

Banner design for maximum visibility.

Banners are a very cost effective means of advertising. To get the greatest impact from your banner design, keep in mind they are viewed and created differently than printed pieces. The layout and information found in a print ad is not always appropriate for a banner design. As with all design you should consider your audience, the message, and the feeling your are trying to create. But with sign design you must also consider how the banner or sign will be viewed. Will it be hanging 50' in the air, stretched across the road, or viewed as a backdrop for a trade show booth. Will the audience have several minutes to study the message, or will they drive by at 70mph.

For most banner applications, viewing time is limited, and you should aim to get the most impact possible by creating a clean layout. The logo and graphics should be easily viewable and uncluttered. Too much copy or small text will get lost and may detract from the main message. The less a viewer needs to remember, the more likely it is they will remember your message.

When creating your images consider viewing distance as well as viewing time. Resolution vs. viewing distance is a fair trade-off. A billboard does not need to be printed at 100dpi to look good, but don't ask your digital printer to get the .gif from your web-site and blow it up for your trade show booth. A 150dpi print is appropriate for viewing a banner from 5' or less, while a 75dpi image works fine for a banner that will be viewed from 5-10'. And size does matter. A 4" letters has a viewing distance of 150', 6"-200', 8"-350', 10"-425', and a 12"-525'. It is a good idea to also keep scale in mind. While a 50'x10' banner looks pretty big on the production tables or in your office, it may not look very big hanging from the side of a building or as a backdrop in a large venue.

With today's technology, color reproduction and color matching for short runs is easier than ever. There are hundreds of standard vinyl colors, thermal printing process that can create thousands of solid spot colors, and ink jet and electrostatic printing process that use cmyk to reproduce photos. A skillful use of color will add that special touch that gets your design to pop. Every designer thinking about the message knows how good color selection can enhance or detract from an effective design. There is a wealth of resources available to help you determine what's in today, what color combinations create the most harmony or what shade of yellow best shows your sunny disposition- it is up to you to determine the appropriate colors to sway your targets thinking and create action. But to design an effective banner focus on how to make your main message stand out. In Seattle many banners are viewed on dark or rainy days, subtle color differences may be lost and seem to bleed together and appear fuzzy. For increased visibility lean more towards greater contrast. Black and white have the greatest dark-light contrast, but burgundy, darker reds, blues or greens also provide good contrast against light backgrounds. Using reflective films also boosts visibility in low light conditions.

Outlines and shadows add depth to a flat banner, but picking the wrong color combinations may make your message difficult to focus on. Avoid placing complimentary hues to close together. Red and green or blue and red outline combinations don't work well. When choosing colors from a color chart or swatch book you are making a subjective comparison. Try to view the colors together as they will be used. Place swatches or color samples together and see how they work together. Compare your color possibilities with your computer monitor. Place a few combinations side by side and zoom out. Some designs will quickly become fuzzy while others really hold up.

It does not matter how well you banner was designed if the first blast of high winds rips it to shreds. It is important to use the materials and fabrication appropriate for placement and installation methods. Reinforced vinyl is the best material for exterior use. It is available in a variety of thicknesses. 10-13oz reinforced vinyl is a good general use material for exterior and interior use. For more demanding applications like awnings or oversized banners a 16-20oz material is often the way to go. 8oz material may provide some cost savings for large runs, but it has limited durability. Finishing options like sewn hems, windslits, reinforced perimeters, grommets, and pole pockets also will help your banner hold up to the elements.

Banners can be a great way to compliment your other marketing efforts. By changing them frequently, the banners have even more impact. If the design incorporates a date, price, or time, have that element created in vinyl will allow future changes and updates to be preformed quickly and inexpensively. When hung and stored properly, a banner can last for several years, costing only pennies per impression.

Following these basic guidelines will help you design and create more effective banner layouts.