

What do you get for a basic 3-by-4 parking lot sign?

by Tom McLlrot

This is the third 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 Sign-Craft. 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 rest said they used a combination of paint and vinyl.

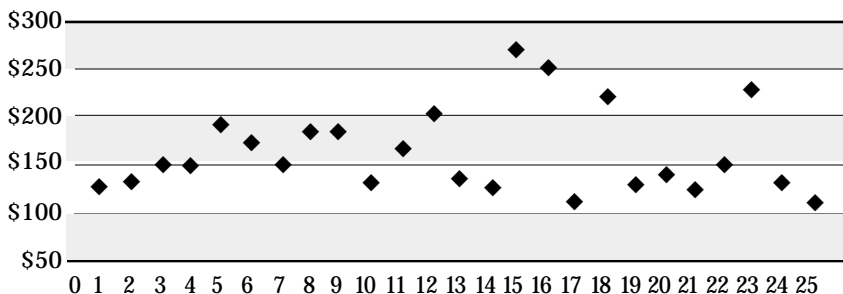
These are the types of jobs most sign makers don’t stop to photograph. Usually, they’re basic signs done for customers who don’t have the budget for something fancy.

The sign:

A 3-by-4-ft. sign with the copy *Car Wash Entrance* with an arrow pointing the way (to be installed on a fence)

The average prices:

Overall average: \$162
Rural/small town: \$143
Mid-sized city: \$166
Large city: \$198



The chart shows the quotes given by all 25 shop owners. Note that sixteen of the quotes fell between \$125 and \$180.

Other times they are informational signs that just need to deliver a message simply and effectively.

For most new small businesses, the budget is tight. The bare-bones auto repair shop might be a garage, some secondhand office furniture, tools, business cards—and a sign out front. Make that a basic sign out front. Cost is usually a big issue in such cases, if not the primary issue. That’s not always the wise approach to the key factor in a business’s image, but it’s often the reality.

In many shops, routine, everyday informational signs fall into the category called “parking lot signs.” These signs are seldom very glamorous, but they are essential directional tools for viewers. Here we look at the pricing of a true parking lot sign: a customer needs a secondary sign to direct customers in their parking lot. Sixteen of our 25 survey participants quoted it between \$125 and \$180. Three were slightly below that range, and six 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 6 to 36 years. We asked each of them a few questions about their businesses:



Where the surveyed shops were located

■ *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, thirteen 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. □*



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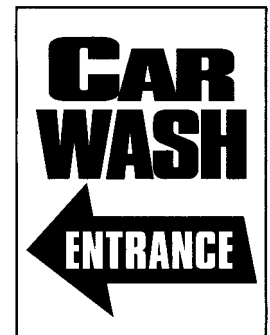
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