HOW TO BUY CUSTOM INFLATABLES
By Stephanie Meacham, Landmark Creations International, Inc. © 2010, All Rights Reserved

When you're looking for a way to get noticed in a crowd, virtually everyone agrees that inflatables are a powerful and proven tool. Deciding which type of inflatable and knowing how to properly use them are two issues some neglect.

This eBook will offer some quick insights into how to select custom inflatables so your marketing efforts succeed. You’ll discover the right questions to ask, helpful checklists and comparison charts that will help you follow each step of the buying processes.

Getting Started With Custom Inflatables

• Choosing The Inflatable That’s Right For Your
• Get Your Ducks In A Row: A Checklist for Ordering the Right Inflatable for Your Event
• Playing It Safe: Choosing an Inflatables Vendor
• Getting the Most For Your Inflatable Dollar
• Is That Inflatable Really A Bargain?
• Professional Inflatables vs. Yard Inflatables
• Calculate the Running Cost Of An Inflatable
CHOOSING THE INFLATABLE THAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU

Making the decision to include inflatables in your marketing mix is definitely a step in the right direction. However, many people mistakenly believe that all inflatables are huge, fan-driven, balloons that must be used outdoors or in very large indoor arenas. This is simply not true.

There are many types and sizes of inflatables that can fit with practically any event or promotion. So, how do you choose the right one for you?

**Basic considerations for buying inflatables:**

- Space available at your event or promotion.
- Whether your event/promotion will be held indoors or outdoors.
- Whether your outdoor event will require placing your inflatable on a rooftop.
- Your budget.
- Purpose of your inflatable (i.e., attention-getter, giveaway, etc.

All inflatables are suitable for indoor events and promotions. Their wide range of sizes and their durability make cold-air, airtight, helium, sealed, and latex/mylar inflatables an excellent choice for either indoor or outdoor events. Dynamic inflatables are great for use indoors, while sealed inflatables are perfect for giveaways and promotional advertising pieces.

When making your decision about the next inflatable you buy, check the chart to be sure you get the one that best suits your needs. Complete with questions to ask, checklists and charts, this manual is a quick-read you can print and keep on hand for future inflatable purchases.
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Contact a representative today at 800.553.3593 or visit us online at landmarkcreations.com
GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW: A CHECKLIST FOR ORDERING THE RIGHT INFLATABLE FOR YOUR EVENT

Inflatables are one of the most versatile advertising mediums available. They come in a range of sizes, have completely customizable colors and shapes and can be used in several different environments. However, all that flexibility means you’ll want to give some thought to several aspects of using inflatables prior to ordering.

Ordering inflatables isn’t a complicated task, but having some information handy when you make your decision will help the process go more smoothly. It will also help to ensure you get the precise type of inflatable that will best suit your needs for years to come.

Before making your final decision, give due consideration to the following questions.

**How will the inflatable be used?**

Will your inflatable be used strictly for looks or will it function in some way? Booths and tents that shade visitors from the sun and rain are also useful. Ball throws and other games are also available. Let your imagination go wild. Chances are we can create it.

Will your inflatable be setup outdoors, indoors or a little of both? The answer can greatly affect the size and shape of your new balloon. Place checkmarks next to all that apply.

**Our new inflatable will be used:**

___ For appearances only.
___ To gain attention from a distance.
___ To gain attention on-site.
___ As a functional booth or tent.
___ Other: ______________________________________________

With customizable sizes and features, inflatables can be produced that works with practically any budget. You will want to discuss the maker's manufacturing standards, however, to be sure you’re getting true value and quality as well as a fair...
What type of installation will you be doing?

Do you plan to install your inflatable on rooftops? At ground level on grass? Concrete? Asphalt? Will you install your new inflatable indoors at trade-shows or other events? Will your inflatable travel a great deal for mobile marketing purposes? Do you have a limit amount of space to display your inflatables? Will electricity be available or will you need a generator? The answers to these questions have a bearing on the type of inflatable you’ll want to order and the hardware that should be included. Check all that apply.

Our new inflatable will be installed:

[ ] On rooftops
[ ] At ground level primarily on [ ] grass, [ ] concrete, [ ] asphalt, [ ] other __________
[ ] Indoors. Average space at events is _______ x _______ x _______
[ ] Other ______________________________________________________

Is a picture of what you want available or will a concept drawing be needed?

[ ] A picture is available.
[ ] A concept drawing is needed.

Who has access to your artwork if product packaging or logos are involved?

[ ] Artwork can be obtained from: ________________________________

How many will you need? ______

Quantity can affect price in some instances so if you plan to order more than one inflatable, please let us know.

When do you need it? ______________________

Rush fees may apply to last-minute projects so order as far in advance as possible. Standard lead times are 4–6 weeks. Also, please note that PMS color fabrics take longer to produce and can add 2–4 weeks to your lead time.

What is your budget? $______________

With customizable sizes and features, inflatables can be produced that works with practically any budget. You will want to discuss the maker’s manufacturing standards, however, to be sure you’re getting true value and quality as well as a fair price.
PLAYING IT SAFE: A CHECKLIST FOR CHOOSING AN INFLATABLES VENDOR

Let’s face it: Inflatables are an investment, not an impulse buy. That’s why it only makes sense to purchase inflatables from long-standing companies who have proven track records with design quality, on-time delivery, customer service and more. But honestly, how would you know? If you contacted an inflatables company (or they contacted you), how could you determine with a fair amount of certainty that your project would turn out exactly the way you wanted?

Based on years of hearing tales from clients who came to Landmark after using the other guys, we’ve compiled a checklist of things to consider, things to make sure of and things to avoid like the plague. Using our inside knowledge, you’ll be able to make a more confident decision on the vendor that’s right for you.

Things To Consider

While answering “no” to any of these is no cause to sound an alarm, you would do better to work with a vendor who does/offers everything below.

__ Has the company asked about the factors of your campaign or the primary use of the inflatable? This could have a profound effect on how the balloon performs, the size, shape and more.

__ Do you like the concept illustration (quote sketch) the vendor provided?

__ Is the sketch from the same company that will build your inflatable? If not, what assurances do you have that you’ll get the same caliber of creativity?

__ Does your point of contact have a long history with the company? How long has your contact been employed and what position do they hold? Being forced to change representatives in the middle of a project isn’t the end of the world, but having your rep quit or be fired mid-stream certainly can complicate and delay matters.

__ Are all needed accessories provided? Do UL-approved blowers, 4000# rated nylon tethers and other needed accessories come with the inflatable or do those cost extra?

__ Are they trying to sell you what they want you to buy? Don’t be pushed around. You’re paying for your inflatable and it should be exactly what you want and need, not what the vendor is trying to get rid of.
Things To Make Sure Of

If you find yourself answering “no” to one or more of these, you’ll want to tread carefully. Each of these questions will show you about the level of quality provided by the vendor as well as their ability to stand behind their products.

___ Do you like the inflatables pictured on their site? What you see on the company’s website should be a representation of the best they have to offer. If you aren’t pleased with what you find online, chances are good you won’t be pleased with the final product they deliver.

___ Do they offer a warranty? How long is the warranty? What does it cover?

___ Is the company’s location stated on their website? Will you be able to reach them when needed?

___ Has the business been operational for a significant amount of time? Can they prove it? Isn’t it awful that you even need to worry about that? Unfortunately, we’ve heard some horror stories from clients that now cause us to advise you to ask. Can the vendor provide customer testimonials or media coverage that shows they’ve been in business as long as they claim?

___ Do they use top-quality construction practices? Without double-stitched seams and internal tethering you run a serious risk of incurring damage to your inflatable, even with normal wear and tear.

Things To Avoid Like the Plague

If even one of these questions has a “no” answer, run like the wind! These are warning signs that almost always lead to a poor performing inflatable and an overall bad experience.

___ Does the vendor provide referrals? If they are unable to offer a minimum of three recent referrals, don’t bother working with them. If they do offer referrals, be sure you call each one.

___ Do the images on their site belong to them? Again, it’s a shame you even have to ask, but you really should. There have been numerous cases of vendors who copy images from other websites. If the vendor can’t verify the images on their site are from projects they created, end your conversation right there.

___ Do their claims seem realistic? There are certain factors that come into play with every inflatables project. Lead times that are far faster than others or pricing that is exceptionally lower than competitors’ bids should send up a red flag.

___ Are their salespeople professional? Using hard-sell tactics and bashing competitors to try and gain business is not only unprofessional, it is oftentimes dishonest. Companies that participate in these sales practices usually carry that behavior over into other areas of their business, too. This should be a deal-breaker.
GETTING THE MOST FOR YOUR INFLATABLE DOLLAR

In order to make the best decision possible for your investment, it is necessary to have sound information about the various aspects involved in the manufacturing process.

A major factor in choosing a cold-air inflatable is the lifespan. Will the inflatable tear apart, will it fade in the sun, will it last indefinitely? The answers to these questions rely primarily on the fabric chosen for the inflatable.

Six of the most commonly used cold-air inflatable fabrics are:

- **Rip stop** – Rip stop is a 70-denier nylon, usually 1.9 ounce, urethane coated. It is used for very lightweight balloons and internal construction pieces such as the internal baffles that control and maintain the shape of the inflatable.

- **Oxford** – This material is a 200/210-denier nylon oxford cloth, usually 3.5 ounce, urethane coated. It is used primarily for internal construction pieces such as baffles, but is not well suited for balloons.

- **Pack cloth** – A 410/420-denier nylon pack cloth that is 7-8 ounce, urethane coated. It is slightly more durable than oxford and is heavier. If you are concerned about weight, oxford is most likely the best choice for you. If you are interested in an inflatable constructed from heavier materials, pack cloth will be the better material to use.

- **Vinyl-Coated Nylon (7.5 oz)** – This PVC coated nylon is normally 7.5 ounce. It is used as the exterior material for most cold-air, advertising inflatables. It’s lightweight, strong, available in custom colors, and accepts graphics easily. This fabric is well suited for cold-air inflatables.

- **Vinyl-Coated Nylon (9-12 oz)** – A PVC coated nylon, usually 10 ounce. This fabric is of medium weight and used on areas requiring additional strength such as bouncers and slides.

- **Vinyl-Coated Polyester (18-22 oz)** – This heavyweight fabric is made from PVC coated polyester, and is usually 18 ounce. Primarily, this fabric is used as a base material, covering areas where inflatables touch the ground. It is also used heavily in interactive inflatables like bouncers and slides.

When making a decision about your next cold-air inflatable, consider the following questions:

- What is the denier of the fabric? Denier is an industry term that relates to the unit of weight, indicating the size of the fiber. The higher the denier, the heavier the yarn, and the stronger the fabric.

- Is the material strong? Material strength is determined by looking at a combination of elements including the denier, the base fibers, and the weave. The tighter the weave is, the more durable the fabric will be.

- Will my inflatable fade? If the fabric is not treated, it is very likely that your inflatable will suffer fading. Ask for material that contains a UV coating to prevent color fading under normal conditions.

- Will my inflatable last forever? With all the advances in inflatables today, we still have not found a way to allow inflatables to “live forever.” Check into the warranty offered by the manufacturer. This will give you a good idea of the lifespan of your balloon.

Knowing all you can about your inflatable will help you get the most benefit and use from it for years to come. Knowing what makes for an outstanding inflatable will also let you judge whether the “deal” you’ve been quoted is really a deal after all.
IS THAT INFLATABLE REALLY A BARGAIN?

It never fails. You get quotes on new inflatables and one quote is much lower than the others. You go with the bargain company thinking you’ve saved your company or client several hundred dollars. Soon afterward you begin having trouble with your purchase. As it turns out, this “bargain-priced” inflatable doesn’t have much value.

The old saying, “You get what you pay for” really is true. Yes, there are companies out there who can and do offer rock bottom pricing on inflatables. However, if you look closely at the major differences they don’t tell you about, you’ll quickly see that saving a little money on the front end can cause you or your client lots of heartache and frustration down the road.

Quality Adds To the Cost

When you purchase a quality inflatable, it will be designed to last for years to come, to install flawlessly every time, and to hold up well through many inflations, deflations and shipments. That’s because quality inflatables have certain things in common.

Construction

Look for double-stitched seams at the pressure points. Also ask questions about the specifics of the anchoring system. Nothing ruins a promotion more quickly than an inflatable that tries to “fly away” in the middle of all the fun. Does your inflatable look “lumpy?” That means extra care was not taken with the baffling. Inflatables of questionable quality will lack a smooth, flat surface. Also pay attention to the design. Is it realistic? Does it match your logo, mascot, or product? Unrealistic replicas really damage branding.

Fabrics

Look for premium quality materials including 7.5 – 18 ounce UV and vinyl-coated nylon. Make sure it is flame retardant!

Hardware

Wind, rain and other weather elements really wreak havoc on inflatables. The hardware included with your balloon should be of the highest quality in order to keep your inflatable steady and in place throughout your promotion.

Artwork

None of the above really matters if you don’t have an inflatable that looks exactly like you imagined. Poor artwork and craftsmanship can lead to a replica of your product or mascot that appears “cheap.” Always ask to see samples before ordering an