

What do you get for routine lettering on an office door?

by Tom McClrot

This is the sixth in a series of articles on pricing routine signs. SignCraft contacted 25 sign makers, asking for prices on a variety of typical “knock-out” projects. All were established sign shops run by capable sign makers, most of whom have been featured in past issues of SignCraft. Each article takes a look at how this group of veteran sign makers and shop owners price a certain type of basic sign—a truck, a banner, an A-frame sign, etc.

To keep installation pricing out of this, we said these were all cash-and-carry jobs. No visit to the site was required (except in the case of the office door lettering). The customer came in, placed the order, then came back to pick up the completed sign. As for materials, we asked them to

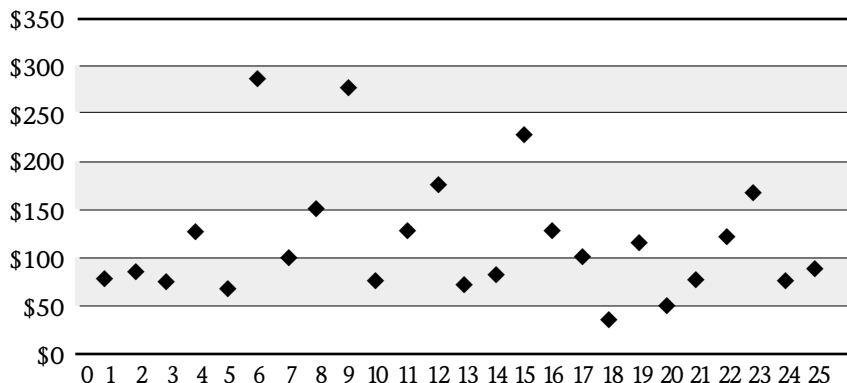
quote using the same materials they typically use on these jobs. Most said they use vinyl lettering on such work;

The sign:

Window lettering installed on a 30-in.-wide glass pane in an office door (located about 20 minutes from your shop) with the copy *Professional Realty Management, Inc.*

The average prices:

Overall average: \$121
Rural/small town: \$89
Mid-sized city: \$123
Large city: \$208



This chart shows the quotes given by all 25 shop owners. Note that seventeen of the quotes fell between \$75 and \$125.

the rest said they used a combination of paint and vinyl.

These are the types of jobs most sign makers don't stop to photograph. Usually, they're basic signs done for customers who don't have the budget for something fancy. Other times, they are informational signs that just need to deliver a message simply and effectively.

Knocking out a routine office door lettering job may require more travel time than actual production time. If the door is 20 minutes from the shop, you'll have 40 minutes on the road for a job that may take 15 minutes to lay out, cut, and weed—and five more minutes to apply.

Since most of what we sell in the sign business is our time, that travel time has to be part of the quote. If you weren't out in traffic, you could be back at the shop making signs, so that time must be accounted for.

Seventeen of our 25 survey participants quoted this door lettering project between \$75 and \$125. One was below that range, and seven were above it.

The everyday or “plain” sign still deserves a good layout. In fact, an effective layout is essential if you don't want viewers to just tune them out because there is nothing else to attract the eye—no stunning effects, no dramatic colors.

We've put together some examples of effective basic layouts for storefront signs like this imaginary project. Some were done by those in the survey; others are from the SignCraft files. We also welcome your photos of effective examples of everyday signs.

About the group: The surveys were completed by 25 sign shop owners in 20 states. These were established shops—they had run their own shop anywhere from



Where the surveyed shops were located

6 to 36 years. We asked each of them a few questions about their businesses:

■ *Most of these 25 shops do plenty of “basic bread-and-butter” sign work.* More than half said it was half or more of their total sales.

■ *They use a variety of factors to guide their pricing of such jobs.* Five said they went on experience. Five said job costing was their primary guide. (Several use estimating software to track costs.) Six said they used a combination of job costing and experience. Two said the *Signwriter’s Guide to Easier Pricing*, and two said a combination of experience and the pricing guide. One said he or she goes by what others charge in their area, and one said it’s a combination of all of these factors.

■ *Most do “job costing”—tracking the time and materials used on a sign—on a regular basis.* Well over half said they did job costing for most or every job.

■ *There were three market sizes.* When we asked how they would describe the market they served, three said theirs was a large city, 13 said mid-sized city, and nine said small town or rural market. Market size seems to be the greatest factor in pricing, at least for basic sign work. In almost every

case, prices increased with the size of the market. (As would overhead, in most cases.) This job was one of the exceptions—the small town shop average was slightly higher than those in mid-sized towns.

What they had to say: Many of the participants had comments on pricing basic sign work, or on one of the particular types of signs. Here’s what a few jotted on their survey:

“The prices for basic signs have stayed the same or gone down over the past several years. There’s a lot of competition for it. It’s the easiest work to get (if your prices are low) and chasing it is the fastest way to go out of business. You end up working harder to make less.”

“Folks have to remember that most of the jobs you see on the pages of *SignCraft* are not basic knockout signs like this survey talks about. You can’t do custom

jobs at basic prices. Basic jobs have to be plain, simple, and fast. If the customer wants more than that, they have to pay more than that.”

“Our business is no different than any other business—you must get paid for your time whether the sign is basic or custom. Otherwise, you won’t be able to stay in business.”□

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