

## PORTABLE EXHIBITS

**Q** I've been charged with buying my company's first pop-up exhibit. What are some of the key things I need to know about pop-ups and vendor selection before I make my first purchase?

**A** Simply by asking questions, you've already taken the first step toward a successful purchase. You'd be surprised how many people merely Google "pop-up display," compare prices, and place an online order — knowing little or nothing about the quality of the materials, graphics, and services they're purchasing and often even less about the vendor.

When it comes to selecting a pop-up display, the old adage rings true: "You get what you pay for." Pop-up prices vary dramatically, depending mostly on the quality of the materials and service provided. While a low-price option may be exactly what you need, you'll want to make a sound, informed decision. Here are several things to consider before you make your first purchase.

**Frame Quality**

Most pop-up frames comprise two main components: rods or tubes, and connectors (sometimes called hubs), which connect the rods or tubes. The materials used to make these components impact the quality of your booth.

Lower-priced pop-ups are almost always made of aluminum tubes that are riveted to a hub. While aluminum is lightweight, it has its drawbacks. If



the frame is bent during use, it can become unbalanced, which not only makes for an unstable and sometimes unsightly exhibit, but can also throw your graphics out of alignment.

Most high-end pop-ups are made of Fiberglas or carbon-fiber rods. These materials also are lightweight, but they are almost indestructible and do not bend permanently.

Hub quality also varies greatly. Some hubs are made of plastic and engineered to release upon impact instead of breaking. So if a rod comes undone, it can simply be reinserted on the fly. The same is not true with riveted hubs. The only remedy for a broken rivet is to send the frame back to the supplier for repair or replacement. If a rivet breaks at the show, you may end up with misaligned graphics or, worse yet, your damaged frame may be rendered entirely useless, leaving you without an exhibit altogether.

**Graphics**

While your frame is your exhibit's backbone, your graphics are the face of not only your exhibit, but also your company and brand. So selecting appropriate graphics is critical.

There are many things to consider when purchasing graphics — including everything from image and text

selection to lighting, color matching, materials, file formats, file sizes, fonts, and so on. However, as a new exhibitor, you don't need to be a graphics expert. Rather, you need to find a vendor with the knowledge and willingness to help you make the right decisions — one with which you can develop a long-term relationship that extends beyond your first purchase and through your program's growth and changes.

Graphics vendors typically fall into one of these four groups: 1) exhibit or graphics suppliers that sell only fabric panels rather than large-format graphics, 2) exhibit suppliers that outsource graphics production and resell them to clients, 3) exhibit vendors that produce multiple types of graphics in-house, and 4) graphics suppliers that sell only graphics, rather than entire exhibits.

While you may need only a fabric-panel supplier, most new exhibitors want a graphics/exhibit vendor with a wide range of knowledge and a consultative approach to client communication. For example, vendors should be willing and able to talk to you about the pros and cons of fabric graphics vs. laminated options, as well as the problems associated with inkjet, Lambda, paper substrate choices, and so on. And when it comes to graphics formats, file types, and sizes, you need a supplier that not only knows its stuff, but that can communicate requirements in a language even Elmo could understand.

As a new exhibitor, ask a lot of these types of basic graphics questions before you sign on the dotted line. The vendor's willingness to answer your questions and the thoroughness of the answers provided will clue you in to the service you can expect down the road. If the vendor becomes impatient before you've made a purchase, imagine the service you'll get after it has pocketed your cash.

**Warranties**

As you may have guessed, a \$700 pop-up doesn't carry the same warranty as a \$5,000 pop-up. While your needs may not necessitate a lengthy warranty, you need to understand your options before you buy. Warranty packages usually cover the frame and graphics separately and range from guaranteeing nothing at all to covering some parts and materials for a lifetime. Prior to purchasing the exhibit, ask the vendor to explain all of their warranty options, and ask for a detailed list of what materials and components the warranty covers.

Some vendors sell strictly pop-up exhibits, while others offer a variety of these add-ons to complement your display. Before you make your purchase, think about all possible uses for your pop-up, and ask what add-ons your vendor can supply to support these needs. Then see how the cost of these add-ons compares to other vendors.

**Vendor History**

Many vendors sell pop-up displays; however, much like their products, many companies pop up today and are gone tomorrow — often leaving you with a questionable warranty and no means of service. Prior to purchase, be sure to investigate the vendor's history in terms of not only the number of years it has been in business but also how long it has maintained its clients — a factor that will provide valuable insight into the level of service it provides over the long haul.

**Add-On Features**

Most pop-up booth programs include far more than a frame and some graphics. Add-on features include everything from reception desks and lighting to banner systems and multi-media options.

**HELP WANTED**

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