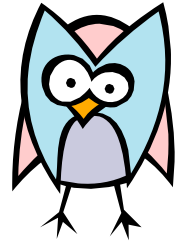


Save the Whales! Save the Owls! Save the Signs – NOT!

Show Management Signage: When Recycling Doesn't Make Sense

by Carol Sconzert, *Principal*, Osmosis Creative LLC

In today's volatile business climate of trade shows and conventions, savvy show organizers are evaluating all facets of their shows to trim unnecessary expenses. Unfortunately, when it comes to their graphics inventory, some are making choices that in fact raise their expenses instead of lowering them. Let's cut through the confusion and provide critical information for better planning and decision-making about the graphics for your show.



Exhibitions are positioned as the state-of-the-art opportunity for commerce and education in your industry. How do you convey your ownership of this forefront position with your signage? Are you using recycled signage? At first blush, recycling your show's signs might make economic and ecological sense, but recycling should be weighed against a host of factors to help determine if it's best for your show.

Will recycled signs foster a sense of excitement among your exhibitors and attendees next year? Does it indicate that your association has its finger on the pulse of issues and developments in your industry? Can your theme or new marketing message for this year's meeting be successfully recycled from last year? When 70 percent of your audience is repeat business, can you afford to bore them? When a competitor's show starts to market to your audience, will they be more tempted by the "new" than the "same as last year" feeling of your event?

In the past, exhibitors were the eye candy of shows. Today, many shows are feeling the need to discern themselves from other events in an increasingly competitive environment — and striking graphics represent an opportunity to help achieve that goal.

Just push a button

Today's trade shows are a monumental tribute to the technological advances of recent years. The digital production of graphics has opened the doors to wide varieties of application and competitive sources. Graphics may be produced by multiple vendors at lightning speed — sometimes at the back of the exhibit hall — and mixed seamlessly at the show.

This relative ease and efficiency in graphics production in tandem with a need to make your show

fresh and appealing, is responsible for shifting the role of graphics. So why is it that some shows still cling to the old habit of saving signage inventory year after year? While there is a valid case to be made for eco-friendly business practices, most show organizers making this choice believe that they are saving money by reusing signs. But a review of some basic facts about sign production today may reveal hidden costs that you can do without. High volume, cost effective graphics materials are not inherently designed for long term color-fastness, and the handling and storage costs of graphics often exceeds the cost of new product.

In addition, consider how your industry has changed over the past few years, including the way companies are now conducting their business, the hot topics of concern, new products or services under development. Are your recycled signs in keeping with these changes and the evolving terminology which describes them? Surely you've added features and amenities to accommodate the changing needs of your guests, such as e-mail, sync stations, and wi-fi hubs. Are these being merely glommed on to the past procedures or are thoughtful and deliberate decisions made to integrate them into your show look?

Tiptoe Through The Tulips

The discussion of the value of reusing signage is not complete without respecting the financial realities of all parties. Conscientious show managers work hard to contain costs in every corner of the show while delivering real value to their exhibitors and attendees. The realities they face include:

- Budgets for design and graphic production vary wildly across industry sectors
- Shows in different stages of their life cycle may have more or less need to invest in their design

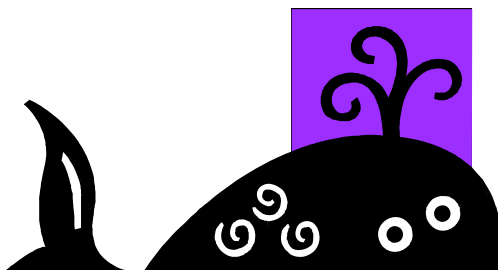
- Shows in highly competitive positions risk the loss of audience if they don't appear to be moving in a leading edge way
- Overall economic factors affect particular industries differently and your show as the bellwether of your industry
- Consider the hidden manpower costs of reviewing and handling your sign inventory, both in-house and with your vendor.

The key to smart budgeting for event graphics is to balance value and budgetary concerns with your marketing efforts and operations. A marketing case may be recognized as a valid goal, but subject to the chopping block once the final budgets are dispersed. It is always a challenge to sell the value proposition against the commodity model. The most successful shows achieve this goal by thinking long-term with one foot firmly planted on the ground.

#end.

If You Recycle: Eight Tips For Planning the Reuse of Show Graphics

1. Kick off your planning with a meeting of all internal stakeholders: budget, marketing, and operation departments all need to provide their input and priority lists and understand the concerns of the other players. This will avoid expensive surprises onsite if an essential need is not met.
2. Include your preferences and requirements about signage reuse in your show design Request For Proposal (RFP). If you are putting your show design and graphic production out to bid, include an inventory list and photos of the properties you wish to retain and integrate.
3. Engage in conversation with your designer and production company about your intentions for the new properties you order. If you are planning for reuse of particular items, that information must be included in your order so that the correct selection of materials can be made. Be aware that archival level materials are more expensive.
4. Address the storage issue of retained show properties. You may need special crates fabricated and if the item is of high value, storage concerns of temperature and humidity should be discussed. The overhead cost of storage space varies broadly nationwide.
5. Take into account the location of your next event and the cost of transporting your graphics to that location. You may find that it's less expensive to have new graphics fabricated closer to your event. With the volume of graphics needed for an entire show you may meet the minimum orders for free shipping offered by some graphics production companies with nationwide service.
6. Review your work orders of items which you plan to reuse. Eliminate all references to dates, times, places, and persons. Avoid using colors which are related only to the current show's marketing campaign.
7. At show site, communicate with your event contractor and on-site graphics contact. As soon as the show opens, your conversation should switch to the handling of graphics during dismantle. Use your walkthroughs of the facility to develop a punchlist of "keepers" and make plenty of copies of this list for disbursement. Don't rely on verbal instructions to a particular person of what should be saved.
8. By the end of your event, it may be tempting to be lazy and wave your arm to "save it all." This creates hidden costs and more work down the road to sift through inventories when no one remembers the details or the players have changed. Plan correctly and you will have exactly what you need.



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