

14 Tips For a Successful Vehicle Wrap

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The market for vehicle wraps continues to grow at a record pace as businesses increasingly discover the power of this advertising medium.

Savvy shops everywhere are discovering the power of wraps as well. To help others get started, we recently became vehicle graphics instructors for Roland University, part of Roland DGA Corp., and we offer training at our own shop in Louisville, Kentucky, as well. Thousands of wraps and hundreds of students later, we are still reaping the benefits of this fantastic business opportunity - and you can, too.



While there is no substitute for hands-on experience, the following tips may help you produce better wraps, cultivate more satisfied customers, and avoid the common mistakes that can drain your bottom line.

1. Evaluate the Actual Vehicle

When your customer asks for a vehicle wrap, have the vehicle brought into your shop in advance so you can photograph and measure it. This step is important to ensure an accurate quote. The reason we like to see the actual vehicle is to inspect the condition of the paint as well as assess the vehicle's contours and body accessories. If the actual vehicle is not available, then refer to Pro Vehicle Outlines which provide vehicle templates.

2. Photographing the Vehicle

As you photograph the vehicle, take direct shots. Do not photograph at angles. This will help you accurately scale the graphics for the wrap. Photograph every side, the hood, rear, roof and the bumpers. Sometimes a customer is indecisive as to which part of the vehicle will feature the wrap. Having a complete set of photos will save time and aggravation down the road.

3. Measuring the Vehicle

Measure the exact height and width of each side, as well as the hood, rear, roof and bumpers. Record an extra measurement like a door to ensure proper scaling of the graphics. Pay attention to body breaks and keep in mind how you intend to print the panels required.

4. Data Collecting

Brainstorm with your customer. Look at photos and logos, and get as much information as you can on the business. This process will help you create a more effective wrap. The most important question to ask is "What is the wrap going to advertise?" Is it promoting a product or corporate image, or branding a logo? Is it simply an attention getter? The side of the wrap should work like a flash card, using images to illustrate a trade or a product.

5. Set Customer Expectations

Customers should understand some logistics about the wrap itself. Inform your customer about the life of the media and your company policies about the wrap media warranty. Present your customer with a wrap

“care sheet” that discusses how to preserve the quality of the graphics. Walk around the vehicle with your customer and highlight any problem areas. Inform the customer about difficult areas that may need to be relief cut or seamed.

6. Vehicle Inspection

We recommend a complete vehicle inspection to protect your company from faulty or defective paint jobs when it is time to remove the wrap. You should review this inspection with the customer, going over any problem areas together. Have your customer sign the inspection report and keep a copy in the client file.

7. Determine the Difficulty of the Wrap

Every vehicle model has different printing and installation requirements. Consider extreme curves, rivets, door handles and other protruding parts as you prepare your estimate. The complexity of these elements will impact installation time as well as the materials involved in printing (and sometimes reprinting) graphics. Design around these areas to save time on installation.

8. Pricing

Pricing should be determined by three factors: the square footage of the material used, design/production time for the graphics, and installation time. Keep the customer’s budget in mind while designing the wrap.

9. Designing and Sizing

A full wrap requires you to first break the design into “print panels.” These panels must scale to the exact measurements of the vehicle. Refer back to your notes - including the extra door measurement - to double check your exact print panel measurements. Now create the wrap design based on this data and the customer’s budget. Once the artwork is approved, save your files to a RIP (raster image processor) folder.

10. Customer Approval

Show customer samples on the media you intend to use for the wrap to secure approval of the color and image quality. Make sure you get both a signed approval and a deposit before printing begins.

11. Printing

In a perfect world a seamless wrap is our first option, but eventually you have to panel or seam the wrap. The critical question: vertical or horizontal panels? Horizontal panels force you to lay bottom to top and are usually large panels. Get them on straight and you are done. With vertical panels, you can work with smaller sections (usually five) that are easier to handle. However, you need to dry fit vertical panels first. Which is better? It’s your decision. Choose your weapon.

Either way, be careful not to overstretch your seams as this can compromise registration accuracy.

12. Inspection of Graphics/Dry Fitting

Quality of both the printing and laminating is critical, and by producing in-house prints you can control this. As time goes on, you may work with companies that send you pre-printed graphics. For these installation-only jobs, it is important to check to make sure all the prints are present. Dry fit them to the vehicle to confirm correct sizing as well.

13. Installation

You may have the best design, printer and media, but if you don’t have a great installation, you don’t have a great wrap. A great wrap is one without noticeable seams, bubbles or other imperfections. So inspect your wrap at close range. (Remember, that is what your customers are going to do.)

Most wrap media products have some repositionable technology to help ease the initial tack so you can remove bubbles during installation. Today’s repositionable media makes it easier than ever to install a great wrap. As your skills improve, you will find you can work with a wider variety of products. After installing, trim

away the excess wrap, separate door panels, and cut out door handles and windows. Be careful not to cut into the paint because your customer will eventually remove the wrap.

14. Attention to Detail is Key

Paying attention to the details is just as important during the installation process as it is for the vehicle prepping. There are many areas that can be overlooked when installing a wrap. If panels are not tucked and trimmed properly they can create problems down the road. Window perf should be laminated for the safety of the driver during bad weather. During colder seasons, keep the vehicle indoors one extra day before releasing it to the customer. A drop in outside temperature too soon after the installation could result in media failure. Keeping the finished vehicle overnight in your shop is a great standard rule anyway. This allows you to double check tucked areas, deep contours, body lines and window perf, as well as heated or stretched areas. And it helps you remember the small things - like cutting out the customer's gas cap.

Finally, we recommend checking your wrap six months after the installation to assess how it looks. Is the media holding up? How is the image quality? Remember, the wrap is an advertisement for your business, too.

And the more wraps you produce well, the more business will come your way.