

Let's Talk Shop

BY CHARITY JACKSON

Wrap Removal Strategies

Tools and tricks for smoother, more efficient removal of wrap films



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EVERY SO OFTEN we're asked to remove a wrap that a customer doesn't want anymore, usually because they're selling the vehicle. Most of our removals though are in preparation for a new wrap we'll install.

When you're removing a wrap that you previously installed, you already know the materials that were used and how long ago the vehicle was wrapped. If you're removing a wrap that you didn't do, you'll need to gather a little information in order to accurately quote the removal.

We've found that it's important to cover yourself from a liability standpoint. Paint conditions are unknown on a wrap you didn't do, but they can also be a problem on a vehicle you did wrap.

With the right tools, cleaners and information

it can be a fairly straightforward process to remove graphics off a vehicle. This doesn't mean you should throw it in as part of your next wrap; be sure you cover your labor because wrap removals may not require much materials, but they'll definitely cost you time.

Material Check

We've removed quite a few wraps over the years, and removing wrap film that is designed for clean removal definitely holds up to that claim over other films. Even an economy transit film removes fairly easily because it's designed to be removed cleanly.

If your shop didn't wrap the vehicle initially then be sure to ask the customer if they have a record of the material used. You also need to ask how long the wrap has been on the vehicle. The longer it has been on, the harder it can be to remove. Long-term UV exposure bakes the material and makes the film and adhesives brittle and harder to remove in large pieces.

Removal Estimates

We price our wrap removals based on an estimate of how long we think it will take to remove the graph-

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Date: _____

Older factory paint jobs, after market paint jobs or factory paint jobs with defects, could be damaged by the installation and/or removal of vehicle lettering and graphics. Graphics will be installed and/or removed with utmost care and utilizing years of experience.

Visual Horizons Custom Signs cannot be responsible for any damage to a customer's paint job during the installation or removal of vehicle graphics due to underlying issues with the surface of the vehicle.

By signing below, I acknowledge that Visual Horizons Custom Signs has made me aware of the possibility of damage to my vehicle by installing or removing graphics on my vehicle and I will not hold Visual Horizons Custom Signs liable for any damage to my vehicle.

Customer's Signature _____

Customer's Name (please print) _____

A review of a customer's paint job and a simple signature can eliminate any headaches associated to paint removal while taking off a wrap.



Using heat on a wrap removal is a necessity on older wraps and removals in colder weather.

Peel the graphics at an angle instead of pulling out from the vehicle to cut down on paint removal.

ics, and multiply that by our hourly shop rate. If we installed the graphics and I have the information I need, then I feel pretty confident giving the customer a set price.

If the customer can't give me much information about the film materials used or when it was installed, then we usually tell them our hourly shop rate and we give them an estimated time to complete the job. We let the customer know that we will write down our start and stop times and charge accordingly.

This gives the customer a ballpark dollar amount to expect without locking us into that price if we run into issues. If problems do arise then we call the customer to update them on what we're encountering and then we get their authorization to proceed.

Liability Issues

In previous articles I've talked about a nightmare wrap removal we once encountered, and it was a perfect example of why we developed our Paint Removal Liability Form. In our nightmare example we had done the original

wrap using premium wrap film so our materials weren't the problem. The customer's original paint job was.

We had told the customer when we installed the wrap originally that their paint was in poor condition and we even pointed out problem areas. The customer still wanted us to apply the wrap despite our cautions, so we wrapped the vehicle.

We price our wrap removals based on an estimate of how long we think it will take to remove the graphics, and multiply that by our hourly shop rate.

A couple years later the client wanted the graphics removed—after they tried removing it themselves and pulled up some paint. We took on the project, and when we ran into paint problems, we again warned the customer that paint was continuing to come off, but they told us to proceed anyway. When we were finished and the vehicle was missing big chunks of paint, that's when they decided to complain. Despite the fact

that we had stopped all along the process to warn them about the bad paint they still took us to court.

Even though we didn't have anything in writing at that time we still won in court and didn't have to pay the customer. However, our time was wasted in court and our confidence took a hit. Still, we learned a valuable lesson.

Now we make sure that customers are thoroughly educated on the fact that the removal of vinyl graphics can remove paint, especially on older vehicles or ones that may have had damage repaired over the years. We also make sure to get the all-important signature on our Paint Removal form, indicating that the customer was cautioned beforehand and still chose to move forward.



Simple scrapers, heat guns, propane torches and powered vinyl removal tools help speed the removal process.



Choose a remover that works best for your project. Some help remove the graphics and adhesive while others work great on adhesive after the wrap has been removed.

Chizlers, Scrapers and Such

So now that we've gathered our information, given an estimate and covered ourselves against liability issues, it's now time to start taking off those graphics. Some wraps require nothing more than a warm day and a little elbow grease, but having the right tools will make any removal job that much easier.

Lifting up an edge of the graphics is the starting point to begin peeling. Choose an inexpensive tool to help with this and your fingers will thank you. We use Lil' Chizlers and cheap orange plastic scrapers to start the edges of our removals. We've also used plastic razor blades in the past but the edge is a little flimsy and doesn't seem as effective as the sturdier scrapers.

If the graphics are not that old and it's a warm day then you may not need anything else. Just start pulling the graphics at an angle peeling off in large panels. Avoid pulling out on the graphics at a right angle to the vehicle surface; this can increase the chance that paint will come off.

Adding Heat

For older or stubborn graphics, adding in heat will make a huge difference. Portable propane torches and heat guns work great. Apply the heat in small sections, lift the corner and start peeling at an angle. Add a little more heat to the next section as the graphics get harder to peel.

Choose an inexpensive tool to help you lift up an edge as a starting point and your fingers will thank you.

Be careful that you don't overheat the vinyl. Reheating an area that is already lifted seems to burn faster than graphics that are still laying flat. This can leave burn marks on the vehicle itself.

Power Tools

For stubborn sections of vinyl, you may need to bring out the big tools. A couple of the tools on the market use a powerful wheel that cuts through the vinyl without damaging the vehicle finish below.

The Stripe Eliminator, for example, is a urethane rubber wheel that you attach to a standard drill. The price range is reasonable for the initial tool and the replacement wheels.

3M offers the Stripe Off Wheel tool that works similarly to the Stripe Eliminator. It also is a rubberized wheel that attaches to a hand-held power drill.

The MBX Electric Vinyl Zapper works similarly and is a hand-held motorized wheel. The toothed wheel cuts through 50-75 square feet of vinyl every 90 minutes. This is a self-contained power tool and doesn't require a separate drill.

Each tool has a varying level of expense for the initial tool and replacement wheels. If you do a lot of removals it's worth it to give it a try as the cost of the tool and parts may be a lot less in comparison to the cost of labor to do the removal by hand.

Adhesive Removal

Once the graphics have been removed you may be left with a little or a lot of adhesive residue. For most of our removals we're left with just small areas of left-over adhesive. Our remover of choice is Rapid Remover by Rapid Tac. Use it in a well-ventilated area and avoid allowing it

to drip onto plastic bumpers or car parts.

Orange Peel Adhesive Remover is biodegradable citrus-based remover that is designed to remove water and oil-based adhesives. 3M makes an adhesive remover that also will prepare the surface for another wrap by removing any oils, grease, tar and waxes.

Some products, like Crystal Tek's Vinyl Off, are designed to be applied to the surface before the vinyl is even removed. Crystal Tek recommends applying the liquid in small amounts (a little goes a long way) to the existing graphics and then waiting a bit to allow the chemical to penetrate through the vinyl and break down the adhesive underneath. The vinyl and adhesive should come off together. **SDG**

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