



# Getting into the Magnetic Signage Game

A White Paper  
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The idea of feeding a big magnet through a printer sounds a little strange on its face. Many people picture the hard, U-shaped or bar magnets from high school science class when they think about magnets, which I'm sure wouldn't feed through your printer at all. Fortunately, what we're talking about printing are **flexible magnets**, also called rubber magnets, like the kind you've probably seen on refrigerator doors all of your life.

People have been printing sports schedules or local business ads on magnets for years, hoping that they'll end up in customers' kitchens. Recently, though, magnets have exploded into many new industrial, office, retail, and marketing spaces. Today many businesses use printed magnets as interchangeable point-of-purchase signage, removable signs for cars and other company vehicles, and even large outdoor graphics on the sides of buildings. Businesses are catching on that magnetic signage is easy to use, durable, and easy to change frequently.

As requests from these end users have increased over time, printers and sign shops that serve many diverse markets have caught on, too—offering printed magnets can drive lucrative, repeat business. It's a specialty media that not all shops offer. **But here's a little secret:** With a bit of know-how, most printers can add printed magnets to their product offerings without adding special equipment or processes. If you've avoided offering magnets because it sounded too foreign or too complicated, or just plain didn't know where to begin, you've been missing out.

## Getting Started

Where to start? For a printer or sign shop new to printing magnets, it makes sense to begin by choosing a market to sell into, and focus on satisfying the magnet needs of that one particular niche. This way you can get by with stocking only one or two kinds of magnetic media as you test the waters. If you already serve that market with non-magnetic products, so much the better—you can target your existing customer base with a new, “attractive” product offering.

## Vehicle Signage

One great entry point into the magnetic signage arena is vehicle signs. Magnet vehicle signs can be a cost-effective, low-risk alternative to full vehicle wraps. Unlike costly vehicle wraps, magnet car signs are easy to pop on and off, which is a great option for small business owners who might want their logo on their van temporarily, but also plan to resell it some day. Magnet car signs are also easy to update or change as often as needed, making them a great low-risk investment for the end user. When printing vehicle signage, we recommend using 30 mil magnet to give the sign the holding strength needed to withstand highway speeds. We also suggest rounding the corners to prevent them from getting dinged, which gives rushing wind a place to get underneath the magnet and pull the sign off. We also have a “high-energy” option called MuscleMag®, which is thinner media (typically 15 – 17 mil) with greater holding strength than a normal refrigerator magnet.

## In-store Signage

Another booming market for magnetic signage is point-of-purchase (POP) displays and other in-store signage, such as menuboards. Store owners love magnetic POP because of how easy it is to change high-turnover signage such as seasonal décor or menuboards. We offer media suited for both indoor and outdoor POP signage in widths up to 48", which allows for some colossal wall graphics and eye-catching displays with no seams.

## What's the Holdup?

Some printers and sign shops have avoided magnets because of a natural fear of the unknown. Here are a couple of common questions that we hear from people apprehensive about trying to print magnetic media.

### Will it have feeding issues?

Flexible magnets are considered a semi-rigid substrate, and printers typically use material that's between 15 and 30 mil thickness for most general applications, although thinner and thicker material is pretty common, too. Due to the thickness, just like with any other media, you'll need to set a roll-fed printer's head height high enough to allow the material to feed through smoothly without head strikes. (We typically recommend setting the head height to maximum.) Many magnet manufacturers offer printer profiles via their websites, which can give you the exact settings you need to run the media optimally. Always make sure you're printing media that's within the thickness limit of your printer (more on finding the correct media for your printer later).

Some printers have metal feeds or platens that the magnetic media likes to stick to, which creates feeding problems. If you encounter this, you can create an air gap between the media and the metal surface by cutting off a slice of the magnet and covering the offending metal with it. This creates a mask that will allow the rest of your media to feed smoothly over the metal parts without sticking.

### Will it mess up my printer?

Using the *wrong kind* of magnetic media absolutely can create headaches ranging from head strikes to sensor damage. That's why it's so important to work closely with your supplier to ensure you're getting media that's designed and tested (or even certified) for use on your particular press type.

When a customer calls us about placing a magnet order, the first question we ask is "What kind of printer (or printers) do you use?" The answer to that question alone tells us a lot about what we should provide to that customer. We supply very different materials to operators of sheet-fed digital presses versus UV flatbed presses versus big offset printers. (Yes, you can print magnets on all of these!) Without getting overly technical here, basically we use different formulas to make media with different magnetic properties, thicknesses, and print surfaces that are each suited for a particular printing process, and sometimes even for specific printer brands or model series.

Using the wrong type of media in your printer would be like putting rocket fuel in your lawnmower—they're just not meant to be used together, and bad things will probably happen to the machinery if you try to force it. So you can see where relying on the expertise of your magnet supplier will save you a lot of headaches.

Put simply, you can safely print directly to magnet on almost any type of commercial printer, as long as you're using the right media for the job. Your supplier can help you match the right media with your press type to avoid compatibility problems.

## How to choose a magnetic media supplier

- **Request samples and test print.** Call your supplier and talk to them about the intended application for the material, and request a sample to test-print beforehand. Especially if you've never printed magnet before, it's a good idea to sample magnetic material from multiple sources. Unfortunately, not all magnet is created equal, but you'll be able to tell on a test print run whether the material you've sampled is going to turn out the way you want. Check for

ink adhesion and image quality, and make sure the printable surface doesn't scuff or peel easily, as these are signs of inferior material.

- **Safety check.** Ask whether the material is tested to be free from lead and other heavy metals. U.S. manufacturers are held to a very high standard in this regard because of industry regulations. Some, such as Magnum's products, even meet the strict U.S. toy safety standards for heavy metals content, which gives customers peace of mind.
- **Get the exact size of material you need for your graphics.** Good magnet is a terrible thing to waste. If the space for your graphic is 45 inches wide, think twice before purchasing a stock roll of 48-inch-wide magnet. There's not much you can do with a leftover strip of magnet that's 50 feet long and three inches wide, so these odd offcuts tend to be pure waste. It's often worth getting a quote on custom sheeting that matches the exact size you need so that you can get maximum yield from the material.
- **It's not just another commodity.** When you purchase a roll of printable magnet, you're not just buying blank media to print onto – you're making an investment in a specialty product line that offers you the potential for immediate profits and a renewable revenue stream. Flexible magnet manufacturers are in the business of making the magnets, sure, but they also double as educators, customer service, and tech support for their products. You should expect nothing less from your magnet supplier; any magnet source that just wants to sell you material for cheap and never talk to you again is not providing you with real value for your dollar. Avoid fly-by-night third party resellers on the Internet and stick to your favorite local sign supply distributor.

If you're ready to give printing magnets a try, we'll be more than happy to help. Please call 800-258-0991 to speak to one of our account managers today, or visit [www.magnummagnetics.com](http://www.magnummagnetics.com) for more information and resources to help get you started.