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## Vinyl advertisement in the UNI Bookstore windows

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VINYL ADVERTISEMENT IN THE UNI BOOKSTORE WINDOWS

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

Emma Wilker  
University of Northern Iowa  
May 2019

This Study by: Emma Wilker

Entitled: Vinyl Advertisement in the UNI Bookstore Windows

has been approved as meeting the thesis project requirement for the Designation University  
Honors

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Date

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Dr. Lee Geisinger, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of Technology

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Dr. Sara Smith, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of Technology

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Date

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Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

## **Project Overview**

The rear entrance of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Bookstore consists of two stories of windows that cover the entire north (back) side and part of the east side of the building. They had always been blank, and the only advertising on this side of the building had come from merchandise displayed in the lower-level windows on either side of the doors. The goal of this project was to turn the upper-level windows into an eye-catching advertisement. The new window decals attract customers and encourage them to buy products from the UNI Bookstore.

## **Project Origin**

This creative thesis stemmed from a project I completed last year in one of my Graphic Technology classes. The class was divided into pairs, and each group picked a live project to complete. A live project means it has a real-world client. My partner and I chose the project of vinyl wrapping the windows of the Industrial Technology Center (ITC) conference room. Our client was our professor, Dr. Lee Geisinger, who had been assigned the project by the Department of Technology. We followed the project from concept through installation.

The Director of the UNI Bookstore Doug Johnson, my client representative for my thesis project, visited the ITC and observed the conference room windows covered in perforated vinyl. He then reached out to the Department of Technology to request something similar to be applied to the windows of the UNI Bookstore. Eventually the project made its way to me, when I chose to take it on as my honors thesis. Since the request stemmed from work I had previously completed, I already had some background knowledge on the process and requirements. The main difference between my class project and this project for the UNI Bookstore was the ITC conference room was an indoor window, while the UNI Bookstore windows were exterior.

## Project Specifics

At my initial meeting with my client representative we discussed his interest in a perforated vinyl advertisement. We met at the UNI Bookstore so I could see these windows in person. The UNI Bookstore windows are divided into sections by thick bars. There are equal-sized divisions vertically while horizontally they are divided into three sections: a large middle section and smaller top and bottom sections. He envisioned perforated vinyl on the middle sections of the windows, possibly all of the north facing windows and half of the east facing ones.

My client representative had little idea on the design at that moment, but we discussed both long-term and short-term advertisements and he liked the idea of a mix of both. Short-term designs could be changed seasonally and include topics such as UNI football, homecoming, holiday shopping in December, or selling back textbooks at the end of the semester. Long-term designs could be more generic with a saying such as “Go Panthers” or “Wear Purple.” We also discussed a project timeline, and he did not provide a deadline for when these advertisements needed to be in place.

The client initially envisioned the windows to be covered in perforated vinyl like the ITC conference room windows. After discussion with my thesis advisors, it turned out that perforated vinyl could only be applied to the outside of a window. We needed a material that could be applied on the inside of the windows since they are on the second floor of the building, so perforated vinyl would not work.

My thesis advisors and I reached out to a former UNI Graphic Technology student who is now a production manager at Nagle Signs to consult on this project. Alex Smith has worked at Nagle Signs for several years and is an installation expert. He has completed many projects for

different clients who had requests similar to mine. He had successfully used the method of layering clear vinyl on top of white vinyl, printing the image on the clear vinyl and backing it with the white vinyl to ensure the image was visible. When backing with the white vinyl it could be possible to print a design on both the inside and the outside of the window. Alex described how Nagle Signs had run several tests with different vinyl to solve the problem of creating an outward-facing image when applying the vinyl to the inside of the window, and this was their proven method.

However, when testing this method at the UNI Bookstore, the interior image was not clearly visible, as the exterior image was showing through as well (see fig. 1). The UNI Bookstore windows are tinted, which could have been a causing factor. I tried layering several layers of white vinyl in between the printed layers, but it did little to help the situation. Instead of having an interior and exterior image, I had to settle on an exterior image with a solid-colored interior layer. I chose to layer clear and purple vinyl with a white layer in between to give the image printed on the clear material a white background. The image was visible to the building's exterior, and the purple was visible to the building's interior. Due to this material change, the client and I decided it would be best to cover the bottom sections of the windows instead of the middle sections due to the opacity of the material. This new material would not let light through, as perforated vinyl would have. Since these windows are smaller, we decided to only cover the north-facing bottom window sections.



Fig. 1. Initial test with both outward and inward facing designs.

When discussing designs with my client representative, he initially wanted both long-term and short-term window decals. Since their main profit comes from clothing sales, the long-term designs could promote their wearable merchandise. Throughout the year the UNI Bookstore holds several promotions, such as seasonal sales. There are also campus-related events they cater toward, such as homecoming, family weekend, buying textbooks at the beginning of a semester, and selling back textbooks at the end of the semester. My client representative wanted a few window sections to have short-term decals that they could change as they pleased to tailor to different events throughout the year.

I sent my client three initial design ideas (see fig. 2). The first two were more generic, long-term advertisements, while the third could have gone off the idea of having part long-term and part short-term vinyl ads. On my third design, the middle two panels could have been long-term while the outside two panels could have been exchanged to advertise seasonal promotions. My client representative responded by sending me a design of their own they wanted to use

instead (see fig. 3). I mocked up their design on the rear side of the UNI Bookstore using Photoshop (see fig.4) and tweaked the design to best fit the space (see fig. 5).



Fig. 2. My designs for the project.



Fig. 3. The client's design.



Fig. 4. The client's design mocked up in the UNI Bookstore windows.





Fig. 5. A mockup of the design altered to better fit the windows' separating columns.

Once the design was approved by my client, I began production. I printed the design onto transparent vinyl. The design was divided into four panels since we applied it across a four-window span. It was important to print the designs in reverse because the side of the vinyl the design was printed on was not the side that would stick to the windows. It was basically like printing on the backside of the material, but the material was see-through so the design looked correct when viewed from the front side. Next, I used the laminator to apply white vinyl and then purple vinyl to the back of the transparent material. I used the laminator because it pressed the materials together to ensure it was applied smoothly with no creases or bumps.

Finally, I cut the panels down to size. Originally I had incorporated bleed into my designs so I could apply them to the windows and then trim off the excess border. Bleed is

printing that goes beyond the edge of the design's size. When discussing installation with Alex from Nagle Signs, he suggested cutting down the designs to size for installation. He also reminded us to account for the rubber seal around the edge of the windows. I measured that to be 1/8-inch-thick, which required me to subtract 1/4 inch from my original height and width measurements. Each window was a different size, so I had to ensure each vinyl panel was the correct size for its corresponding window.

Installation was the trickiest part of this project. To install each panel, I first cleaned each window with rubbing alcohol and lint-free cloths so no dirt or dust would get caught in between the window and the vinyl. Next, I removed the entire backing from the vinyl so the entire side that would be stuck to the window was exposed. I then sprayed this sticky side with vinyl applicator, which is a solution composed of water and dish soap. The vinyl applicator allowed the vinyl to be somewhat moveable when applied to the window so it could be shifted to correctly fit the space. It also assisted in smooth application and the removal of air bubbles.

It took several tries to figure out how to apply the thick sheet of vinyl to the window. I first attempted to stick the whole sheet on and adjust from there, but the surface was not wet enough to fluidly shift the vinyl. I then tried to apply the top edge and work downward from there, but that proved difficult as well. The method I found that worked was lining up one side, I chose the left side, then slowly applying the vinyl from that edge. The trick was that I had to line it up perfectly along the edge, otherwise the vinyl would be applied crooked. I also had to keep the material pretty wet in case I had to pull part of it back up to remove large air bubbles or readjust the angle of application. I used a felt-covered squeegee to apply the vinyl so I did not scratch its surface.

## Project Outcome

Overall, the final product looked excellent (see fig. 6). The client was satisfied with the result and agreed to pursue similar vinyl projects with other UNI students. From the outside, when walking into the UNI Bookstore, the design was clear and eye-catching. From the inside, the purple vinyl did not turn out as opaque as I had thought. On the panel with the UNI Bookstore logo, the outward-facing design could be seen through the purple (see fig. 7). On the other panels the outward-facing design was not so visible since they had darker backgrounds (see fig. 8), but the UNI Bookstore logo was black lettering on a white background. We discussed a possible fix with our client of putting a vinyl design over top of the purple to distract from the transparency.



Fig. 6. The finished product.



Fig. 7. The interior side of the panel containing the UNI Bookstore logo.



Fig. 8. The interior side of the panel containing the letters “PAN”.

The final product was an advertisement in the rear second-story windows of the UNI Bookstore advertising their UNI spirit. The phrase “Panther Pride” implied that they sell items for both UNI fans and students, such as gameday apparel, UNI paraphernalia, and school supplies. This display marketed to their desired audience and promoted their most popular items for sale. It was eye-catching because vinyl advertisements like this were unique to the area and drew customers into the store. This vinyl window decal doubled the UNI Bookstore’s advertisements on the rear side of their building when coupled with the merchandise they displayed in the first-floor windows. This was unique to the store because they did not have vinyl window decals anywhere else.

### **Reflection**

This project furthered my experience within my field of study. I gained practice using a wide-format printer, Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, and other lab tools. I expanded upon my skill of vinyl graphics installation. I added another live project to my repertoire. During this project, I learned that communication with the client is key to the success of the project. Quick responses greatly aid in moving the project along at a decent pace. It is important convey your message using language that the client understands and avoid technical terms of which they may not know the meaning.

I also gained experience in solving problems within a live project. During this project, I had trouble figuring out what material to use. The initial idea, perforated vinyl, would not work because it needed to be placed on the outside face of the windows. The second idea, suggested by Alex Smith of Nagle Signs, did not work because both the interior and exterior images were visible from an indoor viewpoint. I had to conduct many test runs using different materials and material layering to find what would work for this project. It was finally established that an exterior-facing image on clear vinyl backed with white vinyl would work if the interior side was lined with solid-colored vinyl. This experience greatly increased my understanding of the print and marketing worlds and real-world projects.