

Fighting Fatigue with Formed Fashion

Hastings Entertainment Superstores Upgrade Image and Service-Counter Durability with Vacuum-Formed, Damage-Resistant Thermoplastic

Setting the Specs

AMARILLO, TX - When you're David battling Goliath, you need every advantage you can get. When you're faced with several Goliaths — including the likes of Blockbuster and Barnes & Noble — you can't make any mistakes. So in 2004, when Amarillo, Texas-based Hastings Entertainment hired a design firm to develop an updated, upscale image for its stores, both sides knew they had no room for error. They were already the underdogs.

Hastings Entertainment has fared well in this fight to date. With 153 superstores in 20 states and a busy e-commerce Web site, the multimedia vendor is a well-established retailer of CDs, books, videos, video games and boutique merchandise. The company also rents videos and video games.

Hastings began implementing the new store design early in 2005 in both existing locations and newly relocated stores, and has now completed 15 locations. The redesign allowed Hastings to overcome several functional shortcomings in its old interiors, including failing cash-wrap countertops fabricated in plywood and surfaced with high-pressure laminate.

"People slide things across the counters all day," said Ken Hamilton, supervisor of Hastings' in-house fixture shop. "The countertops were wearing all the way through the printed pattern of the laminate."

Hamilton began evaluating surfacing materials that would stand up to heavy use without wear or fading. He consulted with David Romero of Lumber Products, a wood-products distributor based in Tualatin, Oregon. He recommended KYDEX® thermoplastic sheet three-dimensional laminate, a damage-resistant thermoplastic alloy produced by KYDEX, LLC of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

Romero told Hamilton the material was available in the desired thickness (.040") and colour that matched the new design palette (Treasure-Chest green with a black-and-white granite cap). It was also highly formable, and most important, extremely durable. "It's even used for aircraft interiors," he pointed out.

Hamilton evaluated the material and agreed with Romero, selecting KYDEX® 510 grade, which met or exceeded all of Hastings' requirements for strength, flex and flame resistance. (See box for full specifications.)

"We liked the colour, the way it looks and how it wears," Hamilton said. His shop sent the designs for the cash-wrap counters to Lumber Products, which engaged one of its regular subcontractors, Lamination Technology Industries (LTI) of Medford, Oregon, to build and finish them using a vacuum-forming process.



The new cash-wrap countertops in Hastings Entertainment's superstores are finished with KYDEX® thermoplastic sheet, which provides top durability and colour-coordination with a chain-wide redesign plan.

Choosing a Grade

KYDEX, LLC

ISO 9001 and 14001 Certified

Customer Service

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A Cleaner edge

“We send the substrate – 3/4" MDF with thermal-fused white melamine on the bottom – to our machine centers, where CNC routers machine the parts,” said Jason Paterson, director of sales and operations at LTI’s White City, Oregon, facility. “The counters for each store are unique in size and shape. Large, U-shaped and complex countertops may be assembled from several parts.

“After checking the parts for imperfections, we sand them, wipe them down, and spray them with heat-activated adhesive. Once they are dry, we lay the parts on blocks on the vacuum table and clamp the KYDEX® sheet in a frame to suspend it above the parts. The sheet and parts are rolled into the machine, which heats the sheet and activates the adhesive. A vacuum from below the sheet, in combination with pressure from above, causes the sheet to conform to all top and side surfaces of the parts, including sharp corners, compound curves and undercut edges.”

Once the parts cool, LTI trims the excess sheet at the bottom edge, inspects for defects, and ships the cleaned-up pieces.

“Vacuum forming results in a cleaner edge with no visible seams,” said Romero. “High-pressure laminates are limited in terms of the shapes that can be achieved, and are subject to cracking, chipping and delamination. Components clad with KYDEX® sheet are not.”

When the countertops reach the Hastings fixture shop, Hamilton’s crew assembles the parts and installs the fixtures in the field. “After more than a year of heavy use, the countertops are holding up well,” said Hamilton. “Customers are sliding their purchases across the surfaces all day, every day, with no signs of wear, and we’ve had no call-backs.”



Hastings Entertainment also selected KYDEX® thermoplastic sheet for the countertops of its stores’ drink-dispensing units. KYDEX’s impact resistance and ability to form rounded edges make it easy to keep these countertops clean.

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