

# '01 Ban Comic Sans!

Alumna keeps eyes peeled for much-used font, stickers ready BY KATHLEEN MILLS

**H**olly Sliger Combs, BFA'01, has never had irritable bowel syndrome. But she's pretty sure it's an unpleasant condition — one, when written about, deserving of a sober font. So Combs was shocked to see a pamphlet in a doctor's office about IBS that was written in **Comic Sans**, that whimsical typeface.

"For the love of all that is good in the world, if you have it you are not laughing," Combs says of IBS. "When you are making pamphlets about serious things, you should not be using this font."

An Indianapolis graphic artist who studied typography at the IU Herron School of Art and Design, Combs takes seriously her font choices.

Writing up a pathology report? Then choose a font with gravitas, like Times New Roman. Designing a press release announcing a grand opening? Try something clean and simple, like Futura.

If you're tempted to use Comic Sans for either of these projects or thousands of others, Combs has a message for you: Step away from the keyboard. She considers the ubiquity of Comic Sans not just unfortunate, but downright offensive.

Using the wrong typeface when you don't know what you're doing is "like practicing medicine when you haven't studied it. It feels dangerous," Combs says.

In the past 10 years, Combs has seen Comic Sans used on CPR manuals, for biblical quotes on church windows, on college final exams, and too many other inappropriate locations to count.

But it was the use of Comic Sans in a gallery guide at an Indianapolis museum that set her off on her crusade.

Combs was doing an internship in 1999 at the museum when she was told to use Comic Sans. The guide, the signs, and the banners in front of the museum — all were to be rendered in the bouncy little font.

"Just shoot me now. You are going to have this in a billion-point font in front of the museum?" Combs incredulously asked her supervisor.

Combs's solution was Ban Comic Sans, a movement not really to ban it, but rather to drastically reduce its use.

"I'm not a complainer. I like to fix what's bothering me," Combs says.

With her husband, Dave Combs, who is also a graphic designer, Combs has created Ban Comic Sans stickers, many of which include a picture of the designer who created Comic Sans. The Combses and their fellow travelers affix the stickers to Comic



Holly Sliger Combs seeks to eliminate inappropriate uses of the font Comic Sans.



Sans wherever it rears its overly cheerful head.

Their campaign has put them in 15 magazines, in *The Wall Street Journal*, and in a BBC radio interview with the font's creator, who appears to take a bemused view of all this.

Hatred of Comic Sans also brought Combs and her husband together. She calls their campaign "our little love child," though the couple also has a 4-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter. In 1999, when Combs met her husband and confessed her aversion to Comic Sans, he immediately agreed

with her sentiments.

"Let's just ban Comic Sans," he told her. "I looked in his eyes and said, 'I would like to marry you.'"

Combs's "stickering" is larger than Ban Comic Sans, however. Through a public-school program and a home-school co-op, she teaches children how to sticker — which is considered a kind of street art — without being vandals.

"It's about purpose, placement, and permission," she explains.

And she and her husband have produced eight issues of a magazine, *Peel*, that celebrated sticker and stencil street art.

To Combs, the typeface-related ideas never stop coming. Next up?

"There is a movie about Helvetica," she says. "I'd like to have a movie about Ban Comic Sans."

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