

Using CorelDraw for sign design

Second in a series to help you get the most out of any design software

By Bob Darnell

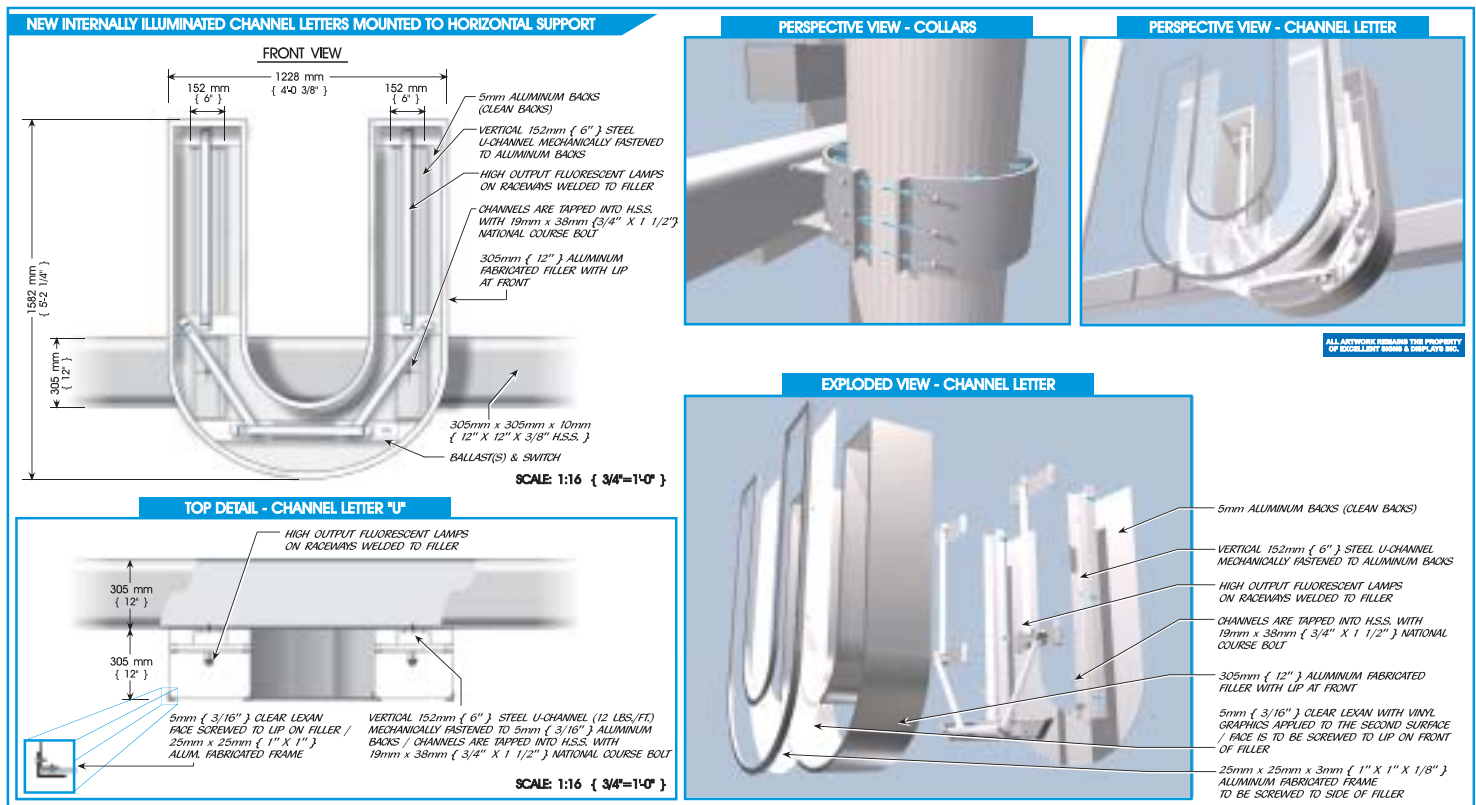
You can use this approach with any design software—the only difference is the commands.

It saves a lot of time to have a ready-made page with your company logo and any information that you want to include on each presentation/production sketch. It gives your sketches a consistent, professional look and delivers information quickly, since it's always in the same locations. Typical things to include are: your company logo and contact information, a sample customer name and address, type of sign, sketch number, account executive, designer,

date, revision number, scale, approval space and a copyright disclaimer.

Since I use two sizes of paper for all sketches I create, I have four template drawings that I can import, one in landscape and one in portrait orientation, for both sizes of paper. My template drawings have sample text already in place and are preformatted so that I just have to highlight the sample text and type in the new copy.

Graphic and text styles Using the Graphic & Text Styles docker provides a quick way to save



CUSTOMER: CUSTOMER NAME	DESIGN NO.: C674 SKDS	SCALE: AS SHOWN	DATE: JUNE 29 / 2000
ADDRESS: ADDRESS	ACC. EXEC.: GLENN WALTERS	REVISION #1:	CHECKED BY:
SIGN TYPE: NEW ILLUMINATED CHANNEL LETTERS MOUNTED TO HORIZONTAL SUPPORT	DESIGNER: BOB DARNELL	APPROVED BY CUSTOMER : DATE :	

Here's an example of one of my template drawings.

or apply frequently used graphic or text properties in your drawing. If you find that you're repeatedly applying the same characteristics in different files, you can save the styles "template" to be loaded into any drawing later. Assigning Hot Keys (or shortcut keys) to these styles makes it even easier to apply them to your objects.

For instance, I have set my default text to be the Blacklight letter style at 9 points high. I like my dimensions and important notes to be in a 10-point Avant Garde, though, so I created another text style with those characteristics and assigned a shortcut key so that I can easily change the default style. With my text selected, I hit Alt-F4 (my shortcut key) and the text changes to 10-point Avant Garde. Once you have created all the styles that you plan to use, you can save them in the Graphic and Text Styles docker by clicking on the little black arrow and going to Template | Save as Default for New Documents. If you've opened an older drawing, you may have to load the template in the same manner to access your styles. I've recorded a script using CorelScript to do just that. I hit Alt-Spacebar and my template automatically loads. I will discuss CorelScript a little later.

Dimensioning The dimensioning feature documents the sizes of objects on the page, even when you work in scale. It is more productive and less problematic to have the major dimensions of the sign labeled when it goes into production. It also gives the customer an idea of the sizes involved in case they don't happen to carry a scale ruler around.

CorelDraw has handy auto-dimensioning

There's more on
www.signcraft.com

Click on *Features* to read:

■ **Setting up CorelDraw for sign design** by Bob Darnell,
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tools that allow you to select points on your objects and pull out dimensioning lines with the measurements already formatted in the middle. I still break these apart for two reasons. First, the default look leaves a little to be

Take a little time to create a custom color palette that matches standard vinyl colors.

desired, so I apply my own arrowhead line styles and text styles. Second, if you do switch between scales and the Dynamic Dimensioning button is selected on the property bar, all of your previously correct dimensions change to reflect the new scale. This behavior usually results in your measurements being incorrectly labeled. Dynamic Dimensioning can be very handy, so I leave it on all the time despite the limitation it imposes.

Custom fountain fills Saving your fountain fills is similar to saving the fill as a graphic style, but this method allows you to edit the fill at the same time, if necessary. You can save your fills in the “Presets” window of the fountain fill dialog box.

I typically use these fills to quickly add a little more realism to the drawing. Adding highlights and shadows to a base color may give the impression of glossiness or the impression that the object is rounded. This is more of an illustration technique, but it goes a long way toward making your sketch more professional and a clearer representation of what it will look like, but it should be done with subtlety. You don’t want the customer to believe that there is an actual gradient where you were trying to make the rendering “more realistic.” Saving your fills allows you to dramatically

Hot keys can save you plenty of time

I use a lot of keyboard shortcuts, but certainly not to the extent I have seen other people use them. Sometimes I think they’re using the keyboard so much that they might as well throw their mouse away and just start programming in the Postscript language! I think there is a certain point where using the keyboard so much might mean that the program isn’t set up to be really productive to begin with.

I’ve never been afraid of overriding the default shortcut keys CorelDraw uses; it became apparent a few versions back that they like to change these things from version to version, anyway. I worked heavily in SignLab for a few years, so I created a lot of keyboard shortcuts in CorelDraw that mirror SignLab’s. This allows me to flip between the two programs and not have to remember another set of shortcuts. Some of the shortcut keys I find invaluable to memorize are: Group & Ungroup, Align & Distribute, Copy Properties From . . . , Arrange to Front, Back, Forward One, Back One, Align Horizontally, Vertically, Top, Bottom, Left & Right, etc.

I have also altered the function keys at the top of the keyboard to suit how I work. This is a good place to stick a little printed template with your shortcuts labeled until you get used to them. If you follow only one piece of advice in this entire article, I would suggest setting up some shortcut keys for your zoom tools. They save a lot of mouse work and scrolling around.

Here is how I have my main shortcut keys set up:

- F1** Context sensitive help (default shortcut)
- F2** Replicate (supplied CorelScript, similar to Step and Repeat in other programs)
- F3** Left Arrow (.72-point black line style)
- Ctrl + F3 -Left Arrow** (1.44-point white line style)
- Alt + F3** Default Artistic Text (9-point Blacklight)
- Shift + F3** Arrow on both ends (.72-point black line style)
- F4** Right Arrow (.72-point black line style)
- Ctrl + F4** Right Arrow (1.44-point white line style)
- Alt + F4** Heading Text (10-point Avant Garde)
- Shift + F4** Arrow on both ends (1.44 point white line style)
- F5** Zoom to All Objects
- F6** Zoom Out
- F7** Zoom to Selected Object
- F8** Zoom to Page
- F9** Full-screen mode (default shortcut)
- F10** Hide Rollups
- Ctrl + F10** Show Rollups
- F11** Wire-frame Mode
- F12** Enhanced Mode •BD

increase the level of the presentation while adding only a couple of mouse clicks to the design time.

Custom palette It is a good idea to have the colors in your sketch match the actual colors you are going to use on the sign. Where I work, we use 3M translucent vinyl exclusively for all of our illuminated signs. I took several different types of color wheel printouts and tried to match the actual vinyl colors as closely as possible. Then after a few test prints to ensure that I had the colors I wanted, I created a custom color palette and added the name of the vinyl to each color.

This makes it very easy to select colors, because when you let your mouse hover over the color well, the name of it will appear in a “tool tip.” You save time by not having to add the color values in each time on every sketch, and you are sure that you’ve got a good color match every time. When creating a custom palette, I always leave the 10 shades and basic colors and add any colors I want after them.

While not perfect, calibrating the colors between your monitor, your scanner and your printer using color profiles is also beneficial. It can be a little confusing to do, but the help files should aid you. The benefits of designing things on-screen using colors that actually resemble what comes out of the printer is not something I take for granted. I used to have to use obscenely bright colors on-screen to get the colors I wanted from the printer. The on-screen version was not only a pretty ugly affair, but it also hindered the development and visualization of color harmonies and relationships. •SC



Bob Darnell is a sign artist/designer for Excellent Signs and Displays (www.excellent-signs.com) in London, Ontario, Canada. You can view his personal online portfolio at www.members.home.net/bob.darnell. Portions of this article first appeared on the Letterville Web site,

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