



In these stock art design examples, you can see the many ways to creatively use type, location, design, color and special effects to make each design unique and completely original. (Images courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.)

Using Artwork to Sell More Services

How many times have we heard, “the artwork sells the shirt”? And while most of us know this to be true, do we really run our business based on this principle? In my experience and observation, I see too many shops sacrifice artwork due to time, budget or other constraints and — in my opinion — miss opportunities to set themselves apart from the competition and increase sales.

One of the things I hear from my seminar attendees is, “I would love to do better designs, but my customers aren’t asking for that kind of artwork.” My answer to that is, “That’s because they don’t know you can do it.” That was my experience when I had my own print shop.

Customers are used to seeing two-color designs with a piece of clip art and type thrown over it. When everyone does that, you can count on the client haggling

over price. By providing upgraded or enhanced versions of the artwork, you start a conversation that allows you to hold your price or even increase it.

Most customers are used to calling around and getting pricing from everyone. “How much is it going to cost me for a full-front, two-color design printed on 72 shirts?” If you’re a screen printer, most will think “Well, that’s a job using clip art with a color thrown in.”

That’s exactly what everyone else is going to do. It’s what many shops have been doing for 30 years. You must differentiate yourself from your competitors, and the easiest way to do that is with better artwork. It doesn’t cost extra for the same two screens if one design is created using regular clip art and the other is created using enhanced stock art. Two colors equals two screens.

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By Dane Clement, President, Great Dane Graphics



Once you start thinking outside the box, you will be amazed at all the different variations you can create with a single stock art design. In this Yorkie example, the artwork was printed monochromatic to give it a distinct look. (Image courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.)

If you show customers a two-color design that has some tonal value to it or possibly with halftones, showing highlights and shadows, they will want to go with the nicer-looking art. Customers are unable to visualize complexities on their own, but if you can show them, they will want to buy it.

If you already own stock art or have printed samples of enhanced designs you've already created, show those to your customers. The more you can actually show the customer, the better they can visualize what you have to offer and the more likely they'll want it.

How To Sell More Product

Selling by showing is always best. If you

have a customer you print shirts for, create samples of other products they might need. If it's a school or team, make a sample jacket, hat or gym bag. If it's a yoga studio, think of leggings, mats or water bottles. If you decorate the products yourself in-house instead of outsourcing them, make an actual sample product. A customer who always comes to you for screen printed T-shirts might not be aware you also offer vinyl cutting or dye sublimation. By creating and displaying sample products using these other methods, you're opening a whole new avenue of possible sales.

When possible, I always advocate for doing at least one sample specific to the client you are talking to. If you go into the conversation with a sample printed with someone else's name or logo, the customer may not be able to visualize how it will look with his/her own logo. It may not convert to an order if you have to say, "Imagine your name or logo here." It's not the same, and it can seem inauthentic when it's not unique to them. When customers see the actual product with their name or logo, you have a better chance of closing the deal.

Here's a favorite story from my own experience. My partner and I wanted to get some business from the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans. We tried for months to arrange a meeting to show them what we could do. The lady who ran the store was happy with their supplier and declined every time.

Eventually (I think because she wanted us to stop bothering her) we got a meeting set up in two weeks' time. As soon as it was confirmed, Missy (my senior art director) and I spent a day at the zoo. We took photos of everything specific to this zoo — the entrance, the large fountain as you walk in, the exhibit signs, etc. At the time, there was a big "name the baby rhino" campaign to celebrate the zoo's newest arrival, which we captured as well.

When we got back to work, we put together a half dozen or so designs and printed them all. We had one featuring both mother and baby rhino as a simulated process design with special effect inks that raised the rhino's skin. We did a tone-on-tone ladies' design with the large elephant fountain at the entrance to the park using special effects such as glitters.

When we arrived at the meeting, she looked at her watch and said we had 15 minutes. By the time we got the second print out of our bag, she was on the phone calling in four other people to see our samples. Her whole outlook and

personality changed. She was blown away. We left the meeting with a very nice purchase order!

I realize it's not always possible or cost-effective to create printed samples with the customer's information, but it is more impressive to do so. If you have an important customer whose business you really want, focus on company-specific samples.

Incorporate Locations

Most customers are used to the traditional left chest or full front or back layouts. By showing examples of other placement options or special effects — some of which won't increase the cost — you open up their minds to a variety of new possibilities. It may be their first time seeing the enhanced designs or unusual locations or combinations you present, which establishes you as the source for new, fresh ideas that can be greater money makers.

While you can try to explain an idea, they won't visualize it until you show them. Printing custom samples may not always be possible, but you can take one design and show how the artwork can be manipulated in a variety of ways.

Create a series of samples to show the same artwork done in different styles and techniques to show various finished looks. Examples include one-color distressed, one-color discharge spatter, two-color, three-color, full-color and special effects such as images with high density and foils. The broad range of looks alone is impressive.

If you do something similar demonstrating the different looks and effects, it will help your customer get a better idea of what you can create for them. It's the next best thing to personalized samples.

When you create samples to use as sales tools, try to make something special. Remember, plain old designs are what everyone else does. Try to add some wow to yours. Create new, fresh designs and layouts.

Think about special effect inks or gels, or maybe add some foils to the image here and there. Create a reflective logo heat printed for visibility at night. Make things pop or stand out. Show them your arsenal of art, design, printing and production possibilities. Give your customer a reason to want to upgrade and add to their prints. It's an upsell for you to charge more for the order.

If you already own stock art, you can get more use out of it if you come up with



Even a one-color design can be made more interesting by adding a distressed texture as shown here. Or consider adding halftones to give a design more depth and dimension. (Image courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.)



In this print, high-density ink was used to create dimension and then overlaid with gold foil. If you can show a customer a broad range of looks, you are more likely to capture their attention — and more business. (Image courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.)



Another way to increase a sale is show products other than a traditional T-shirt. Show the client's logo or related artwork on other products that his/her market would be interested in. For example, a barbecue restaurant would need aprons, mugs, water bottles, cutting boards, baseball caps and more. (Image courtesy of Great Dane Graphics.)

creative ways to show it. Anyone can take a piece of stock art and add some type above it. Try changing the color scheme, pasting the image inside a shape or cropping it. This can give you the opportunity to reuse the design you've already paid for. If you do it right, it will be hard for anyone to tell it's the same design.

Creating Company Logos

If someone does not have a logo already and you want to get their business, creating a layout specifically designed for them is the way to go. Create a design with their company name and print it on various products that are appropriate for their business.

For example, let's say the client is a

florist. You might print the design on various styles of shirts or aprons the employees will wear in the shop. If it's a company that may already have a simple logo, create an enhanced version to present to them by adding some imagery.

For a small burger joint, you can add an image of a hamburger with the logo and print it on shirts, mugs and aprons. Use the full variety of production methods you have available. The greater the variety of options you present to them, the better chance of drumming up a sale.

The amount of effort you expend will, to some degree, depend on the client. Is it a major theme park that might order hundreds or thousands of shirts during a season? You might spend a day or more

creating samples for that. Is it a small landscaping company with 10 employees? That won't justify a full day's work, but could warrant an extra hour or two, especially if you want to go after other landscapers.

In my experience, when I spent the extra effort, it always paid off in the long run. And when it doesn't, you still have cool samples to show other customers, and you got a little more practice.

Always show your best work and designs that are appropriate to the specific customer when you can. However, if you show them something that's not exactly what they are looking for now, you never know if they may need something similar in the future. If they see that you can provide it, they don't have to look elsewhere. Having a good relationship with your customer is a good way to keep them coming back.

As far as what product to show printed samples on, I recommend printing actual garments or products. Pellon swatches might be good for doing test prints, but to wow a customer into spending money with you, you must create good, viable products — merchandise where they can see the quality you offer.

For years in my business, we included a sample with the customer's finished order. We might make a dye sub mug with the same artwork, or print and frame a full-color poster of the design and give it to them. It goes a long way in solidifying business. It shows them what else you can do for them. It's a gift that hangs on the wall or sits on their desk to always remind them of that order and the extra you gave them.

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