



Defining and  
Maximizing Value and  
ROI with **Wide-format  
Print Applications**

**RICOH**

# Defining and Maximizing Value and ROI with **Wide-format Print Applications**

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For wide-format print service providers (PSPs), capitalizing on high-demand applications that deliver ample profits and premium value is an ongoing and ever-evolving objective. In a competitive industry, wide-format applications have established a well-earned reputation for delivering a strong return on investment for print customers. But for established sign and display graphic printers and commercial printers seeking to enter this lucrative space, standing out from the competition requires both an ability to produce these eye-catching applications and taking a creative and collaborative approach with customers in deploying them.

While certain applications are in high demand, understanding how to best serve a client's unique needs is key to delivering premium value. In this white paper, the latest trends in wide-format applications will be highlighted, supported by NAPCO Research survey data and *Wide-format Impressions* articles, with insights into how to maximize profit and customers' return on their investment.

## MAXIMIZING VALUE OF IN-DEMAND APPLICATIONS

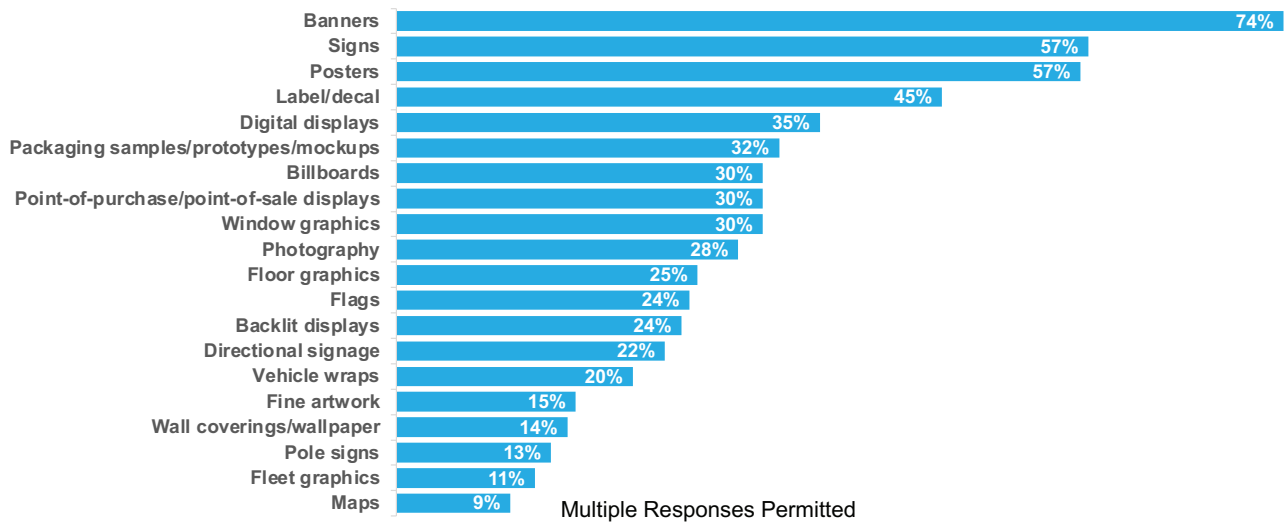
According to NAPCO Research's 2023 report, [\*Who Buys Wide-format Display Graphics: How, from Whom, and Why\*](#), wide-format purchasers invest in several printed applications. Unsurprisingly, banners, signs, and posters top the list (Figure 1), but multiple other wide-format products are purchased by 30% or more of respondents, including:

- **Label/decal:** 45%
- **Digital displays:** 35%
- **Billboards:** 30%
- **Point of purchase/point of sale displays:** 30%
- **Window graphics:** 30%



Figure 1: Several Wide-format Applications in Demand

Q. What types of sign and display graphics does your company purchase?



n=148 Purchasers or purchase influencers of sign and display graphics  
Source: Who Buys Sign and Display Graphics, NAPCO Research 2023

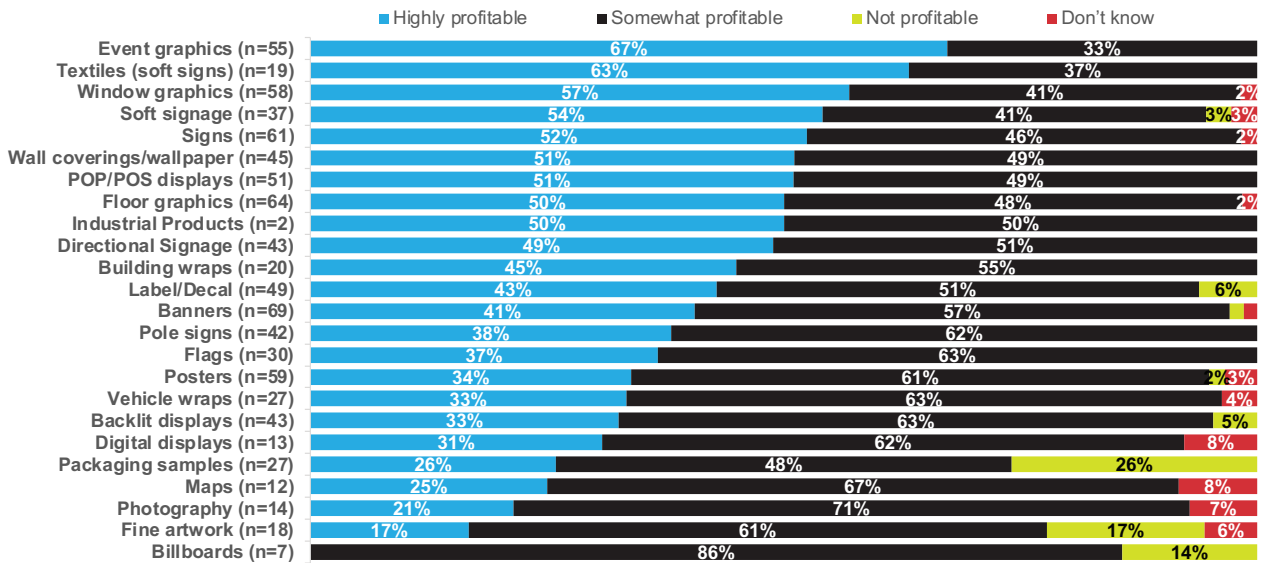


Regardless of the application, however, wide-format print providers report profitability across the board. In the 2023 Who Buys Wide-format study, all wide-format applications being produced are at least somewhat profitable to PSPs (Figure 2), with several being noted by a large portion of the survey respondents as being highly profitable. Exploring the most profitable applications reveals some interesting insights.

At the top of the profitability chart, event graphics are reported as profitable by all respondents that produce them, with more than two-thirds (67%) stating they are highly profitable. This is an encouraging sign for the industry, as live events have made a strong comeback after several years of pandemic-induced cancellations. Following close behind event graphics, printed textiles represent another application that was reported to be profitable by 100% of respondents producing them, with 63% stating they were highly profitable. Similarly, soft signage was reported as profitable by 94% of respondents, with 54% stating it is highly profitable.

Figure 2: Wide-format PSPs Report Strong Profits

Q. How would you describe the profitability of the sign and display graphic products your organization offers?



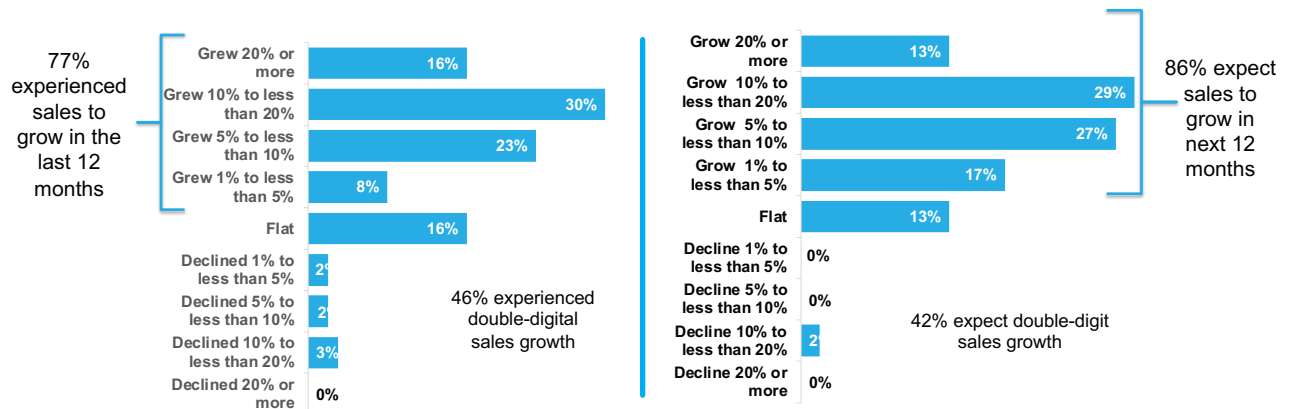
n=75 Print Providers

Source: Who Buys Sign and Display Graphics, NAPCO Research 2023

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In addition to profitability, wide-format PSPs report strong sales growth driven by their wide-format application offerings, along with positive sales expectations for the future. According to NAPCO Research's 2024 report *Selling Wide-format Printing*, 77% of respondents reported sales growth in the preceding 12 months, with 46% citing double-digit sales growth. Meanwhile, wide-format PSPs are optimistic for the year ahead, with 86% expecting sales growth in the next 12 months and 42% indicating expectations of double-digit growth.

Figure 3: Growth and Optimism in Wide-format Sales



n=63 Providers of Wide-format Printing

Source: Selling Wide-format Printing, NAPCO Research 2024

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## WIDE-FORMAT GRAPHICS SET THE SCENE

Print applications are just one portion of the sales equation, however, in order to truly maximize profitable and high-value opportunities, wide-format PSPs should engage in a collaborative process with their customers to deploy these applications in ways they will be the most effective. With event graphics, they are often thought of as tools to capture attention in high traffic settings such as trade shows, conferences, or major performances. However, several vertical market segments can benefit from event graphics, particularly as businesses continue to reengage with consumers. Museums for example, have long been reliable customers for wide-format applications due to their need for directional signage, exhibit graphics, and even temporary soft signage and other graphics to support a current installation. But, as [Wide-format Impressions reports](#), as museums continue to rebound from the pandemic, they are serving as event venues, both for traditional events and for experiential initiatives. When creating non-exhibit graphics however, PSPs must work with their customers to ensure branding stays consistent. As Mark Walhimer, managing partner of museum exhibition design firm Museum Planning LLC, explained to *Wide-format Impressions*, among the objectives for non-exhibit graphics is to encourage repeat visitors.

“The goal is to provide consistent messaging at all touchpoints and create meaningful intellectual, emotional, and experiential value that will motivate visitors to return to the museum in the future,” he says.

While event graphics present opportunities to expand on brand messaging, other high-demand, high-value applications have gained popularity with their ability to enhance the consumer experience. Window graphics, for example, were deemed profitable by 98% of Who Buys Wide-format PSP respondents that produce them, while being purchased by 30% of buyer respondents.

The retail segment has been a long-time user of window graphics, but as e-commerce usage has skyrocketed among consumers, brick-and-mortar destinations have found that revamping their graphics can help lure consumers that may prefer a full retail experience, rather than one that is simply transactional. As detailed in an [April 2024 Wide-format Impressions article](#) on retail graphics, scene setting has become an effective strategy for stores. Window graphics, floor graphics, and wallcoverings can all contribute to the full transformation of an in-store environment.

Window graphics can also have a powerful effect in creating a warm, welcoming, and inviting exterior, which can be highly beneficial in a health care setting, for example. In a [March 2024 article](#), *Wide-format Impressions* details the approach taken by Sepia Studio, a Chicago-based graphic design studio and branding agency and division of Cushing & Co., in its production of window graphics for North Shore Pediatric Therapy. The objective for the graphics was to create external branding for the client, a provider of occupational therapy, speech therapy, and other services to children with disabilities. The graphics had to reflect the diversity of North Shore Pediatric Therapy’s patients, with a nature-based theme and images of children taking part in the types of activities their therapy aims to help them with. Once installed, the graphics were a hit, and *Wide-format Impressions* reports Sepia Studio was hired to produce graphics for the clients’ other locations.

“Environmental graphics for kids is a fun market to be in because there are so many different fields and audiences,” Amanda Eich, design director for Sepia Studio, told *Wide-format Impressions*. “The messaging is so positive, too, and the clients are great.”

## EXPLORING TEXTILES AND SOFT SIGNAGE

While value and profitability can be achieved with applications produced on familiar substrates, wide-format PSPs should also be aware of the opportunities presented by fabric substrates. Printing on textiles and soft signage material is in high demand and can be utilized in a number of settings and by several market segments, but it is important to keep the specific needs of each in mind.

For example, an [August 2024 Wide-format Impressions article](#) outlines the potential for printed fabrics in the hospitality and retail segments. With 63% of textile printers reporting high profitability of the application in the Who Buys Wide-format study, this is an enticing opportunity. But before making a move into textiles, understanding how to maximize the potential for applications in this space is essential.

Because the hospitality and retail segments typically indicate high-traffic settings, durability and longevity of printed textiles is a key factor. This is where substrate selection comes into play, and as Kristen Dettoni, founder of Design Pool, an online design library that connects designers and printers, shares in the Wide-format Impressions article, coated and woven fabrics are often the ideal materials for use in printed upholstery in hospitality and retail environments.

“There is a split of about 40% woven and 60% coated fabrics in high-traffic areas such as hospitality and retail spaces,” Dettoni says. “Coated fabrics, such as vinyl and polyurethanes, have a slightly higher percentage because they can be easily cleaned with water. Woven fabrics had the perception of not being as durable, but over the years, there has been a lot of progress made with stain repellents and special back coatings to enhance the performance of woven fabrics to compete with coated fabrics for cleanability and durability in high-traffic spaces.”

With soft signage, brands and marketers are becoming increasingly cognizant and appreciative of the application’s benefits over rigid signage and signage printed on other flexible materials, such as vinyl. Specifically, soft signage printed on fabrics provides a high-end, luxury look, and from a functional perspective, is not subject to the creasing and wrinkling that can occur with other substrates. Additionally, the portability and light weight of soft signage helps end users easily transport it to various events and destinations while reducing shipping costs.

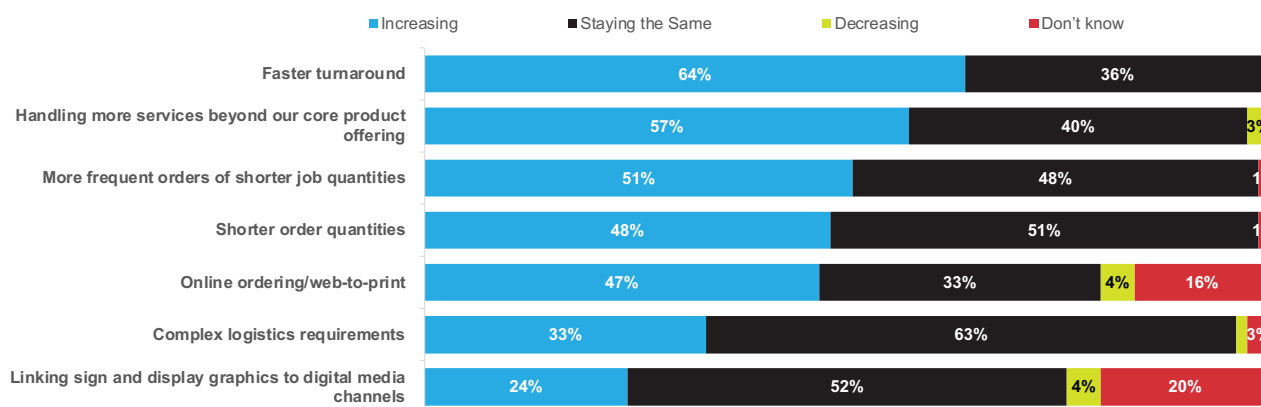
“One of the great advantages of soft signage or textiles is that they’re highly flexible,” Cain Goettelman, president of FLS Banners in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, [told Wide-format Impressions](#). “You can fold them up; they’re easy to store. If you’re all of a sudden going to start getting creases in the hems because you have some sort of hard plastic or something that wasn’t going to relax nicely, [that becomes a problem].”

## INCREASING VALUE WITH STAND-OUT SERVICE

The reality in most printing segments, sign and display graphics included, is that print quality is hardly a differentiator among PSPs. With equipment and technology advancements leveling the print quality playing field, those seeking to take a leadership position in wide-format printing need to separate themselves from the pack with superior service. Understanding the key trends that are influencing sign and display graphic purchasers can help wide-format PSPs provide optimum value to their customers.

Figure 4: Value Extends Beyond Applications

**Q. Please indicate whether demand for the following requirements is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same.**



n=75 Print Providers

Source: Who Buys Sign and Display Graphics, NAPCO Research 2023

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In the Who Buys Wide-format study, PSPs were asked to indicate which customer demands they deemed to be on the rise. Faster turnarounds were at the top of the list (Figure 4), with 64% of respondents stating that customers are more frequently asking to receive their printed work in a shorter amount of time. For print service providers struggling with fast turnaround demands, particularly as workforce difficulties continue to mount, it is imperative to identify inefficient areas of the workflow and address them accordingly. Implementing automation where possible, whether via software or production equipment, can help PSPs work more effectively and help deliver their work within the specified timeframe.

In addition to being asked to work faster, sign and display graphic printers are being saddled with more types of work. More than half of respondents (57%) stated that demand for services beyond their core product offering is increasing. This is likely reflective of brands and marketers seeking ways to stand out beyond traditional banners and signs and why there has been an influx in production of soft signage, wall coverings, window graphics, and other emerging wide-format applications. For PSPs seeking to maintain their value to their customers, diversifying their product offerings is important, and exploring the equipment and substrates that can lead to successfully integrating new products will be essential.

Additionally, like most print segments, sign and display graphic printers are facing an increased demand for more frequent orders at lower quantities (51%). The challenge of producing an influx of short runs is ensuring changeovers can happen quickly on printing and finishing equipment, and that with the current speeds of digital wide-format printers, that finishing can keep up. For example, as explained in a [February 2024 Wide-format Impressions](#) article, when sewing soft signage, a bottleneck can occur if the sewing department cannot keep up with the pace of printed output. This is an area in which automation can be highly beneficial, as the value customers place on efficiency continues to increase.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Value in wide-format printing is created in multiple ways. Attracting consumers' attention, creating welcoming environments, and meeting clients' service needs all play an integral role in delivering a return on a customer's investment.

Understanding which applications are in high demand, including decals, digital displays, billboards, POP/POS displays, window graphics, and soft signage can help steer PSPs toward investment in the equipment and expertise needed to produce these products. But beyond having the equipment on hand and knowledge of in-demand applications, collaboration with customers to formulate the graphics to enhance the setting they will be used in is key to establishing value.

For example, a variety of venues have become event hosts in recent years, including museums, restaurants, and hospitality businesses. In addition to utilizing graphics to enhance their static displays, pop up events and after-hours gatherings can all be enhanced with graphics that can then drive repeat business with the help of a powerful branding campaign.

The rise of printed textiles and soft signage is also becoming hard to ignore for sign and display graphics providers, as brands and marketers invest in these applications for their high-end appearance, wrinkle-resistance, light weight and portability. Understanding the need for durable textiles in high-traffic restaurant and hospitality spaces is key to maximizing the value of these applications.

Lastly, value extends beyond the printed application and into the service that PSPs can provide their customers. NAPCO Research survey data shows that efficiency in production and the ability to take on more orders in lower volumes is key to delivering value to clients. Exploring automation solutions and identifying production slowdowns and bottlenecks is key to meeting customers' turnaround time demands and ensuring they are not kept waiting. Wide-format sign and display graphics are a lucrative opportunity for print service providers. But as more printers enter the segment and competition increases, becoming a high-value provider will be key to earning consistent, repeat business.



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