Wall graphics

Kimberly Bost

Wall graphics can provide information and establish an atmosphere in retail spaces, office areas, cafes, and exhibitions as well as in dorm rooms and apartments. You can make your own wall graphics with everyday materials such as contact paper and office labels, or you can work with a commercial sign company to create adhesive vinyl graphics from a digital illustration file. Whether used as decoration or to convey a specific message, large-scale graphics transform a flat wall into a billboard or a work of art.

OFFICE LABELS For an inexpensive approach to producing wall graphics, use office labels to create imagery or text. (Note that office labels are difficult to remove from glass, but are usually easy to remove from latex-painted walls. Test your surface to be sure.)

WORD IMAGE
The word "image" was constructed using ¾-inch circular office labels. Each letter is made from a series of large dots. Each large dot is composed of a group of small office label dots.

Create a pattern to construct each circle in the letter, then measure and tape the boundaries of the letters on the wall. Eye or mark the placement of each dot using the pattern as a guide or a stencil.

When designing your graphic, keep in mind the size of the label you will be using, so that you can determine how many labels you will need. It can be helpful to map your graphic onto a grid of dots and then subtract the negative space from the grid to form the image.

Apply labels to clean surface. For a complex design, use an overhead projector, you can project a transparent mock-up of your design on the wall. Alternately, translate the design from paper to the wall by making a grid in pencil or tape.
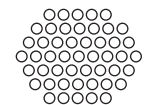*Design: Kim Bost*
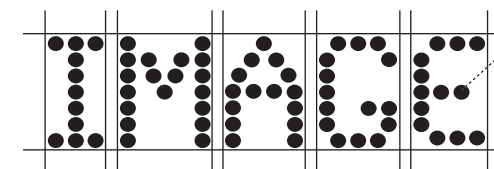
WATER COOLER GUY
Outline a figure in office label dots. Now, there is always someone to talk to around the water cooler.
Design: Judy Cheng

Photography: Nancy Froehlich

PLANNING WALL GRAPHICS

• *Measure the space the graphic will live in. Create your design to scale; for example, one inch equals one foot.*

• *Mock up your design on a digital photograph. This is an easy way to get a sense of how your graphic will look in the space, and it will help you explain your design to other people who may need to see it.*

• *Be sure to mock up your design at actual size, and look at it in the space. Just tape a printout to the wall. Inexperienced designers often make wall text bigger than it needs to be.*

• *Use paint to enhance the effect of applied graphics or to transform the character of an entire space. Paint walls different colors or create stripes or zones of different colors.*

• *When placing graphics, consider the eye level of the viewer. Museums and galleries hang paintings so that the center is 59 or 60 inches from the floor. Depending on the function of your graphics, you may want to place them higher than eye level (to create a "title" for an overall space) or lower (if the room's occupants will primarily be seated).*

CONTACT PAPER Self-adhesive paper is an easy-to-use, inexpensive material that is available in many colors and patterns. Contact paper can wrap around corners, and it can be applied to floors (temporarily) or windows, as well as to painted walls. Teacher-supply companies may have more colors available than your local hardware store.

THINK RELAX
The words "think" and "relax" were cut from contact paper to provide atmosphere in a student lounge. You can work from an exact plan (lettering, logos, geometric elements), or you can cut free-form patterns on the fly (leaves, flowers, birds, clouds, blobs). When creating text, avoid small or complex letterforms and large quantities of text. Place a printed version of your design on top of the contact paper to use as a cutting guide. Secure the printout with tape. Cut through the printout and the contact paper using an Xacto knife or scissors and apply graphics to a clean surface. *Design: Kim Bost*

print out

contact paper
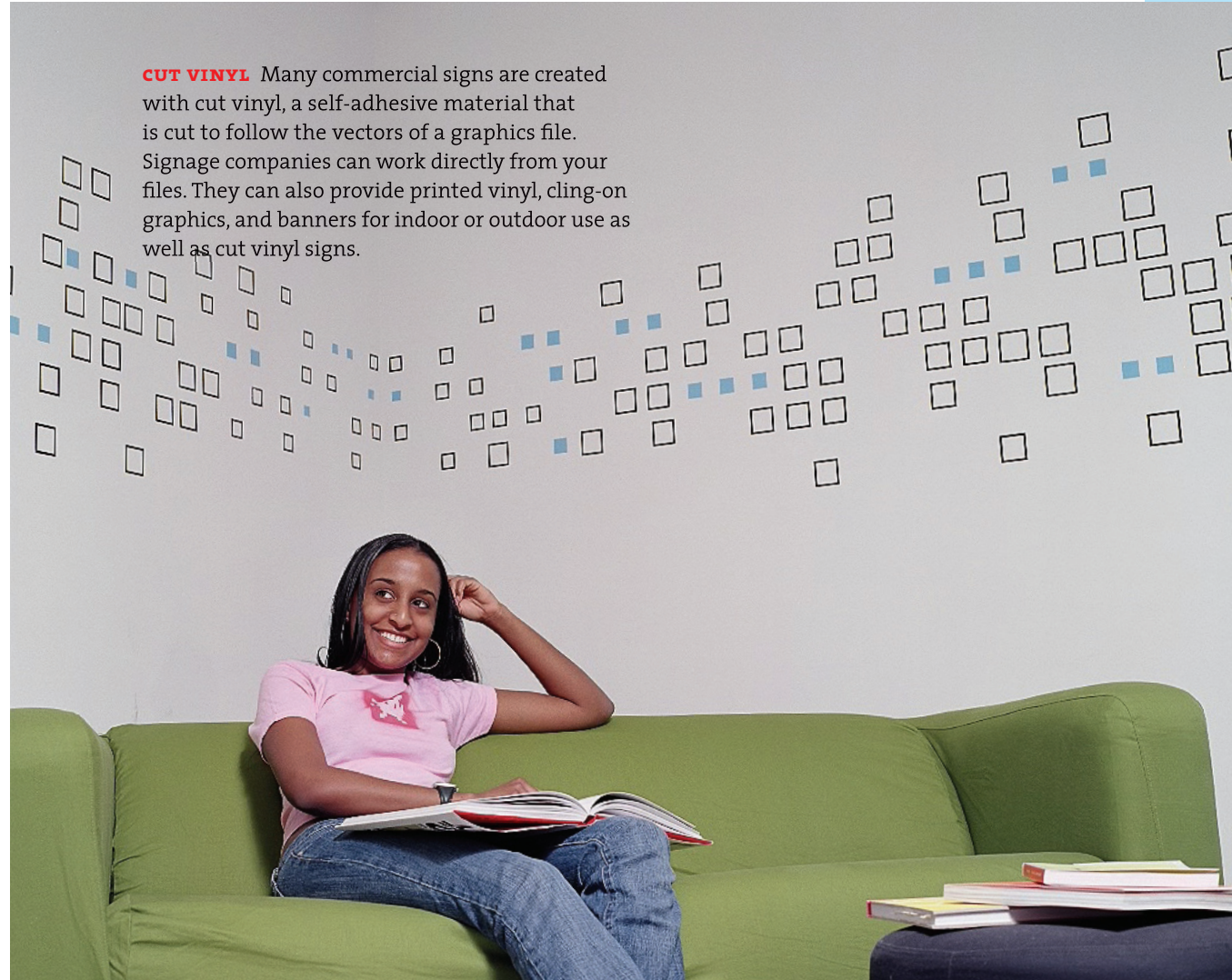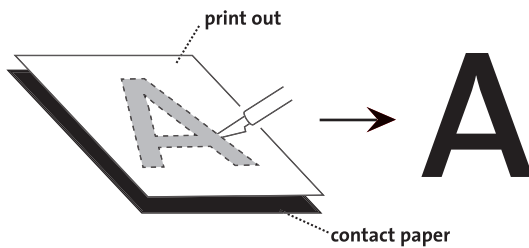
CUT VINYL Many commercial signs are created with cut vinyl, a self-adhesive material that is cut to follow the vectors of a graphics file. Signage companies can work directly from your files. They can also provide printed vinyl, cling-on graphics, and banners for indoor or outdoor use as well as cut vinyl signs.

tacky backing
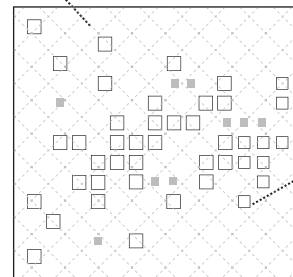
cut vinyl

VINYL PIXELS
This wall graphic was produced by a signage company with custom cut vinyl. Create your design with a vector-based program such as Adobe Illustrator or Corel Draw and provide the file in the format specified by the sign company. Typically, you will be asked to convert all lettering to outlines, so that the company doesn't need access to your fonts. Position graphic on the wall using the low-tack backing sheet that is provided with the cut vinyl. Burnish the graphics into place and remove backing. *Design: Kimberly Bost*