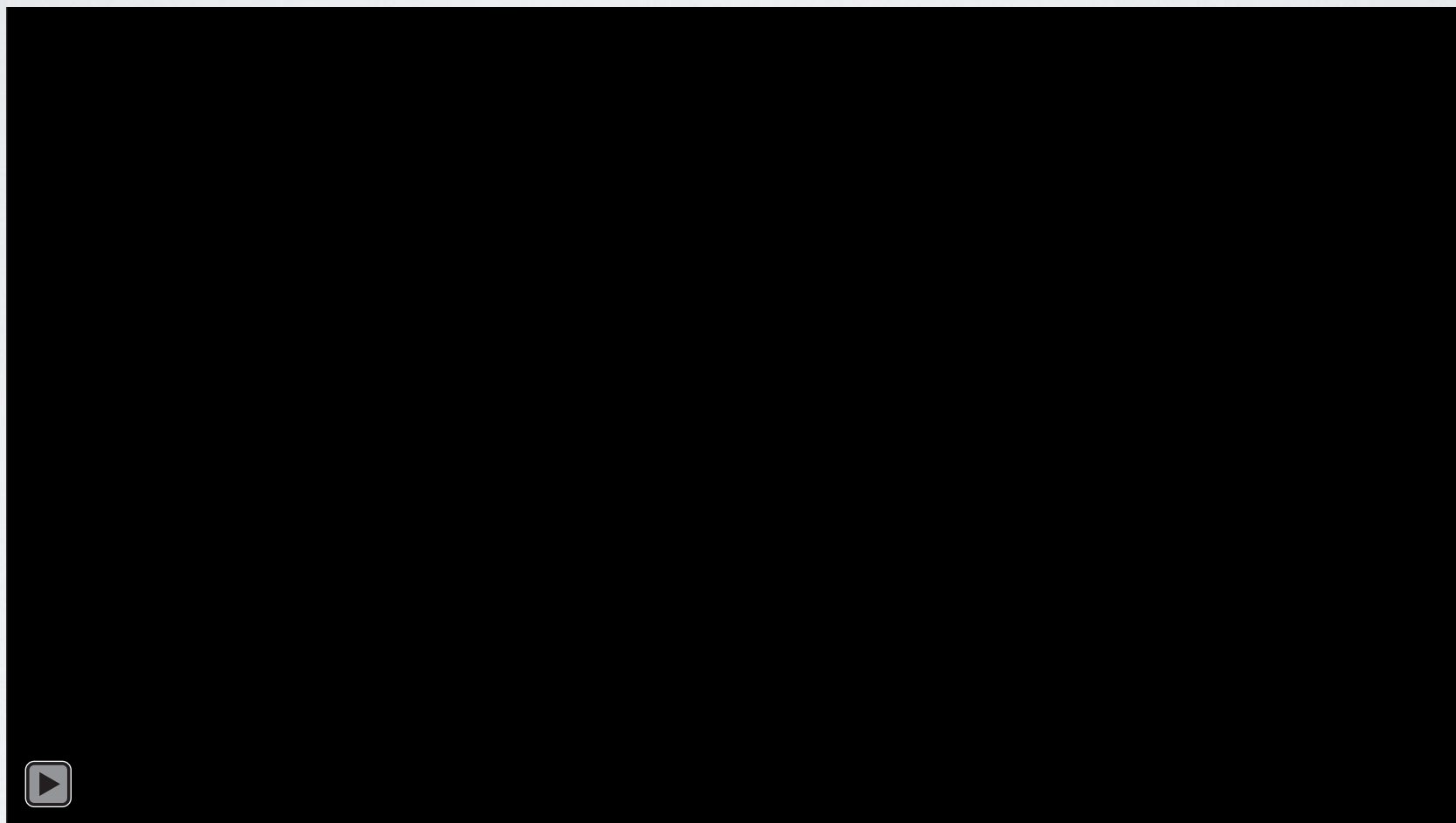# TYPOGRAPHIC TEST FORM:

INVESTIGATING THE PERFORMANCE OF FREE FONTS
BY: NATALIA LUMBY

"LETTERS ARE THINGS, NOT PICTURES OF THINGS – THEY ARE MEANT TO BE READ AND NOT JUST LOOKED AT" (CARTER, 1982).

BACKGROUND

- "Don't use free fonts!!"
- The internet and design
- Digitization of typography
- Changes in copyright and general approach
- Font performance from a technical perspective

METHODS

- Content analysis to establish whether free fonts are meeting market demands
- Custom test form meant to aid in font selection
  - Test form was output as a soft and hard proof for inspection
    - Adobe Acrobat for soft proof
    - Epson 7900 via Esko Automation Engine 14.0 for hard proof
    - Esko "compare" ticket was utilized

METHODS

| Measure	Details
Completeness of glyphs	The typeface includes,: uppercase characters, lowercase characters, numbers, accents, symbols, ligatures
Size performance	The typeface is legible at both small and large sizes
Spacing	The typeface is legible when leading is unadjusted (set to auto) The word spacing promotes identifying separate words comfortably Words with all capitals as well as mixed letters are well kerned metrically
Variety	The typeface includes a variety of weight and style alternates
Structure	The number of anchor points used to create the letterform is limited to those necessary (evaluated digitally)

RESULTS - TRENDS

Paid

Free

RESULTS - GLYPHS & STYLES

- You get what you "pay" for
- Less flexibility
  - Especially in glyphs and styles
- Free is improving

Number of style alternates

Free ▮   Paid ▮

280

67

Number of glyphs
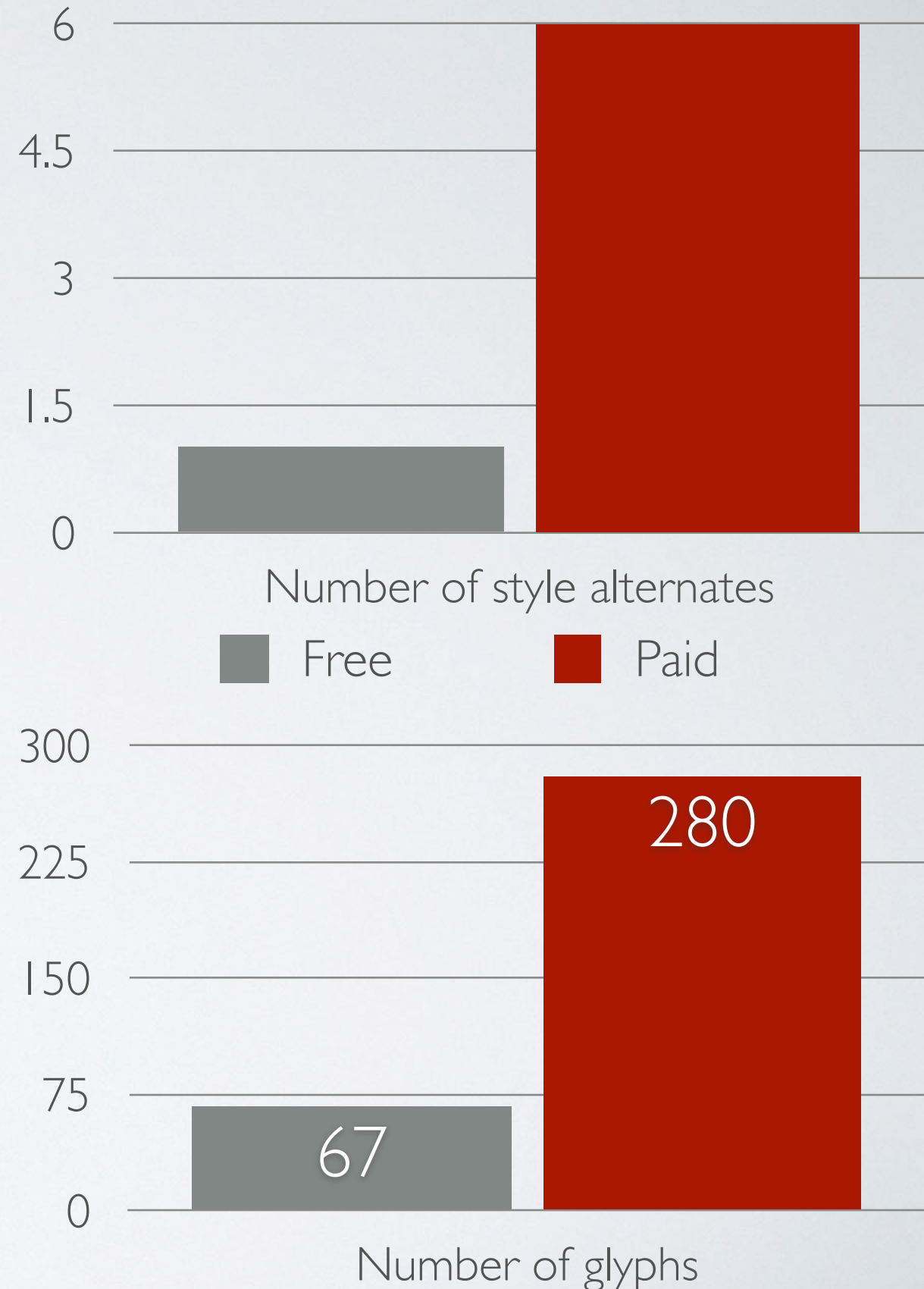
RESULTS - KERNING AND LEADING

- Emphasis on Optical kerning
- Word spacing and leading issues primarily seen among display typefaces
  - Body typefaces performed well in default word spacing and leading
  - Not necessarily an indicator of poor quality since display type should not be used to set paragraphs

KERNING (METRIC)

HOOOHHHHOHHOOO

KERNING (OPTICAL)

HOOOHHHHOHHOOO

LEADING, WORD SPACING (10 PT)

Soluptatent quidest parumquia nam que et quo dolor aute nobitibusam is quo conse nimaximus, quae. El iduci odit es autas que quo te niscus as perernatur

Ut quiaestem aut aboritatem a voluta num faci voluptati qlicil mil landitis esequasse nusania simped ut volorem facero evendaerchit aut quo illupta ssectorestis exerum volum dit aut volorectur serum verum que velendel maionse latesen ihillore de pori quate non repe latem racribus, quo iumque elessitia quis am fugiam acesciam, quae xusandam evenis

RESULTS - STRUCTURE

- Free font outlines used many more anchors
  - Means that they did not perform well at extreme sizes
  - Letters began to fill in with small sizes
  - Sloppiness of vectors were evident in large sizes

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

- Free is bad?
- Designers are creators
- Coming to commercial work near you!
  - Template driven novice world
- What about digital?
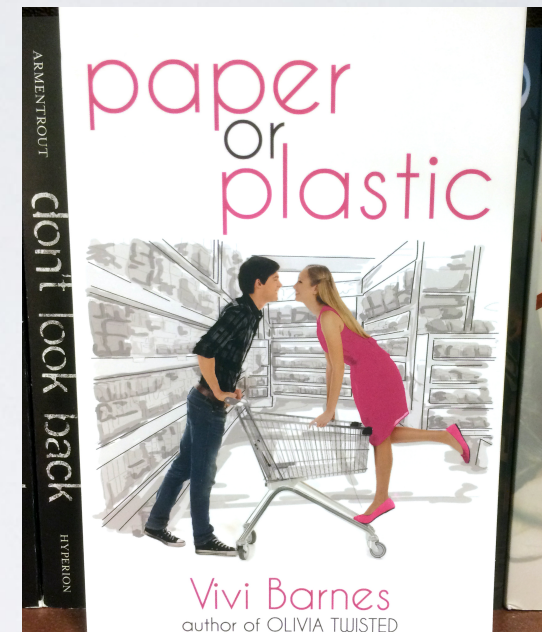
Caviar Dreams on a book cover, and Bebas in a corporate brochure template (designed by TypoEdition)

CONCLUSIONS

- Brands require flexibility which is limited for free typefaces
- The presence and availability of free fonts cannot be ignored
  - Free fonts tested in this study have cumulatively been downloaded over **10 million times**
  - When considering the price of each comparator typeface in this study averages $8, that is a cost savings of **$8 million**
- Short term free fonts will be predominantly used for titling and display works
- As the quality of free fonts continues to improve, it is likely we will see a greater mix of free and paid typefaces used together in design work

QUESTIONS?

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