

# Step-by-step: Photoshop airbrushed effects

No fumes, no mess. Print it on your digital printer!

By Dan Antonelli

One of the great things about technology is it forces you to explore new ways of doing things. Digital printing is a great example of technology that is changing the way I do business. We recently acquired a Roland VersaCAMM, and this machine has really had a huge impact on the way I design and produce truck lettering. For the most part, white is the only color vinyl I buy. I print nearly everything that goes out the door.

When you realize that you're no longer limited to single colors of vinyl, suddenly the options are unlimited. You can add photos to your designs, add cool airbrush effects, whatever you can think of. The new artwork available from Bergen Design [800-214-6185, [www.bergendesign.com](http://www.bergendesign.com)] allows you to make lettering effects that look like gold leaf, diamond plate and other wild effects. It's like candy to me. Used appropriately, it offers you the opportunity to really set your work apart.

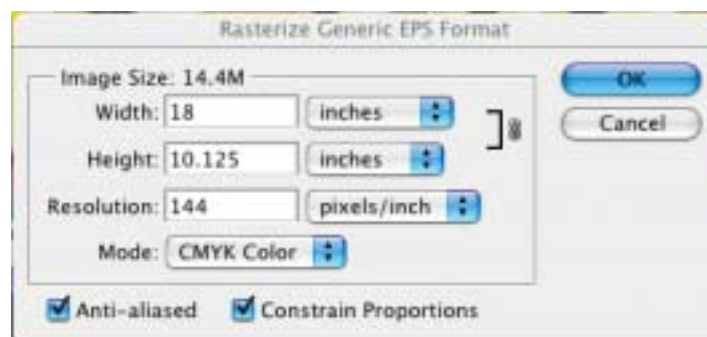
We recently got a call from John Aiello at Lightning Signs in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, to design his company logo. He also has a Roland digital printer, and wanted us to design a prismatic vector-based logo that he printed out, and size and scale without any quality loss. We designed that logo, and then thought it would be real cool to "trick" it out in Photoshop with some other effects that aren't possible in a vector format.

It brought back memories of when I was first starting out, and was airbrushing a lot. Adding "hotspots" and other highlights—boy, this is fun! No mess, no paint on my hands or fumes to breathe. At the same time, I felt a tinge of sadness because now with the quality of digital printing, in a couple hours you can nearly replicate those tricked-out airbrush jobs that formerly took days to complete. The topic of another article might be how, as an industry, we deal with this reality.

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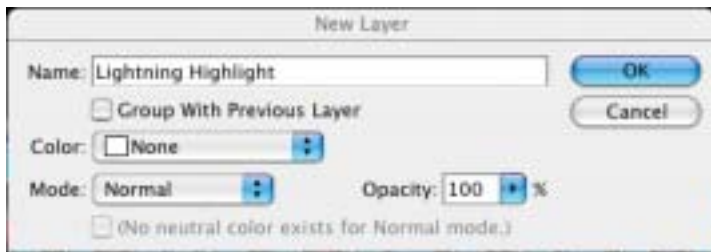
**1. Here's the original vector-based logo** we created for John. *Lightning* uses a simple chrome-airbrush fade, done with gradient fills pasted into the lettering. *Signs* was made prismatic by hand in Freehand. Then we added some gradients to the different sides of the letter. We then saved the file as an MS-DOS PC .EPS file, and added an outline path, which Roland's ColorChoice RIP recognizes as the cutline. John was then able to scale and print this logo at any size he needed. What we needed for Photoshop was a CMYK .EPS file, so we saved it as that and then imported into Photoshop and rasterized it.



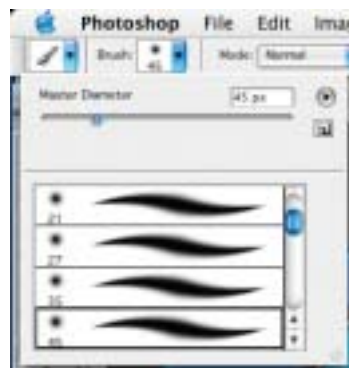
**2. Opening the file:** For the purposes of this article, we made the size 18x10.125 at 144 dpi. Depending on the capabilities of your printer, you would want to increase that to match approximately 300 dpi at final size of out-put. Keep in mind, however, that even 144 dpi at 4 feet away will look pretty tight to begin with, but when observed close up may have some pixelation. Were this to be a set of truck doors, I would have gone about 30 inches wide at 300 dpi.



3. After the file opened, I expanded the canvas size by a few inches top and bottom, and then added a layer for the black background. Next, I was ready to start adding some highlights.



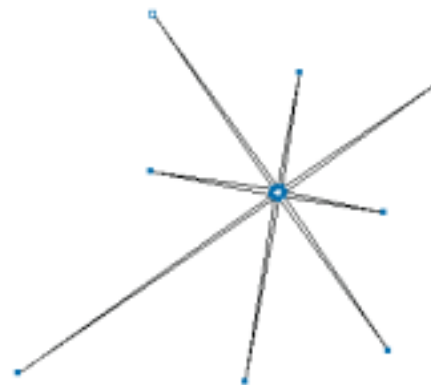
4. I started by adding a new layer "Lightening Highlight," which will have some simple hotspot highlights added to *Lightning*. It's easier to work in layers because if you make a mistake, you haven't touched your original lettering and can simply delete whatever you need to.



5. I selected the Brush tool with 45 Pixel width and made the brush color white.



6. Using the Brush tool, I began to apply some highlight across the horizon line. I clicked the tool only once or twice over the area I was highlighting with these hotspots. Don't overdo it!



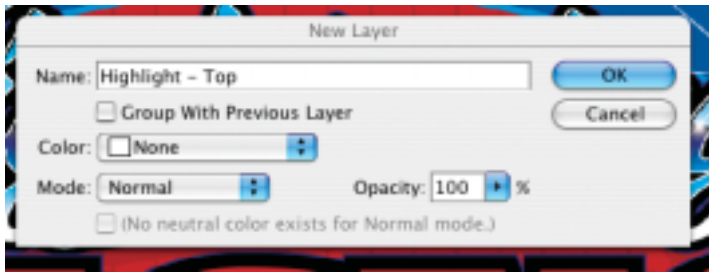
7. I then created a burst using the Polygon tool in Freehand. I colored it white, and then pasted it into Photoshop.



**8. Here's the burst pasted** into Photoshop in a new layer. I can also scale it now and resize as necessary.



**9. I then duped it** into a new layer, rotated and pasted it on the g. Then I got my Brush tool out and added the white airbrushed center. I needed to click the tool a few times before it filled in and was large enough.



**10. I added another layer** that will represent the whiter highlight to the top parts of the letter. Using the Magic Wand tool, I began selecting the lighter parts of the letter that we will be airbrushing with some white highlights. If the area I wanted to select did not include all the areas selected by the Magic Wand tool, I manually added to the selection with the Polygon Lasso (hold the shift key to add to the current selection).



**11. This shows the selected areas** on which we will be applying some white highlights.

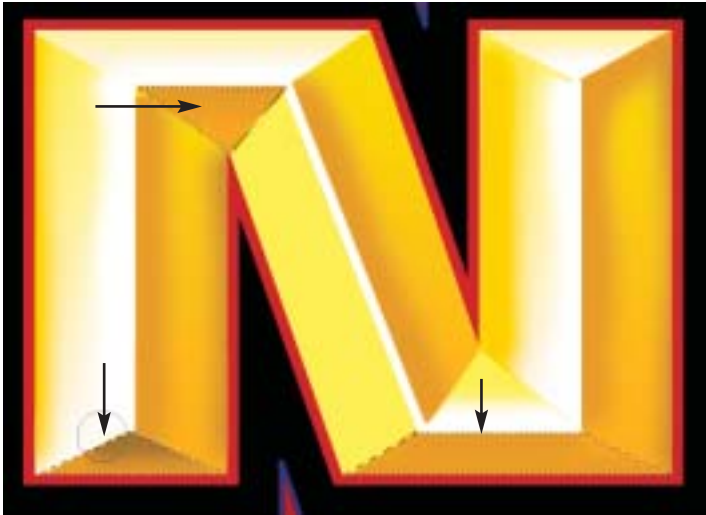


**12. I slowly moved the airbrush** over while holding the mouse button to apply the white highlights.



**13. Next, I added another layer** (repeat the process above) for the darker highlight, and selected all the areas that we'd be darkening. I selected a dark yellow/brown color for the shadowed areas, and applied the dark color with the Paintbrush tool, slowly moving the cursor over the selected area.





**14. I wanted the bottom corners** to have a harder edge, and also be a little darker. So I manually selected the bottom corners using the Polygon Lasso tool, and then chose a very dark brown/black color to airbrush in more shading.



**15. I added some burst highlight** to *Signs* by using the Paintbrush tool with white as the highlight color. I also darkened some of the areas on the right corners using the same method as the previous step.



**16. Here's the finished design.** And my hands never even got dirty! I printed some samples on the VersaCAMM, and then clear-coated it with ClearJet—a solvent-based UV-protective clear. It finishes to a mirror-like finish.

The proactive designers who embrace and exploit this new technology will be sought out—and will be much more profitable. When you combine the experience of actually having wielded an airbrush, and then you jump into Photoshop and realize its potential, it's scary. There are worlds of possibilities at your fingertips.

For this step-by-step, I wanted to illustrate a few of those possibilities, and show you an example of the direction I think we all may be headed. •SC



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