

How To Buy & Use Inflatables

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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 manual will offer some quick insights into how to buy and properly use 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 a usage processes.

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If you have questions or would like to like a quote on custom inflatables, feel free to contact:

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Section One: Determining The Right Inflatables For You

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 on-site.
	To gain attention from a distance.		As a functional booth or tent.
			Other

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 tradeshows 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?

<input type="checkbox"/> A picture is available.	<input type="checkbox"/> A concept drawing is needed.
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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.

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.

NOTE: Flame-retardant material is available upon request and is, in some cases, necessary or even required by the local Fire Marshall. If your inflatable will be used around people (air tents, batting cages, etc.) or if it will be used indoors, ordering flame-retardant material is your best bet.

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. If ordering from Landmark Creations, rest assured your inflatable will be manufactured with UV-coated material.

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! Why? As mentioned previously, if inflatables are used around people or are used indoors, Fire Marshall regulations often dictate fire-retardant materials.

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 inflatable. Be sure the artist and his/her staff are skilled and talented with reproductions of this type.

Once you have the whole story about the quotes you've received, you'll be able to make a more informed decision about which inflatable truly offers the most value for the price. But what about stock, yard inflatables like the ones you often find a discount stores and home improvement warehouses? They usually cost a great deal less than custom-made, professional inflatables. There's a reason for that. Let's find out why.

Guarantee Your Sponsors A Captive Audience

Most people (especially finance department personnel) view inflatables as an expense. What some don't realize is that your inflatables can generate revenue. With the simple addition of sponsor banners on your air tents, sports tunnels, archways and more, your inflatable can pay for itself and go on to create a revenue stream that can help fund your marketing efforts. How does it work? Let's look at the example of an inflatable sports tunnel and see.

Nothing gets fans up on their feet like seeing their team explode onto the field through a custom-designed, inflatable sports tunnel. Nothing gets sponsors up on their feet like knowing all eyes are focused intently on their ad which is placed on the side of the inflatable tunnel.

If you take note the next time you're at a sporting event, you'll see that all eyes are trained on the sports tunnel for several minutes before and during the time the team bursts onto the field. That means your sponsors - whose ads are on the side of the tunnel - have a captive audience.

Selling ad space on your tunnel is an exceptional way to generate fundraising dollars with practically guaranteed results. A short list of those who might want their ad in front of a captive crowd of moms, dads, kids and fans include:

sports shops	discount stores (Target, Wal-Mart)
car dealers	grocery stores
restaurants	night clubs
clothing stores	soft drink companies
computer stores	appliance stores

radio stations

book stores

and countless other retailers.

Inflatable tunnels are excellent for football, basketball, soccer, baseball, band, homecoming, half-time activities and more. Because of their popularity, many schools are able to recoup the cost of their inflatable tunnel within just a few months through the sales of sponsor ads.

The same applies to inflatable archways at the start and finish lines of races, air tents used at tradeshow, fairs and other community events plus blimps, and giant inflatables. Take the time to evaluate where and how sponsor advertising might be incorporated into your inflatables plan. You'll also want to evaluate which type(s) of inflatables will be best suited to your needs.

Calculate the Running Cost Of An Inflatable

Before placing your order for a custom inflatable, you might be wondering how much an inflatable costs to operate. After all, expenses impact your overall ROI on marketing projects. If you know how many cents per kilowatt hour (kWh) you pay for electricity, it's easy to calculate the running cost of your inflatable by multiplying one by the other.

How To Calculate the Electricity Consumption (in kWh)

You need to use kilowatts in your calculations, so if your rating plate is expressed in watts instead of kilowatts, divide that number by 1000 to determine kilowatts. If your rating plate is expressed in volts and amps, multiply the volts by the amps = watts, then divide by 1000 to get kilowatts.

The kilowatt rating of an appliance is equal to the number of units of electricity it consumes per hour of operation. Those units of electricity are expressed in kilowatt hours (kWh).

Our internal Fasco blower system uses .336 units (kWh) of electricity per hour.

Our internal Fantech blower system uses .152 units (kWh) of electricity per hour.

Our external Dri Eaz blower system uses 1.32 units (kWh) of electricity per hour.

Calculate Running Cost

Refer to your latest electricity bill to find out the unit rate you are paying for electricity.

It is expressed in cents per kWh. Most locations have 2 rates - one for peak supply and one for off-peak. Use the peak rate to calculate running costs of your inflatable system.

Multiply kWh by electricity cost.

If your electricity cost is 12 cents per unit:

An average 8' inflatable will cost $.336 \times 0.12 = 4$ cents per hour to run.
(about \$0.97 USD per day.)

An average 20' inflatable will cost $1.32 \times 0.12 = 16$ cents per hour to run.
(about \$3.80 USD per day.)

If you added a 300w light system, it will cost $1.0 \times 0.12 = 12$ cents per hour. (\$2.88 USD per day.)

So, as you can see, inflatables are inexpensive to operate and keep your overhead costs low. But did you know inflatables can actually pay for themselves? By selling advertising on your inflatable sports tunnels, air tents and other balloons, you can create a revenue stream where there was none before.

Professional Inflatables vs. Yard Inflatables

With the introduction several years ago of yard inflatables, we've seen our share of questions about the differences in what we offer and what can be bought at a local Wal-Mart store. In an effort to clear up some confusion, we've created a comparison that will help you determine which is the right option for you.

The Same But Different? Not Really.

Many people think yard inflatables are just a lower-quality version of custom inflatables. Actually, they are two different things entirely. Think of it this way, you might have a kiddie pool in your backyard or you might have an in-ground pool. Yes, both hold water, both allow you to get wet, but there are major differences in the two as far as materials, form, function, price and more. At the end of the day, the two pools are simply not even in the same category.

Truth be told, you get what you pay for. Yard inflatables were never meant for commercial use. They were originally designed as holiday novelties that individuals could put in their yards. If that's what you are looking for, by all means, yard inflatables can fit the bill. But for professional marketing purposes, yard inflatables will leave you lacking.

Comparison

Feature	Professional Inflatables	Yard Inflatables
Customization	Each inflatable is custom-created to match your design.	Not available unless you buy in bulk.
Size	Completely adjustable to meet the customer's needs.	Pre-made in pre-determined sizes.
Blower	Industrial-use blower developed to perform well with constant use year after year.	Small, inexpensive blower designed for very limited use.
Materials	Heavyweight 7.5-, 10- or 18-ounce vinyl-coated nylon that resists fading for years plus withstands weather, temperatures changes and constant use.	Lightweight nylon material.
Installation Accessories	Stakes, tethers, blower and instructions are included along with available telephone assistance with a live person, if needed.	Stakes, tethers, blower and instructions are included.
Warranty	2-years	Usually 30-60 days.

The bottom line: Buy commercial-grade products for commercial use and budget-grade products for home use. If customization, quality and helpful support are considerations for you, the choice is clear.

Section Two: Proper Use, Repair & Storage

Proper Staking Techniques for Ground Installations

In order for your event to go off without a hitch, you'll want to ensure inflatables are properly installed. Staking cold-air inflatables down for ground installations is an important part of a successful set up. While it may seem like an easy enough task, there are a lot of factors to be considered.

Which stakes are best? Are there utility lines buried at your site? Are the weather conditions windy? Will the inflatable be safe from vandalism?

There are several different stakes and techniques, but the professionals here at Landmark Creations recommend using one of the following.

Metal Ground Stakes

Durable, metal ground stakes generally come in 18"- 42" lengths. They cost between \$4-\$10 and can be found at local farm and fleet stores. They're great to use on large inflatable ground installations because they are heavyweight, they won't shear off, and they're durable. These stakes can even penetrate asphalt giving you a larger selection of where to place your inflatable.



While they are heavyweight and will help your inflatable remain safe (even in windy conditions) there are a few drawbacks. Metal stakes are heavy to transport, and expensive to ship. They also require a heavy mallet to drive them into the ground.

Ground Augers

Ground augers are a durable, lighter weight solution. They can easily screw into the grass by hand or with use of a screwdriver run through the top loop. Augers are inexpensive, and easy to ship. These anchors are good for use on small inflatable ground installations, but they, too, have drawbacks. Ground augers can twist out of the ground if the soil is loose or the conditions are windy so you need to be a bit more selective of where you locate your inflatable.



General Ground Installation Guidelines

1. Choose an area that will provide a good line of sight for your inflatable. After all, the whole purpose is to generate a heavy traffic flow to your business or event.
2. Contact your local utility company in advance of your installation so they can mark ground lines.
3. Be sure your inflatable will be protected from vandals. Choose a location with constant visibility, or one with a fence that can be locked after hours if possible.
4. Locate near a ground fault protected electrical source. Use long extension cords sparingly.

Giving due attention to the location and staking techniques used during your installation will help you have a more successful event. If you do find, however, that your inflatable is torn or damaged in other ways during an event, follow these tips to get back on track as fast as possible.

Repairing Damaged Inflatables During An Event

Aside from your inflatable being stolen, having it damaged in some way during an event is just about the worst thing that can happen. However, there are several ways to quickly rectify the situation so the event can continue as planned.

On-site Repair Techniques

If the tear in your inflatable is relatively small, you may choose one of two ways to repair your balloon on-site. Both sewing and patching the inflatable can hold it long enough to finish the event.

Sewing Your Inflatable

A needle and thread (that are strong enough to mend the material your balloon is made of) were included in the repair kit you received with your inflatable, if you bought it from Landmark Creations. To repair your balloon, simply pinch the torn material together and use small stitches to sew by hand.

In the event that a small piece of material to be missing from the tear, check your repair kit once more. You'll find a spare piece of fabric that can be used to fill in the missing material.



Patching Your Inflatable



Patching the tear can be done quickly with a self-adhesive patch. You can also use a standard patch and apply a HH-66 glue to both the patch and inflatable surface. Make sure the patch is big enough to cover an area approximately 1/2 inch larger than the tear.

Call Local Repair Outlets

If you have no desire or ability to repair the inflatable yourself, you can attempt to find a local repair outlet. Call one of the following establishments to ask for help. These types of businesses are generally equipped to repair inflatables:

- tent makers
- upholstery shops
- awning companies
- sign shops
- inflatable rental companies

Return Your Inflatable for Repairs

After the event, the inflatable can be returned to the manufacturer for permanent repair depending how well the temporary repair is holding.

Depending on who you bought the inflatable from, the repairs may be covered under your warranty.

Preventing Damage To Your Inflatable

The best recourse is to prevent damage from the onset. Use these tips to help keep your inflatable in the best condition possible.

- 1) If winds are greater than 20 mph check the inflatable regularly to ensure it is still securely anchored. In most instances, you'll want to deflate your inflatable until the conditions become more favorable.
- 2) Don't leave deflated balloons on rooftops. Once you've deflated your balloon be sure to carefully pack it and store it in a safe shelter.
- 3) When it gets too cold, pack up your helium inflatables for the winter and store them safely. (See below.)
- 4) Don't pack your inflatable when wet. Bacteria and mold can eat away the material and cause holes as well as awful odors.

Section Three: Weather-Related Tips & Advice

Summer Weather Hazards To Avoid

Summer brings its own set of challenges when it comes to inflatables. Heat isn't a problem for inflatables, but storms of various sorts can certainly do major damage. The most common threat to your inflatable during the summer months however, is wind!

The high winds that often come with storms can tear tether straps or anchor points on your inflatable. Unsecured objects can also hit your inflatable tearing or otherwise damaging the material.

You would do well to monitor weather forecasts several days prior to the scheduled use of your inflatable and, of course, pick the most optimal days possible. However, if you notice dark clouds beginning to form in the distance, go ahead and deflate your balloon prior to the storm developing.

It's best to not only deflate cold-air inflatables, but also to roll up the balloon and secure it. Once the storm has passed, it is advisable to re-inflate and allow the balloon to completely dry before packing it away. **NEVER LEAVE A WET INFLATABLE PACKED UP – IT WILL MOLD AND ROT.**

We never recommend deflating **DURING** a storm. Once high winds are in progress, deflation (or inflation for that matter) is very dangerous. The inflatable could easily get away from you or literally take flight with you in tow resulting in serious injury. The cost of an inflatable is a small price to pay to ensure your safety and the safety of others. If a storm is in progress, leave your inflatable and seek shelter for yourself.

As mentioned earlier, heat isn't a problem for inflatables. Heat can cause problems, however, with the environment surrounding your inflatable. Take caution when inflating your balloon on hot asphalt (or asphalt rooftops). These surfaces can often have spots of melted tar that can possibly stain, stick to, tear, melt and otherwise harm your inflatable. It's important to protect the inflatable by setting it on a tarp for inflation, usage and deflation. This will prevent the tar from sticking to the inflatable.

If you pay attention to your surroundings and the weather, and take a few precautionary steps toward keeping your inflatable protected, you should have a safe and profitable summer season.

Wintertime Tips for Helium Inflatables

You don't see helium-filled inflatables used outdoors as frequently in the wintertime. That's because helium behaves differently as the weather turns cold. When the temperature falls helium contracts making it difficult (but not impossible) to use. If you need your helium inflatables for parades or for indoor fairs or exhibits patience is going to be the key. Here are some tips that will help you remain afloat.

1. After you've connected the tube from your inflatable to the helium tank, open the tank very slowly. Helium is stored under extreme pressure. Releasing this gas quickly can damage your balloon.
2. Open the helium tank **only about halfway** until the balloon fills to at least 50% capacity. In cold weather the gases can freeze the sides of the balloon to each other if inflation isn't paced.

3. When your balloon is about 75% filled, begin to slow the rate of helium even more. In cold weather, the balloon's material can become stiff and crack or tear if it isn't allowed time to adjust to the temperature. Take the remaining 25% of the inflation in three stages. Inflate slowly then allow the balloon to rest for several minutes. Add a little more helium and allow the balloon to rest. Then complete the inflation. This process provides time for the material to stretch without danger of tearing.

Also remember that standard protocols for inflating with helium will still apply regardless of the time of year.

- Select a site that is clear of power lines, buildings, trees and other potential dangers. If you'll be indoors, keep an eye out for ceiling lights and ceiling fans that might cause damage to your balloon.
- To begin your inflation, lay out a tarp underneath the balloon for added protection during the initial phases.
- Find your tether points. You should anchor your inflatable to objects that are heavy and sturdy. Tie off points will need to hold three times the lift force of the balloon itself due to wind and other factors.
- Once the balloon is fully inflated and tethered, it can be released into the air! NEVER allow the tether line to slide through your bare hands during the launch. This can cause serious rope burns. Always wear gloves for protection.

After inflation, rain, ice and snow will not hurt the material of your inflatable. However, the added weight will reduce the lift and affect the flying performance. Rain should not be a serious problem, but accumulating ice and snow will be so it is advisable to keep a cautious eye on helium inflatables during foul weather.

Helium balloons are an enchanting part of the holiday season. With a few precautions and some additional planning you can enjoy helium-filled inflatables all year long.

When you're done with your inflatable for the season, simply follow three easy steps to ensure your helium inflatables will keep safely over the winter. That way they will be ready to draw in crowds from far and wide when the weather turns warmer.

These steps apply to all inflatables, actually, not just helium. Each one needs to be completely dry before deflating and packing for any length of time. The product should be stored in a climate-controlled environment that is free of moisture. Packing your inflatable when damp, or storing it in a highly humid area can result in mold or mildew that will damage or possibly destroy your balloon.

Step One - Clean the outside of your inflatable with alcohol (like you'd buy in a drugstore) and dust with talc powder. The alcohol will help get rid of dirt and control mold while the talc powder will keep the inflatable from sticking to itself while in storage.

Step Two - Inspect your equipment. Consider replacing the tether line if it's worn or dirty. Check your cambuckles. Are they bent or warped? They might require replacing, too. Make sure internal lights work (if applicable) and that you have repair kits on hand as well.

Step Three - Carefully roll your inflatable (do not fold) and pack it in a sturdy box to protect the material from being crushed or punctured.

By following these simple procedures, you're inflatables will hibernate peacefully throughout the cold weather and be ready to boost your business again in the spring.

Conclusion

When you have all the inside information, you can make the best choice about which inflatables will work well for you in various situations. Each time you purchase a new inflatable, take time to review the checklists, comparisons and questions in this manual and you'll help ensure the process goes flawlessly.