



# The Lightning Flash

The quarterly newsletter from Lightning Labels, the leaders in digital label printing

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## From the Desk of Steve Smith

In the 6+ years since we started Lightning Labels, we've continually fine-tuned our processes and procedures to achieve a simple set of goals: to provide the very best quality product labels in a very fast timeframe at a reasonable price. These goals can sometimes compete with each other, so we've had to become more focused on having the customer provide us with what we need to allow us to fulfill as many orders as we can without adversely affecting the quality.



For instance, a customer might feel that we "should" be able to work with inadequate artwork, or we should be able to magically deduce what their individual needs are, but this approach can only lead to mistakes and delays for everyone. We prefer to take the view that the partnership requires equal input from both sides, so if we ask you to help us in achieving our mutual goals, please don't feel that we're trying to be difficult (or worse, just plain lazy) – we're simply trying to get as many orders right and as quickly as possible for all concerned.

Cheers,  
*Steve*  
Steve Smith  
President

## Ten Elements of Good Label Design

There are no hard and fast rules that you can follow in order to create a well designed product label. However, most of us recognize an appealing design when we see one. Why? Because there are certain elements that will make a label design attractive and compelling. This article will guide you through the main design elements of a product label and provide tips on how to use these elements to your advantage.

### 1. Color

To grab the attention of someone who is casually walking the aisles of the supermarket you need to use color well. The color you choose for your label is dependent on a number of things. What color is your container? If you are using a clear container, then what color is the product? You need to make sure that the colors you choose for the label don't clash in a negative way to lessen the visual appeal of the entire package. Luckily there are tools to help you choose colors that will work well together. Adobe Kuler ([kuler.adobe.com](http://kuler.adobe.com)), ColourLovers ([www.colourlovers.com](http://www.colourlovers.com)) and ColorBlender ([www.colorblender.com](http://www.colorblender.com)) are tools that you can use to help choose attractive color combinations for your labels.

### 2. Graphics

An eye catching graphic will also help draw attention to your product. With stock photography and illustrations so inexpensive these days you can find a graphic for your labels at places like [iStockphoto.com](http://iStockphoto.com) or [Photos.com](http://Photos.com) for just a few dollars. You can

then use these images on your product labels, just be sure to check the license agreement. In the case of [iStockphoto](http://iStockphoto.com) you can use most images for up to 500,000 product labels without buying an extended license. A picture really can be worth 1,000 words on a product label as a compelling graphic draws the eye to your product.

### 3. Readability

Color and graphics will help catch the eye but unless your label is easily readable at a glance then you will lose people. They say you have only 2-3 seconds to attract the attention of a shopper browsing the aisles of a grocery store which is enough time to read just a handful of words. You should have your brand or company name as well as two or three words describing the product in large enough type that it can be read from six feet away.

### 4. Fonts

Speaking of type, your choice of fonts is a critical decision and deserves just as much attention as choosing color and graphics. Don't choose one of the standard Windows fonts such as Times New Roman or Arial, and also avoid overused fonts such as Papyrus or Monotype Corsiva. Don't be afraid to try something new and different – there are thousands of unique fonts available online – just go to [fonts.com](http://fonts.com) or [1001freefonts.com](http://1001freefonts.com). The important point to remember is that you want good looking type that is easy to read.

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## Ten Elements of Good Label Design

### 5. Material

Before you even begin the design process you need to consider the label material. Your design needs to “fit” the material. Common material choices include white, clear, or a cream textured paper. Clear material allows for a “no label look” that can be very striking if you have a colored container or product. Take a look at Palmolive original dish soap – this is a product that uses a clear label very well. A simple design with white ink, it really shows off the striking green liquid inside. White material gives you the most flexibility with design, because you can make white into any color you like, or you can just use the white background. For an old world look, a textured cream paper can be very effective and is popular with wineries where you want to convey a handcrafted image.

### 6. Label Finish

Whether you choose a glossy or matte finish to your labels is a judgment call depending on the kind of image you want to convey. A matte laminate can provide a more classic look that is very easy to read, whereas gloss will add some impact to the colors on the label and provide a shiny, reflective look. A good example of the matte look is the Honest Tea brand of bottled teas. In the highly competitive beverage market they have a more subdued look with a simple label that works really well with the matte finish. If you can't decide between matte and glossy then do a small order of both and test it – see what people find most attractive.

### 7. Label Size

If you are using a round container then you most likely have a choice – do you want one large label or separate front and back labels? Front and back labels allow you to elegantly separate the front branding infor-

mation from the ingredient and regulatory information but they can be more expensive than a large wrap around label. If you go with a wraparound label then it is important to keep a front “panel” with the vital branding information because that is what the consumers will see as they are browsing the aisles.

### 8. Shapes

You can really draw attention to your label by using an unusual shape. This will require the initial investment of a new die which can cost several hundred dollars depending on the size and complexity of your design. Heinz ketchup is one example of an unusual shape done well – the keystone label shape has become part of their brand after more than 130 years. Here is one trick that can save you the money of buying a special die. Use a clear label and simulate an unusual shape by using white ink to create your desired shape, so it will appear that your label has a unique shape even if it is a simple rectangle label.

### 9. A Theme for Different Flavors

With multiple flavors of the same product it is important to keep major design elements of your label consistent. Whether someone is looking at the peach, orange or lime flavor they should be able to recognize instantly that it is all the same company and brand. A company that does an excellent job of keeping a consistent yet different look between flavors is Nantucket Nectars. Each flavor has a simple illustration encompassing the flavor with a similar scene from Nantucket Island in the background.

### 10. Contact Information

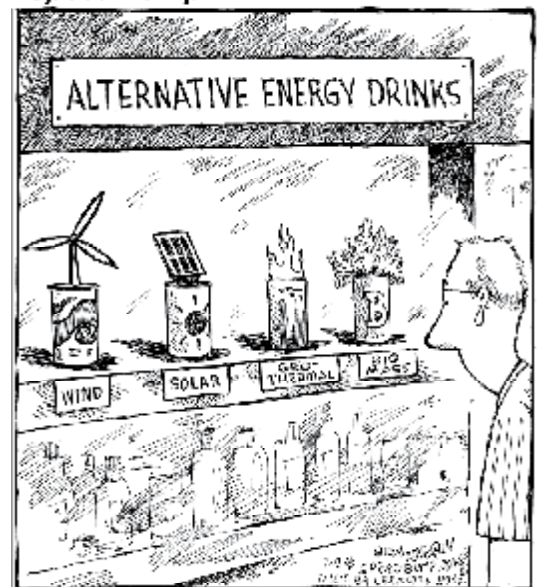
In the 21st century every company should have contact information on their product labels. This is obviously not about making your label design more appealing, but rather having your label be more than just a passive selling and marketing tool. An 800 number, a web site and a

physical address can all be easily included on the label. You could provide a special web site on your label for customers to sign up for an email list, so you can gather information and start to interact with your good customers.

When designing your label it is important to take into account what your competition is doing. If most companies in your space have very colorful and glossy labels, then maybe a more plain and subdued look will allow you to stand out on the supermarket shelf. Take many of the elements mentioned here and differentiate yourself from the competition. Providing a new and interesting look invites customers to pick up your product.

As we said in the beginning of this article there are no hard and fast rules for good label design, but if you stroll the grocery store aisles and look at the labels of products that have been successful you will see that they have many elements in common. Of course, most of these successful products have labels that were created by professional graphic designers, so if you can afford one I firmly believe that is money well spent. But if you don't have the budget or prefer to do it yourself then consider these ten elements when creating your product label.

### Speed Bump



**Label Trivia:** The first product scanned with a barcode was a 10-pack of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit chewing gum on June 28, 1974.

## Customer Focus

### Danny Cash Danny Cash Unlimited Englewood, CO



bottle his own creations. In return he gave them a few free bottles. Soon diner regulars were demanding this new hot sauce, so almost reluctantly, Danny Cash Unlimited began doing business.

That was in March 2002. The biggest immediate challenge was where to make his hot sauce. He needed a commercial kitchen, but being a startup business, he couldn't really afford one. So he turned to his local church. He was able to get the church kitchen licensed as commercial, and for the next two years he made hot sauce in the church in a 40 gallon kettle that had to be wheeled in from the shed outside.

Two years later he moved into a rented space and built a commercial kitchen where they remain today. The business has grown substantially since the early days and now they are the largest hot sauce company in Colorado. You can buy various flavors of their hot sauce online ([www.dannycash.com](http://www.dannycash.com)) and in grocery stores in Colorado (*editor's note: the garlic serrano hot sauce is fantastic*), but the majority of their business comes from private label hot sauces they do for restaurants.

Early on, Danny knew he needed to deal with a label printer that handled short run labels. The key to his business was being able to supply his private label hot sauce in small

quantities. Before calling Lightning Labels he contacted another local label company that had only traditional flexographic printing. He rejected that idea – in his words, “we would have been out of business if we had to pay for plates.” He knew he had to go digital so he contacted Lightning Labels. He loves the fast turnaround and the fact that he can gang-run a dozen or more orders of just 100 or 200 labels each and get great pricing.

To call Danny Cash Unlimited a family business is an understatement. The staff includes Danny, his brother and sister-in-law, both his parents as well as a cousin. It is a business built on family, community, and the support of a local restaurant. Of course, if you visit Davies Chuck Wagon Diner today you will find hot sauce from Danny Cash Unlimited on your table, although it will no longer be in old Tabasco bottles.

Danny Cash (bottom right above) loves hot sauce. He goes through an entire bottle every few days. So several years ago he started experimenting with his own hot sauce recipes. He never expected it to turn into a business; it was really just a hobby and a way to save a bit of money. That is until a restaurant started demanding his hot sauce.

Every Friday Danny and his father had breakfast at Davies Chuck Wagon Diner, a local dining institution dating back to the 1950's. Being a regular he got to know many of the staff and he asked them to save their old Tabasco bottles so he could use them to



## Lightning Labels News

### LL Makes the Inc. 5000 List Again

For the second year in a row, Lightning Labels has made the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest growing private companies. Every year the leading small business magazine, Inc., ranks the fastest growing private companies based on revenue growth over the most recent three year period. Our revenue growth from 2004 to 2007 was 292% which placed us at #1299 on the Inc. 5000 list for this year. For the second year in a row we were the fastest growing digital label printer in the country.

### Lightning Labels is Now on Facebook

Lightning Labels has joined the social networking site Facebook. This 21st century phenomenon boasts more than 100 million users and now many companies have pages there as well. On the Lightning Labels page you will see the latest news, photos, videos, a feed from the blog and much more. So come by and visit our page - become a fan, post a note on our wall, or just take a look around. We know many Lightning Labels customers have Facebook pages, so we would love to hear what you think.

### We Can Now Produce Labels on Sheets

In the last issue of *The Lightning Flash* we mentioned that we had new equipment on order. This new equipment has now been installed and we have added capacity and expanded our capabilities. One new capability that we have added is that we can now produce labels on sheets. This is a request that we hear a lot, so part of this new equipment is a new sheeter. There will be an additional charge for sheeting, be sure to check with your customer service representative if you are interested in labels on sheets.



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## Learning About Labels

### How is thickness of material measured?

Our most popular label material is our 2.6Mil white polypropylene. Our most popular laminate is a 1Mil High Gloss. So what does Mil really mean - just how thick is 2.6Mil and 1Mil? You may think it stands for millimeters but you would be wrong. Mil is actually a term used for thousands of an inch. So 2.6Mil is 0.0026 inches.

Unfortunately when measuring thickness of label material there is no global standard. In this country we describe thickness usually in Mil, which is really inches, and in Europe and Asia they use the metric equivalent which is microns (0.001 millimeters). The table in the next column shows the conversion of the different ways to measure material thickness. You will notice also the inclusion of gage (also known as gauge). Historically, label material was measured in gage, which is really just Mil multiplied by 100. But today gage is rarely used.

The average width of a human hair is around 50 microns, or 2Mil, so label material is really very thin. Because of this, even just adding adhesive to label material will add measurable thickness. Ink will also add some thickness.

Mil	Micron	Inches	Gage
0.5	12.7	0.0005	50
1	25.4	0.001	100
1.25	31.8	0.00125	125
1.5	38.1	0.0015	150
2	50.8	0.002	200
2.3	58.4	0.0023	230
2.6	66.0	0.0026	260
3	76.2	0.003	300
4	101.6	0.004	400
5	127.0	0.005	500
10	254.0	0.01	1000

There is one measurement that isn't in the above table - pounds (lbs). You will often see paper label material referred to in pounds. A 60 lb semi gloss paper is roughly the equivalent of 0.0035" (or 3.5Mil) but there is no hard and fast rule for paper thickness. Because paper is measured by weight rather than thickness, different 60 lb semi gloss could be 3 Mil or 4Mil thick. The 60 pounds refers to the weight of a ream of paper (500 25" x 38" sheets). Fortunately, most label material (outside of paper) is measured in Mil, which has a consistent thickness.

## A Touch of Humor At the Pearly Gates

A man appeared before St. Peter at the pearly gates.

"Have you ever done anything of particular merit?" St. Peter asked.

"Well, I can think of one thing," the man offered.

"Once, upon a trip to the Black Hills out in South Dakota, I came upon a gang of high-testosterone bikers, who were threatening a young woman. I directed them to leave her alone, but they wouldn't listen."

"So, I approached the largest and most heavily tattooed biker and smacked him on the head and kicked his bike over. Then I ripped out his nose ring, and threw it on the ground."

I yelled, "Now, back off!! Or you'll answer to me!"

St. Peter was impressed. "When did this happen?"

"Just a couple minutes ago."

*"Success is a journey not a destination. The doing is usually more important than the outcome. Not everyone can be Number 1." ~ Arthur Ashe*