



VINYL APPS

By Dale Salamacha

Chameleon Colors

“Color-changing” vinyl could grow your shop’s repertoire.

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This month, we’ll address a fun topic (no profit-and-loss statements!).

After decades in this industry, we’ve seen first-hand vinyl’s development, real-world testing, failures and ultimate success. We can always demand more from our materials, but vinyl has undergone an amazing revolution. Manufacturers are continuously testing and reinventing vinyl to provide better products for our industry.

The wrap process has changed little over the last 20 years. Vinyl and printing equipment have made drastic improvements, but you still run bright-white vinyl through an inkjet, electrostatic or thermal-transfer printer. Then, you laminate the final image with clear vinyl on a roller laminator or spray on a liquid topcoat that cures on the substrate. Lamination provides an additional layer of UV protection and abrasion resistance. For this reason, we never offer a wrap without it.

Changing the script

One new, revolutionary development is what we like to call color-change vinyl. This product, which is starting to create a well-deserved buzz among wrap providers, was first introduced by 3M just over two years ago. Arlon, MACTac, Hexis, Avery Dennison and others now offer similar materials.

These substrates are available in many different colors, textures and sheens, and they allow the customer to have a custom “paintjob” for their cars with a fraction of the time and labor required to paint.

With color-changing vinyl, we can take a black BMW, grab a roll of bright-orange vinyl, wrap the entire car and completely change its base color! With hundreds of colors and texture combinations, possibilities are virtually unlimited.

We call it a new process, because we proceed differently than we do with commercial-vehicle wraps. Why?

First and foremost, I guarantee anyone who brings you their \$100,000 Mercedes for a wrap is going to be more critical about the finished product than with the work van his employees drive around.

Color-changing-vinyl applications require highly qualified installers. However, you’re not without a helping hand. Manufacturers know you’ll encounter detail-oriented clients. They’ve designed the vinyl with this in mind.

How? Consider this: standard white, inkjet-printable vinyl is typically 2 mils thick. Then, you apply the clear laminate film, which is approximately 1.5 mils thick. This combination results in a 3.5-4 mil-thick final product. In contrast, color-change vinyl comes out of the box, ready to wrap with no lamination needed, at 3.5 mils thick. This lets you smoothly wrap a surface with vinyl with just enough “meat” to create a flawless, paint-like finish.

Also, this vinyl can be stretched to 130% of its original size without losing any color or adhesive ability. This is key when you need to stretch the vinyl around a bumper section or into door jambs. (Reserve stretching vinyl to very limited uses, and make sure you’re using the proper vinyl size for each application.) Such products also feature a pressure-sensitive, repositionable adhesive and air-release channels, which make installation easy.

The biggest advantage of full wraps? Three years from now, when you remove the wrap from the car, it will leave no adhesive or damage, with the car’s paint exactly as it was.

This alone makes color-changing vinyl a viable alternative to custom paint. If you’ve leased a car, you can’t customize it at the dealership; they want the car back in original,



Dale’s shop wrapped his fiancée Christy’s BMW M6 with 3M 1080 “color-change” wrap vinyl. Wrap This! transformed the formerly white luxury car into a sleek, black (with sassy pink trim) queen of the road.

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Dale points out that wrapping premium cars for demanding customers requires avoiding seams whenever possible. This means fenders, bumpers, mirrors and other parts should be removed and wrapped separately to create the seamless look high-dollar projects require.

pristine condition. But, you *can* wrap it.

My fiancée, Christy, leased the BMW M6 featured here. After our team spent four days dismantling, wrapping and reassembling the car, she now drives a completely original, custom car that commands attention. In two years, we'll strip it back to white and turn it in without any fuss.

Install with care

Now, let's talk installation. Here's where it gets tricky; we've already established the Mercedes owner's scrutiny. You'll have to be virtually perfect with your install. No cutting corners, or it will haunt you!



First, use full panels. NEVER put a seam in a color-change wrap. This vinyl comes in 60-in.-wide rolls, which means it will cover almost all car and light-truck body panels in one piece. If you have a body panel or hood that exceeds 60 in. – a Corvette is one example – think of a graphic or physical

break you can design into the project. Nothing is worse than walking up to a beautiful wrap and seeing a giant seam running down the middle of the hood! For the first time, sign professionals can compete in what used to be a very exclusive market – custom car finishes – and a seam is a definite no-no.

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That said, colored vinyl actually seams beautifully. If you must seam something, conceal it. Small overlaps are “better” on vertical surfaces than horizontal ones.

Now that we have a great material and know how to wrap in solid panels – think of the hood as one piece, then fenders, then doors, etc. – we must address dismantling the vehicle. Most wrap installers now know that you must take a vehicle apart to create a flawless wrap.

With color-change wraps, multiply that concept by 100. I know it may be scary. Trust me, when we wrap a Ferrari here – with little fender emblems that cost \$1,200 each – we swallow hard too. To properly use color-change film, you better know how to tear down and reassemble a vehicle (with no leftover hardware).

Headlights and taillights are a

given, and door handles must come out. Rubber window moldings too – which means you have to take off the interior door panels. It's extra work, but it has to be done. We spend as much time taking apart and reassembling cars as we do with the vinyl installation itself.

This isn't a plumbing company that wants its van wrapped; it's a client who just dropped a serious chunk of money on his ride, and he wants to make it even more beautiful. Take that seriously. If you want a perfect result, remove the front bumper to ensure a flawless wrap. Crazy? Not if the client is willing to pay for it.

Color-change wraps are more complex than simple commercial wraps; price them differently. Throw out your square-ft. formulae and templates. Base pricing on cost of

materials, labor and overhead, but realize this type of job is more labor-intensive. Prepare for the worst and upgrade your insurance when working with high-dollar vehicles. That's enough financial discussion; just make sure you're reaching your desired profit level.

Wrap This! anticipates color-changing films will create a huge wrap-installation market that will grow our business. We already do two or three per month, with more requests coming. Do you have to offer it? No; you can still wrap commercial vehicles and make a ton of money.

But, if you love the automotive aftermarket and want to customize vehicles, color-change vinyl is for you. Give it a try. Remember, it's only vinyl. If you mess up, you can peel it right off. ■