

Retail & P.O.P. Graphics

SMARTER

Retail Graphics

Inexpensive P.O.P. and retail display graphics that work.

By Dave King



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that are typically more complicated than commodity-based products. Visit www.themarketking.com for details.

For 15 years I've watched as retail graphics budgets have fallen from a typical \$8,000 per store per season down to a few hundred dollars per store. In order to adjust for that trend, print shops have had to find less expensive material and application alternatives in order to serve their retail customers. Some packages offered today are outstanding, while others leave a lot to be desired.

My best friend has always said "Go big, or go home," and no statement could better describe the retail graphics and digital printing industry. Years ago, if a retailer wanted to go big, they could either panel the image or accept lower print quality without seams. Today they can get photographic quality 16'-wide prints on just about any material.

APPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

There isn't a mall today without a large 4000-dpi Lambda or LightJet photographic print hanging in a clothing retailer's window. Some of these prints are 6' x 12' and look stunning. To keep the cost down, some retailers request paper graphics and install them with a Rose Displays hanging system. Others mount the Lambda prints to boards or hang them with a PlexiGlass system mixed with props and products.



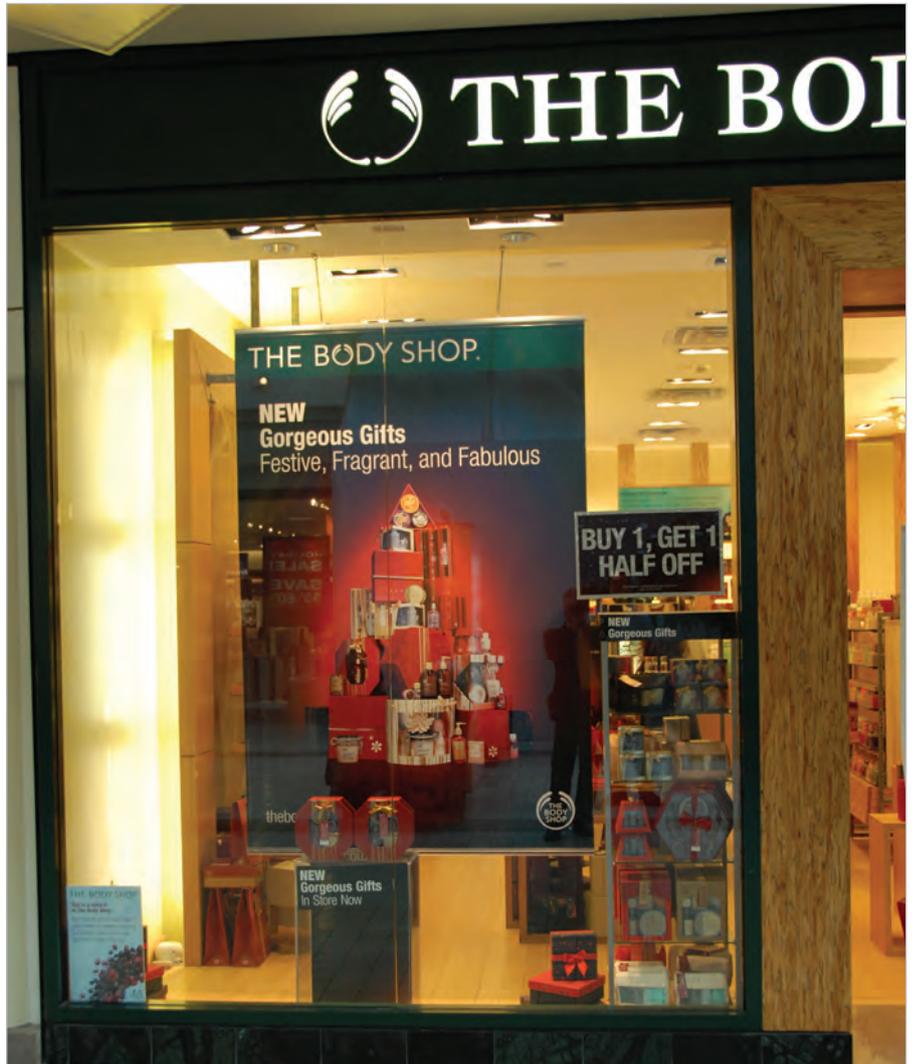
These graphics look nice, but there's nothing very original about them — and they can become easily damaged during installation. They can also curl because of being rolled in the tube. Solutions such as pole pockets and weighted hanging systems exist, but, ideally, retailers just want to take prints out of the tube and hang them up.

Large wall graphics have been popular for years, but installing these graphics is difficult and in many cases requires an outside company to do the work. I think the Apple computer retail chain exemplifies a well setup clean-looking retail operation. Apple started with large wall boards with adhesive-backed vinyl prints mounted to the boards that they changed each month. This got very expensive and the quality control between the different installers became an issue for Apple.

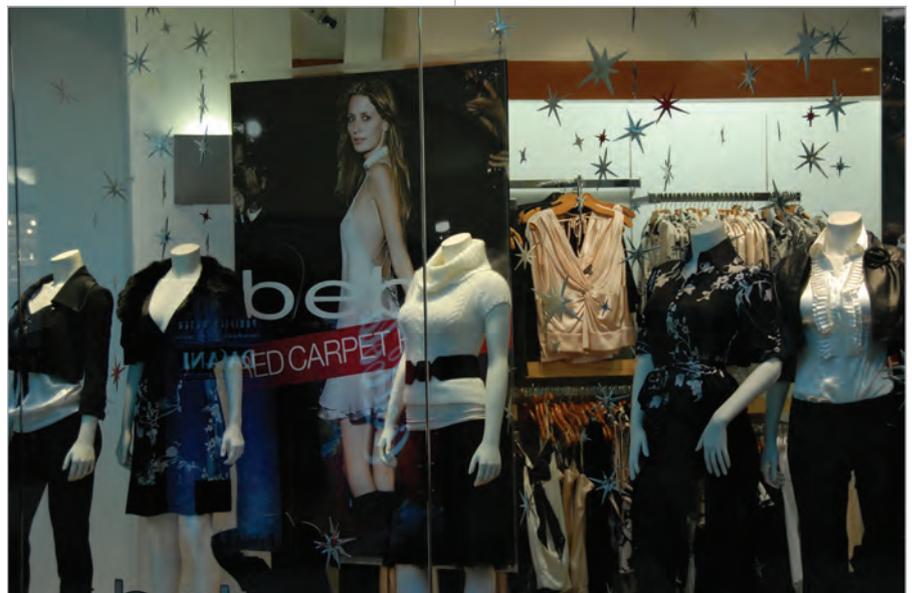
At some point, a print shop came up with the idea of printing large photo prints and over-laminating them, then using Velcro to hold them to the wall. I would say that this person had a Lambda imager and wanted to keep Apple as a long-term client. Good move! Now many Apple stores feature large Lambda prints (some as large as 25' x 4'), and each store will use around six to 10 prints. I'd say that Lambda and photographic retail solutions are here to stay.

FABRIC SOLUTIONS

Another option for shops that can't afford to drop \$250,000 on a photo imager is fabric. During the holiday season, I walked the local mall (about 140 stores) to check out the digital graphic displays. More than 60 percent of them were made using fabric. Fabric has a number of features over hard displays



To keep costs down, retailers often request paper prints and install them in a hanging system, mount them to boards or enclose them in PlexiGlass.

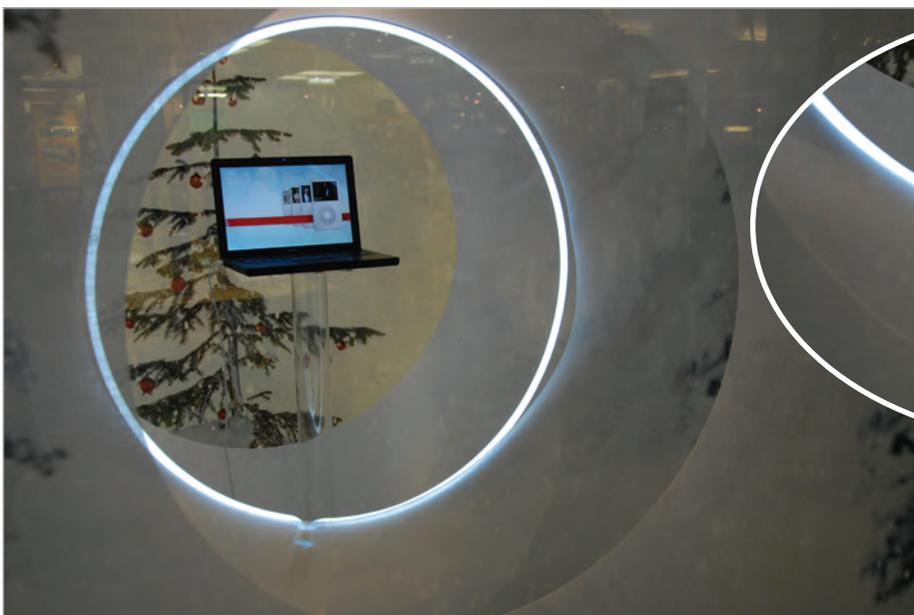


Remember: no matter how attractive a graphic is when it leaves the shop, paper prints can be damaged during installation.

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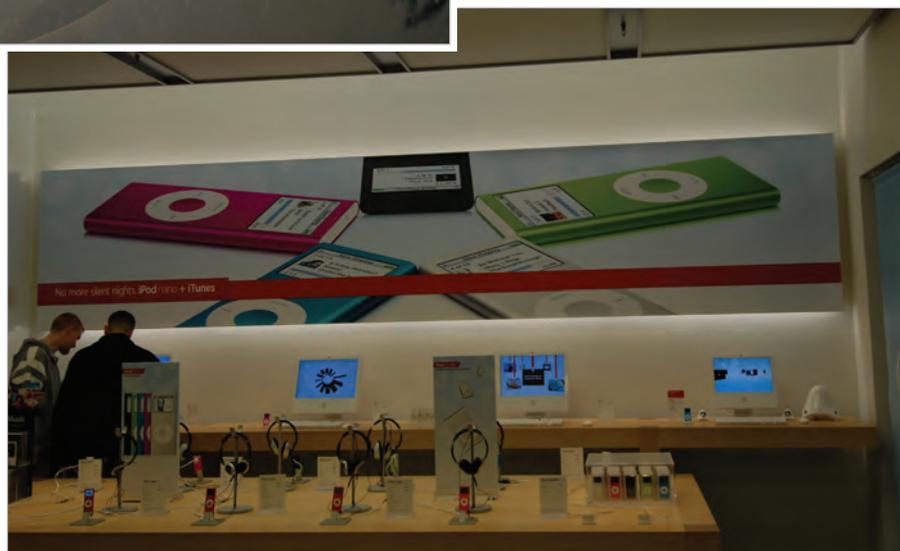


This mesh fabric allows a translucent look into the store, and features an elaborate hanging system.



This Apple storefront is the best vinyl banner display I have seen in years. It features four layers of banner and a neon tube.

Large wall graphics have always been popular, but often require an outside installation company to do the work.



that appeal to retailers. First off, fabric graphics ship rolled up, so the freight savings alone tends to justify slightly higher priced graphics. Next, the material can't kink, rip, or tear during installation, so inexpensive pole pockets are the most popular choice.

Fabric prints can be produced with dye-sub, direct-to-fabric print systems or screen-print methods. With the availability of grand-format dye-sublimated fabrics, retailers have increasingly been calling for large seamless fabric displays. There are more than 160 fabric solutions offered today (many featuring various coatings for direct-print or different thread counts). Most fabrics for graphics are polyester in one form or another.

Hanging systems for fabric displays tend to be more elaborate, and when put with translucent or mesh-based fabric the displays can be stunning. Heavier fabrics are ideal for large displays and can be very opaque and textured. Another major difference with fabric in retail displays is that they can move and sway in the air, and people notice moving graphics. Fabric is all *class*.

BANNER OPTIONS

While strolling the mall I also saw something I haven't seen for years in a high-end mall — banner material. Banners often curl when hung. It's just about impossible to stop banner material from curling. That's why retailers tend to shy away from vinyl banners. But, perhaps in the interest of saving money and eliminating seams, malls are going back to using vinyl banners



Not only does this seamed image have a color shift between sides (check out her nose), the installer didn't align the panels correctly.

in frame systems. Hanging banners are an inexpensive display that keeps the message *large*. If a large banner is supported only at the top and bottom, the sides are likely to curl. Still, from a distance, in a huge mall, even a curling banner will look good, but a vinyl banner with a full aluminum frame looks the best.

Because the material doesn't curl, double-sided mesh banners are now starting to make their way into retail. These definitely benefit from a full frame. Frames can be suspended from wires in the center of the mall, and create a display that costs under \$1000 and is ready to replace at any time by mall staff.

During my mall walk, the best vinyl display I saw was the Apple store's front display. They took a four-layer approach to the front window. Four layers of mesh banner were printed on both sides and hung from a steel cable system. The first three layers had a large hole cut in the center of the banner. The layer closest to the window was suspended away from

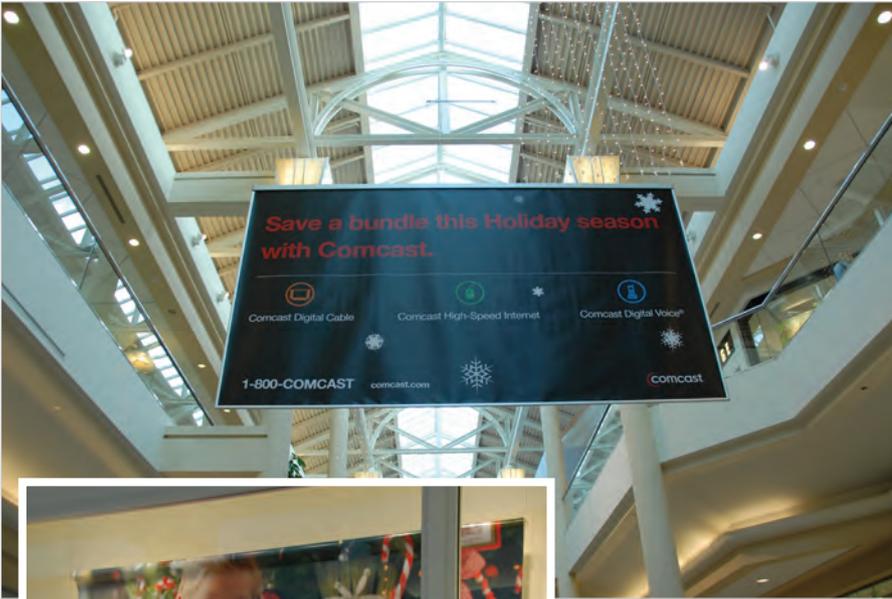
the glass by about 12", the next layer was about 12" behind the first and it also had a hole, but behind the hole was a circle of neon light. The next banner also had a hole, and then there was a pedestal with the new Apple laptop computer sitting on it. The final banner (mesh) had no holes and sat back another 12".

The display was fantastic. And given that mesh banners sell for about \$3 per square foot, this display probably cost about \$1,000 in banner material, and a few more dollars for the pedestal and neon light. The display looked like \$10,000 and was the most eye-catching one in the mall. On the other side they used the same mesh banner material but only one banner with a snowman in front with neon and an iPod. Kudos, Apple!

IT'S GOTTA BE PERFECT

At one point in my tour I saw a display that I don't see very often — an inkjet print on clear vinyl directly mounted to glass. The installation was perfect, and I knew the store had hired a professional to do the job. Next I came across a nice

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Hanging banners are an inexpensive display that keeps the message large. Banner hanging systems come in all shapes and sizes.

wall-mounted vinyl banner. There were no bubbles to be seen on the graphic, but there was an issue: a seam. Seams should be avoided whenever possible, because they're all-too obvious. In this case, the image not only had a distinct color shift across the two panels, but the installer did not align the panels perfectly so it really looked bad. If a graphic *must* be seamed, do it right!

In a retail environment, the graphics have got to be perfect. That doesn't mean that they always have to be expensive. The trick is coming up with graphics that look great for the stores, but that have simple installation requirements that stores employees can follow without expensive professional assistance.

Retail and P.O.P. graphics can be very exciting for anyone with a quality large-format digital printer and an innovative imagination. It's great to be able to do these cool displays, and today's printers and inexpensive materials mean all print shops can explore markets they otherwise might have thought impossible.

Success in retail means thinking outside the box, and shops that practice it will get big orders. Good luck. Be smart with your money, and I will see you on the show floor! 



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