

Wrap-On Brother, Wrap-On

A detailed overview of the vehicle wrap process —
from sales to design to installation.

BY DAVE KING



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new and better technologies. In addition to writing for Digital Graphics Magazine, Dave is a frequent speaker at The Sign Business & Digital Graphics Show. He has also produced InkJet Printing, Laminating and Mounting, an educational video for the Video Classroom series. For more information call 1-800-691-8047.

When I think back to the first vehicle we wrapped in 1996, I ask myself, why I would have kept doing it? It's labor intensive and there's not a whole lot of margin in it. I mean, *What was I thinking?* Okay, I'll tell you.

WHY BOTHER WITH VEHICLE WRAPS?

There are actually many reasons for doing wraps. In my shop the reasons have to do with *business, marketing* and *sales*.

Let's face it, this racket is good for business. Because of vehicle wraps we stay busy 12 months a year. The wrap business never really slows down. In the spring we do promotional wraps for soda, beer, and juice companies; during the summer we do commercial vehicles and wraps for radio stations and in the fall and winter we do a lot of contract commercial accounts — accounts that typically that have hundreds of vehicles.

The marketing benefit comes because this is about the only job that leaves our shop completely finished. Because of this we take lots of great pictures of our work that we can show off to potential clients. Our sales people tell our clients that just about all the wrapped vehicles they see on the road in

our area were done by Castle Graphics. Over the years we have done thousands of wraps on just about every type of vehicle you can imagine. That's like marketing equity.

And when it comes to sales, the more tricks our sales people have up their sleeves, the more successful they are when calling on accounts. Think of a sales person on a cold-call — they go in to make a vehicle graphics presentation to a biomedical company. While they are presenting, they learn that the company also does 12 trade shows a year, they have 40 sales people in the field that make hundreds of presentations to clients and they have 15 service vehicles and four warehouse delivery straight trucks. *Home run!* We offer them all the products and services we can to fit all their needs. Vehicle graphics can lead to additional sales.

THE MESSAGE IS THE THING

First you need to analyze the type of wrap that would be best to fit your client's needs. I have many clients who *think* they want a full wrap, but when we start looking closer we realize that their logo and message might

not really be best served in a full wrap. They might only need some cut vinyl with spot color, a decal job or a partial wrap.

Once you've established with your client the best *type* of wrap, it's time to sell your client on the appropriate graphic message. Some clients will have a very clear idea of what they want, but many do not. Here are some ideas for helping them find the right message.

A wrapped vehicle should tell a very quick story with pictures (not so much with words). Think of it like a flash card that is only viewed for a moment. The message must be designed to be taken in very quickly. The back of the vehicle has the most value because that's the part that will get the most eye-time in traffic, so make sure the best message gets onto the back. The sides are larger, allowing for more graphic real estate. The people who see the sides for any length of time generally are looking at it when the vehicle is parked.

In my opinion all vehicles should have a message that tells the viewer *why* they would want to do business with that company. For example, a company that sells



The benefits of offering vehicle wraps extend beyond margin and immediate profit. Wrap work is available year round and by marketing pictures of your completed work you can often garner new business.

kitchen supplies should show off a beautiful kitchen, food companies should show off the great-looking food and so on. After you find the right graphic image you need to create some kind of *call to action* to go with your rolling advertisement. It could be an 800 number to call, a Web site address to look up, or a radio station to tune in.

CLOSING THE DEAL

Now that you have enough information to be dangerous, it's time to close the deal. Here are some pointers: Each wrap has four cost factors that you should explain and

present separately. The costing factors are for design, for the vinyl itself, for installation and the cost of stripping old vinyl.

We have a standard design fee of \$1,200. Our price includes the customer's images (if provided on disk), text layout, full design and color comps. This does *not* include scanning, image acquisition or any other out-of-pocket expenses we might incur.

Cost of the vinyl is determined by the square foot (regardless of the vehicle type). We start at \$11 per square foot and go down, depending on the total square footage needed for the vehicle.

Our installation prices range from \$1.50 to \$9 a per square foot, depending on the vehicle. Smaller vehicles with lots of compound curves — like VW Bugs and PT Cruisers — are done for \$9 a square foot and flat-surface vehicles, like tractor trailers are done for around \$1.50 a square foot.

If you do the math it makes sense. A full wrap will take two good installers about one full day to complete. All installs come in roughly between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per day. This is a standard day rate for two good installers. A VW Bug is about 110 square feet and a 53' trailer is 835 square feet.

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Vehicle Wraps



Vehicles with lots of compound curves, such as a VW Bug, can be challenging to install. Remember to build in extra bleed to give your installers some wiggle room.

Stripping old graphics from a vehicle is the last costing factor. This part of the job is not fun and I recommend you read my article called "Taking it all Off" to get all the bloody details (see the July 2003 issue of *DG*). Other miscellaneous costs would include vehicle cleaning, removing roof racks and other vehicle parts, fixing rust, painting areas, etc.



Not every wrap needs to be a full wrap to be effective. Partial wraps and simple decals can often be just as effective.



Designing a full wrap with window graphics, such as this wild SUV done for a local radio station, requires some basic understanding of graphics placement. Remember, the message is the thing. Way to go, Pats!

FIGURE IT UP

I highly recommend using a vehicle template program to aide with production. They can help you accurately price the job and really make design a lot easier.

I use a package called Pro Vehicle Outlines. Get yourself the full set of vehicle outlines. The templates are vector based (EPS) and can be loaded into your favorite design program. All templates are a 1:20 scale. We help our designer by converting the templates to a 1:12 scale so she knows that 1" = 1'. All prints are done at 1200 percent at the RIP. To convert a 1:20 template to 1:12 you must scale the 1:20 image up by 166.6666 percent.

The sales people use the templates in Adobe Illustrator to get the correct measurements of the vehicle. Each side of a vehicle is a rectangle, so we price it that way. For example, if we are talking about a Ford E350 van, the template tells us that the sides are 201" x 66", the back is 70" x 60", the hood is 70" x 36" and the roof it is 70" x 138". So, you would add up all the total areas and this becomes be the total square footage for the job. If you're doing window graphics you'll also need to figure the square footage of the glass areas.

From there you can figure how much solid and perforated vinyl you're going to need (including the bleed) and you can then determine your install price for a specific job.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Now that you've sold the wrap and priced it out, let's make it happen. I like to use Photoshop to do my vehicle wrap designs. I load the converted template into a layer in Photoshop and then create a mask of the layer so I can place the graphics into the vehicle image and still see where the wheels and body parts are. Next, bring in the background images or colors, and then the main focus graphics (company product images), and finally bring in the company logo and text.

I create all of the text in Illustrator because if I decide to do the cut vinyl reflective trick, I'll need a vector file to be able to cut the vinyl. Make sure the size of the text in Illustrator is the same scale as the Photoshop file.

And if you want to shrink the text, do it in Illustrator and then re-import to Photoshop. Also, keep in mind that when the wrap is printed you have to give the printer a full rectangle of graphics. You'll want to build in several inches of bleed on all sides of the vehicle. So, if you have a van that is 138" x 66" you will want to print 141" x 69". The reason for this is that the vehicles appear flat on the computer screen but they're not flat in real life. By having a few extra inches on all sides, you allow the installers some wiggle room.

Avoid placing text over door handles, name plates (I take all the vehicle and dealer name plates off), license plate areas, key

holes, bumpers, deep compound curves or on front windows. Once you have laid out the design you should produce a nice color comp for your customer to review. Include some good marketing information on it for your shop. This helps your sales people who present the layout(s) to the client, and later, the client may show these layouts to *their* clients so you'll want your name and phone number on those comps.

Okay, the customer has signed off on the design. Now collect your \$1,200 design fee and get ready to *wrap*. Note: Design fees are a profit center for us; I recommend you also make your design a profit center.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

You need to decide what film you are going to use. I take this part of the wrap *very* seriously. I recommend Avery 1003/1005/1007 EZ vinyl or 3M 180 Comply vinyl. These two companies have a great vehicle graphics warranty and have been making film for wrapping vehicles for a long time. Both of these films are cast vinyl and are ideal for long term wraps (for details on the merits of cast vs calendared vinyl, see *DG*, Jan. 2004 "Cast into the World of Vinyl"). *Long term* is generally considered up to five years, but most wraps will last much longer than that if properly installed.

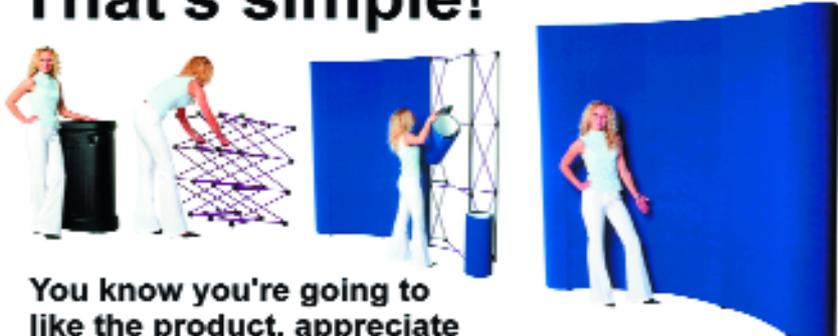
If you have not installed digital vinyl before, then you should consider using pre-masked vinyl. This adds a little cost but makes the installation easier. If you can't print your own wrap, call on one of the large companies in the country that does wraps and sells to the trade and get a price for 3M Scotchprint Certified film, and for Avery's ICS Certified film. This certification will assure you that you are getting a full warranty vehicle wrap.

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Vehicle Wraps



You may have seen this image before, but this fully wrapped PT Cruiser is a good example of many of the principles of good wrapping, good design and compelling graphics. Note how the rear panel is used to advantage, and the call-to-action phone number done in reflective cut vinyl.





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INSTALLATION

Your vehicle now should be in a heated/air conditioned bay. You should install the film between 60 degrees and 80 degrees. Colder than 60 degrees makes the film too stiff and easy to tear. Hotter than 80 degrees will cause the film to stretch too much. All wraps must be installed *dry* — I don't recommend using liquids to install the film.

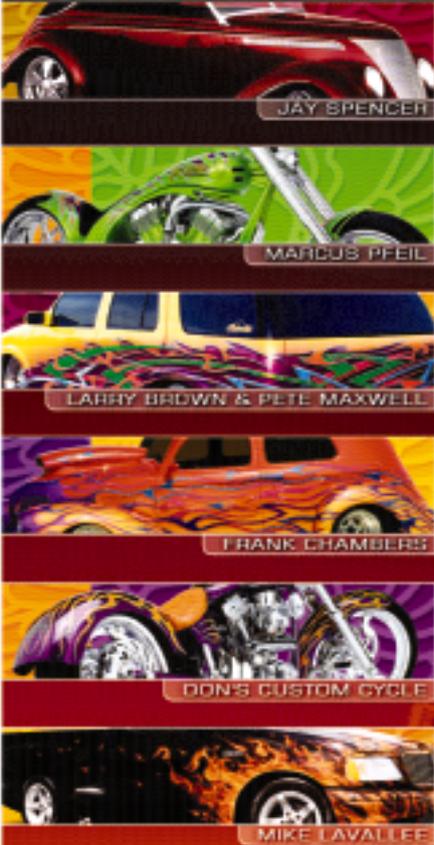
To clean the vehicle I recommend using a 70 percent isopropyl alcohol to clean the whole vehicle. This will remove all dirt and grease and will not leave any moisture behind. Wipe down every part of the vehicle and all parts that are within a half-inch of the body panels — inside the door jambs, along the side of the hood, the rim of the wheel wells, the edges of the hood, the indents around the glass and the bottom of the rocker panels. This vehicle should be as clean as it was the day it left the showroom.

Take the time to clean it properly because otherwise you may find yourself re-wrapping the vehicle later — *for free!* Neither Avery nor 3M will warranty any wrap for a vehicle that is not properly cleaned. Trust me, I learned this the hard way.

Layout the panels on the vehicle (make sure the film was printed at the correct size). Tape the panels onto the vehicle and use your hand to feel the uneven areas of the vehicle that might cause problems with the wrap. If all is fine then remove all panels but the back one. Always start with the back panel first because the overlaps must be back-to-front. This avoids the possibility of anything catching at a seam and tearing the graphic when the vehicle is moving forward.

I use the hinge method for installing panels. I start on one side and the other installer starts on the other. I tape the panel through the center and then install the top

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DIGITAL GRAPHICS



A wrapped vehicle should tell a very quick story with pictures, like a flash card that is only viewed for a moment. The graphic should beautifully reflect the product being sold.

first, then the bottom. Cut away all extra vinyl and keep it just in case. Don't worry about wrinkles over the windows because we will be cutting them out for the window perf anyway. Once the first panel is done, match up the image on the second. The matching is very important to the success of the wrap. No customer will accept miss-registered panels.

If you are working on a vehicle with skip corrugation, then lining up the panels can be difficult. To do this successfully, always start in the center of the panel and fold the vinyl over the corrugations — never stretch the vinyl into the grooves. If you are consistent, the panels will line up just fine. Don't start with a skip corrugation vehicle, these are the most difficult — next to a VW Bug!

Keep going with all the panels but don't worry about small bubbles yet — they will be worked out with the EZ/Comply film, or you can use your *fine air release* (FART) tool to get the bubbles out (it's a pin on a stick).

Next comes the window perf. No FART tool needed here. After cutting and removing any vinyl covering the glass, line up the window perf with the graphics, and again, you can hinge it or use your partner



Using a vehicle template will make life much easier when it comes to design and pricing.



Vehicle templates are vector based (EPS) files that can be loaded into your favorite design program. The templates are typically a 1:20 scale. It's a good idea to convert templates to a 1:12 scale so that your shop's designer knows that 1" = 1'. To convert a 1:20 template to a 1:12 you must scale the 1:20 image up by 166.6666 percent.

to hold one side while you start on the other. Window perf is great and easy to install.

The final step is to add any reflective cut vinyl you might be using to make text *pop*

at night. We try to use cut vinyl for a lot of the Web and phone information, because the customers are always trying to stuff this information into some location on the vehicle where it is very tight. With cut

vinyl you can size it at the last minute and not have to worry that a hood lock is cutting off the letter "A" in the customer's name.

Lastly, put back all the body parts you removed and pull your new masterpiece out into a nice area and take a few pictures of your work. Use these pictures for your Web site and for future sales slicks. Now you can call your customer and tell them to bring the checkbook.

IT SOUNDS EASY

It sounds easy, and for some people it is. But for the rest of us mortals the first three or so wraps are difficult. Most of the time the first one you do is a disaster, the second is a small mess, and the third one is just okay. By your fourth wrap you are making money and the customers are happy.

We have a blast designing new and wild vehicle wraps and our employees just love to see them driving around town.

Good luck, and *Keep on Wrapping!*



If you are working on a vehicle with skip corrugation, such as a school bus, then lining up the panels can be difficult. To do this successfully, always start in the center of the panel and fold the vinyl over the corrugations — never stretch the vinyl into the grooves.