

AN *eye* FOR



BEST OF SHOW

TITLE
Eyeglasses Promo Package

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A young designer's sensitivity to materials and attention to detail helped him score the job of his dreams — and HOW's Best of Show.

Most designers say that it takes years of professional practice to fully develop their aesthetic sensibilities. Understanding how to choose appropriate materials, creating a design around a cohesive message, attending to the details—these are the skills of a seasoned creative pro, not a fresh-out-of-school rookie.

If that's the case, then Tyler Sohm clearly has a leg up on his competition. Not just his fellow graduates from the University of Utah, all seeking jobs in an incredibly tight market, but also his fellow entrants in this year's Self-Promotion Competition, all 3,000 of them. Only the hand-assembly and the rough laser-printing give a hint that Sohm's Best of Show-winning work was his final-semester student project.

Sohm's boxed résumé isn't complicated, but it's loaded with concept and detail. While his senior classmates attacked the task of creating a portfolio by designing logos, Sohm searched for a theme, and he found it by looking through his own eyeglasses. "I used my own weakness, bad eyesight, to become my strength, an acute attention to detail," Sohm says. "The eye chart stemmed from this idea as the bond to tie all the work together. An eye chart is used for someone else to check how good your vision is. Sounds kind of like a portfolio review, so I made it one."

From a two-color illustration of a pair of heavy "grandpa" glasses on the box lid, through the cover letter, résumé and work samples, Sohm used overt and subtle references to eyesight to hold the package together. His business card carries the tag line, "Envision the invisible." Text incorporates the chunky, black "E"—sometimes printed backward—that's an eye-chart staple. A pair of dime-store reading glasses folds to enclose a set of 5x7in. cards displaying Sohm's work. A small line of type at the bottom of his résumé reads, "See it clearly." "Nothing in this piece is without purpose; every detail was well thought-out," says HOW art director and competition judge Tricia Barlow. "The eyeglass art is handled in different mediums (a photo screened on the cover letter, line art on the business card), but maintains the same feel throughout."



DETAIL

by Bryn Mooth

Because Sohm, unlike many of his fellow students, hadn't previously worked in a creative position, he wanted the portfolio presentation itself to showcase his talent. "What my résumé lacked in experience, I made up for in the quality of my work," Sohm says. "This piece had to stand alone without me explaining why I did something."

The package is handmade, output on Sohm's trusty Epson 740 printer. "One of the reasons the package is that size was that I could only print up to 8½ in. wide," Sohm says. "I swear by that printer, though. When all my classmates were spending a ton of money on the big printers that always seemed to have problems, my cheap little thing put out great-looking prints."

Sohm compensated for the print quality by using a heavily textured, uncoated stock, which he selected after extensive testing. He produced 15 packages, then mailed them in bubble wrap-lined, corrugated mailing boxes of his own design. Each edition cost a whopping \$7, including shipping.

But clearly, it was the intent, not the expense, that won over the HOW judges. "The thing that stood out most to me was the feeling of great potential and the dedication to detail this project conveys," says HOW associate editor Katie Weeks. "It's beautifully designed while remaining very personal. Imagine how much work Tyler could put into a client project—it's intriguing and inspiring."

And the portfolio won over Sohm's new employer, Hally O'Toole Design in Salt Lake City. Even during a time of downsizing, Sohm managed to secure interviews at every firm that received his package, and was able to choose the job that he really wanted.

Not bad for a kid who almost didn't make it into the University of Utah's design program. Sohm landed a full scholarship in fine arts, but figured he'd put the money toward a more "usable" degree in engineering or design. Although Sohm missed the deadline to submit his portfolio to the design program, administrators made an exception and admitted him anyway. And so the design profession gained a remarkable young talent.

"My father told me I could be the best in any field I chose," Sohm says. "My professors gave me the encouragement I needed, and I've never looked back. I'm glad I made that decision. I'd be a pretty boring engineer." **HOW**

