Auto Library. Please check with your installation company for the cost of doing your installation(s).

After you have approval, make sure you take out the template of the vehicle and over-bleed the graphics by three inches all around (all sides and top) so your installers have some room to play with the vinyl. If you have problems with the software, check this web site (www.castlesunprint.com) for a detailed overview of how to prepare your files for output.

5: FABRICATING THE VINYL

Now you have everything in place. Your customer has approved the comps and you have your deposit check for the vehicle. You have the installers lined up and ready to go. The next step is to get the vinyl fabricated.

Back in step #3 you and your customer decided what type of vinyl you wanted for the project, so, based on this you would have already had a fabricator chosen for the job.

You should get a color printout of the vehicle from the printer that will be outputting your film. This color print will show your customer the colors that will be on the vehicle from the final output device. We do this for all our resellers because most of them have small inkjet printers that are not very color accurate. This step insures that the customer will know what the color is *before* we run all the film.

Once the customer has signed off on the colors, the fabricator will output the film. Make sure your fabricator gives you the film you requested. It's not uncommon for a fabricator to run a job on a film that you didn't request, and you have *no way of knowing!* Most film does not have a liner that tells you what it is. The bottom line is that you must be able to trust your fabricator.

Well, that's all the space I have for now. Stay tuned for a follow-up article covering the intricacies of graphic installation.

David King is Director of Operations at Castle Graphics, a 3M Scotchprint and Avery Digital Certified Fabricator. David is also a speaker at the B.I.G. Show — Best In Graphics for Digital Graphics magazine. He can be found at www.castlesunprint.com.

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