

# BUS Wraps

**S**ome of the most innovative and cutting edge graphic displays can be seen on everyday streets and highways. No longer only for stationary billboards, display advertising has taken to the streets and is quickly becoming one of the most effective and economical means of promoting both products and services. Whether you are promoting your own company or tapping into a new revenue stream by using your buses as an instrument of advertising, today's bus wraps can add color and life to your equipment, as well as create a lasting impression in the minds of your riders.

Bus wraps have been used since the early 90's to take advertising to the streets and roadways of North America, capitalizing on the mobile nature of our population and allowing for vehicles to serve a dual purpose, transportation and media exposure.

Many of the first graphics placed on buses were air-brushed by hand, which was both time-consuming and relatively cost prohibitive. With the development of electrostatic transfer machines, solvent inkjet printers and other types of wide-format digital imaging equipment, printing companies and graphic designers soon recognized the benefits and marketability of this emerging field. Because the image could be digitized and then delivered through a wide-format printer, new and more extensive graphic creations could be developed for the motorcoach and transit market.

Since these wraps were created digitally then printed for application, if a section of the graphic was damaged due to graffiti, weather or collision, it was possible to replace the damaged part of the graphic without having to repaint or reapply the entire section.

One of the most impressive innovations to the bus graphic scene has been the development of see-through films. ClearFocus Imaging specializes in the manufacture of One Way Vision™, a perforated, pressure-sensitive window graphics film that is used by printing companies and others in the digital imaging industry for a diverse array of promotional applica-



tions. ClearFocus Imaging pioneered the use of its One Way Vision films on bus windows as part of an overall bus wrap.

With this window film, it is possible to wrap an entire bus in a continuous graphic display without blocking or hindering the view from within the bus. This is essential for those companies running tour and charter trips where it is extremely important that the view from the bus is not diminished. An added benefit of this full wrap application is the reduction in heat from the outside, which is a very attractive feature for those in the southern states, where battling the heat is a constant concern.

Bus wraps are large, colorful and virtually impossible to miss. They have the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of viewers within a short period of time, viewers that are often missed by other forms of media. It has been estimated that drivers have less than three seconds to fully comprehend a static billboard; however, exposure to bus wraps is substantially longer. These "traveling billboards" take the advertising message to the consumer instead of waiting for the consumer to access the ad through other media. Many advertisers are taking a closer look at the economical benefits of reaching a broader cross-section of viewers. This can mean more revenue for your buses, not to mention a more attractive fleet!

How much revenue can a bus wrap generate?

"Typically, you can sell the sides of your local coaches for \$1000.00 to \$1,500.00 per month plus production costs, and realistically the cost of a coach side is in the neighborhood of \$6,000.00 per coach for full wraps, not



counting design cost if necessary," says Joe Lapekas of TruckSkin.

TruckSkin has been producing high quality

wraps for the transportation industry for the past seven years and has installed its graphics in 48 states and 5 countries. Joe Lapekas, President of TruckSkin, had been in the heavy truck repair business for 21 years before seeing the opportunity in the advertising side of the fleet business.

"In today's tight budget times we are all looking for ways to increase our bottom line or at the least, offset our operating expenses. One of the easiest methods is to use the hidden value in the billboards that your coaches provide," says Joe Lapekas. "The typical metro coach is viewed by 14 million pairs of eyes annually."

How are buses wrapped?

There are three stages to wrapping a bus: the design stage, the production stage and lastly (con't on page 30)

the installation stage. The design stage is probably the most critical part of the wrap process. Creating the right message and effectively understanding the nature of the medium it is being applied to is integral to the success of bus wrap advertising. The vehicle is a rolling billboard so the message must be powerful, easily understood and instantly recognizable.

The second step in the wrapping process is the actual production of the graphic. The final design is printed digitally on wide-format printers using an appropriate graphic film and rigorous definitive color matching techniques. Films are selected based on different criteria, one of which being the length of time the graphic will be on the vehicle.

3M Commercial Graphics has been helping customers worldwide build their brands by providing total large-format graphics solutions. Working with their global network of authorized graphics manufacturers, 3M pioneered the technique now known as vehicle wrapping- for cars, trucks, vans, buses, aircraft and rail.

"Commercial vehicles make extremely cost-effective rolling billboards with cost per thousand (CPM) figures below \$1. Compare that, for example, with radio where the best you can do is around \$3. Bus wraps offer operators the chance to provide a very affordable advertising option in their markets while generating revenue for themselves," according to Tom Black, marketing operations manager, 3M Commercial Graphics.

There are several different methods of producing and installing graphics on coaches. The most visible and eye catching of these types is the full bus wrap. When this wrap is applied to a coach it completely transforms the exterior into a colorful and uniquely designed vehicle that sticks out in any crowd. Whether the wrap is promoting your own company or is generating extra revenue by outside advertisers, your coaches will leave a lasting impression wherever they may roam.

Another popular wrap style is the partial wrap. This wrap application usually begins behind the entry door back toward the rear of the bus and can include see-through material to encompass the window area. A cost-effective way to do this type of partial wrap is to use two different types of styles, mixing both digitally printed material and the time-tested cut-vinyl approach. Mixing both of these styles can reduce the cost of the wrap and offer an inex-



pensive way to deliver your message to the community.

"An often overlooked area is just to cover the rear of the coach," says Joe, "while not as effective at grabbing the large crowd attention as a full wrap, it does effectively send your message out to the drivers in your community. Who at some during their day is not following a bus? This we find is the best place to put a message that requires actually reading something."

But before placing an advertisement on any coach, you must first sell the space.

There are typically three ways you can sell advertising space on your coaches. The first is selling your advertising space to a third-party agency. This is probably the easiest method of selling the exterior of your coach, but may not generate as much profit as others. An advertising agency will find the advertisers for you but deduct a percentage for their services. They will also arrange for graphics and installation. While this will guarantee you a check every month, it will not be as large as you might want.

A more direct method of selling this space is through an employee in your organization to handle the

pursuit and acquisition of the advertisers. While this requires much more work, it allows you to choose which companies you would most like to see on the side of your coach. You can then have a company or companies that bid and provide the graphic materials as well as providing installation for the wrap. While this is more complex and time consuming, it does provide more revenue to the coach operator in the long run.

For smaller-sized fleet coach operators there is another, more economical option available. Operators can advertise the availability of ad space right on their coaches, as well as put it up for bid on any online agency such as Ebay. Then arrange for the production and installation yourself and collect your monthly check.

It is important to work with a proven graphics supplier that can provide all the elements of the project if possible. The design elements, production and graphics, and the installation and removal need to be handled professionally and efficiently. Trying to arrange these can be a daunting task for a busy fleet operator so be careful when choosing your graphics provider and be sure to ask for references. Wrapping your coaches in creative graphics not only helps your bottom line but also creates a unique and memorable look for your fleet. □