



OAKHURST MARKETING

AMAZING SIGNS



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The Role of Signage

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Attracting New Customers

Commercial advertising can briefly be described as an organized and measurable communication system designed to promote a product or a service. On-premise signage is but one method among many available to a business. Different types of small businesses require different marketing and advertising strategies. Given the expense, most small businesses cannot afford the major media advertising campaigns typically waged by large corporations.

However, your on-premise sign is an economical way to display and reinforce your message. You pay for your sign once, and it works for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. On-premise signage has been proven to attract customers, and has also been shown to have significant economic impact.

Signs Effectively Reach New Customers

Since 1997, the sign company Signtronix has sponsored a survey initiated by several independent small businesses in its community. Each business had a sign that had been installed in the previous 30 to 45 days. They then asked a random sampling of first-time customers a series of questions, including "How did you learn about us?" Among other things, the survey revealed that nearly half of these customers learned about the business because of its sign.

Economic Impact

Another study of on-premise signs was conducted in 1995 by the University of San Diego on behalf of the California Electric Sign Association and the International Sign Association. Part of the study analyzed the effect of certain variables, including signage, on southern California locations of a major fast-food chain. They found that, on average, the addition of even one on-premise sign resulted in an increase in annual sales of 4.75%. (Again, the next chapter will feature more on the cost-effectiveness and economic impact of on-premise signage.)

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Today's small businesses have many ways to reach potential consumers with their message: network television, cable television, satellite television, the Internet, direct mail, radio, sports and event sponsorships, outdoor advertising, newspaper and magazine advertising, licensed merchandise, telemarketing - the list goes on and on. However, it is signage that can most effectively and affordably help a business tie its other forms of advertising together, and communicate to its target audience (those actually moving through its trade area).



In fact, without a sign to identify a business location, the money spent on other media is largely wasted.

Branding Your Business

On-premise signs are a form of commercial advertising. Sometimes, it is the only indication of a business' location. Among retail businesses, it is the most ubiquitous of all advertising options. When designed effectively, a sign can combine with other media to help "brand" your business in the mind of a consumer. If your company has a trademark or a logo, it should appear alongside your business' name. Text and images on the sign should be repeated throughout your marketing mix, either when advertising through another medium (television, radio, the Yellow Pages, and so on) or within your organization (stationery, catalogs, business cards, annual reports, uniforms, vehicles, etc.). The more consistently your message is displayed, the greater the likelihood that potential consumers will remember who you are, and what you're selling.

Signage professionals have identified three main guidelines:

1. It must be of sufficient size and height, and not be hidden or obscured by intervening traffic or other visual objects in the consumer's line of vision (power lines, streetlights, etc.).
2. It must display content (text and/or images) that is legible.
3. It must stand out from its background.

In other words, a sign should possess optimum visibility , readability , and conspicuity .

If your business is part of a national franchise or chain, then you have the distinct advantage of benefiting from major media advertising. It's one of the reasons why many business owners buy into franchises with proven track records. Franchisors such as Burger King or McIneke Car Care Centers are extremely conscious of the role played by signage at their individual locations. These companies emphasize the repetition of an identical image at various places in the store, and also combine such imagery with national television media campaigns. This powerful psychological tool is applied to help increase a consumer's recall (how well a message is remembered within a short period of time) and recognition (how quickly a message is correctly identified) of their brands.

However, even if your business isn't part of a national franchise or chain, the right sign can still brand your company within your local economy. If your company image is accurately conveyed via text and/or graphics in your signage, and is reinforced throughout your organization, your business can develop "top-of-the-mind" awareness of your product or service in all who routinely pass by your location. If a consumer in your area was asked which business comes to mind in your industry,

how likely would that person think of your company?

Creating Impulse Sales

Today's consumer tends to purchase goods and services both by habit and by impulse. However, studies have shown that the majority of sales come from impulse buying. For instance, recent research from the University of California at Berkeley (which analyzed 30,000 purchases of 4,200 customers in 14 cities) found that 68% of purchases were unplanned during major shopping trips and 54% on smaller shopping trips.

To take advantage of such a consumer, your business will need an effective sign to attract their attention. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the merits of using signs in combination with other marketing efforts to help "brand" your business in the minds of consumers. This is a long-term strategy, meant ultimately to create habitual visitors to your business. Signs, though, can also be helpful in attracting impulse buyers - those consumers who may not have originally intended to visit your store.

The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) does a great deal of analysis on traffic habits. One of their studies attempts to estimate how selected business types (or what the ITE calls "business land uses") are affected by motorists' impulse stops (or, to use ITE terminology again, "pass-by trips").

Impulse Stop Percentages	
Business Land Use	Impulse-Stop %
Shopping Center	
- Larger than 400,000 sq. ft.	20%
- 100,000 - 400,000 sq. ft.	25%
- Smaller than 100,000 sq. ft.	35%
Convenience Market	40%
Discount Club/Warehouse Store	20%
Fast Food Restaurant	40%
Sit Down Restaurant	15%
Service Station	45%
Supermarket	20%
From: Claus, J. and Claus, S., 2001	

As the accompanying table demonstrates, the percentage of impulse stops varies by business type. While the table doesn't show every possible business type, it is clear that impulse trade is very important to many businesses. And because the stops are not planned, it is unlikely that drivers would stop without an effective sign to guide them.

The goal of any business is to attract the attention of potential customers, and its sign plays a role in convincing that potential customer to stop. Signage is often the only visible clue that a business exists. Sign industry professionals encourage businesses to adopt signage design so that it is the prominent visual feature of the building. They even have a word for it: signcentric.

Signcentric design has proven to be among the most effective forms of business signage. For example, Best Buy - the giant retailer of consumer appliances and electronics - understands this concept very well. The company deliberately uses on-premise signage as the prominent visual feature on the face of each of their building locations. The company recently ran a survey, and they discovered that about 17% of its customers were people who did not intend to stop there, but did. Certainly the signcentric design played a role in luring these unexpected customers into the store.

If yours is a business that is dependent on impulse sales (including, but not limited to, liquor stores, gas stations, discount motels, convenience stores, etc.), then that factor should certainly influence how you design your signage.

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