



Re-board distributor Oriam Green set up this paperboard trade show booth on a balcony in a convention center. All parts were carried up the center's stairs and assembled by the Oriam Green staff. After the two-day show was over, the Re-board graphics could be re-used or recycled. Courtesy of Oriam Green.

Materials Create the Event Experience

The changing face of graphic materials

Live events are essential in the world of non-stop digital communications. Events help businesses, associations, government agencies, educational groups and families get valuable face time with the people who matter most. Events build awareness, memories and emotional connections. Accordingly, as an event design expert at event management service provider Omnience notes, "Event design isn't just about décor, but about shaping attendees' attention, comfort, impressions and experience."

All Events Need Graphics

Keeping up with innovations in printable materials for event graphics can help you better serve your customers, whether they need wayfinding signage, trade show booth graphics, staging or themed décor. Awareness of earth-friendly materials can help organizers reduce the environmental impact of events.

Depending on the size, type, location

and duration of the event, your shop may be asked to produce a combination of indoor and outdoor signs, welcome banners, banner-stand graphics, registration area and podium graphics, or custom draping, tablecloths, light-fixture covers, stage props, dancefloor graphics, and murals that convert a bland meeting space into a branded or themed setting.

Event stage design matters because the stage is the one place where attendees focus their attention for a given amount of time.

Organizers of outdoor events need mesh backdrops and fencing materials that can handle windy days and speaker covers that don't interfere with acoustic clarity. They also use branded pop-up and canopy tents, flags, and graphics-wrapped fences and crowd-control barriers.

Hundreds of different flexible, rigid and adhesive graphic materials can be printed for events. Some graphics will be used only for the duration of the event, while others will be designed for compact

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By Eileen Fritsch, Industry Author





Outdoor retailer Patagonia asked the EYELEVEL agency's "brand-theater" experts to incorporate more earth-friendly materials in their Summer 2018 Outdoor show in Europe's trade show booth. EYELEVEL designers replaced all medium-density fiberboard panels from previous booths with 100% bio-based and recyclable ECOR panels from Noble Environmental Technologies. The panels were used for the booth's mid-core construction, mid-floor fixtures and all displayed graphics. Patagonia is re-using the panels for in-store merchandising displays. Courtesy of Patagonia.

storage, cost-effective shipping and re-use at future events. This quick overview shows how different categories are evolving.

Flexible Materials

Before UV-flatbed printers, most trade show graphics were printed on banner vinyls, backlit films, or polypropylene, polyester or polycarbonate display films. Booth graphics printed with aqueous inks were laminated for durability.

The development of UV-curable, eco-solvent, solvent, latex, dye-sub transfer and direct disperse inks enabled graphics producers to skip the lamination step and empowered designers to custom-decorate many flexible materials and rigid boards.

Fabrics

Advances in engineered textiles and display systems are enabling lightweight, easy-to-ship printable fabrics to replace the use of bulky rolls of printed vinyls or stacks of rigid display boards. Large-format and grand-format woven, stretchable knit and mesh fabrics have been developed for printing graphics for indoor or outdoor use. The choice of dozens of products enables print service providers (PSPs) to print everything from decorative draping, tablecloths, backdrops and chair covers to front-lit, backlit and blockout graphics. Different weights and textures of fabrics in roll widths up to 126 inches can be used to create seamless 30-foot booth backdrops, freestanding displays, wall-mounted or hanging displays, backlit photo murals and more. Outdoor durable fabrics are available for printing flags, fence wraps, crowd-control barriers and pop-up canopies and tents.

Some fabrics are designed to meet flame-retardant codes for indoor exhibitions. Mesh fabrics allow winds to blow through graphics used for outdoor stage backdrops and fences.

To see the huge range of fabrics available for event graphics, visit the websites of companies such as Ultraflex, Top Value Fabrics and Fisher Textiles.

Fisher Textiles' line of eco-friendly fabrics uses REPREEVE® recycled polyester in varying amounts. REPREEVE yarn is made from post-consumer plastics and post-industrial waste, and fabrics using it are available for exhibit graphics, roll-up banner stands, table covers, street pole banners, tension displays, geometric stretch displays, silicone-edge graphics, photographic backdrops, canopy tents and awnings.

SENFA, the technical textiles division

of the Charguers Group of France, makes coated Decoprint textiles, including the Sublimis line of lighter-weight backlit display fabrics and eco-friendly Alterra textiles made with fibers from recycled PET plastic bottles.

Display Films

Traditional, smooth, lay-flat blockout display films for aqueous inkjet photo printers are used to produce indoor banner-stand display graphics with high-quality images that will be viewed up close.

Vinyl and Vinyl Mesh Banners

Vinyl and vinyl mesh are popular for outdoor events. Vinyl banners have higher levels of opacity and longer-term fade-resistance, and display rich, vibrant colors.

Rigid Materials

The first UV flatbed printers have helped PSPs reduce the cost of producing temporary event signage by eliminating the need to apply adhesive-backed materials to materials such as foamboard, polyvinylchloride (PVC) sheets (e.g., Sintra), acrylic, medium-density fiberboard (MDF) and plywood.

While budget-conscious buyers of event graphics still choose graphic foamboards made with polyethylene (PE), polystyrene (PS) or PVC, many brands are seeking paper-based boards that can be easily recycled. Lightweight, durable, rigid paper-based boards such as Re-board, Falconboard, and ConVerd™ board have engineered fluted cores and come in a variety of thicknesses. Katz Display Board has a paper surface and solid wood-pulp core that resists warping due to



SENASA's award-winning coated Sublimis fabric provides the excellent light diffusion and white point required to add beautiful backlit photo murals to event spaces. Courtesy of SENSA.

temperature and humidity changes. Some paper-based boards can be printed on both sides for hanging signs or digitally cut and/or folded to create three-dimensional or structural displays.

Adhesive Materials

Fabrics and vinyls with removable or repositionable adhesives can be used to add decorative graphics to elevator doors, walls, windows and columns of event venues. Graphics printed on adhesive-

backed polypropylene can be mounted to different types of signboard in shops that don't have flatbed printers.

For large window graphics, event producers choose perforated window films with removable adhesives. Adhesive-free static-cling vinyls can be used on smaller glass surfaces.

Specialty adhesive materials are available to decorate exterior walls, streets and sidewalks, and carpets at event venues. For example, the Alumigraphics line

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Our Paper Life originated in 2011 to make cardboard furniture for university students. They have experimented constantly to produce new prototypes and test different materials and fabrication methods. Working with Jackknife Design Studio, they fabricated this 20-by-20-foot conference trade show booth for Weston Foods with this attention-getting backwall. Courtesy of Our Paper Life.

Printing Equipment Manufacturers Can Help

The huge range of rigid, flexible and self-adhesive materials available for event graphics can seem overwhelming — particularly to print businesses without screen printing or signmaking backgrounds. Printing equipment manufacturers and distributors of multiple brands of materials may be able to help.

Agfa Graphics' Duratex wide-format inkjet media for different indoor and outdoor applications includes digitally printable vinyls, fabrics, graphics boards and adhesive materials, including a 100% recyclable Eco-Banner product and Eco-Display Board. The Duratex product line also includes two-sided pole banner materials and mesh banner materials for outdoor stage backdrops.

According to Larry Salomon of Agfa Graphics North America, ordering all event materials from a single source allows for a streamlined order process and savings in transportation costs. "Chasing multiple vendors for delivery status is extremely inefficient," he said.

Users of HP large-format printers can use the Print OS HP Media Locator to identify different types of graphics materials that have been tested and/or profiled for use on HP Latex, Scitex, PageWide, DesignJet and Indigo printing equipment.

of self-adhesive materials for indoor or outdoor use is made from aluminum and contains no PVC or hazardous ingredients. You can recycle the graphics along with other aluminum products.

TexWalk® by Jessup Manufacturing is a printable matte floor-graphic material with a repositionable adhesive. Indoor, temporary graphics can be applied to carpet, tile or wood floors as well as trade show exhibits, untreated stone, PVC and painted surfaces.

Brand Experience Agencies Are Getting Involved

Many brands and event venues want printed materials that can help them meet corporate social responsibility goals as well as visual communications goals. Just as brand marketers and retailers want to reduce the amount of waste associated with in-store promotional signs and packaging, they also want more recyclable or re-usable materials for trade shows, events and experiential activations.

For example, the EYELEVEL retail experience design firm is partnering with Noble Environmental Technologies to co-create waste-free, fully recyclable point-of-purchase and point-of-sales displays, cabinets, signage, luxury packaging and merchandise materials.

Noble Environmental's ECOR technology is a waste-to-product manufacturing process for making high-performance, sustainable and healthy materials that can be used to design buildings and products to enable a circular economy. ECOR panels are made of 100% recycled cellulose fibers and are

free of toxins and VOCs. Retailers such as Patagonia are using sturdy ECOR panels with Fiber Alloy™ technology to replace MDF and particle board used in trade show booths, fixtures, cabinets, furniture, displays and signage. This fall, Noble Environmental Technologies (a Gold Patron of the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership) plans to introduce lighter weight, printable ECOR panels that can be cut with popular digital-cutting machines and used for temporary signage.

Derek McSpadden, President and Global Chief Operations Officer for Noble Environmental Technologies, says the company has been talking to brands, retailers and design firms to extend the conversation about sustainability. "We want to help brands find new ways to do more of what they are already doing and change materials to increase their sustainability footprint," he says. "If we can cut back on the use of foam, or create a self-ban on foam for temporary signage, we could start changing the world."

He expects new ECOR products for temporary signage to be more competitively priced with commonly used foamboards. Visit the ECOR website (ecorglobal.com) for details about when the new products will be available in the U.S.

Another creative group experimenting with recyclable display materials is Our Paper Life, a cardboard design and fabrication company in Toronto. They use different types and thicknesses of cardboard to make trade show displays and props for experiential marketing installations. Our Paper Life promotes their cardboard booths as a way for small-

to mid-sized businesses to create custom booths. Their booth designs can include display tables, walls and dimensional elements and lettering. All booth elements are re-usable and recyclable.

Printed Graphics Are Just Part of Event Communications

Image Options in Foothill Ranch, Calif., has extensive experience with retail and event graphics. To keep pace with the growth in event marketing, Image Options recently acquired Splash! Events. Together, they produce user-group conferences for tech giants such as Salesforce and Cisco and experiential activation/pop-up events for consumer-product manufacturers, retailers and fashion brands.

Image Options President Brian Hite says graphic producers must understand the full scope of the client's needs. "Most events we do exist simultaneously in convention centers, hotels and outdoor spaces," he said. Plus, the amount of content

delivered during events is exploding as event organizers create mobile apps, run contests and communicate via social media. Event planners are incorporating more video screens and live entertainment and controlling the flow of attendee traffic to ensure exposure to specific messaging.

Event graphics companies must be willing to work as partners with providers of other services, Hite says, because, "It is all about creating the environment and the experience." He notes that choosing the right graphics material is often not as important as choosing the right application of visual messaging for each area of an event venue.

"Our focus is on using recycled content substrates and substrates that can be repurposed, reused, recycled or composted," he said. This means using polyester and cotton fabric blends, paper-based boards, adhesive-backed wall mural fabrics and aluminum adhesive films for outdoor floors and walls.

Even if a PSP never serves major

conferences and multi-site events, the same client that asks them to print marketing collateral may also want banner-stand graphics for a local show or event. By learning more about the many available printable materials, the PSP can show them even more options for event graphics.

No matter what mix of print technologies a print shop uses, PSPs who head to PRINTING United in Dallas (October 23 - 25) will meet plenty of suppliers who can recommend specific materials for any type of event graphics clients might request.

Eileen Fritsch is a freelance writer based near Cincinnati, Ohio. A founding editor of Big Picture magazine, she has covered the evolution of large-format digital printing for more than 20 years. She has written about many different markets for digital printing, including textiles, garments, interior décor, architectural glass, retailing, professional photography, art and packaging. Contact her at eileen@eileenfritsch.com.

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