

**DIGITAL**

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# WE'RE NOT IN CANVAS ANYMORE

## rigid board in home décor

by Melissa Donovan

With flatbed media handling advancements, chemical enhancements in ink, and new material compositions, rigid board is being used in new ways. Santa Ana, CA-based Canvas Express' product line—Photo Linen Canvas—is an ideal example.

### A New Approach to Canvas

The company began in 2013 when Michael Kane, founder, Canvas Express, traveled to the Digital Sign Expo and realized how a rigid board could be cut to create a self-framed construction or unique shapes. Kane already held an extensive

(B2C) market, but through trial and error the company realized the potential of its products in the marketing segment—thus refocusing on a B2B business model.

“The fact that our Photo Linen Canvas product line revolves around rigid boards allows Canvas Express to create products that either the home décor markets have never seen, or products that would be labor cost prohibitive to construct using wood and fabric methods and materials,” explains Bil O’Neill, director of marketing, Canvas Express.

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The company’s utility patent pending portfolio incorporates EnCore Products’ Canvas Foam Boards. Comprised of different canvas solutions including frames, panels, and splits, the product line addresses the need to stand out from the crowd and showcase photographs and artwork in an innovative way, with both the frame and graphic as one. This is all accomplished by printing direct to an embossed linen texture on a rigid board.

background in digitally printing direct to rigid board and looked to combine past knowledge with this new understanding.

Today, with ten employees—and the number growing, Canvas Express offers fulfillment services to business-to-business (B2B) clientele by supplying unique solutions like the Photo Linen Canvas line for home décor. Originally, the plan was to reach the business to consumer

The company offers product development, print on demand capabilities, kitting and pack out, shipping and distribution, customer care support, and order fulfillment management to customers throughout the continental U.S.

At the inception of the business, research and development involved selecting a color calibrated image with balanced highlights, mid-tones, and shadows. The team calibrated the graphic until it satisfied the criteria for the best visual results.



Left to right: Canvas Express works with EnCore’s Canvas Foam Boards to create unique, innovative artwork. The Photo Linen Canvas line includes Photo Linen Canvas WallWraps and Photo Linen Canvas Brights—LEDs illuminate the wall around the back of the canvas frame, which is constructed to wrap around a 90 degree wall corner.

"I pinpointed the top 12 B2C retail canvas suppliers and purchased 12, 16x20-inch traditional stretched canvas products. The results were all over the place. At that moment we realized that our print quality was in the 98 percentile to the market," adds O'Neill.

EnCore Embossed Canvas, which the company uses in both 3/16- and 1/4-inch thicknesses, consists of a polystyrene foam core. The 1/4-inch version features embossed canvas on one side, while the 3/16-inch option consists of embossed canvas back and front. The rigid board offers excellent ink adhesion, resulting in a sharper and brighter appearance of the graphics. It provides the company with the ability to offer a unique self-frame product without compromising on quality or customization.

Canvas Express prints using an EFI VUTEK GS3250LX with GS LX series 4 inks. It is a 3.2-meter flatbed and roll-to-roll UV-curing printer. For cutting finished graphics down to various sizes, Canvas Express uses a Zünd America G3 3XL-3200 cutter/router. O'Neill comments that the laser cutter features a carbide steel blade.

The Photo Linen Canvas line continues to grow and transition into markets not previously considered. "There seems to be a never-ending supply of product ideas and applications," says O'Neill.

Citing car dealerships as one vertical embracing the trend by placing vehicle photos on canvas, he shares that interest stems from its 102x42-inch with a three-inch frame depth Photo Linen Canvas Panel. It is a less expensive alternative to traditional stretched material for a project of that size, continues O'Neill.

Three of the newest products in the Canvas Express portfolio are Photo Linen Canvas Shapes, Photo Linen Canvas WallWraps, and Photo Linen Canvas Brights. Photo Linen Canvas Shapes leverages all-in-one frame technology to create a limitless option of shapes and configurations. Photo Linen Canvas WallWraps allow users to take a piece of art and wrap it around a 90 degree

wall corner. Photo Linen Canvas Brights feature built-in LED lighting, engineered to illuminate the wall around the back of the canvas frame.

When working with Photo Linen Canvas Brights, such as the example pictured on the left, the canvas is raised off the wall and a lip is added. This provides distance to help the LEDs diffuse against the wall. Depending on the user's preference, the lights can be one particular color, an array of colors, or fade between colors, according to O'Neill. The lip provides a ledge to seat the light strip into. As with all of the frames in the Photo Linen Canvas collection, this frame is an all-in-one construction.

#### Here for the Entertainment

Recently, Canvas Express completed work for FELD Entertainment, a worldwide leader in producing and presenting live tours. The customer asked the company to create display art out of photos depicting some of their entertainment experiences. The final pieces would be placed in the halls of a new office space.

To meet the correct size requirements, Photo Linen Canvas Panel was used and printed on the EFI VUTEK GS3250LX printer. Printed with eco-friendly, archival, pigment-based ink, the graphics are rated to stay true to color for 50 years. Since the substrate is run right through the printer and no additional frame is necessary, the graphics appear at full bleed to the viewer.

"The type of entertainment experiences our client provides are incredibly visual. Stunning colors, high-quality photography, captivating imagery—ideal attributes for our Photo Linen Canvas product to display," adds O'Neill.

With a turnaround time of roughly a week, Canvas Express did not encounter many challenges.

Of note, the company likes to take photos of an environment and Adobe Photoshop intended artwork into a blank canvas to give the customer an idea of how their finished décor will look. Choosing which of the entertainment

provider's photos fit best in certain areas was one of the more challenging issues associated with the project.

#### Fresh Faced

Only in business for a little over a year, Canvas Express is taking home décor by storm. While personalized prints on traditional canvas are trending, the company's ability to print directly to EnCore's Canvas Foam Boards presents them with a unique opportunity to provide an all-in-one frame and graphic, but with the same quality, longevity, and durability expected from traditional, flexible canvas.

The company's commitment to expanding the Photo Linen Canvas collection is evident in its continued investment in the newest technologies. Without the advancements in ink composition the work Canvas Express has done would not be possible. The company has opened up new ways for consumers and businesses alike to decorate on their own terms. **D**

**DIRECT** See page 23 for more info.

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