A Deviation From Helvetica

Meta typeface, also-know as FF Meta, is a typeface designed by Erik Spiekermann. Spiekermann began working on the typeface in 1985 when Deutsche Bundespost (the German Post Office) commissioned a new typeface for its corporate identity. According to Spiekermann himself, Helvetica was the standard typeface used for everything in corporate design in Germany at the time. So much so that deviating from the Helvetica typeface would have caused culture shock. After the typeface was finished, the company did not utilize the Meta typeface for its corporate branding, instead choosing type from the Helvetica family. However, FF Meta was later released in 1991 by Spiekermann himself when he left his previous design studio and went on to create his own. In 1986, Spiekermann wrote for the magazine Baseline, about the process of creating Meta and some of the considerations taken into account to create it. Since the creation of the Meta typeface was meant to deviate from the over used Helvetica, Spiekermann analyzed six font families and deviced the essential characteristics for Meta. To begin with, Meta was designed as a humanist sans-serif. This means that it had simple strokes that were more geometrical than decorative. However, it aimed at being a less bland typeface. Considering the use that was to be given to the new typeface, it required legibility in a variety of sizes. Another consideration was that it had to be legible in low quality stock paper. For this reason its lines are thick enough to be printed on rough paper but also light enough to give it a distinguishable, even appearance, making it a narrow, but uncondensed typeface. Its x-height is relatively high, and it has one important feature, relatively open apertures that allow for similar letter-forms to be distinguishable from one another and improve their legibility.