

Audi: When Engineering Counts



Audi is known the world over for their excellence in engineering. So when they decided to completely remodel all 250 of their US showrooms, they wanted the space where their cars are showcased to reflect their core values of innovation and precision engineering. The design and execution had to be perfect.

Working with the US interior design firm Ideal Image, Audi decided on a circular motif within their showrooms that reflects the four interlocking circles of their brand symbol. Customer service staff would distribute literature and answer questions from within cylindrical counters. Suspended from the ceiling, banners featuring the five current models would not only extend the counter cylinders vertically into the overhead space but also include graphics of arcs that, perfectly spaced, together provide optical illusions of the brand circles.

There were some immediate stumbling blocks in achieving this vision. First, digital imaging machines could neither use a fabric heavy enough to hang properly nor imprint a true metallic sheen for the logo. Second, no circular mounting hardware for hanging fabric banners existed.

John Peterson, VP of Marketing for Audi, was at a trade show, GlobalShop, when he saw the perfect fabric. There in the Project Graphics booth was the durable, heavy-weight fabric he wanted and it happened to be exactly the Audi red. He stopped and spoke with Project Graphics' owner, Andy Riecker, who told him about the company's capabilities. One



month later, still without a viable solution, Mr. Peterson flew to Connecticut to visit the Project Graphics manufacturing facility and meet again with Andy.

Project Graphics could, indeed, provide a comprehensive solution. Instead of digital imaging, Andy suggested that Audi use silk-screening technology. This process allows the use of a heavy-weight, durable fabric that would hang crisply and without a wrinkle as well as a chrome ink for a true metallic sheen. Project Graphics could also custom design and manufacture the necessary hardware. Mr. Peterson took samples back to show his German colleagues and got their general agreement that it was the look they all wished to effect.

Project Graphics then worked directly with Ideal Image, the firm handling the entire redesign and refurbishment of the showrooms from the ground up and the originator of the "carousel of graphics" going from floor to ceiling, to find ways to create a system that would allow the banners to form the kinetic

Audi Case Study

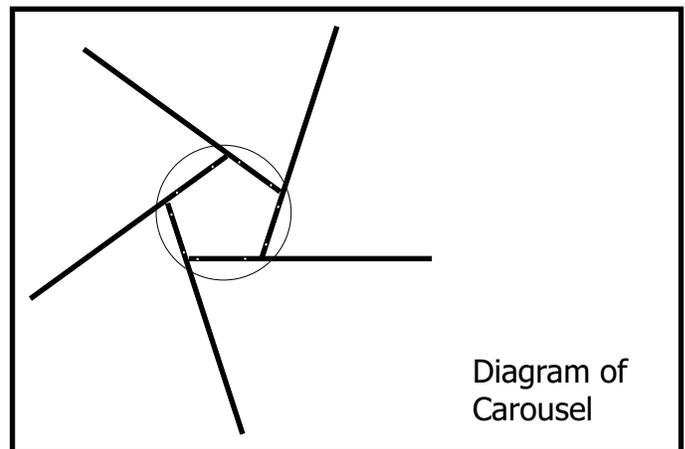
structure of their vision. The fabric was easy – it had been chosen before the project began. The rest was more of a challenge. Project Graphics' production specialists first created a liquid silver ink by suspending actual chrome flakes in a clear base. This ink, silk-screened onto the fabric, gave the solid metallic impression that the client wanted. Next, the firm engineered the carousel hardware. Using two stainless steel powder-coated circular plates that sandwiched five matching 27" rods, the mounting would hold not only the banners but also their two internal steel rods. The banners themselves could be hung directly from the rods or suspended from slender, nearly invisible wires at different heights to line up accurately to create the circles that echo their brand symbol. The whole would hang straight and be strong enough to not tip or sag while remaining adaptable enough to accommodate different ceiling heights and conformations. The entire project went smoothly and the two firms interfaced easily to accomplish the goal. Audi never had to intervene or participate in the mechanics of the process.

Audi had decided to use their Danbury, CT facility as the flagship to launch the showroom redesign. Executives would be arriving from Germany and across the United States to judge the final result. Ideal Image had completed the rest of the remodel and the banner carousels were the last thing to be installed. There was one glitch when the installers, unfamiliar with the custom hardware, were unable to figure out how to hang the hardware from the Danbury facility's curved ceiling. Project Graphics' owner and production manager both came out to explain the process and make sure there were no other problems. Project Graphics then standardized the installation process and produced a "how-to

guide" and Ideal Image designated a single person who understood the process to attend all installations.

The Danbury launch was a great success. The entire redesign was magnificent and the banner carousels were an integral part of the design and a visual focal point. Now a proven plan, the redesign could be rolled out to all the remaining showrooms. Given the scale of the project and the number of showrooms to be redone, though, the whole process was clearly going to last several years. Project Graphics agreed to warehouse all the materials and drop-ship them directly to the showrooms being remodeled as needed. With over 70% of the Audi showrooms located between Boston and Washington, DC, Project Graphics' location midway along the Northeast Corridor could not have been more convenient. Not only could someone from Project Graphics be onsite quickly in case of problems, but with one-day UPS ground shipping from Maine to Washington, materials could be sent easily and inexpensively.

Audi's new showrooms truly live up to its tagline: Truth in Engineering.



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