

Adding stationery design to your services

Designing and printing stationery is a great way to add to your bottom line

By Dan Antonelli, President and Creative Director, Graphic D-Signs, Inc. and SignShopMarketing.com

As sign shop owners, so much time and effort is focused on actually landing the client. But what if they only need to have their truck lettered? You may not see that client again for years unless they need another sign-related service. This takes us back to one of the real problems related to selling signs—they last too long. So, it makes sense to try to get that client to buy as many items from you as possible. And if those items have a shorter shelf life, that's even better!

This leads me to stationery design and printing. Here's a great ancillary service you can add to your shop—and the learning curve is not as steep as you might think. The many online printing sites make this an extremely viable, profitable line of business.

Frequently, we're asked to design a logo along with truck lettering or a sign. This

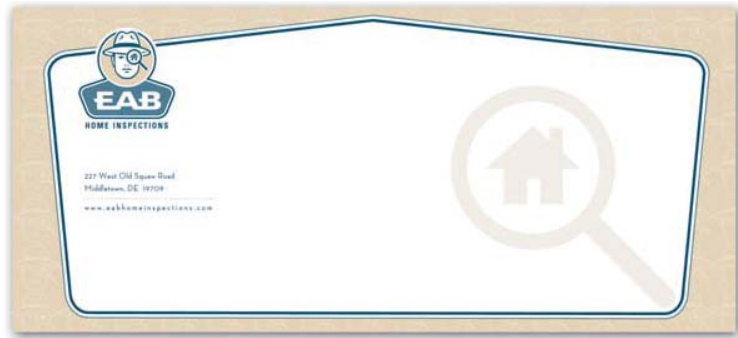
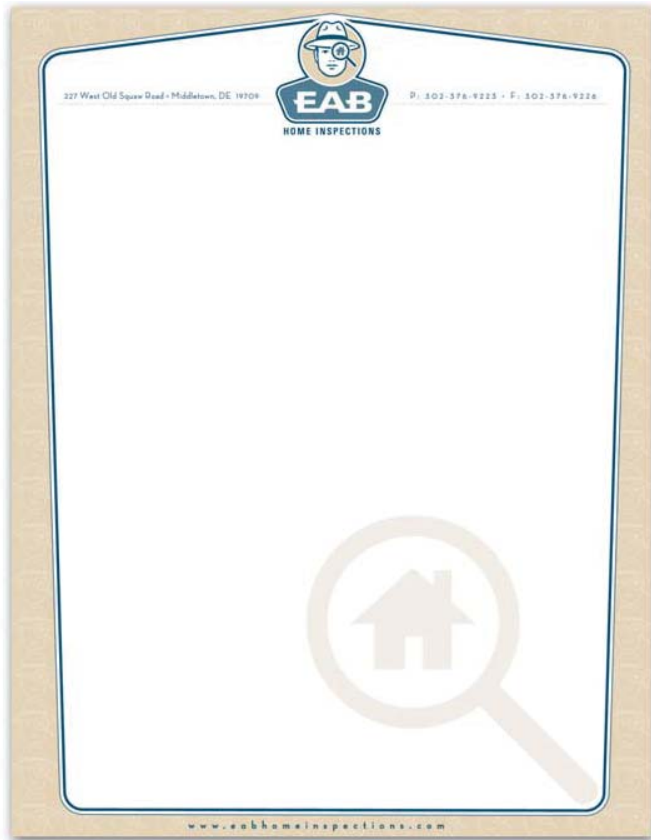
is a perfect opportunity for us to offer more, because now we have their logo. Wouldn't it be great to be able to offer the client a nice, complete package of stationery and business cards as well?

Now you have the opportunity to create another dedicated revenue stream from that client. And not just for the first order, but presumably for a long time afterwards.

The beauty of the reorder In our experience, the average time it takes for a client to reorder stationery is approximately nine months. Compare that with the average time a small business owner needs a new sign or truck lettered. We have over 100 clients who buy their stationery through us, so we're constantly getting reorders on this work. Our clients love the convenience of simply



Nice synergy with the new logo we designed for this sign company's stationery. It's all designed to be printed in full color. For the background of the stationery, we printed a very pale tan color on the white paper. We also used a two-sided business card, which is how we design most of our cards.



This was a fun design for this home inspector's stationery. We used a ghost of the man icon as a subtle backdrop in the border around the stationery. It's very simple, but the subtle ghosted magnifying glass sits nicely in the white area.

Software options

While some of the available software used for sign layout and production may have sufficient export options, it's recommended that you invest in software that is more commonly used in the printing industry. This will cause much less grief preparing files for printers. Here are some programs that are printing industry standards:

- Adobe® Illustrator® CS: It's a leader in vector-based illustration work and it integrates with Adobe® Photoshop® very easily.
- Adobe Photoshop CS: This is used to create bitmap files of your designs. Most printers prefer CMYK files in JPEG format, and Photoshop is the best method available to get it.
- CorelDraw® 10: This can also function as both a bitmap—and as a vector-based program.

Producing files for online services

Most online printing vendors have templates you can download to help you prepare your files correctly for printing. Usually, they have these key components specified:

- Bleed Area: This area extends beyond where your piece will be trimmed. So if you want color to bleed off the edge or off the fold, your color must extend beyond the trim area.
- Trim Guide: This is a guide that shows you where your piece will be trimmed, cut or folded (as would be the case on an envelope).
- Safety Zone: This area, just slightly inside of your trim area, is where you want to avoid putting critical information, in case there is a shift when the piece is trimmed.

e-mailing or phoning in the order. And we love the convenience of simply logging into one of our print vendors' sites, and hitting the *Reorder* button. By being smart about how you buy printing, the markups can be very substantial.

The residuals on this line of business are there, but it's essential that you keep your clients coming back to you. The more they do that, the better chance that they will want a sign or banner from you.

Full color is more the norm It used to be cost prohibitive to get full color stationery for our clients. Full color business cards were easy to find, but finding full color letterheads and envelopes used to be more of a challenge. Now there are dozens of places to buy them online.

More and more of our orders are for full color letterheads, envelopes and business cards. For corporate clients, most work still tends to be two-color. At present, we deal with a local printer for our two-color work. Interestingly, we can usually buy full color for less money than two color. A few years ago, this certainly wasn't the case.

Negotiate your prices By simply logging into some of the sites (see sidebar at right) you will be able to get prices on most types of stationery. However, several sites offer broker rates for companies that are reselling printing. The broker discount ranges from 10 to 25 percent. Some sites don't advertise broker rates. A good bet is to inquire directly, or begin buying from one source, and as they see a decent amount of orders, negotiate for better pricing. Some will give you a dealer or broker status for an upfront fee, but require a guaranteed number of orders per month.

Charge for the design I have really been enjoying stationery design lately. I like to think about how any given logo we design could be used to create a nice piece of stationery. It's considered a finishing touch on their branding, but we don't include that as part of their logo design fee. We usually charge an additional \$350 to \$500 for stationery designs. Good ones do take a fair amount of time, so my recommendation is to not do it for free just to get the printing services. •❧



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Online vendors for stationery printing

It takes some time to establish relationships with different online vendors to see who is reliable, and also learn who will stand by their work. Here are a few we have found to be good vendors:

Postcard Press [www.postcardpress.com, 800-957-5787] delivers first-class customer service, and stands behind their work. On the rare occasion that something wasn't right, they handled the situation perfectly. Their prices can be slightly higher than some other companies, but I'm willing to pay more for quality and service.

Vista Print [www.vistaprint.com, 800-961-2075] is a vendor we've recently signed up with as dealers. I've been impressed with their ordering system and their turnarounds have been fast. They also offer a lot of other products.

PsPrint [www.psprint.com, 800-511-2009] has good customer service and turnaround, plus they offer many different products. Short print runs are also available.

Action Envelopes [www.actionenvelope.com] 800-653-1705] is one of the few sources we've found for full-color window envelopes. We have used them for both letterhead and envelope orders.