

Illustrator and Photoshop
CS3 or later

Make your corporate work cool

Corporate doesn't
have to equal dull.
Simeon Elson
demonstrates how to
fulfil commercial briefs
with work that really
turns heads

Sometimes it's easy to fall into a more reserved creative mindset when producing illustrations for your corporate clients, delivering bland, basic illustrations to accompany business magazine articles, annual reports or corporate billboards. The trick to ensuring that your corporate client work remains a highlight of your portfolio is to find a way to inject your personal style into this work while still ticking all the boxes in the set brief. When it comes to creating cool corporate graphics, Illustrator is brilliant for drawing shapes and symbols quickly and accurately.

Using Illustrator in combination with Photoshop, I'm going to show you how to go from a rough sketch to a strong highly conceptual corporate illustration that fulfils your client's brief while boasting that added cool factor.



Simeon Elson

A London-based freelance illustrator and graphic artist, Simeon's clients include Penguin, Grazia, 2Darc Entertainment and Miss Capital UK. To check out more of his work, visit www.simeonelson.co.uk

Time needed

6 hours

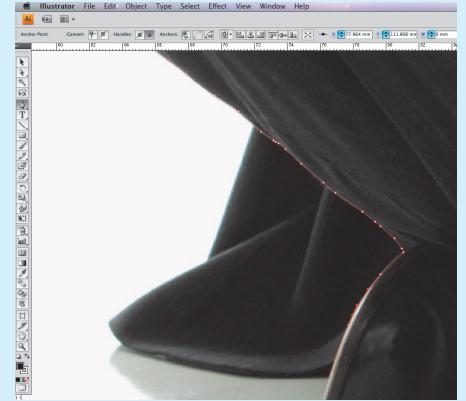
Skills

- Using gradients in Illustrator
- Creating symmetrical shapes
- Composition
- Effective use of texture and colour

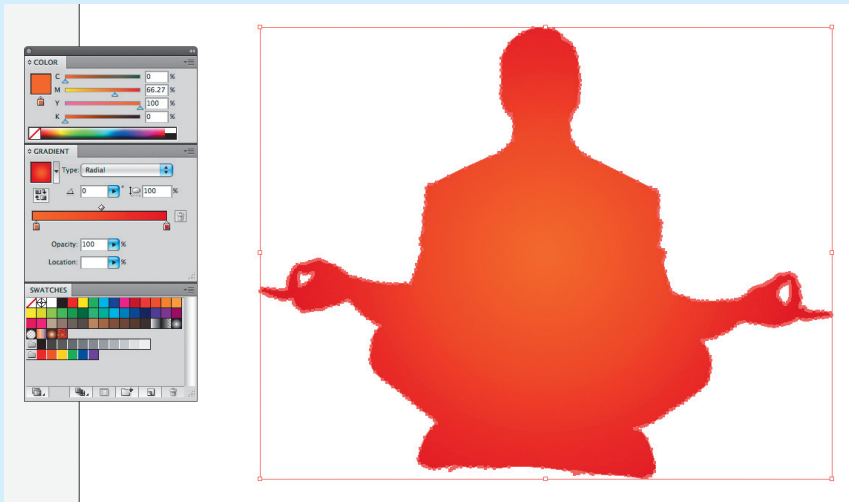




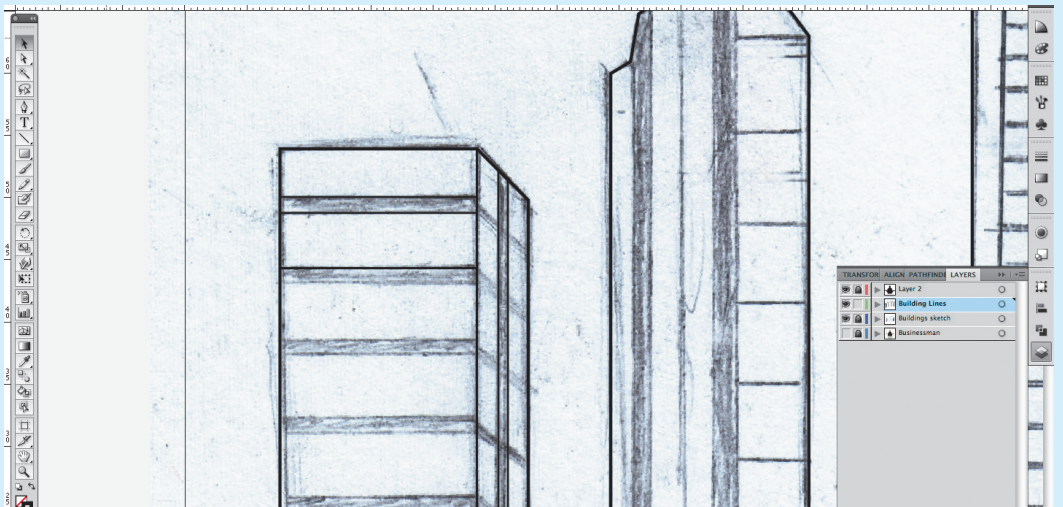
01 Once you've received the brief from your client, it's time to select a suitable reference image. Draw at least two sketches that fully display composition, energy and style to your client, who will then select the one they want you to work up. Creating a few different sketched compositions is also essential for you, so that you can see if your idea actually works visually and how it might be improved.



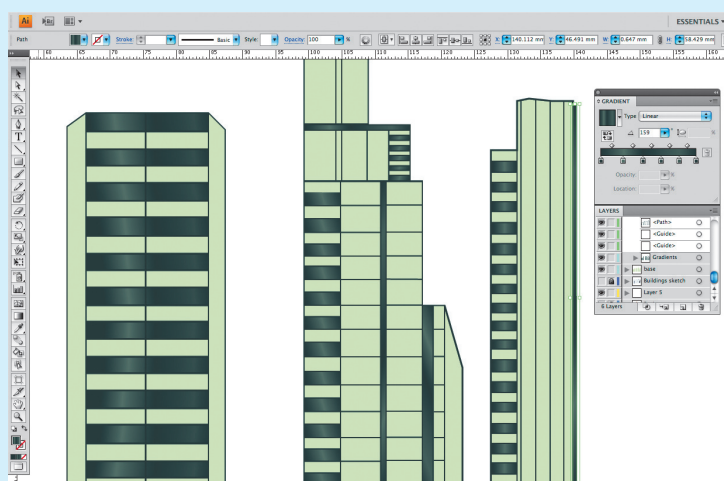
02 Now create a new CMYK Illustrator file. Click File>Place to insert your reference image. I've named this layer 'Businessman'. Select the Pen tool with a black fill (no fill) and, with Opacity at 0%, draw around your subject to create a clean silhouette. I decide not to include the jacket flaps as they needlessly complicate the silhouette.



03 Set Transparency back to 100 to see how your silhouette looks. Now add a Radial gradient to the silhouette – I make the inner colour a yellow/orange and the outside colour an orange/red.



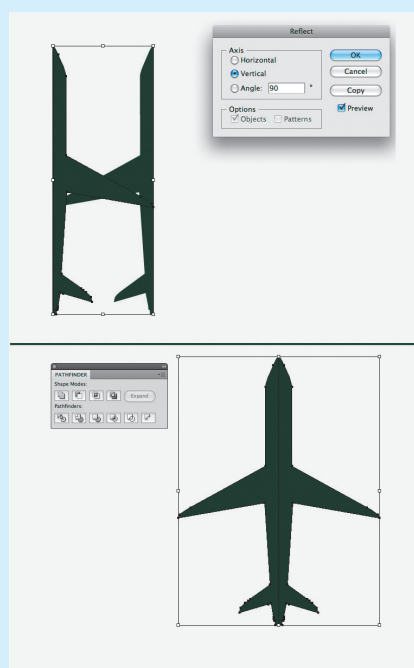
04 Create a new layer for some buildings in the background, and name it 'Buildings'. Using the Pen tool, with the stroke set between 0.5 and 1.5 pixels, draw the outlines of some buildings. With the other layers locked, go to Select>All and change the line colour. I choose a deep blue-green. Create a new sub-layer by clicking the second icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Name it 'Gradients' and drag it to the bottom of the layer. →



05 Now with the same colour, fill the thicker areas. I add reflective detail by using gradients – the darkest colour will be the same blue-green, contrasting against a lighter colour using a linear gradient. Add more colour points where you see fit, and adjust the colours and angles until you're happy with the reflective effect. Create a new sub-layer below, called 'Base', and draw base colour. Mine's yellow/green.



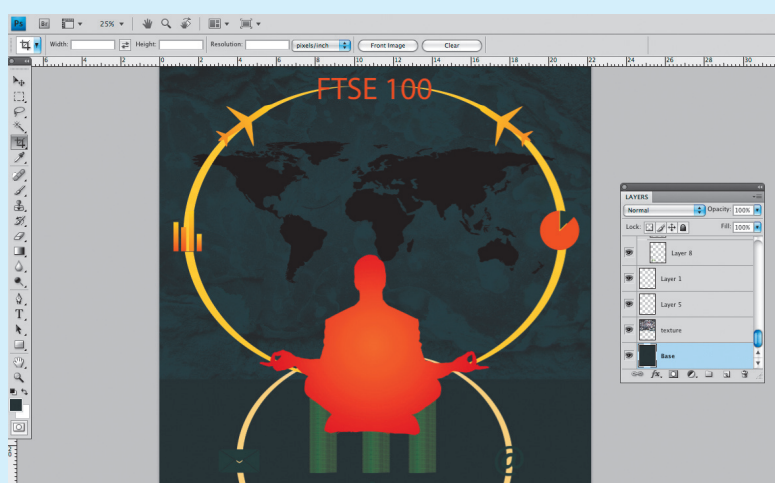
07 When you have drawn all your shapes, and before you jump to Photoshop, save all of your drawings individually. As each image has its own layer, you can make just the object you are saving visible. Turn the visibility of the others off by clicking the eye icon in the Layers panel. If you are using CS4 or later, you can go to File>Document Setup>Edit Artboards and draw an Artboard around each image.



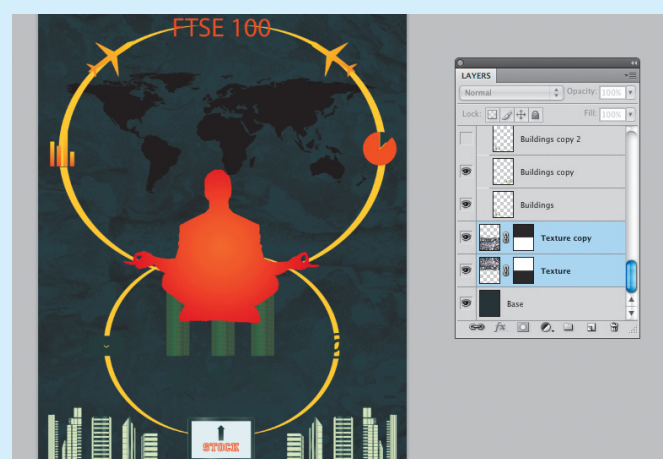
06 Continue to draw elements of the illustration, keeping each drawing on its own layer. When drawing symmetrical objects, such as a plane, it may be easier to draw half of the object then duplicate the shape in your Layers panel by dragging it onto the new layer icon. Next, go Object>Transform>Reflect to bring up the Reflect dialog. Check the 'Vertical' Axis tab and set Angle to 90. Press Shift to keep the reflected shape in line, and position it at the point where the two shapes meet. Select both shapes, go Window>Pathfinder and click the Unite shape icon located top-left in the palette to make one shape.



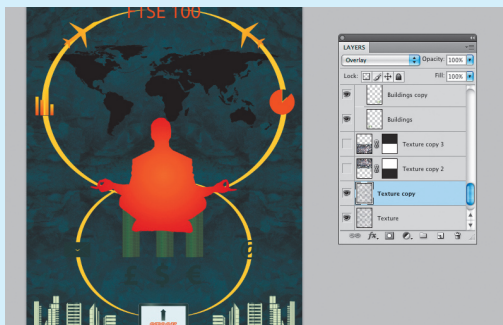
08 Create a new Photoshop document to your client's specified dimensions. I name mine 'Corporate Maverick'. I find stock images including a stack of cash, light beams and a world map, so select images suitable for your project. Duplicate and flip layers such as the 'Buildings' layer by dragging them onto the 'Create new layer' icon, then going to Edit>Transform>Flip Horizontal. Use rulers to mark out the centre point and keep everything aligned.



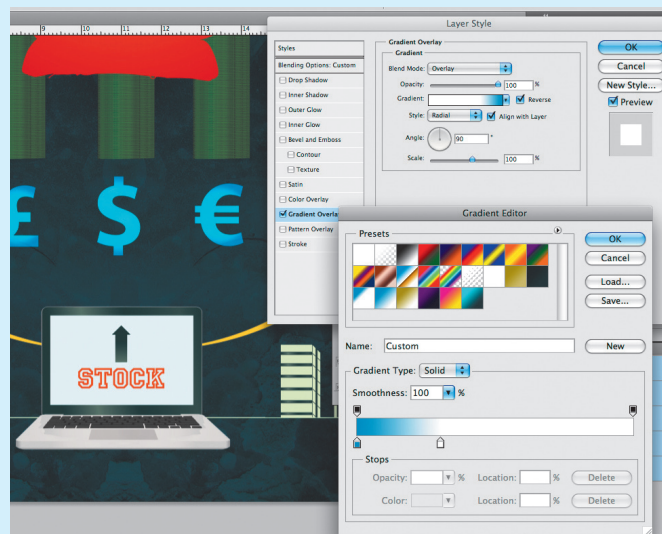
09 Create a new layer called 'Colour base' then go to your Colours palette. I set it to C=93%, M=68%, Y=55%, K=64%. Next, select the Paint Bucket tool and fill the layer with your new colour. Source a texture – I choose UrbanDirty079 from urbandirty.com – and drag it onto the illustration. Name this layer 'Texture'. Position it at the top left of the page and stretch it so it fills the top half of the page. Set the layer's blending mode to Overlay, and Opacity to 31%.



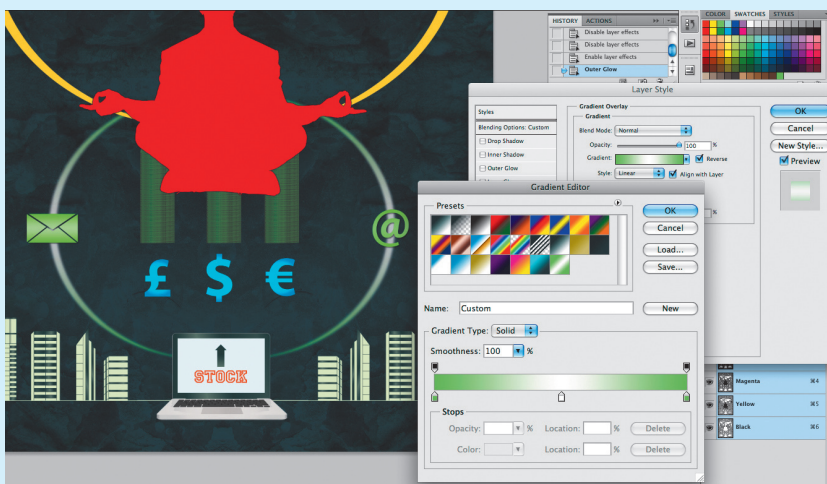
10 Click the Add Layer Mask icon in the Layers panel, select the Gradient tool and select the black and white gradient. Whilst holding down Shift, draw a small line with the Gradient tool, starting just below the horizontal centre line and ending just above. This will fade off the edge of the texture. Now duplicate this layer, go Edit>Transform>Flip Vertical and position it at the bottom half of the page so that the two layers meet to form an invisible edge.



11 Now duplicate both the texture and texture copy layers for back-up, then turn their visibility off. Click on the top of the two texture layers and go Ctrl/Cmd+E to merge them. At this point you might see the 'Apply the mask before merging?' request box. If you do, click Apply. Duplicate the merged layer and go Edit>Transform>Flip Horizontal.



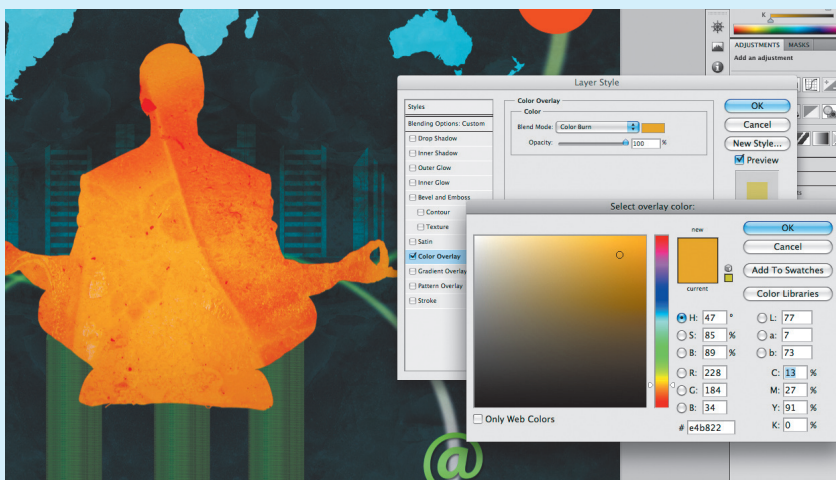
12 We need to darken the contrast a little. Duplicate the 'Base' layer then change the blending mode to Multiply and Opacity to 30%. I want to add some vibrancy to the currency symbols, so I set the layer blending mode to Screen, then double-click on the layer to bring up the Layer Style palette. I create a sky blue and white radial gradient and set the blending mode to Overlay. Next, I Ctrl/Click the layer in the Layers panel, select Copy Layer Style then paste it onto the £ and € layers.



13 I continue to add layer styles to the rest of the symbols. You can experiment with the blending modes and layer styles, such as Outer Glow and Drop Shadow. I go to my smaller light beam layer, set the blending mode to Screen, then go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, setting Radius to 4.5. I go to Filter>Blur>Motion Blur, setting a distance of 11 and an angle of 29. I double-click the layer to bring up the Layer Style palette, and create a green and white linear gradient. I repeat this process for my other light beam layer.



14 To add some more cool factor, I duplicate the two building layers and flip them both horizontally. I place them on either side of the silhouetted shoulders, and set the blending mode to Overlay. I source a texture – Ubrandirty053 from urbandirty.com – and place it above the silhouette layer, then name it 'Urban texture'. I set the opacity to 50% so the silhouette beneath shows through.



15 Subtlety is key in creating a realistic effect. Once you have played around, experimented and tweaked, you will have transformed your flat vector illustration into a textured screen-print-look piece ready for your client!



16 I decide to add a circuit image to my illustration. I open the image and drag it onto my document, duplicate this layer then flip it horizontally. I set the blending mode to Overlay and Opacity to 40%. Position your additional layers in interesting areas that enhance the composition. Use the Eraser tool to erase any unwanted elements before making any final compositional changes, then it's time to show your client!