

Doing Better Banner Business

Matching types of banner materials with applications will help you have a banner year.

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.

Ban-ner (bá-nər), noun, a strip of cloth on which a sign is painted — at least according to Webster's Dictionary. To the rest of us a banner is a big, usually durable print put up where many people can see it.

But the term *banner* can mean different things to different people. One client calls me and asks for a *banner*, but what he *really* wants is a 96" x 9" trade show header, hardly a *banner* in my book. When I say "banner", I'm talking about a vinyl or fabric graphic that is typically made with grommets or pole pockets. Typically, digital printers (like me) charge good money for graphics — and banner graphics are no exception.

BANNER PERCEPTIONS

Looking back, before *digital people* tried to change its perception, banners were created using cut vinyl and banner blanks (pre-cut, pre stitched, pre grommeted). A sign company would purchase a banner blank and apply vinyl to it. Screen printers printed onto banner blanks, or sewed their own if they were a high-volume shop. Many thou-

sands of banners are still made this way.

But for those in the digital printing world, banners are seen in a very different light. Instead of printing onto thin, finished banner blanks, we print onto heavier-gauge rolled banner material, put in our own grommets and skip the sewing all together. We use heavier banner material because the grommets would tear out of thin material without a properly reinforced/stitched hem.

The issue is that digital printers have paid so much money for printing equipment that they don't want to pay a stitcher for the finishing. Most printers can run at 12 linear inches per minute, but the finishing can't keep up with the printing. There are a number of finishing choices — RF welders, the Miller Weldmaster system or taping. But big seamers can be expensive and tape doesn't last. So, the easy way out is to pay

longer-term banner should be finished. Welding is the best way to avoid the puckering caused by stitches.

BANNER LINGO

Selecting banner materials can be a little confusing if a shop owner doesn't understand the lingo and available options. It's best to start with the application and work back to the material. Knowing how and where a banner is to be used makes media selection fairly easy. Pick the material that best fits the application. Here are some points to consider:

Banner Weight — Banner material is generally sold by its weight, measured in ounces (oz.) per square yard. A 16 oz. banner will weigh 16 ounces (one pound) per square yard (nine square feet). A roll of 16 oz. banner material that is 72" wide by 150' long weighs



Here we printed onto 16 oz. banner material and mounted them to the building using a truckside graphic frame.



more for a heavier banner material and sell clients on the fact that the banners will look better without stitching, and that heavy material will hold tooth grommets just fine.

The goal, plain and simple, is to work as little as possible and charge as much as possible. A little note — banners really do lay flatter and look better without stitching. However, the edges will fray with time, so a

100 lbs. Typically, an 18-20 oz. banner material is ideal for billboards and a 15-16 oz. is good for outdoor events, building banners and just about anywhere that a strong banner is needed. Lighter weight banners are typically better suited for indoor applications.

Blockout Banner — Blockout means that the banner material was constructed to stop light from passing through, often employing

Selecting Banner Material



Here are two banners used together. The top banner is made from a blue banner blank with yellow cut vinyl. The lower graphic is a dye sublimated fabric banner printed onto denim light fabric.



These banners were created for an event for the "IMUS in the Morning" syndicated radio show. The table banners are made from dye sublimated denim light. The backdrop is dye-sublimated satin fabric.

three layers (two layers of media with a blackout material in between). If viewed from behind, the image printed on the other side cannot be seen. Different types of banner material can be made into blackout, such as scrim or fabric.

Blockout banner is well suited for two-sided banners because images will not bleed-through. However, two-sided printing can be difficult to do digitally.

Scrim Vinyl Banner — Scrim refers to the nylon mesh material that is found in most banners over 10 oz., identified by a pattern of visible squares caused by an embedded nylon mesh. Scrim vinyl is very strong, but the pattern is considered a drawback by some, and smooth scrim vinyl is very expensive. Another drawback to scrim vinyl banners is they tend to curl over time.

Scrim banners are ideal for outdoor use, especially as event graphics. A 15 oz. (or heavier) banner with a spur grommet is good to go outside for just about any event.

Backlit Banner — This is a high-quality, smooth banner material with a very fine scrim. In most cases, backlit banner is less expensive than standard backlit film. The difficulty with using standard film with a large backlit graphic is that once backlit, seams will appear darker than the rest of the banner.

Backlit banner is ideal for backlit applications that are larger than standard film-

based backlit material. It's great for backlit outdoor signs, large indoor backlit signs, very large backlit stage graphics and just about any indoor or outdoor backlit application that is larger than standard backlit film widths.

Smooth Banner — Smooth banners are typically made from scrim-less vinyl (no nylon reinforcement). Smooth typically comes in 9-12 oz. weights. The up side of smooth banner is that it prints a wonderful image. The down side is that it tends to rip easier than heavier scrim vinyl.

Smooth banner is ideal for indoor applications such as roll-up banner stands, retail banners, table banners, promotional covers and any indoor application.

Mesh Banner — Mesh banner is designed for use against a solid surface, like a building. The mesh construction allows wind to easily pass through the banner. It is similar to window perf in that mesh works best when 75 percent of the light is on the graphics side. Mesh banners are rated based on the hole size and the weight of the material. Mesh banners come in the following configurations: 40/60, 50/50, 60/40, 70/30, 80/20 and 90/10. The numbers show the vinyl/hole percentage. Therefore, a 90/10 mesh banner is 90 percent vinyl with very small holes (10 percent). As the holes grow, see-through visi-

bility increases and strength and image quality decreases.

Mesh banners are best used for building banners, stage backdrops, speaker banners and building wraps. For some retail applications, mesh banner can be used inside a store's display window and it will act like window perf. To cover a set of black speakers for a rock concert, use a 50/50 mesh, which allows sound to pass through, but still provides good image quality. To hang a mesh banner that the sun could shine *behind*, consider a 90/10 mesh to avoid the image being washed out by sunlight.

Polypropylene Banner — Polypropylene banner is a very smooth and strong material that works very well for screen printing. Some digital printers cannot use it because it tends to stretch when heated by the platens on many solvent-based inkjet printers.

This low-cost, flat, smooth banner material is best used for short-term banners and should be stitched for additional support.

Tyvek Banner — Basically, Tyvek is the same stuff that's used to insulate a house. A Tyvek banner is very strong and lightweight, takes a great image, yet can be hemmed and grommeted. The drawback is that Tyvek banner material is expensive and can yellow over time.

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At the Hot Dog Safari benefit event at Suffolk Downs, the large 60' x 12' banner on the front of the building is a 90/10 mesh material. The small hole openings in the mesh made for a much more vibrant image. Inside the building we hung several double-sided heavy paper banners made from IntelliCoat product.



Tyvek banners are ideal for short-term (less than one year) outdoor applications where light weight is very important and tremendous strength is needed.

Paper Banner — Paper banners are basically inkjet paper prints done on heavy paper, often made with an overlaminate. If created on a *really* heavy-duty paper, it can be grommetted and hung. As the banner is made from paper, it will not support outdoor applications and will rip easily. The upside is that paper is light, cheap and disposable. The downside is that it's fragile — keep away from human hands, birds and dogs!

Paper banners are ideal for very short-term retail applications, one-day promotional events or any short-term indoor application.

Fabric Banner — Fabric is one of the best materials used to make and sell banners, even though fabric banners are more expensive to produce than vinyl banners. Fabric banners don't have that plastic look and feel.

Banner fabric types include canvas, nylon, denim light, poplin, polyester, duck and more. In most cases, fabric is lightweight and easier to hang than vinyl. A lot of fabric banners are finished with pole pockets at the top so they can hang straight and flat. I think fabric is a huge home run, even though it is more expensive than vinyl and is more difficult to finish (stitching is preferred). The quality of a finished fabric banner product is just outstanding.

Canvas banner is great for inkjet printing and generally has a coating to facilitate ink adhesion and to eliminate dot gain. Dye sub printers can image onto polyester fabric. These fabrics are available in a variety of weights and finishes. A coarse-textured 8 oz. poplin would work well for flags, while a super-sheer 3 oz. polyester would be very transparent. A general rule of thumb: the tighter the weave

Here we used a heavy-duty 16 oz. blockout scrim banner material (Avery's Jupiter vinyl). Notice that this banner is not sewn.



This is a 30' tall dye-sub fabric banner made from denim light material with a pole pocket at the top. It's double sided with blackout material stitched inside to prevent light from passing through.



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and smoother the finish, the better the image.

Fabric banners are great for retail graphics, stage banners, table cloths, roll up banner stands, flags, promotional covers, trade show graphics and more.

MORE THOUGHTS

It is important to remember that most banner materials are available with and without inkjet coatings. In all cases, aqueous-based inks require banner materials to be coated in order to receive ink. When using a solvent or eco-solvent printer (great choice for banners), most materials do not need to be coated. However, fabric banners will print much better if coated.

Banners are very popular. In my shop we use just about all of the above materials and produce more than 4,000 banners a year. Some events we do require more than 200 banners for a single day! Banners are great because very few clients expect them to last long, and they will come back again and again for more.

Good luck. Be smart with your money. See you on the show floor!

