



Using Magnetic-Receptive Media to Create the Next Generation of Retail Signage



“It’s not a magnet,” I said to the woman at our trade show booth when asked if she could take the digitally-printed and die-cut flower home to stick on her refrigerator.

“Well if it’s not a magnet,” the woman said, “Then what is it and how is it sticking to your booth?”

“It’s magnetic-receptive print media,” I replied.

The look of confusion was still on her face. Many people don’t understand how magnetic-receptive works right away and this provides the perfect opportunity for a quick demonstration. When the demo was over, I knew this prospect had just been turned into a future customer.

Defining Magnetic-Receptive Media

Magnetic-receptive, simply put, can be defined as something that will stick to a magnet, just like steel or iron. The concept behind magnetic-receptive media is to coat printable films with micro-iron particles. So, instead of being a magnet itself, the substrate is a thin, high-quality print film that can then be adhered to a magnet, using a simple system.

To describe the concept in more detail, magnetic-receptive media is a flexible digital or analog printing material with a coating on the back side containing iron

Magnetic-receptive media is more cost effective, more environmentally responsible and easier to work with than the vinyl-based graphic installations that many retailers have traditionally worked with, while avoiding the shortcomings associated with other direct print magnetic media.

particles. The front side of the print media can be designed with coatings compatible with most digital and analog print devices and does not require any special knowledge to be able to print beautiful, high-quality images. When one sees a roll of magnetic-receptive print media, it is obvious which side is which — the magnetic-receptive coating on the back is dark gray or black and the print side is white.

But keep in mind, magnetic-receptive is not the same as magnet. Just like anything else made of iron or steel, be it a hammer or nails, it won’t stick to a refrigerator. Something else is needed for that to happen; that’s where the magnet comes in.

Magnetic-Receptive Graphics Systems

To make everything work effectively, a system made of two, or sometimes three, basic components is needed:

1. A wall or fixture surface prepared to receive roll or sheet magnet

Wall surfaces can be activated by painting them with a micro-iron magnetic-receptive paint. This grayish-black paint contains micro-iron that allows a magnetic sheet to stick to the wall. Graphic fixtures and frames typically don’t need to be painted; in that case, skip to step two below.

2. The flexible roll or sheet magnet itself

These magnets are relatively thin, flexible rolls or sheets of magnetic film sold in widths of up to 24 inches. Some have adhesive on the backside, making them easy to apply to the backing in fixtures or frames, while others are double-sided where one side applies to a fixture or to magnetic-receptive paint on walls (see step one above). The side of



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the magnet facing away from the fixture or wall receives the graphic. Some magnets also have a built in locking system so when two pieces of magnet are joined together, they align themselves perfectly and lock into place, allowing for layering of light graphic fixtures on top of base magnetic-receptive images. This layering can create stunning three-dimensional graphics.

3. The magnetic-receptive print media

Finally, on top of the previously mentioned sub-layers is the printed graphic media which has the magnetic-receptive coating on the reverse surface so it will stick to the magnet previously installed in the fixture or on the wall. The range of product options for this receptive media continues to grow based on the different applications they are geared for.

White polyester films tend to be ideal in scenarios where high gloss and heat stability are paramount, while polypropylene films or synthetic papers work well where lower gloss and economic factors may be driving the choice. New materials that are fabric-based will be hitting the market in 2011 with a range of products that can be used for unique-looking POS signage, wall coverings, art reproductions and other textured signage applications.

The Advantages of Magnetic-Receptive Media

Below is a list of the advantages that magnetic-receptive media provides when compared to other traditional print media such as printing direct to rigid board, adhesive-backed vinyl or even printing directly onto magnetic films.

- **Easy to install graphics** — Magnetic-receptive media is designed to be wrinkle free and easy to remove, reposition and change-out. Rolling the thin print film onto the desired display surface takes only a few seconds and requires no installation expertise — so even in-store personnel can do it with flawless results every time.
- **Drastically reduced shipping costs** — Printing on magnetic-receptive media, once the fixture is installed, considerably reduces shipping costs. By implementing magnetic-receptive roll media, retailers have cut shipping costs associated with in-store signage by more than 50 percent and reduced the hassle of the incidences of damage in transit. Unlike directly printing to magnets, magnetic-receptive media is six times lighter than many printable magnets, making it easy to install and cost-effective to ship.

• **High quality** — Magnet-receptive media has optimized print surfaces for creating photo-quality graphics. Unlike printing directly onto magnets — which are typically thick and limited in image size and quality — printers can use this thin, smooth and flexible substrate, which is similar to other commonly-used films and is low profile. Using magnet-receptive media also reduces the chances of having dings or corner damage occur during shipping and installation.

• **Ideal for layering** — Magnetic-receptive graphics can be overlaid for as many as three-plus layers, making it great for applying event-based specials or utilizing die cut overlays or three-dimensional fixtures on top of base image. Additionally, magnetic-receptive systems allow for the layering of graphics onto flat or curved surfaces, so it becomes possible to change various elements of a retail display based on different seasons and promotional campaigns.

• **Cost savings** — Using magnetic-receptive media can save 30 percent or more on total cost of ownership compared to graphics installed on board or vinyl. The more the images are changed, the greater the savings. Retailers have turned this saving into increased graphic change-outs in order to keep a fresh look in-store. Although printing directly to board has an economic advantage to printing graphics that later are mounted to board, this type of visual display can be relatively bulky and expensive to ship and, once it has been delivered, difficult and time-consuming to install in-store and prone to edge damage.

• **Environmentally friendly and recyclable** — Typically, graphics printed on vinyl are not reusable. As a result, once they are outdated the retailer must first remove, and then discard all materials, and start the entire process over again by ordering completely new graphics. This is a very expensive and wasteful practice.

Magnetic-receptive materials reduce waste because graphics are repositionable and waste can also be reduced significantly by creating 'layerable' graphics, which can be updated without having to replace their frames, fasteners and/or adhesives. An added benefit of mag-

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netic-receptive media is its ability to be recycled into energy or new steel due to the high iron content in the magnetic-receptive coating, so future change-outs will not mean sending retired graphics into a landfill.

In fact, a hybrid car can be produced for every 1.3 tons of ferrous metals extracted from magnetic-receptive print media. True, that's a lot of print media to recycle but better than in a landfill! It's always best to contact the manufacturers of the magnetic-receptive print films to determine if they support these "retired graphics" recycling programs.

Real-World Results: Oakley's Magnetic-Receptive Graphics Program

Oakley, a leading retailer of athletic goggles, sunglasses, prescription eyewear, apparel, footwear and accessories, began using a magnetic-receptive graphic system in 2005, replacing its earlier foam board POP displays. Before this project's implementation, every time Oakley changed its POP assets, the company was required to send flat panel display shipments weighing 60 pounds or more to each store. Invariably, some of these shipments were damaged in transit, so further resources were needed to recoup those losses.

By implementing magnetic-receptive graphics, Oakley cut shipping costs associated with in-store signage by more than 50 percent and eliminated the hassle of the incidences of damage in transit. It also achieved greater flexibility in changing out photo-quality promotional graphics. Now, whenever POP assets are updated, Oakley store employees replace the display faces with new graphics printed on magnetic-receptive materials. The installations are easier than ever, as the in-store employees simply unroll the media onto the sign surfaces and the job is done.

Changing In-Store Signage Forever

Magnetic-receptive graphic systems are changing the way in-store graphics are being installed and subsequent campaigns are rolled out. The ability to use in-store personnel to change out graphics, combined with cost savings in shipping and labor, is driving demand in many different applications and market channels. Add other features like recyclability, high quality, and the ability



Magnetic-receptive graphic display in an Oakley retail store

to layer graphics into a unique presentation style and it's easy to understand why many major international brand owners have become believers in magnetic-receptive graphic systems.

Daniel Halkyard serves as director of marketing and product management at Visual Magnetics. In this role, Halkyard is responsible for managing Visual Magnetics' marketing activities, including existing and new product management, promotion and positioning, pricing and channel management for the rapidly-growing Visual Magnetics product line.

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