

How to prepare customer-provided art for cutting

Recreating all or part of a logo may be faster than cleaning up their file

By Jason Fairless

Let's say that someone you know—not you of course—has opened their mouth and told a customer that it would be no problem to scan their business card and use it to letter the side of their semi-trailer. I'm sure someone out there has done that. If not, I must be the only one.

The basic steps of this process are the same no matter what software you use.

Sometimes I get a little overzealous about selling a job and I let customers take advantage of my abilities. You don't want to inconvenience them by making them find the camera-ready artwork—some customers don't even know where their logos came from. Others had them made at a quick-copy shop when they bought their 10,000 business cards for \$1.99.

So what do you do when you can't get the original on disk in a format you can use? You take the business card, stay late or come in early, and then fumble, struggle, cuss, yell and when it's all over, the logo never looks right. I've done it and so has everyone else.

But, over the years you learn to use things—like your software—to your advantage. In this and the following two articles, we'll work through the process of recreating all or part of a logo and preparing it for cutting. I'll show how I do the process in FlexiSIGN, but the basic steps are the same no matter what software you use:

1. **Obtain the logo file**, if available. If not, you'll have to scan the original art. Even if you get the file, it may be more practical to scan and use parts of it.
2. **Match the text**, if at all possible. Finding the fonts used in the design, or similar fonts, is usually faster than cleaning up text from a bitmap file or a scan.
3. **Recreate any graphics**. You may want to scan in detailed portions and redraw panels and other components that can be drawn quickly with your software.

4. **Colorize the design**. Set any gradients, specify CMYK values for printing, etc., then the design is ready to cut or print.

This article is about common sense more than using FlexiSIGN to handle such a project. FlexiSIGN is just a tool. And a tool that you do not know how to use is no tool at all. It's a source of frustration. You have to invest a little time in learning the functions of your software to get the most out of it.

Getting a file you can use Always ask the customer if they have their artwork on disk. They might be able to locate it or have an in-house computer whiz get it to you. If they can, that helps.

Most of the artwork you'll get is set up for printing, not cutting out of vinyl. Most customers will have a .tiff or .jpg file. You can't just open either of these files and cut the vinyl. These are bitmap files, and the graphics in them are made up of millions of little boxes on a grid. For vinyl cutting, bitmaps of any type have to be converted into vector files, which are files where the images are made up of outlines.

Bitmap files must be "traced" by software that can then convert them to a vector file. FlexiSIGN includes a function called Auto Trace. Black-and-white images can usually be traced with good results. If it's a color bitmap with lots of little strokes, though, forget it.

Auto Trace is a button on your toolbar that looks like a letter Z. Don't ask me why it's a Z, but it does get you off to a good start.



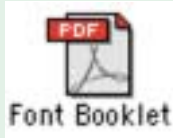
Trace it or recreate it? Often the correct answer is to do a little of both—particularly on more complex logos. Before you trace the logo, ask yourself a few easy questions:

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Locating and installing a font in FlexiSIGN



1. If you're a Mac user, put FlexiSIGN's Fonts and Graphics CD into your drive and open it. On my Mac, the disk opens a dialog box on the screen that shows the contents of the disk. Double click on the font booklet icon.



2. Adobe Acrobat Reader must be installed on your system to open this document. Just about all of us have this whether we know it or not. Double-click the icon to view a catalog that shows the fonts on this disk—and there are plenty.



3. At the top of the catalog you'll find a tool bar that includes these VCR-like controls. The arrow point takes you right to the next page; the one point going left takes you to the previous page. You can print the catalog to keep as a handy reference, or just view the PDF catalog as needed.

Now compare the text in the logo to the fonts on your screen. Often you'll find the exact match; other times you'll find a close one that can be modified to work. Remember—most logo design is done on a computer. The graphic may be hand drawn, but most text is a font modified to create a certain look and feel.



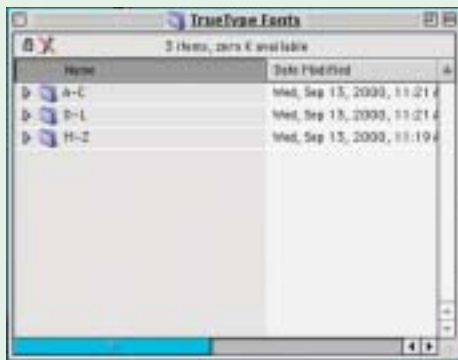
4. With that in mind, look at the Cow Town logo. I designed it, but if someone gave this to me and the font wasn't familiar, I would look it up. Cow and Town is a font called *Informal*.



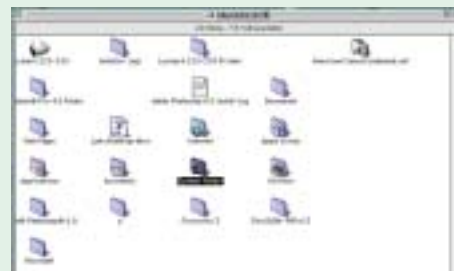
5. The PDF catalog is arranged in alphabetical order, so for practice click the forward arrow until you get to the font names that begins with *I*. When you get to *Informal*, the catalog gives you an accurate representation of what the font looks like.



6. Now place this font in the Fonts folder on your system. Minimize or close Acrobat Reader, then return to the Fonts and Graphics dialog box. Double click the True Type Fonts folder to open it.



7. Another window will open with folders labeled according to the fonts that are alphabetically contained within. Double click the folder labeled *D-L*. Another window opens that shows all the fonts with names that start with letters *D* through *L*.



9. Find *Informal*, then click and drag it to the desktop. Depending on the operating system you're using, you can install the font in the Fonts folder. (Mac users: drag the font to the Macintosh HD icon and hold it there until the window opens showing the contents of the hard drive, then drop it into the System folder. It will automatically go into the Fonts folder.) If Flexi is currently running, you will have to close it then reopen it before the font will become available.

Installing a font in Windows on the PC

If you're running Windows 95 or 98, click the Start button, point to Settings, then click Control Panel. Double-click Fonts, then click File on the window that opens. Click Install New Font.

Click the drive (in this case your CD-ROM drive), then the folder that contains the fonts you want to add. Select the fonts you want to add, then click OK.

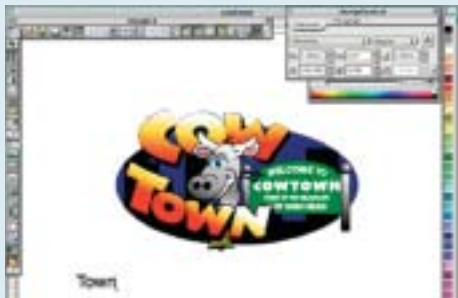
Under the View menu, you can choose to List Fonts by Similarity if you want to group like fonts together for viewing. To view a font in Windows, double-click the icon or the font name.

CorelDraw users (or if you have BitStream's Font Navigator) may want to read *Get Your Fonts Under Control* by Doug Downey in the January/February 2001 issue for more help with managing fonts.

- If there is text in the logo, do you have the same font on your computer?
- If yes, you don't have to worry about clean-

- ing up the text. Simply match the size and attributes of the text and you're done.
- If no, and you have the full version of

Matching a font to a logo in FlexiSIGN



1. First, type in the text. Once you find a font that matches the text in a logo, you're ready to do any manipulation that is necessary. Again, this example is in FlexiSIGN on the Mac, but you can modify type in most sign software on either PC or Mac.



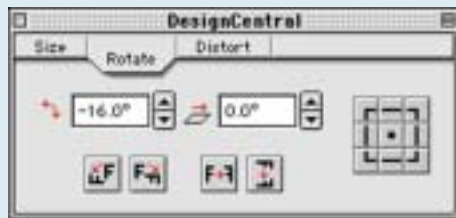
2. Set the font style. Then set the tracking distance between letters. Select the text, then click the character tab in Design Central. A dotted line will appear under the text with arrows on the right-hand side. Slide the arrows left to adjust the spacing to match the original.



3. Make the T larger. The dotted line on the bottom of the text lets us select one letter at a time by clicking the little dot in front of that letter. Select the dot in front of the T and increase the height in Design Central.



4. Select the text and scale it up to the approximate size you need. Now, click on the Effects menu and scroll to Distort. Design Central now displays the Distort options. Choose Arch from the pop-up menu then drag the distortion handles to match your original. Be sure to click the checkmark in Design Central to apply the changes.



5. Rotate the text. Now rotate the text to match the angle of the text in the logo. Select the text and then click the Rotate tab in Design Central.



6. Use the handles to rotate the text. Using the original as a guide, use the handles on the selection to make it match. The text matches perfectly with the crisp, clean lines the logo deserves.

FlexiSIGN-Pro, you have another option. You can look for the font you need—or something similar—in the fonts that come with the program.

Sound like a lot of work? It's not. Try it. It takes a few steps, but once you learn them it will be second nature. And scanning in text and cleaning up all the lines is even more work.

Here's a tip to try out! So far we've learned how to use the program's CD to find and load fonts onto the computer so we don't have to spend hours cleaning up text so it can be cut. We reviewed the procedures for editing text, more precisely, using Design Central's character menu. We learned how to use the *Distort* command coupled with Design Central's options for *Distort*, and we used the *Rotate* tab. We'll use more of Design Central's functions in upcoming articles.

In the next issue, we will Auto Trace the cow head and clean it up for cutting. In closing, I'm going to start closing each article with a FlexiSIGN tip to help in your everyday work. Here you go:

Mac users, hold the Control key down as you click on objects that you are editing. PC users can click the right mouse button. A menu will fly out that just might show the command you need—such as *Ungroup*, *Compound*, *Uncompound*, *Select by Color*, etc. Try it. You'll like it. •§



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