

Print Protection That Performs Where It Matters

Description

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A freshly printed graphic can look exceptional on the production table, then lose its impact within weeks once it meets rain, fingerprints, cleaning chemicals, trolley knocks or UV exposure. Effective print protection is not an optional finishing touch. It is the layer that helps preserve colour, surface quality and commercial value after the print has left your premises.

For signmakers, wide-format print providers, vehicle graphics specialists and wallpaper installers, the right coating decision starts with the environment. A reception wallcovering faces repeated contact and routine cleaning. A vehicle wrap faces road film, weather, fuel splashes and abrasion. An outdoor sign must retain its colour through prolonged sunlight. These are different risks, so they require a coating system selected for the job rather than a generic finish applied by habit.

Why prints fail in the real world

Print damage rarely has one cause. It is usually the combined effect of handling, weather, cleaning and wear. A graphic may be technically durable enough for short-term display, yet still become visibly marked, faded or difficult to clean long before the customer expects replacement.

Abrasion is one of the most common issues. Scuffs on point-of-sale panels, scratched display graphics and rub marks on vehicle livery can quickly make an otherwise successful installation look neglected. High-contact areas are particularly vulnerable: door graphics, lift surrounds, retail counters, museum displays and branded equipment all experience repeated surface contact.

Moisture and chemical exposure create a separate challenge. Condensation, rain, spills and aggressive cleaning products can affect unprotected ink and substrate surfaces. In hospitals, leisure facilities, public venues and food-facing areas, cleaning is frequent and non-negotiable. The print finish must be able to withstand the cleaning regime, not merely look good on installation day.

UV exposure matters too. Sunlight gradually degrades many printed images, especially where graphics are installed externally or positioned behind glass. Fading reduces contrast, dulls brand colours and shortens the useful life of the asset. When graphics are part of a fleet, campaign rollout or permanent

branded environment, early replacement is an avoidable cost.

Print protection begins with the application

The best approach is to assess what the printed surface will experience before choosing a coating. Start with the substrate, ink technology, required finish and expected service life. Then consider whether the graphic will be handled, cleaned, bent, exposed to weather or subjected to transport wear.

For example, a fine-art giclÃ©e print may need a clear protective layer that preserves tonal detail while reducing the risk of marking during framing, packing and sale. A digitally printed wallcovering may need a durable, washable surface capable of standing up to daily contact in a corridor, hotel or healthcare setting. A vehicle graphic needs flexibility as well as protection, because a coating that cannot move with the vinyl can compromise the finished result.

This is where liquid coatings offer a practical alternative to conventional plastic laminate films. Film laminates can be unsuitable for textured media, canvas, irregular surfaces, certain wallpaper installations and applications where edge lift, adhesive interaction or added plastic content are concerns. A properly specified liquid laminate follows the surface of the print, providing protection without relying on an adhesive film layer.

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It depends, however, on the production method and the performance requirement. A water-based liquid coating may be an excellent fit where low odour, practical application and an environmentally considered process are priorities. UV-curable systems can be the better choice for high-volume operations that require rapid curing and consistent production throughput. The correct system is the one that matches the printed product, workflow and end-use risk.

Selecting the right protective finish

A coating should protect the print without undermining its visual purpose. Gloss can enrich colour and create a strong, polished appearance, making it popular for promotional graphics, photographic prints and vehicle livery. Matt finishes reduce glare and can suit wallcoverings, exhibition graphics and interior displays where viewing comfort matters. Satin sits between the two, offering a refined surface with reduced reflection while retaining depth of colour.

Appearance is only one part of the specification. Consider the practical properties required for the installation. These may include resistance to abrasion, water, common cleaning chemicals, dirt, pollution, UV degradation or graffiti. In high-touch settings, anti-microbial performance may also be relevant as part of a wider hygiene strategy.

The coating must also be compatible with the ink and substrate. Solvent, eco-solvent, latex, UV and aqueous ink systems can behave differently, while media such as self-adhesive vinyl, banner, paper, canvas, rigid boards and digitally printed wallcoverings each present their own application considerations. Applying a sample first is sensible whenever materials, ink limits or curing conditions are unfamiliar.

A small test panel can reveal far more than a data sheet alone. It shows how the coating levels, how the surface finish appears, whether colours are enhanced as expected and how the print responds to drying or curing. It also gives production teams confidence before committing a full run.

Protect appearance and reduce replacement pressure

Print protection has a direct commercial effect. When a graphic stays cleaner, brighter and more resistant to surface damage, it remains presentable for longer. That helps protect the reputation of the print provider, installer and brand owner alike.

For customers managing estates of signage, fleets or public-facing interiors, extending print life can reduce replacement frequency, installation disruption and material waste. A coating decision made at production stage may prevent a premature reprint, a return site visit or a difficult conversation with a client whose graphics have deteriorated too quickly.

There is also a sustainability argument. Replacing a damaged print involves fresh media, ink, energy, packaging, transport and labour. Liquid coating systems can help extend the working life of the original print while avoiding the additional plastic layer associated with many film laminates. Sustainability claims should always be considered in the context of the complete application, but fewer replacements and lower material consumption are practical gains.

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For short-life promotional work, extensive protection may not be necessary. For a long-term wall graphic, a heavily used display or a vehicle operating daily on UK roads, cutting protection from the specification can be false economy. The key is proportionate protection: enough performance for the real conditions, without adding unnecessary process or cost.

Application quality is part of protection

Even the most suitable coating cannot compensate for poor preparation or inconsistent application. The print should be fully dry and stable before coating, particularly where ink systems retain solvents or moisture. Dust, silicone contamination and handling marks can affect the final appearance, so clean working conditions matter.

Coating weight, drying time, curing method and equipment setup all influence performance. Too little coating may leave the surface inadequately protected. Too much can affect texture, flexibility or finish. For production environments, controlled application equipment improves repeatability and helps teams achieve a consistent result across larger runs.

Smaller studios and specialist producers can also achieve strong results with carefully selected starter systems, provided they follow the recommended process and allow for testing. Technical guidance is valuable here because the practical details vary. The correct roller, spray setup or coating machine depends on the format, substrate, volume and finish required.

Landor Liquid Lamination has built its coating approach around this application-led thinking: assess how the print will be used, identify the likely failure points, then specify a protective system that enhances rather than compromises the finished graphic.

Where a specialist coating earns its place

Some applications demand more than a standard protective layer. Anti-graffiti coatings can make vandalised graphics easier to restore, helping sites avoid full replacement after marker pen or paint attacks. This is particularly relevant for transport environments, public spaces, schools, retail exteriors and venue signage.

Anti-microbial coatings may be appropriate for printed surfaces in healthcare, hospitality, education and other high-contact environments. They should be selected with a clear understanding of the intended use and cleaning process, rather than treated as a substitute for established hygiene procedures.

For lorry curtains, fleet graphics and flexible vinyl, durability must be balanced with flexibility. For wallcoverings, washability and appearance are often the critical factors. For fine art, visual integrity can take priority over extreme chemical resistance. The specification should reflect the actual value and exposure of the finished piece.

The most reliable protection starts with a straightforward question: what will this print have to survive? Answer that honestly before production, and the right coating becomes far easier to specify. Protect the surface early, preserve the image for longer, and give every printed asset the working life it was designed to deliver.

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