



Commercial Interior Décor: Improving Patient and Customer **EXPERIENCES**



Credit: BrandArmor.

🔗 *Wallcoverings are a great way to add personality and life to spaces, which can in turn help patients heal faster.*



When it comes to healthcare situations, interior décor is about more than just branding.

By Toni McQuilken

As we move into the second half of 2021, there is no denying that COVID-19 still has a firm grip on the world. The fight against the pandemic is starting to make progress as vaccines are rolled out more broadly, but there is still a lot of work to be done — and some states and countries are still experiencing surges that drive home the fact that we aren't completely out of the proverbial woods just yet.

One sector, in particular, has been hit especially hard: healthcare. From overloaded hospitals, to local doctors' offices and national pharmacies, healthcare providers of all types have had far more challenges to overcome in the past year than most businesses. You might be wondering, however, what that has to do with the wide-format printing industry — after all, print isn't going to heal anyone, right? The reality is that now, more than ever, the interior décor of a space can mean the difference between calm, happy patients who are easier to treat, and panicked, depressed patients who present additional challenges on top of whatever problems have brought them through the door.

And interior décor is something wide-format printers can help with.

Smarter Healthcare Experiences

HP's Tom Wittenberg, Industry Relations & Events, recounts a major project he worked on for a children's hospital, working to create not just unique and engaging images, but integrating it with interactive elements such as videos, or even trivia games, that could be accessed using a tablet PC and scanning different elements of wallpaper, for example.

"The idea was a background wallpaper with embedded triggers," he notes, "for example, a map of the world on the wall. And a kid could take an iPad and go put it on 'Paris,' and ... it would show a quick video." The heart of the system was gathering the data at check-in, such as age and interests, to then ensure that when that child scanned an element, they received age-appropriate content, and if they scanned the same thing multiple times, they would get several different pieces of content.

"The purpose was to get kids out and moving around, healing more quickly," he says. "That's one of the biggest challenges — finding ways to get people with serious diseases up and walking and moving to improve their health much more quickly, and get back home faster."

The scope of the project quickly grew, and Wittenberg notes that, unfortunately, after a year-and-a-half, the project eventually had to be scaled back. The challenges of creating a project of that size proved to be too much — at least with current technologies — but it does prove that there is an incredibly strong need for creative print professionals coming through the door with innovative ideas to help improve the patient experiences — not just grow a brand.

The biggest challenge in this case was the scope of the planned interactive elements, which proved to be far more complex than initially anticipated. But for other wide-format printers looking to create projects on a slightly less ambitious scale, there were a few other lessons Wittenberg shared that apply to any project in a healthcare environment.

First, he notes, it's all about having the right materials. The average



Credit: BrandArmor.

➡ With the wide range of substrates available, there doesn't have to be a compromise between function and design.

wallcovering substrates used in most applications, for example, simply can't stand up to the needs of a healthcare facility, which often uses harsh cleaning chemicals such as ammonia and bleach on every surface — including the walls. “No matter what kind of wallpaper it is, that will do a lot of damage,” Wittenberg notes. “So you have to figure out ways to laminate it so they can clean it, but it

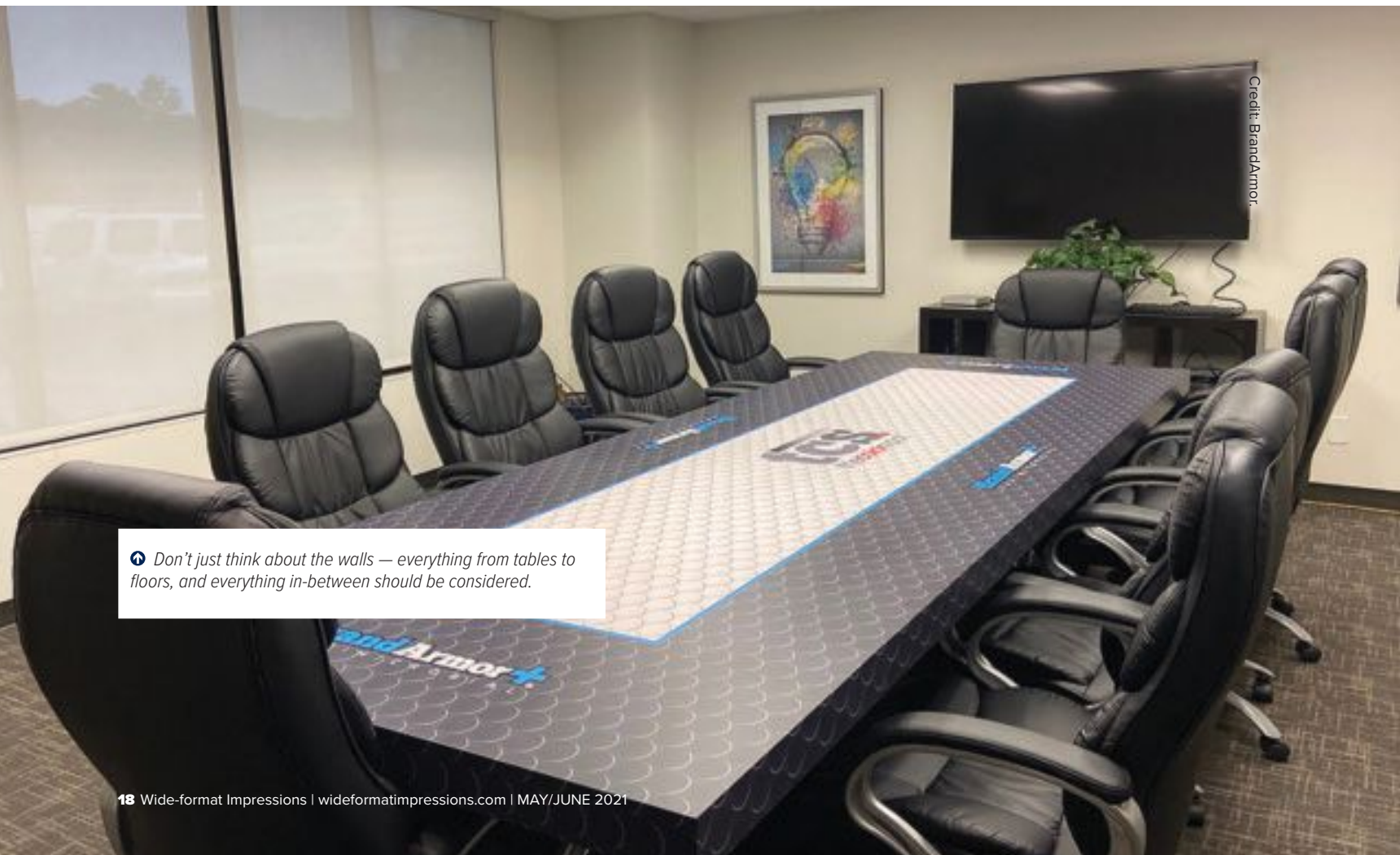
won't damage the wallpaper.”

Jonathan Baltic, the SVP at BrandArmor, notes that this is the very problem his company set out to solve, creating a product that was durable enough to stand up to the rigorous requirements in facilities such as hospitals, but was also still receptive enough to be printable on wide-format equipment.

The latest products in their line focus on providing more of a matte finish needed for interior spaces, as well as an antimicrobial option, which is something healthcare facilities in particular are starting to demand as the technology to produce this type of substrate gets more broad recognition.

When they first launched the antimicrobial product, called SafeWalls, Baltic notes, the focus was on viruses such as

E coli. “And then COVID came, and we changed direction. We're now very focused on healthcare and businesses that want to get the doors open, while doing as much as they can to limit risk.” In fact, he says, just this past Fall the company put the product through official testing to prove that it kills up to 96.2% of the COVID virus within an hour, allowing it to officially market the product for COVID prevention.



Credit: BrandArmor.

➡ Don't just think about the walls — everything from tables to floors, and everything in-between should be considered.



🔊 *Anti-microbial substrates are perfect choices for hospitals, schools, restaurants, or any space where people spend time.*

“It’s not a coating,” he notes, instead it is an additive that is “added at the compound level before the film is extruded, so it doesn’t ever wear off.” He notes that it is also a polymer product that is stain free: “you could drop a tray that has blood on it, for example, and it would wipe off. You can write on it with a Sharpie and it will wipe off. It marries durability and safety for public spaces.”

That combination makes it an appealing option for those looking to overcome some of the challenges Wittenberg faced when trying to completely rethink the way hospital interiors are designed.

More Than Décor

Of course, the print products needed in healthcare environments aren’t limited to just the décor. The other major component wide-format printers can bring their expertise to bear is in the wayfinding signage that is found throughout every single space — and which needs as much consideration as any other printed element. Add to that the fact that COVID-19 has in many cases led to the need to completely rework the flow of people through a facility, and the need for both temporary and new permanent signage is obvious.

“The biggest challenge for provider facility signage has been wayfinding signage,” says Ken Gammon, SVP for RRD Healthcare Solutions. “COVID-19 has created a completely new traffic flow

for these facilities, and accurate up-to-date signage is critical to ensure patients know where they need to go for their appointments. Additionally, signage that is instructional — especially relating to COVID-19 — has been a challenge. Reminders to wash hands, maintain space, and wear masks are important to keeping all patients and staff safe. Prior to the pandemic, not many materials management or facilities management teams had much experience with this type of signage, so they needed to identify new suppliers and to qualify them appropriately.”

That is where wide-format providers can present creative solutions to help these facilities solve the new challenges they face. Right now, healthcare providers are far more focused on trying to keep their patients healthy and safe — they likely don’t have a lot of time to think about their signage. So a printer who comes to the table with a plan already fleshed out, with samples, design elements, and even a rough idea of how and where to install them will be welcome.

And don’t just think about the long-term signage — right now, temporary wide-format signage elements are both brand new to hospitals, but something most print service providers (PSPs) have experience creating and producing for other sectors, such as retail. Don’t be afraid to share that expertise.

“While temporary signage is very common in industries such as

retail, it is new for provider facilities,” notes Gammon. “The impact of the pandemic continues to reverberate throughout every industry, and while the need for long-term social distancing or wayfinding signage remains to be seen, as provider facilities become more consumer centric, we will see an increase in wide-format signage to decorate and promote their services, as well as to create an atmosphere that is more inviting.”

Wide-Format's Future in Healthcare

With all that in mind, the future of wide-format opportunities in the healthcare segment is a broad one. Creative providers can approach the problem from a variety of angles, and in the process become a valued partner for these facilities, allowing doctors and nurses to refocus their energy back on their patients instead of needing to worry about signage.


Beyond wayfinding and wallpaper, there are other opportunities in the space to keep an eye on. A few examples:

- **Wraps inside elevators** that both help to reduce the spread of germs, but also allow hospitals to convey branding or messaging.
 - **Wraps for MRI machines** — Wittenberg recalls one project he came across where a colorful and fun wrap was used, and the facility in question found that it reduced the fear and stress in patients who had to undergo a scan.
 - **Custom graphics for individual hospital or exam rooms**, making each one unique. Especially in facilities that cater to children, this can be a fun way to make them more comfortable and less afraid.
 - **Magnetic wallpapers** in hospital rooms that allow staff to change the scene based on the patient's age or interests, as well as providing an easy way to personalize with name plates or other elements.
- That is just a short list of ideas — the potential is nearly limitless once a provider starts to think about it. Wittenberg notes, however, that when getting started, the best way to begin is to find out “what’s going on, what are you doing?” He goes on to note that “Interactivity is not for the faint of heart — it is very complicated — but wraps are things any PSP can do. And with the right equipment you could even do the curtains in the room that go around the beds, you might be able to create hospital gowns or window blinds. It’s about creating an experience — maybe not an interactive one, but having each room done a different way.”

“The evolution of wide-format printing technology has given decorators another tool to help create vibrant and engaging interiors that weren’t an option before,” says Gammon. “And with the price point of wide-format, it gives the decorators the flexibility to quickly and easily change based on seasons, events, etc.” He continues that for those who want to explore this market, “proactively bringing new and creative use cases to our clients is a way to be seen as more of a partner, and less of just a printer.”

“Printers now have a way to be part of the COVID solution in a really impactful way,” stresses Baltic. “Those that work with clients will strengthen relationships — it’s not just selling something, it’s solving some of their problems.”

And that is really the key to wide-format in the healthcare environment: solving problems. Wide-format print technologies and substrates have come a long way even in just the past few years. Finding new and innovative ways to help hospitals, doctors, pharmacies, clinics, and more create engaging and interesting spaces that help put patients at ease is a business goal worth pursuing. ●



Interior décor can also serve as wayfinding elements, combining function and design.