



## DISCIPLINES

## FONT MARKETING 101

Monotype Imagings David DeWitt reveals how to successfully sell your very own typefaces. Here are some tips to help you make a little money from this alphabet soup.

Not only has the computer revolutionized the way we find and purchase type, but it's also changed the way we design and market fonts. Today, anyone with an understanding of typography and the ability to work with a font-design program can theoretically design a typeface. They can then post the typeface online so that others can find and purchase it for their own use.

If this description sounds deceptively simple, you're right. Posting a font on a website isn't necessarily a guarantee that people will buy it. The market is saturated with hundreds of thousands of fonts, and there are hundreds of websites offering fonts for sale. In fact, a keyword search for fonts on any search engine will yield page after page of links. If you have a font that you'd like to make available to designers online, their chances of finding it are akin to locating the proverbial needle in a haystack.

There are some steps you can take, though, to increase your chances of profiting from a typeface of your own design. A recent conversation with David DeWitt of Monotype Imaging yielded some tips on how to successfully market a typeface design. At the time of this interview, DeWitt, business manager for Monotypes creative professionals business unit, had just returned from TypeCon, a conference held in Boston that drew designers interested in producing and marketing their own fonts. DeWitt conducted a workshop there called "Turning Fonts into Cash."

**What's the most important thing designers need to know about marketing their own fonts?**

The reality is that the marketplace votes with its money. The questions designers need to ask themselves are, "Who is the customer, and what do they want?"

### **Do designers tend to ignore this aspect of marketing?**

Most designers and others who design their own typefaces really haven't had much of a marketing background. When I asked them at my workshop, "What makes a great font?" some of the answers I heard were, "look and feel," "personality," "usability," "dependability." These are all important aspects of producing a font, but for me the answer is, "when the customer pays to use it." That's the main component.

### **What should type designers think of when keeping the customer in mind?**

Understanding who your customer is and how they will use the font are crucial to the success of a design. Before they begin, designers should be asking themselves whether or not their design has broad appeal or if it's going to appeal to a small niche of users. A font with limited appeal will yield fewer potential buyers.

### **Is there a way to determine how many customers would need to purchase your font in order to break even?**

You can quantify it this way: If you spent 300 hours developing a font (typically a family of four weights) and want to earn \$100 per hour for your time, you have a \$30,000 investment in sweat equity. How would you measure success against this? Three hundred customers need to be willing to pay \$100 for your font in order to break even. To get 300 customers, your market needs to be 10 times that size, or 3,000. If you use a distribution channel, you need to have 600 customers in order to give the distributors their 50% profit margin. Keep in mind that it also takes time for those customers to add up. You could be waiting a long time to be paid for your investment.

### **Is it possible for designers to successfully market their own fonts via their own websites?**

It's a matter of distribution. You could make your product available on your website, but how do you get as many customers as possible to come to your site? If you don't have a lot of other fonts to sell, you're really restricting how many people will find the handful of fonts you're offering. Hooking up with others or with a distributor is probably your best option. It's very hard to do it by yourself and be successful.

### **Isn't it possible to draw people to a website by creating it in such a way that your font offerings will pop up on search engines when designers do a keyword search?**

We spend a lot of time not only marketing fonts from our website, but also making it easy for our customers to find and acquire them. You have to know what your customers would type into a search engine when they're looking for a specific font so your website will come up to the top. We work with technicians to continually retool our website for search-engine optimization. Knowing how to do this requires a high level of technical expertise.

### **When browsing online for fonts, it's easy to find a number of websites promoting free fonts. Is this a good way to lure potential customers to your website?**

That question came up at the workshop. An example that was cited was seeding the market by offering a bold version of a font as a freebie. Then, if the user likes it, they would come back and purchase the regular and italic versions. I think that's a slippery slope. Once you start to market a free product, how are you going to justify charging for it after that? I think it might be difficult to do, but there were some people at the workshop who had done this with some success.

## **FROM BITS OF METAL TO BYTES OF**

A designer's ability to freely compose or set type is a fairly recent phenomenon. Before the Computer came into common use, designers didn't produce type or purchase fonts. Instead, they chose their typefaces from a specimen book and purchased galleys of set type from type houses where trained operators used special equipment to compose their type. In the early 20th century, lines of type were cast in metal. In the 1960s, phototypesetting equipment became a more common means of typesetting. In both of these instances, fonts were proprietary to the equipment.

Typeface design was also more labor-intensive and was largely the exclusive domain of typographers who labored over letters, numerals and other type characters they drew by hand. There were just a few companies producing typefaces and fonts in those days. Some of the largest were the manufacturers of linecasting equipment, such as Linotype and Monotype, as well as International Typeface Corp., which was established in the 1970s under the direction of Herb Lubalin.

With the advent of the personal computer in the 1980s, designers started setting their own type. Many of the companies that produced and sold type to designers went out of business, while others became service bureaus. By the early '90s, designers were beginning to produce their own typeface designs, making keyboard-accessible fonts with programs such as Fontographer and FontStudio. As more designers started to generate their own designs with this software, fonts—and the number of companies offering them—began to grow rapidly.

When the internet came into common use in the late '90s, the ability to market fonts online opened up even more doors, encouraging existing type companies, large and small, as well as even more designers to develop websites and post their fonts online. By the end of the '90s, more than 100 type companies were marketing fonts on the web. Since then, many of these companies that were once competitors have realized that it makes more sense to partner with one another in font distribution. As a result, companies such as Monotype Imaging serve as distributors for other companies' fonts. Monotype Imaging is currently the distributor for nearly 200 different foundries and offers more than 100,000 different fonts and font-related products from its website, Fonts.com. You'll find a comprehensive list of type distributors at the end of this article.

**Lefts say you decide to join a larger group that's offering fonts. How do you get your work listed on a major site?**

On Fonts.com we offer a chance for people to submit their own fonts. In these situations, we basically become a reseller for products by the designer.

**How do font designers get compensated for this?**

In most cases, it's a royalty arrangement where 50% of the net profits go to the designer. We also have a type review board that determines what kinds of fonts should be added to the Monotype and ITC type libraries. Because those are distinct brands, our review board determines where we need to add product. We either solicit people we know who do specific type designs or, as we get submissions, we make the decision to put them into our own branded library'.

**What are the advantages to having a font selected for inclusion in the ITC and Monotype libraries?**

It's a different agreement, more long-term. We spend more money and attention on marketing the products that are part of these libraries. Library products are also available as collections. We tend to focus more on these collections, although not specific typefaces. We also spend a lot of time and money on helping with the development of these fonts. It involves co-production of the font where we add our expertise to the designers creative product to make sure it will work well in any environment. We don't do this with fonts that aren't part of these libraries.

**How does a designer submit a font idea to Monotype?**

They can go to Fonts.com and do a keyword search for "Submit a Design." We like to see the complete character complement along with a test word set in various sizes.

**Do you have any advice on how to promote a font in a way that will make it appealing to potential customers?**

As a designer, you probably know how your font design works best. Describe that visually by creating layouts or examples of how you think the font would be used in the marketplace. Think about how somebody would best utilize the typeface's characteristics, which you know intimately as the designer.

**Is there anything else that typeface designers should know about successfully marketing their font ideas?**

Just remember that your customer determines the success of your product. Adapt the four Ps of marketing to your customer's perspective: Product, Price, Promotion and Place. Your product needs to solve your customer's design and communication needs. The price needs to be competitive. Place is the convenience of the web, which is open 24/7. Promoting to the customer is showing them visual examples of your typeface working effectively in design applications. ■■■

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