Post Mortem
or: How I once designed a typeface
for Europe's biggest company.

Name, logo, colour and typeface —
those are the basic elements of any
 corporate design programme. Once the
first of these elements has been
defined or, indeed, designed, the fourth
one hardly ever presents a problem.
In Germany, it's got to be Helvetica.
And if it isn't Helvetica, Univers might
just be allowed. If a company wants
to look more traditional and considers
a serif face one usually chooses
Times New Roman.

When Sedley Place Design in Berlin
was commissioned to develop a
corporate design programme for the
West German Post Office — Deutsche
Bundespost — it became clear right from
the start that this time Helvetica did not
fit the bill: it is being used by too many
other companies because of its 'neutral'
appearance and it fails to distinguish
the Bundespost on this very basic level.

One of the reasons why so many
companies have chosen Helvetica as
their corporate typeface is the fact that
it is perhaps the most widely available
typeface today. This availability has,
however, been achieved at the expense
of recognizability. There are so many
weights, versions, legal and illegal adap-
tations and so many other almost identi-
cal typefaces that by simply specifying
'Helveta' one ends up with a range
of 'almost right' and 'not quite right'
solutions. Visual chaos instead of one
typeface being the common denomina-
tor of all corporate communications.

Since Helvetica first appeared in the
late fifties the typesetting and printing
industries have been subject to a series
of technical changes, if not revolutions.
Poor Helvetica was never intended to be
used in very small sizes, set on low-reso-
lution CRT-setters and printed on rough
recycled paper. It was also never intended
as a space-saving face for listings, tables
or in fact telephone books. Condensing it
electronically to fit a given space doesn't
help much to enhance the original design
either, which was for a generous, even
appearance. Faced with all these argu-
ments and the fact that today it is possible
to go straight from fairly rough artwork
into digitisation via the Ikarus pro-
grame, thus saving enormous time and
costs, the Bundespost gave Sedley Place
Design the go-ahead for the develop-
ment of an exclusive type design
based on the necessities of the
corporate design programme.

The brief
A typeface for Europe's biggest employer
(more than 500,000 employees) has to
do more than look pretty: it has to work
pretty hard. Rather than going for attract-
ive novelty, we decided that it needed to
be:
very legible, particularly in small
sizes and under the special considera-
tions of finding names and figures
rather than reading extensive amounts
of copy;
neutral, not fashionable, trendy or
nostalgic;
identical on all typesetting systems;
available from every supplier of
typesetting in the country at very short
notice and at reasonable cost;
economical in its application —
 ie space-saving;
designed in clearly distinguishable
weights;
distinct and unmistakable;
technically up-to-date.

Hausschrift AEG
Hausschrift BASF
Hausschrift Bayer
Hausschrift BMW
Hausschrift Bundesbahn
Hausschrift Bundespost
Hausschrift Daimler Benz
Hausschrift Lufthansa
Hausschrift Nixdorf
Hausschrift Siemens
Hausschrift Sparkasse

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