

PIPE AND DRAPE SYSTEMS

Pipe and Drape (PB) systems are extremely versatile and can be used for a variety of events. But what exactly is “Pipe and Drape”, and how do you know what is essential for your own particular needs? First of all, “pipe and drape” and “pipe and base” are interchangeable terms that refer to a system of portable components regularly used to create exhibit booths such as those used in trade shows. Typically, the hardware components consist of steel bases along with aluminum uprights and drape supports (“pipe and base”), while the drapery is hung onto the drape supports.

Originally designed for Trade Show Booths, Pipe and Drape Systems are so multi-functional and eclectic that they are now used in numerous other capacities as well. Exhibits and conventions make use of these kits for memorable, portable trade show displays. Churches and other small organizations frequently utilize PB goods to create hallways and concise barriers. Pipe and drape can be utilized backstage (and even under the stage) to create temporary dressing rooms, designate backstage corridors, mask off areas, and more. It can also be used onstage to hang a backdrop for the performers on stages where truss or other overhead hanging options aren’t available. And because of its versatility and ability to be so easily customized, PB kits are also a great option to help set a beautiful stage for live performance events.

Normally, PB drapes are made as flat (un-pleated) single width panels (usually 4’ to 5’ wide, depending on the fabric), with 3 to 4 panels used for every 10 feet of drape support width. By “pushing the drapes together”, this will allow for the look of natural fullness. These drapes commonly have an open 5” top hem to allow the drapes to be threaded onto the drape support. Also, adding the optional Velcro closures on each end is a great way to cover the top of the upright, for a cleaner overall look. IFR Banjo Cloth is the most common economy choice for exhibit booths, but other fabrics, such as 15oz DFR Encore Velour and 16oz FR Commando Cloth, are regularly selected when greater opacity is desired. Custom drapery is also an option for those wanting something different, with a multitude of drapery style possibilities ranging from pleated drapes to digitally printed backdrops to non-operable Austrians and more.

The PB hardware systems are easily expandable, allowing you to utilize pipe and drape components to create anything from a single freestanding backdrop setup to a convention center filled with hundreds of exhibit booths. The telescopic drape supports (which is the pole that the drapes hang onto), have hooks on either end and fit neatly into the slots at the tops of the uprights. The configuration of 4 slots, at 90 degree positions, allow you to attach up to 4 drape supports to each upright (such as when arranging multiple booths side-by-side and/or back-to-back). You can also incorporate 3” and 8” valance hangers (to add a “double layer” of drapery for a two-toned look), double backwall hangers (to allow the attachment of two supports in any or all four directions), and clip rod supports (which offer you the ability to extend 10” to 44” beyond the upright) to help tailor the drapery precisely to your event’s own exclusive layout.

Pipe and Drape Uprights, which may be standard (fixed length) or adjustable, have one or more sets of 4 slots, positioned every 90 degrees. With a “slip fit” system, each upright is attached to a base via a pin and screw assembly—NO TOOLS REQUIRED! These uprights can come in sizes from 3'h all the way up to 26'h, but generally you won't want to go much higher than around 20-23' for better stability. Shorter uprights have just one set of slots, while 6' or longer uprights have two sets of slots (one at 3' from the bottom and one at the very top). This would allow you to create a booth with a higher back wall and shorter side walls, as is repeatedly seen at trade shows. Based on your specific needs, standard fixed uprights can cost less to purchase, but the adjustable uprights offer different height options for more flexibility having various configurations, and will often cost less to ship (adjustable uprights that retract back to 7' and under can usually ship via Fed Ex and UPS).

Uprights fit neatly onto the Base Plates, reliably made of 3/16" zinc plated steel. Various sizes and thicknesses are available depending on the application and weight of the drapery panel selected. Weights ordinarily range from 13 lbs., 18 lbs., 35 lbs., to 62 lbs., and you would want to choose it based on how high you plan on utilizing your uprights. You can arrange to get them with pin holes (where the upright pin goes) in one of the corners, in the middle of one of the sides, and in the dead center. This way you can safely work the bases and uprights into corners and along walls if necessary. Pins are chosen based on the size and style of upright you will be using with them. Adding stacking and handling slots to the bases adds ease to carrying and moving the bases from packaging (such as base carts and dollies) to your event's installation.

There are lots of ways to uniquely customize your own Pipe and Drapery Systems to work perfectly for your own specific set-up—choosing the right hardware, soft goods, and PB components can truly help your special event become a true success.