

Vinyl Reflections

Better engineered vinyl products makes printing and installation easier than ever.

BY
DAVE KING



David King is director of operations for Massachusetts-based Castle Graphics. He has been in the digital industry for more than 21 years and works with a number of major manufac-

turers to help develop 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.

We install more than 100,000 square feet of adhesive-backed vinyl per year. Some is expensive five-year cast film, some is low-cost calendared vinyl. What I find interesting is that when it comes to installing vinyl, I really love the low-cost transit vinyl. I'm talking about 3.5 mil calendared vinyl

equipped with removable adhesive that's offered by several film manufactures.

I just love this stuff. It's easy to work with, sticks well in cold weather — as low as 30 degrees — and is easily removed. This week, we used transit vinyl to make floor graphics, wall wraps and vehicle decals. And we used five-year cast vinyl to print wall wraps, long-term vehicle wraps and some custom cutout decals.

DECAL DEMAND

In our shop, demand for cutout decals (what most call stickers) has increased by 120 percent over the last few years. We use the Roland SOLJET printer with the built-in cutter to make these stickers. Depending on the required durability or application, we can either print and cut, or print then liquid-laminate the graphics, and then roll it back in the printer to cut the decals out. It's fast, easy and very profitable.

Plus, with today's new air-release vinyl films (Avery EZ and 3M Comply), decal

installation can be done easier and with fewer mistakes than ever before. As a result, more people can successfully apply these vinyl decals without special training.

We have about five clients that just love these *kiss-cut* decals. They purchase hundreds of different stickers each month, and the decal designs they send us get wilder as the months go on. The last one was a cutout dragon with a long, curling tail. What a tough install this looked to be. But, between the repositionable adhesive and the air-release vinyl, it turned out to be an easy install.

MY RAP ON WRAPS

Years ago, Dan Rozzo from Avery asked me why Castle always uses cast vinyl for our long-term vehicle wraps. At the time, Dan told me that most people who install graphics on trucks and other flat-surface vehicles were using less-expensive five-year calendared film (it's about 20 cents less per square foot).

Well, I just kept telling him that we only sell the *best* film, and if we always sell the best



Although I generally do all my vehicle wraps using high-quality cast film, for short term applications (around 30 days), calendared film works great.

cast, then we don't have to worry about the film on any surface — flat, curved or otherwise. Besides, cast film won't tent over rivets.

Dan came back a few years later and told me that most of his clients were now using the cast film to prevent problems on their vehicle-wrap jobs. Well Whaddaya know! We have installed more than 1,700 vehicles with the Avery cast film and we've never had a claim against us. Yes, we paid more, but we've never had to eat a wrap and customers are much happier, long-term. I think that was worth it.

CALENDERED WRAP

Now that I just filled your head with my views on cast film, let's talk about how calendered film *can* be used for wrapping. Last Christmas, we wrapped two Grumman step vans for the *Boston Globe* newspaper for their Globe Santa promotional program. It was a short-term application, so we used inexpensive calendered transit film.

Most people would use a calendered laminate on a calendered film. This would transform a 3.5 mil film into a 5.5 mil laminated film. But this layered film is so thick it won't

conform to compound curves or rivets without tenting and peeling. We use liquid laminate for all our vehicle graphics, and for a short-term application like this calendar film job, we use the .5 mil settings on the laminator to keep the film's thickness as thin as possible.

We end up with a 4-mil laminated film that is still very soft and easy to install. The best part of the job is the stripping. After the Globe promotion, we took off all the film from the inside and outside of these two vehicles in one and a half hours without heat. Try *that* with a cast film.



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Demand for small stickers (cutout decals) has risen in our shop. We use our Roland SOLJET printer/cutter for these jobs.



Larger, custom-cut decals are easier than ever to install, thanks to today's new air-release vinyl films.

My guess is that removal would have taken more than nine hours if we had used cast film. And there was no paint-lift, no tenting and no ripping of the film, even after two months in the freezing cold and daily truck washings. The vehicle looked as good the day we stripped it as the day we installed it. But remember — *short-term* applications.

SPECIAL APPLICATIONS

Vinyl is just a great product and works in so many unique applications. Just last week we had a job that required a lot of vinyl to flood-coat boards, but the color the client wanted was not a color that we could get in cut vinyl, so we printed a large roll of white film in the special yellow he wanted, and then laminated it onto 186 rigid boards. It took us about two hours. When we reviewed the cost to purchase the yellow vinyl or to just print it, we realized that we actually saved 12 cents a square foot by printing the job ourselves.

We next had a job to create stripes for a van — but the stripes were 17-feet long. Again, we digitally printed them and then cut them out. The job was a huge success and the money we made for a few feet of stripes was great. Many jobs now are printed and then rolled back into the cutter and cut to the shape needed for the job. We are so successful with colors on our printer, we could replace all cut vinyl with just one roll of white vinyl and the digital printer. Keep in mind, you need a 600 dpi printer to make the colors and blends perfect on a digital printer.

TOOLS AND TRICKS

Here are some tools and tricks for a successful wrap and vehicle strip. Most vehicles are painted with an automotive high-gloss paint. Over time, the paint oxidizes and causes the surface to become matted in finish and more porous. As a result, the vinyl tends to stick too well to these surfaces, making the repositioning of the vinyl

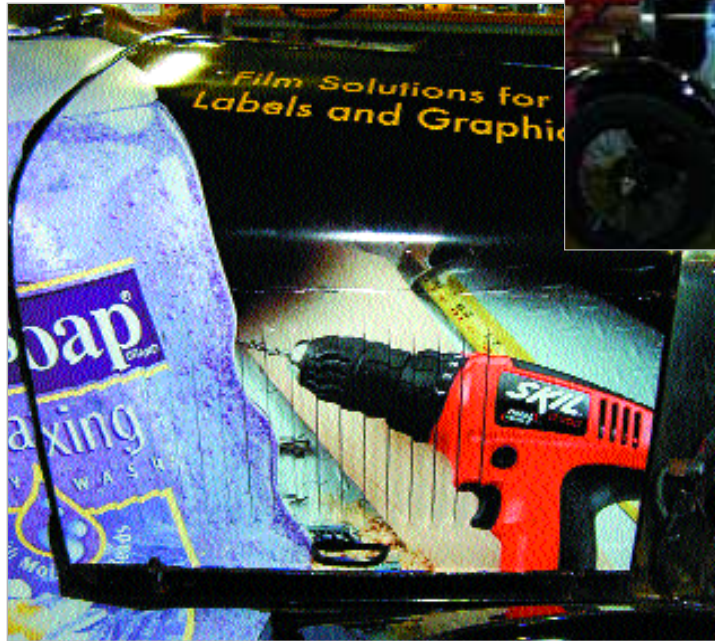
during installation more difficult — and the removal *very* difficult.

I sometimes use a product called Wrap Spray from SunprintProducts.com that you first apply to the vehicle, let dry, then wipe off before wrapping the vehicle. The vinyl sticks great, and when it comes to stripping, the vinyl comes off much easier. This product is best used for short-term wraps on vehicles that have older paint. We use this spray for all short-term wraps and it makes the removal so easy, we do not need heat! The spray is not recommended for long-term wraps, however, as it could cause the film to release before the five years are up.

Other tools that are useful include a high speed FART (fine air release tool), large squeegees, spray bottles with a 70 percent isoproponal alcohol solution and a quick-start torch. Two experienced installers using these tools can wrap a 48' trailer in less than six hours. The average price paid for an install on a 48' trailer is \$1,000. Not bad money for six hours of work.

A 200,000 BTU torch — for heating the vehicles for vinyl removal — is also a great tool, but can be hard to find. Old film comes off best when the vehicle is heated to 140 degrees, and the torch is the best way to do this. Never install a long-term film wet, as it will void the film's warranty. If you are removing small areas of film or cutting vinyl letters, use the MBX system. This is a great German-made pneumatic rotary tool for vinyl removal that is now sold here in the U.S. through Monti Tools Inc., Norwood N.J.

For those of you who want to learn the right way to install graphics, or to become a “Certified by Avery or 3M” installer, you need to contact Rob Ivers at the PDAA (Professional Decal Application Association). Rob has a great class that is hands-on for everything from simple cut vinyl to a full wrap. (Visit www.pdaa.com for more information.) A hint: don’t go out partying the night before the big test. I did, and *I failed!* Sometimes I have way too much fun. For basics on digital vinyl and wrapping vehicles, go to www.VideoClassroom.com and order Tape #2.



Here is a short-term full wrap we did a while ago using calendared film and Wrap Spray to help with adhesion and removal from old-paint surfaces.

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