

Blends, convex, outlines, inlines, bevels—use these effects on the copy that counts

Save special effects for the primary copy

by Todd Hanson



Who says all outlines must be narrow? A super-wide outline like this one creates a panel that carries the lettering.

When I was starting out, I often tried to throw everything at every line of copy on a sign or truck—multiple outlines, shades, and anything that would make it more jumbled looking. It was overkill. I used to think: “More action, more professional.” Wrong!

Once I started subscribing to *SignCraft*, I realized that the top people have discipline—something I didn’t have yet. Have you noticed that the best jobs are legible? Pretty novel idea, huh? Actually being able to read what you are supposed to, in the order you’re supposed to!

Use effects sparingly

Usually, the main copy is large enough to have the tricks done to it. Whether it’s beveled edges, outlines, shades, splatters, or whatever, it will work as long as there is good contrast between the main copy and the rest of the layout.

For the secondary copy, I occasionally put a single outline around it or a panel behind it. But overall, it usually stays pretty simple. I can’t recall the last time I outlined or shaded a phone number. They just don’t need it.

Capitalize on your strengths

Many times you see a sign that uses a nice pictorial with the copy. In a way, the main copy is almost secondary (depending on the size of the pictorial, of course). For me, I dress up the main copy because I totally reek at pictorials. (The cup on the *Kay’s Family Restaurant* sign is my all-time best pictorial.

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Convex or prismatic effect lettering can add a lot of dimension to lettering, but save it for the main copy.

Save special effects for the primary copy

You have to look closely, but there's a white inline on the pale pink lettering on Auto Images. I don't always plan on a special effect being seen from a distance—I sometimes put it there so that it creates a little added interest for those who are viewing the sign from a relatively close distance. Make sure your layout works from the maximum distance the sign must be read from, though, before you add any effect.



The main copy on this job got it all—outlines, funky inlines, and an inshade.



A beveled edge is a great effect, and can really add strength to a message. A letter like this lends itself to a bevel. I added an outline to tie the word together into a unit.





Here are those beveled edges again...



... and again! You can have a lot fun with color and bevels, too.



The wide outline and shadow can add emphasis to primary copy.

Eat your heart out, Bill Hueg!)

I try to capitalize on my strong points. It's not really a formula, but it's an approach that suits me well. Remember—if a customer has a limited budget, you can spend the bucks on the main copy and fly through the rest. Which, besides being cost-effective, is also a practical design process. □



Todd Hanson's shop, Hanson Graphix, is in Wauseon, Ohio.



I used beveled edges, a shade and outlines to help add a little punch to Toppers. The shade merges with the outline for the panel that holds Hair Design.