



Creating Booth Graphics the Pop

Clients often ask me why they can't use pictures from their website or photographs from their personal camera to create the eight-foot mural graphic on their tradeshow display. They don't understand why the images they used on their brochure can't be blown up on their banner stand. If you are not versed in the art of graphic design it is difficult to figure out what artwork and images have the correct resolution to be blown up large enough to look great on a 10-foot display.

The other concept that is difficult to grasp is the fact that having the properly formatted artwork is not enough. When you work with an exhibit company to create graphics for your tradeshow display it will require four steps before a designer can get the final, finished display graphics delivered to you.

First, you must provide the company logo, pictures and text messages you want to use on the design. You can also request the specific font styles and background colors you desire. The more information about your concept or desires that you provide to the designer, the easier and faster it will be to transfer those ideas from your head into a fabulous graphic.

The designer must then sit at the computer and create, size, format, crop, edit, composite, color match, assemble, layout and finish all the elements of your artwork to make it look professional and ready to print. Then a proof is sent to you by email for approval or you can request a test strip. This is an actual slice of the printed graphic you can color match and check for resolution quality. Lastly, the artwork must be produced by enlarging, printing and mounting it. Production time usually requires 3-7 days from your approval of a proof, but can be expedited for an additional fee.

The key to a fabulous result is realizing that your final artwork will be only as good as the files and photos it was created from. In this age of the digital camera, everyone assumes that the gorgeous photograph you took on vacation, that great graphic you have on your website or those wonderful images on your brochure can be magically enlarged for use as the eight-foot background picture on your exhibit. There is a huge learning curve associated with understanding how digital graphics are designed and how artwork resolution impacts the appearance of the final image.

The simple truth is, unless you have pictures, logos, fonts or illustrations originally created in a format that can be properly scanned or digitally manipulated, you will not be able to turn a 3" x 4" picture from your brochure into a 6' mural for your tradeshow booth. There is something called DPI, (dots per inch), that determines the resolution of an image. The closer the dots are the clearer the image. The resolution determines whether your words and pictures will look crisp and beautiful or a blurry, jagged mess. To ensure perfection your photos must be taken with a high resolution camera and the images you select for use on your display should be originally created for large format

reproduction in design programs like Illustrator or Photoshop by someone with graphic art and design knowledge who understands that your goal is to enlarge them for use on your tradeshow display.

Remember that graphic artists charge by the hour and the clock starts ticking the moment the designer sits down at the computer. Make a plan to brainstorm with your sales and marketing teams about the graphic images and sales messaging you want to convey at the booth. Request assistance from your exhibit consultant, as they have the expertise and insight on what will look the best and attract your target audience. They will save you time and money by helping you conceptualize a preliminary layout and marketing message before it goes to the designer.

Gather useable artwork from the printer who printed your business cards and letterhead or have pictures scanned into the correct resolution. You can also purchase large format stock photos on the internet. Whether you hire the designer to create your display graphics or use the graphic design services provided by your exhibit house, expect to pay from \$80-\$150- per hour for this service. This may seem expensive, but a professional can do the work quickly and upon completion the artwork will be yours to use on your website, flyers, brochures and advertising.

It is an unfortunate, but true, fact that tradeshows are places of extreme excess. Multiple resources, hundreds of man-hours and millions of dollars are wasted on show floors across the country every day. You are paying for plenty of it. Maybe it's the pressure of too many deadlines, shrinking budgets or an overworked staff that causes exhibit marketing professionals to neglect or forget important processes and procedures that are required for a show to run smoothly and stay on budget.

There certainly are an overwhelming number of tiny details to oversee before, during and after the show. When multiple departments share in the planning and execution of the program, there is ample room for error if good communication procedures are not practiced. Below is a list of the most common budget busting habits that, if immediately eliminated from your tradeshow program, will save you money and reduce waste.