

Adobe Illustrator

Screenprint eye-catching business cards

Jordan Metcalf shows you how to create original high-impact promo cards from your own home

Producing a range of high-quality custom business cards needn't cost the earth. With a little thinking outside the box, it's possible to create a striking card design that stands out – and can be manufactured within your own home, cutting out the cost of professional printers.

This project guides you through the process of creating a set of screenprinted, hand-cut business cards. I chose this aesthetic for several reasons: my work varies from traditional graphic design to painting, drawing, typographic design and illustration – and from digital to analogue – so I wanted a card that would encompass all of this. I also wanted to produce something substantial, printed onto thick board, which would pass on my details and people could keep.

Screenprinting is not only incredibly versatile in terms of what you can print on, but I've always loved the look – the texture of the ink and the natural imperfections. For me, it was the perfect way to create a business card with the tactile traditional feel of craft, but with a contemporary graphic twist, portraying what I do in an intriguing, subtle way. It's practical and does the job, but also gives someone that extra incentive to keep it.

If you fancy tackling the printing at home rather than sending your artwork to a professional screenprinter, check our tutorial from issue 123 (www.bit.ly/screenprint) for some great tips – or see page 51 for the inside track on how the pros do it.

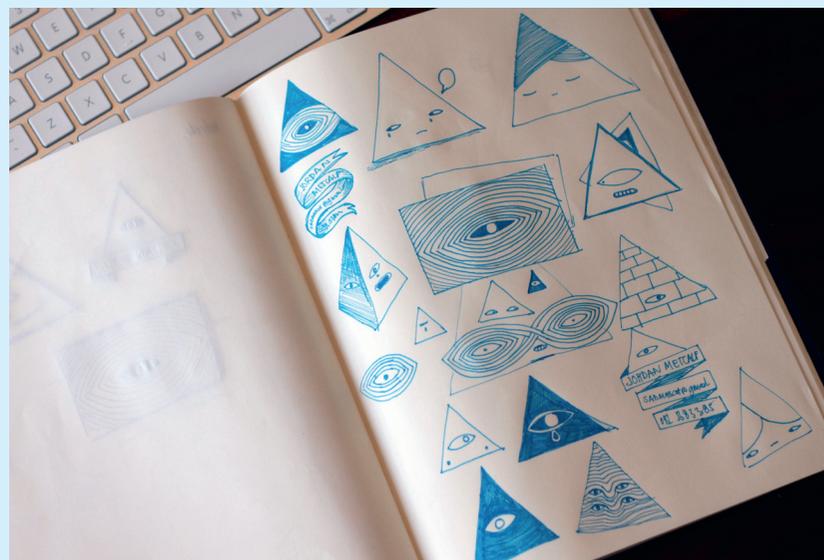


Jordan Metcalf

Based in Cape Town, South Africa, Metcalf is a freelance graphic designer and artist who has worked for a diverse range of clients around the globe. www.behance.net/thiswinter

Skills

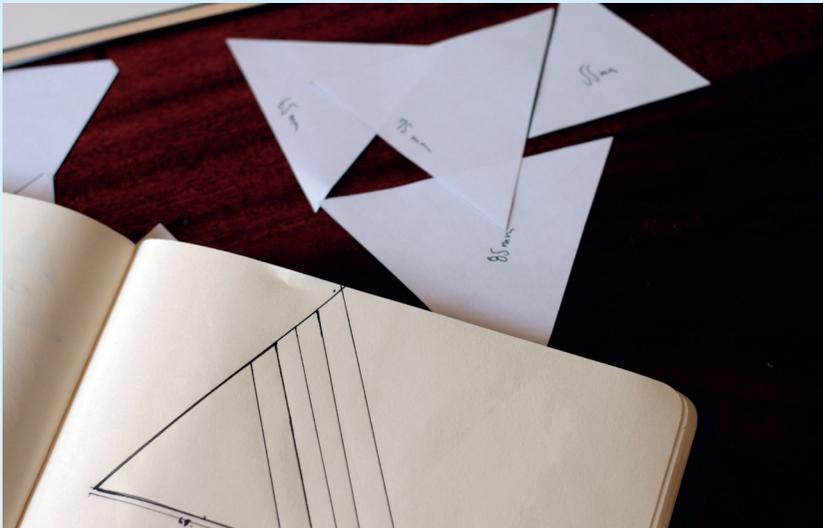
- Manipulate shapes in Illustrator
- Master the Alignment and Pathfinder tools
- Prepare artwork for screenprinting



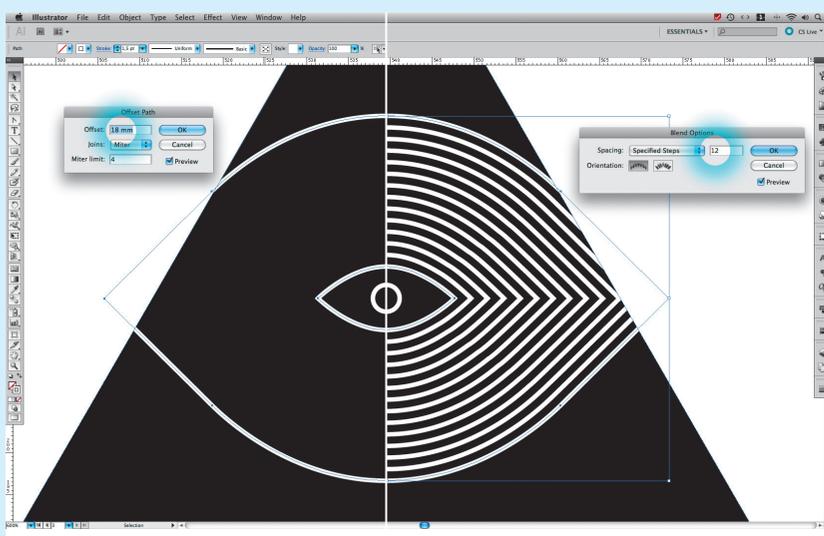
01 Start by sketching out some rough ideas and executions. I knew that I wanted to do a range of triangular cards on thick black mount board, so I came up with some quick variations. Play around with various designs, shapes, ideas and sizes. Don't just restrict yourself to a 90x50mm rectangle.

Simple is best

Execution methods are often just as important as the visual ideas they are meant to produce. Try to think of both when conceptualising your card. A screenprinted design says something very different to the same design printed digitally, or done as a gold foil. Sometimes a simple design done in an unexpected way can work wonders.

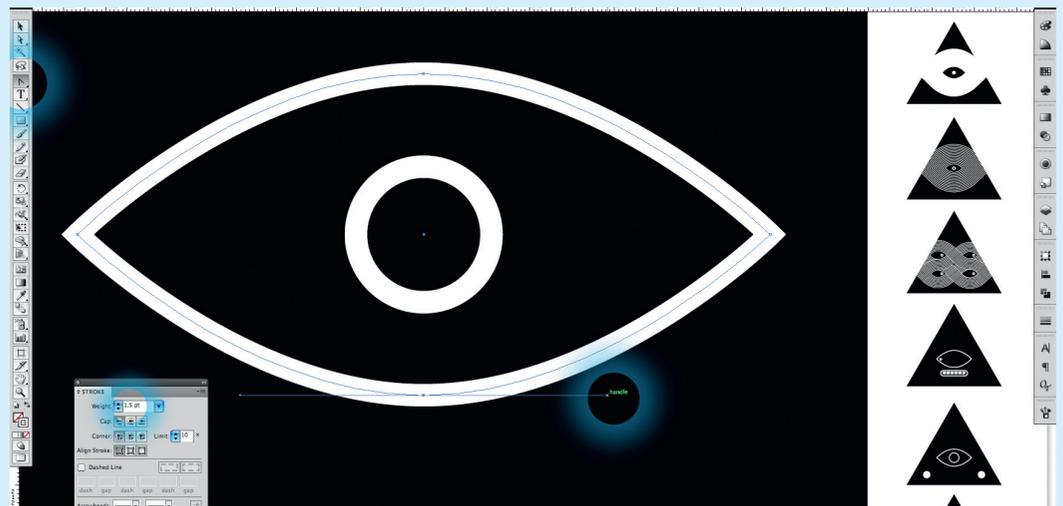


02 Now begin the design and planning process. Decide on the final size of your triangle by cutting out various options on cartridge paper, and experimenting to find which works best. I decided on 75mm high and 85mm wide: this size felt the closest in overall area to a standard card, without becoming impracticably big. Knowing the size of your card, what substrate it'll be printed on (in my case, 1.5mm thick black mount board with a white back) and what mesh count you're working with (110 threads per square inch, here) will allow you to decide on the amount of detail to include and line thickness beforehand, ensuring you get the best print possible.



04 To create multiple line variations, offset the eye shape (Object>Path>Offset Path), and choose an appropriate distance – I opted for 18mm. Now select both shapes, and go to Object>Blend>Make, and then Object>Blend>Blend Options. In the Blend Options window, change Spacing to Specified Steps, and specify the amount of lines you want: 12, here. This is where knowing how much detail you want comes in: if you have too many lines too close together, they might bleed into each other as the print is pulled, making it look smudgy.

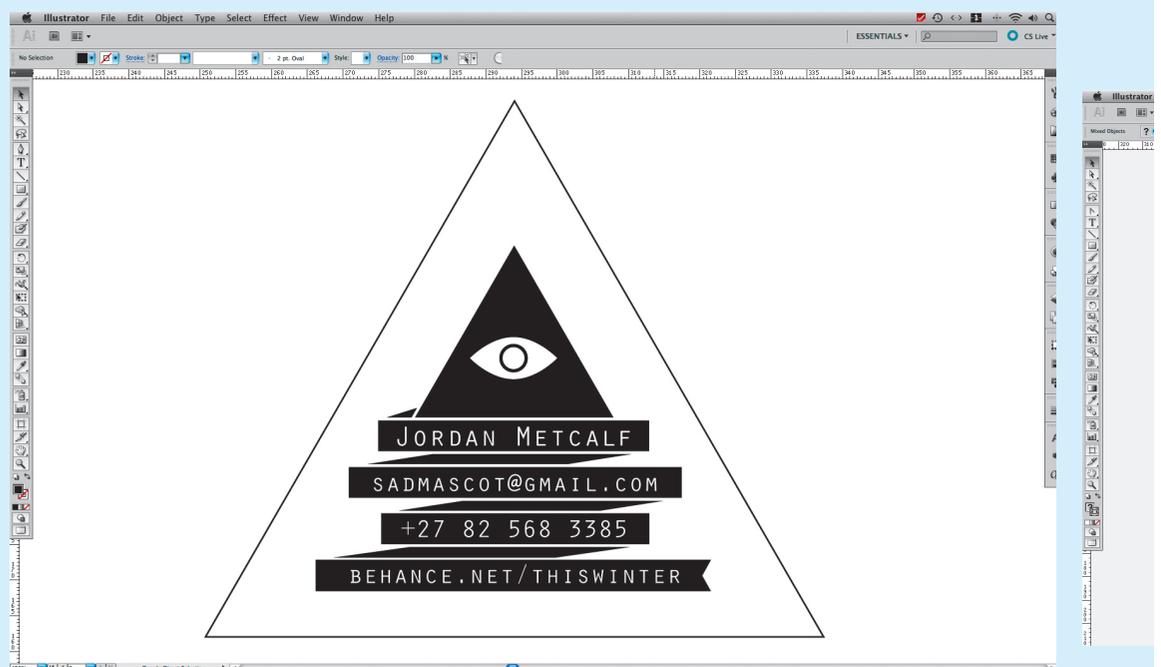
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03 Open Illustrator, create a new file, select the Ellipse tool, and draw an oval shape using a 1.5pt stroke width to get a thin but solid line. Choose the Direct Selection tool, and click on the anchor points at the widest points of the oval. In the Anchor Point menu options that appear at the top of the screen, select Convert Selected Anchor Points To Corner. This is the eye, and will form the basis of the design. Now create some variations of this using the Ellipse and Rounded Rectangle tools shapes, adjusting them with Convert Anchor Point options. Experiment with changing the stroke to a fill.

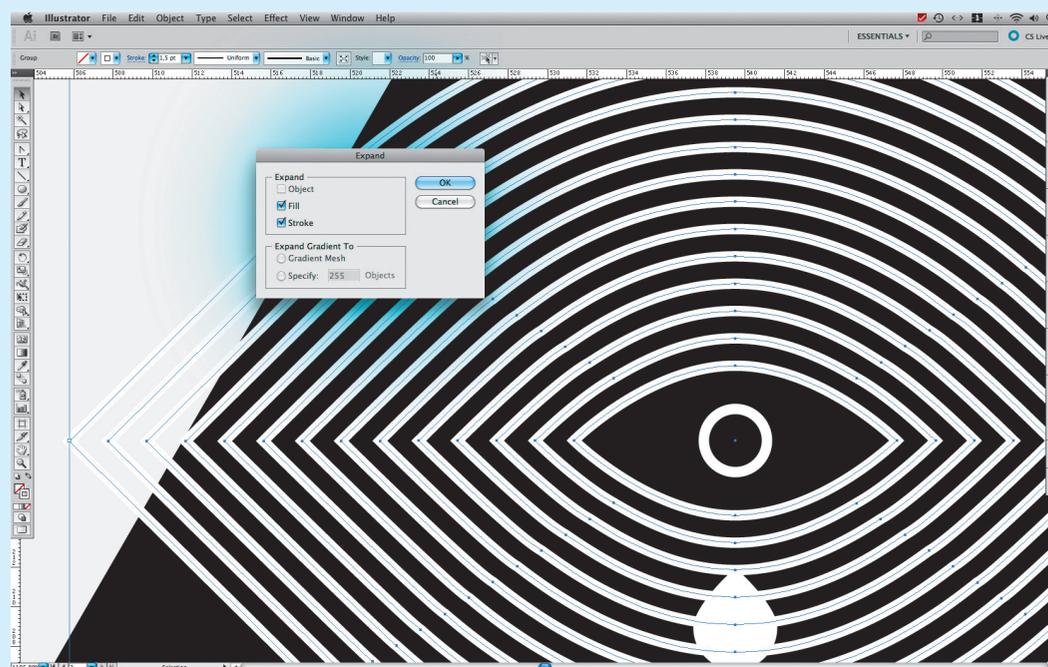
Learn your mesh counts

Screens have different mesh counts: a lower mesh count means more ink but less detail; higher means more detail but less ink. Speak to your printer about what you want to achieve, and design accordingly to get the best results. I was printing onto black, so I used a slightly lower mesh count to get the ink thicker and ensure it wasn't translucent.



05 Next, create a generic reverse design that will go on the back of each card. These will be printed onto the white side of every card, and the text will be reversed out. Bear in mind that when text is reversed out of black ink, it can sometimes spread slightly into the white areas, thinning the letters out. When screenprinting, it's a good idea to make sure your text isn't too small or thin to guarantee legibility.

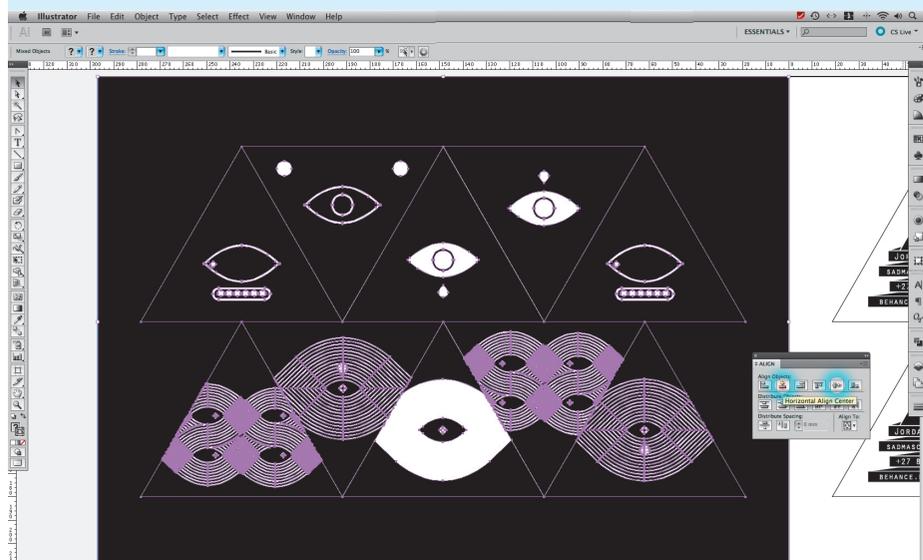
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06 Once all your variations are finalised, select your line blends, and click Object>Expand. This should convert your lines from blends to individual strokes. Now select all your lines, and expand them again to make them into filled shapes.

Variations

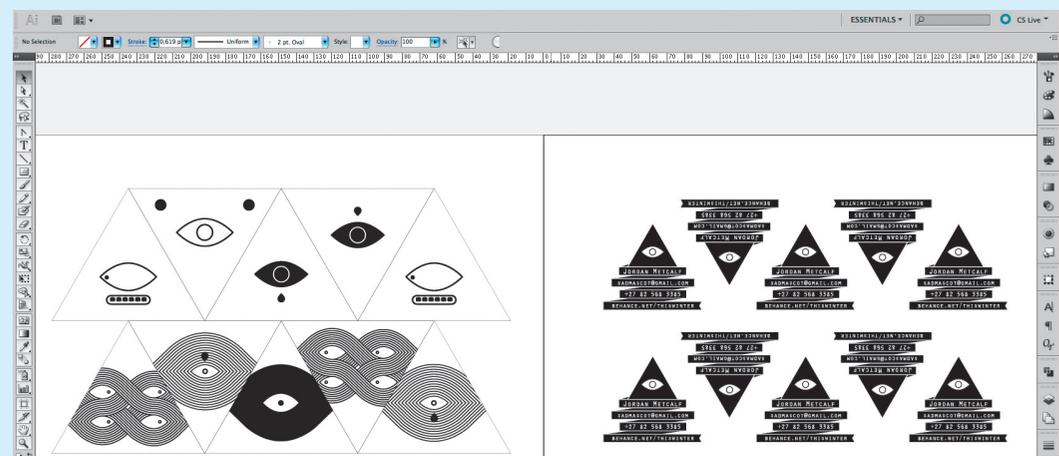
The beauty of screenprinting is that you can print on almost any substrate, and with a simple wash of the screen the printer can add in another colour. I chose to do silver and gold versions of the front, doubling my variations at no added cost. You could also easily change the material or colour of your substrate to do the same.



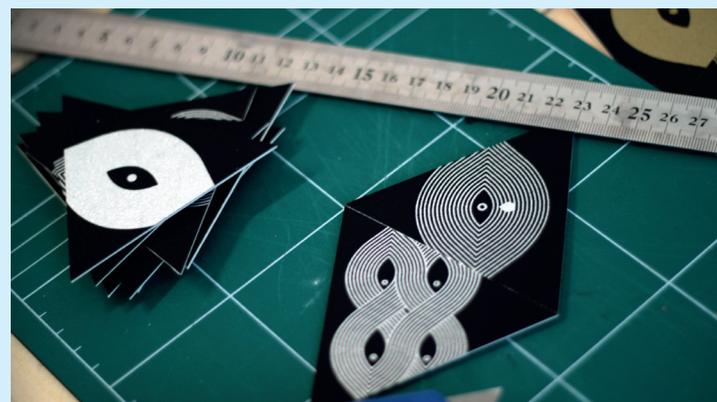
08 Arrange your cards in the most economical way possible on an artboard the size of the page you will print on. By including all your variations on one page, only one screen will need to be exposed for the front and one for the back. Ensure that the front and back designs correlate exactly by laying them out the same way, grouping them, and aligning to the page (Window>Align>Horizontally And Vertically To The Artboard).



07 A key advantage to using a triangular shape is that, by laying out the different designs edge to edge, you can make the most of the card space available – I've played on this and created an interlocking design. However, the artwork overlaps at the edge, so select your triangle, and go to File>Copy, and File>Paste In Place. Remove the stroke and fill from the new triangle, select it and all the elements of the design that overlap the triangle's borders, and click the Pathfinder's Divide tool. This will cut all the shapes at the borders of the card. Remove the shapes on the outside of the business card.



09 Check that everything you want printed is black on white (regardless of what colour you want it to be printed) when you send your artwork to the printer – or do it yourself, if you have the equipment. This black-and-white image is used to expose the screen. If the card is two-sided, create thin outlines; if it's square or rectangular, put crop marks on one side of the design only. The alignment could be a few millimetres off, so you don't want to leave room for error.



10 Request a proof before the whole run is printed, and check the colour, alignment and print quality of your cards, paying attention to all the details. Having another screen exposed with adjusted artwork is cheaper than paying for another entire print run. Once you've signed off your proof and have your prints back, you're done. Simply cut them out and give them away.