Brendan Blaber
The Loudness of Signs
Process Book

Conception &
Initial Research

Our initial assignment was to go out into an area of the city and photograph every piece of typography we saw, no matter how small. I started to wonder how small something could be before it no longer warranted a photo, but then I decided that it doesn't matter how small a sign is, they're all equally valid examples of type.

This got me thinking even further about the types of typography and signage that we see. Why are some signs ignored? Why do we take note of some type and not others? What type of placement helps a sign be seen? I started to think about the concept of how "loud" a sign could be. When one person in a quiet room is loud, everybody hears them. When everyone is shouting, nobody can understand anything. The concept of loudness as it related to visuals fascinated me. Which signs tended to be quiet or loud? What made them that way? Where were they? What did they have to say?

Photos from the original shoot. The signs on the lefthand page are louder than signs on the righthand page.

Studies and Findings

I went back out to take more photos over the next few weeks and decided to make a cohesive map of all the noteworthy signs in the area.

The loudest signs belonged to businesses trying to catch the attention of passersby.. Quiet signs often depict instructions or warnings. Loudness was most often conveyed through color and size. The bigger a sign is, the more visible it is. Bright colors like reds attract the most attention while blues, greens, and especially browns tend to fade into the background.

Another key to making a sign more noticeable is its placement relative to a viewer's eye-level. There are a lot of signs at the average person's height so they tend to blend together in busy areas. Signs lower than the waist are almost never seen by someone who isn't looking for them. I found the most noticeable place to put a sign was slightly above the viewer's height. Signs that jutted out above high-traffic areas were the most eye-catching and kept a viewer's attention for the longest period of time.

A sign's surroundings are also important. If there is only one loud sign on a street, that's the one you're going to see. Even quiet signs can stand out against a blank wall.
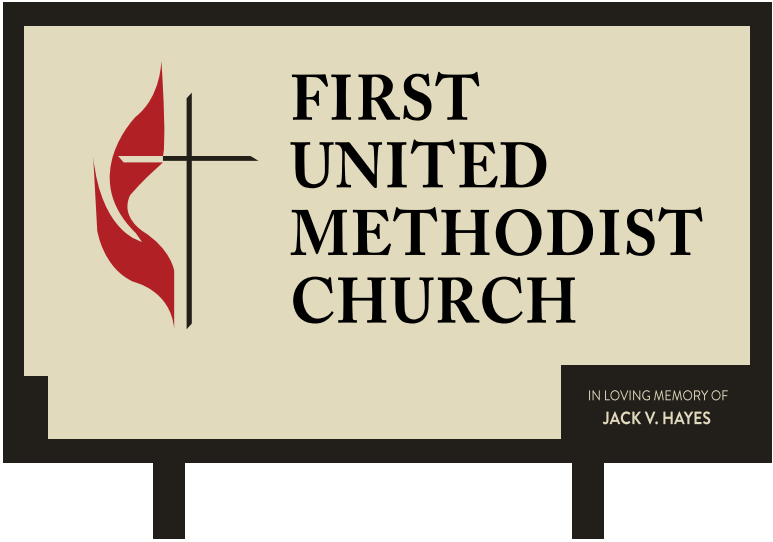
Final Illustrations

I used Adobe Illustrator and over a hundred variations of fonts to recreate the images to the best of my ability. Here are just a few examples of illustrations on the final map.

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Colophon

A Map of the Loudness of Signage in Downtown Champaign
Designed by Brendan Blaber.

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Adobe äÓÎ Medium
Adobe Carlson Pro
Adobe Devangari
Adobe Garamond Pro
Adobe Jensen Pro
Aliva
Alte DIN 1451 Mittleschrift
Aparajita Bold
Ardagh
Arial
Arial Unicode
Arno Pro
Avenir LT Std 35 Light
Beautiful Day
Beaufitul Day Ornaments
Bebas
Book Antiqua
Brandon Grotesque
Brush Script
Cafe Rojo
Calibri
Cambria
Cambria Math
Candara
Carneval Bold
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Chaparral Pro
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DIN Schlabonierschrift
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FreesiaUPC Bold
Freestyle Script
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Georgia
Impact
JasmineUPC Italic
Levenim MT Regular
MinyaNouvell-Regular
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Adobe Illustrator CS6
Adobe InDesign CS6
Google Street View