

A homemade display just might save the day

The universal hard and fast rule that affects organizations large and small is that marketing budgets are always tight. This was a painful reality in my marketing early days while employed in Wichita's aircraft and healthcare industries. There seemed never to be enough money to buy a nice display to take to a tradeshow, health fair or to loan to the employee club for the local scout roundup. To have either a good floor or table-top display was then, and still is, very expensive; displays are many times very fragile and hard to buy parts for. To have two or more displays for company reps to use was almost always for my employees, completely out of the question.

A marketing department position with Cessna Aircraft in Wichita introduced me to fabricating displays that are attractive, inexpensive, long lasting and easy to make. The Cessna maintenance department made scores of displays designed by the department for reps to use in presentations around the world. The primary material used in these applications is one I still find perfect for display fabrication today – it is Gatorboard.

Gatorboard is an extruded polystyrene foam mounting board encased between layers of a melamine and wood fiber veneer. Gatorboard, sometimes called Gatorfoam, has a harder outer surface than other foam core boards, resists warping and does not dimple under cutting pressure. Gatorboard is more durable than foam core boards and is a good choice for applications where

strength and light weight are important – like fabricating a marketing display.

At my next marketing position with a Wichita hospital, an excellent maintenance department built a half a dozen, three panel, floor displays that were used extensively for the 10 years I

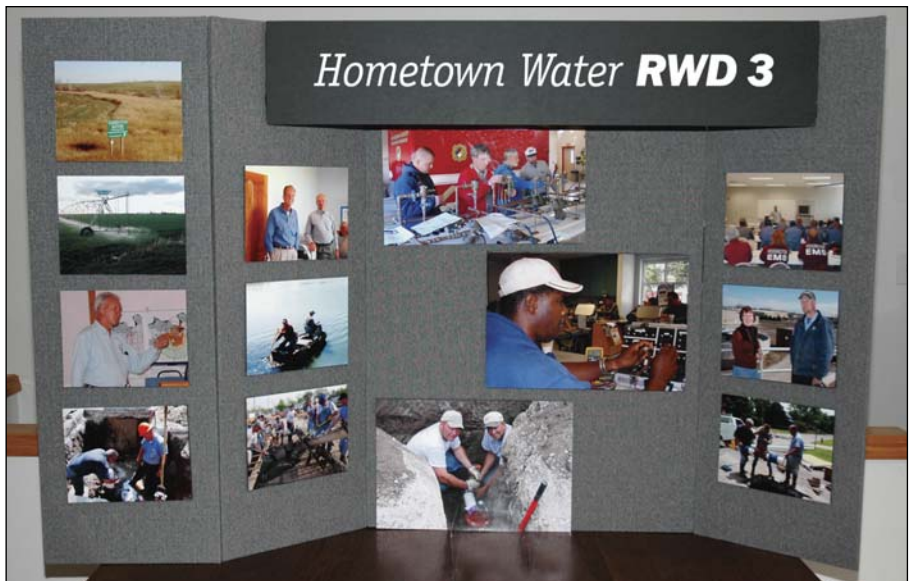
One of the presentations I made frequently to rural chapters was how a small town, small budget, Red Cross chapter manager could afford to make a professional display usable at local events for fundraising, volunteer recruitment or bloodmobiles. Many volunteer chapter managers utilized the

design on the handout and made similar displays that are still in use today.



Left: The 6-panel KRWA homemade display is shown at a past March conference in the Century II EXPO Hall.

Below: This homemade, 4-panel, table-top display costs just over \$200 to make. It is sturdy, attractive, lightweight, flexible to use and will last a long time.



spent in the department. During this same time I was National Rural Chapter Volunteer Chair for the American Red Cross serving southern Kansas and the northern two tiers of Oklahoma counties.

Displays used in direct marketing and public relations can be designed to fit specific needs. Lighting, special product mounts and panel configurations can be incorporated into a display design.



Above: A 4 x 4 ft. panel is cut to 32-in. wide with a table saw.



Center: After measuring material to cover the 32 in. panel, it was marked with a white grease pencil and cut with scissors.



Right: The 32-in. center display panel is sprayed with 3M Super 77 in a healthy crisscross pattern. The edges were also sprayed at this time. There was a breeze at my back so the overspray was blown away from me. A mask should be worn in less ventilated areas.

8-ft. sheet down to one 32-in. wide panel, and three 16 in. wide panels. A router, jigsaw or Skilsaw could also be used to make the same cuts. The Gatorboard and other materials mentioned are detailed in the ‘Materials’ sidebar on page 117.

Selecting, cutting and gluing fabric to board

The fabric selected for this project is an upholstery fabric with a rubberized backing that accepts 3M Super 77 spray adhesive quite

well. When selecting a fabric, the fabric surface needs to be rough enough to readily allow Velcro hook fastening material to latch on tight. The 54-in. fabric is then measured to width and cut to let it wrap the Gatorboard edge to cover an additional two inches on the backside of the display panel’s vertical edge. This makes a nice edge but also gives the panel fastening system a Velcro grip on the panel edges. This will be shown a little later.

My displays are covered with fabrics that accept Velcro hook fasteners used to hold photo images and signage to the display surface.

It wasn’t until starting work with KRWA that I had an opportunity to finally fabricate a display myself. Three years ago I designed and constructed the 6-panel, floor display that is currently used in the KRWA booth at KRWA’s annual conference in Wichita.

For this *Lifeline* article and a Thursday demonstration class at the March conference, I have made a second display. It is a 4-panel, Gatorboard table-top display. The following steps in the article will provide an overview of materials and techniques to follow in building one of these displays.

Cutting Gatorboard

Gatorboard can either be cut by hand with a utility knife and straight edge, or with a number of power tools. A small table saw was used to cut the half-in., 4 x

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Above: The fabric needs a good amount of adhesive on the back to ensure a good bond between fabric and board.

Center: After material is centered over the board, a firm burnishing with 3M burnishing tool facilitates bonding.

Right: After burnishing fabric to the panel, wrap-around material is sprayed along with a masked area on the back of the board where the wrap will glue.

Left circle: Finished and mitered 45 degree angle corners on two panels joined by Velcro hinges sit next to a Velcro hinge. Hinges are made with three strips of 1-in. Velcro hook sewn onto a canvas backing.

Right circle: The hinge's Velcro is gripping two wrapped fabric edges on the back of two panels, holding them together.

The Gatorboard is sprayed with an overlap double coat of the 3M Super 77 spray. All spraying should be done outside or in a well-ventilated shop or garage. Do not breathe the overspray! The panel edges must also be sprayed well at this time.

The fabric is sprayed with a fairly heavy coat of the 3M 77 adhesive. Having board and fabric surfaces both coated with the 77 spray adhesive ensures a good bond between the two. After

measuring, cutting, centering and laying the material down on the board for gluing, a plastic

3M burnisher or similar tool is used to firmly burnish the fabric down, mashing the two glue coatings together. I found that a window ice scraper works just as well. A hard burnishing is also needed on panel edges and panel back wrapped areas. It is important not to forget to spray adhesive on the 2-in. strip along the vertical edges and a little larger spray strip on the back panel ends where the 54-in. length of material wraps each panel end. When finishing the corners on the back wrapped areas, it is easy to fashion and trim a 45 degree miter joint that lays the adjoining sides together that keeps them glued down flat to the board.

Securing the standing panels

To make the one 32-in. and three 16-in. panels stand together they need to be aligned at approximately the angles shown in the first page photo. To secure the standing panels, it is easy to fashion Velcro hinges that affix to the edge joints between panels.

To fabricate the hinge, three 6-in. strips of 1-in. wide Velcro hook tape are sewn onto a canvas backing making a Velcro hinge. (See the inset on the photo above.) Three hinges per panel joint are ample to hold the panels together.

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