

Article: Banners and Wide Format Graphics Send a Big Message

There are times when an organization or business needs to make a big, bold statement. Not just figuratively, but literally. At a trade show, a convention, on the side of a building, or hanging above a busy street, the message has to be physically large and vibrant, cutting through the clutter of the visual landscape. What's needed is a big banner.

Full Color banners and wide format graphics are perfect when the message has to be seen by many people in a public environment. Whether in the high school gymnasium, at a trade show, attached to a building, or hanging from streetlights, banners are used to announce sales, special events, and new products, or to just proclaim the name of the business itself. They position the business as a major player in the market (size does matter, after all), create a sense of excitement, and deliver news that people need to know.

When a banner is the solution, choosing the right graphics provider for your banner printing is important. There are many factors to be considered, including the cost, quality, service, and even ecological concerns. Making the right choice can mean the difference between having a headache and being a hero.

The first step is to understand what's needed. A banner is typically a piece of vinyl or fabric with a width (or height, depending upon how you see it) of up to eight feet. Because the banner material comes on a big roll, the length can be almost anything. The image is set up in a digital file and printed with an inkjet process on a wide-format printer. The process can be very fast—some banners can be printed and delivered in a matter of hours. The finished piece can be fitted with grommets to make hanging easy.

To create a banner with visual punch, the quality of the original image is important. The digital file must have a high enough resolution so that the image doesn't look grainy. For printing, resolution is measured in dots per inch, or DPI. The resolution of the printed banner depends upon the DPI of the original image and the DPI capacity of the printer. Most commercial printing is done at 300 dpi, but photo-quality ink jet printers have resolutions of up to 4800 dpi.

A banner can feature nearly any type of graphic art. The printed image can combine text with photos or artwork^¾if it can be created in a graphic art computer program, it can be printed on a banner. Today's

printers and inks can achieve breathtaking smoothness and capture subtle effects that were unheard of even ten years ago. To ensure a high quality product, the graphic design staff at the printer should give clients expert advice and assistance in setting up the digital files.

Clients should check out the production environment and the inks used. For outdoor applications, digital printing providers should be using eco-solvent inks. These are inks that are free of cyclohexanone and MEK, two powerful solvents traditionally used in older ink formulations. These solvents are volatile and can be both hazardous in the workplace and damaging to the environment. The newest generation of eco-friendly inks are not only better for the environment but also offer superb dot quality, scratch resistance, and dry times. For greater durability, the inks should be UV protected.

Price is key, too. But consumers should remember that you get what you pay for, and simply going with the cheapest bid may not always be the best decision. No one wants a banner that is poorly printed, fades, or was manufactured using out-of-date equipment that is detrimental to the environment. Many organizations need a banner that is to be used year after year, exposed to the weather or in demanding conditions, and that's when quality really counts.

A quality banner or large-format graphic can make a bold and effective statement. For businesses, non-profit organizations, schools, community groups, even at the family reunion, a big colorful banner can get the message across to a wide audience.

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