Chapter One

How to Determine Your Business Signage Needs

How Do You Use Signs?

Signs can be used to unify a business brand, advertise a product or service, promote a call to action, or identify a location. Taking advantage of various types of signage combined at the same location can accomplish all of the above.

Whether your business is new or existing, retail, service, or warehouse—you need a signage business plan. Too often signs are erected helter-skelter as businesses rebrand, expand, remodel, or relocate. Without a plan, a new sign may be placed that doesn’t complement existing signage. Brand de-unification can be avoided by developing a signage plan.

A Signage Checklist

What signage is required by regulation, where would signs be useful, and where can signs best be placed to identify and promote your organization?

Mandatory

- Americans with Disabilities
- Exit and Emergency
- Fire and Safety
- Local ordinances
• US Department of Labor

Useful

• Wayfinder and directional
• Message centers
• Information, such as, restrooms
• Identification, for example, office and warehouse areas
• Directories and maps

Promotional

• Channel letters
• Logos
• Lit and non-illuminated identification
• Interior, such as lobby and entryway signage

Exterior Signage

• Monument and pylon signs
• Channel letters
• Storefront awnings
• Directional or wayfinder signs
• Pole
• Free standing portable
• Projecting
• Gable
• Canopy

Interior Signage

• Lobby sign
• Informational signage
• ADA signs
• Floor graphics
• Banners
• Window
• Directional
• Informational

Creating a Signage Plan
**Budget** – Once the number and type of signs has been determined the next step is to create a budget. Local sign providers can share sign options and costs to fit your budget and needs. Here’s an example. [Retail Signage on a Budget](#).

**Review** – Audit the signage checklist on a quarterly basis. Are signage ordinances being met? Are there new signage opportunities such as added locations or remodeling?

**Inspect** – At a minimum, signs should be inspected for condition, cleanliness, and conformation on a yearly basis.

**Plan for it**

Signage should be part of any and every business plan; planning for signs is good business. Signs inform the public, advertise products and services, and say something about the culture of the organization they represent. Doesn’t that sound like something that should be planned?

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**Signage Planning Shouldn’t Be an Afterthought**

Let’s be honest here. Many organizations put little or no thought into signage planning. Don’t get me wrong; we work with many companies that understand the importance of signage and act accordingly. At the same time, some businesses look at signs as a nuisance they must deal with. The truth is, signage can make or break a business.

**34, 29, and 49 Percent**

People are influenced positively and negatively by signage. Folks depend on signage for information. They look to signage for direction and the judge businesses by their signage. If you don’t believe it read this excerpt from a study completed by the University of Cincinnati.
“Shoppers associate sign quality with store and product quality (34%); and shoppers make store choices based on the information communicated by store signs (29%). Potential customers often lack significant pieces of information. Even when businesses attempt to convey this information through their on-premise signage, characteristics of those signs and the surrounding environment, as well as other impediments, often inhibit the communication of this information. It was found that nearly half (49.7%) of American consumers have driven by a desired business without finding it because of insufficient signage. There are significant anecdotal examples where the loss of good signage.” — The Economic Value of On-premise Signage.

Put Forethought into Signage not Afterthought

The best signage takes planning. It doesn’t just happen. If you don’t want your business to be on the wrong side of the 34, 29, and 49 percent, then you have to invest time in understanding your signage needs.

Do You Fire then Aim or Aim then Fire?

Planning ahead, making signage part of your marketing strategy, and building signage into your advertising campaign will put you ahead of the pack; being thoughtful about signage before, rather than after, leads to impactful signage.

6 Steps to a New Sign

Creating, building, and installing a new sign can be a daunting task, and that’s only part of the job. Sign project management can be complicated and challenging. It’s important to have the support of an experienced sign provider to help you avoid the many pitfalls, costly mistakes, and time-eating overruns.

Site Survey

A site survey should include measurements, material checklist, client expectations, and a complete examination of the surface the sign will attach to.

What to ask – How experienced is the surveyor? What does the survey include? Is it completed onsite? If it’s not possible to visit the site, how is the site surveyed?

Permits

Jurisdictions vary greatly in their permit requirements. It’s important to understand the regulations before the design process. Designs are often presented and paid for, only to learn they’re not within code.
What to ask – Does the provider research permits, or is it the responsibility of the customer? Will the provider guarantee the design meets code?

Design

The design should fit the needs of both the customer and code requirements. Signage is not a one-size fits all project – it should be a custom designed piece of art that does what the client needs it to do.

What to ask – Is there a design department? How experienced is the department? Do they design to the customer’s needs within local regulations? How much does the design work cost?

Manufacturing

Signs are usually custom made. The most effective signs are built from the ground up – not prefabricated with a logo slapped on it.

What to ask – How is the sign built? What materials will be used? Where is it manufactured? What options are available?

Installation

Experience and equipment is the key. A poorly installed sign can damage a building or the surface it’s attached to. Worse yet it can be a safety hazard when improperly installed.

What to ask – Does the provider employ crews, or do they use sub-contractors? How experienced are the crews? Do they have the equipment needed to properly install the signs? Are there similar projects they’ve completed you can preview – or examples of their work?

Communication

This is important with any project. If you’ve ever NOT been notified or updated in a timely manner, in any business transaction, you know how frustrating this can be.

What to ask – Is there a point person and a system for change orders, delays, updates, and customer questions?

Service

Service after the sale can mean the difference between a long-term positive relationship, or regretting the money spent.
**What to ask** – What services are parts of the package and what are additional costs? How soon can service be completed? What if a light burns out? If damage occurs, how is insurance coverage handled?

Any experienced sign company can walk a customer through this often puzzling process of sign project management. As in any business, beware of fly-by-nights, inexperienced short-term providers, and franchises that may look to be accomplished in the industry, but may have limited experience and resources at the local level.

Another key ingredient to getting the sign you need and want is understanding the sign layout.

**How to Proof Your New Sign Layout**

The other day, I asked Lee Faulkner from TKO Signs for the best piece of advice he could give to someone ordering a new sign. Lee said the best advice he could give was for customers to take their time reviewing the sign layout. Too often, customers take a quick or incomplete look at the sign layout and then approve it. If there’s a mistake, and the sign provider doesn’t catch it—that’s a problem. A good sign provider may find errors, but if it has to do with color, style, or content, the customer is the best person to review the information.

7 Check Points

- **Colors** – Do the colors match your branded company colors? Are the background, foreground, and fonts the right colors?
- **Copy** – Is the content correct and the grammar proper? A misplaced apostrophe or a misspelled word can ruin a sign.
- **Materials** – Are the materials what you expected? For example, did you think the monument base was to be stone, but the layout shows it to be wood construction?
- **Font** – Does the font fit the style guide of your organization and is it easy to read. Is it the best size?
- **Hierarchy** – Are you giving top billing to your most important message?
- **Size** – Whenever I mention sign or display size I think of the Stonehenge set piece in *Meet Spinal Tap*. Check the size.
- **Installation** – Will it be installed where, when, and how you expect it to be installed?

**How to Get the Sign You Want**

When a sign provider sends a layout to a customer for approval, the sign maker is asking, “This is the sign we’re going to make, is everything in order?” When a customer doesn’t take the time to thoroughly check and double check the layout, mistakes can happen. Before telling a sign vendor that it looks fine, take the time to check the seven bullet points listed above, and then ask a few teammates to do the same. The C-staff, marketing team, and sales department might all offer valuable insight.
There could be a seventh bullet point on this list, signage continuity. Let’s discuss that next.

**How Signage Continuity Can Help or Hurt Your Business**

Not long ago I was in a shop that specialized working with small businesses. As I toured the building something seemed...off. There was something missing. It didn’t feel professional. It didn’t inspire confidence. And then it hit me their signage was all over the map. The channel letters on the outside of the building were a different color and font than the interior lobby sign. Wayfinding and directional signage seemed to be several designs from different eras, and their logo had nothing to do with any of the signs. It was confusing and disruptive.

Most professional businesses, large and small, share their brand across all types of signage, from monument signs to vehicle graphics, to identification banners hanging above equipment in our shop. Here’s how we to accomplish this.

**How to Create Signage Continuity**

**Colors** – The same color palette should be used on all signage. It doesn’t have to be exactly the same PMS color, but it does have to be recognizable as your brand.

**Fonts** – It may not always be possible to use the same font on every type of signage, but the fonts should be complimentary to each other.

**Logo** – The logo should be designed with multiple applications in mind. What works on a business card may not work on a 25 foot pole sign.

**Materials** – Different signs use different materials. However, similar signs should look alike. For example, I was driving through a parking lot of a manufacturer and saw three different types of monument signs that looked nothing alike.

**Shapes** – Although there will always be some difference in shapes due to different types of signage, it doesn’t mean the shape of a sign shouldn’t be considered. For example, if all of your exterior signage is rectangular, a circular lobby sign may look out of place.

**Signage Continuity Shows Professionalism**

When a business makes the effort for continuity in signage, it says something about the organization. It says the company pays attention to detail, takes pride in their work, and they know what they’re doing. A potential customer may not consciously think this, but when it’s missing, when signage is a hodgepodge it sends a message, and not the one any business wants to send.

Now you’re ready to start the process. Let’s begin with choosing a provider.
Chapter Two
Where to Begin
In business, as in life, bad choices haunt us all, and the fear of making the wrong decision can paralyze us into no decision. Regardless of what we do — how much we research, analyze, and prepare — some mistakes will be made. However, by taking precautions when choosing a service provider, in this case a sign shop, disappointments can be reduced.

**How to Choose a Sign Shop**

Start by asking how long have they been in business. Considering [50% of new businesses fail](https://www.sba.gov/content/50-new-businesses-fail) (SBA) within five years, a company who is gone doesn’t offer much in the way of warranty, follow up, or service, does it? Tenure usually translates to experience as well. Although experience doesn’t guarantee superior workmanship, it does speak for credibility. New businesses are often plagued by low credit lines, lack of inventory, and sporadic sales. If a sign shop has been around 10 or 20 years, what are they doing right? Why have they survived? Does the shop have long standing loyal followers? Does their quality of work attract new clients? If so, they’re likely to do quality work for you, too.

How experienced are they? Not only the number of years they’ve been in business, but how long have they designed, fabricated, or installed signs? Do they sub any of this work? Are any of their departments new or inexperienced? Because a sign shop has been in business for 20 years, doesn’t mean they have 20 years of manufacturing or installation experience.

Do they have work you can see and customers you can talk to? I once had a provider tell me he had no work in the area. Really? Wait, you work in this neck of the woods, but have no work I can see? Enough said. I know a smart sign shop would never give the contact information from
a dissatisfied customer, but I’ve learned a lot by asking references more than by asking the typical, “Did they do good work?”

**A Few Questions for Sign Shop Customers:**

- Were they timely with communications and updates?
- Did you request any changes and, if so, how did they handle them?
- Were there any additional charges you were not initially made aware of?
- Was the installation crew professional? Were they considerate, polite, and did they maintain a safe and clean work area?
- Was the project completed on time?

By doing a little bit of research you can save yourself time, money, and headaches.

**5 Questions to Ask a Sign Company Before You Sign**

I’ve yet to meet a businessperson who hasn’t, at one time or another, made a mistake caused by not asking a provider or vendor the right questions. Whether it was a product or service most of us have made this mistake. I’ve ordered products that didn’t fully meet my needs, and services that didn’t serve my purposes. And through every face-palming incident I knew the problem was me. I didn’t ask enough of the right questions.

**What Are the Right Questions to Ask a Sign Provider?**

1. Does the sign company acquire the permits needed to meet the requirements of all government agencies within the jurisdiction? Are there any additional fees for permitting? Does the provider guarantee that all regulations will be met?
2. Who will install my sign? How much experience do they have installing my particular type of sign? Are they licensed and insured? What training have they had? Have long have they been installing signs?
3. Do you provide design? How experienced is your team with sign design (not design in general)? Will I be able to work directly with the design team? Will design options be offered? Are there additional fees for design? Will there be extra charges for design changes?
4. Are there written warranties or guarantees? Will you guarantee a time frame for installation if I supply all needed information? Do you offer maintenance and service? What happens if my sign is damaged by weather or an accident? Will you be able to match future projects to this sign?
5. How long have you been in business? Do you have references? Is there a portfolio of your work I may access?

**How to Avoid Headaches and Heartaches**
By asking these 5 categories of questions you’ll avoid dozens of headaches and heartaches. 
The questions alone will not guarantee this. They must be coupled with research and vetting. 
Unfortunately, there are those who may not answer your questions honestly or completely. 
Most of us have been there. So, take your time, get online and probe the provider, then ask 
these questions. It could save you a world of pain.

Miscommunication can cloud the process as well. When a sign shop consultant begins talking 
about cabinets you might be thinking you don’t need cabinets—you want a sign! This glossary 
will keep you all on the same page.

**How to Talk with a Sign Shop**

**Sign Design Glossary**

Communicating your wants and needs to specialized providers can be hindered by 
terminology. What may be standard and accepted industry language can be confusing, even 
alien, to the consumer. One way to avoid misunderstanding is to share terminology. We offer 
this brief glossary as a tool to help save time, confusion, and disappointment.

**Awning signs**: Signs mounted on a building or vinyl applied to existing awnings.

**Backlit letters**: Channel lettering, open-backed or translucent, lit from behind and light behind 
the surface to create a halo effect.

**Ballast**: The electric unit that powers fluorescent lamps.

**Banners**: Reusable signage made of a light, flexible material such as cloth or vinyl that is hung 
or strung from hooks or cord.
Bench sign: Lettering and imagery applied to seating surfaces, such as bus-stop benches.

Building mounted signs: Signs mounted on the wall or roof of a building.

Cabinet: The frame or box that encloses the elements of the sign.

Canopy: A sign that serves as a canopy; used over entrances and walkways.

Changeable copy panels: For example menu boards where images and letters may be updated.

Channel letters: 3-D letters, most often custom built, used inside and out, and may or may not be lit.

Contrast: The color and tone difference between various elements of a sign.

Copy: Words, such as tag lines, calls to actions, and product listings.

Decals: Printed vinyl film with adhesive backing.

Dimensional letters: Cut-out lettering or logo applied to create a 3D image on signs.

Directional signs: Instruction signage used to locate structures or events; often combined in a series of signs.

Directory signs: Signs listing names and locations most often used for building or industrial park tenants.

Double-faced signs: Printed on two sides so that the message is shared on both sides.

Exterior illuminated signs: Lit by a light source from outside of the sign.

Face: Front of a sign or printed area.

Fluorescent lamp: A glass tube that radiates light when phosphor on its inside surface is made to fluoresce by ultraviolet radiation from mercury vapor.

Font: A set of displayable text characters in a specific style and size.

Freestanding sign: A sign that stands on its own not attached to any building or structure.

Logo: A graphic representation or symbol of a company name, trademark, abbreviation, etc., often uniquely designed for ready recognition.
**Menu boards**: Changeable copy signs, typically used by retailers to list items and prices of good currently offered, or by food service and restaurateurs to describe daily meals offered.

**Message centers**: Variable message sign controlled by computer allowing message to be updated from a remote location.

**Monument signs**: A freestanding sign, usually less than 10 feet from the ground to the top of the sign.

**Neon signs**: Signs utilizing neon lighting.

**Off-premise signs**: A sign not displayed on an organization’s property such as a billboard.

**Open channel letters**: Dimensional letters with open fronts that, when illuminated, reveal the light source.

**Pan faces**: A three-dimensional sign face (front) that includes molded raised or inset design elements; sometimes called embossed or debossed face.

**Permanent signs**: Durable signage mounted or affixed for long-term use, not easily removed, and resistant to weather and other wear and tear.

**Point of Purchase signs (POP; also Point of Sale, POS)**: Signage posted at the location of goods and services offered for sale, advertising items or special sales.

**Portable signs**: Signage not permanently affixed to a building or ground, nor wired for electricity or other utility, and easily removed to another location with little or no need for tools or special equipment.

**Post signs**: Sign installed by mounting on a single or multiple support posts.

**Projecting signs**: Building-mounted sign installed perpendicular to the fascia of the building.

**Pylon signs**: A freestanding sign with visible supporting posts or other foundational structure.

**Raceways**: The enclosure that holds the wiring on lit signs and is used for mounting.

**Returns**: The sides of channel letters.

**Reverse channel letters**: Channel letter with opaque face and side walls.

**Roof signs**: Signs placed on the roof of a building.
Sidewalk/sandwich signs: Light weight portable interchangeable signage used in front of businesses.

Single face sign: One side is printed the other is blank.

Transformers: Electrical unit that converts voltage to the signs requirements.

Variance: Permission to vary from local zoning ordinances.

Wall signs: Sign mounted on the wall of a building.

Wayfinding: Informational signage that helps travelers to their destination.

Window signs (graphics): Adhesive vinyl graphics applied to windows.

Now that you and your provider speak the same language what should you talk about? The purpose of your signage is a good next step.

What’s the Purpose of Your Sign?

Signs are a form of communication. They’re used to share information; sometimes the information is geared to a targeted audience and other times to the general public. Signage is used to direct traffic and inform travelers. Signs are prominently displayed in storefronts, shopping centers, and on 40’ pylon signs as advertising. Signs are used to share public service
announcements and share information. Signage is a graphics language that can be used to broadcast many different messages. What message do you want to send?

**What’s Your Message?**

Knowing what type of message is to be shared is the first step in creating any sign. Sharing information through wayfinder, safety, or regulatory signage may be best accomplished using simple, straightforward, and uncluttered designs; while advertising a product or service may need to be more eye-catching. Designing a storefront sign that looked similar to a highway safety sign would, most likely, be ineffective. Conversely, a directional sign created with a multi-colored and complex design would be confusing or even dangerous.

**Types of Signage Communication**

- **Wayfinder** – Sharing maps, directories, locations, and information.
- **Advertising** – Used to promote and identify a product, service, or calls to action.
- **Identification** – Pointing out facilities such as restrooms, floors, and offices.
- **Safety** – Warnings such as exits, restricted areas, requirements like hard hats, or work conditions like wet floors.
- **Regulatory** – This includes ADA (Americans with disabilities) and posting government regulations.

**What’s Your Purpose?**

Understanding the purpose of a sign and the message to be conveyed will simplify the creative process; knowing how a sign will be used and what it needs to “say” are key to a successful sign. To effectively communicate through signage, the right language must be used. Much depends on whether a sign will be used to direct, inform, or share a call to action. Do you know what you want your sign to say and who you want to speak to? Do you know how design will figure into meeting your needs?

**Sign Design 101 for Non-Designers**
Why would a non-designer need to know the basics of sign design? If you’re not a designer you might not need to know much about sign design, but knowing the basics will make it easier to communicate your design wishes to a sign designer.

5 Keys to Sign Design

**Hierarchy** – First things first. It’s easy, for a sign, to lose the message. To avoid this, the designer needs to understand the signs priorities. Is it to give direction, promote a service, or bring visitors to website? A good design should rank primary and secondary messages. How big should the primary message be?

**At this distance, you can read:**
- 100 ft. 4-in. letters
- 200 ft. 8-in. letters
- 300 ft. 12-in. letters
- 400 ft. 16-in. letters
- 600 ft. 24-in. letters

**Color Palette** – Just as office or home décor should fit together to create a space, the color palette of a sign should create a flow and accentuate the message. It’s important to consider corporate branded colors as well as color contrast and message.

**Focus on a Font** – The number one function of a signage font is to be readable. It’s not to be beautiful, or commanding, or unique. It’s to be highly visible. What good is a font on a sign if it’s difficult to read?

**Whitespace** – Too much information and too many images detract from the message. Too much of anything on a sign can be a distraction. The white space, or negative space, should be used to highlight the message. The size of images, density of copy, as well as position and format all help in sending the desired message.
Images – Photos and images should fit the message through color, size, and story. Images should complement the copy not take away from it. Done properly images support and balance the copy.

Are you Ready to Design a Sign?

Probably not, but you are ready to discuss sign design with a provider. Knowing and sharing your primary message, corporate colors, and the image you want to portray helps a provider better serve you.

However, before the design begins you need to learn what is allowed by local ordinances.

How Do I Get a Sign Permit?

That’s an interesting question. The answer is it depends on your personality. If you’re like me, impatient and easily frustrated when dealing with multiple paperwork and people, you may want to consider hiring a competent sign provider to procure the permit. If you’re like my wife, who enjoys research and has the patience of a priest, then it may be something you can DIY.

Where to Start Your Sign Permit Journey

Entrepreneur Magazine shared this advice, “Some cities and suburbs have sign ordinances that restrict the size, location and sometimes the lighting and type of sign you can use outside your business. To avoid costly mistakes, check regulations and secure the written approval of your landlord (if you rent) before you go to the expense of having a sign designed and installed.”

What You’ll Need for Permission to Install Your Sign

This will vary by location, but the most common things you’ll be asked to provide a municipal planning division or a department of engineering includes the following:

- Site plan with building elevations
- Permission letter from your Landlord
- Estimated value of your sign
- Drawings completed to scale

Where to Find the Information

A reputable sign shop should provide you with scale drawings of the sign and its estimated value. Most counties have copies of site maps available for a small fee. If your business building is leased, more than likely, there’s an addendum in the leasing agreement with signage guidelines. If not, your landlord should be able to provide you with this information. Most municipalities share signage permit information online. Here’s an example from the town of Greenwood, IN.
Another consideration is timing. Be aware of the time involved, the permit process can take 90 days or more, which could miss the opening of a business or a re-brand.

**Should You Get Your Sign Permit?**

That depends on who you ask. If you ask me, I’ll tell you to let the experts who’ve been doing this for decades, procure the permit. If you were to ask my wife she’d tell you to go online and find the answers.

Next let’s review the most common types of signage.
Chapter Three

Types of Signs

Usually built let's begin this chapter with the basics and then we'll dig a little deeper into how specific signs are made and how they're used.

Architectural Signs - Usually built on and around a cabinet, which typically is fabricated out of aluminum, although they can be constructed of masonry. These signs are mostly used for exterior way finders, business signs, and corporate office signs. However, the uses are almost limitless.

Dimensional Signs - May be made with various materials. They are comprised of two or more layers, which adds dimension for a “3D” look. They may be used for interior or exterior signage.
Monument, Pylon, and Pole Signs - Freestanding signs in contact with the ground. Although definitions vary, monuments are usually 6–8 feet high, pylons up to 20 feet, and pole signs over 20 feet. A few examples are outdoor civic or community signs, anchor signs for a shopping center, 35-foot truck stop signs — and like architectural signs — the uses are unlimited.

Channel Letters - Mostly metal or plastic letters with faces, raceways, and cabinets — all of which may be different colors and materials. Usually attached to a structure, they're used for storefronts, government offices, and all types of organizations. They may be used on the outside or inside of a building, and may be illuminated or non-illuminated.

Electronic Message Center - Use LED lights to digitally deliver a message. They may be based on a monument, pylon, or pole for exterior usage, but are also occasionally used indoors.

Way-finding and Identification signs - May be manufactured from various materials and they include smaller ADA (Americans with Disability Act), office door signs, or large warehouse signs.
The six signs above cover these basics, but let’s dig a little deeper beginning with exterior signage.

**What Kind of Exterior Sign Does Your Business Need?**

Whether you have a new building, an old sign that needs replaced, or you’re in the rebranding process, once you’ve determined you need a sign, the next step is to consider what type of sign you need. What are you trying to accomplish with your sign – branding, advertising, wayfinding, information sharing, or all of the above? What image do you wish to project, who is your potential customer, and what are your limitations?

*How big should the sign be?* The sign should be easy to read from the highest traffic area where your sign is visible. An experienced sign builder can help you determine this by conducting a site inspection.

*What are the regulations?* Every municipality has different regulations. Again, an experienced sign provider will be able to walk you through this complicated, often slow, and sometimes frustrating process.

*Should my sign be lighted?* In most cases – yes. If your sign is only identification or directions, maybe not, but most signs are much more than that – they’re one of the more cost effective ways of advertising. Why would you ever want to turn your advertising off?

*How many words should I use?* A good average is 3 to 5 words. You want prospects to quickly and easily grasp your message while keeping in mind they may be in their car, and are certainly being bombarded with thousands of other messages.

*What font should I use?* Think readability first, demographic second, and style third. We would advise against difficult to read fonts, regardless of how attractive they might be.

*What color should my sign be?* The first question is what are you trying to convey? For example, yellow is stimulating. The soothing quality of blue may be appropriate for a Yoga studio. Many restaurants incorporate warm tones for their energy and enthusiasm.

There are many points to discuss when designing an exterior sign. Size, regulations, and style must all be considered. Your customer, demographics, and what you’re trying to accomplish are key to the best signage for your business.

Have you heard of dimensional signage? What are they and how are they produced?

**How Are Dimensional Signs Created?**
Creating a dimensional sign begins with fitting the sign to the organization’s image and brand. Where appropriate that means using branded colors, fonts, and logos, but it can also mean thinking outside of the sign… I mean box.

**What is a Dimensional Sign?**

A dimensional sign uses layers of materials to create a 3D or dimensional image.

**What materials Can Be Used?**

Materials are only limited by their ability to withstand weather, weight, surface adhesion, and the designer’s imagination. The most common materials used in 3D signs include:

- Aluminum
- High-Density urethane board
- Composites
- Plywood
- PVC

**How Are They Built?**

Dimensional signs are fabricated one layer at a time with two or more layers. Layers may include:

- Frame
- Background panel
- Primary graphics
- Outline panel
- Raised graphics
- Illumined sign can

**How Are the Panels Attached?**

The most common methods include using hardware or state of the art adhesives.

**How Are Graphics, Images, and Lettering Applied?**

The finish may include multiple medias such as paint, adhesive vinyl, digital print, and faux finishes.

**What Tools Are Needed to Build a Dimensional Sign?**

It depends on the materials being used. For shaping high-density urethane the best tool is a CNC router while aluminum may require a brake for bending. Different layers may use different tools: shears, aluminum miter saw, drills, hand router, chop saw and other hand
and power tools. For example, one layer may need a paint sprayer while another may require a squeegee to apply adhesive vinyl.

**Why Use a Dimensional Sign?**

Dimensional signs stand out—literally. They can be viewed more completely from varied angles than one dimension signage. They add a level of artistic expression not found in most other signs. And they just plain look good.

Lighting a sign can add tremendous visibility and exposure, but how do you make a sign show well both day and night?

**Let There be Light!**

Adding light to any sign, interior or exterior, adds another level of attraction and visibility. Light draws the eye and enhances the image. Light can be used to highlight a particular area
of a sign or it can be used to create shadows that outline the display. Lighting adds to almost any sign, but what kind of light?

What are the Options?

Ground – Typically used outdoors these lights are placed on the ground below the sign highlighting the entire sign or specific areas.

Trough – Is an enclosed unit that attaches to a sign, often at the top, and usually lit with fluorescent lights.

Gooseneck – Is exactly what it sounds like—an elongated neck that may be used to create nostalgic look.

Directional Spot – Used for interior lobby or display signage.

Light Box – Is lit from the inside of an acrylic faced box.

Edge – Can be used many ways, but when attached to the side of an acrylic sign, it can highlight etching and engravings on the sign face.

Side – Much like trough lighting, these may used to add a glowing effect to any sign.

Open Channel – Is an open-faced sign with the lights exposed. Usually done with open channel letters they use low wattage bulbs, LED’s, or neon.

Internal – Internally lit signs including box lights, channel letters, and raceways.

Back Lit – Lights placed behind a sign to outline the sign and create a halo effect.

Dual Color Overlay- Two colors are used, for example, perforated black facing layered over white material shows white at night and black in the daytime.

Don’t Take This Lightly

Light can change a sign from an unnoticed object on a lobby wall to the center of attraction. Light can make a sign next to a busy highway something that thousands of motorists notice every day…and night. Without proper lighting many signs are nearly invisible and go unnoticed.

Channel letters are one of the basic types of signs mentioned at the beginning of this chapter let’s take a closer look at what they are and how they’re made.
Channel Letters 101

We all see hundreds of channel letters every day; our daily commutes bring us past letters attached to corporate headquarters, retail outlets, and government institutions. Channel letters help consumers identify and locate businesses. Without channel letters, we’d be lost. For channel letters to be most effective, they need to be the optimum size, style, and color. Choosing the wrong channel letter configuration can lose the message, damage a building, and add maintenance expenses.

9 Steps to a Channel Letter

Although there’s a lot more to it—basic channel letter construction can be broken into nine steps.

- Design
- Computer layout
- Routing faces
- Bending returns
- Building raceways
- Sanding and finishing metals
- Painting boxes, returns, and metal faces
- Attaching wiring and electrical components
- Trim capping faces

Channel Letter Options

There are multiple options available for channel letters, which can be combined in hundreds of ways. Here are a few of the choices:

Construction – Standard or reverse, which is sometimes referred to as halo. Standard letters are lit from behind using plastic faces to illuminate the letters. They’re easy to read and highly visible. Reverse letters are closed in front, open behind to create a halo lighting effect. Reverse construction produces a soft warm effect but may not be as visible as standard.

Lighting – The two primary options are LED and neon with LED lighting being the most popular option. LED lights last longer, use less voltage, and require less maintenance than neon.

Mounting – Letters can be mounted to raceways, narrow rectangular boxes, which are then attracted to the building. The raceway holds the electrical components and the installation requires less alteration of the building. Direct mounting means each letter is attached to the structure requiring holes in the building for every letter. Direct mounting is sometimes used to avoid an exposed raceway.
Channeling Your Letters

There are options on top of options as far as material, construction, and design available for channel letters. One option is using raceways to mount the letters.

What’s a Raceway Have to Do with Signs?

A raceway is a motor park where auto enthusiasts watch race car drivers compete, isn’t it? Or, it’s one component of wall mounted signage, often used with channel letters.

What is a Raceway?

A signage raceway is a three-sided rectangular box that functions as a mounting mechanism, and electronic component enclosure for a wall mounted signage. Using a raceway to mount channel letters allows for less alteration and intrusion to the mounting surface.

Advantages of Raceways

• Protects wiring and electrical components inside the raceway.
• Most raceways only require two or three mounting points, which is less intrusive than single letter installation.
• Faster installation than installing one letter at a time.

Disadvantages of Raceways

• May require additional equipment, for example, a boom truck to lift the sign.
• Raceway may be visible. Although many are painted to match the building.
• Cost may be more than channel letters alone.

Components of a Sign with Raceway

• Channel letters and returns
• Raceway box
• Mounting brace
• Power supply and wiring
• Mounting platform
• Fasteners
• Trim cap

A raceway isn’t only a place for cars to compete. It’s an important part of many exterior and interior signs.
There should be some connection between race cars, raceways, and finding your way, but I haven't found it. I've lost my way...

**Finding Your Way with Interior Wayfinding Signage**

Interior wayfinder signage is no longer the exclusive realm of hospitals and large public buildings. Whether its purpose is to inform employees, comply with regulations, or improve the customer experience, interior wayfinder signage has found its way into myriad organizations large and small. Manufacturing plants use interior signs to improve efficiency and promote safety, restaurants and retailers to inform guests, and institutions use interior wayfinder signs to direct and notify. Any building with public access has a use for interior wayfinders.

**How Can Interior Wayfinder Signage be used?**

Interior wayfinder signage can be used to map an operation helping visitors to locate where they need to be. It can be used to announce projects, delays, and changes. Wayfinders are used to comply with government regulations including ADA, exit, and safety ordinances. They can be used to identify departments, offices, and designated areas. Interior wayfinding signage can be used to share relevant information of any sort.

**What Style of Signs Are Interior Wayfinders?**

Depending on the purpose of the signage, environment of the installation, and budget, several types of signs may be used to fit specific needs. Wall mounted signs may be best for stairwells, lobbies, and work areas. Suspended or hanging signs are practical for high-traffic areas and confined spaces. Free standing signs work well in central areas. When combined with digital displays or frame and insert construction they may offer up to the minute notifications. Wall and floor graphics are especially effective, using little space to share a message. Once the purpose of the sign is established the type of sign can be chosen to fit the needs.

**How should Interior Wayfinder Signage Be Designed?**

The signage should be uncomplicated. The purpose of interior wayfinder signage isn't to impress visitors with design graphics, multiple images, and artistic layout. The purpose is to share information and the best way to accomplish that is to be clear. The signage should use high color contrast, plain fonts, and be uniform in color and design throughout the organization. For readability, signs should be non-glare. Some signs may be required to include Braille to meet federal regulations.

**How Should Interior Wayfinder Signage be Installed?**

Interior wayfinder signage should be installed by experienced signage installation teams. They should be installed where they will do the most good—where they will be seen. Maybe the
most important aspect of proper interior signage installation is safety. These signs need to be anchored securely and not put in the path of foot traffic where guests or employees may trip over or bump into them. How can you know where to place the signs?

“The placement of the sign also lends a hand in the overall design. Keeping in mind the purpose of the signs, you must physically walk the route the signs will navigate to select the best position for the signs.” Sign and Digital Graphics Magazine—Navigating Interior Wayfinder Signage

What Interior Wayfinder Signage is Best?

It depends on the needs of the organization and the purpose of the signage. It needs to fit the budget of the business, and it should be designed, fabricated, and installed by reputable sign providers.

Interactive signage is one of the most effective types of wayfinding.

How Interactive Wayfinder Signage Will Lead the Way

Have you ever misplaced your car in a parking garage, lost your way in a hospital, or wandered around a mall looking for a particular store? Have you ever found yourself running in what you hoped was the correct direction toward a gate at the airport? Yea, me too. Interactive wayfinder signage could be the answer.

Is This Really Necessary?

You may be wondering why anyone would need this. Malls have kiosks with maps, and airports have signage and hospitals have...OK, everyone gets lost in hospitals. The need is to answer individual questions. For example, lost your car in the parking lot? How convenient and reassuring would it be to slip your ticket in a slot and be given directions to your vehicle?

How Would They Work?

To begin with, it could include digital message centers housed in traditional signage bases strategically placed on premises. Signage could include kiosks, screens, stands, and information centers. The signage could offer accessibility and language choices. It could include maps, graphics, video, and smartphone apps. The signage could share information, such as hours, special offers, and directions.

Where Will They Be Used?

The better question might be where couldn’t interactive wayfinder signage be used? As I’ve mentioned, they would be welcome at Hospitals, parking garages, and malls. Visitor centers could share attractions of interest to individuals without bombarding them with every tourist trap in a 10-mile radius. City centers could gather information and direct visitors to where they
need to go rather than going blindly from office to office. Large retail outlets could direct consumers to specific products while sharing consumer information and coupons. Public transportation could help riders choose the best routes. Parks could share interesting facts about flora and fauna. The list goes on.

**It’s More Than Finding Your Way**

Interactive wayfinder signage is about finding one’s way and a lot more. Dynamic signage can be used to direct, inform, and educate. And it can be done to fit communication needs and segmented by individual preference.

Have you ever entered the lobby of a business where there was no lobby sign? Did it feel like something was missing?

**How to Makes a Lobby Sign that Stands Out**

A lobby sign should be the focal point of an organizations entryway. It’s one of the first things customers, vendors, and employees see when they enter the building. An ineffective, poorly designed lobby sign will not only detract from the appearance of the lobby it sends a bad message about the business. On the other hand, a well-designed lobby sign that fits the culture of the company and blends into the surroundings speaks positive volumes about the organization.

**What Materials are used in Lobby Signs?**

There are thousands of combinations of materials that can be used. For example, we once fabricated a lobby sign out of wire. C-Cat: A Lobby Sign of Distinction. Lobby sign materials may include but are not limited to:

- Aluminum
- Glass
• Acrylic
• Laminates
• PVC
• Foam
• Metal
• Wood
• Plastic
• Printed Cut Vinyl

How Are Lobby Signs Designed?

Lobby signs may be flat or multi-dimensional signs. They may be non-illuminated, lit, backlit or lit from above. Lobby signs should encompass the overall brand by using corporate colors, fonts, and logos, but shouldn’t be limited to this. They may be constructed of channel letters, acrylic panels, or wall graphics, or they may be a combination of all of the above. The key element is to design a sign that relates a positive image of the organization while not only fitting into its surrounding but also enhancing them.

What’s In Your Lobby?

Take a minute and walk outside of your building and then enter your lobby like you’re a client. What do you see? Is your lobby sign sending a positive message or is it an afterthought? Does it speak of your organization’s professionalism or does it look cheap? Does it fit your culture or is a standard design that could be used in twenty other business lobbies?

In chapter four we discuss what makes a great sign and what makes a sign that’s not so great.
Chapter Four

What Makes a Great Sign?
The components for making a great sign include design, fabrication, and installation. Missing any of these ingredients will make a sign...less than great.

**What’s the Best Color Contrast for Signage?**

One would think that white against a black background or black on a white backdrop would be best color contrast for any sign, but that’s not always the case. To determine the best color contrasts for your signage consider a few points.

**First, Support Your Brand**

If your brand incorporates a specific shade of blue, then a black and white sign will not fit your brand. It may show well, but passersby won’t recognize that it’s part of the brand. They may not know it’s you.

**The Psychology of Color**

The color you chose for your sign sends a message. For example, blue is seen as trustworthy, red as bold, purple as imaginative, and green as healthy. There are combinations of colors that speak volumes without one printed word. How many fast food restaurants use combinations of red and yellow in their signage? How many financial institutes use blue and white, and how many healthy foods use various shades of green?

**According to Psychology Today**

*In an appropriately titled study called Impact of Color in Marketing, researchers found that up to 90% of snap judgments made about products can be based on color alone (depending on the product).*

*And in regards to the role that color plays in branding, results from studies such as The Interactive Effects of Colors show that the relationship between brands and color hinges on the perceived appropriateness of the color being used for the particular brand (in other words, does the color “fit” what is being sold).*

**You Want to Stand Out Don’t You?**

The reason you installed signage is to make it easy to find you, advertise your wares, and issue a call to action. If your sign is lost in a crowd of signs, your message and its purpose are lost as well. Consider the signage environment. What signs dominate your location and how can you use this to your advantage? If the two largest signs on your street corner are yellow and red, one more yellow and red sign may be lost in the crowd. But if your brand supports white, blue, and green you can create a sign that shines apart from the others.
What Colors Work Best for You?

To begin with, consider how the two colors contrast. The LR (light reflectance) of the colors sets the contrast. For example, the top five contrasting colors are:

- Black on yellow
- White on black
- Yellow on black
- Black on white
- Blue on white

Another way to enhance the color contrast is to outline the letters. For example, if your branded colors are blue and green you could outline the letters in black or white to make them stand out against the background. The same can be accomplished with drop shadows.

Spin the Color Contrast Wheel

Choosing the best and most contrasting colors for your sign can make the difference between getting your signage noticed and being just one more sign. Taking into consideration such points as branding, surroundings, and LR (light reflectance) can make all the difference in color contrast.

What’s the Best Color for Your Sign?

Great question, although the answer may start with another question, “What’s the best color for a logo?” Signs are only one part of a branding strategy, albeit an integral part, but not the whole. Signs should match or complement the brand, not stand alone. Regardless, whether it’s the logo, sign, or overall brand, color may be the most important factor in designing effective graphics.

How Can You Know What Color Fits Your Product?

Understanding the psychology behind color is integral to choosing the most appropriate colors for any sign. Red appeals to the impulsive; it can increase heart rate, it sends an urgent message. Blue is secure and dependable. Yellow shares optimism and youth, while purple is soothing and wise. Orange comes across as aggressive and confident and green denotes wealth, fertility, and relaxation.

What’s Color’s Best for Your Business?

The answer begins with understanding your customer, product, and company culture. Is your company’s unique position a call to action such as emergency service or revolving special offers? If so the excitement of red may fit your image. Is your business model
conservative—banking, finance, or insurance, if so the trust created with blue may fit your needs. How about creative endeavors such as design, marketing, and advertising, wouldn’t the image of creativity and imagination presented by purple send the right message?

**Combining Colors Creates Layered Messages**

For example, yellow creates warmth and red is bold combining them creates a feeling of optimistic excitement. Many fast foods restaurants use the red-yellow combination for just that reason. FedEx uses a combination of logos some are purple and orange others use purple and gray. The message sent is creative, friendly, wise, and calm. The best color for your sign depends on who you are and what you do.

Next let’s talk about how to choose a font that fits your brand.

**What’s the Best Font for a Sign?**

There isn’t one universal font for all signage. A sign should be part of a unified brand. It needs to be part of the marketing campaign not separated from it. Therefore, the font must fit the brand. Many signs will use more than one font. How the fonts complement each other is critical. The visibility of sign fonts is important—if you can’t read it, you don’t need it. Here are a few fonts’ that are clean and legible…and some that aren’t.

**Clearly Legible Fonts**
• Futura
• Garamond
• Baskerville
• Helvetica
• Myriad
• Rockwell
• Verdana
• Times New Roman
• Clarendon

Not So Much
• Mistral
• Bradley Hand itc
• Algerian
• Papyrus
• Brush Script
• Comic Sans

The Best Font Depends on the Sign

An effective sign font reflects the image of the organization and compliments the brand. It’s easy to see and highly visible. It works well with the design of the sign. It fits the colors and style. The best sign font is the one that fits all of the above and represents the company’s image in a positive way. If you don’t think consumers view sign fonts in a positive or negative light try posting one using comic sans. However, even the best doesn’t work if your sign is too small.

How Big Should My Outdoor Sign Be?

There are several factors to take into consideration. However, the purpose of the sign should be one of the first points examined. Who do you want to reach and what do you want to tell them?

Who Do You Want to Reach?

For example, a gas station or restaurant at an interstate intersection may need their sign seen from a ¼ mile away or more. Whereas, wayfinding signage for an office building may only need to be visible from 20 or 30 feet. While a shop in a strip mall may want to be seen from the road 100 yards away and by foot traffic 10 feet away.

What Do You Want to Say?
McDonald’s says it with a golden arch. No words are needed. Same with Nike, Starbucks, and many brands. The fewer words needed to send your message the better. You don’t need to say Bob’s Tire Service is Open 24 hours for tire repair, replacement, wheel balancing, and alignment. All you need to say is Bob’s Tire Service OPEN 24 HOURS. Think about your primary message. Keep it short, sweet, and simple.

What is Allowed?

Before you get too far into a sign design, check with your local municipality for signage restrictions. Almost every local government has ordinances, which restrict size by type and location of signage.

What’s Your Budget?

The first three questions may not matter if you can’t afford the solution. Consider your budget before you begin the process.

How Big Should the Letters Be?

One rule of thumb is every inch of letter may be seen from 20 feet. So 5-inch letters can be seen from 100 feet away, 20-inch letters from 400 feet, and 50-inch letters from 1000 feet. Also, the higher the sign, the farther it’s away from the target audience, and the larger the letters will need to be. Color and contrast are important, for example, black letters against a blue background doesn’t work. While, black letters framed against a white backdrop may be seen for miles. Another thing to think about is the font. You want it easy to read. Stay clear of scripts and difficult to decipher fonts even if it’s your logo.

So How Big Should Your Sign Be?

As big as you can afford, that’s allowed by ordinances, and will reach your target audience to share your message. And big enough that people can see it even if they’re driving past your sign.

Do People Have Time to See Your Sign?

I was driving by a shop the other day that had windows covered in special offers. I imagine the signage worked for foot traffic—they might have time to see and read it, but from the road it was—One. Big. Blur. The brick and mortar retail store had missed an opportunity to reach me and thousands of other consumers on their daily commutes. We didn’t have time for a long message. How much time do consumers have to view your signage?

This chart from Grandwell shares the viewing distance and time by character size.

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<th>Character</th>
<th>Max. Viewing</th>
<th>Max. Viewing Time (seconds)</th>
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<td>Size</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,542</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How much Time Do People Have?**

According to USSC Foundation people operating or riding in vehicles need between 8 and 11 seconds to detect and decipher a sign. Determining the optimum size for characters is done by using a legibility index, which is a combination of font style, size, color, contrast, and lighting. Another factor is the amount of information. Too much information displayed will be difficult to digest in only a few seconds. With that in mind, it’s best to stick with the top of funnel information.

- Contact information – Phone and website
- Call to action – Special or limited offers
- Company name and logo
- Unique sales position - such as same day service, 24 hour hotline, or price matching.

**Do You Want to Learn More?**

We’ve only scratched the surface of this equation. If you’d like to delve into the math and science behind sign design time and distance, we recommend the USSC Foundation – Sign Legibility Rules of Thumb

Signs can also become ineffective when there’s too much information and not enough space between content and images.
How Much Negative Space Does a Sign Need?

Negative space is the space surrounding the sign copy and images. It’s the margin, spacing, and boundary of the design. It’s around and between the signs message. Without negative space, the message of a sign would be lost in confusion. Not enough negative space and a sign will become difficult to decipher. Negative space has a positive impact on signage.

How Much Negative Space is Enough?

According to the **USSC (United States Sign Council)**, “Negative space is the open space surrounding the copy area of a sign. It is essential to legibility, particularly in signs in which the copy is displayed within a background panel. Negative space ideally should not be less than 60 percent of the sign or background area. This requirement for a 40/60 relationship between the copy area and negative space is the minimum USSC standard. It is intended only to establish a measurable baseline for the negative space component of a sign, such that a reasonable expectation of legibility will exist. The bottom sign panel illustrates how the aggregate copy area comprises 40 percent of the total sign panel area, with the remaining 60 percent forming the negative space area.”

Other Considerations

**Contrast** – The contrast between copy and negative space should stand out.

**Margins** – Letters that edge up to the parameter of the sign are more difficult to decipher. Negative space leaves room for margins.

**Placement** – Putting 60% negative space all on top or to one side doesn’t help legibility. It must surround the copy sharing the space.

The Importance of Negative Space

Improperly spaced signs that share an overload of information, which limits negative space, are difficult to read. Signs that try to cram too many images, and too much copy, take the risk of losing the entire message. It’s better to share one message than lose five.

Let’s talk about other ways to make your sign stand out.

How to Make a Flat Sign Stand Out

Not every sign application calls for a dimensional sign. Dimensional signage may not always fit the space, design, or budget. In many cases, a flat sign is more appropriate, but that doesn’t mean a flat sign has to look...flat.
How to Add Depth to a Sign

- **Effects** - Shadows, from thin lines to heavy contrasting colors may be added to create dimension and depth. All copy can be shadowed or key copy alone to stand out, and different types of shadowing can be used on separate text on the same sign. Borders can be used to outline images and copy, setting them apart.
- **Custom Contour** – Rather than a standard geometrically shaped sign, a sign can be cut and contoured to fit the image, copy, or both. This creates a level of separation that stands out.
- **Contrasting Background** – A plain white background may appear flat whereas a darker contrasting color can add depth. Using faded images or simple textures in the background can add to the dimensional appearance of a sign as well.
- **Copy Underload** – OK, that may not be a word, but it should be. When a sign is overloaded with copy, it adds to the flat appearance of the sign as well as confusing the message. Deliver a strong message by restricting the copy to key points, and those points will stand out.

Stand Out from the Crowd

The best way to make a flat sign leap out at customers may be to use a combination of the points bulleted above. There are hundreds of combinations that may be used. For example, a contoured sign combined with shadowing or faded image background that uses a simple three-word text. Whatever combination is used, the key is to create a sign that as [Lee Faulkner](https://www.tko-signs.com) from [TKO Signs](https://www.tko-signs.com) said, “If it’s done right you have to touch it to see if it has dimension.”

Putting a Halo Around Your Sign

Is there any more positive or distinguished icon than a halo? What comes to your mind? Is it a disk of light above an angel’s head or a circle of colored light refracted from the sun or moon?
Either or both, a halo sends an unequivocal message of warmth and trust. And that’s not a bad image for any organization.

**How Does the Halo Effect Work on Signage?**

Halo effect signs, sometimes called backlit or reverse channel, direct light at the substrate behind the sign not forward into the cabinet. By reversing the light the sign cabinet, or channel letters, are outlined by the light. The sign is mounted on standoffs to create space between the sign and substrate. Older reverse letter signs used neon lighting but most halo signs are manufactured today using LED lighting.

**What are the Options for Halo Effect Signs?**

Halo signs can be made almost any size only limited by ordinances and the mounting structures size. They can be designed in any color and font to match the brand they represent.

**How Are They Constructed?**

Reverse channel signs are usually constructed with aluminum sides, returns, and faces. The sign is painted, and then LED lights are clipped inside. The back is covered with clear polycarbonate to protect it from weather, insects, and birds. The sign is mounted using 1 to 2 inch standoffs with the power supply protected inside the building or wall.

**Halo Signs are Attention Grabbers**

Halo signs are conspicuous without being gaudy. They’re prominent but aesthetically pleasing at the same time. They convey integrity and influence. Halo signs are a step above. You could say they shine over your head.

**What Makes a Great Sign?**

A great sign is a combination of colors, fonts, size, and location. The best way to make a great sign is to understand your purpose, find a sign provider you trust, and communicate your needs to the provider.

Do not skip or browse over the next chapter because it might be the most important in this guide. It covers how to avoid common mistakes.

**Chapter 5**
Signage Pitfalls and Mistakes to Avoid

So far we’ve discussed what to do it. What we haven’t talked about is what *not* to do, and that may be the most important thing to know when considering new signage.

**Don’t Confuse the Message**

We’ve all seen them, confusing, sometimes inappropriate, and often humorous signs—that weren’t intended to make us gasp or laugh. Unless you want your company to be the joke, editing your sign design before fabrication can save a lot of embarrassment and misspent marketing dollars. Here’s what to watch for.

**Poor Grammar**

It’s easy to overlook proper grammar. For example, homophones, words that sound the same but have different meanings such as there, their, and they’re. Here’s an example, a sign above the sink in a restroom sharing, “All employees are to wash *there* hands!” Or a no parking sign with, “Violators will be towed and *find* $50.” Cool, will the money be in my glove box? Misuses of apostrophes abound; an apostrophe is commonly used to note missing letters, or to show possession. Here’s an example of poor usage, “Professional *Sign’s*” (that’s a real example I can’t make this stuff up.)

**Missing Copy**

Missing letters, words, or information can change the meaning of a sign. “English is Our Language—No *Exceptions*!” Real sign. Really. Or a sign I’ve seen posted on restaurant boards more than once, “Now Hiring *Losers*” do you think they meant closers? My favorite, “*Ho* made Apple Butter” or maybe, “15 Great Things About Our *Public* Schools.”
Ambiguous Messages

I don't have to go far for an example. For many years, my mother owned and operated cabins on the Patoka River in southern Indiana. They were rustic, rough-hewn wood sided cabins with covered wooden decks. My mom had two “pet” peeves about deck usage. Visitors would feed their pets on the porch, which stained the decking, and would set up charcoal grills—on a wood porch. Not a good idea. City folk you know. So...my mom had a sign made. “Do not Feed or Cook Pets on Porch.” Yep, it really happened.

Information Overload

TMI on a sign can make it at best difficult and at worst baffling. My favorite is a poster from an organization offering to help with information overload. The top of the poster asks, “Too Much Information? We can Help.” so far, so good. Then it proceeds with 160 words (I counted them) in the body. Huh? Here's another one, a local municipality shared a no dancing ordinance listing 14 specific dances. Sigh...

Conflicting Messages

There are a lot of these. For example, a sign on a baseball ball backstop fence stating, “No Signs.” At a park, “No Pets Allowed. All Pets Must be Leashed.” A caution sign that stated, “Caution: No Caution Signs.” Or, “One Way.” Dead End. No Parking.” That one kinda makes sense—I think. Maybe I'm confused.

Measure Twice Cut Once

From missing letters to misplaced apostrophes simple oversights can change a sign from an important part of a unified branding effort—to an embarrassment. Avoiding a sign that detracts from an organization’s image can be accomplished by taking the time to review a sign before production. Best practices include having several people check the sign design and it wouldn't hurt to hire a sign provider that inspects it as well.

Another way to lose the message is through spacing fails.
How to Avoid Signage Letter Spacing Fails

The best way to avoid a signage letter spacing fail is to hire an experienced and qualified sign provider. But even then it’s prudent to check layouts before any signage is fabricated. I considered sharing a few sign letter spacing failures but decided against doing so for two reasons.

1. Most of the failures I found were from legitimate, hard-working businesses large and small.
2. The majority of the failures posted weren’t PG rated.

If you’re considering a new sign, please take two minutes to read this before you settle on your sign. I’ll guarantee the companies with sign letter spacing failure wish they had.

Measure Once Cut…

One of the keys to proper letter spacing is fitting the letters to the space. Even if the letters don’t fail, improper spacing can detract from a sign. Crowding letters slows reading, spacing letters too far apart is disruptive, and not allowing enough free or white space can make a sign look cluttered.

All Fonts Aren’t Created Equal

Fonts space letters differently, for example, in many fonts a CL may resemble a d, or a LI may look like a U when they are one spaced. Be sure the space allows the letters to stand alone and not combine to change the meaning.

Give it Some Space

Grouping words to closely may change the word or meaning. For example, I saw a sign that meant to say Free WIFI and X brand beer, but by putting free and beer in caps with Wi-Fi and the X brand above each it came out as FREE BEER. I’m down with it. Another example is a sign I found that shared P L A N ahead. I hope it was created on purpose for fun.

StopLetterSpacingFailureNow!

The key to avoiding letter spacing signage failures is to take your time, review the layout, and check the font spacing. Unless you’ve added a hashtag to your sign, you don’t want run-on letters. Unless you’re making a joke, you don’t want to send a double message.

Here are more ways misused lettering can ruin a sign.

12 Signage Lettering Mistakes that Can Ruin Your Sign
A sign is the face of your organization. It identifies who you are and what you stand for, as well as your location. Signage lettering mistakes can sabotage hours of design, fabrication, and installation. Signage lettering mistakes can change the appearance, intent, and meaning of a sign. Worse yet the sign may be altered to send an entirely new and sometimes derogatory meaning.

12 Signage Lettering Mistakes

1. **Reversed letter** – This is more common than you think turning a Z backwards, or placing a stylized A the wrong way can ruin a sign.

2. **Upside down letter** – For example, it’s not as difficult as it sounds to place some letters in certain fonts upside down. Putting an N upside down can be an easy mistake.

3. **Using the wrong leg** – The legs on K can meet in the middle or come off the top leg but shouldn’t rise from the lower leg.

4. **Using a number for a letter** – Have you ever typed 0 when you meant o?

5. **Letters out of order** – Everyone has seen examples such as the Kansas City Cheifs for Chiefs.

6. **Missing letters** – When installing channel letters and not proofreading it’s easier than you think to omit a letter like one I saw—school crossing. What’s a school?

7. **Poor s pacing** – Spacing can change the meaning of a word or phrase. There are plenty examples of this on the internet and many aren’t PG rated.

8. **Misspelled words** – Not only omitted letter misspellings but misspelling in general.

9. **Homophones**, words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings.

10. **Letters too small** – What good is a word if the letters are too small to read?

11. **Poor font choice** – “An effective sign font reflects the image of the organization and compliments the brand.

12. **Limited color contrast** – Dark letters against a dark background, light letters against soft colors, and any background that competes with the lettering distracts from the sign and its purpose.

Don’t let Signage Lettering Mistakes Ruin Your Sign

Taking the time to check signage layout before it’s too late can save time, money, and frustration. **How to proof your new sign layout.** Vetting signage providers can help you avoid signage installation mistakes. **5 Questions to ask a sign company before you sign.** It’s always better to catch letter mistakes before they’re on your building.

We’ve all seen signs that missed the mark—signs lost in the crowd, hard to understand, and harder to read. We’ve all noticed signs that were confusing, misleading, and ambiguous. There are too many signs that are bland, look like every other sign, or are just plain unattractive. What none of us want to see is for any of these examples to be “our” sign. Here’s how to keep that from happening.
5 Common Signage Mistakes to Avoid

Too many signs – Attempting to crowd one more sign into a space already squeezed with signage will not make the sign stand out. This is not Times Square, and your sign isn’t a multi-million dollar mammoth digital sign. Don’t try to overwhelm consumers with signage. Make your sign stand out by standing outside of the pack.

Too many words – The golden rule for sign copy is logo plus a maximum of seven words. Much more and consumers don’t have time for your sign—another sign will be calling for their attention. Too much copy leads to confusion. What message do you want to send?

The wrong colors – Poor color choice is two-parter. Poorly contrasted copy and background make a sign difficult to decipher. There’s a scene from Parks and Recreation where Tom shows his new business cards. The card is totally black. Tom explains black is the “hot” color. The card is black print on a black background. The wrong color can also be an inappropriate color choice, for example, bright colors for a funeral home.

Uncreative design – The biggest mistake made in design and layout is not letting the professionals do it. Don’t let your intern, copywriter, or the CEO’S niece design your sign. Hire a sign design team.

The wrong font – The wrong font is any font that’s difficult to read. Don’t make it hard on passing consumers. They only have seconds.

Give us a Sign

If you don’t care about how your sign looks, the message it sends, or how the public views it then ignore the 5 signs of sign failure and tackle signage development on your own. But if you want a sign that works, a sign that can be seen, read, and understood then hire a profession sign provider.
Top Ten Signage Mistakes

A few of the top ten signage mistakes listed below are understandable—almost. Part of a professional sign provider’s job is to help businesses avoid these pitfalls. Some mistakes are funny—unless it’s your sign. Some are real head-scratchers, but if you think about it, you’ve probably seen them all.

**Copy** – Too many words can be confusing. Keep it short and sweet. The best copy shares your unique position, appeals to your target audience, and does it in few words.

**Color** – The *Psychology of color* should be considered as well as industry traditions, for example, the majority of fast food restaurants use combinations of red and yellow on signage. Another common color miscue is using a background and typography that are too similar in color and shade.

**Font** – Easy to read, highly visible fonts are the best. Fonts that take time to decipher, such as scripts, may not give a passerby the time to process the information.

**Location** – Placing a sign facing away from traffic is inexcusable yet we see the backs and sides of signs more often than we should.

**Code** – When local ordinances and restrictions aren’t followed it can mean taking down a sign that doesn’t adhere to regulations. Removing, realigning, and replacing a sign—is expensive.

**CTA (Call to Action)** – Where’s the phone number, website, or social media icons? Come on man. I once saw a sign with one digit missing from the phone number.

**Bad graphics** – A sign isn’t the place to use clip art.
**Brand** – A sign should reflect the overall brand of an organization. Colors, logo, and style should be unified on stationary, website, and signs.

**Light** – Light can make or break a sign, a lighted sig works for your business 24 hours a day seven days a week.

**Grammar** – Use Spellcheck—please. Understand basic grammar such as proper apostrophe use, if you don't, hire a copywriter.

When designing a sign, there's more to consider than Emailing your logo and company name to a sign shop. Who's going to see the sign, what story should it tell, and what regulations apply, are a few of the questions you'll need to answer.

But wait. There's more! Here are 10 additional sign mistakes.

### Ten More Signage Mistakes

10. **DIY** – Signage isn't something you watch a YouTube tutorial and then design, manufacture, and install a sign. If it's not a complete and utter failure, as well as a safety hazard it will certainly not reach the advertising potential of a professional sign.

9. **Using the wrong material** – Sure, plywood is cheaper, but how long will it last, and how long will it be before wear and tear start to show? The right material for the job may cost more initially, but will pay for itself in the long run.

8. **Banners aren’t signs** – Using a banner for “Coming Soon”, or a special offer is great, but banners were never designed to be permanent signage.

7. **Treating a sign like a business card** – Sign design and business card design aren't the same, and shouldn't be treated as such. Don't ask a sign design team to use your business card as a sign template.

6. **Contrast counts** – We see fonts and images lost in a background more often than you’d think. Dark colors on dark colors or light colors on light colors don’t work.

5. **Making it too complicated** – Signs should be simple. They should share one message, not try to convey six. They should stick to one color palette, and not share multiple images to the point of confusion.

4. **Not establishing a budget** – Knowing what you can afford to spend before you begin the process will help your sign provider give you the biggest bang for your buck.
3. **Improper installation** – This isn’t like hanging a painting on the wall. Signs need to be anchored properly, and lighted signs must be safely wired. If not you may have a law suit on your hands.

2. **Not getting a permit** – Don’t wait until it’s time to install your sign to seek a permit. If you do, you may find your sign doesn’t meet specifications. [How do I get a sign permit?](#)

And the number one mistake is—drum roll, please – **Not using a Professional Signage Provider.**

Signs are a specialized one-of-kind custom product. It takes years to learn the best practices in sign design, fabrication, and installation. Don’t let a rookie practice on your sign.

Are you rebranding your signage? If so rebranding has its own set of challenges and pitfalls.

**8 Signage Mistakes to Avoid when Rebranding**

You’ve decided it’s time to rebrand your organization. The old brand has served its purpose, but it’s dated. The logo, fonts, and images are more 1960’s than 21st century, and the colors and taglines...well let’s just say they both had their day. It’s time to update the logo, change the letterhead, and redesign the website, but what about all your signs?

**Signage Rebrand Considerations**

1. **Plan for the removal of old signage.** Who is responsible for taking down and hauling off the old signs?
2. **Have your permits in order.** Signage restrictions vary by municipality. Before beginning the sign design process learn what is permitted and what is restricted.
3. **Don’t settle for less to save a buck or two.** Signage has a long life span, and cheap signage looks bad for years. Send a professional message with a professional sign.
4. **A sign isn’t only identification.** Think of the sign as advertising. What message do you want to send?
5. **Do your research.** Survey customers, talk to your customer service department, and learn what people want from your brand.
6. **KISS – A complicated sign can be confusing.** Don’t lose your message by trying to do too much.
7. **Don’t abandon your old brand.** A 180-degree departure from the previous brand may confuse and lose customers.
8. **You are not too small.** If rebranding works for the big guys doesn’t it make sense it can for small businesses on a smaller scale?

**Do Your Homework First**
Over the years, we’ve consulted with numerous organizations during a rebrand. Many had rushed ahead with the rebrand, without considering the signage consequences. By taking the time to do your homework before the rebrand, you may avoid many signage branding mistakes that are time-consuming and costly.

**Make no Mistake Signage Mistakes are Costly!**

Signage mistakes can be costly and embarrassing. They diminish the effectiveness of your signage and worse than that, they send a bad message about your organization. Signage mistakes have a negative impact. Next, let’s discuss the positive impact of signage.

**Chapter Six**

**The Impact of Signage**
The Economic Impact of Signage

According to a study from the University of Cincinnati, the economic impact of business signage goes beyond the effect it has on the organization. When signage appeals to consumers who respond to a call to action, it not only affects the business in a positive way but the community as well. Increased patronage means additional employment and tax dollars, which directly impacts the community.

Signs Are a Multi-Purpose Tool

Size, design, placement, and the number of signs affect signage effectiveness. Signs may be used to identify location, separate a business from competitors, unify a brand, announce special offers and promotions, as well as list products and services.

“About three-fourths of consumers have entered a store or referred a friend because of a sign that made the business stand out, and two-thirds have made a purchase as a result. Conversely, most consumers indicate that bad or no signage deters them from entering a store. Sign readability is the most important sign factor in causing consumers to try a store’s product or service.” – The Economic Value of On-Premise Signage

The Type of Sign Makes a Difference

In the study, the number and types of signs varied by business but wall, pole, and monument signs proved to be most useful for companies large and small. The University of Cincinnati shared case studies of how signage impacted sales, transactions, and employment for businesses, which in turn, translated into overall community improvement.
The study found that improving signage to enhance the brand of a particular company and location made a positive impact, as long as the sign conformed to good design.

- Legibility is the most important characteristic of signs across all sizes of companies
- Use of business logos, and the size and location of the signs were more important for companies with multiple locations, compared with single establishment organizations.
- Sign updates and changes generally had significant, positive impacts on sales, number of transactions, and profits

A Bad Sign is a Bad Sign

A poorly designed sign negates the positive impact of signage. A poorly executed sign can negatively affect a business and therefore the neighborhood. A bad sign not only reflects on the business and drives consumers away, it also reflects poorly on the community.

Is it Time for a Sign?

Adding, upgrading, and maintaining signage is a great way to market any business. Done correctly signage influences the buying public in favor of the enterprise, which in turn is good for the community.

Infographic: Why Signs Matter

We have a riddle for you. What advertising do you pay for once but promotes your business for years? Need a clue? What marketing effort delivers thousands of impressions per day but doesn’t add additional costs? Do you know the answer? It’s signage. Your organizations exterior, interior, and wayfinding signage, say a lot about who you are and what you do, and it does it for a very long time. It may be the most cost effective, top of the sales funnel, advertising there is.

We have another riddle for you. What detracts from a business and sends a bad message to potential customers? The answer is old, outdated, damaged, signage. When a prospect sees a dirty sign with unlit missing letters, that doesn’t support current branding, it makes that prospect wonder what else the business neglects. They can’t help but consider whether a company’s product and customer service are neglected as well. If you want to be certain you’re not sending a negative message to your customers Contact us, we’d be happy to help you with service for your sign, or a signage rebrand. And…we’ll tell you like it is—we won’t speak in “riddles.”
Why Signs Matter

How did you learn about us?

- 46% Saw your sign
- 38% Word of mouth
- 7% Newspaper advertisement
- 6% Yellow pages advertisement
- 3% Radio commercial
- 2% Television commercial

Effective retail signage can increase impulse buying by 55%:
- Fruits & Vegetables
- Cold Food & Drinks

8 out of 10 American consumers have entered a business because a sign caught their interest.

68% Made a purchase because a sign caught their interest.

58% Said they will not enter a business with no sign.

Exterior signs are working for you

24 Hours a Day

365 Days a Year
What’s the Best Sign for Your Business?

The best sign for your business is one that fits your needs and those of your customers. It’s a sign designed to uphold the continuity of your brand, a sign that attracts attention without going overboard. It’s a sign that’s well-planned, designed by professionals, fabricated by experts, and installed by an experienced sign installation crew. It’s a sign that becomes part of your business.

If we can help in anyway please Contact Us, 1-888-544-8071