

No Rest for the Weary

Installing graphics for the Super Bowl.

By ETHAN ELLIOTT



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"The reward is when you're down on the field during kickoff and you can see all the graphics. You can see the crowd cheering. You walk around the venue and watch the spectators taking pictures of the graphics, taking pictures of their friends in front of the graphics. They want to have them to take home as souvenirs. You don't always get that opportunity when you create building wraps — to see people gazing at them."

— Gene Chambers

A man with a wide broom pushes confetti and waxy paper cups across an otherwise empty concrete floor. Super Bowl XLII is over. The cheering has subsided, the crowds have all gone home, and the University of Phoenix Stadium, often called "one of the 10 most impressive sports facilities on the globe," is once again an empty shell. All that remains as proof of the spectacular event are the giant graphics that marked the National Football League's 42nd championship game.

Suddenly, surfacing from the passageways and tunnels hidden deep within the stadium, a bedraggled team emerges. Its members tired and anxious, their thoughts drifting homeward, they scramble to disassemble a project that has been their sole purpose for the last five weeks. But the ensuing emptiness feels good.

"I'm anxious to go home," begins Brett Roe, president of Roe Fabricators in Chester, Pa. "I'm relieved that everything went smooth, glad the customer is happy, and anxious to wrap it up. We've been on site maybe five weeks... it's a long time to be on a project and away from family. That's kind of what's on everyone's mind."

Roe Fabricators is the company hired by Salt Lake City-based digital print provider Vision International to first install and later remove all the graphical elements of the Super Bowl. On site a total of five weeks, the team spent four weeks on installation and one on removal — with a short interruption in between for a football match-up between the newly crowned NFL champion New York Giants and the defeated New England Patriots.

Joining them on this annual sojourn are the design team from Infinite Scale in Salt



Vision International direct printed this Super Bowl XLII logo onto Sintra. The player image was dye-sub printed, then stretched over an aluminum framework. Unless otherwise noted, all graphics were printed on VUTEK PressVu 5330s.



This 235' x 55' wrap on the Bank of America Building was printed on Clear Focus Superview window perf.



The theme for Super Bowl XLII was "Who Wants it More." These 20' tall column graphics were printed on Mehler vinyl and fastened with Velcro.

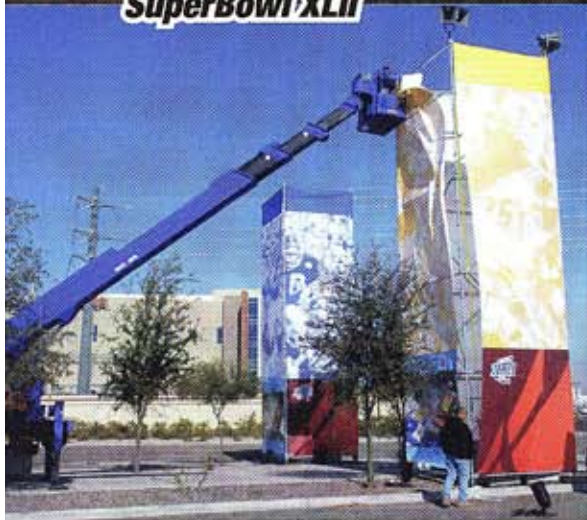
Lake City, illumination experts from C. Dall Brown Lighting in Plano, Texas, and, for the first time, the custom letter fabricators at Image First Creative Sign Solutions in Grinnell, Iowa. Overseeing the entire quest is project manager Brian Murphy, from SubjectMATTER in Dallas.

GAGGLE OF GRAPHICS

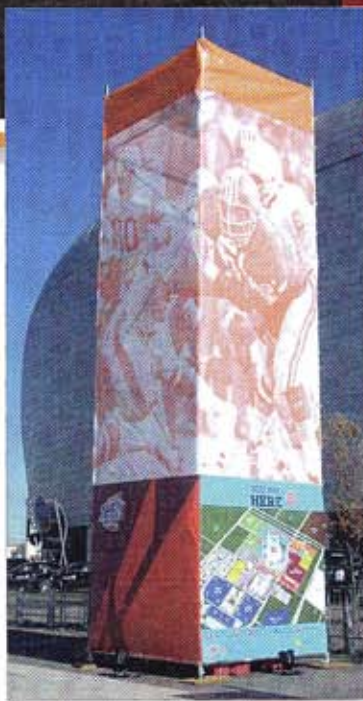
"Each year presents its own challenges. Each venue is different and has its own characteristics," says Gene Chambers, vice president of Vision International. "It's a challenge to see what you can do to try to equal or make the graphics better than the year before, and I think we've been pretty successful at doing that."

This year's Super Bowl theme, "Who Wants it More," focused on team imagery and photos. "The designs were good this year as well because we had large images,

On the Job: Super Bowl XLII



These 8' x 30' directional towers were printed on mesh, and a solid Mehler vinyl map of the stadium grounds and was seamed to the top section. Graphics were mounted to the 2 1/2" scaffolding pipe.



These 25' x 23' dimensional letters were created by Image First Signage Solutions.

Anytime you have a football helmet that's 30 feet tall, it makes an impression," says Chambers.

Having a plethora of graphics to choose from was especially important because the University of Phoenix Stadium, home of the Phoenix Cardinals, is also home to a nest of team-specific graphics.

"The NFL wants to keep it to two teams in the Super Bowl, so there were a lot of challenges there in covering up the existing graphics," says Chambers. "And the challenge

is not only to cover them up, but to tie in the overall look and have it make sense. I think Infinite Scale did a great job of tying it all together."

Graphics were installed throughout the stadium, at the NFL headquarters Hyatt Hotel, and on the Bank of America building and the Convention Center. The largest piece was a 200' x 50' banner hung inside the south end of the stadium.

Since it's an indoor stadium, Vision was able to use solid Mehler 15 oz coated PVC

vinyl rather than mesh, the fuller canvas adding greater depth of color to each graphic. The company began printing in December, producing graphics for six to eight weeks using its VUTEk 5330 solvent-based printer and a Mimaki JV3.

"It's nice to be producing hundreds of thousands of square feet of graphics in December and January when it's usually a slow time," says Chambers. For Super Bowl XLII, they printed more square footage of vinyl than in any other year, says Chambers — about 350,000 square feet. Because the printer is limited to a 16' width, after printing, each panel was RF welded on a 100' table for final assembly.

Of course, printing the graphics was easy; shipping them to Phoenix turned out to be a "real scramble."

When shipping a 50' x 200' graphic that weighs 1,000 lbs., the vinyl can't be rolled up in a tube, and to avoid wrinkles — unacceptable to any client, especially the NFL — they can't be folded and put on a pallet. To solve the problem, Vision hired a dedicated 18-wheeler semi-truck, rolled the big graphics, then had 10 employees pick them up and slide them into the truck's trailer.

Once on location, another 12 guys slid the graphics out of the truck and carried them to a holding area before moving them onto the field, where the 50' roll was unfurled and re-rolled lengthwise for hanging.

PUTTING IT ALL IN PLACE

Given the size of the graphic, and its intended installation spot — the main scoreboard — the use of penetration or attachment points was impossible. Instead, Roe's crew rigged a truss system similar to a theatrical stage truss.

"We had some pretty big hits interior, much bigger than we have had in past years,

**On the Job:
SuperBowl XLII**



These team specific wraps, installed on the Hyatt Hotel, were printed on Mehler mesh vinyl. The photos were chosen after the final Sunday night playoff games; Vision received artwork Monday evening; the 65' x 22' graphics were printed and installed by Thursday night.



Vision International printed all graphics then RF welded them before shipping. This 81' x 32' graphic was printed on Mehler vinyl and installed in the south end zone.



This 175' x 40' graphic covered Cardinal branding on the tunnel wall.

because of how much opportunity there was with all the structure in the end zone," says Murphy.

The team wrapped the massive graphic around the south scoreboard, and surrounded the JumboTron scoreboard with an image of the Arizona desert and the Lombardi Trophy. The north end zone boasted an offensive/defensive line matchup between the two football teams.

Two additional elements at the stadium caused trouble for Roe: a 50' x 90' rounded exterior Cardinal head, and one of the gates. Members of the facility didn't want to damage the existing signage, so traditional invasive rigging was out of the question.

"Covering that without any anchors or penetrations was hard," explains Roe. "To hang those and make them look good and be safe without traditional rigging was a challenge."

Chambers adds that "the weather was pretty cooperative for the most part, especially because of the indoor stadium, so we didn't have to deal with weather on some of those big graphics. Downtown, at the headquarters hotel, we installed some images opposing each other on each side of the building, and did a 200-foot-tall window graphic of the Lombardi Trophy on the Bank of America building."

While Roe Fabricators installed graphics, additional teams were at work completing other installation parts. Lighting expert Dall Brown was in charge of putting the spotlight on the Super Bowl.

"It's been exciting from year to year," says Brown. Graphics the first year (Jacksonville, Fla.) weren't much, but the NFL has involved lighting more and more ever since. This year we proposed some video projection on the stadium, but the cost per panel limited us to a small portion of the stadium, so we decided to go with a different approach."

The stadium is brushed aluminum and takes light very well, so Brown began by mounting 19 color changing Syncrolite 7,000 watt search lights and flooding the surface with light. Because of NFL restrictions on the use of radio-controlled devices, his team couldn't electronically control automation. Instead, two employees and four local sub-contractors had to manually visit and synchronize each light every day at 5:45 p.m., and turn them off at 2 a.m.

For the Bank of America wrap, Brown used theatrical fixtures to light the downtown icon from across the street at the Phoenix Symphony Hall, noting that the people were very cooperative.

The final signage piece this year came from Image First Sign Solutions. The Iowa company produced a series of 25' tall dimensional letters that read "XLII" and installed them on an 8' base. The 25' x 23' aluminum and vinyl letters were built in sections for easy shipping

"Our team not only built an incredible sign that millions of people were able to see, they were able to deliver and install the sign efficiently during the pre-event chaos of the biggest sporting event in the country," says general manager Michael McKeag.

And then the game began, filled with sparkle and glitz, and all the razzmatazz one would expect from the United States' premier sporting event. And then it was over. It took just a few short hours to play out what had taken months to prepare for. And the installation team made their way onto the field for tear-down. But the story doesn't end there.



Roe employees installed this 75' window perf on the stadium by repelling.



One of Roe Fabricator's biggest challenges was covering the stadium's built-in Cardinal head. The 92' x 55' Lombardi Trophy graphic was printed on Mehler Vinyl.

THE GREEN THING

The NFL has a recycling program, and there's nothing flashy about that.

"Throwing away the work of just one day would not be very responsible, and the NFL has been ahead of a lot of folks, and ahead of where they needed to be on that issue, and they keep doing bigger and bigger things each year," says Murphy. All of the energy for this year's game was "green", from solar or wind sources.

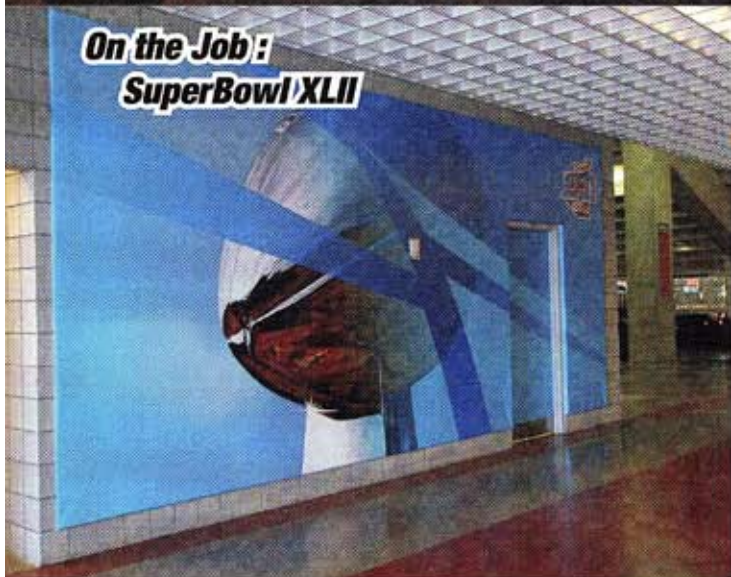
As the "uninstall" team completes its work, they load the graphics into semi trailers. Chambers explains that all of the big pieces of vinyl go to the Red Cross and are cut up and made into tarps or utilized for roofing or temporary shelter. Smaller pieces with logos are given to local charities to be auctioned off as fund-raisers. Five miles of fence wrap is given to local high schools and different sports venues to be wrapped around their fields.

"We try to re-use every piece of printed graphics that we produce every year. They're very conscientious about that," says Chambers. A few of the 8' x 30' wayfinding pylons are palletized and shipped back for next year's game.

"The NFL brand is extremely strong, and there are a lot of people out there who like to have that kind of stuff. Some fans don't hesitate to stand on someone's shoulders to tear down a pole banner. Some of it gets re-purposed automatically," Chambers jokes.

"As a manufacturer, you produce the product as cleanly and efficiently as you can, and with the end user, it's up to them what they do with it," he

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Super Bowl graphics were printed on 24' x 10' vinyl and installed to hide interior Cardinal Graphics.

says. "It's ultimately up to the end user to try to recycle or re-purpose — a lot of the time it's more expensive to recycle than to start from scratch, but we try to be conscientious, and the NFL is very good about it, too."

"It's great that we can play another role beyond just doing the job — to give back at the end. It's not just about the event, but what it leaves behind also," says Murphy. "The challenge of take-down is just completing the job and closing the loops with a little bit of restoration."

After more than 20 people worked five 100-hour weeks straight, he says "everybody wants to get home at that point." The Super

Bowl XLII job is finished, and everyone goes home.

THE BAND PLAYS ON

That doesn't mean the work is over. Infinite Scale and the NFL are already planning next year's graphical theme.

"Right now we're working on next year's Super Bowl graphics," says Shandon Melvin of the NFL. "It's a three to four month process. Designs are made for products first, and we release the initial phase of artwork in March, then visit the new headquarter city and start to plan.

A series of photos are taken in the host

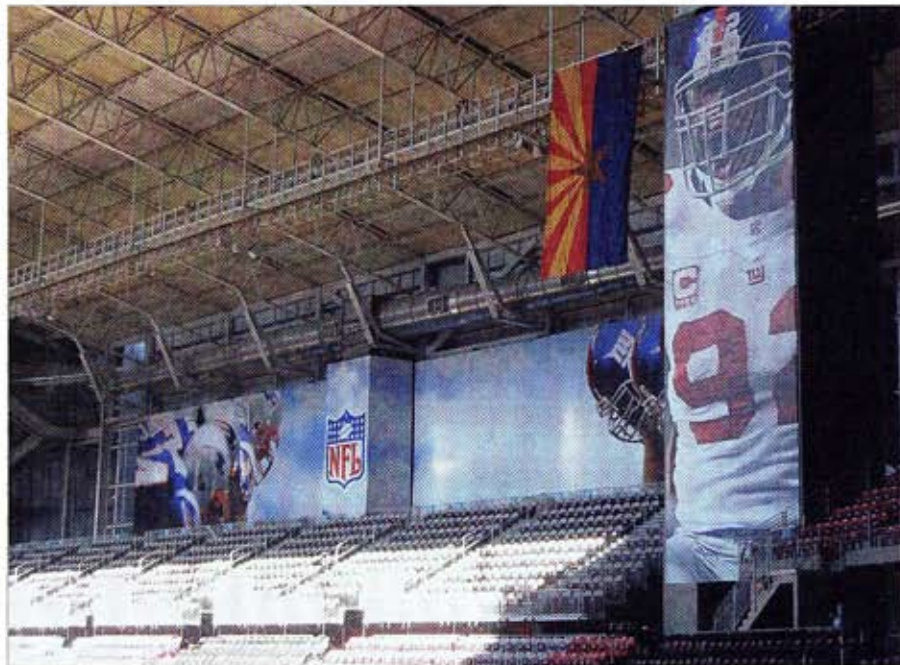
city, taking into account and reflecting its heritage. Melvin says graphics installation is planned based on the city's layout and highest traffic areas. Once a new Super Bowl logo is designed, the logo is used as the singular element around which all other graphics are made.

Infinite Scale starts the design process with site visits and measuring in May. Photos are sent to Vision to help formulate an initial budget. Now beginning their fifth year on the job, they've developed a pretty streamlined process.

"In some ways we feel like we're getting a real good system down that is efficient and



Setup and take-down took a crew of 20 five 100-hour weeks, starting in January.



These north end zone graphics are 230' x 40'. The Giant in the foreground is 57' x 17'.

DIGITAL GRAPHICS

enables us to control the budget, make sure we've got plenty of exciting new areas to try to dress up with graphics. We always try to find some kind of area that we can have a real icon, that can be visually seen throughout the city," says Chambers.

"We're always making adjustments to the way we plan, because we form our future plan of attack based on previous years," says Murphy.

While the designers at Infinite Scale start the process anew, the rest of the Look Team reflects on a job well done, and enjoys a little well-deserved time off.

THAT'S A WRAP

"To me, this year's project, short of some closure at the office, is pretty much a wrap. We're just looking forward to going to Tampa in April, and maybe a little bit of relaxation prior to that," says Murphy, adding, "The biggest hurdles aren't going to *this* city or *that* city or the venue itself. Most of the time, they're the ones we place in front of ourselves. Still, nothing compares to the final throws of Super Bowl.

"This year, in retrospect, we all feel like it was easier. We can continue to make it easier on ourselves, but it's also the environment. We had a really great local team at the stadium. It's so important to have good support from the people whose venue you're temporarily taking over," he says.

"Looking back, we're glad the customer was happy and all the graphics looked good. We took it from the paper end to reality, and the customer was happy. That's what was important to us," says Roe. "You forget how hard it is until you do it again. The sheer energy and hours and manpower that go into doing it, in ten months you forget about it. I'm just a little tired." 