

Add dimension to your lettering with a click

Up-sell to higher-profit jobs with professional renderings

By Dan Antonelli

It wasn't long after I began working with Fireworks, the Web design software from Macromedia [www.macromedia.com], that it occurred to me that this software is an excellent tool for rendering dimensional signs.

I've created special effects for lettering using Photoshop, but it was quite a cumbersome process involving multiple steps, masking, embossing—and a lot of time. With Fireworks, effects can be generated with the push of a button. Using the built-in bevel effects, you can generate raised or incised letters with ease.

With Fireworks (street price \$279), you don't have the steep learning curve typical of programs like Photoshop. While you can use layers in Fireworks, you don't really need to. Its format is similar to most drawing programs—you can simply arrange the pieces using *Bring to Front* or *Bring to Back* commands.

Like Photoshop, Fireworks renders composite images. But, unlike Photoshop, Fireworks actually uses vector paths that most sign people have used to render images. So, just as you see your vector paths in your sign-making pro-

gram, that's how they will appear in Fireworks. To apply an effect to any of these vector paths is easy—you just select the paths and apply an effect.

It sells dimensional signs I got excited about using Fireworks for dimensional signs while I was showing Brian Schofield and Karin Levin of Lines and Letters, Bridgewater, New Jersey, some of the neat special effects you could apply to text and graphics. I don't produce this type of signage, but Brian and Karin do every day. So, I asked them how they present sketches for wood-carved signs.

"We just usually print out a sketch," said Brian "and show the letters flat. Then explain to the customer which parts would be carved. We use our portfolio to show them what carved signs look like."

Wouldn't it be nice to show the client how their carved sign would look? Or, to up-sell the client to a dimensional sign by showing them how nice their layout would look with carved letters instead of flat?

Some people just don't understand something until you put it on paper and show them. By using Fireworks, you can present accurately what their sign will look like—and help explain the price difference.

According to Brian and Karin, Fireworks has really helped their sales process. "To the customer, it solidifies what they're getting," says Brian. "Their reaction so far has been great. They'll look at the sketch and say, 'Wow! That's what my sign will look like in 3-D.'"

Step-by-step The following step-by-step is from a carved sign that Brian and Karin did recently. The layout was first created in SignLab [CADlink Technology, 800-545-9581, www.cadlink.com].

You begin by creating your layout in any sign-making software or illustration program (i.e., Freehand, Illustrator, CorelDraw). Once the layout is complete, convert all fonts to paths.



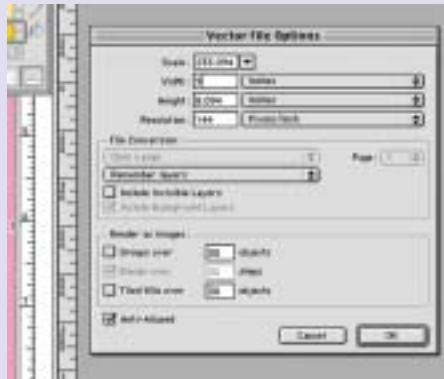
A sampling of Fireworks beveling features. The top lettering uses a raised bevel; the middle uses an inverted bevel. The bottom design uses a soft, rounded bevel, which is useful for showing how extruded letters would appear.

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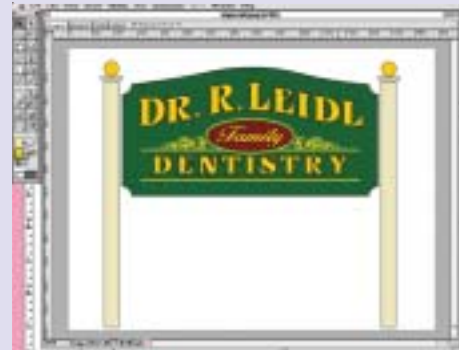
Simulating carved, gilded letters with Fireworks



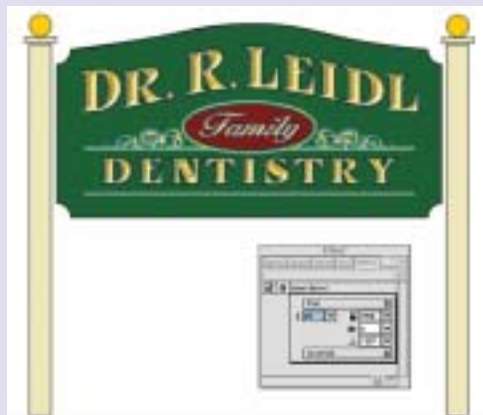
1. Create a new Fireworks document. Note that the resolution is set at 144 pixels per inch. This will give you a fairly crisp, finished print on a typical inkjet printer. You can go with 300 pixels per inch, but expect additional redraw time on the screen and increased file size. For Web graphics, 72 pixels per inch is adequate.



2. Click *File / Import*. If you're going to print at 8 1/2 by 11, import the graphic at 9 in. wide. Switch the dimensions to inches—that's easier to figure out than pixels.



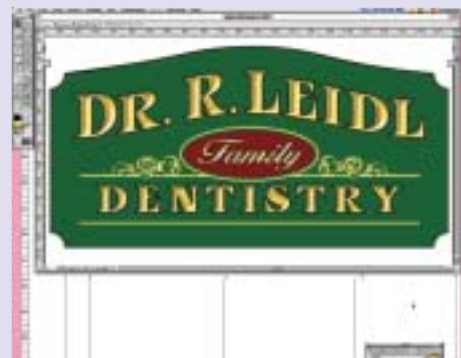
3. Import the AI file. Now you're ready to add the effects. Select everything that will be carved and gilded. This file already had a black outline around the main lettering. We're not selecting that path—just the letters.



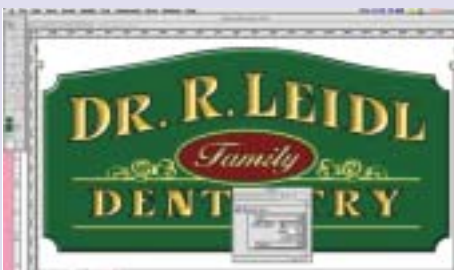
4. Select *Bevel* from the *Effects* palette. You can change the settings on the right to make the effect more distinct, as for a V carved letter, or softer for a curved, carved letter.



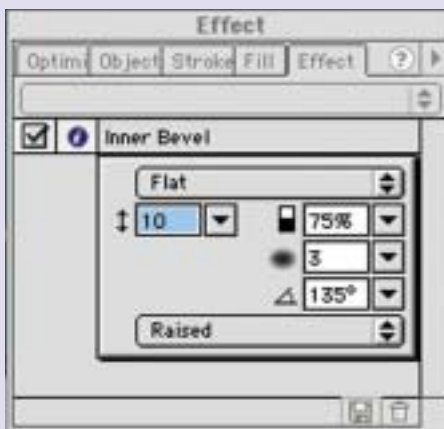
5. Here are the settings for the bevel used on the lettering. Note that the bevel has been changed to *Inverted*. If you're doing raised carving, select *Raised* instead.



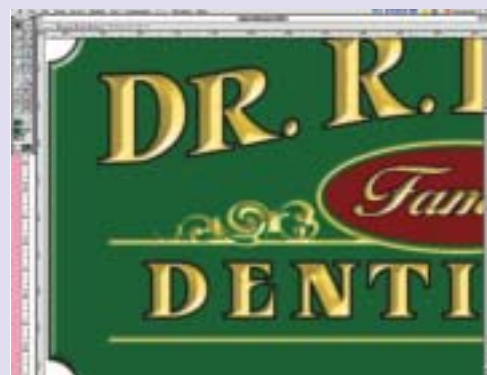
6. Click OK and the bevel is applied to the selected area, creating the look of carved, gilded lettering complete with highlight and shadow areas. Looks pretty good for a few clicks, doesn't it?



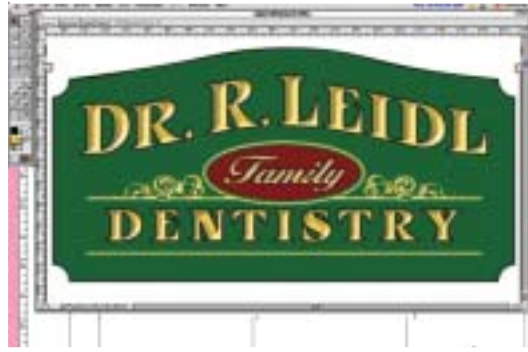
7. This sign will have a routed edge, so select the path for the sign itself. Apply a bevel to that to show how it will look.



8. Here are the settings used to create the bevel effect on the routed edge of the panel.



9. Click on *View*, enlarge the image and check out the detail—it's pretty impressive. Turn the page to see the sign.



Here's the rendering—after using Fireworks—and Brian and Karin's completed sign.



Here's another drawing Lines and Letters used to sell a job—and a photo of the finished sign.



I did this as a flat overlaid-plywood storefront sign last year. Here I've used Fireworks to show how much better it would have looked carved. Had the customer been able to see this drawing beside the flat version, I may have been able to up-sell to a carved sign—or at least sell a convex job on the flat vinyl sign.



This proposed signage by Lines and Letters utilized a carved sign meant to fit into the architecture on a tan-colored building. Note the soft shading—also added in Fireworks—that shows how the sign will be raised off the façade.

Then save the illustration as an AI file (Adobe Illustrator EPS). It's best to save the finished AI at approximately 11 in. wide.

Open Fireworks and you're minutes away from a really powerful sales drawing. As you follow through the steps, you'll probably be as amazed as I was at how easy this software is to use—and how much time it can save you. It's not just for helping sell carved signs—it's great for adding all sorts of effects to graphics for digital printing, Web or print design. *SC



Dan Antonelli's shop, Graphic D-Signs, Inc., is in Union, New Jersey. You can e-mail him at dan@graphicd-signs.com or visit his newly redesigned Web site at www.graphicd-signs.com. His book, *Logo Design for Small Business*, is available from SignCraft, P.O. Box 60031, Ft. Myers, FL 33906, for \$25 plus \$6 shipping and handling.



Fireworks was used to enhance this rendering of a proposed freestanding sign for the same customer.



For this logo, the edges of the panels were beveled, and a soft drop shadow was added to the lettering.



You can also use Fireworks to enhance your logo designs. The bevel and glow in this logo were added after the original layout was done in Freehand.