



Utah's Hogle Zoo

When it comes to full-color printing, they're not monkeying around. Two years ago, Jameson (Jay) Weston, director of the graphics department at Utah's Hogle Zoo, began petitioning zoo administration to invest in a large-format printer. Weston's reasoning was simple: being able to produce full-color signage in-house would be more cost efficient than outsourcing to screenprinters and sign shops. "In order for me to convince them to invest thousands of dollars in a printer, I had to demonstrate that we could utilize it for as many different applications as possible, including banners, outdoor posters, ID signs for the animals and backlit displays," said Weston.

The zoo decided to invest in an Encad 36" NovaJet printer. Prior to the purchase of the printer, the zoo's graphics department consisted of a PC and a black and white laser printer. Designs would be printed and taken to the local print shop to be enlarged, typically to 24" by 36" inches. Once the print was enlarged, Weston and his crew would color the posters by hand. This process was costly, time-consuming, and yielded mediocre signs that did not look very professional. When larger signage was needed, Weston would have a vinyl cut printed. "We would hand color posters for temporary usage, and would usually only use one or two colors and only color some parts of the posters," explained Weston. "Even when I would have the vinyl cuts done, my color choice was limited because the more color I wanted, the more costly each sign became. So, needless to say, we didn't have very many full-color posters or signs hanging around the zoo." Now, after a graphic has been designed, employees can print and produce full-color signage in minimal time with minimal cost.

Having a color printer in-house has also enhanced creativity among Weston and his team by offering them a much larger palette from which to work. "The ability to print in full-color has opened up a whole new world. Everything I do is so much more interesting and attractive," said Weston.

Three-foot by four-foot banners currently hang in a dozen locations throughout the zoo promoting its annual art show. After working out several design concepts, final layout was developed and the banners were printed onto Rexam's DMVB15 scrim vinyl, grommited and hung. "For short-term signage we use the Tyvek® material. We also use Rexam's DMVLA5 pressure-sensitive, adhesive vinyl for the animal ID signs, which is cold laminated and mounted on Sintra®, and the DMBF5EN backlit media for map displays of the zoo," added Weston.

Situated at the mouth of a canyon, the zoo encounters some fierce winds and harsh weather conditions, making it especially important that the banners be durable enough to withstand these conditions while maintaining vivid color and image quality. Weston expected the banners to last about three months and so far his expectations have been met and sometimes even exceeded. "I've had some ID signs out for about a year and they still look really good. The canyon winds can be pretty hard on the signage and the banners get blown around a lot. After about three months they start to tear around the grommet, but the image quality is unaffected," said Weston.

With help from a local Rexam reseller, Weston began experimenting with different media, like the pressure-sensitive, adhesive vinyl used for the animal ID signs and the backlit media. Steve Jackson and Brandon Mosen of Mosen Engineering, a local supplier of digital printing media to the architecture, engineering and graphic arts industries, introduced Weston to Rexam Image Products' media. "Rexam's products seemed like the most natural choice when we looked at Jay's needs, which included indoor signage that would need to be hosed down and cleaned, banners that would be hung outdoors to direct visitors, and permanent display signage," said Jackson. "Rexam had a comprehensive line that could meet all these needs. The zoo's use of Rexam media was a learning experience for all of us because we were able to see how the media performed in practical use."

"The representatives at Mosen Engineering were really good about bringing us samples of the different materials. This was a great help because we could test it out before having to spend lots of money on a whole roll of it," added Weston.

"We haven't figured out the exact financial savings of investing in our own printer, but the time savings and the clear aesthetic enhancements we've achieved are incredible. Since we started using the banners and producing our own signage, we have received several comments on the improved appearance of the zoo," Weston said. "In addition, the banners have proven to be especially effective in increasing traffic to the zoo's special events." For example, the zoo hosts an annual art show, which is held in a typically low-traffic area that most patrons wouldn't visit. "The banners are great for promoting awareness among visitors to the art show and several of them have commented on how nice it is that we host such events. Before we started posting banners many visitors didn't even know about the art show."

An eight-year veteran of the graphics industry, Weston has noticed trends in quality and durability of media as well as an increase in the facility with which printers can produce

long lasting, color signage. "It's getting easier and cheaper to produce full-color images and the materials today are much more durable, offering many more options than were available even five years ago. The whole production process is much less time-consuming as well."