



a Party City's exterior features its standard primary color logo, but designers shifted the interior palette to trendier, softer colors, such as pinks, oranges and blues.

b The store's Seasonal zone highlights major holidays throughout the year. Yellow vinyl tile flooring in a diagonal pattern is designed to draw shoppers through the space.

Signage and Graphics: Inside and Out

Graphics in stores, and logos on facades – it's the big-brand era

RETAILERS THAT DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE WILL be in trouble.

Retailers that know who they are have been supporting their distinct identities with graphics all over the place – inside and outside the store – that bear logos, provide information, catch the attention of shoppers, drive sales and reinforce the retailer's image, its brand. (There's research that documents just how much some signage can drive sales – see page 34.)

It might be high-quality printing or high-tech displays. It might be outside signs that are bigger, bolder and more colorful. Or it may be the use of dynamic digital images that move, scroll and flash.

In some cases, the technology has not yet settled in enough to lower the prices. In other cases, outstanding-looking printed graphics have become more affordable than ever.

But what is clearer than ever is the graphic you can use in your store, and the power it can bring to your brand. On the following pages are stories about some retailers that have harnessed that power.

LIFE OF THE PARTY

Party City wants people to have fun – in the store, not just at the parties they throw after leaving the store.

But shoppers weren't having enough fun. Andy Bailen, executive vp of merchandising and marketing for the Rockaway, N.J.-based party goods retailer, says that feedback over the years criticized the stores' atmosphere, the lack of enjoyment shopping there, the confusion of departmentalization.

Ken Nisch, chairman of JGA Inc. (Southfield, Mich.), says "the stores were historically set up similar to a Home Depot. It was a functional place to go, but the party started after you were done shopping, instead of in the store itself."

Worse yet, says Bailen, the stores' color scheme had a lot of black in it. "Black isn't the most appropriate color for an environment promoting celebration," he acknowledges.

JGA also determined, as its design team took on the multi-location prototype design project, that most people giving parties have performance anxiety. As they're shopping, they're wondering if they're buying the right thing, if their party will be fun, if anyone will come. So the stores need an encouraging, upbeat environment that is easy to shop.

The layout of the new prototype stores feature five key category zones, or neighborhoods, supplemented by extensive signage. The Social Expression section includes everything under the messaging umbrella, from invitations and stationery to gift wrap and cards. The Juvenile zone features licensed products for kids' birthdays. In the Party Basics area, shoppers find dishes, serving pieces, crêpe paper, banners and other essentials for a celebration. The Adult Party zone features merchandise for theme parties, weddings and showers, while the Seasonal zone highlights the major holidays throughout the year.

"The neighborhoods are clearly visible and identifiable."

Party City has revived its stores with pop-up areas where the ceiling is elevated to create a 3-D graphic concept. The kids' area is organized under a bright orange pop-up. The layout of the store features five category zones, or neighborhoods, supplemented by extensive, color-coded signage.



a An area for custom-order invitations is marked by hot pink and magenta signage. A magenta pop-up organizes several areas around one central idea. **b** The Inflation Station, an in-store shop for balloons, is identified by a circular-band yellow graphic and a magenta ceiling palette.

able from the entrance," says Nisch. "The overhead signage, cornice strips, end-cap signs and shelf talkers are color-coordinated by area. Even the store directory ties into this coding, providing a clear mapping of the store."

Designers were allowed flexibility to shift the palette of these interior graphics to trendier colors such as pinks, oranges and blues, but were asked not to modify the Party City logo on the outside of the store, featuring primary colors.

This bold, yet softer new color palette was applied to attention-getting graphics such as a circular-band yellow graphic that hangs above the Inflation Station, an in-store shop for balloons. An area for custom-order invitations stands out under an array of hot pink and magenta signage.

"We decided to look at graphics architecturally," Nisch explains. "So, we created three pop-up areas where the ceiling is elevated to create a 3-D graphic concept. The thought was to create strong color blocking to give us accept points, to frame out those neighborhoods." These colorfully painted pop-ups occur where there are multiple classifications. For example, the magenta pop-up falls over the wedding invitation desk, the inflation station and the social expressions area, organizing them around one central idea. Similarly, the kids' area – party favors, piñatas, licensed products – is organized under a bright orange pop-up. Seasonal products fall beneath a vivid blue ceiling palette.

"What once was a fragmented product area now appears more cohesive," says Nisch. "These large areas with color blocks help pull together all the elements so the graphic components feel architectural, and the architecture feels graphic."

Because existing stores had been relatively dark, Bailen says, additional cornice lighting was added to make the mer-



chandise more visible. "It's having an impact on the feel of the store as well as on the ability of the consumer to understand the product and the quality of what we're selling," he says.

JGA realized that the product's color saturation was an underleveraged element, and that effective lighting was needed to take advantage of its inherent chroma. "We went to a much cooler lighting output, which intensified the high pigment of the merchandise," he says.

Since Party City has a multitude of ceiling-hung products, including piñatas, the product lighting was brought down so it was not blocked by product. "We put the intensity at eye level," Nisch adds. "The store appears much brighter through this more productive placement of lighting source."

– By Alicia Hanson, Assistant Editor

Client Team: Party City, Rockaway, N.J. – Andy Bailen, executive vp merchandising and marketing; Carol Rekucki, director, visual merchandising; Pat Tobin, director, construction/facilities

Design Team: JGA Inc., Southfield, Mich. – Ken Nisch, chairman; Gordon Eason,

creative director; Arvin Stephenson, project manager; Brian Eastman, graphic design director

Lighting Consultant: Lighting Management, New City, N.Y. – John Sapanaro, president

Suppliers: Lozier, Omaha, Neb. (gondolas, wall shelving); Opto, Wheeling, Ill. (wedding desk); National Millwork Inc., Clawson, Mich. (cashwrap, balloons); Armstrong World Industries, Lancaster, Pa. (flooring); Benjamin Moore Paint, Montvale, N.J.; Pittsburgh Paint, Pitts-

burgh (paint); Pionite, Auburn, Maine, Wilsonart Intl., Temple, Texas, Nevamar, Odenton, Md., Formica, Cincinnati (laminates); Décor Group Intl., Clawson, Mich. (graphics, fixture finish)



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