



BY PEGGY MIDDENDORF

# BROADENING PRINT'S HORIZONS

By never saying “no” to its clients, Sport Graphics strives to set itself apart from the competition.

***Every company has its print specialty.*** All shops have limits. And most businesses are quick to tell customers just which services they can provide—and which they cannot. Sport Graphics in Indianapolis, however, refuses to be straitjacketed by any of these familiar truisms.

In fact, while working with clients such as the Indianapolis Colts, the Indiana Pacers, USA Gymnastics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and the National Football League (NFL), Sport Graphics has learned the wisdom of never saying “no” to a customer. And it has garnered the company business and customers who understand that no matter what the job, Sport Graphics will get it done.

“We just don’t say no to our customers,” says Jim Caudill, vice-president of the signage division at Sport Graphics. “If they have a need, we’ll find a way to fulfill it.”

## Divide and profit

Mainly working with sports-oriented businesses—including pro and college sports franchises and sporting-goods retailers such as Finish Line—the company has grown since its 1986 beginnings as a commercial printer. Today, under its 125,000-square-foot roof, Sport Graphics ([www.sportg.com](http://www.sportg.com)) is diversified into five divisions:

- Printing (commercial printing, stitching, and labeling more than 20 monthly publications);
- Distribution, including warehousing and fulfillment;
- Creative Services (22 full-time graphic designers plus writers and editors);
- Technology (five Web designers plus Web monitoring, and online orders); and
- Signage (wide-format printing, finishing, and installation, including vehicle wraps), begun in 2006, and now officially the fastest growing division of the company. It has grown more than 300 percent in the last 18 months.

But it's the five divisions working together and that "never say no" attitude that has won the company business, gained customer loyalty, and boosted Sport Graphics' bottom line, says Caudill. A case in point: The NCAA is one of Sport Graphics' long-standing clients, and the company has been providing printing, binding, mailing, and fulfillment services, as well as storing inventory for NCAA publications and providing wide-format signage for its events, most notably the Final Four, for a few years. When the NCAA decided to eliminate its in-house editorial and graphic design department, Sport Graphics hired the NCAA's editors and more than doubled the size of its Creative Services division to meet the NCAA's needs.

## Comprehensive Colts work

Customers have been attracted to that kind of one-stop-shopping mentality and have learned to rely on Sport Graphics for entire projects. For instance, one of the company's recent big projects was a "station domination" for Lucas Oil Stadium, the new hometown football facility for the Indianapolis Colts. Sport Graphics produced hundreds of décor and signage pieces in and around the stadium.

But the project involved more than just printing the stadium's banners and signage. When one of the Colts sponsors asked Sport Graphics to build a 16-foot-tall football helmet equipped with six large plasma screen TVs and an 18-foot horseshoe base—with seating inside the horseshoe—they said yes. An added twist to the design and construction of this installation is that it isn't permanent. When the stadium is rented out, the horseshoe, along with many of the other Colts-related displays and graphics, have to be hidden or stored away. With this in



To add some visual excitement to the stairs at the NCAA Women's Final Four Championship in Tampa (far left), Sport Graphics turned to its EFI Vutek QS3200, imaging onto Flexcon's Outdoor Walkway System. Top: The 16-foot helmet at Lucas Oil Stadium, constructed of aluminum, sign foam, and glass, houses six LCD displays. The QS3200 also was used for graphics for the stadium's HH Gregg wall and escalator, above.



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mind, the horseshoe is built in modules so it can be easily taken apart and stored.

Another part of the Colts stadium job had the shop constructing an 8 x 40-foot wall display for electronics retailer HH Gregg. Covered in graphics, the display also includes embedded plasma TVs, shelves to hold featured products, and, of course, the whole wall has to be portable so it can be stored between Colts events. Sport Graphics constructed the wall with connectors that are strong but easily removed, and they designed and built a cart that holds all sections of the wall for easy storage.

This past summer, the shop constructed two 10-foot-tall Lucas Oil bottles destined for the stadium. They are exact replicas of oil containers on the shelf of your local automotive store; however these bottles contain 42-inch touch screen kiosks. Stadium visitors can walk up to these bottles and test their knowledge of Colts trivia.

Beyond the one-off walls, horseshoes, and giant oil bottles, the new Colts stadium also has the shop producing a lot of graphics, including three 40 x 30-foot banners and motorized billboards. Sport Graphics also printed stadium sponsor Lucas Oil's signature 50 x 20-foot sign, which had to be installed 300 feet in the air, requiring the install team to work from a swinging stage hung from the roof supports. Additionally, Sport Graphics wrapped stadium columns in color, installed a runway on the floor, and much more.

The company's commitment to the Colts, by the way, doesn't stop with the stadium. Sport Graphics' commercial division even prints the playbooks for the team—personalized for each player. As you might guess, the printing is done under high security, and if a player loses his playbook, there is a heavy fine to pay and Sport Graphics reprints that copy.

### Problem solving

Many hands-on production VPs would pull out their hair at the prospect of undertaking all of these projects, which require exact engineering to design and build signage systems. However, Caudill likes the challenge presented with new jobs and relies on his staff, which he describes as "highly skilled and highly creative people," to produce high-quality graphics, problem-solve complex projects, and deliver the graphics on time.

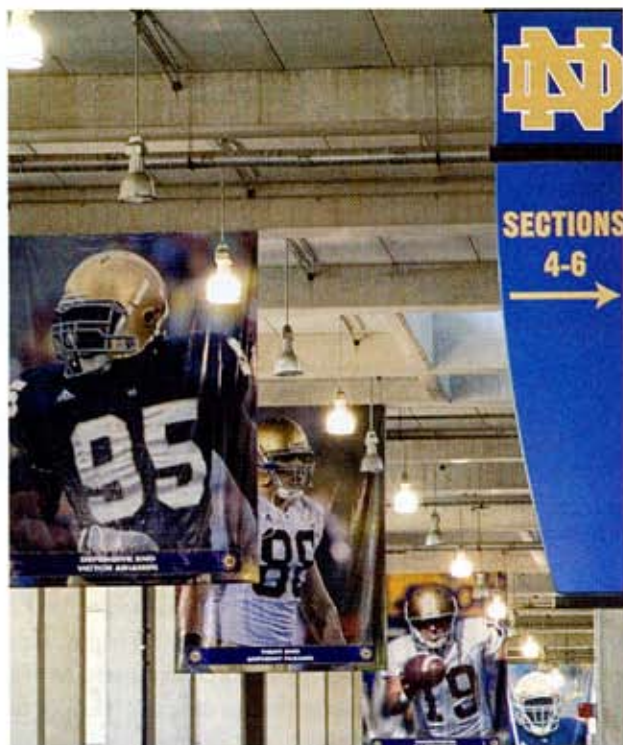
The staff creativity goes beyond designing massive displays. One project for the new Colts stadium was to provide the letters for each of the suites. Originally, the plans called for solid aluminum letters, but these are expensive and heavy to hang. Using the company's XYZ router, however, they were able to cut letters out of Dibond with a brushed silver finish and then paint the black foam core silver with spray paint. The resulting letters look just like solid aluminum at about a quarter of the price. And most importantly, the customer was very pleased with the result—both on the wall and in their wallet.



## Beyond Sports: The Rebranding of WFYI

With high-profile clients like the Indianapolis Colts and the NCAA, it didn't take long before Sport Graphics' innovative work attracted the attention of local businesses outside of the sports market. Last year, Metro Indianapolis Public Broadcasting affiliate WFYI tasked the company's Creative Services department with their rebranding, which included a new logo for use in print, signage, on-air promotions, and on the Web. The redesign package also encompassed WFYI's business cards, letterhead, and website ([www.wfyi.org](http://www.wfyi.org)) as well as interior and exterior signage.

The logo, featuring lowercase call letters and a multicolored icon, was created to project a more friendly, approachable image; reinforce a brand that audiences would immediately recognize, regardless of which WFYI program or service they were using; be usable across print, on-air, and digital media; and symbolize the diversity of the WFYI audience. In addition to physically applying this logo on the WFYI building exterior, Sport Graphics designed and installed branded banner flags that line the walkway to the station's main entrance, wayfinding signs throughout the facility, freestanding lobby banners that welcome visitors, and a 25-foot-tall static image of Big Bird, affixed to the interior of the window that faces the northwest corner of the station's parking garage. The celebrity spokesfowl for one of Public Broadcasting's most beloved television programs now waves a welcome to visitors to the station.



Large two-sided banners in the concourse at Notre Dame's football stadium (left) were produced with the shop's HP Scitex XL1500, onto 13-ounce Ultraflex media. The shop combined both its EFI Vutek QS3200 and XL1500 for the job at right for the Indianapolis Pacers' Conseco Fieldhouse. The window graphic was done with the XL1500 onto Clear Focus window perf media, while the huge floor graphic was produced using the QS3200, onto MacTac StreetRap concrete vinyl with PermaColor PF6300 textured vinyl for slip resistance.

Sport Graphics doesn't outsource the install end of a job. Instead, virtually all of the installation of the graphics they print is executed by the in-house staff that runs the printers and does the finishing of the digital graphics. Caudill's multitalented employees are regularly trained and certified in various methods of installation. "Having the printing and finishing staff involved with the install makes for a better product. Knowing how the final graphic will be installed helps the staff to better understand how it needs to be finished," he says.

For large-scale multifaceted projects like the NCAA Final Four, Caudill goes to the site to designate areas for graphics, as well as make meticulous measurements. Once the graphics are printed, Caudill and his crew return for the install. For short-term graphics, the installers generally stay through the event to take the graphics down the day after. Many of these graphics are not reused, but some are saved for dispersal to players or local charities.

Caudill and his staff have definitely learned some lessons from installs. At one sporting event, the crew installed 150 street-pole banners on Saturday. By Sunday morning, however, only 75 were still up. The lesson they learned was to install the pole banners with the bottom at least 14 feet above ground, discouraging most fans

from shimmying up the pole and stealing the banner. "The graphics are cheap souvenirs," says Caudill. "We've had to become more resourceful in keeping them in place until after the event is over."

### Hardware and throughput

Already equipped with an HP Scitex XL1500, several Mimaki printers, a Seal Image 5500 laminator, and an AXYZ 5010 ATC router, Sport Graphics added an EFI Vutek QS3200 this past January. Caudill and staff have worked on it for an array of jobs and have used it to image onto PVC, glass, and other unusual substrates.

One of the reasons the company bought the QS3200 was for its ability to print directly to substrate. For the Final Four graphics, the previous workflow involved printing, mounting, laminating, and cutting for each graphic. Now they simply print and cut, "saving hundreds of hours of labor and allowing us to produce more graphics," says Caudill. Running it two shifts a day, seven days a week, the shop images onto rigid substrates 70 percent of the time and the remaining 30 percent images onto roll media. Additionally, the printer's white capability "has allowed us to image onto glass and produce two-sided window decals, which we couldn't do before."



Clear Focus window perf media was used for this 20 x 280-foot graphic over glass for the Women's Final Four Championships, with Sport Graphics' XLI500; the two banners on either side were also produced on the XLI500, onto 13-ounce Ultraflex.

Other recent jobs for the signage division have included:

- The Red Bull Indianapolis GP motorcycle race called for wrapping nearly 10,000 feet of walls at the Indy 500, as well as covering scaffolding in banners. The three-day event was installed the first week in September and came down right after the September 14 event.

- Notre Dame's Football Stadium has windows around the stadium that needed graphics. Sport Graphics produced 198 double-sided and 20 x 15-foot banners commemorating players, coaches, and championship seasons. To up the intimidation factor for opponents, Sport Graphics also printed banners touting Notre Dame's football feats and installed them in the hall that opposing teams use to enter the field.

- For the 2008 Opening Game of the NFL, Sport Graphics printed a window mural for the Colts' old stadium and covered area hotels, the airport, nearby garages, and even garbage cans with event graphics.

- The Tampa Bay Sports Commission ordered a 280 x 20-foot mural (printed on window perf) to cover their facility's window for the 2008 Women's Final 4 Championship.

- Indy's new Convention Center is nearly doubling in size. Caudill and Sport Graphics helped the Convention Center design the signage placement and developed a hardware system for the quick and easy installation and removal of graphics.

- Casino graphics (outside signage and indoor graphics) were requested for two new Indiana casinos, as well as wrapping the vehicle the casino gives away each week.

From hanging from a tall building to install a window graphic to applying a vehicle wrap, the signage division staff does it all. The understatement of the year is Caudill's off-hand comment that "every day is a little different."

It will come as no surprise that with its expanding list of hardware and with the number of jobs ratcheting higher each day, the signage division has outgrown its current space. As this piece was written, Caudill reported that the company is looking to either expand its present location, or find a signage-only building within a mile of its current location.

### A dedication to excellence

A recent job producing the banners for the 2007 Indianapolis Tennis Championships is a great example of how Sport Graphics will literally go to any lengths to satisfy a customer.

The project's installation-time window was tight, scheduled for the day before the first match. As Caudill and his team were doing the install, however, a tournament official realized that the blue—the key color in every banner—was the wrong shade.

Not wanting to disappoint a customer, Caudill sent some of the install crew back to the shop to reprint the graphics. Then, as pieces were finished and delivered, the on-site crew installed them. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't cooperating. During that cold night, it began raining—making installing the self-adhesive graphics much more difficult. Caudill and the crew worked through the night, finishing just 30 minutes before the initial match's first serve.

Rain-soaked all-nighters are not typical for Sport Graphics, but via jobs like this, Caudill and crew have proven to a diverse client list that once they are given a job, they don't just finish it—they complete it so that everyone involved is more than satisfied with the results. Not only do they never tell a client "no," with a track record of excellence like this, it's unlikely that they hear "no," either. **BIG**

*Peggy Middendorf is the former managing editor of The Big Picture.*