



Carrying the Ball

A huge NBA promotion is wrapped around the Las Vegas monorail.

Terry Sullivan is courtside.

WHEN YOU THINK OF NBA BASKETBALL, VERY LITTLE about the sport is small: the players, the endorsements, the hype or the salaries. Everything seems larger than life. And when you think about the city of Las Vegas, you are likewise confronted by a scale that shies away from the diminutive: huge hotels, enormous neon signs and over-the-top stage shows.

So it seemed fitting that when the Las Vegas-based advertising firm R&R Partners was approached by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) to help create an image that would promote a big event like the 2007 NBA All-Star Game taking place in Vegas next February, the advertising firm

would want a big image.

But they needed it to be really big—long enough, in fact, to stretch the length of the four cars of the Las Vegas monorail. The ad would be output as a vinyl wrap that would be stuck directly onto the surface of the monorail cars. “We’ve done this type of work occasionally for the LVCVA,” R&R Partners art director Glenn Scott explains. “We’ve done two of these monorail wraps in the past, but those pretty much were vector-based images and didn’t involve photos, like this one did.”

Scott knew the image had to be simple

and clear, since it would be, literally, a moving (as opposed to stationary) image. Yet, he also wanted the image to evoke the exciting atmosphere of Las Vegas. In doing some research, he came across the work of Rick Wahlstrom. “Once we realized that we wanted to have a real basketball shot with neon effects, I started looking for people who I thought could shoot both the images and do all the digital [postproduction] work themselves in order to keep it consistent.”

It soon became apparent that the size of the project would be a challenge in terms of harnessing resources. Wahlstrom notes,

All aboard: The Las Vegas monorail with the NBA promotion wrapped around the train.

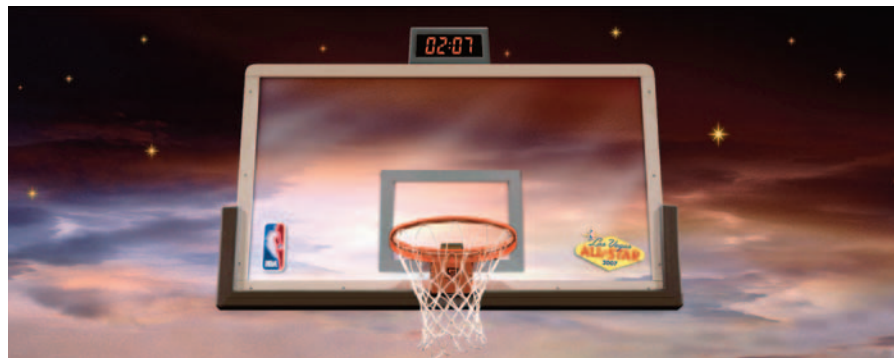
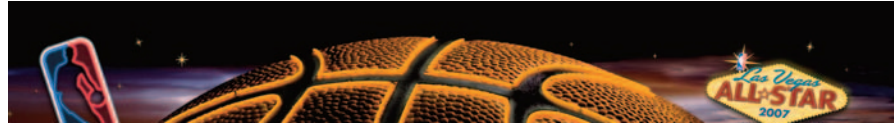
"I called up the company who was out-putting this project—Crush Creative—and asked them how large a file size they would need for the project. They said the final image would need to be roughly 136 feet by 12 feet. They said, 'We'd like to also get it in as 72 dpi, although we could live with 50 dpi.'"

Wahlstrom looked around his studio, and decided he would need to dust off his 8 x 10 large-format camera and try to remember how to use 8 x 10 Polaroid film. He believed that taking Polaroid photos and then getting large-scale scans of these images would be the best approach. "That was the first hurdle to pass," he says.

But once the file-size elements were ironed out, Wahlstrom and Scott still had the challenge of piecing together all the photo elements, which included photographic and vector elements. The main subject of the ad centers on an NBA basketball (which needed to be an official ball, approved by the NBA itself). Wahlstrom shot the ball with his 8 x 10 Polaroid and then got hi-res scans of the shots, which he imported into his Photoshop file. Wahlstrom also shot various nighttime sky scenes (which he would also scan in) that would be used for the background. However, there were also various vectors, non-pixel-based images that Wahlstrom would include in the image—the NBA logo, the stars in the sky, as well as the neon tubing that appears "on top of" the basketball.

He was also concerned about the lighting. Wahlstrom says early on in the project he felt that using a darker background, one that implied an evening setting, would work much better than a sparse, white background, which is what the initial concept called for. Wahlstrom recalls they started out with a hard lighting technique. "Then, we pulled back and used a softer, rim-lit bank light, which gives the basketball that crest moon. I also darkened down the ball and shaded it more because then the light would burn out the dimples on the surface of the ball."

Of course, size matters when it comes to detail, and everyone involved was concerned about how grain might compete with the details, since it was going to be such a big enlargement. Also, the NBA



The final ad combines photographic elements such as the ball, which was shot using 8x10 Polaroid film, with vector non-pixelated images like the NBA logo and the stars in the sky. The sky itself was photographed by Wahlstrom.

logos and the neon lights, which are vector-based images, might compete with the photographic elements, which might look too soft in comparison. "One thing that we did expect," says Wahlstrom, "was that if you're going to blow up an image so big, it is going to get grainy. It'll be soft when viewed up close. However, since the logos are illustrative [vector] elements, I needed to soften them up slightly and pull them back to marry them with the ball. I didn't want it to be a totally clean, sharp illustration against a grainy basketball image."

After the process of importing, editing and layering all the various elements in the image was complete, Wahlstrom used Genuine Fractals software, which generates high-quality enlargements for print with more manageable file sizes, to accurately enlarge the image up to the proper size. "The software's a pretty good program for that," Wahlstrom says. He then passed these four files on to Scott, who delivered them to the production house.

Once the image was delivered to the Burbank, California-based production house Crush Creative, Scott said it took five days for the company to wrap the monorail. "They actually have to take the train out of commission for a week," says Scott, "to apply the 3M adhesive-backed vinyl to the monorail. It's very much like wallpaper going up."



The promotion does not stop on the outside. The inside of the monorail is also an advertisement for the NBA game.

The NBA All-Star Game ad will remain on view on the Las Vegas monorail through February 2007. □

Reprinted with permission from *Photo District News*, November 2006.



RICK WAHLSTROM PHOTOGRAPHY

650 ALABAMA ST. #302
SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94110
PH. 415 550 1400 • RICK@WAHLSTROMPHOTO.COM