

SPELL-BINDING INVITATION SET CELEBRATES HALLOWEEN

By Kym Conis



Shakespeare’s infamous chant in *Macbeth*, “Double, Double Toil and Trouble; Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble...” conjured up more than just a haunted spell for McGraphics, Inc. of Nashville, Tenn. Inspired by the ‘bewitching hour’ and all its captivating possibilities, McGraphics succeeded in crafting a spell-binding Halloween open house invitation set that turned heads and opened new doors in the area’s print and design communities.

Initially designed as a Halloween ‘survival kit’, the 10-piece set encourages viewers to “Be Not Afraid...” – inviting them to open their minds to a world of decorative processes where dimension and shine are not to be feared but embraced. Through the use of familiar Halloween images adorned with a splash of pizzazz, the kit showcases a wide variety of finishing processes without a single drop of ink. From an intricate,

sculpture embossed bat depicting eerie and lifelike features to a foil stamped and embossed mask eliciting devilish delight in rich tones of red, the Halloween invitation set demonstrates stamping, embossing, debossing, mounting, diecutting, CAD design, folding/gluing, eyeletting, and assembly.

A Hauntingly Brilliant Collaboration

For McGraphics, the project started with a quest: how to take away the fear of utilizing various finishing processes while instilling in customers the trust that McGraphics was there to help – from design through production. Seeking a way to highlight not only high-quality craftsmanship but promote its creative capabilities in structural design, McGraphics came up with the concept of a Halloween ‘survival kit’ last summer.

“The initial idea of a survival kit gave way to an amazing collaborative effort by our entire company,” explained McGraphics President Tommy McEwen. “Each day someone would come up with a different image to go into the box.” From sales to production to the front office, the entire company took part – and ownership – in what would turn out to be an incredible collaboration of ideas, creativity, engineering, and a whole lot of fun!

McGraphics wanted to create a piece that demonstrated its capabilities and provided customers with a sales tool when trying to sell finishing. “We were looking for a piece that would stand out,” stated McEwen. And Halloween provided the perfect platform. The idea of turning the ‘cold calling card’ into an invitation to a McGraphics open house came later in the process. “We were so excited about the

Halloween kit that we wanted to make more of the promotion,” stated McGraphics’ CAD designer and CFO Brian Clements, “and an open house was a great way to bring the promotion full circle.”

Seeking to bring in new business, McGraphics set out to design a piece that would help its outside salesman gain an audience with new accounts. “Getting in the door to potential print and design customers is always a challenge, starting right with the receptionist,” stated Clements. “The Halloween-themed invitation set was just the ticket we needed. Our salesman would come walking in with one of these box sets – assembled and filled with candy – and pretty soon a group would gather in awe of the piece.”

Devising the structural design of the outer box (which housed all the pieces), the candy box, and the luminaries was a challenge that McGraphics, and its new Graphtec CAD system with Cimex software, met with confidence. “We really wanted to showcase our design capabilities in the area of diecutting,” stated Clements. “We’ve been making our own steel rule dies for quite some time, but we wanted to create a piece that would focus on the design end. Whether a box kit or capacity pocket folder, we can help with the design stage. As the invitation states, there’s nothing to fear.”

Numerous hours were spent cutting samples and fine tuning the exterior box and the pop-out candy box in the shape of a haunted house that needed to fit snugly inside. Hand-assembly also was very time-consuming. “We could have produced several of the pieces on our Universal folder-gluer, but because of the low quantity (400), the run did not justify the time on press,” said Clements.

As a work in progress over a period of three months, the final design of the Halloween invitation set encompassed a sculptured embossed bat; a foil stamped and embossed devil mask eyeleted with an elastic strap; a three-dimensional haunted house, stamped and embossed with the McGraphics logo and filled with candy; a diecut and foil stamped capabilities card with rotating cut-outs; a debossed tombstone; and a foil stamped cat, which served as the open house invitation. Two contrasting orange

and dark grey luminaries with diecut images of a jack-o-lantern and a cat also were added to the kit, along with four tea candles to complete the set.

“Utilizing the diecut cats as the invitation was a secondary thought,” explained McEwen. “We had all these cats lying around from the luminaries, so we decided to put them to good use. In fact, there was very little waste on the entire project.” Finally, a vellum band with a blind embossed McGraphics logo functioned not only as a means to contain all the items in the kit but as a design element that added a unique ‘finishing’ touch.

Double, Double Toil and ... No Trouble

Taking a concept from design through production was what the McGraphics invitation set was all about. The overall set, with its simplistic but creative use of orange and dark grey stock, presented an end result that was very attainable – one that gave onlookers the confidence to design with these finishing mediums. “Our goal was to encourage printers and designers to no longer fear using finishing work on their printed pieces,” McEwen explained. “We needed a message that would grab their attention, and ‘Don’t Be Afraid...’ did just that.”

However, the production process was far from ‘simplistic’. The entire kit was produced on Dur-o-tone 140# cover in Butcher orange and Steel grey. The two colors were mounted together on a Pot Devin, creating a sturdy and functional stock from which to produce the luminaries. One grey and one orange, the foil stamped and embossed luminaries contained cutout images of a jack-o-lantern and cat, through which viewers could see reversed color and shimmering light. Crown Roll Leaf supplied the foil, and Metal Magic donated all of the foil stamping and embossing dies, which included copper flat stamp dies and raised-round, beveled-edge, and hand-sculpted brass embossing and debossing dies.

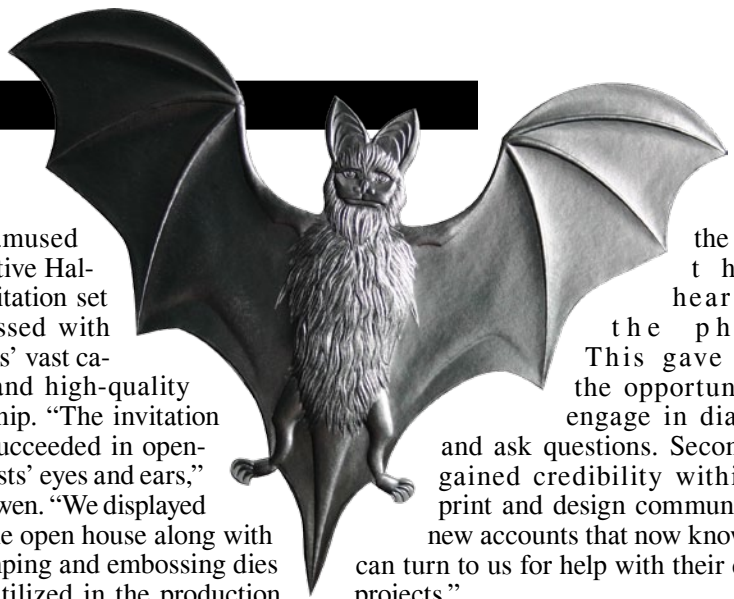
All artwork for the foil stamped and embossed images was designed in-house, except for the exquisitely detailed bat, which was sculpted by hand at Metal Magic. Stamped with a gloss black foil and then multi-level embossed, the life-

like detail of the bat is so real that it elicits the expected squeamish response. “All we supplied the diemaker was an outline of the bat,” explained Clements. “From there, he worked his ‘magic’.”

The devil facemask with its sly grin was stamped in metallic red foil, embossed, and diecut. Eyelets were added with a Segal press to attach the elastic band, creating a very functional and devilishly popular piece. The cat cutouts, orange on one side and grey on the other, provided the base for the open house invitation and were foil stamped in gloss black foil with the details of the afternoon event. The black gatefold card detailing McGraphics’ capabilities was stamped in matte silver and red metallic foil. The diecut and foil stamped circles, inscribed with the text “Don’t Be Afraid” and “We’re Here to Help”, were carefully engineered to twist with the opening of the piece. The tombstone, comprised of 80# Greystone Classic Linen cover, was debossed with a tint foil, listing all employees of McGraphics as “Overseer”, “Mad Scientists”, and “Trusted Minions”.

To emphasize the company’s wide variety of equipment and range of capabilities, the invitation set utilized as many different pieces of equipment as possible. The stamping and embossing work was produced on a Brausse 402, Franklin, Kensol, Kluge, and Brausse 780, and the diecutting work was produced on a Thomson, Kluge, and Brausse 402. The large 37¾"×23⅛" flats were first diecut on the Thomson and again, because of the small quantity, were foil stamped in





gloss black pigment foil and embossed on the hand-fed Franklin instead of the Bobst BMA. “Hand assembly was extremely time-consuming. I barely kept one ahead of the hand-deliveries, producing as many as our salesman needed for each call on each day,” stated Clements.

Completing the Halloween kits was no small accomplishment for McGraphics employees; as each kit went out the door, an incredible sense of pride permeated the shop floor. “All of our employees worked together to create something truly unique. We actually designed something that *could* be produced for a change,” chuckled McEwen with a hint of sarcasm. “This was a phenomenal team builder for our company.”

Open House Magic

As the ‘witching hour’ of the open house approached, McGraphics opened its doors on Oct. 24, 2007 to an amazing turnout. Enjoying the CAD demonstrations, plant tours, and plenty of great food, attend-

ees were amused by the creative Halloween invitation set and impressed with McGraphics’ vast capabilities and high-quality craftsmanship. “The invitation set really succeeded in opening our guests’ eyes and ears,” stated McEwen. “We displayed the set at the open house along with all the stamping and embossing dies that were utilized in the production process; this served as a very useful educational tool.”

In the end, the Halloween invitation set impressed, amazed, and piqued the curiosity of onlookers, so much so that McGraphics’ open house proved an overwhelming success. “We accomplished several very important things with this project and our event,” concluded McEwen. “We streamlined the lines of communication between our customers and our employees by putting a face with

the voices they hear over the phone. This gave them the opportunity to engage in dialogue and ask questions. Second, we gained credibility within the print and design communities – new accounts that now know they can turn to us for help with their design projects.”

As the winner of the elite Best of Show award in the Foil Stamping & Embossing Association’s 2007 Gold Leaf Awards Competition, the Halloween invitation set turned out to be an incredibly dynamic piece, unique in concept and design. Without a drop of ink, McGraphics successfully conveyed a powerful message utilizing the design mediums it knows best – producing the quintessential example of finishing at its finest! ■



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