



What's the Cost of Sign Design?



Sign designers, Chris Murphey, above and Darin Bramwell, right, hard at work developing new sign designs at Holiday Signs, Chester.

UNIQUE FIELD

When I first started my career in construction and signs, I was a civil engineering technician in Bethesda, Maryland; then an architectural draftsman in Charlottesville; then the primary design and sales person at my own custom sign company in Waynesboro, Virginia for many years. I understand sign design, and it is such a unique field, blending so many trades into one project. Just like commercial buildings, signs need foundations, electric power, steel, framing, exterior finishes; I guess the only things they don't need are HVAC and plumbing, although we have designed and built signs with waterfalls, so HVAC is probably the only differentiating factor, unless you consider the cooling fan systems in certain brands of electronic message signs as HVAC components!

Today, I help sell custom electric signs for Holiday Signs, located in Chester, Virginia, just several miles south of Richmond, and many times customers ask, "What's the cost of sign design?" The answer depends on the size and scope of the job and varying levels of design drawings are required for different sign projects. But there are three main design phases involved in a typical sign design:

Phase 1-Engineering

- o Site Survey and Photos
- o Details of sight lines
- o Construction options

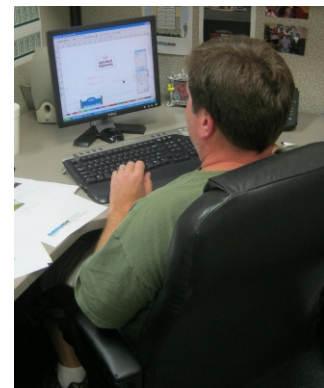
Phase 2-Preliminary Sketches

- o Selling an overall concept
- o Showing various options

Phase 3-Finalized Drawings

- o Final Presentation Drawings
- o Permit Drawings
- o Shop Fabrication Drawings

"...the end product of the design has to convey what the original sign concept was all about."



Determining sign design fees depends on the sign company or sign consultant you use. Most electric sign companies charge for their design services on an hourly basis, but some sign design consulting firms determine their fees as a percentage of total construction cost, the way many A&E firms often do.

HOURLY RATE

Around the Raleigh-Richmond-Washington, DC areas of the southeast, where our sign company is located, the average rate for sign design by in-house electric sign company designers is about \$60-\$125 per hour depending on the sign designer doing the work. The more seasoned and experienced the designer, the better quality of work and costlier the designer. We utilize a team of skilled designers that work from our office and manufacturing plant in Chester. Our in-house prices are less than many alternatives and we have one of the most well-rounded sign design teams in the Central Virginia region.

AS PERCENTAGE OF CONSTRUCTION COST

As a rule of thumb, sign design generally ends up being about 7% to 13% of the overall sign construction cost on large projects, although this may vary by firm and project. (Sign construction costs include any scope of the project where project management is required from initial meetings and surveys to final installation.)

END-RESULTS IN MIND

The most important element of customized sign design/build projects is being able to effectively coordinate ideas between the developer, the architect, the city or county, and other parties involved. Good, effective design is one thing, but the end product has to convey what the original design concept was all about. You should work with a sign company who is able to look at all the parts and pieces in advance to make sure they will all go together as planned. If you miss one part, you have to do a lot of manipulation to make it all come together. The value in utilizing an experienced sign company is an important aspect for consideration when considering a custom sign designed specifically for your site.

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