

We Are Here

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Trade shows have always provided the opportunity for an equal playing field for many companies to capture their audience. By exhibiting in a neutral facility, even the smallest firms have a chance to draw the attention of their targets with creative and compelling display. For many years, the obligation of the overall show management began and ended with securing the convention hall space and enlisting a general services contractor to facilitate the logistics of moving the exhibits in and out. As the number of shows has increased, both exhibitors and attendees are faced with making choices of where to spend their marketing and research dollars. Show management teams must now provide a discernable difference in the overall show experience to maintain and grow market share.

The 2001 RSA Security Conference at Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco on April 9-12 had these and several more compelling reasons to provide an exceptional experience. Not only did the show's date cap a period of growing public and media focus on issues of Internet security, the content was closely related to a show opening the same day across the street. Added to this was the challenge of a new venue for exhibitors and attendees to navigate, since the prior years' show was in San Jose.

The theme of the 2001 event perfectly captured the message: "We Are Here." The graphic vehicle selected was a combination of images and icons that represented the Pioneer 10 Spacecraft's voyage to another solar system, carrying an encrypted map with a "return address" locator of our planet. CODA Creative of Oakland, CA developed the source artwork with a color scheme of neon green, orange and magenta that was so bright, it likely could be seen from another galaxy!

GES Exposition Services worked closely with LKE productions, San Francisco, to create an event that relayed the full power of the message for RSA Security. Beginning at the street, visitors were met with a building wrap of the entire façade of North Hall with a one-way viewable window material. The perforated material, which is printed with an image on one side, is mounted to the exterior of the window. From the street, the viewer's eye will naturally read the image as complete despite the perforations. From the inside of the building, the viewer's eye will naturally read through the holes in the product, and ignore the black backing. Voila! One-way viewing that is as simple as looking through a screen door.

Designing for a building wrap begins with the basics of educating the client on the process of fabrication and installation. This treatment is a single-usage product, and cannot be saved for another show. Considering that a



building surface is articulated with window mullions and details, the best approach for the design is to think in terms of large shapes and strong colors. Small details may be compromised by the perforated nature of the product, and since the optimum viewing is at a distance (or from a moving vehicle) the “less is more” maxim applies.

Timely consultation with the facility is also vital, since there are many layers of coordination and approval between the building management and the installation. Moscone Center requires a design to be submitted at least 60 days in advance of installation for their internal review. Facility concerns which may arise range from municipal advertising regulations to insurance liability to the Fire Marshall’s approval. You will want to have all appropriate MSDS sheets available for the building and for your own files. If this treatment is new to a facility, be prepared to provide samples for them to test well in advance. You should obtain permission if your design will cover any existing signage on the building, to avoid any surprises on site. Be sure to have a discussion on the cleaning schedule prior to (and also during) the installation. Adhesion of the product requires a clean surface, free of any oily solvents or ammonia. And, although industry standard films are designed for clean release without residue, some facilities may require additional deposits for cleaning after the project is dismantled, “just in case”.

GES San Francisco fabricates window graphics in-house on Encad printers for the front of our offices and on custom booths at shows. However, for a full building wrap of approximately 3,500 square feet, we enlisted the fabricating services of Adera Corporation, Las Vegas, NV.

Conversations with a fabricator should start early because the file set-up is dependant on the output device. Adera uses Vutek printers with solvent-based inks that will etch into the surface of the vinyl. Other types of equipment are toner-based, and the image is heat-transferred with a carrier layer to the window product, so this type of transfer requires the image file in mirror.

Regarding the finishing of the printed piece,

there are several types of overlamine or liquid sealant to consider and match to your particular circumstance or intended lifetime and weather conditions. Also of concern was the packaging instruction for shipment; we specified that the finished work be rolled from the bottom up so we could unroll from top down on site. Finally, we had both the layout grid and shipping details faxed in advance so we could continue the install planning.

Building wrap materials are made in rolls approximately 54” wide, depending on the brand specified. When working with an outside fabricator, be sure to discuss and understand the different materials available for your project. For the RSA Security show, we specified SuperVue™ Exterior-Mount window film from Clear Focus Imaging, Inc., Santa Rosa, CA. This particular film has a 2mm hole size for improved optics on a large area, and is made for exterior applications, for an expected lifetime of two to three years.

By this point in the process, you’ve spent so many hours preparing the job, you are anxious for installation to begin. This is the time, however, to take a deep breath and go over everything one more time. When we are wrapping a building for a trade show, we are allotted limited hours of access and a firm deadline for completion. There is no luxury of a pre-set in advance, as in exhibit fabrication – the final act of this play is live performance and you have one shot to get it right!

In the best circumstances, there will be room to unroll and check your rolls of film. Make sure each roll is marked to match the install grid, and add your own notes on the back liner material since it is difficult to see the image when you are holding one piece of it up close. Although you’ve measured the windows a hundred times up to now, measure them again now that you are ready to start. Determine where you will begin and drop a plumb line at the edge of your first roll. Our installations generally begin with the logo area, which usually is planned for the center of the building.

At the beginning of the installation, we tape two or three rolls in place at the top of the window and let them hang down. This is to allow us step back once more and evaluate the placement before starting, since the entire window is dependant on the beginning. Once the logo area is set, we may start several crews in different areas, depending on the design. If there are large expanses of flood color you can work ahead in those areas, or have a ground crew work ahead of the installers on a lift and leave out rolls at registration points until everyone is caught up. The number of people we assign to an installation may vary with the timeline we have to work with and how large an area is treated. If lifts are involved to reach the top of the building, plan for two or three on the lift and one of the ground to feed them rolls and spot them. Areas within reach of the ground can be done with two people or even one.

Handling of the material takes some getting used to, and you will find assorted techniques developing



as you proceed. The film comes with a release liner on the back, which is peeled away to expose the adhesive. The adhesive is re-positionable, so if the roll starts to drift at an angle, you can pull it up carefully and start over. It's best if you tack the material into place lightly with your palm until you are sure of placement, and then go back and burnish it down. We have a variety of tools available for our installers: along with standard plastic squeegees and wallpaper brushes, we have several strips of Plexi cut in various lengths and the edges covered with adhesive-backed hook and loop to create a fuzzy squeegee that doesn't scratch surfaces.

Since most of our trade show installations are for less than one week duration, we don't need to burnish heavily, and many areas are secure enough after hand-setting into place. Joe Toback, training coordinator for Local #510 Trade Show Installers (I.U.P.A.T.), was the lead person for the RSA Security windows. "The best approach is to handle the material as little as possible to avoid stretching it," he explained. "Use the plumb bob on the first few panels to ensure they are straight. Unroll and mock up the next few rolls with masking tape, looking for areas of critical registration, and make adjustments of placement to align your design. Unroll the liner at the top and set the first couple of feet on the glass, then re-roll from the bottom up to have a manageable roll to handle. Continue peeling away the backing liner as you work your way down the strip." Some installers prefer to cut away the backing liner as the progress; others have systems of rolling the liner onto another tube as they go. For our project, some areas of the glass façade had metal plates, which protruded in front of the glass panes. After several variations, our preferred treatment of these is to unroll the film and continue on down a couple of feet, then go back and lightly press the film on the metal surface, leaving the air gaps alone around the edges. It was at first awkward to resist trying to "fit" the plate or trim to the edges, but your ground person will confirm that the best overall effect is to leave the air gap and allow the film to visually soften the protrusion.

Temperature can have a dramatic effect on the

installation process. We are fortunate that both façades of Moscone are recessed away from direct sunlight, so the glass surface doesn't get extremely hot. If you installing on hot glass, give yourself plenty of time to practice and innovate in advance.

As trade shows continue to raise the bar on the overall experience for attendees, designing and installing graphics for an entire building can be an exhilarating way to help your client announce to the cosmos: We Are Here.

~sconz



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