



CeeLite Hits the Road with the Sallie Mae Fund Signage Case Study

When The Sallie Mae Fund, an organization dedicated to providing access to higher education, was about to hit the road to renew interest in their College Funding programs, they desired a new look. They needed an exhibit that would drive the message home about education for high school juniors and seniors.

The solution was clear: turn the exhibit into the message. The Sallie Mae Fund enlisted the help of Dominion Exhibits to convert the original Stevie Ray Vaughn tour bus into the quintessential symbol of education: a mobile meeting place. Inside the bus, visiting students could learn about the college application process while being assisted by Sallie Mae fund representatives. The bus would depart on a year-long tour of the country, stopping in communities that would not normally have access to these services.



To design and construct this traveling exhibit, Dominion Exhibits had to overcome many challenges, chief among them the spatial constraints of the bus itself. The bus interior needed to convey the illusion that it was bigger and taller than it actually was, so as to overcome the tight fit caused by students carrying bulky backpacks and coats.

Dominion Exhibits immediately concluded that skylights would create this illusion. However, skylight construction proved to be difficult due to the structure of the bus shell. In addition, skylights would not offer much light on gloomy days. There was also a long, dark aisle to contend with. Dominion Exhibits needed to light up this educational bus in order to brighten students' futures.

To meet this design challenge, Dominion Exhibits used a total of 10 24"x36" CeeLite panels and 10 inverters as their lighting source. CeeLite panels offered an innovative option because they were flat and flexible, and enabled creative design construction. Additionally, they could be easily attached and adhered to the structure of the bus shell with velcro. Furthermore, the panels did not emit significant heat, which was important in a bus environment with limited ventilation.





The CeeLite panels made it possible for Dominion Exhibits to create a skylight ceiling without cutting into the bus shell. Instead, and in response to the curve of the arched bus ceiling, Dominion Exhibits inserted the CeeLite panels and 1/8" sintra panels into pre-existing precut openings. And, the applied CeeLite "skylights" above marketing materials and bookcases also brought a sleek blue glow of increased visibility in, and attraction to, otherwise darkened areas of the bus.

Dominion Exhibits also placed CeeLite panels, surrounded by foam, on the roof of the bus, which created both the illusion of center skylights and a pre-set traffic pattern for visiting students. This application immediately brightened the long, dark aisle running down the center of the bus, and offered a warm, welcoming environment. The bus remained safe and secure from potential vandalism as the CeeLite panels were easy to attach and detach in the event that the emergency escape hatches were needed.



"The CeeLite panels exceeded our expectations in helping us provide The Sallie Mae Fund with the novel sky lighting we couldn't have created with conventional lighting," said Marco Vita-Finzi, general manager, Dominion Exhibits. "Best of all, CeeLite ensured that it was always a sunny day for learning regardless of the outside weather conditions," he added.

"CeeLite really contributed to the fun environment we wanted the exhibit to convey to the students we were attracting," said Susan Corsini, senior vice president, The Sallie Mae Fund. "We could not have been happier with the results."

With the successful collaboration of CeeLite, Dominion Exhibits and Sallie Mae, there might be a new verse in the timeless classic, "Wheels on the Bus." The bus conversion was a huge triumph for the Sallie Mae Fund, and was even featured in national media such as MTV. Most importantly, this bus was able to provide information about higher education to students in communities across the country.

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