

Streamlining Design



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Working well with your graphic designer will improve your business

BY JUSTIN PATE



Justin Pate has been a professional graphics installer for over 13 years. Aside from doing installations, Justin has created several teaching platforms, including an instructional DVD series, "Reakwraps" (www.realwraps.com). Last month, Justin created a more thorough, complete instructional series, "Techniques and Tips: Vehicle Graphic Installations." This series is available for purchase at Carwraps.net.

DURING MY 13-year career as a graphic installer, I have had several of what I call "ah-ha" moments. These moments are insights or breakthroughs that made my installations dramatically easier, more efficient and stress-free.

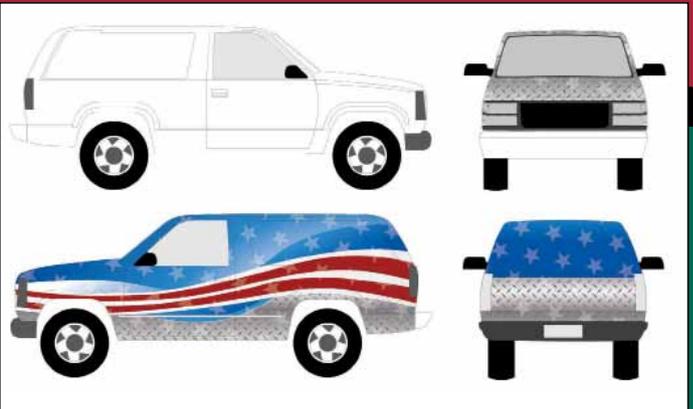
One of them came early on (thankfully) and that was taking extra time to create a dialogue with the graphic designer. When I begin working for a client, I go out of my way to discuss his or

her designs before and after an install, explaining what worked and what didn't.

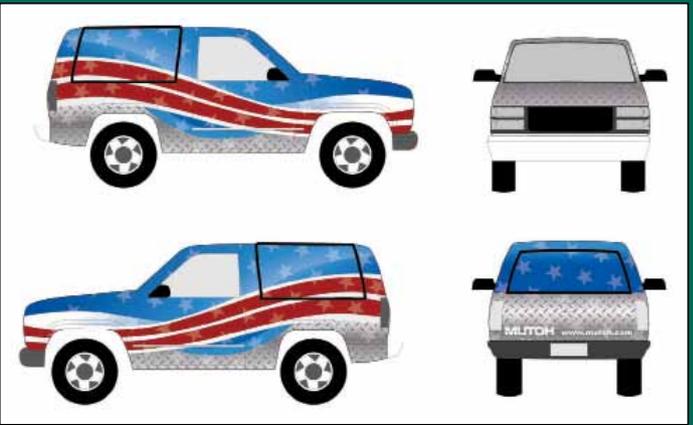
The reason I take this extra time, which initially involves several hours of phone conversations and e-mails, is that I want to help the graphic designer understand the installation process. Many wrap designs either do not fit properly on the vehicle or are so complicated that the graphics end up making the installation unnecessarily longer and more difficult. This often happens because the graphic designer is making a 2-D image that has to then be applied to a 3-D object.

The graphic on a printed layout looks flat but actually is placed on a curvy fender or a deep-recessed area. Text on a bumper that looks easy to install turns out to be very complicated when the actual bumper has many contours and isn't as wide as the layout implies. The list can go on and on, so I offer several recommendations to the graphic designer.

First, I ask them to look at an actual



Layout A



Layout B

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picture of the vehicle online before completing the design. The picture can either come from the client or an Internet search. This helps the graphic designer see more of the 3-D aspects and work around them during the design process.

Second, I encourage the graphic designer to make the designs more simple in terms of text and images. A common error on designs is to include too much information or imagery. The most effective designs I have seen, which garner lots of attention, are the simplest. I'm a big believer in the idea that simple sells. In terms of installation, simple designs are easier and more efficient to install.

Next, I ask the graphic designer to send me the layout before it's approved by the client. This gives me the ability to make a few suggestions that will make the installation quicker and less stressful. Taking 10 minutes to do this can save hours of installation time, especially on fleet jobs.

A good example of this occurred on a design used for a hands-on workshop I taught for Mutoh in March 2009. The first draft I received looked fine, except for the back. The blue line was put roughly two inches below the window (**Layout A**). I asked the designer to raise the blue line so that it only was included in the window (**Layout B**). This adjustment made the back much easier to install because I now didn't have to be concerned about making the blue line straight. Of course, I can make the blue line straight, but by taking it out of the equation, I reduced time and energy needed for the installation. All that now was required on the back was to wrap the window with blue window perforation and the door with the gray film. This suggestion didn't compromise the design and made the installation much easier.

Another ah-ha moment came when I discovered what I call triangles. I use the shape of a triangle in conjunction

with the technology of today's films to break panels into smaller sections. This helps make the installation process easier, quicker and reduces mistakes. This ah-ha moment came to me around 1998.

Its basis comes from the fact that I wrap most of the vehicles by myself. This means I get all the profit from an installation, but it also means that I have to find ways to apply large, awkward panels by myself. I was managing this for several years, using normal techniques, but I was expending a lot of energy and time.

One day, when I was installing the hood of a vehicle in New York City for a new hip-hop album, I tried something new. When I set my hinge in the middle of the hood, instead of making long, horizontal squeegee strokes toward the side, I broke half of the panel into two triangles. I did this by making a squeegee stroke to the side from the vertical hinge in the middle. I could do this because the adhesive of the film had a repositionable

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I use magnets with handles to hold the panels on the vehicle.



I use the Squeezy Sleeve, instead of Velcro, on my squeegee because it makes installations easier and reduces failures.



I use application gloves to apply the film to recessed areas to help work in otherwise tricky sections.

feature that kept it from sticking right away to the hood. Then, I applied the two triangles onto the hood by starting at the tip and working out. I repeated this on the other side.

And what a difference it made. Instead of these long, awkward squeegee strokes, I now made compact, efficient movements. This improved the quality, I expended a lot less energy and it cut my install time on the hood by half.

By breaking up the hood into four triangles, it enabled me to wrap cars more efficiently by myself. I then began applying the method of triangles to the roof, sides, back and bumpers, and, in doing so, I started shaving off hours of installations. An SUV that used to take me six hours by myself was now taking four hours with better results and less energy expended.

Essentially, triangles allowed me to wrap two cars each day, instead of one. My installations became easier, and my income went up by about 40 percent.

The concept of triangles now is part of my overall system that I have created for installations. I call it the "Universal Graphics Installation System." It's made up of three modules: the basics (squeegeeing, cutting and heating), the method (glass, triangles and hinges) and five good habits. UGIS is the foundation of the new training series I have created for Carwraps (www.carwraps.net) and Mutoh, and it's what I teach my students in hands-on workshops. Triangles are an essential part of this system.

Another ah-ha moment came when I realized what was costing me the most time and money for my business was not the installation of the graphics itself but everything before and after the install.

It's so easy to focus most of the attention on applying the graphics to a vehicle because it's the most interesting and fun part of the process. However, waiting around for graphics to show up, fixing a peeling bumper due to an improperly cleaned vehicle or not having the right tools can make a four-hour installation into eight hours or more due to non-installation time.

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My goal is that the four hours spent wrapping a vehicle is all I spend on it, and here are some of ways I accomplish this. Before the job, I make sure to have my client e-mail me the tracking number for the graphics and a printed layout. This way I know for sure if the graphics will arrive on time, so I don't have to wait. If a printed layout wasn't put in with the graphics, I have a back up. This saves me from having to layout all the graphics to figure out what the install is supposed to look like.

When I'm at the install location, I take extra time before wrapping to properly clean the vehicle. One dirty edge or recessed area makes a big difference between whether the install is durable or peels. The same goes for post-heating the film after the installation. Post heating the film can add an extra 20 minutes to the installation, but I see it as insurance. That 20 minutes spent post-heating

keeps the film from lifting in recessed areas and on compound curves. This means I won't have to go back to fix or pay for a new panel.

For a long time, I never really paid a lot of attention to tools. What else did

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I need other than a squeegee, knife and heat? Now I have about 32 tools in my bag that make that installation more efficient and reduce mistakes. Here are several of the new tools in my bag: I use magnets with handles to hold the panels on the vehicle. I use the Squeezy Sleeve (www.squeezysleeve.com), instead of

Velcro, on my squeegee because it makes installations easier and reduces failures. I use application gloves to apply the film to recessed areas to help work in otherwise tricky sections.

Doing all these little things before and after an install makes me more efficient, which, in turn, increases my profits and free time. I treat installing graphics as a business, trying to make it as streamlined as possible.

What ah-ha moment will come next? Who knows? They generally just appear out of nowhere, a gift from hard work, focus and really enjoying what one does for a living. **SDG**