



New Opportunities for Graphics Installers



Through SGIA's ongoing affiliation with the Professional Decal Application Alliance (PDAA), we have had a unique view into what is an increasingly competitive industry, particularly as new pressure-sensitive materials have made installation easier.

The graphics installation community today is based on one common denominator: Sticky stuff. Pressure-sensitive materials have become a critical element in many graphics projects, ranging from simple applications such as wall graphics, to challenging applications like vehicle wraps. In some cases, unskilled persons can install the simplest applications of pressure-sensitive materials, to varied results. Many applications, however, require the skills of experienced installation professionals.

Through SGIA's ongoing affiliation with the Professional Decal Application Alliance (PDAA), we have had a unique view into what is an increasingly competitive industry, particularly as new pressure-sensitive materials, offering improved conformability and air-egress technology, have made installation easier. Many new players have begun entering this industry area, resulting in a price squeeze.

Because of this growing reality, many graphics installation companies are looking for new opportunities for their businesses, finding new ways to use their considerable skills in less saturated areas.

Defining Decal Diversity

A quick look into the results of PDAA's 2011 Installer Survey helps illustrate the nature of graphics installation today. Among companies that provide graphics installation services exclusively, glass, walls, floors, building and vehicle wraps are seen as fully saturated application areas, as 100 percent of companies responding to the survey serve these areas. Even though one application in particular — vehicle wraps — requires a great deal of skill on the behalf of the installer, PDAA hears that competition on price has become increasingly common among graphics installation companies, a key warning flag of commoditization.



Dan Marx, Vice President, Markets and Technologies, SGIA

Beyond the rather saturated markets mentioned, the survey results show areas of opportunity where additional skills are required to complete the job. The application of graphics onto buildings (interior or exterior) taking place more than 21 feet above street level is a prime example of this, a service offered by slightly more than one-third of installers. Surely high-altitude installations require a higher level of attention to details, such as safety, and a firm knowledge of lifts, scaffolding and rigging if ropes and harnesses are required. But if the opportunity is right, these additional steps are well worth the additional work involved.

Strong opportunity may also exist in areas where pressure-sensitive materials are not even used. Nearly two-thirds of graphics installation companies reported that they provide services in signage installation, non-pressure sensitive. For those companies willing to expand their skill sets to include hanging and rigging of signage, banners and soft signage, new opportunities for revenue may exist, especially from some graphics producers who would prefer to outsource their installation work (signs, wraps and otherwise) to a single, qualified provider.

By paying attention to these particular concerns, and doing the work needed to access work in this application area, installation companies can open significant opportunity for their businesses.

The two sidebars presented within this article address two methods close to graphics installation — in some cases utilizing the exact same skills — to complete projects that fall outside the traditional mindset of the graphics and sign industry.

As illustrated in the first case study on page 43, graphics installation trainer Justin Pate used the highest-level skills of vehicle wrapping to literally change the paint color of vehicles using new, pressure-sensitive films. For those companies that can access this market, opportunity abounds.

The second case study on page 44, written by Roy Ritchie of Dreamscape, describes the growing uses of pressure-sensitive wallpaper materials to replace traditional wallpaper applications, and tells of the ongoing confluence in the skill of graphics installers and wallpaper hangers.

Understanding the Proposition

In some cases, taking a graphics installation business toward new, more profitable opportunities requires an act of redefinition, which can be daunting. With that said, redefinition is about staying current. The graphics installation industry has been in a constant state of flux since its inception. For example, 20 years ago, most vinyl installers were putting cut vinyl lettering onto the sides of semi-truck trailers. Today, they're wrapping boats, buildings, furniture and nearly any other item with a receptive surface, and those semi-truck trailers are now festooned with colorful, digitally printed graphics.

Little stands still. As a witness to how digital printing technology has rocked the printing industry to its core over the past two decades, I know that those who have followed the opportunity — and in many cases, the money — are those who have stayed strong.

Dan Marx is SGIA's vice president of markets and technologies, and has worked extensively to raise awareness of the specialty graphics industry, and to help printers and their customers identify and adopt new technologies and access new, lucrative market areas. In his more than 20 years at SGIA, he has authored numerous articles for industry publications worldwide, has presented at a wide variety of industry events, and has served as an enthusiastic ambassador for innovative technologies.

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Wallpaper Installation

By Roy Ritchie, Jr., President, Dreamscape

There is a growing opportunity for graphic installers to expand their business into interior wall graphics. As the custom digitally printed wall graphic market has expanded over recent years, so has the need for quality installers.

Within the digital print industry, we have seen a heavy concentration of install attention given to vehicle wraps through organizations like PDAA, and several trade shows that routinely feature car wrapping demonstrations. Wall installations are not as commonly featured, yet the number of walls being decorated with custom graphics has grown considerably in the last decade. Advancements in print technology and an increase in performance material options has opened the doorway for a much larger audience.

Even as recent as 10 years ago, custom digital design for walls was limited to large clients with enormous budgets — think Vegas casinos and high-end hotel properties. Today, budget-conscious retailers, small commercial properties, and even residential clients are taking advantage of lower production costs and numerous sources.

Learning how to install graphics on interior walls is not rocket science. There are some nuances that come with experience, but for the most part, if an installer has worked with sheets of vinyl in the past, he or she should be able to pick up wallcovering techniques fairly easily.

In today's industry, there are two predominant forms of application for wallcoverings: Self-adhesive and standard. Self-adhesive is often referred to as "peel and stick," or PSA (pressure-sensitive adhesive). There are a variety of options within the self-adhesive product category. Some are permanent, while others are temporary. Some temporary products can be removed cleanly from the wall without residue or damage, while others claim to be completely re-positional.

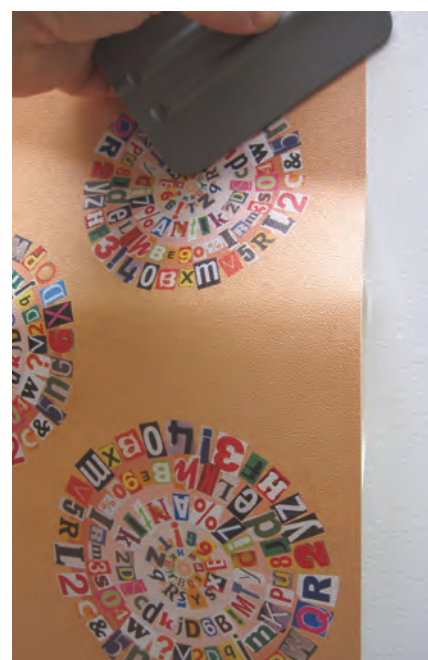
Standard wallcoverings, by comparison, generally require a paste applied to the back of the material during installation. While the glue is still wet, the material can be shifted or removed, but once dry, this becomes a permanent install. Dealing with the extra step of glue is sometimes viewed as a nuisance, especially when compared to a self-adhesive product, but in practice, it has been shown to be the most reliable method for long-term precision installs.

There is a healthy demand for wall installations today. Large-to medium-sized jobs, especially on a commercial level, will almost always involve a professional installer. There are some print companies who offer their own installation services successfully, but skilled trade people are still performing the majority of projects. The exception to this would be very small jobs, which can potentially be taken on by the end users themselves.

For new construction, often the task of finding an installer belongs to the general contractor. For refresh projects in older properties, the task could fall to the building owner, or the company selling the goods. In any of these scenarios, someone looking for an installer will often be directed to organizations like PDAA or the National Guild of Professional Paperhangers (NGPP).

In my personal experience, there is a difference in expertise between the PDAA and NGPP communities. PDAA has a strong experience level with graphics, and by extension, a better comfort level with self-adhesive products. In contrast, the NGPP community has always been more focused on traditional wallpaper installs, which, up until recently, has meant standard methods using glue.

Both of these communities could benefit from the other. As there are advantages to both self-adhesive and standard install methods, I believe both will remain important techniques into the future, and I do not think one will replace the other. So, as the custom wall graphic segment continues to grow, so should the demand for each type of installation method. Members looking to take advantage of this growth should therefore become proficient in both installation techniques, maximizing their share of opportunities.





Paint Wrapping

By Justin Pate, Professional Graphics Installer

One of the most exciting new developments in the car-wrapping sector has been the emerging paint wrapping market. This has been made possible due to the major manufacturers now providing a wide array of single-color gloss, matte, carbon and textured films. Instead of having to design and produce graphics for vehicles, an installer or company can simply pull a roll of film out of a box and start to wrap. This has transformed the car wrapping process, making it much easier and opening the concept to a much wider base of consumers.

Yet, as great as paint wrapping is in these regards, it does come with several challenging aspects that need to be addressed in order for a company or installer to make it a profitable enterprise.

Concerning installations, first and foremost, the skill level of an installer has to be much higher for paint wrapping than for full-color car wraps. The vehicles have to be cleaner; the cutting has to be perfect; the install has to be seamless, and a durability of three to four years has to be achieved. An installer really has to up their standards; otherwise their shortcomings will become very clear to clients, which will guarantee a loss of profits and future business. In order for an installer to really achieve a higher level of skill, they need to work on perfecting the more advanced nuances of wrapping, like door handles, bumpers, mirrors, working around antennae, and making perfect cuts on corners and around molding. This may take extra time and energy, but the pay off will be well worth it.

For companies interested in adding paint wrapping to their arsenal, they must learn how to sell the concept, and to price the jobs accordingly. If a client asks why paint wrapping is better than painting a vehicle, the answer should be, paint wrapping has a lower downtime than painting. It protects the OEM paint, which raises the vehicle's resale value; there are a wider array of colors and finishes to choose from than with paint, and a paint wrap can easily be removed and replaced. Another selling point is for people looking to buy a used vehicle. Paint wrapping allows a person to disregard the color of a car at the time of purchase, because they can choose any paint wrap color or finish after the sale. This gives people buying vehicles greater choice and flexibility, which is a valuable asset.

As for pricing, it is very important to keep in mind that a paint wrap generally takes between 40 and 60 percent longer to install than a full print wrap. This means that the price for a paint wrap needs to be higher, and more time needs to be allowed for the install when scheduling. Also, choosing the right film for a vehicle becomes critical, since durability is a



Before



After



Before



After

major factor. Educating salespeople and installers on the properties of the film and the differences between manufacturers will be richly rewarded down the line.

Once all of the nuances associated with paint wrapping are mastered, an installer or company can really take it to another level. Paint wrapping really opens the door to a much wider client base, and has the potential to create a base for long-term profits for years to come.