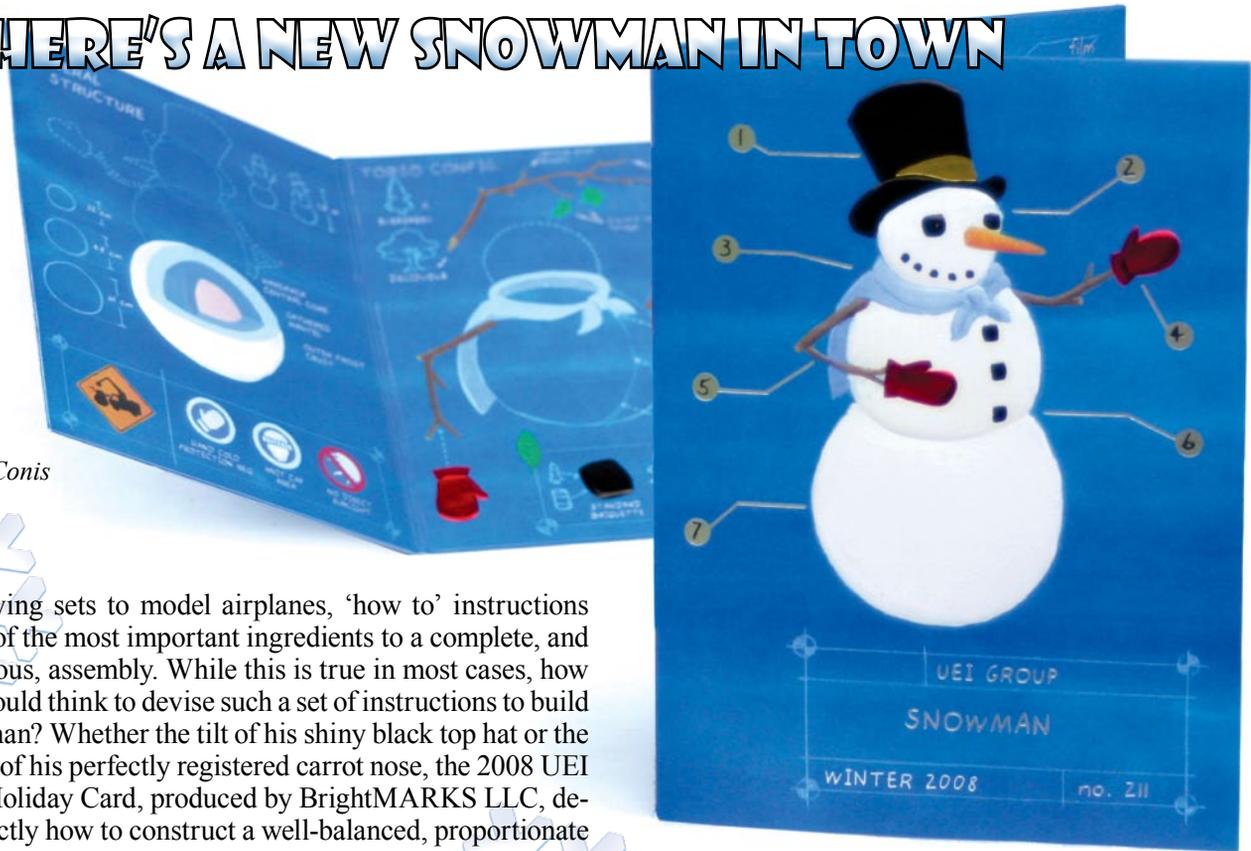


MOVE OVER FROSTY - THERE'S A NEW SNOWMAN IN TOWN



by Kym Conis

From swing sets to model airplanes, 'how to' instructions are one of the most important ingredients to a complete, and expeditious, assembly. While this is true in most cases, how many would think to devise such a set of instructions to build a snowman? Whether the tilt of his shiny black top hat or the position of his perfectly registered carrot nose, the 2008 UEI Group Holiday Card, produced by BrightMARKS LLC, details exactly how to construct a well-balanced, proportionate snowman.

Seemingly basic on the surface, building a snowman can require careful planning and precise calculations (not to mention great packing snow). Similarly, designing a foil stamping/embossing job requires equal preparation and often, guidance from the diemaker and finisher. Drawing upon the similarities between the two, the UEI Group Holiday Card combines clever design, multiple layers of difficulty, and superior execution to create a one-of-a-kind card whose sense of whimsical complexity and universal appeal has assembled a fan club all its own.

It Starts with Education

Recognizing the importance of acclimating graphic designers to the processes of foil stamping and embossing, UEI Group (including companies Universal Engraving, Inc. and Infinity Foils, Inc.), Overland Park, Kan., developed a program with The University of Kansas (KU) Design Department in Lawrence. Each year starting in fall, the students are given the assignment of designing a project for a client. The client is the UEI Group and the project is a holiday card.

According to UEI Marketing Representative Nicole Mercer, "We start out the semester by taking a couple of class periods to educate the students on foil stamping, embossing,

diecutting, etc. – as much as they can absorb in a few classes. Typically, design schools don't offer training in these applications, only a brief overview of printing. By participating in this educational program, our hope is that they will design with these processes when they get out into the marketplace."

Fundamentals of foil and embossing/debossing are covered in class, along with the basics of diecutting and specialty effects. "We bring in lots of samples to give them a sense of the many different effects that can be achieved through these processes," said Mercer. "We've also created a digital art tutorial that walks the students through the digital design process and details how to set up the artwork. Comprehending how a design translates in terms of foil stamping and embossing can be difficult initially; but with a little education, a clearer understanding is realized." Details such as image placement, backside impression, and even scores/folds are discussed to give students overall guidelines on what must be considered in the design process.

The goal for students each year is to design a holiday card that is new and fresh – uninfluenced by commercial trends. General parameters are provided to which the students must adhere, including size (limited to a standard envelope), global appeal (as the card is distributed by UEI Group companies

to customers around the world), and tone (a corporate environment). “We ask them to incorporate processes that our products produce – a certain amount of die effects and foil effects, even glitter if they wish,” said Mercer. “The goal is to showcase our products in a unique, interesting manner and to help the students get used to working with a client and interpreting what that client wants.”

After the students complete their initial thumbnail sketches, UEI meets with them to critique their work and help steer them away from faulty design decisions. Presented to the entire class, the sketches always spur rigorous Q&A. “Answering a question on one design often addresses a question on another. The benefit of this type of forum is enormous in that everyone learns,” said Mercer. Students are encouraged to act as a designer would on a project by specifying foils, finishes, shades, stock, and conveying the overall design intent with written and visual explanation. “We provide them with many resources to accomplish this task,” said Mercer.

Judging takes place at UEI headquarters, as five judges from varying departments within the company individually score each card based on a set of predetermined criteria. This may include the following: *Overall impression of the artwork—was the design well executed? Is the design realistic to produce and will it showcase UEI products? Is the holiday message appropriate, universal, and corporate-appropriate?* Each card is judged on its own individual merit and each judge utilizes his/her own area of expertise to tally the score.

The ‘how to build a snowman’ design was the winner of the 2008 competition and design student Matthew Cook received the distinct honor of having his work produced and distributed to UEI’s database worldwide. “There were so many great designs submitted and any number of them could have won and been utilized,” said Mercer. But Cook went a step further and really listened to the client, capturing the very essence of what UEI Group is all about.

“We strive to be an innovator, a manufacturer that is always coming up with a better way – a new way – of producing something. The snowman blueprint mirrored what we try to do as UEI Group companies. Many students get caught up in only the design aspect, but Matthew put a lot of thought into the concept as well and really found a way to blend the two so they worked together.” Successful on so many levels, the holiday card even addresses current issues such as sustainability with instructions that specify “compost-based renewable” coal instead of “standard briquette”.

Once the design was selected and minor necessary adjustments made, the card went into production. But instead of the magic happening on a snowy tundra amidst giggles of glee, the snowman would be brought to life on the printed sheet through numerous passes of foil, multi-level embossing, and the high quality craftsmanship of print finisher BrightMARKS LLC of Lenexa, Kan.

Some Assembly Required

Like constructing a ‘live’ snowman, building one of intricate detail and dimension on paper required as many, if not more, meticulous steps. From lithography, foil stamping, and embossing to diecutting, folding, and gluing, a total of 10 passes in exact registration were required to assemble the snowman, snowball by snowball. BrightMARKS, with plant locations in Kansas and Iowa, is a high-end producer of print enhancements including foil stamping, embossing, film laminating, trademarked UV coating processes, folding/gluing, and hand-assembly.

According to David Hutchison, CEO/Managing Member of BrightMARKS, three issues were identified during the pre-planning stages that might pose a challenge during production. Since the job required so many passes in tight registration, the first issue lied in controlling sheet to sheet print position as a foundation for all the subsequent passes. “We chose a heavy, stable sheet and a one-up format to avoid print stretch, spread, or sheet whip, and to maintain the quality of the guide/grip edges for the duration of the passes,” said Hutchison. “The job had to start with a good, tight-register printed sheet.”

The second issue that came into play was matching the register of all the dies (five foil and one emboss) to the print and to the other foil passes. “We called out the operating temperatures for each foil product and the temperature at which we intended to emboss the sheet. UEI then used its proprietary heat compensation program to fit each die to 100 percent,” Hutchison explained. “Our production plan called out for the embossing die to be set up first so that each foil pass could be checked for position during set up and production run. Each quality control press pull was put through the embossing press to confirm that no position change had occurred.”

The final issue was in the folding process, where the ink coverage needed to be monitored for scuffing and rub. “The interior panels had to be cut with sufficient compensation for the push created when gathering thick layers and folding them in a tri-fold manner,” said Hutchison. “The internal scores were replaced with slotted cuts exposing side-two print, and the outside edges of the interior panels were tapered to remain inside of the outside panel die line.”

In production, the cards were printed two sides in 4/C process with bleeds on 12"x18" Cougar Opaque 100# cover on a Heidelberg 74 DI at Tangent Press, Lenexa, Kan. After BrightMARKS received the printed sheets, the embossing die was set up on a Kluge press to register to the litho and each foil pass was registered not only to the litho but also, to each other using the embossing die. In the first pass of foil, a clear holofoil was stamped over the reversed out white of the snowman features. Clear holofoil was chosen for two purposes: 1) it is an effective way to give dimension and depth to a printed piece, and 2) it provided an opportunity for UEI Group to showcase the scope of its product line to include holofoil products.



In the second pass, all instructional copy was flat stamped in metallic silver foil. The fine lines of the text coupled with the small point size (as small as 6pt.) emphasized the importance of foil release and proper makeready in producing clean lines with no fill-in. In the third pass, the mittens were flat stamped in red metallic foil and the top hat, coal buttons, and facial features were stamped in black metallic foil in the fourth pass. The fifth and final foil pass was comprised of a gold metallic foil band around the hat. In the sixth pass, all printed and foiled images were register embossed in one pass utilizing one brass multi-level embossing die with a pre-cast counter.

In the seventh pass, the sheets were diecut on a Johannesburg cylinder and then folded over and glued to form a double thick, duplex-style sheet in order to hide the reverse images of the embossing so they would not conflict with other design elements. Finally, the card was folded and glued to a tri-panel finished size on a Bobst Fuego 110. All foil for the job was supplied by Infinity Foils, all copper flat stamp dies and the brass embossing die by UEI, and the steel rule die by Davis & Pierce (Kansas City).

According to Hutchison, the project sought to highlight several features of the UEI Group products: 1) the versatility and scope of the Infinity foil line with holofoils and metallics, overstamping on both ink and foil, and 2) the quality of register that can be achieved with multiple-pass tight-register production using UEI dies. And certainly not to be ignored is the top quality capabilities and craftsmanship of BrightMARKS technicians. All of these factors, along with a clever design, earned the 2008 UEI Group Holiday Card the 'Best of Show' award in the recent 2008 FSEA Gold Leaf Awards Competition – an honor bestowed on only the very best workmanship in the industry.

Beyond the Printed Box

The overall success of the project was apparent from the moment the cards came out of production. Accolades from customers and employees alike made the holiday card one of the company's all-time favorites. "We encourage the students to think outside of the box. Through this program with KU, our clients and customers get to see some extraordinary creativity and fresh ideas," said Mercer. "We are always overwhelmed by the level of inspiration. The university continues to ask us back, which gives us the opportunity to educate, and it's great for the university curriculum as well – the students love the class. It's a win/win situation for the both of us!"

Mercer concluded, "The more we speak about the value-added processes and products, the better. We're investing in the future of our industry by providing a new generation with the knowledge and tools to utilize the mediums of foil stamping, embossing, and other specialty effects within their designs." From concept to design to production, the 2008 UEI Group Holiday Card set a new standard for "innovation, engineering, and creativity...down to the very last 'instructional' detail". ■

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