

What do you get for a 4 by 8?

by Tom McClintrot

I'll bet you've got at least a few of those everyday "bread and butter" sign jobs in the shop today. I mean routine, run-of-the-mill, knock 'em out sign jobs—basic signs where there is no logo to design or reproduce and no special colors to match.

Like all sign work, these signs can be a challenge to price. We often wonder how our prices compare with other shop owners. Most of us realize that comparing prices is difficult—almost every sign is a custom product, and every shop approaches a job differently. Even so, we're curious about what others charge.

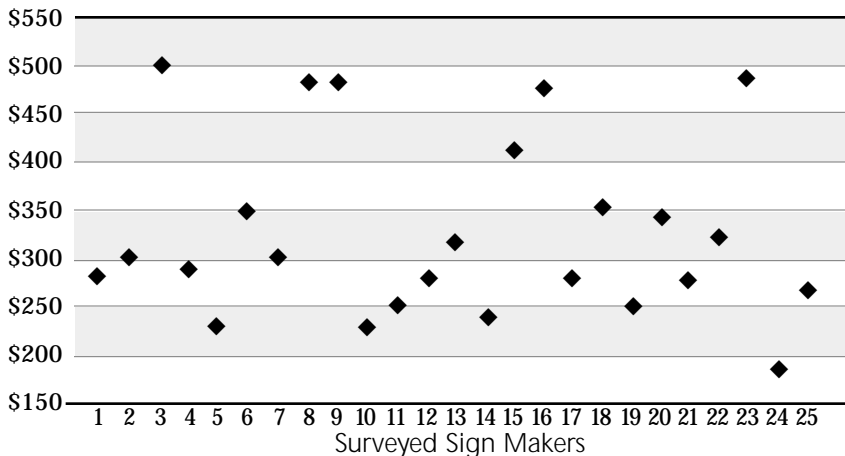
So *SignCraft* sent a survey to 25 sign makers asking for prices on a variety of typical "knock-out" pro-

The sign:

A 4-by-8-ft. sign with the copy *For Sale or Build to Suit, 150' by 450', 123-456-7890*

The average prices:

Overall average: \$326
Rural/small town: \$305
Mid-sized city: \$322
Large city: \$402



This chart shows the quotes given by all 25 shop owners. Note that eighteen of the quotes fell between \$225 and \$350.

jects. All were established sign shops run by capable sign makers—most of whom have been featured in past issues of *SignCraft*.

To keep installation pricing out of this, we said these were all cash-and-carry jobs. 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 balance said a combination of paint and vinyl.

In each of the upcoming issues we'll take a look at how this group of veteran shop owners price a certain type of basic sign—a truck, a banner, an A-frame sign, etc. We'll start with common fare for many a shop: the basic single-faced 4-by-8-ft. real estate sign.

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

Nonetheless, 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 interesting cutout, no dramatic colors.

We've put together some examples of effective basic layouts for these types of signs. 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 that had been in business from 6 to 36 years. We asked each



Where the surveyed shops were located

sign maker 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 goes by what area shops charge, 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.)□



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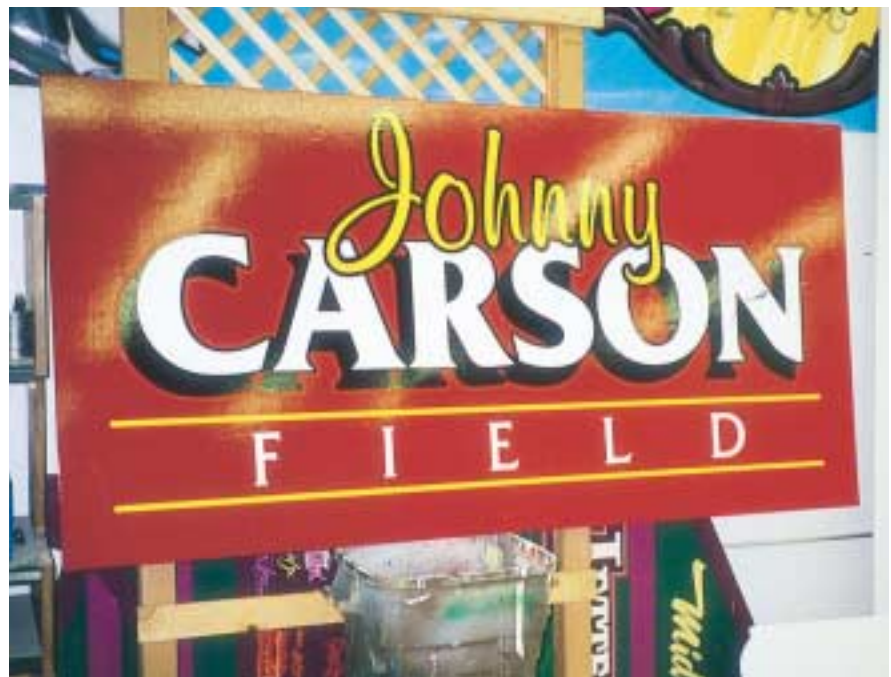
Vince Balistreri, Vince Balistreri Signs, Orlando, Florida



Steve Mysse, Sign & Design, Billings, Montana



David Showalter, David Design, Bryan, Ohio



Marvin Renter, MR Graphics & Signs, Norfolk, Nebraska