

ENERGY BBDO ZACHARY SCOTT DESIGN IN PORTUGAL FIRSTBORN  
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## Typographic Cheap Tricks

**G**raphic design can be a high-priced proposition. Photographs are pricey, clever die-cuts are costly and illustrations are expensive. Typography, however, is cheap. Even though the economy is supposedly on the road to recovery, it still makes sense to have a collection of low-cost typographic tricks in your arsenal of design tools. Typographic cheap tricks are great—and inexpensive—design solutions.

### Make your own alphabet

One great typographic trick is simply not to use fonts. This can save money, and create graphic communication that is exceptionally expressive. Which is precisely why Jeremy Schwartz, senior vice president and creative director at Partners + Napier, chose handwritten “typography” for the Otetiana Council annual report he created. This pro-bono project was produced with virtually no budget. “Sometimes being presented with the challenge of creating messaging and design with such limitations is liberating,” says Schwartz. “It makes you focus on what’s important—and it can become a showcase of what can be done without the benefit of a production budget.

“The client provided most of the content electronically,” Schwartz recalls, “so I started the design process by flowing the copy roughly onto the pages to get a sense of how the information was to fit in the book. Then, I simply grabbed as many ordinary pencils as I could scrape together and started scrawling the copy on white paper.

“As I completed sections,” he continues, “I scanned my handwriting and mirrored the page layouts within Photoshop. Proofing tweaks and several rounds of client changes made the process laborious, but the analog and digital workflow suited the approach. The handwritten copy also produced a piece that represented the human side of the client far better than any font could have.”

### Do the unexpected

Another trick is as simple as doing the unexpected, like setting the type upside down. The Mammoth Unbound posters are part of a visual identity system that designers David Bates and Javas Lehn, of Hornall Anderson, created for Mammoth Mountain. Working off the positioning statement “Come as you are, do what you love,” their goal was to tell a story that focused more on the experience than on the destination.

“We designed the posters with the freedom of being unbound, taking it to the extreme,” says Bates. “We wanted the posters to reflect this attitude—hence the upside-down typography and logo.”

The design team chose Blender, which was influenced by Wim Crowel’s Gridnik typeface, as the main font for the posters. “The face has a progressive, cutting-edge feel to it,” Javas says. “I thought it would connect well with the audience of Unbound—bold, simple and upside down.”



The Otetiana Council annual report uses the cheapest of typefaces, handwriting, to create a feeling of humanity and straightforward honesty.





Turning the type on its head echoes the photographs on the Mammoth Unbound posters, while conveying the subliminal message that there are no limits at the resort.

### Make the type do double-duty

Another way to get the most value from type is to make it do double-duty. In addition to words, typography can also create illustrations, visual puns and memorable shapes.

Derek Lockwood, of Saatchi & Saatchi in New Zealand, used type—lettering, actually—to create both a typographic message and a delightful image for the packaging of an international lingerie manufacturer and retailer.

“Our solution was inspired by the origins of corsetry in Art Nouveau France,” says Lockwood. “The forms of both the logo and the typographic illustrations imply craft, thread and the elegant curving brush strokes of an artist.”

When asked why he came up with the idea of a typographic pun, Lockwood’s answer was simple, “We wanted to embed the story into the brand applications in a beautiful, subtle way.

“After looking closely at the intricate lace patterns on lingerie—and with the brush-stroke form of the logo as a starting point—we sought to mimic lace detailing,” he continues. “The desire was to make women look twice, ‘It’s lace. No wait! It’s words!’ We were fortunate that the solution worked so well.”

### Double-duty for a good cause

David Ryan, at Brogan & Partners Convergence Marketing, also used type and lettering to create a design solution that is charming, fun—and a little provocative—for a very different client. Ryan’s client was a co-worker, Ellyn Davidson, who needed a logo for her newly-formed breast cancer three-day-walk team.

“When Ellyn came to me with the name ‘ta ta breast cancer,’” Ryan recalls, “I came up with an idea almost immediately and sketched the concept on a scrap of paper in about two minutes. I submitted the rough sketch to Ellyn, and she loved it.”

Ryan chose to combine handlettering with the typeface Americana because, as he says, “I wanted a typographic solution for the logo but could not find the right typeface to illustrate the shape

of a breast, so I drew the letter ‘t’. The lowercase ‘a’ in Americana is a round and soft character and worked perfectly for the rest of the illustration.”

### Simple but not easy

Bradford Lawton arrived at a solution for the logo and branding for the 2008 annual San Antonio Zoo Ball through a more laborious and frustrating process.

“We inherited the theme ‘Monkey Business,’ and, I have to admit, it didn’t really inspire us,” recalls Lawton. “It was hard to not stray into referring to the Marx Brothers film, or doing something camp. After several false starts,

I went back to my desk and began sketching monkey faces, using only circles, to see if I could create a simple but interesting design. That didn’t seem to yield anything noteworthy either, so, getting frustrated, I left my desk for a break. When I returned I happened to see my scribbled monkey face circles from a side angle and the ‘o8’ appeared. It was one of those eureka moments when you feel more like a conduit than an author.”

The next step was to choose the best typeface to represent the concept sketch. “It was important that the idea be realized without manipulating the type,” says Lawton. “My goal was not to create something new but to invite people to see things they see every day—in this case numbers—in a new way.” He chose Helvetica Black.

A word of caution: Visual puns and multiple typographic images do come with a potential problem. If they are forced, if they are not absolutely clear, they can fall as flat as a bad joke.

### Masters of typographic cheap tricks

There are a few designers, however, who are masters of typographic design—never making a false step, always delighting



The calligraphic typography complements the Bendon lingerie logo while telling an evocative story in an engaging manner.