

HOW

THE BOTTOMLINE DESIGN MAGAZINE

DIGITAL DESIGN

the
Wired
NEXT

AUGUST 1994
\$7 U.S./\$8.95 CAN



P. Scott Makela's Eclectic Imagery •
Interactive Kiosks • CD-ROM Magazines •
Wired: Pixel-by-Pixel • Affordable, Quality Printers •
And Lots More!

A face for a **BLACK BOX**

by F.A. Mulholland

How can you represent something intangible in an exciting way? The National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) faces that problem every day. Its stock market, Nasdaq, has no trading floor. Instead, it's a network of computers and traders. Since the market's inception, NASD has tried to explain its intangible (but very real) business through graphics. When it comes to three-dimensional graphics for offices and showrooms, the problem becomes even thornier.

A new environmental graphics program for the NASD Visitors Center in Washington, D.C., suggests one way out of the box. Developed by New York City-based graphic / multimedia / interior design firm Enock as part of a four-year project, its key graphics are based on the look of information itself. Their innovative solution suggests a new way for companies to represent themselves in the



age of the "virtual corporation" when far-flung networks will supplant centralized offices and screen driven environments will eclipse real physical spaces.

At first glance, the latest addition to NASD's corporate graphics looks something like a deformed double helix. Called "the wave," it's based on a graph showing activity on Nasdaq, the NASD flagship subsidiary. The graphic compares the market's aggregate price, or index value against its volume.

"It's really an artistic interpretation," says Chris Enock, president of the 10-person design firm and the



The Enock design team for the Visitors Center included (left to right): David Enock, Tom Kwon, Minah Oh, Max Maddock, Chris Enock and Matt Enock.

THE NASDAQ STOCK MARKET™ **NASDAQ**

Enock's work on the NASD project began with a logo for its flagship subsidiary, The Nasdaq Stock Market. Introduced in 1990, the logo is the basis for Nasdaq's print materials and environmental graphics.



of securities dealers and The Nasdaq Stock Market. A pioneer in computerized trading, Nasdaq zoomed into prominence as electronic technologies took off. Today it's second in size to the New York Stock Exchange, with 3,100 companies traded on it. Its growth, however, outpaced its image. To keep its place in the forefront of electronic information, it need a more sophisticated, technology-

based look.

"One of the image problems we had is that we're a black box," says Thomas Apple, Nasdaq's vice president issuer services, "and our competitors like to talk about the human decision-making factor in their trading environments. That goes on here, too, but you can't see it. We needed something that would be more visible, tangible and understood."

For Enock, the ongoing identity program started with a simple job: paring down unwieldy five or size signatures to a single mark that would best communicate the organization's contemporary, high-tech personality. From there, the same team of designer went on to develop corporate identity standards, print marketing pieces and finally signage for Nasdaq's four facilities: its Washington headquarters, its New York marketsite, and systems centers in Trumbull, Conn., and Rockville, Md.

CREATING A PRESENCE

All aspects of the image come together at the Visitors Center, Enock says. Opened in March, the Visitors Center gives NASD a friendlier, more accessible public face – one that will greet 1,500 foreign and domestic visitors expected in 1995.

The new look begins at street level. Enock removed existing signage, which detracted from the three-story building's

program's creative director. "We're trying to convey a sense of the aggregate market without reverting to standard images. We needed something more high-tech and dynamic."

The wave will appear on print graphics, but that's only the beginning of its new life. At the NASD Visitors Center, it's become the core of bold new environmental graphics. And by the end of this year, it will appear in an application that may well foreshadow the future of EGD.

The NASD Visitors Center is part of a larger effort to increase the visibility and update the image of the nation's largest association



This rendering details the banners and a subtle etched-glass sign that were installed at the Visitors Center entrance. They replaced existing signage that many thought detracted from the building's facade.

The center's spare interiors are highlighted by two large-scale environmental graphics; a video wall, which displays many graphics throughout the day and can be used for presentations; and a frieze depicting the company's signature "wave" graphic and the logos of prominent companies traded on the market.

facade, and replaced it with subtler identification etched in glass at the main entrance. A low-key white banner bearing the NASD logo hangs above the entrance, while a trio of multi-colored, 30-ft. banners identify the center. In the Capital's conservative signage environment, these banners stand out and provide visitors with a first glimpse of the wave.

The designers cleared out the once-cluttered lobby, giving a reception desk (beneath the new Nasdaq logo) more prominence. Enock specified the materials, furniture and finishes for the 1,600-sq.-ft., L-shaped center, which hosts presentations explaining how the market works.



The high-tech frieze is created entirely on computers. Seven-ft. sections of printouts are mounted behind acrylic panels and lit with trough lights. Though the Cactus prints are relatively short-lived, corporate names and logos change frequently, so sections will need replacing anyway.

based on a 10-year timeline that pinpoints trading activity at any given time, using a scale that appears at various intervals.

Layered over the wave are logos from 28 companies whose stock is traded on the market, chosen to convey Nasdaq's size, scope and prestige. Making a "simple" frieze meant courting the corporate communications departments of more than two dozen companies, each with stringent corporate identity standards of its own.

"It's not like we have generic approvals from companies to keep using their logos when we want," Enock says. "We had to deal with each company about its logo individually."

Nasdaq's Apple predicts that this reluctance will change. "One of the things a company expects its stock market to do is increase the company's exposure to the public," he explains. "our listing agreement says that if you want to trade in the market, you've got to give us access to the logo. Given the inherent nature of the business, it's basically a lay-up."

But for this project, each company received a presentation describing the project and proposed use of its logo. Designers relied

The center's two focal points are graphic: a video wall and frieze. The video wall plays multimedia presentations and will eventually be linked to the New York marketsite, as yet unbuilt, for real-time trading demonstrations. The 107-ft. x22-in frieze, which circles the center, displays logos of prominent companies traded on the market.

The graphic wave forms the background of the frieze. It is



on Nasdaq's credentials and support to secure corporate involvement. And in most cases, they got it, even though that frequently meant violating the companies' identity standard.

"Corporate standards are intensely restrictive, limited to the basics," says Enock. "They don't get into subjective areas, and companies have trouble changing gears when you suggest something subjective. A lot of manuals specifically say not to put the logo over this kind of background. We had a big struggle with that."

Along with displaying the logos in an unorthodox manner, they were placed strategically to acknowledge status. For instance, Microsoft – the largest company on the market – was placed at the frieze's "beginning," where visitors see it when they walk in.

Color considerations came next; these also meant straying from some corporate standards. Blue (the dominate hue) logos had to be distributed equally around the room. When they extended beyond the wave and into the frieze's blue field, they sometimes had to be lightened to make the logos stand out.

Another design issue, though less controversial, was industry type. Designers tried to distribute logos so that they help convey Nasdaq's diversity, countering the common perception that its companies are all high-tech.

SIMPLE FABRICATION

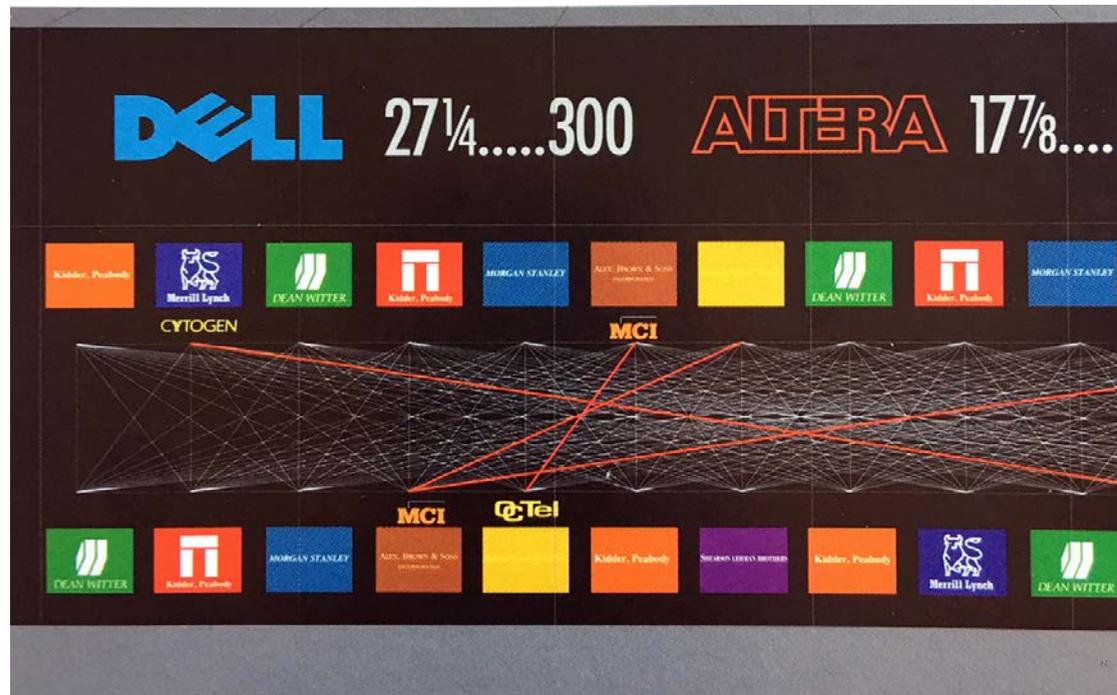
Despite its expensive, multi-layered look, the frieze itself was relatively inexpensive and simple to produce. Enock's designers created the frieze in Adobe Photoshop, then experimented with several kinds of photographic prints. In the end, they used direct

computer prints as final art; they had superior sharpness and color intensity, and had more of a "high-tech feel."

Enock says computer output simplified the process. "First of all, you've got what you see on your computer," he says. "Then, you've got what you see on your test prints and color copies. And then you've got what you see on your transparencies."

"All the media look completely different. And for this project, color is all-important. Also, because of the interlacing and

A 36-screen video wall displaying market activity as it happens will be the highlight of The Nasdaq Stock Market's New York site, slated to open later this year. The wave graphic will display volume of trading and index value, while a new ticker featuring company logos, rather than their three- and four- letter stock symbols, will make it easy to monitor stock prices.



multiple images happening at the same time, if you make one change in color, you've lost it. You have to start all over again."

Enock output the photoshop files as Cactus prints, using 40-in. rolls of paper. Though the graphic could be printed as on continues element, it was done in 7-ft. panels for easier lamination and changes. Under the UV-coated acrylic panels, the print should remain bright for a few years.

"You're not going to get 10 years out of it," Enock says, "but two years from now I guarantee it'll look totally different anyway." He designed the frieze to be updated easily as Nasdaq adds companies to its trading list or corporate names change. In fact, the first change occurred while the frieze was being installed: Akzo, one of the featured corporations merged with a company called Nobel. The market must reflect these changes as soon as they happen; so must the frieze.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

For all that went into development of the frieze, the most complex use of the wave remains to be seen. At Nasdaq's New York marketsite, slated to open this winter, designers and computer



programmers will turn market data into real-time video graphics, a sort of "virtual selling floor."

"The static, artistic rendering of the wave used on banners and brochures and the frieze will actually exist as a real-time, functioning market graphic," says Enock.

A 36-screen video wall will replace the traditional LED displays, displaying and explaining trading activities as they happen.

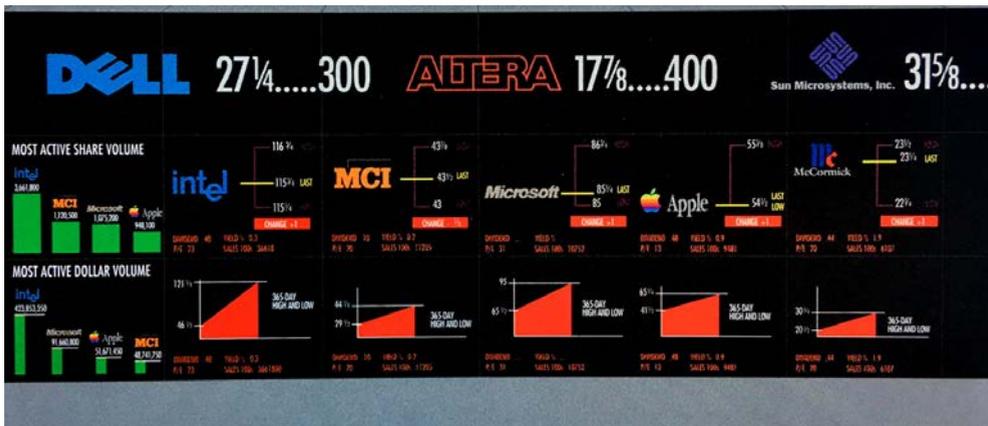
The logos of Nasdaq's 2,300 most actively traded companies will replace conventional stock symbols on a radically redesigned ticker. "I've long recognized the difficulty in understanding [stock market] symbols," says Apple. "The public does not deal in three- and four-character symbols, and doesn't recognize most of them in the first place.

"Then there's the whole issue of the mind's ability to grasp an image faster than decoding a symbol. During an active

period, the ticker might be running late because you can't visually process it any faster. Not only is this a better visual presentation, but it distills information faster."

The same could be said of the physical space for which the wave graphic will serve as a backdrop. It's design specifically for live broadcast and will give Nasdaq's activities a focal point in the real world. Environmental graphics won't identify the environment, they'll define it.

Realizing those graphics, which will literally make themselves from moment to moment, requires the combined efforts of designer, client and programmer. Nasdaq will provided the data, while Enock will interpret it and develop the original concepts and graphics for the wall. The New York City-based Imtech, a developer of video wall display and information systems, will write the programming. For all three, it



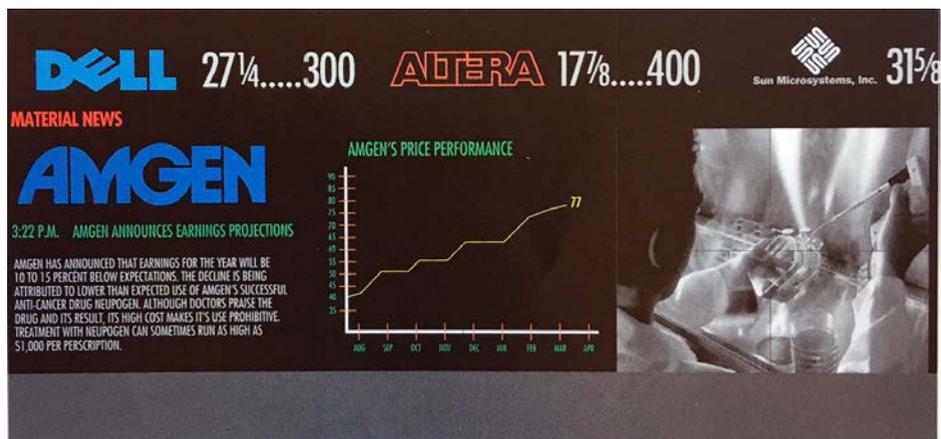


means charting new ground. “As designers, our role is to push against the constraints on both ends,” Enock says.

The financial industry, traditionally a bastion of conservative design, has become a source of graphic innovation with the latest Nasdaq developments. The Nasdaq wave suggests a tantalizing premise: that techniques, like graphs, traditionally applied to visually presenting information might be richly extended to a new generation of corporate signatures – each as distinctive as the “shape” of the information itself.

In developing this iconography and finding new ways to apply it to environmental graphics, designers will be challenged to explore the full potential of electronic technology.

F.A. Mulholland is a West Coast-based freelancer who specializes in writing about environment graphics.



The video wall allows extensive use of company logos and other sophisticated graphics, such as diagrams of trading as it occurs. News wire services and live network coverage of relevant stories will also be incorporated. At the Nasdaq marketsite, environmental graphics will be constantly changing video images, rather than the traditional (and limited) LED display boards.