



Photo 1.

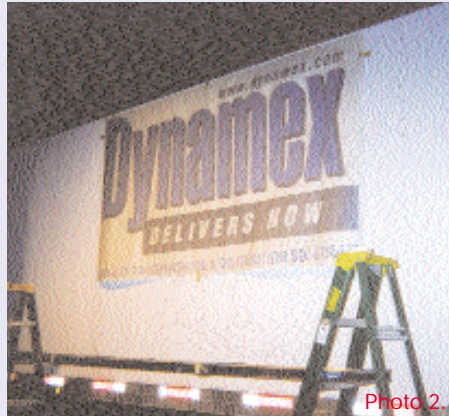


Photo 2.



Photo 3.

## Vinyl

By Paul Olson

# The Application of Fleet Graphics

The sides of tractor-trailers, delivery trucks, and vans that travel the nation's highways and interstates are rarely used for product advertising. The majority either bear only a company's name or logo—or they are just plain blank.

There are over one million trucks available for use as mobile billboards. A study conducted by the American Trucking Association estimated that a mobile billboard delivers 101 "impressions" per mile. Consider that a tractor-trailer typically travels 130,000 miles per year, and this results in more than 13 million impressions per year. Ninety percent of the people surveyed noticed words and pictures, and three-quarters developed an impression about the company based on their viewing. Vehicles that contained graphics were



Photo 7.



Photo 8.



Photo 9.



Photo 4.



Photo 5.



Photo 6.

perceived as safer and better maintained and driven than those that were unmarked.

With all the advances in the vinyl and printing industry, fleet graphics are attractively priced, easier to apply and remove, more colorful and versatile, and even changeable and reusable. In order to achieve the most from your graphics marketing program, the proper application of these new images is critical for appearance. The following basic steps are necessary for a successful professional application (in this case, applying vinyl on a flat surface with rivets):

Before application, all surfaces must be considered contaminated. With this in mind, you must first clean the surface with detergent and water. (Avoid using anything that contains oils or waxes.) Then be sure to dry it thoroughly.

Next, if the need arises, use a solvent cleaner that will eliminate any waxes, tar, tough road grime, etc. 3M Prep Solvent™ or Xylol work great for this. Saturate a lint-free towel with solvent and wipe the surface thoroughly before the solvent evaporates from the towel. As the towel becomes dirty, discard it. You do not want to recontaminate the surface.

Make sure that the surface is completely dry, as moisture is difficult to remove from beneath the film. You should use a large torch (weed burner) here, being careful not to burn the surface.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to have a clean surface. Do not skimp on the cleaning procedure, as the result could end up costing you additional money and business in the long run.

Once the surface is clean and dry (Photo 1), you are ready to begin the application.



Photo 10.



Photo 11.

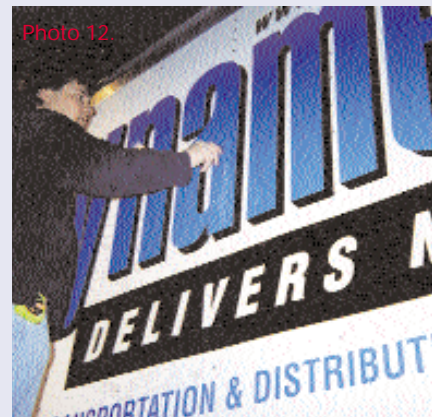


Photo 12.

**Step One.** The surface temperature should be, at the very least, fifty degrees Fahrenheit. If it is cold outside, move the vehicle indoors and use a propane torch to heat it to this temperature. This step is crucial for proper adhesion of the graphic.

**Step Two.** Tape the graphic that is to be applied to the surface (Photo 2). Carefully measure each end to ensure that the graphic is straight (Photo 3).

**Step Three.** Remove the tape from one side, leaving the opposite side still taped in place. Fold it over in half and carefully remove the backing paper (Photo 4).

**Step Four.** Starting in the center of the graphic, squeegee the film using vertical movements, keeping the squeegee at a slight angle in order to allow the air to move in front and gradually away from the center of the graphic (Photo 5). Most professional installers use a product such as 3M's gold squeegee, which consists of a hard, nylon-type material. When you



Photo 13.

near the edge of the graphic, start to squeegee outward, forcing the air out and away.

**Step Five.** Repeat the same procedure on the other half of the graphic (Photo 6).

**Step Six.** Once the graphic has been fully applied to the surface, cut each panel seam with a utility knife (Photo 7). Then squeegee the graphic with horizontal movements to "tuck" the material up to the panel seam (Photo 8).

An advertisement for Southern Stud Weld, Inc. The top left features a logo with a map of Texas and the text 'Southern Stud Weld' and 'MAKING THINGS WORK'. The top center has the company name 'SOUTHERN STUD WELD, INC.' and website 'www.studweld.com'. The top right lists two locations with their phone numbers: Houston, TX (713-931-8007 LOCAL) and Conflans, IN (773-799-3330 LOCAL). The center features a technical diagram of a stud weld assembly with labels '109 PUSH NUT' and 'NUT DRIVER'. The left side contains three bullet points: 'LOOKING FOR QUALITY? \*WE MANUFACTURE AND STOCK OUR OWN PRODUCTS', 'LOOKING FOR SERVICE? \*COMPONENT LEVEL TECHNICIANS ON STAFF', and 'LOOKING FOR RELIABILITY? \*DO YOUR STUDS FALL OFF?'. The bottom left says 'GIVE US A CALL AND REQUEST A CATALOG, WE CAN HELP'. The bottom features logos for 'PREFERRED TSSC SUPPLIER', 'ISA', 'WSA', 'MSSA', and 'TXA'. The TXA logo includes the text 'TEXAS IRON ASSOCIATION'.

A dark grey rectangular advertisement with yellow and white text. The main text reads 'I want my free copy of Sign Builder Illustrated'. Below this, it says 'Go to www.signshop.com/subscribe to request a new subscription'. The website URL is highlighted in yellow.

**Step Seven.** You are now ready to remove the pre-mask (or application tape). Carefully start at one corner and pull it over itself at a 180-degree angle (Photo 9). If you are working at any heights, be careful, as the pre-mask can tear and cause you to lose your balance and fall.

**Step Eight.** When all of the pre-mask has been removed, you are ready to perform the finish work on the rivets. Using a sharp, pin-like tool, poke a series of holes around each rivet head and rub with your rivet brush (Photo 10). Using a heat gun or a small hand-held propane torch, carefully heat each rivet. Again form the material around the rivet head with your rivet brush. You can also employ your squeegee to accomplish this (Photo 11).

Use extreme caution with the torch if you are not familiar with it. Until you master this part and learn how heat affects vinyl, you should use a heat gun.

**Step Nine.** Once again using your utility knife, run the blade down each panel seam to trim off any excess that may hang over the edge (Photo 12).

**Step Ten.** Look over the completed application, searching for any bubbles, missed rivets, and edges not completely down (Photo 13).

**Step Eleven.** Finally, clean up all backing paper and discard the pre-mask.

In conclusion, the application of your graphics is a very important step. If you are inexperienced, you will want to contact a professional applicator to apply your new graphics, both for appearance and warranty issues. There are also classes available to learn this trade. Graphics application is a skill that develops with time and much practice. ☒

*Paul Olson is the general manager of Interstate Graphics of Wisconsin in Point Stevens, Wisconsin, and a seventeen-year veteran in the application and removal of commercial graphics. To contact Paul, call 715/252-1814, e-mail paul@graphicsinstall.com, or log on to his Web site, located at www.graphic-install.com.*

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