
ART AND DESIGN GUIDE

IGNITE OP

MESSAGE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Ignite message editor makes creating content for your sign simple and is easy to use. To assist users in getting the most out of their LED sign, the Watchfire Creative Services department has assembled a selection of tips and tricks to help ensure that your sign looks as good as possible.

Keep it Simple

The first step to creating an effective message for your sign is to use the appropriate amount of text. Keep the wording concise. Don't use eight words when four will do. Stick with short, simple words to maximize quick comprehension by passing motorists.

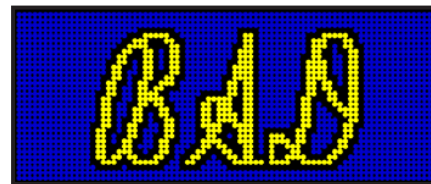
Keep it Clean

Avoid using thin fonts as well as most script fonts. The strokes are simply too thin or detailed to be legible on an electronic sign. Stick with thicker fonts that maximize readability. In Ignite, we recommend keeping the bold feature on and using all capital letters and a black outline around all text whenever possible. Capital, bold letters use more pixels to create the letter which means they are usually much easier to read from a distance.

BAD **GOOD** **BEST**
sans-serif



BAD **GOOD** **BEST**
serif



Keep it Big

Typically, an LED sign's target audience consists of passing motorists traveling anywhere from 25 to 65 miles an hour. Keep your message's text large. Larger text makes your message easier to read by motorists at a greater distance, which means it's less distracting and more noticeable. Although your sign might be capable of smaller text, plan to use a minimum 12-inch character for optimal viewing distances. If your message won't fit cleanly in one frame, use multiple frames.

Bad

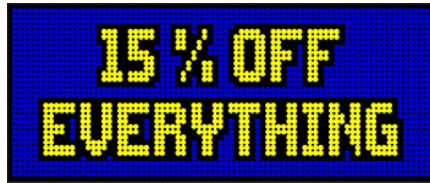


Too much text and too small. Passing motorists cannot read this entire message.

Good



Frame 1



Frame 2



Frame 3

By removing a few words and spreading the message over multiple frames, larger text lets passing motorists read it more easily.

Also, remember our guideline; set each frame's Hold Time to at least one second per line of text.

EFFECTIVE COLOR SCHEMES

High color contrast is a key ingredient to a successful message. The right color combination can make your message easy to read from a greater distance. See the samples below for many of the best text color vs. background color combinations for your electronic sign. As always, a black outline is recommended to help distinguish the text from its background.

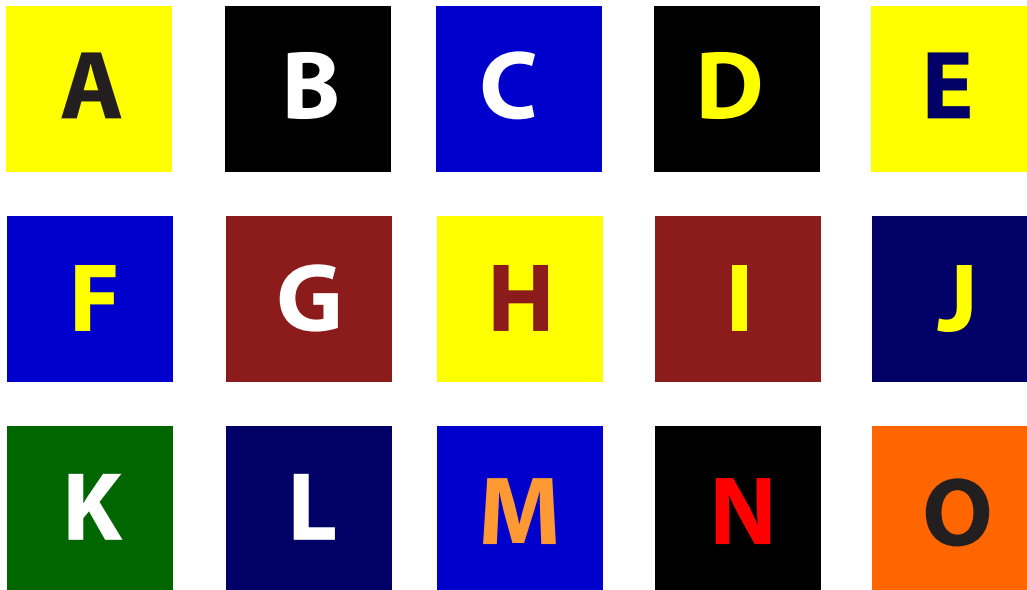


IMAGE RESOLUTION

Image resolution for an electronic sign is dependent upon the total number of pixels in the image. When designing messages, you want at least as many pixels in your image as you have in your sign. Having more pixels in your digital image allows you to crop more tightly without losing image quality. Watchfire recommends using images with at least five times as many pixels than your sign has in both height and width.

CREATING CUSTOM CONTENT

The Ignite message editor offers many tools for creating excellent content for your sign, but more skilled graphic designers may choose to use third party software to create custom artwork. For more advanced designers, here are recommended formatting guidelines to ensure your graphics look their best on your sign.

Canvas/Composition Size

From a design standpoint, most electronic signs have very few pixels. However, the imagery looks much cleaner than expected due to the light diffusion which occurs when LEDs are illuminated.

For optimum results, create compositions that are at least two times the sign's height and width in pixels. For example, if you have a sign with a matrix of 48 x 112, you would want to create a composition at least 96 x 224. You could even go to ten times the sign's size with a smaller sign. The key is even incremental increases for both the height and width of your sign. Ideally, you want at least 200 additional pixels in each direction to work with. By doing this, you won't have to worry about cropping or distortion when you import your imagery into Ignite. The image will be scaled perfectly to match your sign.

The same principle applies to video content. Most video content will either be shot with an aspect ratio of 4:3 (standard definition) or 16:9 (high definition). Either aspect ratio will have sufficient resolution for your sign. If you decide to scale down the video content to save file size, remember that you still want at least two times the number of pixels in each dimension of your sign.

Frame Rates (for animated content)

For XVS signs, create your content at 30 frames-per-second (fps).

For W-Series signs, create your content at 20 fps.

File Formats

Still images can be imported as JPG (jpeg), GIF (graphics interchange format), or BMP (bitmap) files. Keep in mind also that they must be in RGB color format, not CMYK.

Animation and video importing requires an appropriate codec to be installed on your computer to support reading video data from the file. In addition to the codecs Microsoft ships with Windows, many third-party codecs are available to support a wide variety of video file formats. Visit article 706 on the Watchfire KnowledgeBase for a full list of compatible codecs. (Go to watchfiresigns.com/kb and search 706.)

SOFTWARE TRAINING

Watchfire has developed the most user-friendly software package in the industry. Ignite is designed for quick, easy learning but it also contains enough power to support the most demanding content developer. If you ever need more instruction, or would simply like to go beyond the Ignite manual, sign up to participate in a web-based training option that will take your content creation to the next level.

Web-based training is an excellent option for users who have access to the internet at their locations. A Watchfire trainer can remotely control your computer screen and guide you through the steps of creating content for your Watchfire sign while you can observe, practice and ask questions. Attendees from multiple locations can connect to the same session – a great option for users with employees in remote offices. Audio is handled via a standard conference call. Watchfire will provide a common phone number for all attendees to use. Web-based sessions last one to one and a half hours.

Check the front cover of your Ignite manual to see if training was included with your sign's purchase.

Schedule convenient, online training at watchfiresigns.com/ist

Minimum internet connection: Cable modem, DSL or better Internet connection

Web browser: Internet Explorer 8 or newer, Mozilla® Firefox® 24 or newer, or Google™ Chrome™ 23 or newer