

Twenty-five sign shops on the fine art of pricing everyday sign work

# What do you get for a routine 18-by-24 stake sign?

by Tom McClintrot

*This is the second 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*

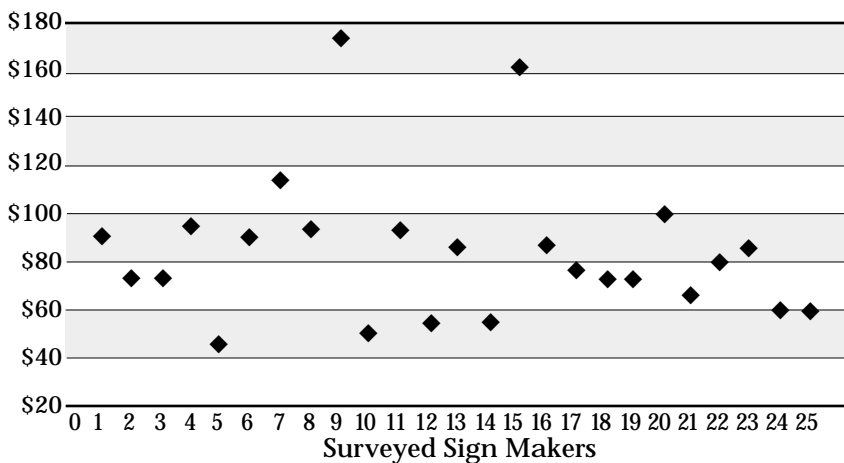
*came in, placed the order, then came back to pick up the completed sign. As for materials, we asked them to*

## The sign:

An 18-by-24-in. aluminum panel with a step frame stake with the copy *2 Bedroom 2 Bath Apartment for Rent 123-4567*

## The average prices:

Overall average: \$85  
Rural/small town: \$83  
Mid-sized city: \$75  
Large city: \$138



*This chart shows the quotes given by all 25 shop owners. Note that 18 of the quotes fell between \$60 and \$100.*

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

The “yard sign,” that handy little 18-by-24-in. sign on a step stake, delivers a lot of information and advertising—like a home for sale, another job by Quality Roofing, or an estate auction. They are usually about as basic as a sign can get.

In this issue, we look at pricing such a sign. Most of our 25 survey respondents quoted an 18-by-24-in. sign on a step frame between \$60 and \$100, with just a few above and below that range.

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 also included some examples of effective basic layouts for 18-by-24-in. 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 *Sign-writer’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 can make money on these jobs, but you can bet we don’t spend much time on them. In my shop right now, all work like this would be done completely in vinyl.”

“We based our prices on our ‘Standard Design’ knockouts as we rarely do a plain, basic layout—even simple signs usually get some level of custom treatment.” □



Raymond Chapman, Chapman Sign Studios, Temple, Texas



Marvin Renter, MR Graphics & Signs, Norfolk, Nebraska



Chuck Peterson, Chuck Peterson Signs, Cardiff, California



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