

25 sign shops on the fine art of pricing everyday sign work

What do you get for a quick vinyl banner?

by Tom McLlrot

This is the fifth 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

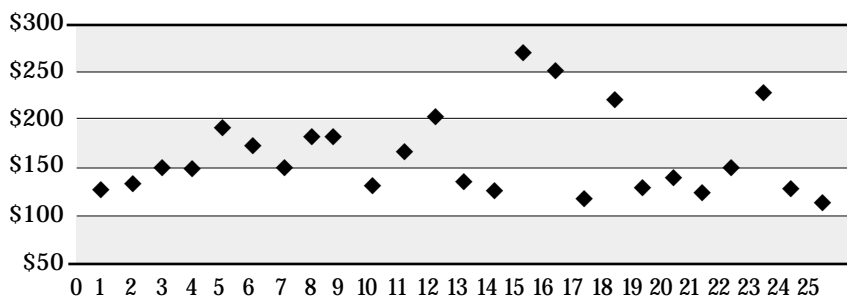
quote using the same materials they typically use on these jobs. Most said they use vinyl lettering on such work; the rest said they used a combination of paint and vinyl.

The sign:

A 3-by-8-ft. vinyl banner with the copy *No Money? No Credit? No Problem!*

The average prices:

Overall average: \$160
Rural/small town: 152
Mid-sized city: \$153
Large city: \$213



This chart shows the quotes given by all 25 shop owners. Note that 16 of the quotes fell between \$125 and \$175.

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.

Most banners are short-term promotional signs. Or at least most customers say that—even if they do end up using them month after month. The custom, high-budget banner is the exception. Many shops turn out a steady stream of basic banners for local businesses.

A basic banner was another of the survey subjects. Sixteen of our 25 survey participants quoted this banner between \$125 and \$175. Two were slightly below that range, and six were considerably 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 vinyl banners 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:

■ *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.*



Where the surveyed shops were located

No Money? No Credit? No Problem!

Steve Mysse,
Sign & Design,
Billings, Montana

■ *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.

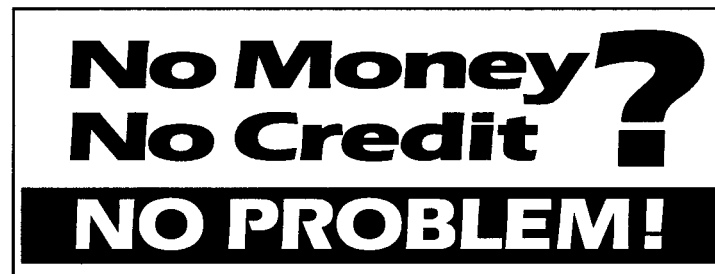
■ *There were three market sizes.* When we asked how they would describe the market they served, three said theirs was a large city, 13 said mid-sized city, and nine said small town or rural market. Market size seems to be the greatest factor in pricing, at least for basic sign work. In almost every

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:

"We use vinyl for most work like this but, this banner might be printed directly onto banner fabric on the inkjet printer. We're doing more and more of that."

"Pricing is the most difficult of all shop tasks to delegate. Quote too high and you lose the job; too low and you wish you hadn't bid the job." □



David Showalter,
David Design,
Bryan, Ohio

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