

CASE HISTORY



Making History: The Amtrak Acela Train Wrap

Self-Adhesive Films Promote Year that Shaped a Generation, One Stop at a Time

Who would have thought the side of a train could evoke memories from America's past?

But an Acela Amtrak train, flashing by at 150 mph up the Northeast Corridor, carries images of Richard Nixon, Jimmy Hendrix, Goldie Hawn, among others, celebrating a year that changed the world and targeting the millions of commuters as an audience for The History Channel's premiere of "1968 with Tom Brokaw".

The History Channel banked on it; it was the first to work with Amtrak to use the exterior of the Acela train as advertising space. Making it happen meant wrapping 18,000 square feet of metal and windows that are pummeled regularly by all sorts of elements at high speeds in both directions.



Along with History Channel officials, the project's print and installation company, a major FLEXcon customer, wondered what material would yield the best results for such a unique marketing campaign.

The train wrap promotion was the brainchild of Steve Feder, President of Corporate Image Media, which helps Amtrak market advertising opportunities. Feder had been discussing the full-wrap idea with The History Channel and the printing and installation company for some time. Aside from the actual application, he said a balance of boosting revenue sources while maintaining public perception was essential.

"We've discussed this possibility for a number of years, but were just waiting for the right advertising partner," Feder explains. "We felt The History Channel was ideal for launching this advertising revenue possibility because they appeal to the business traveler that the high-speed train services and The History Channel content is non-controversial."

The Acela Express Train travels the Northeast Corridor from Boston to New York to Washington, D.C., the nation's busiest route with more than 1,700 trains operating on some portion of the corridor each day. The Acela's eight car configuration, six cars and two locomotives, travels in both directions and can reach speeds of 150 mph. Ridership of this premier service topped 3.1 million in 2007, an increase of 20 percent over the previous year. The Acela largely services business travelers.

The Emotion, the Graphics, the Show

The train wrap graphics depicted “1968 with Tom Brokaw” as an emotional time in history. The feature-length History Channel special was based on Brokaw’s book, “Boom!: Voices of the Sixties, Personal Reflections of the 60s and Today”. From music to politics, to issues of feminism, race and war, 1968 was an epic year of tragedy and transformation. Brokaw draws on his decades of experience as a journalist and revisits the scenes of these iconic events, exploring how these historical moments still impact our lives today.

The graphics are just as intense in color and imagery, with photos of Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, the Vietnam War, Jimmy Hendrix and others who represent our past. The History Channel provided TIFF files to the printer’s creative staff. It took about a week to properly rework the 200 gigabyte files for output.



A large amount of color intensity and density were obvious in the production of the panels. Because of this, the printer had concerns about the ink and print device all working in harmony to yield the fantastic imagery.

The material needed to receive the ink well in order to produce this result with no variance in panel color consistency. One of the key visual features requiring precise graphic capability for the entire wrap was a vertical or horizontal line across the bottom of the graphic that ran the total length of the train. Any variation in the print image quality would easily be shown on this line.

According to an official at the print and installation company, the overall tonality of the base white of FLEXcon's material enhanced the graphics. The aggressive adhesive performance, overlamine and stable release liner also contributed to the project's success.

Graphics production took one eight-hour shift on one of two HP Scitex TJ8300 machines. The wrap used FLEXcon's Bus and Train Wrap system, a CBS Outdoor approved system. The portions of the train's metal exterior used a combination of a white printable base film (BUSart™ V 400 F White A-69 90 PFW BA) and luster overlamine (BUSart™ OV5020L). The product's adhesive offers superior performance for repositionability of the film during installation, clean removability at the conclusion of the promotion, and exceptional bond to painted metal and stainless steel. The film conforms to the shape of the bus or train while providing good hiding power, and offers excellent printability. To withstand abrasion and



other impacts of the exterior environment, the overlamine is important to protect the graphics. The final piece of the system – the release liner – has excellent layflat properties for efficient printing and handling.

The window portions of the train were wrapped using FLEXcon's SEETHRU-SIGN® STSWBF2 base film – a perforated white/black flexible vinyl that provides optical clarity for see-through viewing from the inside out and graphic visibility when viewing from the outside in.

Installation Challenges

The printing and installation company faced multiple challenges in accomplishing the task at hand. The tight timeline involved off-site printing, determining a unique installation technique and then just 48 hours to transform the train. Normally, an installation of this caliber would take about a week and be completed at a facility the firm has near Washington, D.C., should problems occur.

The wrap involved 485 panels of graphics to cover the 18,000 square feet of space - a lot of material to handle and finish on site. Three hundred fifty of the panels were solid vinyl and 135 used a see-through window material. For the short installation time, there were concerns over whether installers would begin to fatigue, but the ease of installation of the FLEXcon materials offered reprieve. Installers told FLEXcon officials that the material was easy to manage.

FLEXcon material does not have memory, therefore it doesn't curl. The on-site trimmers finished the panels for installation without having to grapple with the material.

To maintain film integrity, adhesive selection was critical for a vehicle traveling at high speed. In a typical vehicle wrap installation, the vehicle is usually traveling in one direction at its highest speed. This usually calls for the conventional approach of applying the first panel at the back of the vehicle and then overlapping the rest, leaving the actual edge of the material always facing the back, which assures there will be no lip to potentially get picked up from the wind and rip the vinyl graphic material. With a train that traveled in both directions, this method could not be applied. The installer decided to work from dead center, noting that with an installation of this magnitude and uniqueness, it is ultimately the material that makes the difference in the success.

The Buzz and Aftermath Success

The launch of this history-making event created an incredible buzz. There were a number of blog postings among the advertising industry and train industry, including discussion around the general economic impact of using this type of advertising to increase revenue at Amtrak. It even hit YouTube, where one can find multiple videos of the train at varying points on the Northeast Corridor line, often with a significant amount of commentary.



The History Channel successfully targeted their audience. The Acela train between Boston and Washington is a business class train, with a demographic of riders who remember 1968 and the events highlighted in the show. This group is also likely to value The History Channel and tune in.

“Opportunities like this exciting Acela promotion help us dimensionalize history and make it more active, entertaining and immediate. The Acela Express is all about making great connections for people. That’s what The History Channel is doing. It’s contemporary, it’s exciting and – you can’t take your eyes off of it,” says Chris Moseley, Senior Vice President of Marketing for The History Channel.

Indirectly, the success of the campaign can be seen through the desire of Feder and Amtrak planning the next wrap.

“The train wrap was incredibly well-received by everyone involved and considered a huge success. We are talking with other advertisers for the next one,” Feder says.

“We were very pleased with the resulting graphics,” says Amtrak spokesperson Karina Romero. “Ratings for the show were high and the feedback great. Given the success, we are sure to do another soon.”



Wrapping it up – Again

With the first wrapped Acela train being a success, FLEXcon, along with the printer and installer, are poised to do it again.

Officials from the print and installation company called the project a massive undertaking, saying that it had never been done before, and the success of the effort was due largely to FLEXcon’s materials.

Alternative media have become a cornerstone in advertising and marketing campaigns. With today’s target audiences spending more time outside of their home than ever before, alternative media helps brand owners and advertisers reach the consumer. With vibrancy and durability, self-adhesive films have the capability to grab audience attention in all kinds of challenging locations. Along with proven products for alternative media, FLEXcon specializes in custom applications – finding the right combination to meet any creative challenge.

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Chris Moseley,
Senior Vice President of Marketing
- The History Channel.





About the Author

Jodi Sawyer is a Product Manager for the Product Branding Business Team. She is responsible for the lifecycle management of FLEXcon's product lines for At-Retail, Outdoor and Transit Advertising Markets. Through strategic planning, industry involvement, and marketing, she works to ensure that FLEXcon products exceed the expectations of brand owners, ad agencies, ad specifiers and printers. Jodi has 20 years experience working in the self-adhesive materials industry. Among her other responsibilities, she serves as an information resource on FLEXcon products and self-adhesive applications. Jodi Sawyer holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science & Economics from Drew University. She is a member of the In-Store Marketing Institute and Specialty Graphic Imaging Association. Reach her at (508) 885-8262, (508) 826-2973 (cell) or e-mail at jsawyer@flexcon.com.

About FLEXcon

FLEXcon is an ISO 9001:2008 worldwide manufacturer of pressure-sensitive films and adhesives for applications including indoor and outdoor advertising, bonding/mounting, and product identification, safety, hazard, bar-coded, and primary labels. The company's Value-Better-Supreme (VBS) product offering is the most extensive standard product offering in the pressure-sensitive film industry. FLEXcon is also a leader in developing custom solutions to meet unique converting or application needs. FLEXcon's mission is to provide its customers the highest quality products with exceptional service. The company is headquartered in Spencer, Massachusetts, and has operations throughout North America and Europe, with distribution worldwide. For more information on FLEXcon, visit www.FLEXcon.com.



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