

AMERICAN BUS EXCHANGE

December / January 2008

Bus Wraps

a new look for your coach

Throughout the history of bus travel there have been many changes in the design and style of buses. Early in the twentieth century, urban transit buses and intercity buses began to evolve differently, with 35-footers giving way to 40-foot units, while intercity coaches continued to evolve to become 45-foot motor-coaches that are regarded as today's full-size industry standard. Now we are seeing a trending to literally an infinite variety, types, and sizes of bus vehicles. Buses have become an extremely efficient and competitive mode of mass transportation. More than that, it has become an acceptable mode of transport by the traveling public, and dare we say – even a preferred mode by some. Certainly at the very least the industry is successfully stepping away from the stigma of cheap lower class transportation.

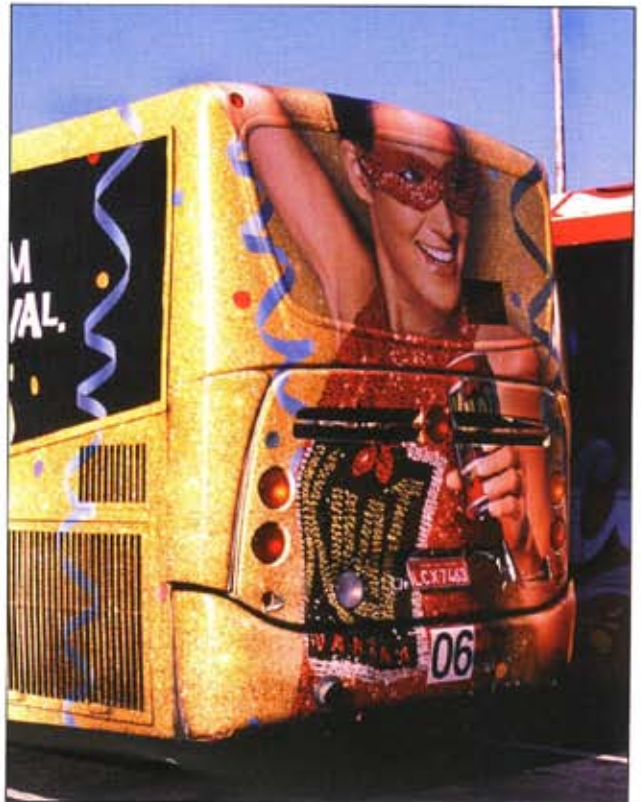
It is quite evident that bus engineering, design, and styling have played a very large part in generating better acceptance of buses by the public. "Curb appeal" is the most popular term used by the bus industry people.

The 'curb appeal' of a bus or coach has become an essential ingredient in marketing bus services, and in attracting higher ridership. Operators in every segment of our industry understand that in a competitive market, anything that can give you an edge is worth its weight in gold.

Modern bus graphics have taken curb appeal to the next level, giving a completely new and vibrant life to both the coaches and the businesses they represent. Image has a direct influence on both ridership and revenue and operators are taking some creative steps to ensure that they stay on top of their game.

"There have been reports of increased ridership of up to 20% in places that have had graphics applied to their buses," says Stan Mitts of Trolley Illusions.

Stan Mitts has made quite an impression on the riders that have seen his work. Like the name implies, he makes buses look like trolleys by applying specially designed





Graphics Created By Turbo Images



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vinyl graphics to the exterior. These graphics make an average bus look more like an authentic trolley, complete with wood paneling and window treatments. The graphics are so detailed that people have attempted to open the gate, which of course does not exist!

"Personally designed wood grain is printed on high quality vinyl, clear coated with a UV protection, and cut into 'boards'. Other parts of the design, including pin striping and fancy scrolls, are also of high quality vinyl. All of the graphic pieces are put together as a kit to be applied to the exterior of a bus. Nothing on the bus is altered," says Mitts.

Bus wraps are only limited by the imagination. Operators have gone to great lengths to move away from the pack, incorporating some truly inspired graphics that not only catch the eye but also say something about the operators.

"I received a call from a motorist who said that he had just passed "the most beautiful bus" he had ever seen!" Said Greg Hammond of Hammond Transportation Services, speaking about his newly applied graphics by Turbo Images. "It is just beautiful, and it is a great rolling billboard for our municipality, Muskoka, Ontario!"

Although travel themed graphics have always been popular, other recurring themes are capturing both the interest and imagination of today's riders. Since 9/11 patriotic images have been used to show support for our country and confidence in travel and corporate logos are taking on a more dynamic form.

"We are finding a trend beginning to emerge where fleet owners are going beyond basic colors and company names on their coaches," says Walter D'Andrea, President of Walter D'Andrea BodyWorks. "These fleet owners are trying to catch the eye of customers with unique designs and images. This can be more economically-friendly when vinyl graphics are utilized. The advantages of vinyl over painted designs are a



quicker turn around on a finished product, and the ability to change schemes at a lower cost."

Speaking through their graphics, bus companies are giving potential riders a look at what this industry is really about, safe and secure travel that is as exciting and fun as the destinations they service. But while some recurring themes are popular among motorcoach companies the graphics are as varied and unique as the companies they represent and some can be quite lucrative.

Coaches are often seen by as many as 70,000 people a day as they travel up and down North American highways and traverse urban streets. Corporate America has discovered this as an incredible opportunity to reach an otherwise untapped advertising resource and some are willing to handsomely pay to carry their message. This advertising resource can represent a very important source of additional revenue. Third party advertisers not only are willing to pay for the bus wrap, they are willing to pay as much as \$4,500 a month to place their advertising message on a bus or motorcoach.

But what goes into creating an attention-getting bus wrap?

There are 3 basic steps to the wrap process. Developing the concept, working the design and installing the graphic.

The most critical step is the design of the image. The finest materials installed by the most experienced technicians will do you little good if the design you are using is flawed or confused.



Remember, this image needs to make an immediate impression on those who see it so keeping it simple and direct will work in your favor.

“Choose a well known reliable graphic company who will provide service and solution before providing graphics!” says Esther Morrisette of Turbo Images.

At this stage in the process communication is key. You need to ask a lot of questions and confer with professionals who do this for a living, as they often can steer you away from a potentially disappointing experience. Feel free to explore your creative side and show your colors but temper it by listening to those who have been there before. Remember, the idea is to bring in more business so focus on brand recognition and simple but calculated designs.

A few things you may want to think about...are you your own best advertising client, or are there other advertising clients out there willing to pay you a very good price for what amounts to as a traveling billboard. If your company is in fact the advertiser, what is the message that you want to convey to both potential riders and those who see the wrap as it passes by.

Once the creative process is approved, the next stage is production. Transforming a detailed image into a completed and ready to install bus wrap takes an expert and choosing the right materials for your application is essential. There are two basic vinyl wrap processes. The first uses colored vinyl that is cut into different shapes in order to create a finished design. The second uses a white vinyl film that can be digitally printed with more



Graphics Created By Trolley Illusions

detailed graphics.

There are different grades of vinyl that are available. If the graphic will be removed after a short time then you may want to go for a more economical material. However if you intend to keep the bus wrap for several or more years you will want to select a high quality film. You may even wish to take advantage of some of the reflective vinyl material that is becoming increasingly popular with those who wish to have their graphics seen both night and day.

The last step is the actual installation of the bus wrap. Improper or careless installation can leave you with creases, bubbles or an image that may not line up on the coach. Creases and bubbles, or other distortions can appreciably shorten the service life of a bus wrap. The entire image is cut into panels, much like large stickers. Once the backing is removed from the vinyl panel, it is then applied to the motorcoach. The protective layer covering the graphic is then removed to reveal the image beneath. These panels must be fitted precisely or the image may be distorted or crooked. Special care must be taken around rivets and other body components to ensure that the wrap fits the coach perfectly, much like a second skin.

A full wrap on a 45 foot motorcoach can cost upwards of \$8,000 and \$10,000 depending on the quality of the material and the time spent on the design of the graphic. However, costs can vary considerably depending on the type and amount of film used, and also the size of the bus unit.

From design to installation the whole process can take upwards of 5-10 days, and when a good quality film is used and properly installed, the wrap can be removed without any damage to the bus.

One of the additional perks of having a bus wrap applied to your coach is that when the exterior is damaged, you need only order a new graphic panel. Most reputable suppliers will store your image on digital file and can duplicate the vinyl panel on the damaged area quickly and relatively cheaply compared to traditional painting. This saves you money as well as downtime

due to repair.

Bus wraps are a great way to increase you revenue and/or to promote your public image. Letting people know who you are and what you do is essential to staying competitive in any market, especially one as competitive as the bus industry. Using graphics can breathe new life into older buses and coaches and allow you to explore new revenue streams. The potential return on investment is high and you have the added benefit of being able to enjoy one very cool looking fleet!



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