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Value-Add POP

Drive Business with New Opportunities

By Thomas Franklin

Advertising agencies value point of purchase (POP) marketing for its ability to make the final, and perhaps most important, immediate impression on potential customers.

Standing out in a crowded retail environment requires innovation. Applying new materials and techniques not only distinguishes a brand, but the print provider as well. Most people associate corrugated board and standees with POP. But thanks to the growing availability of low-cost specialty vinyl, print providers now offer additional attractive and easy to use products for POP. With the proper laminate, every inch of retail space is now fair game for potential revenue—for the sign shop and the client.

"We've seen our IMAGin JT5529BFD vinyl used to wraps odd things in stores—ATM machines and coffee dispensers," says Mary Ann Kucera, product manager, MACtac Graphic Products. "It jumps out at you."

"Previously, in the pressure-sensitive market, all you heard about was how good the film was, how long it would last," explains Peter Evans, managing partner, Icon Digital. "Today, our clients want to dress up their stores for less money and higher profit. We're not putting up graphics for longer than six months. We need access to films that print well but are less engineered."

"In response to the shortened duration of promotional campaigns, Avery Dennison Graphics and Reflective Products developed solutions to align with our customers' needs," explains Mike Eyman, business manager, promotional films, Avery. Avery's new SX ReadyCal 1001 promotional film is specifically created for screenprinting. MPI 3900/3910 is a 3.4-mil film with permanent adhesive for digitally printed, short- to medium-term promotional graphic applications. Eyman explains the need for the new media, "A solution for a six week POP graphic has a different set of critical quality elements than a six year marking film."

According to Kucera, there was a real need for short-term films in the POP market. "Media customers look for shorter life spans, and may skip laminates for graphics placed above the eye level," she says. MACtac's new PrintCover is an economical laminate designed for these short-term, promotional environments.

Another new product for the POP space is MACtac IMAGin wallNOODLE, a 6-mil vinyl with a microsphere adhesive. The virtue of the new media, Kucera shares, is that "anybody can adhere it to the wall." It can also be removed and replaced quickly and cleanly to release air bubbles.

Though 3M Graphics Market Center previously left the economy space alone, it too broadened its media lineup to meet the demands of POP printers, says Jason Amidon, product marketing supervisor, 3M. "We saw demand from our customers, but they also said they needed roll-to-roll consistency."

Other products, such as the company's textured surface vinyl, turn previously unused space into potential revenue, Amidon observes. The company is looking to use its 3M Scotchcal Changeable Translucent Graphic Film IJ63-20 as a temporary backlit menu board in quick service locations. "We're looking at places like Burger King. Rather than having one long-term backlit, a fast food chain puts in temporary signs to complement menu boards that run as 30 day campaigns."

R Tape Corporation expanded the print widths of its Vinylefx metallized vinyl for POP applications, with sizes currently reaching 48 inches and potentially larger by the year's end. We see these additions as an opportunity for the print provider to up-sell," explains Tom Cornelius, sales director, R Tape. The company is also poised to commercialize a line of patterned overlaminates in five distinctive styles—frost, linen, carbon fiber, diamond plate, and metal flake. Available in 54-inch widths, these pressure-sensitive overlaminates will work with any media "to give it a really unique look."

Some high-end retailers, particularly fashion merchants, create interior displays from fabric, shares Mike Ecker, director, special products, Tara Materials, Inc. "The Fredrix 1008 Polyflax is similar in appearance to what you'd paint on but the coatings are modified for solvent and UV printing." The company supplied digital printable textiles for years, but recently saw a steady increase in demand for POP and display applications. "It used to be a few rolls here and a few rolls there. Now, we have regular demand; nationwide chains are specifically asking for artistic canvas," comments Ecker.

Tara Materials also offers its canvas stretching services to print providers, to give POP the look "of a stretched piece of art." Because canvas is durable, many retailers store it and reuse the printed graphic on a seasonal basis, Ecker adds.

Innovation in the POP market also occurs at the intersection of two worlds—print and electronic, or digital display. Electronic displays can be freestanding flat panel monitors showing a mix of motion, sound, and still images. Or, they can be integrated into larger kiosks adorned with printed output. For the print provider, electronic displays offer not only a new product, but also a way to sell off of existing print services.

The Complete Solution

35 year old Artisan Complete is a POP powerhouse. Spanning four facilities with over 200 employees and representatives in the North and South America, the ON, Canada-based firm prides itself on innovation. It is anchored by three product lines—Artisan Retail, Artisan Live for electronic signage, and Artisan Print+ for digitally printed and screenprinted displays.

Artisan was at the forefront of the emerging electronic display market, says Stephen Ghigliotty, account director, Artisan Complete. Artisan's new nCapsule electronic display is an example of the emerging trend of combining both print and electronic retail display signage into a single package. The nCapsule is customizable, accommodates branding, and swaps out printed corrugated panels from the company's Inca Digital Printers' Columbia Turbo UV flatbed. It sports a 24-inch HD monitor from LG Electronics as its digital centerpiece.

Yet what makes the nCapsule unique is not simply the melding of static and dynamic signage, but what's inside the display—a diminutive camera that records how many people interact with the kiosk and for how long over a period of time.

Software from the developer BroadSign International Inc. manages the signage network while CognoVision Solutions Inc.'s Anonymous Impression Metric (AIM) software gathers key information from the camera about how customers interact with the kiosk. As the name suggests, AIM does not record actual video of customers but registers their presence and how long they stand in front of a sign. Soon, Ghigliotty says, the system will record age, ethnicity, and gender details as well.

The goal is to make POP displays more effective—to give both Artisan and its clients the means to gauge how pieces are performing in the field. Because the system is electronic, Ghigliotty explains, new content can be developed and deployed based on the analysis derived from the system and fed into the kiosk without having to make changes manually.

The nCapsule made its debut this summer at Birks jewelry store in TO, Canada for the Movado Group and its Concord brand of high-end watches. Artisan's in-house production team designed fifteen minutes of high-definition content to display in a loop.

The nCapsule is both a promotional and research tool in one. It helps retailers collect concrete data on customer flows and more subtle patterns of customer traffic as well, says Ghigliotty. Artisan and its retail partners collaborate on more effective messaging—coordinating colors and calls to action and keeping the content always in motion. "You have to make it informative and friendly—casual, clear, and contextual," shares Ghigliotty.

"We think these measurement tools are more and more important in POP displays, and we're looking to use them with non-electronic display signage," he adds.

Ghigliotti, who came to Artisan from the advertising agency industry, says that for high-end brands innovative retail marketing is essential. Electronic displays, he adds, are making major in-roads, pointing to Wal-Mart's decision to move its in-store electronic signage network from above eye-level, down to eye- and shelf-level, as a sign of mainstream acceptance.

Iconic POP

"We always look for what is next," is how Peter Evans, manager partner, Icon Digital describes his company's philosophy. A passion for experimenting pushed Evans, fresh out of college in 1995, to join with co-founders Peter Yeung and Juan Lau to found the ON, Canada-based print provider. Icon Digital now boasts a 46,000 square foot facility with offices in New York City, NY and Montreal, Canada with 65 employees.

The company got its start with electrostatic wide format printing. "Traditional technologies were slow, production wise, and we needed short runs," Evans says. The company cut its teeth printing for agencies, producing indoor and outdoor graphics, and today roughly half of all its work is in the retail market.

Icon employs a variety of tools to meet its POP demand—a pair of Océ LightJets, a 52- and 72-inch, for photo and backlit; an Hewlett-Packard (HP) Scitex Turbojet produces adhesive vinyls for window and floor graphics; while a pair of EFI/VUTEK solvent printers, ten and 16 feet, round out the firm's grand format capabilities. "We made the leap to grand format in 1997," Evans shares. The company even remained true to its electrostatic roots, purchasing a 3M Scotchprint 2000 several years ago.

Agencies, particularly the high-end fragrance brands that Icon regularly works with, look for novelty. "They need to make a big impact at product launches. They spend a lot of money because there's a lot of turnover in this market, so the initial buy of the product has to be big." The result, Evans explains, are POP campaigns "that are really big, bold, and make a splash. Everyone needs to see that this new fragrance is hot. We literally dress up the entire launch site with POP."

The company recently completed a launch for actress Sarah Jessica Parker's fragrance line. They produced floor graphics, small posters, standees, large format banners for both indoor and outdoor display, and some fabric prints.

Part of the décor involved an elevator door wrap with related floor graphics. Using MACtac's IMAGin JT5800P vinyl on the doors and IMAGin JT5800R on the floor, the company created an image of the actress peering through shattered glass. "The media is very easy to apply and comes off easily, which is very important," says Evans. "These are short launches—Parker's likeness was up for a week, two weeks tops."

One of the keys to Icon's success is its niche. "Some online shopping has taken a bite out of retail, and some retail products are in decline. But we target lifestyle and high-end brands, like Rolex. The touchy-feely product," explains Evans.

Such a customer base drives the firm's innovation. "There is an increasing demand for more innovative displays, each one tries to outdo the last. We're constantly being asked to show new materials or interesting installations. In spending a lot of time with clients we like to think that we're leaders in trying new things," adds Evans.

Wishes to Reality

In 2001, Eric Rosencrantz launched EMR Graphics. The Randolph, NJ-based firm now sits in 20,000 square feet worth of production space and boasts 15 employees. Rosencrantz estimates that roughly 25 percent of his work is indoor/POP and display, with the rest being outdoor grand format work.

EMR is a 3M authorized manufacturer with EFI/VUTEK superwide printers. "I have one of each," Rosencrantz says, including the VUTEK 3360 eight-color solvent, VUTEK 150 six-color solvent, the VUTEK QS2000 UV flatbed with white ink, and the newly installed VUTEK 5330 eight-color, five-meter machine. He also owns a pair of HP Designjets—the 9000 and 5500. Most of the company's

POP and indoor display printing is done on the QS2000 UV flatbed, he adds.

The company recently completed a project for Destination Joy—an awareness building campaign for the Make A Wish foundation—that included indoor banners, fleet graphics, and a series of contour cut stars. EMR produced 250, three- by three-foot stars on 3M's Controltac Graphic Film IJ162 using the VUTEk 3360 with 3M inks. The files were developed in conjunction with EMR staff to ensure the cut lines were properly applied and the stars were contour cut using the firm's Zünd flatbed cutter.

Though the vinyl was rated for indoor use, the event staff that installed the graphics used them indoors and outdoors—to mimic the stars on Hollywood Boulevard. "They held up well," says Rosencrantz.

Window and floor graphics are growing rapidly as a popular, innovative POP application. "People are starting to realize that everyone can have these—not just supermarkets, they're all over the place." The big push from clients is to think outside of the box. "You have to wow them with something—a new material, new inks—anything they haven't seen," concludes Rosencrantz.

The Evolution of Innovation

Advertising is a creative medium. It takes a print provider willing to be equally creative and experimental to win high-profile POP projects. With new, lower cost media hitting the market and the burgeoning category of digital displays ramping up, there are more options than ever for the forward looking print professional.

Now, all potential advertising space is available. Columns, walls, brick, and sidewalks are covered with companies' branding messages. With additional space, sales dollars soar exponentially on the production, install, and design end for the print service provider.

Low-cost, new specialty media is ideal for promotions that change constantly. Films are easy to remove, which results in frequent display changes depending on factors such as the season, clothing lines, etc. As campaigns are switched out, the more a printer's services are called upon.

Specialty POP created from pressure-sensitive media becomes a value-add if marketed, designed, and installed correctly. Customers will want to stand out from competitors with these unique applications.

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