

What to Consider

When Buying a Laminate?



Buying a wide format laminator can be a significant capital investment and to some businesses, a one-time purchase.

Use this guide as part of your laminator selection process to identify the best equipment for your business today - and for growth in the future.

Your Prints & Images

How wide are your prints?

To determine the laminator width you will need, consider the widest prints you currently produce or use to produce graphics that require lamination.

Roller laminators that use film generally fall within one of the following four width categories:

25" and under 61" and under
43" and under 80" and under

Automated coaters that apply a liquid laminate generally fall within one of these categories:

60" and under 8' 6" and under
10' 10" and under 16' 8" and under

Note: Allow 1- 3" additional inches to your widest print width when deciding on a laminator. Ask your laminator provider for the 'full working width' measurements.

What type of prints?

Although most laminators will process many print technologies, there are exceptions to the rule. Identify which type of prints you mostly intend to laminate to ensure compatibility with your laminator.

Finished Products for Application

What would you like to produce?

Use the checklist below to identify which of these products, that can be made with lamination, you would like to offer. This will determine the application capability you will need from your new laminator.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Posters | <input type="checkbox"/> Rigid Displays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pop-up Displays | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible Displays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Floor Graphics | <input type="checkbox"/> Backlit Displays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Window Graphics | <input type="checkbox"/> Vinyl Banners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation Boards | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Signage |

Based on your selected applications, ask your laminator provider whether a film laminator or liquid coater would be best for your business.

Application Considerations

Will you need your laminator to mount, laminate and encapsulate? Refer below for help with this decision.

Mounting - The process of permanently or semi-permanently affixing a printed image to a rigid substrate using an adhesive.

Laminating - The application of a "film" to the face of a printed image for color enhancement, durability or a particular finish.

Encapsulating - The sealing of a printed image above and below with a heat-activated laminate, leaving a 1/8" to 1/4" border around the outside perimeter when trimming.

If you want to produce rigid displays – try to anticipate the thickness of your substrates. This will affect the nip opening measurement on your laminator.

If you plan to fully encapsulate your widest prints with a sealed edge - this will determine the full heated working width of your laminator.

Also try to anticipate the ratio of encapsulation to mounting applications you are likely to produce as certain laminators are designed to specialize in certain applications.

An Expert View..

“Finishing is an important part of the overall value you can provide customers, and it can help to differentiate your services. Instead of just offering prints, you can offer solutions that are ready to display.”

“When you take the opportunity to discuss the customer’s intended use, you’ll learn what finishing best meets their needs. This consultative approach will also build trust and secondary business.”

Will Holland
Founder GIA

Volume

Wide format laminators vary in terms of robustness and strength. Approximate the volume of prints you would likely produce in a day or week and ask your laminator provider whether the model you are interested in will cope with your production demands and the frequency with which you will use the laminator.

If your volume is up to 20 prints per day:

- You may only need a basic laminator with a low start-up cost and slower operating speeds.

If your volume is over 20 prints per day:

- Ask about features that speed up your change-over of materials.
- Ask about highest possible production speeds for both hot and cold processing.

Functionality

Hot or Cold?

Laminators are generally heated with one or more heated rollers or are completely cold. Heated laminators can process heat-activated, heat-assist or pressure-sensitive materials; whereas cold laminators can only process pressure-sensitive materials.

Factors affecting your decision on a hot versus cold laminator are generally:

Price – Cold laminators can be significantly less expensive than heated ones.

Material usage – Heated laminators allow you to select from every type of laminating material and process at varying temperatures to optimize the bond and performance.

Application needs – Selected applications require heat; i.e., true encapsulation.

Ease of Use

Depending on whether the intended laminator operator is a novice or experienced finisher – ask your laminator provider which model would best suit your needs. If you intend to bring in other laminator operators or have a high staff turnover – share this with your laminator provider and ask if a new operator can quickly and easily be trained on the laminator in which you are interested.

Ask your laminator provider what sets his line of laminators apart from the rest and whether there are any unique functional aspects.

Common ease-of-use features to look for include:

- Auto-grip shafts for easy loading
- Pre-set controls for speed, temperature and pressure according to application
- Application settings guide

Roller Sizes

The quality and choice of the roller affects the performance of the laminator and helps to get the best results from your laminating materials.

Ask your laminator provider about the type and size of rollers featured on the laminator and how they compare with other laminator brands.

Large diameter rollers process quickly and the heat and pressure contact with the graphics is greater than with smaller rollers.

Speed & Pressure Controls

Laminators can operate at speeds of up to 20 feet per minute and generally have two types of pressure control: *Pneumatic pressure* is automated, often with pre-sets for fast and easy processing. This type of control requires a compressed air supply. *Manual pressure* allows the operator to control the finest detail and make multiple height adjustments in between fixed increments. This option does not need additional air supply and is ideal for experienced finishers.

Safety

Ask your laminator provider if the laminator is accredited with industry regulations; i.e., CE, cETL etc. Also ask about features that safeguard the operator while the laminator is in use. Common safety features include:

- Safety eyes
- Multiple emergency stops

Costs

Initial Investment Budget

Wide format laminators vary greatly in price and this is usually based on the feature set of the machine and whether it will process hot or cold materials.

Identify a budget that you can afford and be sure to match that against the functionality you need for your business. Remember: *Today's capabilities are tomorrow's limitations; however, do not be oversold with functionality you will never use.*

If the laminator you need is above your budget, ask your laminator provider about which payment options they offer. Many providers now offer lease options, delayed payment and purchase-to-own programs that make your laminator investment affordable.

Tip: Check out any tax savings you could enjoy based on the latest capital equipment tax laws – ask your accountant or tax advisor for details.

When a price is quoted - ask about what is not included but what will be needed when purchasing the laminator; i.e., training, power cables and electricity set-up, materials, air compressor (if applicable), cutting and trimming accessories, etc.

Return on Investment

Ask your laminator provider for an approximate return on investment model for the laminator in which you are interested. Your current circumstances need to be factored in; i.e., are you currently out-sourcing your finishing?

If you will be getting involved in lamination for the first time, ask what potential revenue can be generated by adding finishing to your business.

Maintenance Costs

Ask your laminator provider how much it will cost to maintain your laminator in top condition over the next one, five and ten years.

Ask about parts that may need changing, their availability and what the manufacturer's policy is for supporting parts on machines that have been discontinued. Ask about any optional maintenance programs and their average costs.

Logistics & Installation

Space and creating an environment to maximize 'workflow' is a big consideration. Ask your laminator provider how large a work area (not footprint of machine) is required to efficiently and effectively run the machine. Note: This will include the footprint of the machine and enough space around the machine for feeding prints into and out of the laminator.

Many laminators require a dedicated, heavy-duty power supply. Check the power requirements and get advice from an electrician on installing the appropriate power supply for the installation of your new laminator.

Training & Support

New to lamination?

Ask your laminator provider which models are recommended for new users. Many models on the market today offer pre-set controls and easy-loading mechanisms to help the new user get started quickly.

Check out the training options and post-installation support available. Check if training and support is free with the installation or available for a fee. Ask about technical support hotlines or on-line training videos to help you overcome any problem with using your laminator.

Experienced laminator users?

Although the lamination process has not changed, a new laminator may include features on which you will need to be trained. Check out training options and costs.

Some laminator providers offer advanced training programs to increase your profitability through techniques that reduce waste, and train on how to produce the latest and most innovative products. Ask your laminator provider if this is available.

Warranty & Performance

Check out what is covered (labor, parts, etc.) and for how long with the standard warranty package. Ask how that compares with other manufacturers and whether there are any extended warranty programs available.

Ask your laminator provider to go over the process for claiming against the laminator warranty and who to contact once the warranty period has expired.

Ask for a list of supported applications that can be run through the laminator and/or a list of unsupported applications. Ask which materials can be used on the laminator with guaranteed performance.

Trade-ins and Upgrades

As you grow your business your application needs may change. Ask your laminator provider for any trade-in or upgrade options should this apply to you in the future.

Testimonials

Ask your laminator provider for names of businesses who have purchased the model in which you are interested. This will give you a view of how they have applied finishing to their business and the laminator performance. If you speak with the company directly, you might like to ask:

- What are your likes and dislikes about your laminator?
- When did you purchase and have you had to service it?
- What type of processes and products do you produce?
- If you bought a new laminator tomorrow what would you do differently?
- Have you had any unresolved issues with your provider?

If this is not practical, ask for any published testimonials from recent and long-standing customers.

Selling your 'Finished' Services

Before buying a laminator, make sure you fully understand the prices for which you can sell your finished products. If you have previously out-sourced your finishing you will already know this and can soon enjoy the profitability from bringing your finishing 'in-house'.

If you are offering finishing graphics for the first time, undertake some research with your local competitors to establish some market prices.

Ask about materials with unique finishes, textures or properties that will set your products apart from the competition. Ask if there are any sample swatches or selling tools available that will help you promote and sell.

And finally, establish a niche market and focus on it. Become a strong supplier in particular markets; i.e., courtroom graphics, where you will get referrals and repeat business.

Laminator Selection Builder

Complete this checklist and give to your laminator provider to help determine the best wide format laminator for your needs.

Why are you considering buying a laminator?

To enter finishing for the first time / expand current services

Replace old equipment (please specify old model and brand) _____

Add an additional laminator to increase production

Other (please specify) _____

What type of print output will you laminate?

Inkjet

Litho

Screen

Photographic

Other (please list)

How many prints per week will you laminate?

1 to 5

6 to 10

11 to 20

21 to 40

Over 40

What will be the widest width of your prints?

Up to 36"

Up to 42"

Up to 54"

Up to 60"

Up to 72"

Wider than 72"

Which processes do you need your laminator to perform?

Mounting

Laminating

Encapsulation

Transfer

Which products would you like to make?

Posters

Pop-up Displays

Floor Graphics

Window Graphics

Presentation Boards

Rigid Displays

Flexible Displays

Backlit Displays

Vinyl Banners

Outdoor Signage

Do any of the following considerations apply?

Space restriction

Limited power supply

No lamination skills

Which of the following is important to you?

Safety Features <input type="checkbox"/>	Ease of use <input type="checkbox"/>
Low start-up costs <input type="checkbox"/>	Lease options <input type="checkbox"/>
Extended warranty <input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to upgrade <input type="checkbox"/>

How much would you pay for your laminator?

Up to \$6,000

\$6,000 to \$8,000

\$8,000 to \$11,000

\$11,000 to \$15,000

\$15,000 to \$20,000

\$20,000 or more

Contact Name _____

Company _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Fax _____

Email _____

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