

JUNE 2008

# DIGITAL GRAPHICS

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## GRAPHICS AL FRESCO

Relevant trends in outdoor applications

### ***Also in this Issue:***

- Laminating and mounting techniques
- Profiling media through a laminate
- Advanced file resizing
- Makeover contest winner

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# TAKE IT



This 30' x 150' building banner was created on mesh for the US Airways Center. (Image courtesy Bluemedia)

By Ethan Elliott



Ethan Elliott is Features Editor for Sign Business, Digital Graphics and Wraps magazines.

**C**urrent economy have your customers feeling down? Struggling to maintain business because of dwindling sales? Read on.

The present economic slump has many business owners looking for ways to cut costs. One quick-fix that is all-too-often employed is to pull advertising and signage budgets back. Unfortunately, this remedy solves a temporary issue by creating a more-permanent problem. Losing touch with customers during



This public service-type banner for St. Joseph's Hospital at Westgate Center demonstrates just how impactful a well-constructed outdoor message can be. (Image courtesy Bluemedia)

# OUTSIDE!

Outdoor advertising is an economical and highly effective marketing solution.

a recession means losing touch with an even smaller pool of dollars still in circulation.

Remaining pertinent to customers is the business equivalent of breathing. Companies that stop advertising when times are tough run the risk becoming "dead" to the customer. Even in troubling times, there's always somebody who wants to spend money. It's up to business owners to show them the most profitable ways to spend it. Graphics shop owners *listen up!*

## TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

"Outdoor is probably the most cost-effective advertising medium. People are starting to realize that it's not that expensive to produce, and it gets better results than TV," says Mark Rowell, president of Mammoth Media, in East Weymouth, Mass.

For Rowell and others, outdoor signage offers a low-cost solution for companies to keep their names in front of *their* customers, and is also a profitable way to keep print shop doors open.

Current examples of outdoor advertising options include event signage, transit graphics, vehicle wraps, building wraps, billboards and dynamic digital signs. The good news is most shops already have the equipment necessary to produce one or more types of outdoor signage. All that remains is to sell it to the customer.

But outdoor advertising is a two-way street, as Andy Salcido, account executive at Bluemedia, in Phoenix, points out. When orders were low, Bluemedia kept



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## Outdoor Advertising Applications



The future may be closer than imagined. Is it time for digital signage? This LED ribbon, created for the American Broadcast Corp. by D3 LED, is one eye-catching example.



As a sponsor for Firebird racetrack, Bluemedia estimates their billboards and car sponsorship have earned over \$266,000 worth of TV time on ESPN. Billboards were printed on the HP-Scitex XL Jet 3 using 14 oz. banner material.

employees busy by producing a plethora of self-promotional outdoor graphics. They wrapped several employee cars, and formed sponsorship agreements with local sporting venues such as Phoenix's Coyotes and Suns, the Arizona Diamondbacks, and at Firebird Raceway.

The best part about the racetrack sponsorship: not only did it get them advertising, but the agreement also made them the track's sole graphics supplier. Salcido estimates that the sponsorship has earned him about \$260,000 worth of TV time.

"Sports marketing really pays," Salcido says. In addition to creating signage for race tracks, Bluemedia is also wrapping the racecars as well. That's one place where the sun *does* shine.

## WHAT'S SHAKIN', BACON?

"I think vehicle wraps have absolutely changed [outdoor advertising] without a doubt," says Salcido. "There's no permitting, no sign or city ordinances to deal with, and the number of impressions a vehicle gets per day is as huge as billboards, but without the big investment."

Salcido says that right now vehicle wraps comprise about 90 percent of sales at his shop, and he doesn't see that slowing down anytime soon. One of Bluemedia's

biggest clients, Jobing.com, has had more than 400 cars wrapped so far.

"It's just a great way to advertise," Salcido says. "The average vehicle wrap costs about \$3,600. Lease that car for three years, that's \$100 a month. You don't get that kind of advertising anywhere."

To comment on the success of vehicle graphics, Salcido points to one client who called five minutes after leaving the shop with a new wrap to report that his cell phone was already ringing.

There are still several other tremendous outdoor opportunities available because of the current economy.

Salcido points to a new windfall Bluemedia has just stumbled upon: vacancy graphics. The housing industry has felt the pinch of the recession perhaps more than any other. There are still plenty of developers sitting on fully-constructed buildings that remain unoccupied, and no one wants to move into a dark and lonely housing complex by themselves.

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## Outdoor Advertising Applications



Mammoth Media produced these Swarovski graphics as an advertisement for a location that had not yet opened. What better way to drum up business at a new location?

Standard outdoor floor graphics, such as this one featuring a team emblem are cost effective and outdoor durable. (Image courtesy Mammoth Media)



Another example of lifestyle prints, these vacancy graphics produced by Bluemedia during construction of the Orpheum Lofts condo project in downtown Phoenix, were printed on translucent backlit film and double stick taped to the inside of the windows.

facade, Bluemedia now prints lifestyle graphics – bright, cheery designs made to look like the place is full. When potential buyers visit, they're not looking into bare windows or empty suites. Even better than the idea is the price tag.

Salcido recalls one company that ordered at least \$75,000 worth of graphics that went up for a month then came down. With a foot in the door, other developers are now calling, and happy clients are sending referrals.

### WATCH OUT!

Just as there are upcoming applications that pull in a hefty dollar, there are also a few outdoor applications that fail to produce.

"The billboard market is basically gone," laments Rowell. "To get all the other work, we pretty much give away billboards. About three companies have ruined the market with lowball pricing tactics.

"A few years ago we were getting 500 percent margins on billboards, now we're lucky to get 10 percent. If you can even get fifty cents a square foot you'll still double your money – but the price point is a little aggressive right now in solvent."

Rowell says that includes the price point in vehicle graphics, because "everyone has a Roland in their garage."

He focuses, instead, on creative marketing. The goal, Rowell explains, is to provide a complete in-house marketing solution for the client. For shops with enough equipment, selling an entire graphics package to a client allows them to make up for less-profitable jobs over the long run.

Rowell also sees a lot of colliding markets fighting for outdoor advertising's money. The biggest, he says, is P.O.P.

display, where "flatbeds are splitting the market."

Mammoth Media's current high sales marks include building wraps and transit graphics, although bus shelters are "falling in the transit world" in favor of bus wraps.

*"I think vehicle wraps have absolutely changed [outdoor advertising] without a doubt."*

#### UP AND COMING

Of course, not everyone uses the same approach to boost business. When Rowell noticed a dip in business this January, he started thinking about the future of the signage industry. While he also recently purchase a new EFI -VUTEk QS3200 UV-curing printer, his major investment came in the form of a display company. Now called Mammoth Displays, the new outgrowth sells outdoor LED displays.

"The industry's going to change quite a bit. It's all merging. There's not gonna be reprographics, flexo, wide-format, it's just gonna be printing," says Rowell.

The fact is, he's not alone in that estimation.

"If signage is boring and uneventful, the customer will go in another direction," says Meric Adriansen, managing partner at D3 LED, in North Bergen, N.J. Adriansen has been producing outdoor LED digital signage for more than 15 years, and says his team takes credit for

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See page 61 of this issue!

## Outdoor Advertising Applications



Bluemedia has found its newest niche in "lifestyle graphics" – temporary signage used to fill empty spaces with positive imagery. These were printed on 3M 180IJC using a Mimaki JV3.

almost half the electronic displays in Times Square, in New York City. Their latest high-profile project was to create the ABC Super Sign seen on the *Good Morning America* TV show.

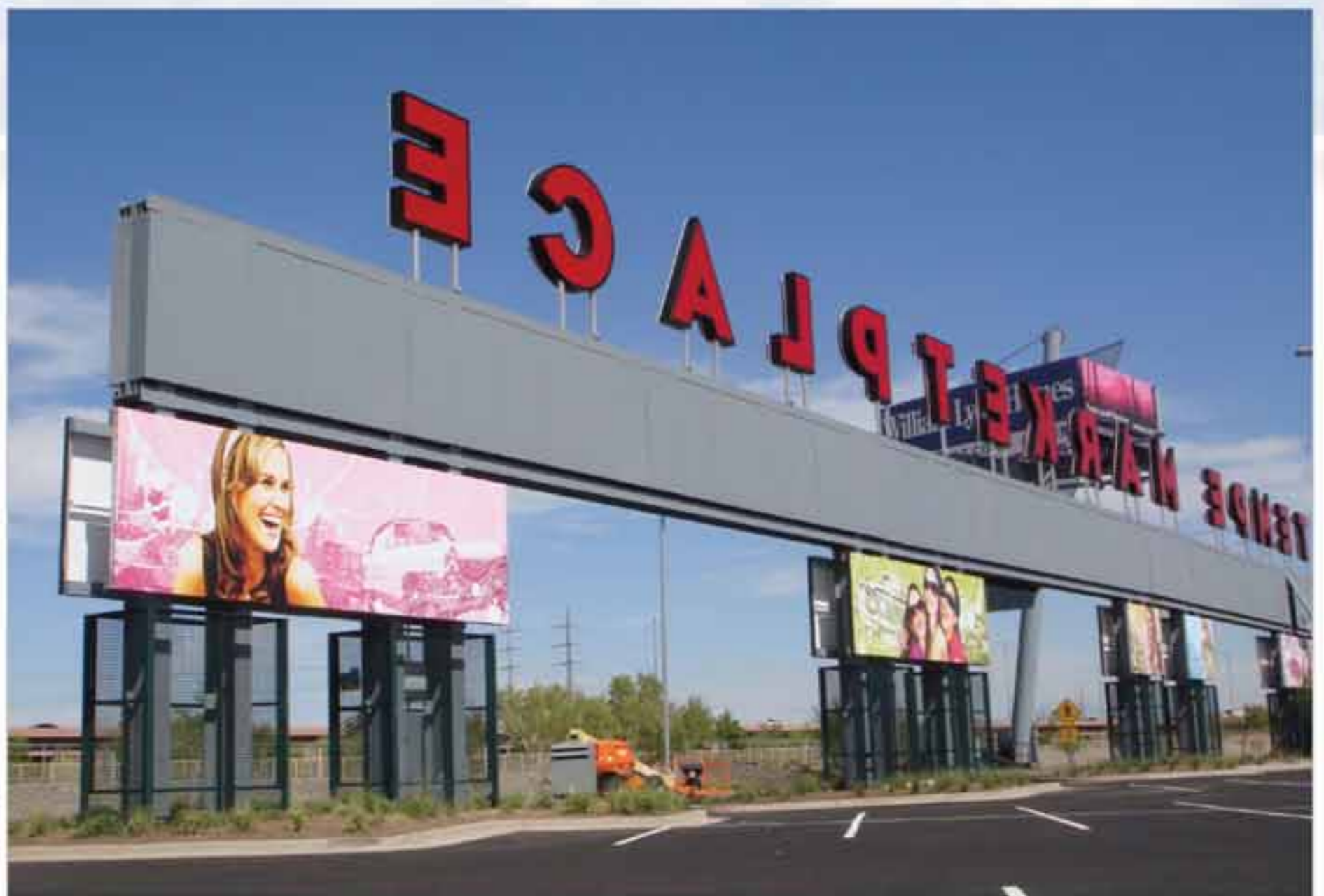
According to Adriansen, LED signs create an outdoor branding experience and "grab the eyeballs of passersby, where a vinyl sign just doesn't do it anymore." The only two places where advertising can still capture customer attention are on the Internet and in outdoor signage, he says.

This has led to healthy growth in the digitization of billboards for D3, and Adriansen sees it as the wave of the future.

"The dropping of the component pricing on digital billboards has gotten to a place where we're ready for full-blown use. It's going to retool the print business. By being able to create a business model where you can create multiple impressions on the same surface, people who own these very coveted properties are able to enlarge their businesses."

Adriansen foresees a time when digital signage shops will be able to create dynamic surfaces as cheaply as paper surfaces. Only time will tell. In the meantime, what the experts do agree on is that there's a lot of money to be made in outdoor advertising.

"I think the outdoor market's going to grow," says Rowell. Even with a slow economy, as more people fight for advertising space, niche applications will continue to grow and turn into mainstream signage jobs. Ⓞ



This upscale outdoor mall, located in Tempe, Ariz., is located near Arizona State University. Bluemedia produced multiple graphics for the location.

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