

Retail Signage... Tips for Increasing Sales & Service

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Signage is one sales promotion effort that is guaranteed to get results. University and wholesale group reports show that better signs increase sales and profits. Surprisingly, many retailers don't devote enough time and attention to this marketing component. Since this is one of my specialty areas, I'd like to offer advice on how to assess your signage and see if it's time for a makeover. With just a few basic economical steps, you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much you can increase your sales.

Like the song says: *signs, signs, everywhere are signs...* So start paying attention to them—not only when you're out shopping or driving around, but also make it a point to visit other retail venues in your industry as well. As you look, think to yourself, *how does this sign get my attention and invite me to buy or take some other call to action?*

Entering the store: Next time you enter your store, "be the customer." Come in through the front door, rather than the back, and see the store through a customer's eyes. Before you even enter, think about what you see through the window. This is your customer's first impression of your store. One of my biggest "pet peeves" is a cluttered look. The signage on your window or door shouldn't look like a liquor or convenience store. If you try to share too much information, the message gets garbled.

The front door: I feel very strongly that from at least the middle of the door upwards, the glass should be clear so customers can see through it. When you're standing there, ask yourself, *do I see something warm and inviting inside my store?* You need to position something appealing to catch the customer's eye and make her want to go inside—e.g., a sign, featured table or end-cap in your produce department with an appealing message that's visible from the front door.

Inside the store: Once you are inside the store (thinking like a customer), what messages are being conveyed? How is the store being branded? How is information being shared? What is the customer being told? You have an incredible opportunity to increase sales with customers that are already in your store by using in-store signage effectively. Flyers, hot sheets and signs encourage additional impulse purchases. It costs a whole lot more to bring in new customers with advertising than it does to increase sales with current customers!

The following are the major categories of signs:

1. Customer Service or Directional
2. Branding
3. Educational
4. Sale
5. New Items
6. Monthly Themes

1. Customer service or directional signs: These can be gondola signs, inline shelving signs or on-shelving signs; and they're used as directionals. You can have the best customer service going, but what happens when you have 4 employees with customers and a fifth customer walks in? You always want to acknowledge a customer when they walk in the door. A directional sign can serve as a key part of your customer service by promptly steering the customer to a category or aisle until an employee can reach them.

Easy to read aisle markers are a great start, but you need more. You can have an aisle marker that says "VITAMINS," but think of how the customer feels once she gets to your vitamin aisle. It looks a mile long to the customer! You want her to easily find what she wants.

2. Signs for branding: Be consistent in your message about who you are, and offer ways to stay connected with the customer. Almost like a subliminal message, your logo, tag lines and web site address should be consistent on all of your signs.
3. Educational Signs: Signs provide an opportunity to share information: announce an upcoming event in your store, discuss a hot issue in the news, or entice customers to frequent your web site. You might want to print a recipe from your web site onto a sign that says, "Get this recipe and more on our web site." You can do the same thing with the news item (invite them back for more). According to Danny Wells, "79% of customers that shop at natural food stores turn to the Internet for health and wellness information." Why not steer them to your web site?
4. Sale Sign: At a surprisingly low price, you can increase your sales significantly with effective signs. Give the customer a reason to pick up the product. Find a sizzle statement to attract the customer to the sale item—e.g., fresh organic herbs, wheat free, grown locally, fresh pressed, etc. Remember, it's not always about price. Use your signs to guide customers to the sale items: "See the values in Aisle 5." Give strong buying commands on signs, flyers and coupons: "Look at These Features," "See the Values" or "Don't Miss This Opportunity!"
5. New Items: Use signs to create excitement and educate the customer about new items. You can bring the greatest new item into the store, but if you don't have good signage or give out some information, it's the best kept secret! You've spent the money to bring the product into your store, so create a little excitement! You might want to display new items on end-caps and see how they do before you put them into the inline shelving.
6. Monthly themes: Develop a themed calendar for the year, then create an end-cap display with 12 different signs that you can easily rotate each month. It's reusable, saves you money and can bring a fresh look to your store throughout the year.

Sign Tips: As you really look at your signs, think about how you're engaging the customer. Ask yourself: *Are our signs clear and consistent?*

A professional sign is vital. There's nothing worse than a hand-written, crumpled, faded sign hanging lopsided. It ruins your professional image. Use the KISS method (Keep It Simple Sweetie). Be consistent with the feature lines, price size, color and fonts so the customer's eyes can easily scan the sign. Allow for plenty of white space, keep the font simple, be sure the text is balanced & proportional, and consider using bullets. Highlight words in bold or by using a different color. Avoid using all capital letters, which makes it difficult to read. You want customers to be able to glance at your sign and understand: here's the cereal I'm looking for, it's \$1.99 and it's organic.

Listing prices: There's a lot of controversy about how to list the price and the savings. Make it simple to understand—no one wants to do the math! If a sign says "10% off," a customer has to think, what does that mean exactly? Focus on listing the sale price so that it's easy to read. You can also list the regular price and the total savings using a percentage or a dollar amount. Either one is fine. Customers want to know that the item costs \$1.99...period.

Lettering: When you have a lot of information on the sign, design it to read from left to right by having the text start on the left side rather than in the center—e.g., a 3-line description is harder to read if it's justified to the center. Also, be as specific as possible—e.g., instead of saying "Fish Oil," say "Fresh Alaskan Fish Oil." Limit the words, but make it sizzle!

And remember to be proactive: track merchandise that hasn't been selling; put an exciting sign on it and it will sell!

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