

# **Make**

## **Them See**



## **What You Want Them To**

# **See**



Whiteline Design Explains How to Purchase an Effective Sign

# Tips for Purchasing an Effective Sign

## The Four Major Components of an Effective Sign

There are four major components found in every effective sign. They are: message, materials, contrast, and design. When a sign combines the best of these four components, it will be effective and successful.

## Effective Signs Just Give the Facts – Get the Message?

Keep your message simple and to the point...do your customers really need to know the “fine print”? Of course they do...however; an outdoor sign is not the place for it.

Well-established businesses typically only need their business name or logo on an outdoor sign (to let the customer know he/she has arrived at your place of business). Newly-established businesses need to consider use of their outdoor sign for advertising as well as for announcing to your customer they have arrived.



Established Business



New Business

A billboard or advertisement sign must convey more information than a location sign. They are used to inform potential customers what products or services your business offers, and how to contact you (and perhaps supplemental information, such as a special “sale” promotion). However, since billboards are installed along highways, you must be extra cautious about being too wordy (it’s hard to read many words on a billboard when traveling at 65 mph!)

billboard for  
established or  
non-established  
business



Often, “immediate” information type signs are required, such as: Enter, Exit, Private, and Welcome. Even these signs must be focused, and get the point across without blending into the background.

## Materials Make the Sign

The use of your sign will determine which materials are appropriate. For short-term use, you can consider using the more inexpensive materials such as lightweight banners, corrugated plastic, or pressboard with calendared vinyl. Calendared vinyl is processed using a cost-effective and quick production technique to make the vinyl affordable. There are many grades of calendared vinyl, with some warranted for outdoor use as long as 7 years. However, even with the higher grades of calendared vinyl, all calendared vinyl will eventually crack, peel, shrink, or fade. But because they are affordable and will typically stand up to at least 6 months of outdoor use without problems, calendared vinyl is a popular choice.

Cast vinyl is produced using a method which gives the vinyl a long life-span and makes it resistant to shrinking, fading, cracking or peeling. As the durability is higher than calendared vinyl, so is the price. Justify the price by the life you will get out of the sign (often more than 10 years). Cast vinyl can be applied to many long-term types of sign substrates – aluminum, varnished wood, pressed plastic, glass, and more.

## Contrast Screams “Look At Me!”

The use of color in effective signs requires careful consideration. Too much color may detract from the message, while not enough color may render the sign useless. Contrast is used typically for legibility; however, it can create excitement and convey emotion or feeling to a sign. It can draw attention to special pieces of information.



Less contrast



High contrast

## Designs That Demand Attention

The most important factor in an effective sign is design. Your design must make a powerful statement. It must grab the customer's eye and scream "look at me!" The message will get lost in a cluttered design. Too much information will turn away a prospective reader. With an effective design, the sign can be read and understood in a quick glance.

- You can't beat BIG. To be noticed you need to be noticeable!
- ***Create anticipation...effective signs need to change routinely. Make frequent changes to your sign or banner. New messages, graphics or colors help your sign stand out from familiar surroundings and draw renewed interest from viewers. Displaying the same sign for an extended period is less effective.***
- The point is not to use a sign but instead to reach out to your community in way they will appreciate, understand and enjoy.
- Adding a border to focus attention on your sign helps the viewer read it 26% faster. That's a big advantage in a fast-paced marketplace.
- By presenting special information in a second color, you increase the reader's retention by 78%. So whatever is most important on your sign, whether it's a phone number or a key word, try using an accent color to draw better response.
- A highly noticed sign sends your message to more people per dollar invested than any other advertising medium. (For example, if you display a \$200 sign for one year at a location where just 1,000 cars pass by every day, you've reached over 350,000 people! That's just one half of one cent for every potential customer who sees your sign.

## How Big Is Too Big?

Letter size will affect sign legibility. Fascia signs placed above storefronts should contain letters at least six to ten inches in height. As a sign should be in proportion with a building, so should the lettering be in proportion to the size of the sign. A general rule of thumb is that no more than 60 percent of the entire sign area should be used for lettering.

Sign type, size and location are usually regulated by Municipal Zoning and Development By-laws. As development permits are normally required prior to installation, the municipal zoning officer should be consulted before design and construction to ensure compliance with the by-laws and to avoid costly changes. After consulting with your zoning officer, refer to the chart on the following page for legibility sizing.

Reading Distance	Letter Height
100 ft.	1-3/4" to 2" or above
200 ft.	3-1/2" and above
400 ft.	7" and above
600 ft.	10-1/2" and above
800 ft.	14" and above
1000 ft.	17" and above
1300 ft.	22" and above

### Should You Fix Your 'Broken' Sign?

Review your outdoor signage. Have others analyze it for you. Ask yourself if:

- Your sign blends into the scenery, instead of coordinating with it.
- Your sign is dull, faded, illegible, too wordy, or doesn't match the building architecture or color.
- You have moved from being a new business to an established one.
- Your sign has remained the same for over 3 years.

If any of the above statements are true about your signage, it's time for a change. Consider that a quality sign system, integrated with the building design and an interesting product or service, is effective in drawing and keeping customers. ***A sign that looks shabby or dull leads to apathy in new customers. Such a sign is a daily declaration of "Nothing worth stopping here for!"***

### Final Tips...

- Keep it visible and legible. Remember that people are looking through windshields, walking, moving in a vehicle in traffic, in daylight and night. They have to be able to see and read your sign easily.
- Save the details for the sale. Don't attempt to sell them with information on the sign -- save that information until they are in your business.
- Keep it simple. The proper design of your sign is critical to its effectiveness. Crowding the sign with too many words or lines of text makes it impossible to read from a distance.

- Use as few words as possible so your signage is legible. Fewer words are better; and three to five words are optimal for quick readability.
- Grab attention. There should be something about the sign that will reach out and command attention.
- Ideally, the first read should be a large pictorial graphic or your company logo, but it can also be large dominating text.
- Your sign is your first impression with the public (and first impressions are lasting impressions). Your sign must project the image you want the public to have of you.
- People will judge the inside of your business by how it looks on the outside.
- Appeal to impulse buyers. Many owners mistakenly think of a sign as merely a device that identifies the business. What they fail to realize is that 55 percent of all retail sales are a result of impulse buys.
- People see, shop and buy. If a sign is ineffective, it can actually cost the business owner more in lost sales than the entire cost of a good sign.
- Aesthetics and suitability. Your sign must be attractive and appropriate for your type of business. Thoroughly think about what type of image you want to project – do you want the public to see your business as fun, whimsical, serious, entertaining, professional, etc.
- Keep it near the viewer. Put the sign as close to the street as allowable.
- Make sure your sign is conspicuous. Your message competes in a complex environment. A passerby must be able to differentiate your sign from its surrounding environment.
- Avoid obstructions. Make certain the sign can be viewed without obstruction from any source.
- Drive past your business from all directions to help determine the most visible location for your sign.
- Use pictures or graphics. It should have an attractive pictorial graphic or company logo that clearly grabs a viewer's attention first.
- Make it memorable. It should make your products or services, and your location, easy to remember.
- Make it enticing. Your sign should make a potential customer want to stop and see what's inside the business.
- Consider colors carefully.
- Make sure colors are contrasting. Yellow on white is not readable, whereas black on white is very readable.
- If you have several colors in a graphic, stay away from multi-colored lines of text or words (they will compete with the colors in your graphic). Black text is better.

- Keep a consistent visual image. Ideally, the design and the colors of your building should reinforce the design and colors of your sign (or vice versa). Color is probably the easiest and most cost-effective device for this coordination of design for business identification.
- Avoid clutter. "White-space" is the surface area of a sign's face that is left uncovered by either text or graphics. The proper amount of white space is just as important for quick readability as are graphics, text and colors.
- 30% to 40% of the sign's face area should be left as white space for optimal readability.
- Place it to be seen. An attractive and well-designed sign will only be effective if it is placed in a location that optimizes its visibility to passers-by. Your goal should be to make the sign unavoidable to the passing viewer.

### **In summary...**

Your sign will do many things for your business, from creating the initial impression to providing the message to new and potential customers about your products and services. It is an investment that can provide so much more than identification. Please feel free to call us at 937-417-0769. We'll be happy to design an attractive and attention-getting sign for you.



### **Contact us:**

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