



VEHICLE GRAPHICS: Prepping for Success

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All the Right Angles

Dichroic film lends rainbow-like finish to Lamborghini Huracán Spyder

Compiled by Jason Cramp

Photos courtesy Sekanskin

It is said Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, a 19th century author, coined the phrase: “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Today, scientists say the same can be said when someone is looking at art—the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination.

Tiago Teixeira, the owner and operator of Sekanskin, a Mississauga, Ont.,-based company that specializes in vehicle graphics using vinyl customizations, use exotic cars as blank canvases to create unique works of art.

An idea comes to life

Teixeira has always had a fascination with the simplicity and strength of the perfect triangle. He believes without math there is no art, and without symmetry there is no beauty.

That said, in 2016, when coming up with the concept for the company's next show-stopping car wrap project, like most clever ideas, his vision started with a sketch on a napkin during lunch one day with his team. The idea later evolved into reality after speaking to Heather Ballentine Aucoin, a super luxury brand specialist, Lamborghini, at Grand Touring Automobiles in Toronto about bringing his vision to reality. Teixeira said her instant confidence and trust in his vision provided him with all the motivation he needed.

Within a couple of days, Ballentine Aucoin delivered Sekanskin a brand new 2017 Lamborghini Huracán Spyder to use as a blank canvas. Originally, Teixeira wanted to incorporate some famous triangles, including the perfect triangle and the Pythagorean triangle, into the design. After days of research and development (R&D), his vision morphed into the idea of using a prism design: three triangles, three colours, and three different iridescent finishes. In fact, the design would split the car into triangles when looking at it from a bird's eye view.

This project was much more than just a car skin as the Sekanskin team aimed to encompass a consistent geometrical flow stemming from the vehicle itself, while also influencing the custom-built stage. Every line, angle, and shape of the design was meticulously created to ensure visual fluidity. After speaking with a 3M representative about the limits of certain materials, Teixeira and the team selected the Dichroic film, which 3M primarily designed for interior and architectural use. Its glass-finish variations practically capture the full spectrum of the rainbow. This is where the project inherited its name: the Prismacan.

The geometry of triangles

Creating a pattern that was not only suitable for the vehicle's shape and contours, but also worked with the film,



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The car was divided into a triangular prism and the lines were used to define where the colours transitioned.

proved to be extremely challenging. According to Teixeira, this film (at the time this project was completed) had never been fully applied to a car before. The film is polyester as opposed to traditional vinyl and, consequently, cannot be stretched or severely contoured. As a result, the Sekanskin team had to be extremely creative, which tested their skills to the max in bringing this vision to life.

To complete the project, Teixeira and his team divided the car into a triangular prism and used those lines to define where the colours transitioned. Every aspect of the concept was calculated to work with the vehicle's body lines while maintaining consistency throughout the design.

Each piece had to be placed by hand, creating many prisms which all connected to form a symmetrical design that flowed throughout the car. The dimensions of the triangles were specific to replicate that of desirable angles and structural efficiency.



Each piece of the polyester film had to be placed by hand, creating many prisms which all connected to form a symmetrical design that flowed throughout the car.

An award-winning finish

Time was an issue for this project, as it usually is, as Sekanskin planned to unveil the car at the 2016 ImportFest, one of the biggest 'after-market' competitions in the world. As a result of Teixeira's initial sketch on the napkin and his team's execution of the plan, Sekanskin won the 'Baddest Vinyl Wrap' at the festival. After the show, the 'Prismacan' went back into the shop so the team could perfect it even further.

Teixeira was really proud of his team and how they stuck with him through the entire process. The entire team was dedicated to get this project finished on time. When reflecting back on the job, Teixeira said he could not actually count the hours they spent on this project; however, he estimates it was well over 100 hours. ●

With files from Sekanskin. For more information, visit www.sekanskin.com.



10 TIPS

for Vehicle Wrap Success

The performance of a vehicle wrap shop depends on the quality of its work

By Matt Richart

Photos courtesy Roland DGA Corporation

Vehicle wraps continue to grow in popularity as businesses discover the power and effectiveness of taking their advertising and marketing messages 'on the road.' Shops throughout North America are noticing this increase in demand and widening the spectrum of services they offer to include vehicle wraps. Further, operations that already specialize in wraps are growing their businesses by adding more staff and equipment to accommodate greater demand.

The success of any vehicle wrap business depends on the quality of each project. The author suggests 10 valuable tips to cater to customers' wrap needs and avoid costly mistakes.

1. Size up the job

To ensure an accurate quote, wrap installers should request customers to bring their vehicles to the shop in advance for photography and measurement. They should inspect the condition of the paint, and assess the vehicle's contours and body accessories. If the vehicle is not available, they can refer to Pro Vehicle Outlines, a library that provides professional vehicle wrap templates.

Since faulty or defective paint jobs can result in damage when a wrap is removed, a complete inspection of the vehicle is recommended. Installers must review this assessment with the customer and make sure they are aware of any problem areas. They should also have the customer sign the inspection report and keep a copy in the client's file.

When taking photos of the vehicle, installers must ensure the shots are direct (photos should not be taken at angles), and they should also photograph the sides, hood, rear, roof, and bumpers. Sometimes, customers are indecisive as to what part of the vehicle they want to wrap, so having these photos on hand works as a reference and can save time and aggravation. One should also measure the exact height and width of the sides of the vehicle, as well as the hood, rear, roof, and bumpers. Further, installers should record an extra measurement, such as a door, for proper scaling of the graphics. Also, one must pay attention to any body breaks and how these panels would be printed.

2. Know the reason for the wrap

Before starting any job, it is important installers have a clear understanding of their customer's wrap needs. Therefore, it is recommended one gets as much information as possible on the project.

The most important question to ask is, "What is the wrap going to advertise?" Installers must find out whether the goal is to promote a product, brand, or corporate image, or if it is simply an 'attention getter.' One must remember the sides of the vehicle will act like a moving billboard that illustrates a trade or product. To create an effective visual message, one must understand what their customer wants to communicate.

3. Set customer expectations

There are some logistics customers must know about the wrap. Installers should ensure they inform their clients about the life of the media and the company's warranty policies. It is also a good idea to provide them with a wrap 'care sheet' that lists ways to extend the



If the project involves a full wrap, installers will first need to break the design into 'print panels' that scale to the exact measurements of the vehicle.

life of the graphics. One should also walk around the vehicle with their customers and highlight any potential problems or areas that may need to be relief cut or seamed.

4. Price in the challenges

Complexities involved in the printing and installation of a wrap can impact installation time as well as the material requirements for printing (and sometimes reprinting) graphics. One must consider any expected difficulties, such as extreme curves, rivets, door handles, and other protruding parts, as they prepare their estimate and design around these areas to save time on installation.



A successful wrap install is one without noticeable seams, bubbles, or other imperfections.

When pricing any wrap job, it is important to consider the dimensions of the material used, design/production time for the graphics, the required installation time, as well as overhead costs. When designing the wrap, one must always keep their customer's budget in mind.

5. Designing and sizing

If the project involves a full wrap, installers will first need to break the design into 'print panels' that scale to the exact measurements of the vehicle. One can use notes, including the extra door measurement they may have taken, to double-check the accuracy of the print panel measurements. This data should help to develop the design according to the customer's budget. Once the artwork has been approved, one must save their files to a raster image processor (RIP) folder.

6. Get the green light from the customer

When obtaining approval on the colour and image quality of the wrap, installers must make sure to show some media samples (of what they intend to use) to the customer. Also, it is a good idea to get a signed approval as well as a deposit before printing.

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7. Panel decisions

It would be ideal if every wrap job was seamless, but this is far from reality. Sooner or later, one will need to panel or seam the wrap. This brings up a critical decision: whether to use vertical or horizontal panels. Horizontal panels are larger and must be laid bottom to top. If they are laid out straight, the job is essentially complete. On the other hand, vertical panels allow installers to work with smaller sections (usually five) that are easier to handle, but these need to be dry-fit first. Of course, the choice of panels is a matter of personal preference. Regardless of the panel type one selects, installers should be careful not to overstretch their seams as this can compromise registration accuracy.

8. Inspection of graphics/dry-fitting

Being able to control the quality of printing and laminating is key to the wrap installation process. To do so, businesses can produce their prints in-house. At some point, however, one may work with companies that send pre-printed graphics for installation. For installation-only assignments like these, it is important to ensure all the prints needed are present. Installers must remember to dry-fit them to the vehicle to confirm correct sizing.

9. Installation

A successful wrap install is one without noticeable seams, bubbles, or other imperfections. Installers must inspect the quality of the wrap at close range just as a customer would. Most media products feature at least some repositionable technology to help ease the initial tack, so one can remove bubbles during installation. With experience, of course, installers can work with a wider variety of products. After applying the wrap to the vehicle, one must trim away any excess, separate door panels, and cut out door handles and windows. When doing so, technicians must be careful not to cut into the vehicle's paint as the customer will eventually remove the wrap.

10. Double-check the details

A successful wrap requires precision; therefore, attention to detail is critical. Installers must ensure panels are tucked and trimmed properly; if not, they can create problems down the road. One must laminate window perfs to help ensure the safety of the driver during bad weather.



The wrap is not just a promotional vehicle for the customer; it is an advertisement for the wrap installation company as well.

If the wrap is installed in cold weather, installers must keep the vehicle indoors for an extra day before releasing it to the customer. A drop in outside temperature too soon after completion of the wrap can result in media failure.

Keeping the vehicle in the shop overnight is a great rule to follow for other reasons, too. It allows installers to double-check tucked areas, deep contours, body lines, and window perf, as well as any heated or stretched areas. This also allows an opportunity to catch minute details that may have been overlooked, like cutting out the vehicle's gas cap.

Finally, it is recommended one checks the wrap at least six months after the installation to assess its appearance, the durability of the media, and the image quality. One must remember, the wrap is not just a promotional vehicle for the customer; it is an advertisement for the wrap installation company as well. ●

Matt Richart co-founded Digital EFX Wraps in Lexington, Ky., in 2004, and is an expert in wrap design, production, and installation. He is also a veteran instructor for Roland DGA Corporation's 'Born to Wrap' workshops, which are held every year at various locations across the country.

Specialty Film Applications

Designing and protecting vehicle graphics



By Samantha Ashenhurst
Photo courtesy 3M/Meyer Signs

Vehicle wraps have proven themselves an excellent form of outdoor mobile advertising. The application of film graphics to cars, buses, trucks, and boats is an increasingly popular strategy for companies looking to reach a wide audience via a moving billboard.

As this trend grows, more and more sign shops are receiving orders for these unique applications; however, for some signmakers, there are still many uncertainties with regard to how to best handle these requests.

Photo courtesy 3M/Meyer Signs

As this trend grows, more and more sign shops are receiving orders for these unique applications; however, for some signmakers, there are still many uncertainties with regard to how to best handle these requests.



Large, bold graphics are more certain to grab the attention of onlookers.

JMR Graphics, a 3M-certified manufacturer of commercial vehicle wraps, offers answers to common questions related to these applications, as well as advice for how to effectively preserve these graphics in varying weather conditions and tips for safe removal.

Creating eye-catching designs

Vehicle wraps rely on modern digital inkjet printing and skilled installers, but the most important part of the process may be the creation and development of the design.

Before printing or applying graphics, signmakers should take these considerations into account during the design phase.

1. Beware of space

While a computer screen on which wrap graphics are designed is 2D, the vehicle itself is, of course, 3D. So, it is important to be mindful of all of the nooks and crannies of the vehicle—such as door handles—that will affect how the image appears after it has been applied.

2. Be bold

Large, bold graphics are more certain to grab the attention of onlookers. As long as they appear sufficiently professional and appropriate to the client, do not shy away from using dynamic designs.

3. Add a pop of colour

On a similar note, plain designs typically do not attract the most attention, so it is advisable to add some ‘fun’ with bursts of colour, taking advantage of the capabilities of vinyl graphics to show off creative, unique brand images to the public.

4. Do not overcrowd the vehicle

While a dynamic design is desirable, it is also important to beware of including too many images and/or words on the vehicle, which could overwhelm viewers and cause them to lose interest. It is better to use negative space to enhance the overall design.

Common questions about wraps

While the vehicle wrapping business has grown and its benefits are now well-known, new customers tend to ask the same questions before placing an order. It is important for sign shops entering this business to know how to respond.

According to JMR Graphics, the following are the five most commonly asked questions—and answers—about vehicle wraps:

1. How long does it take to install?

The wrap installation process is different for all projects. The estimated time of completion will depend on the type and size of vehicle (e.g. car, truck, or bus) and the intricacy of the wrap design.

With this in mind, sign shops should (a) provide estimates prior to ordering and (b) work closely with clients who need wraps completed by specific dates.

2. What is the process of ordering a vehicle wrap?

There are three phases to ordering a vehicle wrap, which should be explained to clients:

- (a) The design phase, whereby the layout, text, and images are created.
- (b) The production phase, when the design files are printed and prepared for installation on the vehicle.
- (c) The installation phase, at which point the vehicle must be taken in for the application of the graphics.

3. How long will the wrap last?

There are different types of vinyl for different applications, so a sign shop should offer a variety of options based on durability, but most vehicle wraps will last for years with proper care. To reassure the customer, it is a good idea to offer a warranty plan in case of accidents or other damage.

4. Can the wrap be removed?

Any vehicle wrap can be removed, but of course the client will rely on a professional sign shop that can do so safely, preventing any possible damage that could otherwise result from an improper wrap removal.

5. Will the wrap damage the vehicle's paint job?

If a sign shop installs and eventually removes the wrap properly, the vehicle's paint job should not be affected whatsoever. Rather, upon wrap removal, the vehicle should appear the same as it did before.

Protecting applications from winter weather conditions

With the harsh weather of the winter months approaching, many signmakers and their customers wonder if their vehicle wraps will be able to survive the season. The answer is a question of not only effective installation, but also ongoing care.

Given the growing popularity of vehicle wraps, what was once a summer-focused marketing technique has now become a year-round business across Canada. Proper wrapping techniques can help prepare graphics to withstand colder temperatures, but in particular, if a wrap will be applied during the winter, it is important to ensure the installation bay is kept warm enough—at least 10 to 16 C (50 to 60 F).

Photo by Jason Cramp



If a sign shop installs and removes the wrap properly, the vehicle's paint job should not be affected.

Then, to care for the wrap correctly, typical maintenance will include a weekly wash, keeping the vehicle sheltered whenever feasible and fixing any small tears, breaks, or holes in the vinyl as soon as possible.

Rock salt and de-icing chemicals, which are commonly used in the winter to help keep roads clear of snow and ice, can certainly present an issue for wrapped vehicles, as they can begin to eat away at the vinyl and ruin its appearance. To combat this problem, wrapped vehicles driven on public roadways during the winter may need to be washed more frequently than usual.

Shielding wraps from summer heat

Vehicle wraps create brand awareness with repetitive exposure, but in the summer heat, the graphics may fade or peel, leading to a poor representation of the promoted business.



Take advantage of the capabilities of vinyl graphics to show off creative, unique brand images to the public.

Therefore, it is important to ensure the proper care is taken to maintain the appearance of a wrap.

With this in mind, the following are four tips for protecting vehicle wraps against the potentially detrimental effects of prolonged exposure to sunshine:

1. Install graphics vertically, not horizontally

When vehicle wraps' graphic panels are applied horizontally, the configuration of the seams leaves them more susceptible to the effects of heat damage and exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays. Graphics should always be applied vertically, such that they can better withstand the damaging rays of a summer sun.

2. Use wrap-safe car waxes

A car wax is key to maintaining and enhancing a vehicle's bright appearance, but any regular wax containing petroleum distillates will damage a graphic wrap. It is important

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instead to invest in a wrap-safe wax for use after every wash. Some brands offer UV protection for additional prevention of fading in sunlight.

3. Apply protective sprays

In addition to choosing the right car wax, UV protective sprays should be kept at hand. It is a good idea to get into the habit of applying them regularly for an extra coating of protection, particularly in extreme heat.

4. Keep out of the sun whenever possible

Whenever possible, a wrapped vehicle should be parked inside a garage—or at least in the shade—to limit its exposure to sunlight. In open lots and other scenarios where parking in the shade is not possible, the vehicle's direction should be changed each time it is moved, so as to 'distribute' sun exposure as evenly as possible.

Safely removing wraps

Sign shops and other companies equipped to install vehicle wraps also need to be prepared to eventually remove the graphics at the end of their useful life. This requires a combination of the right skills and the right tools.

Isopropyl alcohol or a degreaser may be used to clean the vehicle before and/or after graphic removal. It is important to wear gloves when handling any chemicals and solutions to protect the skin from any possible contact damage.

To start the removal process, a heat gun should be used to warm up the edges of the graphic panels. With exposure to steady, high levels of heat, the vinyl should begin to lift up, without any damage to the vehicle's paint job—but it is important to avoid overheating any plastic parts of the car that could easily melt, such as the headlights and tail lights.

Once the graphic edges begin to lift, they can be slowly pulled away from the vehicle by hand. Gloves should still be worn throughout the process to protect hands from the heat.

The graphics should be lifted at an approximate 15-degree angle and no sharper than a 90-degree angle, so as to avoid leaving any adhesive or residue behind. Again, this work needs to be done slowly. Trying to 'rip' the graphics off quickly like a bandage tends to leave behind broken fragments that will then take even longer to remove.

For any residue that is left behind, a razor blade or plastic scraper should prove useful in removing the final bits. ●

With files from JMR Graphics. For more information, visit www.jmrgraphics.com.