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Come Together

Multiple graphics sources converge for 2007 NBA All-Star Game.

By Ethan Elliott



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Although the Beatles probably weren't thinking about the graphics industry when they released their 1969 album "Abbey Road," the title of the lead song, lends itself to a recent job done in Las Vegas.

The job, wrapping Sin City for the NBA's 2007 All-Star Game, was accomplished by no less than eight companies, including designers, project managers, graphics producers and several installers.

How did they do it? By *coming together*.

SO HARD TO SEE

Making graphics stand out in a visually over-stimulating city like Las Vegas is challenge enough, but collaborating a myriad of prints between so many vendors seems like mission impossible.

"One of our biggest challenges, because Las Vegas is a visual cacophony with so much glitz and glam, was decorating downtown," says David Kerchman, president of Flying Colors in Berkeley, Calif. "The Thomas & Mack Center isn't on the strip, so it provided a nice blank canvas to incorporate our own presence, and everyone on the way from the airport passed by it." But downtown was a different story.

"There were unique challenges in the hotel portion because they're very heavily themed. It was a challenge coming up with the right graphic pieces that would work within the hotel style without looking

These window graphics were designed by Flying Colors, the official project manager for the NBA All-Star Game, printed by Pictographics, and installed by Extreme Media. (Courtesy Pictographics)



This 150' x 392' triangular advertisement at the Luxor hotel was printed by Vision International on ClearFocus SuperVue window vinyl on a VUTEK 5300 printer, and installed by Elite Media. It features basketball stars Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard. (Courtesy ClearFocus)



These column banners inside a Las Vegas hotel were printed by Pictographics and installed by Extreme Media. (Courtesy Pictographics)

garish," Kerchman explains. In addition, the game coincided with the Chinese New Year, a big event in Vegas, so making sure the graphics blended harmoniously with the décor was paramount.

Once Flying Colors had completed designs for all NBA-branded portions of the job — their 17th year handling the project — they handed assignments

to print shop Pictographics and installer Extreme Media.

Several of the advertising agencies involved hired their own teams to install brand graphics on the face of various hotels. Companies involved in that aspect of the project include Elite Media, Outdoor Solutions, Big Mountain, and Vision International.

ONE AND ONE AND ONE

"I thought the designs were really good this year, and [Flying Colors] took full advantage of the application," says Gene Chambers, president of Salt Lake City-based Vision International, who was also pleased with the non-sanctioned portions of the job.

"A lot of the time you see images that weren't designed properly for windows, knowing you'll lose some of the image to the holes in the vinyl. We like to be involved in jobs that have good creative," Chambers says.

Vision received its first assignment from designer Outdoor Solutions, who asked them to produce prints for the MGM Grand hotel wrap. Vision produced the 180' x 300' graphic in just three days, printing onto ClearFocus SuperVue perforated window film media with their VUTEk 5300 UltraVu printer. To aid the installation crew, Vision prepared a grid system "blueprint" to mark the location points of each panel. Elite Media handled installation at the hotel.

Elite was contacted to handle the MGM Grand and Luxor hotel installs directly by Adidas' ad agency, according to Chad McCullough, Elite president. While the MGM was a fairly straight-forward piece, the situation changed pitch quickly during the Luxor install.

"Getting the proper sizes of the hotel itself and doing the math was a big challenge," says McCullough, who had employees rappel from the top of the pyramid-shaped building to measure and then hang 684 separate 4' x 20' panels.

Adding to the excitement, the company that was originally contracted to print the graphics delivered a product with registration issues, according to Chambers, so Vision was called in on short notice.

"We got the call Saturday morning, had the artwork Monday, produced the first 16,000 square feet and shipped on Wednesday, did another 16,000 square feet

On the Job



The 300' x 180' adidas ad on the MGM Grand hotel, featuring Tracy McGrady and Gilbert Arenas, was managed by Outdoor Solutions, printed by Vision International and installed by Elite Media. (Courtesy ClearFocus)



Elite Media employees install the MGM graphic. (Courtesy Vision International)

on Thursday, and sent the last bunch on Friday. They installed it over the weekend and it was ready by Monday. To meet the deadline, Vision employed all three of its VUTEk 5300's day and night, and consumed even more SuperVue film.

The end result: the massive 150' x 392' graphic took up around 43,000 square feet of ad space and took six installers five days to complete.

"We were under a big time crunch, doing several pieces at the same time, and the guys ran with it and got it done," says McCullough, who believes this was the largest ad ever on the building.

Next came work at the Mandalay Bay, another of the eight hotels chosen for graphics during the event. A giant T-Mobile graphic covered the face of the building, printed by Big Mountain and managed by Elite. The official NBA ground-level graphics at the hotel were printed by Pictographics, another Vegas shop, and installed by Extreme Media of San Francisco.

In order to meet the graphics demand for this project, Pictographics bought a new VUTEk QS3200 UV-curing printer with white ink capabilities. Their upgraded print capability in hand, graphics output was as sweet as a strawberry field. The installation, however, went temporarily helter-skelter.

As the project was under strict timetables, Extreme rented a house in Vegas to make it easier for installers to come and go during the job. Teams were staggered so everyone could rest after



Pictographics printed all of the graphics at the Thomas & Mack Center, including an interior hanging banner (inset), and the mesh banners outside, shown here being hung by Rhino Rigging.

On the Job



The finished Thomas & Mack Center. (Courtesy Pictographics)



The epicenter of the NBA event was the Thomas & Mack Center, where ground-level, face-level and roof-level graphics were installed. (Courtesy Xtreme Media)

their shift while another crew went to the next location. Most hotel work had to be completed between 3 a.m. and 8 a.m.

When the team arrived at the Mandalay Bay one sleepy morning, they discovered that some Vegas patron who was having too much fun had thrown Molotov Cocktails near the hotel in the early hours of the day. Because of the flambeau, work was rescheduled.

That's okay; the Extreme crew did its best work away from the crowds.

OLD FLATTOP

The epicenter for the real graphics action was at "Old Flattop," a.k.a. the Thomas & Mack Center, the basketball arena on campus at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. For the final location Pictographics produced thousands of square feet of graphics, which were installed by Extreme and by Rhino Rigging.

"The majority of the work was performed at night," says Extreme's Tom Atteo, still

recovering from the Molotov incident. His team handled ground-level graphics, including a 1,400' window-perf job at the arena, and a very rewarding installation on the building's roof.

The roof wrap, created for video game company EA Sports, was a 150' x 150' logo on top of the arena. It came in three sections, and consisted of 69 panels of self-adhesive vinyl that measured 80" x 50'. Atteo's crew initially tried to clean the roof with alcohol and rags, but, after a rainstorm, they decided that simply painting the whole surface would be easier.

The most critical part of the job was finding the roof's precise center point — the exact spot where the radius was 75' from all angles. Next in line was making sure each panel was square — domes make that difficult.

After one day of prep, Extreme had 18 staffers on the roof for two days. One employee was staged at each corner, two

pulled the backing paper, and the others secured the vinyl.

They originally attempted to use 4" squeegees, but quickly realized the futility of using such small tools on a such a giant project. Here, another issue became apparent.

"If you forgot something on the ground, it was time-consuming. It was a 20-minute process to get from the roof back down to the ground," says Atteo. Luckily, the crew from Rhino Rigging had a 65' boom-lift on site, and were willing to lend a mechanical hand.

After a trip to the hardware store to pick up some 36"-wide push-brooms and floor squeegees, Extreme was back in action. "They worked just like a typical rivet brush," says Atteo. The 22,500' of vinyl was installed with a 1/2" overlap, and then employees went around the perimeter with Gorilla tape and staples to ensure the edges wouldn't lift.

Meanwhile, just below them, Rhino Rigging completed its installations on the face of the building. Before long, the job was done.

GROOVIN' UP SLOWLY

"I pay a lot of compliments to Flying Colors and Pictographics," says Atteo. "Bringing everyone together and getting this program done in the amount of time we did was pretty incredible."

Another high for the Extreme Media crew was standing on the roof of the center looking out over the Vegas skyline, "like climbing to the top of the highest mountain and looking out over everything," according to one employee.

After completing such a massive undertaking, what more is there to say? Monkey finger. It begged verbalization. (C)