

Madonna's Large-Format Magic



Window graphics promoting Madonna's Re-Invention tour stop in Worcester Mass., at Worcester's Centrum Centre, were created using FLEXcon seeTHRU-sign W/B Flex printable window perf. (Photo by Bob Nash, Nash Studio Inc., Worcester, Mass.)

How large format graphics, and some tricks of the trade, helped reinvent Madonna's Re-Invention Tour.

BY KEN MERGENTIME



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Although people still refer to her as the Material Girl, you have to admit, Madonna's got staying power. The successful Warner Brothers/Maverick recording artist is a two-time Grammy winner, a multi MTV Award winner and has sold over 250 million albums during her two-decade career.

When she embarked on her Re-Invention concert tour this year she made a four-night stop in Massachusetts at a small venue in the town of Worcester (pronounced *Woosta* in Bostonian). Needless to say, the event caused quite a stir.

REINVENTION IS INFECTIOUS

Officials at the venue, Worcester's Centrum Centre, wanted to make the Madonna event special. "When Madonna does something, it's always bigger than life," says John LaHair, marketing director for the Centrum. "So we wanted to do something larger than life for her."

The facility, which seats about 14,800, is owned by the City of Worcester and is managed by SMG, a private facility management company. It generally hosts hockey games and LaHair wanted to do something different to promote this event.

"If Madonna can reinvent herself, we as a 22-year-old facility, can do the same for ourselves," says LaHair. But at that point, the nature of that reinvention had not been decided.

LaHair approached FLEXcon, based in nearby Spencer, to ask about vinyl graphics. The Centrum had done business with the pressure-sensitive film maker in the past,

and LaHair wanted advice. He spoke with Roland Castonguay, FLEXcon's market development representative for the company's Product Branding Business Team.

The two decided that the event, if promoted properly, could be a fantastic marketing tool for everyone involved — especially if the graphics and materials for the job were donated as a welcome for the pop icon.

"We wanted to do something special for Madonna," says Castonguay, "a sort of thank-you for giving Worcester four shows."

Castonguay then contacted Dave King, vice president of sales and marketing for Castle Graphics, a print house based in nearby Concord, to design, print and install graphics at the venue. King, who is no stranger to the value of marketing, accepted the job.

In lieu of pay, the concert graphics and actual installation of the job would be highly promoted by local TV, radio and

On the Job



Windows at the Centrum contain thick mullion between the panes. Castle decided that wrapping over the mullion would produce a better effect. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



John LaHair holds up the poster from which the window graphics were created. (Photo courtesy Castle Graphics)



It was slow going in the sweltering heat. Experts from Castle Graphics carefully applied the vinyl from the center of each glass panel with a 2" overlap to cover the mullion. The result was a seamless application. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



newspaper media. Madonna and large format graphics, it turns out, are highly marketable commodities.

King suggested that a massive window wrap would have the most impact. The facility features three large, paneled glass facades framing the entryway that were begging for graphics.

The venue generally has not used graphics in those windows to promote events, but both LaHair and Castonguay agreed that it was time for a change.

They decided that the best material for the job would be seeTHRU-sign W/B Flex printable window perf that would maintain

vision from inside the building. Now all they needed were the graphics themselves.

RAY OF LIGHT

As with most big projects, this one presented its own unique challenges. With one facade measuring 40' x 14.5' and two at 18' x 14.5', the best graphics that LaHair could provide was a limited edition promotional poster for Madonna's Greatest Hits Volume II album. It features 26 different images of Madonna spanning her entire career.

The problem that Castle now faced was that the poster, an offset printed piece, if scanned directly, would have picked up the

line-screen dots on the print and would look terrible when blown up.

"It was an impossible job, but we did it," King jokes. "How we did it? Ah, that was magic."

The magic happened by enlisting the help of Zona Labs, Summerville, Mass., where a photographer took hi-res images of the top and bottom halves of the poster that were then made into 4" x 5" chrome film positives. Shot from 30 inches away, the camera didn't pick up on the screen dots and yet produced sharp images.

Castle Graphics oil-mounted and scanned the film positives at 5000 ppi using a Screen



After a while, the heat does funny things to your vision. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



This largest window facade, at 40' x 14.5', required 11 panels of graphics, but no seams show. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)

This graphic, created exclusively for Madonna's Re-Invention Tour, came late in the production process and was supplied by Madonna's production department. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



AI 1030 drum scanner. Castle's staff designers then took the files and separated out each unique Madonna image into individual files and color-corrected them.

Then, using careful measurements of the facility's windows, Danielle King, president and founder of Castle, sized and scaled the images in Photoshop and designed a new layout to fit the windows.

There was one more piece of artwork that came late in the process — shot specifically for this tour — a digital file of 20 ppi. This image was destined to be placed as a single large image in the 18' x 14.5' center window next to the entryway.

INTO THE GROOVE

After many rounds of revision during the approval process, the final design was signed off and it was ready to print — just before the much-promoted press event for the big graphics installation. "We got final approval on Sunday afternoon and did the final signoff on Monday morning, one day before the Tuesday morning installation," King says. That left precious little time for printing.

However, Castle's NUR Fresco 1800, a four-color solvent-based printer, was up to the task. The files sent through the RIP ranged from 9 to about 14 ppi and were printed on the Fresco at about 300 dpi.

"The printer performed extremely well," King says. "The whole job printed in about five hours. We slit the job in about 12 minutes. Soup to nuts, we were ready to go."

There was no need to laminate the prints, and, since this window perf uses a 60/40 ratio of vinyl to perforations, the color density of the image was impressive. But more tricks were required to deal with the mul-lion between the window panels.

"We wanted to print this job with no seams," King says. "I had Danielle create squares in the actual files so we could see where the window panels actually fell. Then I made each panel the width of the windows and configured the RIP so each panel would have a two-inch overlap. We started in the center of each window and it worked out for us. Actually we got real lucky — the two-inch fudge-factor allowed us to apply the graphics with no seams."

There were a total of 22 panes of glass on the 40' window that required 11 panels of vinyl. The 18' windows each

had 10 panes of glass and required five panels of vinyl.

However, the installation was tricky.

BURNING UP

On installation day the press was there in force. TV crews, radio stations, the whole nine yards. At 8:30 in the morning, however, the temperature was already 90 degrees. By noon it had shot up to 96 degrees.

"They all got to see us all melting out there trying to do this job," says King. "One of my guys actually got ill from the heat, so I had to take over for him. It was miserable."

Normally, that kind of job would take

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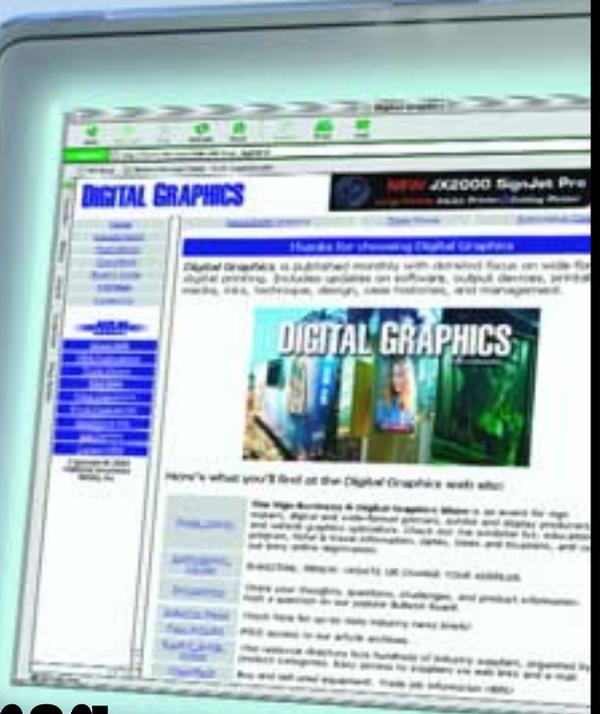
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In order to use the small poster images, 4" x 6" film positives were shot of the poster which were then scanned at high resolution. Each photo was separated from the original file to make independent files that were sized and then assembled into the window graphic. The screen dots from the original offset piece are not visible. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



FLEXcon's fully wrapped Model T Ford. (Photo courtesy Castle Graphics)

The Model T provided extra promotional value for FLEXcon, who supplied materials for the job. TV, radio and newspaper coverage of the event resulted in new business for Castle Graphics, who did the file work, printing and installation for free. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)



about six hours, but because of the heat, it took two days. The problem was the film would stretch when pulling off the release liner, and the adhesive became very aggressive. "It grabbed onto the glass like crazy glue," King says. "We couldn't have picked a worse day for this job."

Still, the press was happy with the free lunch, King was interviewed on television and radio and it all went very well indeed. FLEXcon even brought in a fully wrapped 1920 Model-T for the event.

And the graphics looked great. "What he did with that piece of artwork I gave him just boggles the mind," says LaHair. "It was a great backdrop for the show. The reaction in terms of media attention was great. But the most rewarding for us was the fan reaction."

As show time approached, fans posed in front of the windows for pictures and the sellout performances were spectacular. The arena's scoreboard had to be removed to accommodate Madonna's stage equipment, but in the course of her Worcester run more than 40,000 people got to enjoy one of today's most renowned pop icons performing in top form.

TAKE A BOW

Madonna's production company was so impressed with the graphics job that it actually gave Centrum an award. This was the



The graphics remained up on Worcester's Centrum Centre for about a month after the concert. (Photo by Nash Studio Inc.)

only venue in her tour to make this kind of promotional effort. They gave FLEXcon 200 free tickets for its employees and treated the staff of Castle Graphics to the concert as well.

"What an awesome concert," King says. "I saw it twice in a row with Danielle. It was fabulous."

Unfortunately, on the first night of the show, some over-enthusiastic fans pulled off some of the graphics on one of the windows as souvenirs. Castle came in the next day and blacked out the damaged panels. Fortunately, the upper panels were out of reach, and Centrum posted security guards outside for the remaining three shows.

When all was said and done, it was a smashing success. "It was a great opportunity for three important business leaders in our community to come together as one," says LaHair. "We were able to make an event that was *Madonna-big*."

"It was fun to be a part of it," says Castonguay. "And it was fun to get such special attention from the Madonna people."

And did all that free work pay off as a marketing effort? According to King, had he charged for the work it would have been an \$18,400 job. "I didn't go into this with any big expectations, except to get some PR and do a good job," King says. "The goal was to try and get future business. And, boy, it worked."

LaHair says he's sold: "Now that I see what the company brings to the table, I would certainly be in touch with Castle for any job the Centrum had that might involve digital imaging. I consider Dave as a sort of partner of the building." **DG**

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