

Lookin' good! When fleet management decides to prominently put its name or company logo on the...

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Let's start off with some statistics. First, from the American Trucking Associations' (ATA/ study: 91 percent of all people notice the words and pictures displayed on trucks. 75 percent of all consumers surveyed developed an impression about the described company. 39 percent of all consumers surveyed said they would base a buying decision on vehicle graphics. 98 percent of all people surveyed felt that graphic advertising on trucks created a positive image for the advertiser.

Secondly, a study of Global Positioning Systems performed by the Traffic Audit Bureau, a non-profit organization, showed that a Seiko ad created with ScotchPrint Graphics on one truck reached an estimated 40,585 people a day in Chicago.

The American Trucking Associations also claims that a single truck generates approximately 10 million visual impressions a year--add another four million if you have nighttime-visible reflective signage. The ATA also says that 40 percent of American over-the-road trailers have no graphic identification. Another source claims that another 40 percent are poorly marked with minimal graphics.

Of course, the majority of promotional vehicle markings are used by private fleets to advertise their brands and products. This has been shown to be an effective marketing medium that can result in increased sales and provide subliminal impressions that impact future sales.

Campaigns over the years to convince for-hire carriers to use their equipment as "moving billboards" have never been very successful, usually because such ads might conflict with the freight they're carrying.

Like many other things in trucking, it's getting tough to spec the right graphic product. One reason is because of the technological advances in the number of different decals, coatings and the application products available. This includes the relatively new quick-change, no residue processes available.

Vinyl graphics

"These are not your father's vinyl graphics," should be the watchword. Vinyl graphics, which usually last the life of the vehicle, are being increasingly used over paint because of the speed of application reducing vehicle downtime.

In addition, today's offerings have a number improvements over older products: higher quality adhesives; longer lasting, fade-resistant materials and a higher number of finishes, colors and patterns.

For example, computer-cut custom vinyl graphics are cut by a machine that is similar to a conventional ink-jet printer except instead of ink tanks and a print head a sharp knife moves back and forth on the page cutting out the design on a sheet of adhesive-backed vinyl.

After the design has been cut, the excess vinyl is removed leaving the design. A sheet is then placed on top of the design to hold all the elements in place and allows backing paper to be removed when the design is applied to the truck.

Included among the benefits of computer-cut vinyl graphics is the ability to repair or replace only the affected segments of a damaged graphic rather than repainting a large area.

Reflective graphic film The 3M Commercial Graphics Division recently introduced Scotchlite Intermediate Reflective Graphic Film Series 5100R for commercial vehicles. This product is designed for use on flat or moderately curved, aluminum, painted or fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP) surfaces. The white film can be imaged using electrostatic, piezo ink jet, thermal mass transfer, screen printing or electronic cutting. It is sold with a three-year removability and a four-year durability expected performance life.

The company says that graphic manufacturers benefit by being able to sell added-value reflective films that provide 24-hour a day visibility and support customers advertising and safety efforts as a result of the intermediate price-performance positioning of this product.

Film 5100R has a durable, flexible retroreflective construction that provides similar day and nighttime appearance. The graphic image is highly visible even when totally wet. It has a two-mil pressure sensitive adhesive and a lay-flat liner. Its removable-on-demand adhesive permits easy removal (heat may be required) within three years with little or no adhesive residue. It is available in 36- and 48-inch widths in 50 yard rolls.

Coatings

Chameleon paints, paints having colors that shift and change with the viewing angle, are becoming quite popular. Although they are relatively expensive, they're driving the use of paints.

In a move to help paint users (excuse me, coating users), Sherwin Williams Automotive Finishes Corp. recently introduced a recoatable primer called Element Shield. It provides extended, non-sanding recoatability for weathered, primed units for up to nine months, the longest in the industry, according to the manufacturer.

This recoatable technology utilizes chemical bonding between primer layers that do not need the aid of mechanical abrasion to deliver intercoat adhesion and long-term durability. In addition, to a nine-month outdoor protection life, UV-stable Element Shield offers high solids, excellent corrosion resistance and low VOC. The new product eliminates the need for sanding before finishing, saving valuable time and labor in the assembly process and ultimately reducing labor manufacturing costs associated with larger equipment.

DI Graphics, a supplier of design, imaging and installation solutions, has helped Hi-Line Moving Services, a household mover, to promote its service to Alaska with different graphic designs depicting prominent Alaskan themes. They include close-ups of grizzly bears and Prince William Sound with its whales and penguins.

The company says one of its specialties is to provide a cost-effective solution to accommodate small and mid-size orders. For example, Mike's Hard Lemonaid wanted to supply distributors with vehicle graphics with a flexible but cost-effective printing solution. Di Graphics offered a print-on-demand inventory program utilizing its Scotchprint 2000 digital printer to produce short-run, on-demand orders. This eliminated the additional costs associated with screen printing and stocking large product quantities in inventory.

Avery Dennison Graphics Div. features a broad range of products for wide and super-wide format digital printing, traditional printing technologies and cut signage applications. The offerings include a Metallic Series product family that includes three series:

* Metallic Series--A high-gloss, premium quality metallic cast film available in 36 colors, five of which offer the company's Easy-Apply technology.

* Ultra Matallic Series--A cast metallic vinyl film offering five-year durability and is available in 10 colors.

* Shade-Shifter Series--A premium quality five-year durable iridescent cast film available in six color combinations that change color as viewing angles shift.

Early this year, Avery Dennison launched its 2004 Color Selector featuring more colors, more products and more choices than ever before. It allows customers to choose vinyl based on durability, color and product features. Color chips are provided for each selection offered, as well as product information such as conformability, printability and printer compatibility charts, specialty vinyl and screen print film.

Another premier supplier, Lowen Color Graphics, points to reasons why graphics are used by several its customers:

* Barton Beers used full color fleet graphics to build Corona Beer's quality image maximizing its marketing strategy and capture consumers' attention.

* Advance Food Co. uses large format graphics on both sides of its nationwide distribution fleet so a larger percentage of the population sees its moving ads than they would on a one-sided billboard.

* Nestle Waters reminds consumers on the sides of its distribution trucks that a natural, healthy and refreshing beverage can be conveniently delivered to their home or office.

* Callaway Golf's Brett Porath, custom fitting manager, says, "The gray background of our tour trailers was too drab. We now use full wrap, reflective surface graphics to promote our brand and products."

Tara Advertising Systems, in alliance with Tara Graphics, offers FastTracks, a graphics mounting system that is quickly and easily installed on truck sides and allows vinyl graphics to be installed and changed out without the use of special tools. According to the company, new vinyl is quickly snapped into place, eliminating the cost and downtime of removing old adhesive graphics, cleaning, prepping and re-applying the graphics.

Surface Preparation

The Technology and Maintenance Council has Recommended Practice 411A that offers these guidelines.

1. Wash the vehicle with mild soap and water to remove dirt. Rinse well with clean water and blow or wipe dry with lint-free rags.
2. Wash the surface prior to sanding with a good grade of solvent designed to remove grease, wax, tar, road grime and other surface contaminants. Saturate a clean towel or rag with solvent and apply to a two-ft. square area. While the rag is still is still wet with solvent, wipe with a second clean towel to lift and remove contaminants. Do not use shop rags as these might contain contaminants.
3. Remove all paint and rust in the affected area using a grinding disc. Apply and finish body filler per manufacturer's recommendations. After initial leveling and smoothing of body filler, sand with 180 to 200 grit sandpaper using an orbital sander for the final sanding. Clean with solvent and wipe dry.
4. Apply two or three coats of a two-component primer per the manufacturer's recommendations to the surface to cover the body filler. Block sand as needed using 180 to 220 grit or finer sandpaper.
5. Clean with solvent, spot prime as necessary, then final sand with 220 grit or finer sandpaper.
6. After the sanding is complete, blow off the dust, clean with solvent.
7. The vehicle is now ready for the application of the appropriate top coat selected to meet the operating needs of the vehicle. Just prior to application, the vehicle should be "tacked" to remove any small particles.