

Graphics
By Jeff Wooten

Test Driving Graphics on a National Scale

Vehicle graphics are a highly visible advertising solution for retail businesses and a profitable opportunity for sign shops that offer them. Their influence reaches as far as the gas tank will allow them. However, imagine if your work producing these graphics could be viewed on a national scale. One company is test-driving this concept and reaping the rewards.

This past fall, bluemedia [sic] of Tempe, Arizona, was selected to help introduce 3M's enhancement to its line of graphic films using the new 3M(tm) Comply(tm) v2 Adhesive Technology at the Specialty Graphics Imaging Association (SGIA) Expo held in Las Vegas. The company demonstrated this new media, using a wrapped Ford F-250 four-wheel-drive truck-limousine measuring a monstrous thirty-six feet long and eleven feet tall.

An internationally recognized graphic design and large format printing firm, bluemedia started up operation in 2000 and specializes in using vehicle graphics and environmental graphics to help companies get noticed and gain market share and has worked with a number of high-profile clients (such as the Arizona Lottery, Clear Channel Communications, Comedy Central, Wells Fargo, and the NHL's Phoenix Coyotes). The company wraps vehicles as diverse as PT Cruisers to Volkswagen Beetles to top-fuel dragsters and has won numerous awards for their efforts in this field.

"Corporate vehicle graphics are one of the fastest-growing mediums in outdoor advertising," states one of the company's brochures. Currently, bluemedia designs and installs these cost-effective advertising solutions. The 3M-certified company has also been making a big splash with its partnership with the manufacturer at these SGIA tradeshow.

"Every single business-especially small businesses-are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack," says bluemedia President Jared Smith. "It sounds like a good thing to be 3M-certified, and it sounds like an even better thing to be selected by 3M as its top choice to do their show vehicle. The kind of angle we bring to customers is that if we were able to handle [I]this[I\] job, then we can do something for [I]you[I\]."

The 2006 monster truck limo was bluemedia's second such job for 3M at the international SGIA tradeshow. In 2005, the company was asked to design a vehicle wrap for a hummer, and Smith is certain the company's response on this project allowed his company to be selected again the following year-and to expand its imagination. "At the 2005 show, we did what we were told and designed a more corporate-looking piece for them,"

he explains. "We wanted to showcase 3M's ability to have good color and vibrancy, and we wowed them with some photography and beautiful high-resolution prints."

Smith strongly felt this latest venture should have explosive graphics and a larger-than-life vehicle to wrap that nobody else could possibly

find. "[The manufacturer] liked what I was saying, so they gave us carte blanche and said, 'If you're going to put your reputation on the line, then we trust you. Let's see what you got.'"

With the responsibility of finding the vehicle and negotiating an appropriate deal, Smith soon located the Ford F-250, which belonged to a local Arizona businessman with whom bluemedia had previous relations. "We designed graphics that most people would say were too loud, too obnoxious, and too bright," he says, "but this was such a ridiculously sized vehicle that these graphics [I]needed[I\] to be bold."

Bluemedia had three-and-a-half weeks to find a vehicle, figure out all the details, plan out the designs, have the designs approved, print the graphics, install them, and get the vehicle to the show in time. "It was a pretty quick turnaround time," remarks Smith, "but I think, as everybody in the sign business knows, this was normal. The 3M officials were so appreciative because, as you can imagine in the corporate world, everything takes forever. In fact, when they called us, they were worried it would take three months. I just looked at my calendar and said to myself, 'I've got plenty of time.'

"As you can imagine, this gave us extra brownie points. When we were all done, they said, 'Not only did bluemedia pull this off, but they pulled it off in that little amount of time.'"

At the SGIA show, bluemedia did some final coordinating to get people where they were supposed to go and then sat back and watch the demonstrations attract hundreds and hundreds of people each time. "We decided to wrap the entire vehicle before the show," explains Smith. "So the first part of the demonstration showed people how to take the vinyl off. The install team consisting of UASG founder XXX and some of 3M's Marketing Staff would unwrap a few pieces and then rewrap them. We even had some of the higher-ups at 3M do their show in their corporate apparel." (At the 2005 show, bluemedia installed 90 percent of the graphics before the hummer's arrival and then Andrew Napoleon from CSI wrapped the remaining areas at the demonstration.)

For bluemedia, getting one's name out to the public is one of the most important windfalls of hooking up with a national manufacturer such as 3M at a highly attended event. "In 2005, we put our logo on the vehicle, so all the photography and articles devoted to 3M's demo had our name appearing," states Smith. "I learned a lot from that show, and the following year, we took some liberties. We provided some extra display boards that showed how the process worked. The 3M officials liked that initiative and were pleased we had an opinion. We went above and beyond.

We printed sample media with the design on it to hand out to people. We set up big banner stands on either side of the vehicle that showed the design process, the print process, and the installation process."

"Another thing I learned is that if you have a couple of hundred people surrounding the Hummer, you can't see the demonstration," continues Smith. "I was in the back row trying to take pictures of the crowd and the vehicle, and I couldn't see any of the demonstrations. We thought about putting a vehicle up on a rotating stand or building a stage around it. I told the manufacturer we needed to go big. It had to be a show-stopper; it had to be the monster truck."

As mentioned earlier, Bluemedia wrapped the entire truck in a controlled environment before leaving for Las Vegas. However, instead of putting the wrapped truck on the back of a flatbed, the business client decided to drive the vehicle himself to the SGIA show, which caused a bit of excitement-especially at Hoover Dam. "When this vehicle was on the top of Hoover Dam, (there is no stoplight) other drivers were stopping their cars in the middle of the road to turn around and take pictures of it," relates Smith. "The police were yelling at the truck driver to move, and he was like, 'I'm trying!,' and flashbulbs were going off. So I guess we did our job: We stopped traffic. It's kind of a good feeling." (In fact, the client liked the wrapped graphics so much, at press time, he is still driving them around the Phoenix area.)

The company had their general liability policy to protect them, if something disastrous happened to the vehicle on its way to the SGIA show, and since this was a "limousine," the owner had his own transportation and charter insurance, as well. However Smith points out there are still wary factors to consider. "If the truck got in a wreck and landed in the front page or something, it would have the manufacturer's name glued all over it," he says. "So as you can imagine, you just need to deal with the highest caliber people to minimize anything stupid from happening."

One of bluemedia's secrets for being selected for these jobs is that they are proactive. "We have always tried to stay the noisiest client of 3M," says Smith. "We send them unsolicited photos of work that we have done, in case they find it interesting as much as we can. "We can't necessarily pinpoint exactly how we got chosen, but I have a feeling that staying in good contact with our local 3M reps, stirring up some press, sending out photos, and applying for awards was kind of how we got on their radar to be chosen."

Bluemedia has used these jobs to springboard into additional high-profile events, such as speaking engagements and roundtable discussions. According to Smith, the same types of opportunities await any-sized shop wanting to get involved in similar fashions. "The only way you're going to remove the label of being a 'small time shop," he says, "is to do some big-time stuff."

Smith has some advice to offer shops that are interested in getting started (and continuing to work) with national manufacturers. "You need to stay abreast to what is going on.," he recommends. "Your shop needs to be diligent and know where and when every show is going to be held. That is the job of one or two people in our facility-to find out where the next training is taking place, when the next show is scheduled to occur, and who are the names of the national players.

"It's just flat-out paying attention, making notes, and doing something about it. Contact the people putting on a show and let them know you would like to get involved-maybe doing a demo or providing some signage for the show's entrance. If you are good at your job, they will take you up on it. That is their job-to pull the show off. They could use the help."

Smith, though, does urge any shop intending to do this type of work: If you're going to take on a project of this type, you'd better be able to finish it. "I'm all about being eager optimistic, but you'd better know you can pull it off," he says. "If there's any aspect you are worried about, you need to be extremely upfront with the manufacturer. The corporate people have been around the game long enough that they will appreciate your honesty.

"If for whatever reason, you're having any problems along the way, that phone call needs to happen right then and there because some of these bigger corporations have the ability and power to do something about it.

They can help; they can fly in installers or overnight materials."

From the initial show, Smith estimates that his company has generated \$50,000 to \$100,000 in additional business from people who were there or saw the press releases, and he is quick to point out that other sign shops can take advantage of working with national manufacturers in similar situations. "If done correctly, these things really can go straight to the bottom line," he remarks, "but you have to be visionary when you think about it, because this was a quite expensive project for us to do and we didn't get paid for it. We consider it an investment.

"If done correctly, it will work. The reason I say 'done correctly' is because I have a lot of people donate their time or services and they don't get their name or logo on the project, nor do they get photos or issue press releases. They don't do what needs to be done to maximize the efforts put into it. You have to know two things to do at your sign shop: You have to build signs and you have to market yourself."

For more information about bluemedia, call 480/317-1333 or visit www.bluemedia.com.