Takin' Care of Business

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Dingbats and Wingdings

Setting type means selecting and arranging groups of characters, but not all of those characters have to be part of the alphabet. Dingbats are non-typographic elements that can enhance your work by adding variety and functionality.

Dingbats Dingbats Dingbats

A dingbat is a decorative element available in font format. Dingbats can be graphic elements such as squares, triangles, hearts, checkmarks, pinwheels, lightning bolts, arrows or stars.

They can also be small illustrations of anything you can imagine: a pointing finger, a pencil, a pair of scissors. Dingbats are appropriate for both print and web applications and can enhance visual communication in many ways. Use dingbat characters as:

- Bullets (try squares, inverted triangles, or checkmarks)
- Paragraph separators
- Article endings
- Borders (when strung together)
- Checkboxes on forms or surveys
- Eye-catching symbols to highlight e-mail addresses, phone & fax numbers, etc.
- Logos (when combined with type)
- Purely decorative elements

Dingbats can also be enlarged, tinted (try converting them to outline format and coloring them), flipped, flopped and reversed. Are they versatile? You bet.

The most well-known dingbat font is ITC Zapf Dingbats, designed by Hermann Zapf. It is bundled with most computers, printers and much software, and is thus freely available to virtually anyone using a computer. Many wonderful and varied dingbat fonts can be purchased, and others are available as freeware. They can be addictive, however. Once you get hooked on dingbats, you'll never have enough of these practical, fun-to-use fonts! Use decorative fonts sparingly and for effect. Decorative fonts can be especially ornate letters, or they might be little pictures and symbols used as borders and dividers. This step deals with those that are letters, sometimes called initial caps or fontbats.

Picture dingbats are used in the same way as outlined in Step 6, except you can place them anywhere that you need a picture. Enlarge them. In some applications, (i.e. MS Publisher & Adobe In-Design), they must be placed in their own place-holder where the provide a special illustration of some kind. Use one as part of a logo for a company or product. Use simple dingbats as special bullet characters. Make a pictograph showing the relationship of numerical data by using dingbats to represent the data values instead of a bar graph.

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Microsoft's Wingdings: Fun with Dingbats

The Wingdings fonts were designed by Kris Holmes and Charles Bigelow in 1990 and 1991. The fonts were originally named Lucida Icons, Arrows, and Stars to complement the Lucida text font family by the same designers. Renamed, reorganized, and released in 1992 as Microsoft Wingdings(TM), the three fonts provide a harmoniously designed set of icons representing the common components of personal computer systems and the elements of graphical user interfaces.

There are icons for PC, monitor, keyboard, mouse, trackball, hard drive, diskette, tape cassette, printer, fax, etc., as well as icons for file folders, documents, mail, mailboxes, windows, clipboard, and wastebasket. In addition, Wingdings includes icons with both traditional and computer significance, such as writing tools and hands, reading glasses, clipping scissors, bell, bomb, check boxes, as well as more traditional images such as weather signs, religious symbols, astrological signs, encircled numerals, a selection of ampersands and interrobangs, plus elegant flowers and flourishes.

Pointing and indicating are frequent functions in graphical interfaces, so in addition to a wide selection of pointing hands, the Wingdings fonts also offer arrows in careful gradations of weight and different directions and styles. For variety and impact as bullets, asterisks, and ornaments, Windings also offers a varied set of geometric circles, squares, polygons, targets, and stars.