

# Creative digital printing can set your shop apart

Try these tricks to enhance your printed lettering

By Dan Antonelli

I never got very enthused about digital printing for truck lettering. Most of the times I had seen it at trade shows, a printer was turning out pretty pictures of flowers or some other colorful photo. That's fine, but as sign makers, how often do we really need to print pretty pictures?

For most of us, the real use for these



**One of my favorite techniques** is the inset shading on *Fence-It*. The white highlight on the left of each letter gives added dimension. I outlined the letters in red, added a heavier black outline and then outlined it again in red. The second red outline "holds" the design on the dark truck.

machines is using their potential to create killer lettering effects. And for people like myself, who have always been layering vinyl to achieve various effects, it's a tremendous timesaving tool. One single layer of vinyl replaces the three or four I used to need to produce certain effects.

At the USSC sign convention in Atlantic City last December, I saw some of the new digital printers. I was impressed with the



**I created the fence from scratch.** There's a slight fade of 20 percent black to about 45 percent black, plus a fade for the shading of behind the fence of 60 percent to 100 percent black. Then I just scribbled a few lines for the grass. When the design is finished, you need one path that the printer/plotter will recognize as your cut line. This lettering on two doors plus the logo sold for \$850.



**We're starting with simple faded lettering** with a red pin line outline, and a beefy black secondary outline. I'm selecting the red outline here. Then I'll duplicate it, make the fill transparent and change the outline to white from the original red.



**Next, I place the duplicate selection** slightly to the lower left of the original red outline. Then, using the Cut command, I cut the white outline.



**Now I use the Paste Inside command** to paste the outline in, and the highlighting is finished! This was done in Macromedia Freehand.



**The original Scalora design (top)** used two shades for the prism and a third color for the shadow. That's time consuming to execute in vinyl. With a few creative blends in your illustration program, you can enhance your prismatic lettering (bottom) and print it for a more realistic effect. I added a thin outline on the secondary copy, which also contains a 30-percent gradation from black to white.

Roland ColorCAMP Pro PC600 [Roland DGA 800-542-2307, rolanddga.com]. The machine prints at a high resolution (600 x 1200 dpi) with no visible dot patterns, and also cuts vinyl. It comes with a PostScript RIP, too, which allows me to print and cut directly from my favorite design program, Macromedia Freehand.

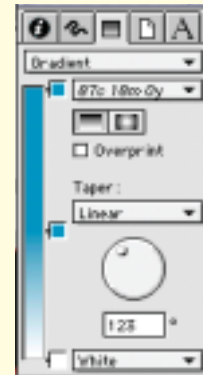
When it comes to colors, digital printing leaves you virtually unlimited. I've been able to design logos and truck lettering that would have been impossible for me to execute without paint. It's opened up a new creative outlet because I don't have to worry about using solid colors anymore for my lettering. I can add inlines, outlines, double shadows, pin-striped panels—whatever I want.

So, with my newfound creative freedom, I'm giving the client something more than could have been executed cost-effectively in paint or cut vinyl. I'm getting more money for my design time, and I'm setting my work apart with some cool techniques that you don't see utilized much in digital printing.

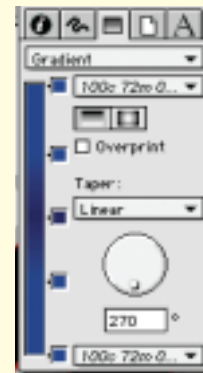
When you see this stuff in action, it's nothing like vinyl lettering. It's pure advertising—and that goes along with how I'm promoting my business. I'm positioning myself more as an ad agency than a sign shop.

Most vinyl sign-printing software and machines supports these techniques. However, you may find it easier to create your design in a vector-based illustration program like Corel, Illustrator or Freehand, and then save your work as an .eps file. As I mentioned earlier, I use Freehand. The Roland RIP has a convenient "drag 'n drop" feature, which allows you to simply drag .eps files right to the spooler. I like being able to continue working on other things while the job is being printed.

My pricing on a digitally printed installation on two doors begins at around \$450 (design not included). For most jobs, you can easily print two doors on one set of CMY ribbons. (I've found it unnecessary to use the black



**The main elements of the design are** the black and red outline of the main copy, and the two sections that compose to make up the prismatic effect. The lighter shade is selected, and a gradient blend is used on all the smaller pieces.



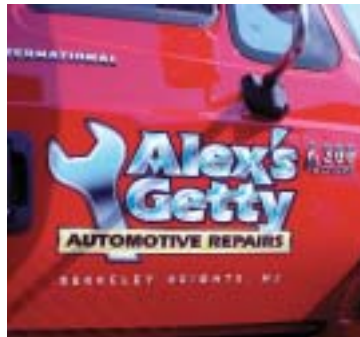
**Select and shade the darker side** of the letter. Now we've got a medium blue to dark blue fade through the center of the lettering.



**Group the two shades** of the lettering over the outlines and you're done!



I modified the original By Andrei logo I designed many years ago to work better on this quad-cab dually. With this design, it was a little tricky to prepare the file for printing because I wanted a third outline of the white to help hold the thick black outline together. I used a yellow outline for the main copy and inset a black outline into it. A subtle fade for the secondary copy (gray to white) with a black outline and darker red shadow on the red panel, adds visual interest. The design is a little loud, but the client really wanted to make a statement.



This a revised version a logo I created a few years back. Here we've done the prismatic effect with two shades—process blue and white on one side, and white to gray to black on the darker side. It's an interesting effect that looks a little like chrome. A simple little fade effect on the yellow panel adds a nice touch. I even printed the phone number digitally, adding a chrome horizon line, and then inserting a black inline from the white outline.



There's more on [www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com)

Click on *Features* to read Dan's article:

- **Step-by-step: Creating special effects for digital printing**, September/October 2000
- And several more of Dan's past articles

ribbon.) To enhance outdoor durability, all the prints get a coat of Frog Juice [Far from Normal Supply, 800-877-1907]. The cost of the ribbons and materials for two doors is roughly \$50. Add in a logo-design charge or straight design time, and it becomes quite profitable work! •SC



There are some subtle details in this design that are only practical when printing digital graphics. The outline on Carpet Cleaning and the faint drop shadow would be too time consuming to execute any other way. I also added the black inline shade to the main copy lettering. The pinstriped panel adds some depth to the design. It's a nice example of "Jersey-style" lettering in the late 80s or early 90s style. But, as my friend Bert Quimby would say, "The retro look is in!" The design has good distance legibility and eye-catching colors.



The key to this simple design is the hairline with outline coupled with the black inline. That makes the lettering appear to have depth—as if it's slightly inset into the white frame.



Since a design like this can be printed and cut from one sheet of vinyl, installation is easier—even easy enough for some customers to do themselves. This came via my Web site. The printed vinyl was rolled up and shipped to the customer in Oklahoma.



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Portions of this article are excerpts from his book, *Logo Design for Small Business*, available from SignCraft, P.O. Box 60031, Ft. Myers, FL 33906, for \$25 plus \$6 shipping and handling.