

Seven Colors, One Screen, \$40 Each

By Bill Mogensen

Short-run screen printing and vinyl graphics make a profitable combination.

BACK IN THE MAY ISSUE, I presented an article on creating multi-color cartoon figures out of vinyl. That very month a local homeowners association contacted me about creating some signs for the equestrian trails running throughout their development.

Because their association dues help to maintain the trails, they had a vested interest in preventing litter and graffiti from spoiling the natural beauty of the surroundings. By placing some simple signs alongside the trails they hoped to achieve their goals of cleanliness, safety, and respect for private property — soliciting cooperation from the trail users with a friendly, informative message.

I was given some preliminary copy, asked to design something that would convey the desired information in a *nice way*, and invited to present my ideas at their next board meeting.



Figure 1: Creating a concept on your design software is one thing. Finding a practical way to produce it is another.

Using my favorite PC-based illustration program I quickly formatted the copy to fit a portrait-oriented 12' x 18' sign blank. In an effort to present the information in clear (but amusing) manner, I decided what was needed was a cartoon of the horse (a talking horse no less) thanking the readers for their cooperation. In no time at all I had created a very effective, seven-color sign design that was a big hit with the board of directors, but would was also:

1. Much too expensive for their budget since they needed only 12 signs, and..

2. A nightmare to screen print, since it would require multiple screens, screen registration, ink colors, etc. See **Figure 1**.

This is one of the *big* problems with today's computer illustration/design programs. It's too easy to get carried away and create something that is effective, but impossible to produce in the real world. However, with a little thought and some *tricks-of-the-trade*, you can sometimes have your cake and eat it too.

In thinking over this situation I recalled the vinyl cartoon idea and decided that by screen printing the two predominant colors, then cutting the colored areas for the cartoon horse out of vinyl. The customer would get a good value, I'd make a nice profit and the whole production would be friendlier to the environment.



Figure 2: First, I screened the red areas on the sign blanks using enamel ink.

THE STEPS

1. Since I don't have a copy camera or PMT processor or any of that stuff, I created a full-size single transparency using a sheet of acetate and black vinyl. The areas that would be used to create the photo stencil were the text, the border, and the outline/background of the horse. My intent was to create a single screen that could be used to print two colors, in this case black and red.

2. I prepared a 20" x 24" screen and applied a direct/indirect film. After the film was ready I sandwiched the transparency (from Step 1) with the screen and placed everything in my homemade exposure unit and let it burn in for about 15 minutes. I could have used the sun to burn the stencil, but most of the time I work at night. After the proper amount of exposure (which is based on experience) I washed out the screen in lukewarm water, blotted off any excess and placed the screen in the airflow from a circulating fan so it could dry.

3. The screen preparation was finished by applying blockout around the edges, and a temporary blockout consisting of strips of 2" clear packing tape over the areas of the screen that would be used to print the black areas. The tape was applied to the squeegee side of the screen, with particular care used in burnishing the edge areas that would come into contact with the squeegee.

4. I mounted the screen in the clamps, and registered the sign blank.

5. Using enamel ink, I screened the red areas on the sign blanks. While these were drying, I cleaned the screen, and prepared it for printing the black areas by using tape to block out the red areas that I'd just printed (see **Figure 2**).

6. Using the same registration guides, I printed the black areas onto the sign blanks (see **Figure 3**).

Now, for the other five colors...

7. I open up the computer file again and deleted everything except the cartoon horse. I then separated the various parts that were different colors, making enough duplicates for all the signs. Then I *nested*

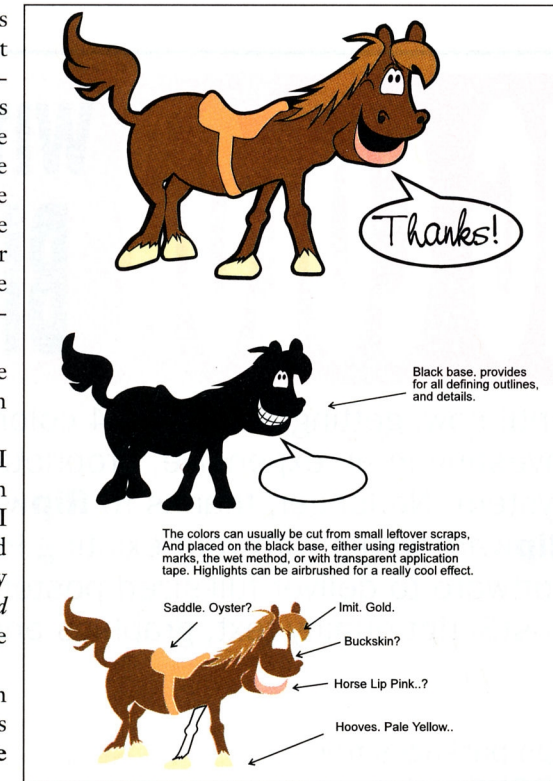


Figure 4



Figure 3: Next, I printed the black areas onto the sign blanks.

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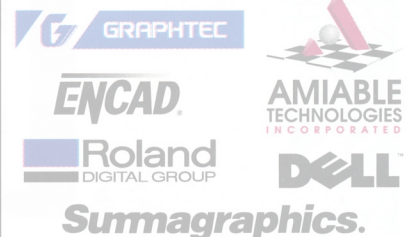
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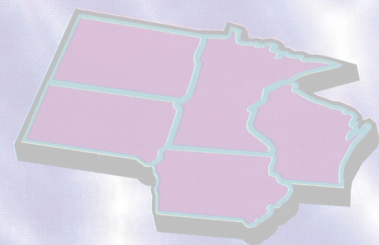
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THANKS ALSO TO: KEVIN MURPHY OF NEW JERSEY, BILL KRAMER OF WISCONSIN, AND ALL OF THE OTHERS...

Figure 5

the pieces for efficient cutting out of scrap vinyl.

8. After cutting and weeding all the vinyl, all I had to do was piece the cartoon horse together. I used a simple production line method of registering each piece by eye, starting with the largest pieces (in this case the horse's body in medium brown), and ending up with the smallest pieces (the imitation gold hooves). See **Figure 4**.

Total production time was about five hours. My material costs were about \$50 to \$60 (the screen was recycled, and the vinyl was scraps from other jobs). Profit: At least \$400, or \$80 to \$90 an hour (gross). Sure would be nice to be able to bill that much for a full 40 or 50 hours per week.

If you design something up front with this technique in mind, it's a good way to provide lots of color with a short run screen-printing job at a price that is more affordable to a larger customer base. Of *continued*



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Seven Colors

continued

course, you wouldn't want to get stuck trying this for a hundred signs, but 25 or less isn't too bad. And remember, just because something saves you time (and money), it doesn't mean you should give it away.

TIP OF THE MONTH

This vinyl cutting and weeding tip is provided by Pete Ordway of Ordway Sign Supply in Van Nuys, Calif.

Pete has cut letters as small as the type on a typewriter using this method, and having used it many times myself, I know it works.

1. When cutting tiny lettering or graphics always use the sharpest blade you have.

2. Use the least amount of cutting pressure that you can get away with.

3. Reverse weed the lettering. After cutting the lettering, don't weed it yet. First remove as many centers (of A's, B's, O's, etc.) as possible, and cut between the lines of copy. Then apply the application tape, and turn the whole thing over. Remove the liner paper, and tape the application tape down to the table. Now, carefully weed the background off the application tape. You'll find that the small letters are much more likely to stay in place. Once you've finished weeding you can return the application tape (with the small letters in place) back onto the liner paper until it's applied to a substrate.

I suggest that you practice with the method in order to determine the least amount of cutting pressure you can get away with.

THE NINE DOTS PUZZLE

This puzzle appeared in the May issue and was designed to demonstrate non-traditional solutions to problems.

Of all of the correct responses that I received, a few were especially interesting in that they offered *new* solutions to the puzzle (see **Figure 5**). I've included Terry L. Jenson's, of Gordon Sign Co., Colorado Springs, Colo. Thanks to everyone who participated.

In a future article I hope to give everyone an inside look at the Warner Brothers Studios Sign and Graphics department, and pass on a new trick of the trade. See you then.

Bill Mogensen operates Mogensen Design in Shadow Hills, Calif. 