Harness the power of images and pictorials

Remember these three key factors as you tackle a new design

By Dan Antonelli, President and Creative Director, Graphic D-Signs, Inc. and SignShopMarketing.com

When designing for an outdoor medium, the time in which you have to communicate your message is much shorter than other advertising mediums. Whether it's vehicle advertising or a sign, your message must not only be interpreted and understood quickly, but memorable as well.

Before the advent of digital printing and full wraps for vehicles, many sign painters employed techniques utilizing "supergraphics," which were large, simplified graphical treatments for vehicles.

While wraps continue to have their place in the outdoor arena, the reality is that most fail to deliver a high-impact or memorable message. Too many are littered with photographs, and competing messages. They become a cluttered, unfocused mess of photos and graphics. In the end, the target audience may have some vague notion of the business, but often does not know the name or where they are the located.

At my agency, we're not firm believers in full wraps. Generally, we advocate partial wraps to our clients, or larger supergraphics with traditional vinyl lettering. If a client wants a full wrap, we're careful to keep it focused and simple.

Assess the client's needs first Before embarking on any design work, you need to determine what your client's primary objective is.

We designed the logo and stationery for this landscape client. We then sent him to Rich Dombey at Rich Designs (www.richdesignsinc.com) in Hillsborough, NJ, who designed and installed the trailer graphics. Clean typography and a memorable icon make this an effective piece of advertising.

The clients who come to us are looking to rebrand themselves, and this starts with a new identity. As such, we need to determine the most important medium that the logo will be used on. For many small businesses, it's their sign or vehicles. That's what delivers the most impact and value for the typical small business.

If your goal is to get your clients the most value for their investment, you'll want to make sure that you keep these three factors in mind:

1. Graphics are generally icon-based. The icon developed to accompany the typography needs to be easily recognized, as well as give the viewer an indication as to the nature of the business. Therefore, the more simplified it can be, the better. A graphic with too many details tends not to be as memorable or easily

We designed the logo, vehicle lettering and other marketing materials for this Virginia-based painting contractor. We then supplied the artwork to the client's sign company, Lettercraft Signs, and Mike Duncan installed the job with vinyl film.
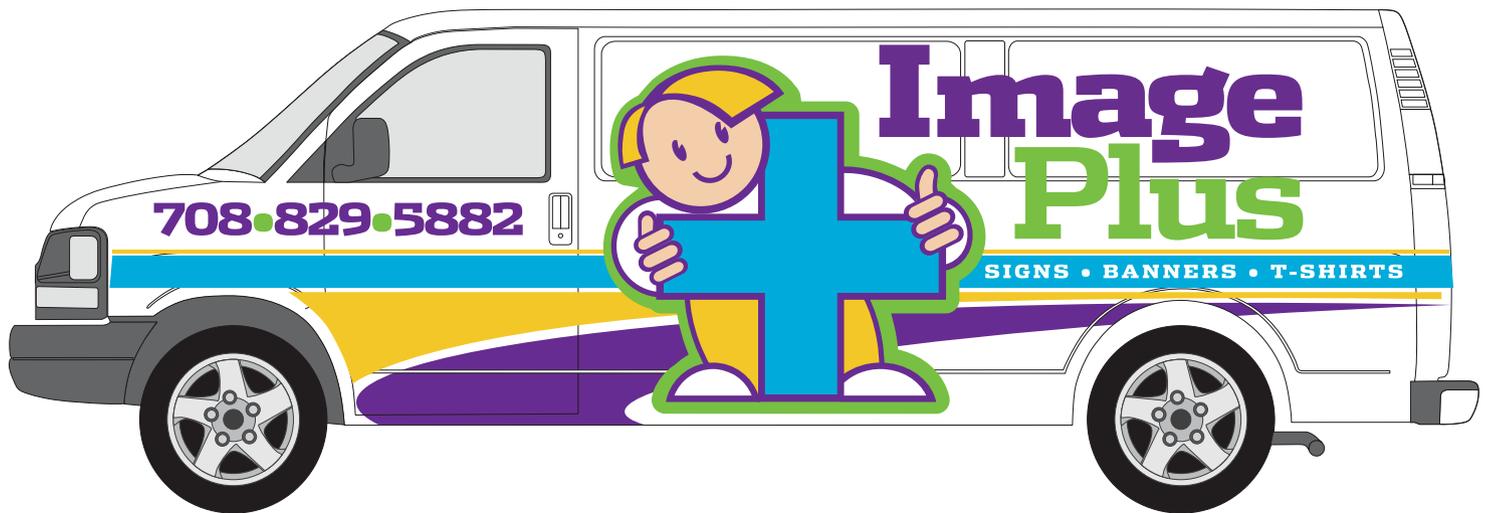
understood. Keep in mind that the distance in which the graphics are viewed plays a huge role. Sometimes the hardest logos to design are the ones with the most simple icons or graphics.

2. Typography is bold. Typography selection is very important, especially in the realm of outdoor graphics. While something may work in print, the nature of outdoor media necessitates a bolder approach to typography. It's interesting to note that if you're designing for outdoor use, the logo will work fine if the client needs print collateral, like stationery. Quite often though, when logos are designed primarily for use in print, they fail when used in an outdoor medium, like truck lettering.

3. Minimize photographic elements. Resist the urge to plaster signs and vehicles with a lot of photos. The only memorable impression they tend to make is a blur of color—with little impact on the message, or worse yet, for the advertiser. Just because you can print full color, doesn't necessarily mean you should print everything in full color.

Take a minute to review designs that you see as effective and those that you don't. Consider these three factors as you do. You'll see how important these issues are to making sure a design does its job. •SC

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