

1. What constitutes large format -- and what's all this about grand, wide, or super wide? Are there maximum size limits? Bill Hurley says that anything over a 12" x 18" size could be deemed large format.

Wide format goes up to 72" and after that, you're into grand format. Uni-Graphic's Lizier considers anything poster size (say, 2' x 3') and above to be large format. (Like so many other processes in printing, terms for this specialty don't have universal definitions.)

2. What should every client think about before starting a large-format job?
As with the production of every other print job, both experts agree that you have to know how a piece is going to be used -- and discuss it with your print provider.

Is it going to be outside? Is it going to be against a wall? Is it going to be spread between two poles? How about backlighting? Are you going to repeatedly put it up and take it down?

The usage of your large-format piece will help determine the best substrate (that's material, paper or otherwise) to print it on. Naturally, you have options. "There are so many different types of substrates," noted Lizier, "and at Uni-Graphic, we standardize our substrates for each application. This gives the customer a consistent experience."

3. How about file creation for large format --
This is important stuff for designers to know about, because not all files will work. Hurley explains, "There's raster and there's vector (points versus pixels). For good quality, your image has to be a minimum of 200 dots per inch, and for the absolute BEST quality, text should be a vector image.

"Imagine using the word 'Christmas' in raster. Once you blow it up to size, the letters will become pixilated. For grand format," Hurley added, "you should to be at a minimum of 72 to 100 dpi at size."

4. Do you show proofs for large-format jobs?
For sure. Both men agreed that clients have to see and sign off on proofs. Clients commonly get test strips at size to proof. Uni-Graphic might show a regular proof (either Epson or HP), which is an inkjet proof that's been color calibrated. They might also show a press proof, which is a mini version of the final piece.

Customers come into their facility and literally walk around the proof to get a sense of what the final job will look like. These mini proofs are popular.

5. Are there limitations customers should be aware of?
The main one is color. The large-format images you see are generally inkjet-printed and they only handle process colors, not spot colors. So, if you have a corporate logo in a specific Pantone or spot color that needs to be matched, you may have to compromise.

6. What's new in large format?
There's increasing respect for the environment (everybody cheer, please). Hurley mentioned the growth of "ecosolvent printing." Printers have been using dye inks or UV inks, which include limitations for what you can do with them. For one thing, you need to over-laminate them to protect them.

The new materials are much more durable and often don't require over-laminating. The scratch issue is gone. Lizier says that Uni-Graphic customers are also requesting these biodegradable materials more and more.

7. What else is cool about large-format printing these days?
Lizier says they're now incorporating backlighting with an actual billboard. Also, Uni-Graphic is going to have a proofing system where they can use a full-size billboard at their facility. Customers can come in and view the proof at full size (the space will be grand in every way).

At Infinite Imaging, they've recently incorporated a state-of-the-art cutter, called a Summa. This enables them to do very detailed and exquisite shapes -- as if they had a razor blade on steroids, says Hurley. This will do away with die-cutting at their facilities. Projects no longer have to