



# REAL WORLD VINYL

By Rob Ivers

## Banner Up

Banner season hits full swing.

Rob Ivers owns Rob Ivers Inc. (Raymore, MO), a vehicle graphics and installation company. He's installed vinyl since 1978 and taught vinyl-graphics installation since 1993. For more information, visit [www.robivers.com](http://www.robivers.com)

**B**anner usage typically declines in the colder months. So, spring's arrival brings good news for shops that fabricate banners.

Most experts agree we have a long way to go before the economy hits a strong stride. However, the stock market continues to rise, along with the temperatures, and business has been picking up correspondingly for many signshops. It's time for me to step up to the plate and cover all the bases for my shop.

For most of my career, I've focused on vehicle graphics. I offered cut-vinyl banners for awhile, but decided to bench them because they didn't fit into my game plan. I targeted higher-end advertising jobs, not banners, whose primary crowd-pleasing trait was their low cost.

Technological advances have made full-color banners much more attractive – both in appearance and cost. Businesses really need advertising now, and, for many of my clients, wraps are out of their league financially. I wouldn't be so far behind in the count if I'd figured this out a year ago.

It's past time for me to take banners

off the bench and put them back in the starting lineup. As we pull out of this slump, selling lots of banners for hundreds of dollars, rather than a few vehicle wraps for thousands, may keep me in the ballpark for another season.

### Choices

Banners can be produced by digitally printing directly on the banner, by applying cut vinyl, or both. You can print a full-color banner, and then overlay cut vinyl for items that need to be changed, such as a date for a recurring event. Or, you can print part of the banner and use cut vinyl for the rest. It's also common to use cut vinyl and add graphics that have been printed on vinyl and applied to the banner, rather than printing directly on the banner. I've made lots of signs and banners over the years, but my specialty has always been vehicles.

Because I haven't produced many banners lately, I asked a colleague, Rich Bartle of Sign Connection (Olathe, KS), for insights. With 20 years in the sign business, he owns a CNC router, a vinyl cutter and a large-format, solvent-inkjet printer, for creating

myriad signage and graphics.

I asked him his criteria for using printed versus cut-vinyl graphics. He said most of his banners now entail direct-printing media. Start with a roll of flat material, and hem all four sides after printing. They can be sewn, with an industrial sewing machine, which yields edges that lay flat and last longer, or they can be made with banner tape. Either way, Sign Connection then adds grommets for installation.

If a client wants a one-color banner, Bartle's shop always uses cut vinyl for two main reasons. One, he can purchase banner blanks in standard sizes that come with sewn hemmed edges and grommets, which saves both time and money. Second, Bartle can turn the job around more quickly because he doesn't have to wait for the ink to dry.

He also buys banner material on rolls of different widths that contain hemmed and grommeted edges. Sign Connection uses these when the customer needs a non-standard size. He cuts them to the desired length, applies the cut vinyl, and finishes the left and right edges with banner tape. Bartle also noted, if the banner isn't overly tall, the shop leaves the ends unfinished.

### Cut-vinyl-banner facts

Most shops prefer to stretch banners taut on a firm surface, such as a work table or wall, for application. This reduces the chance for wrinkles and alignment errors, and makes premask removal easier. Use 2-in.-wide masking tape around all edges or clamps for tabletop applications. Larger banners may be hung on a wall using bungee cords, rope, screws, nails or pushpins. Vertical installations are easier than reaching across a table. This also helps avoid graphic pre-adhesion to the banner because you're not fighting gravity.



Banners may be produced via digital printing or cut vinyl. For projects such as this, with multiple colors and complex graphics, I recommend printing.

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Vinyl banners work best for cut vinyl. Sold in different weights, they contain an embedded, polyester scrim for strength. For outdoor banners, use 13-15-oz. material. Single-sided material, where the front is smoother than the back, is most common.

Plasticizers make vinyl, or PVC, banners flexible and supple. These plasticizers gradually migrate to the surface. The longer banner material sits in storage, the more plasticizers will move to the surface.

To clean banner material, use isopropyl alcohol (IPA). Soaps, which don't dissolve plasticizers, can leave residue that reduces adhesion. Stronger solvents can melt banners or fuse into them, which again reduces graphic adhesion. A new roll of banner material usually needs only one cleaning with IPA.

However, excessive plasticizers will cause the IPA to bead on the



**Because I use cast material for my vehicle graphics, I also use it to decorate banners. I think it's more durable for customers that need them for recurring events, such as this banner I'm producing for my church.**

surface. If that occurs, clean the banner until the IPA no longer beads.

Use a hinge method to anchor the graphic in the proper position and apply the vinyl dry. Remove only as much liner as you can manage at one time. Even smooth banners usually have some texture from the scrim. The banner's texture, combined with the premask's rigidity, causes the vinyl's adhesive to make good contact only with the material's high spots. This holds true for all

textured surfaces.

To fix cast vinyl, use a rivet brush, usually with some heat, to mash the adhesive down into the texture. You can do it before and after removing premask, or only afterwards. Brushing before helps prevent edge lifting when removing the premask, but brushing after is essential. With the rigid premask gone, the vinyl conforms significantly better to the texture. However, this technique doesn't usually affect

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calendered film. Calendered media is thicker and more rigid.

Bartle uses calendered vinyl exclusively for banners, so he shops for the smoothest banner material that won't require brushing. Most clients who want single-color banners want a short-term, low-cost advertising option. For customers who need long-term graphics, he steers them toward digitally printed banners.

Because vehicle graphics represent the majority of my business, I only keep cast film in stock. I brush the vinyl before and after removing the premask. My customers pay a little more for cast material – if this is an issue, I refer them to Sign Connection.

Many of my customers purchase banners for recurring events, and cast vinyl works better for these. My church uses several banners annually for a few weeks at a time. I simply change the date each year.

Whatever vinyl you choose, it's



**Rich Bartle, owner of Sign Connection (Olathe, KS), hung this banner to depict the many choices he offers his banner customers – cut vinyl vs. digital printing, and different text or banner sizes. He said it simplified the sales process and boosted banner revenue.**

best to provide banners rolled on a 3-in.-wide, or larger, core, graphics side out, for your customers. Tell them not to fold the graphics. For reusable banners, I deliver them, on the core, inside a plastic bag for long-term storage. This keeps the banner smooth and dust-free.

### **The closer**

As a great tip, Bartle explained how he helps the customer choose the right size and type of banner. A banner that hangs on the shop wall tells the whole story at a glance.

This banner shows the different standard sizes they offer, and how different text sizes will look. It also mentions that custom sizes are available, and it visually renders the differences between cut-vinyl and digitally printed banners.

If you sell banners, you need a similar sample hanging in your shop. His banner sales increased dramatically thanks to it, and the time required to sell them decreased. ■

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