
Tips for Developing and Designing Effective Trade Show Graphics

There's no doubt that marketing through events and trade shows costs cold, hard cash. With so much at stake on the show floor, your organization's first impression is paramount. Your trade show/event graphics are the tool that makes that impression — so make sure they're great!

As you set out to maximize that first impression, there are several important factors to consider as you develop and design your trade show graphics. The two most important components are, first, the simplicity and effectiveness of the marketing message and second, the eye-grabbing power of the graphic design itself. Sure, there are other things to consider, but if you keep your eye on the quality of the message and the quality of the design, you'll likely be a step or two ahead of your competition to begin with.

The Marketing Message

In a private event setting, you may have a captive audience that's already primed and receptive to your sales message. In a trade show environment, however, your audience is usually doing everything possible to avoid contact with anyone who doesn't have precisely what they need. To make matters worse, the usual suspects are generally cruising the aisles quickly — rapidly scanning the booths for evidence of something to be interested in. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that your message quickly penetrates.

To make a long story short — make *your* long story short!

In general, try to keep written copy to a minimum on display graphics. You want to gain attention quickly with your trade show booth, then move in for the real contact with your brilliant sales staff! The booth and its message is just a medium to help your booth staff establish contact with prospects. Simply put, this is best done with a short, sweet and clear benefit-driven message. Not even your organization's logo, unless you're an obvious and already well-recognized industry leader in your field, is as important as this short, clear marketing message. Give people a reason, and a darned good one, to stop and discuss the benefits of working with you.

A concise headline (preferably just a few words) that tells the 'story' of your product along with an optional short secondary phrase, sentence, bullet points, etc. that serves to clarify and drive home the value of the main headline are usually more than enough main copy for most trade show displays. Those elements, standing alone or supported by great images, should do the job.

Avoid 'brochure' displays, which attempt to convey every last bit of information in the corporate brochure and website to every show attendee. No one, or virtually no one, will read them. Furthermore, all that copy works

against your number one goal — quickly grabbing attention. Nothing serves to bore a trade show audience quicker than the thought of having to stop and read a book about your organization's products or services. That's what your brochures and website are for anyway, not to bore of course, but to provide the nitty-gritty details.

At the same time, it's important that your trade show booth graphics are consistent with your organization's other marketing efforts. If you have a great look and simple, clear message already, stick with it. If not, get working! Either way, it's good to remember that consistency brings familiarity, familiarity brings trust, and trust is great way to start a relationship!

Of course you'll want your organization's logo to be there, usually along with important contact/branding information such as your web address, but generally speaking, less is more. Every single element you add to your display, words or images, is something else to potentially distract your audience from your main, and most important, marketing message.

Remember, your trade show display's number one job is to get show attendees to look at your booth, and in turn, your booth staff. If your booth staff achieves eye contact, and uses that contact effectively, it is far more likely that a potentially interested prospect will stop to discuss their possible fit with your company.

Trade Show Graphic Design

Once you have the perfect message figured out, it's time to bring it to life. First and foremost, if you're not a professional graphic designer, seriously consider hiring one. There are many reasons to consider a professional, both artistic and technical. On the artistic side, using an artistic individual or company that has a proven track record is simply more likely to yield you attractive eye-catching graphics. Using a designer experienced in designing for trade show graphics is even better.

On the technical side, the reasons may be even more compelling. Professional designers have the professional tools needed to accomplish trade show graphic design. Trade show graphics can be quite large and require very large electronic files, and the knowledge of how to handle those files, to achieve the best quality. Many consumer level software packages simply do not have the muscle to appropriately prepare these files and many amateur designers lack the appropriate technical knowledge. Check out our graphic file specifications [\[LINK\]](#) here for our specific requirements to get an idea of the kinds of software and files necessary.

If you choose to hire a professional, you can call a Beautiful Displays representative to get a quote on your specific display graphics project. Whether you do it yourself, choose our design services or those of another professional firm, please be sure to familiarize yourself with our graphic file requirements to avoid any problems and delays in production.

From the design standpoint, think 'easy to read in 5 seconds or less.' Whatever that main headline is, design your graphics so it's clear and easy to read. Not just big for big's sake, or with the wildest funkiest new font, but just plain easy to read. Whatever that takes. Seriously, you have mere seconds to capture someone's attention. Consider that carefully when placing words and images on your display graphics.

Generally speaking, put your most important message toward the top of your display in the most prominent position possible. Secondary information can be placed in the middle of the display, with logo and contact information placed depending on its relative importance to you and the rest of the design.

What is needed to begin the trade show graphic design process?

To ensure a smooth design process, it is best to prepare all these materials before beginning the actual design.

- Your logo, preferably in a vector based file format such as an Illustrator eps file, or alternatively in a high resolution image file.
- Your written copy. That perfect headline, sub-headline and/or secondary information should be typed out exactly as you want it to appear, including capitalization and punctuation.
- Any desired contact information. Again, capitalized and punctuated as you want it to appear on the final product.
- Any preferred imagery should be provided in high resolution formats or described and defined clearly so we can search our archives of photography for appropriate material.
- Reference copies of your existing marketing materials that you may want to emulate in your display graphics.
- Communicate any thematic appeal you may desire. i.e. retro, modern, techie, organic, futuristic, etc.
- Communicate any specific design likes or dislikes that may be helpful to our designers.

After we receive your information, our designers will begin bringing your new display graphics to life. Normally, we will generate a first proof within 5 working days, though this may take more or less time depending on the specific graphics and timeline. At that time you will have the opportunity to make revisions and address any design concerns. Ultimately, we will provide a final design proof electronically and will require a signature of approval before production of your trade show graphics will begin.

We will also gladly provide printed proofs at an additional charge if requested. Please keep in mind that printed proofing adds to graphic production time by three to five working days. We offer three types of printed proofs:

A) Full Layout Reduction (\$25 plus shipping) - This proof shows the entire layout and general color output at a reduced size.

B) Actual Size Swatch (\$25 plus shipping) - This proof shows a 12" x 12" swatch of the file printed at actual size and is good for judging the resolution of imbedded imagery or other critical design elements.

C) Color Matching (\$50 per matched color plus shipping) - This proof is used for Pantone and other color matching situations. 10 blocks of color are printed approximating your desired color. You then pick which block best satisfies your matching requirements.

Most of our trade show graphics have a standard turnaround time of 5-7 business days after you provide print ready files or approve your design. Discuss your timeline in advance with your display professional to ensure completion of your display graphics in plenty of time.

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