

Powerful vehicle advertising doesn't always mean a full wrap

Maximize your canvas—and don't stress about the install

By Dan Antonelli

I've always thought of truck lettering as not really being just lettering, but as advertising, pure and simple. Even in its most basic form of one-color vinyl slapped on a door, it is advertising (though poor advertising). And for any small business, the power of creative advertising, coupled with a cohesive identity plan is a powerful combination that gets their marketing message to their core audience—the people in their neighborhoods.

I don't have the exact statistics, but when you to compare the cost of a branding campaign and lettering to other advertising mediums, I'm sure that vehicle advertising delivers the lowest cost per impression. It surprises me that some clients think it's expensive. Compared to what? The Yellow Pages? Direct mail? Newspaper advertising? No way. If you break out the yearly cost of vehicle advertising, it is unrivalled in its effectiveness (when done right).

The business owner not yet educated in the value of creative vehicle advertising by a good designer or sign maker is often, "Boy, that's expensive!" But find a business owner with a little bit of vision, one looking to grow his company and seeking a company that can help him or her do it, and you'll be doing the

rewarding, creative work that you love—and that other shops can't touch. When you're making design decisions based on strategic marketing objectives of the client and not how many layers of vinyl the job needs, you're in a different league altogether.

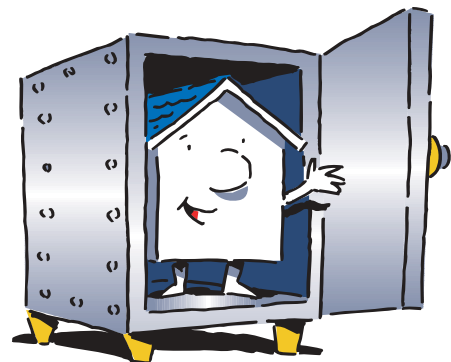
It starts when you make the decision whether you prefer to sell vinyl by the pound or if you want to run a creative shop that's producing cutting-edge work that garners instant loyalty to your company. Not really ready to take your work to that next level yet? Take classes, attend trade shows, get on the Net, read books—whatever it takes. Those willing to enrich and enlighten themselves will rise to the occasion and step things up, each and every day.

Have you noticed that those designers who constantly outdo themselves are always at the top of their game? They are always pushing the envelope, taking things to the next level, looking for new ideas and finding solutions to their client's marketing needs. It's a never-ending quest because greatness is simply a long journey. The moment you stop trying to be better than you were the previous day, put a fork in you—you're done.

The clients who are looking for this type



Apple and purple are two pretty loud colors that you don't expect to see coupled with a security firm. That's precisely the reason we choose them—different, unique and unexpected.



You never know what will click with a client, and in this instance he immediately reacted strongly to this hand-drawn cartoon. We found several other ways to implement it in the campaign.



of advertising and marketing services done on vehicles will find you. If you're doing your job right, they can't help but notice your work. Such was the case of Richard Haig of Haig Services. He found us after seeing a van we lettered for a local restaurant.

The mission: Create buzz! Richard owns one of the largest security firms in the state. His company has a solid reputation for providing residential and commercial security services. The company has also done very little, if any advertising over the past several years. They suffered from a nearly-nonexistent image. Vehicles were lettered with magnetic signs and were very plain.

Richard wanted to build a brand for his company, so we scheduled a meeting to discuss his needs. He had purchased a black Toyota Scion and wanted us to wrap it. He wanted to use it as the centerpiece of his branding campaign. But there was a lot of work to be done before we tackled any actual lettering. We had to think about the brand, the company name, and a marketing campaign that could be built around the branding and identity ideas we would come up with. We also had to look at how to apply this identity on all the other elements we'd be handling—Web site, collateral, stationery, etc.

A key request from Richard was to focus on branding the name Haig. We started with the name of the company, which we felt needed changed. Haig Services doesn't say what they do—it was too vague. We changed it to Haig Security Systems.

Next, we came up with a theme or central idea for the logo that could be tied to the branding message. I brought in an illustrator to help with some concepts and we homed in on a catchphrase: "Home Safe Home." We built

the graphic with that tie-in. He comped up a house that also doubled as a safe. It was a perfect, creative icon. I worked the typography in, choosing unique, fresh colors that would have the most impact and keeping the vehicle color in mind. Our illustrator also drew a cartoon of a safe that we decided to use on the rear of the vehicle, and that we felt would be good to use in some future print ads.

Next we tackled the vehicle sketch, which had been carefully considered during our logo design phase. A primary objective of the vehicle was to create "buzz" and brand recognition. The Scion is still pretty new, and is somewhat odd looking, so that helps it stand out. Rich's first event for the vehicle was to have it parked inside a mall in the heart of the neighborhood they serve. People walking through the mall were sure to notice an odd-looking car parked inside!

Full wrap or not Our original intent was to digitally print all the graphics on our Roland VersaCMM digital printer and wrap the vehicle. But it became clear to us that there was no reason for a full wrap. We didn't want to wrap it just for the sake of wrapping it—we simply wanted to take full advantage of the available space, and create some really eye-catching graphics.

We also knew it would be less expensive to not wrap it fully. When managing a campaign, you need to be aware of the cost implications, and advise the client as to the cost versus the benefit. We jazzed up the original logo by adding in some "bling" to it (airbrushed bevels, of course, and some hot-spot twinkles). We also brought in more apple green and a purple swoosh.

For the sketches, we used vehicle templates of the Scion from Digital Auto Library (www.digitallibrary.com).

Hiring outside experts? Be not afraid!

For this project, I hired an outside illustrator to assist me in bringing some concepts to fruition. His work helped seal the deal. I can't draw well and knew the illustration needed was beyond my realm. I brought in someone else to do the illustration and I worked the typography (which I'm most comfortable doing).

For the longest time I resisted hiring outside help, probably more for ego reasons than anything. I feared that everything that came through here had to be completely done by me or someone on staff.

But we can't all be pros at everything under the sun. Letting go of elements that are not in our strongest areas not only results in better work, but also different styles of work, which ultimately brings a sense of freshness to our portfolio. I'm now very comfortable that not every thing that passes through here has to be touched by me. What I care more about is that it's up to the high standards we have for our clients. It's about doing what's best for them—not what's best for our egos.

digitalauto.on.ca, 888-843-1325). These are a must for those doing wraps or large vehicle graphics. The measurements are spot-on, and when you're printing hundreds of dollars worth of graphics you don't want to leave anything to chance.

Easy application We printed all the lettering on 3M™ Controltac™ film. I had never used it before, but will now never use anything else! I am by no means a great installer (at least not until I started using this stuff).

I had always done installations wet, but it was very cold and I knew I'd have to do the whole install dry. So I hinged everything, and laid it down, and got ready to start popping bubbles with my X-Acto knife. To my surprise, not one appeared. The entire job went down flawlessly. Great stuff!

After the lettering was installed, we hired a photographer to shoot the vehicle. We anticipated using the actual vehicle in other marketing efforts. We took the photography into Photoshop and retouched all the reflections

From the client's perspective: Why vehicle advertising is a great value

It's one thing to hear Dan's approach to the Haig Security System project, but you may be wondering what they client thought about all this. We're fortunate to have Richard Haig's comments on it—and some valuable advice for other business owners concerning vehicle lettering. —Editors

We started this process with two objectives, both aimed at growing marketshare and profitability. We wanted to raise brand awareness throughout the state but do so neighborhood by neighborhood, and to couple that brand name (which is *Haig*) to *Security*.

From what little I do know about sales and marketing, I know that telemarketing and direct mail are probably the most frequently used methods in our industry. They are basically used as a numbers game. I've never liked these methods, from both the receiving standpoint or from the sending. Couple this inherent "resentment" that I think most recipients of junk mail or telemarketing calls feel with the fact that no one *wants* to have to buy a security system. They have to spend money that could otherwise be spent on pleasure to protect themselves from negative forces.

One thing people *do* like are "events." Disney World is the perfect example of this. At Disney, everything from checking in to getting on the plane to go home is an event. It almost makes you forget how much you are paying to be entertained. We saw our vehicles as being an opportunity to play the numbers game for impressions in a non-intrusive way and without the stigma of telemarketing calls at dinner time or junk mail.

I recognized the opportunity for making a statement with, thanks to the hard work of the car designers, an abundance of oddball vehicles on the market. If done right these vehicles can become "events" both on the road and in display uses. The result is the "Box on Wheels" with a phenomenal logo design that can't help but bring chuckling potential customer's eyeballs directly to it. Viola! One happy impression, one less time that our name has to hit that customer before it sticks, and no stigma as with telemarketing and/or junk mail.

Another consideration was that we targeted women and families. The most valuable thing to these two groups are their children. I believe that the children, much more so than they might think, drive their buying decisions. Taking advice from my 11- and 8-year old daughters, Samantha and Melanie, and buying the coolest car out there (a "Box on Wheels" as they and their friends call it)

was one of the best things we did. Appealing to the senses of a child makes the parent turn into a child as well and thus makes our vehicle an "event."

We also built on strengths that we already had, in that we protect just about every school in this market and therefore the children in them. Now we wanted to be their alarm company at home, too. Again, we are able to influence the parent's buying decision w/ the leverage of a reference to their children.

I'm convinced that the reason businesspeople who see vehicle lettering and signs as expensive is because they are spending the money from "direct sales" budgets that are measured purely on how many closes they get today. If they separate some of that cost, particularly the "branding" portions, out and consider them part of their marketing budget (which in my mind are longer term investments), they will feel much better about the cost.

The key here is pair up with a great company like Graphic D-Signs so that the costs are investment dollars with an expected rate of return that matches the financial goals of the customer's company. From that standpoint, the more you invest, the more you make. Direct Sales is what you do on a daily basis (such as fielding calls from those expensive Yellow Page ads). Branding and Marketing is re-investing daily profits into your own company's stock to insure and increase future opportunities to do those daily direct sales.

Consider this: I pay \$1,600 per month for a quarter-page Yellow Pages ad that only gets seen by people that already know they are a potential customer for an alarm company (ours or anyone else's). I'm not sure how many impressions that one page in the book gets but I'm

pretty sure it wasn't the 22,000-plus who saw my vehicle in the mall during the three-day period of last weekend. And the space for those three days only cost us \$450. How many months do you suppose it would take the Yellow Pages to catch up to over 22,000 impressions? This is where we are getting our profitability growth.

I'd advise other business owners to look for a way to make your vehicle an "event." You'll know if you have it right when it's fun. If it seems like work, it is work. Remember, fun is fun—and everyone loves a little fun.

Richard Haig owns Haig Security Systems in Green Brook, New Jersey.



Here's the Scion inside a local mall, with complimentary POP displays that we designed and printed.



Retouched artwork of vehicle

out, took off the roof rack, license plate, inspection sticker, and dropped out the background. We then had a nice piece of art to be used for ads, brochures, Web sites and whatever else.

What about the cost? The actual lettering job was \$1650. The branding, identity and logo development was several thousand dollars. The value? According to the client—priceless. [See *From the client's perspective: why vehicle advertising is a great value*] For the next client that walks into your shop with some vision, take full advantage of the power of vehicle advertising. Create something that generates some buzz not only for your clients, but yourself as well. People will start seeing what you do in a whole different light. •SC



Dan Antonelli owns Graphic D-Signs, Inc. in Washington, New Jersey. He is the author of *Logo Design for Small Business* and *Logo Design for Small Business 2*. He's recently started a Web site, www.signshopmarketing.com, which is dedicated to the marketing needs of sign shops.

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There's more on www.signcraft.com

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Rich Dombey [Rich Designs, Inc. Hillsborough, New Jersey, www.richdesignsinc.com.] is another designer who constantly pushes the envelope when it comes to creating eye-catching, creative vehicle advertising for his clients. These are a few examples of Rich raising the bar, combining both paint and digital technology.