

# Five curbside re-designs

Fall in the Midwest is a great time to get out and see the leaves changing colors, take a walk, and breathe in the cool northern breezes—invigorating one’s creative juices. As Carm, my wife, and I got back in our car and headed for home, I couldn’t help looking at a few signs along the way. I wondered how I could improve the layouts if these business owners ever called to order a new sign.

Well, I guess my wife knew what she was in for—more curbside sketches. So, off she went to the nearest shops, while I sat down

with my sketchpad.

Looking over these five examples, all are struggling for some unity within the design. You can see one common element that links them together—all the copy is floating about, like astronauts in the space shuttle. In some cases, the primary copy is the same size and letter weight as the secondary copy. A couple of the signs have the emphasis on the wrong copy. Each of these examples is working at half speed. It’s like a motor governor on a go-kart. They start to get your attention, but the lack

of design unity and contrast tend to extinguish the final message.

I’m not intending to make the sign makers feel bad here. It’s sometimes helpful to dream and recreate a fictitious solution to an existing advertisement. We do not know the constraints that were handed to the customers, such as cost, colors, expedience, etc.

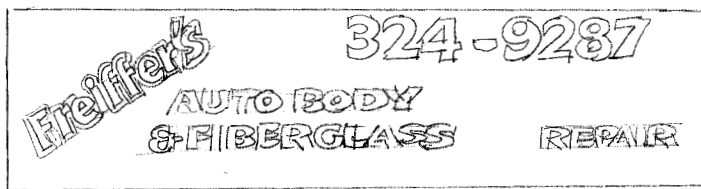
When time permits, I like to look through my old sign photos and imagine what I could do to improve the originals. It helps me to constructively criticize my skills and improve my design ability.

Let me explain what I have drawn and why. I apologize for the shaky lines on these rough curbside sketches.

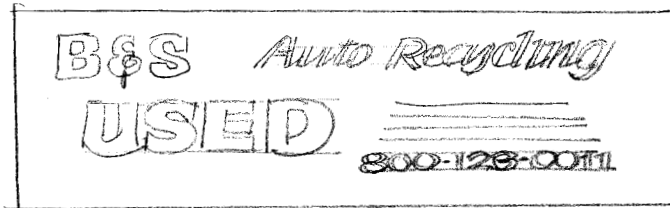
**Freiffer's Auto Body** needed some help holding all the elements together. The dominate feature was a phone number; maybe this was done for a reason. However, type contrast will improve readability, and a few panels help to separate the messages. I’m not sure why the word *Repair* was where it was, but by using a script, *Repair* now has an “action” look to help explain both services.

**B & S Auto Recycling** was struggling to let me know exactly what this business was trying to tell the readers. I assume *Auto Recycling* was most important, along with the company name. Some bold contrasts in size, weight, and type help pull this one together.

**Boomerings** had all the same type weight with very little contrast. By moving the word *Restaurant* up to the top and unifying the two, it becomes a design unit and reads as one. The services, *Banquets* and *Lounge*, are sec-



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ondary, so they are placed below. Again, contrasts in type and weight help readability.

The **Video** sign was effective, but needed some type contrasts. The tape shade panel and a loose,



italicized script toward the right provides a left-to-right flow for easier reading and quick understanding. Underlining the words helps to unify the message. An emphasis on *Video* and *Free* will grab your attention while the contrast in type separates the messages.

**Ray's Auto Detailing** seemed to accentuate his name and not the service he renders. (In some geographic locations, everyone might know Ray and what he does, but I'm sorry about those who don't. He needs to sell his service.) A harder-to-read script will de-emphasize his name while a larger, easier to read bold type

will enable one to understand what Ray does for a living.

As I always say, these examples are my quick fix to the situations. I'm sure there are many more ways to identify these establishments. If you have some extra time, take a walk, sit down, and try some curbside sketches of your own. □



Bob Behounek is a sign artist/designer at Van Bruggen Signs in Orland Park, Illinois. His book, *Trucks*, is available from SignCraft.

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