Secrets of Successful Signage Design

Metro Sign and Awning

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How to Design a Sign for Your Business

To get the most out of your business signage investment, it's important to devote adequate time and attention to the sign design process.

Sign Design Is Step One

Everyone knows a commercial sign, awning or canopy is an important multi-year investment in your business. Whether it's an outdoor sign or an indoor sign, the first step of the process is sign design. An expert design team should work with you to create signage that:

•   Maximizes its advertising and aesthetic values
•   Gets your business noticed and
•   Supports your company goals and brand.

To design an effective business sign or canopy, you should start with your **company goals and brand**. What's your message to your prospects and customers? To the community? The more clearly you can state this, the more effectively you can design signage.

Of course, sign design is just the first step of the whole process. Once the design is finalized, it must be backed up with effective project management, necessary permitting, sensible fabrication, and careful installation. To maintain the value of the new signage, it's important to pay attention to ongoing repair and maintenance. But those are topics for other e-books.

Design a Sign to Maximize Advertising and Aesthetic Values

Factors that are part of effective sign design include your other business designs and where the new signage is placed, be it near your establishment or another place of your choosing.

Design a Sign to Get Your Business Noticed

A well-designed sign not only provides positive exposure for your business, it gives consumers a detailed mental image and emotional message about your business. Consumers will associate an effectively designed sign with your business, and take away a lasting impression. The best designs are those customers and prospects won't easily forget.

Design a Sign that Supports Your Company Goals and Brand

Signs are a great way to communicate with your potential customers. This is because well-designed, properly placed signage shouts your business image and message 24/7, conveying your brand and company values. Every time people pass by your sign, they'll see it and later remember it, potentially taking your business to a whole new level.

9 Secrets To Effective Signage Design

What's in a sign? Text? Yes. Graphics? Sure. Materials? Absolutely. But those are just the most obvious elements.

The truth is that a sign is a significant piece of graphic communications that - done properly, cleverly, creatively, and intelligently - can generate, attract, and direct public attention almost wherever you want it. But done poorly, you might as well throw a tarpaulin over your sign and haul it off to the dump.

Here are 9 "tricks of the trade" to make your sign do the best possible job for you.

1.   Clarify the purpose

As Yogi Berra famously said, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up someplace else." We find that when we work closely with clients to help them zero in on what they want their sign to accomplish, the rest of the sign design and fabrication process falls into place much more easily and effectively.

2. Identify the target audience

Same as above. It's easier to attract people's attention when you know what most readily catches their eye, heart, and mind.

3. Accelerate message delivery

People read and absorb the messages of a sign at different rates of speed. But we know the tricks to drive those messages home at the fastest rate each viewer of your sign can handle.

4. Burnish the graphics

What's true for text is even truer for the visual elements of your signage. Good designers can translate the various messages you're trying to convey into just the right visuals.

5. Choose the best overall shape

Signs can be rectangular, square, oval, circular, complex, or the shape of any familiar object. Making this choice correctly adds considerably to the overall impact of the sign. Getting it wrong can … well, there's just no excuse for getting it wrong.

6. Dial in the color psychology

Shapes of letters and images on a sign can be more or less important, depending on the colors in which those shapes are executed. We take the time to get the colors precisely dialed in to deliver the maximum emotional and physical impact on those viewing your sign.

7. Fine tune the contrast between elements

Mastery of the language of visual communications entails making all the elements work together as a unit. Watch how we take what seems an ordinary sign and make all its messages "pop" with vibrancy.

8. Hone the text

The word messages on your sign are central to its effectiveness, because attracting all the attention in the world won't help your business if you deliver an inferior message.

9. Consider the context

If your sign were hanging alone in the woods, it would readily stand out. Against a backdrop of many other signs, shapes, colors, and human constructs, it takes experience and a wide range of sign-making expertise to make sure your sign rises above the visual noise.

7 Things You Probably Don't Know About Logo Design

Your logo is an essential part of your business identity. Properly designed, it provides an instant - and memorable - point of recognition for who you are and what you do.

Whether you are developing a new logo from scratch or updating one that has outlived its effectiveness, there are at least seven things to bear in mind:

1. Understand your customer

Before you consider any logo design, be sure you understand your prospective customer or clients as deeply as you can. An effective logo is more than pretty; \it communicates a message in a way your audience values and appreciates. The more you know about your prospective audience, the more accurately you can recognize which logo communicates with them best.

2. Go for simplicity

You want a logo that is easily recognized, highly memorable, versatile enough to be used in many places, appropriate and inoffensive. You also want one that isn't trendy, so it will remain effective for many years, or even decades. The longer it keeps working for you, the better. All these attributes are more easily obtained with a simple design than a complex one.

3. The best ideas usually stand out

There's sometimes a temptation to accept a decent idea that seems like a good one. But there's value in keeping standards high. Experience shows that the best logos stand out from the pack. A decent idea may show up very soon, but you should insist that it prove itself in competition with logo ideas that result from completed in-depth research and top-notch creative effort.

4. The typeface is important

Many logos do not involve text (like the Nike "swoosh"). But if yours does, try lots of typefaces to zero in on the best one. Common words can often be made more memorable with impressive typefaces. Unusual wording is usually easier to read and remember in a simpler typeface. Before you sign off on any logo, make sure it is easily and clearly understood, with no unintentional, hidden words or meanings.

5. Look beyond the logo

Don't limit your thinking to the logo itself, but also to the empty space within the logo and to its surroundings. Consider how your logo will interact with other graphics and text information in various contexts and installations. Look at it against both light and dark backgrounds. At a minimum, make sure the logo controls the space immediately around itself.

6. Think hard about color

The same design in different colors may convey entirely different impressions about the underlying brand. It's always helpful to present a logo in several colors and to ask a wide range of people for their opinions of the resulting images.

7. Lock down the specifics

Once you have decided on your new logo, lock down all of its specifications, including size(s), color(s), positioning, usage with other graphics and text, and lighting (where necessary). This was particularly important in our own experience with Lake Region Medical. If you leave any parameters unspecified, your logo's effectiveness is left open to be undercut or compromised somewhere, sometime, somehow.

You can learn a great deal from the best logos, including: ABC, Chanel, CNN, Coca-Cola, Disney, Federal Express, IBM, NASA, NBC, Nike, Shell, the Rolling Stones, and Volkswagen. (But don't copy … just be inspired!)

Signage Design in Action #1

Signage Design Key Part of 53 State Street Project

Built in 1985, the towering 53 State Street building is tied with neighboring 60 State Street as Boston's 12th tallest building. With tenants on all 40 floors, it's a busy place.

And since it's in the heart of Boston's financial district, there's traffic all around.

> Our Challenge: to make the building's signage "pop" for drivers and pedestrians, in spite of all the hubbub surrounding the iconic skyscraper.

Our challenge: to make the building's signage "pop" for drivers and pedestrians, in spite of all the hubbub surrounding the iconic skyscraper. We were also asked to make sure the interior signage was brilliant enough to match the building's exterior, and to ensure the signage installation not only complied with all city codes and safety standards, but wouldn't create a snag for the considerable weekday traffic.

Because the design's polished chrome backer acted as a mirror, while the client wanted more of a "halo" effect, our experienced fabricators added a plex outline to absorb the red LED lighting on the center band and also to complement the white of the channel letters during the day (when the lights are off). It was difficult, because the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) has strict limitation on what it would allow for signage, but we were able to make the signs 'pop' on the building's chrome fascia. We also designed matching stainless steel letters for the building's interior stone wall.

Learn more about the 53 State Street project.

Signage Design in Action #2

All Signs Say "Home:" Overcoming Technical Challenges in Residential Design

Maxwell's Green, an exciting "lifestyle amenity center" in Somerville, MA, needed interior and exterior signage 1) to suit its style and budget, 2) designed and fabricated according to architectural specifications, and 3) beautiful and sturdy enough to look good while performing well in the bustling apartment complex.

The first item we tackled was Maxwell's Green exterior sign: a **24-foot-long, curved metal sign**, with water-cut letters and backlit with LED illumination. Because the architectural drawings called for a rusted, industrial aesthetic, Metro Sign & Awning designers selected Cor-Ten steel as an ideal material. Adding to the complexity: **the completed exterior sign weighed nearly half a ton**.

Cor-Ten develops a rust layer that is both good-looking and practical, providing the look of weathered steel while protecting the underlying steel from further oxidation. Copper, which also offers some weathered characteristics, tends to take on green hues over time, while Cor-Ten maintains its copper and brown tones. Cor-Ten is attractive to designers for its "green" side (meaning its relatively small environmental impact) because Cor-Ten does not require any priming or painting and the material itself is100% recyclable.

Maxwell's Green designers naturally wanted the interior of the complex to reflect the same rustic, industrial look as the exterior. So again, Cor-Ten steel made sense.

However, because interior signs must meet demands far different from those placed outdoors, Metro designers and fabricators worked together to make sure all of the signs, from those marking elevators and stairwells to those marking the fitness center and electric car-charging stations, had just the right look and functionality.

To accomplish the task, Metro's team applied acrylic to the metal, using appliqué raised lettering and Braille for "front of house" signage and specialty rooms.

> The rustic, industrial look, inside and out, included a 24-foot-long, curved metal sign with water-cut letters and backlit LED illumination.

Learn more about the Maxwell's Green project.

Experienced Sign Designers Give the Best Directions
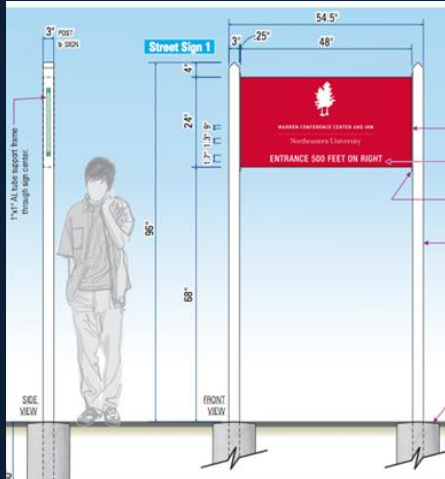
Our expert design team works hard to create signs and awnings that maximize their advertising and aesthetic values, that get noticed and remain memorable. Not to mention that are cost effective and durable.

And you don't simply have to take our word on this: *Sign & Digital Graphics* magazine, a leading signage industry publication, has twice recognized Metro Sign & Awning's design excellence.

To create your business signage, we start with your company goals and brand. We look at neighboring and competitive signage, and we carefully consider the specifics of potential typefaces, sizes, colors, illumination, mounting logistics, and location. Then we focus all this into a plan that stays within your budget.

Remember, compared to the cost of other advertising media and the benefits it can provide, signage is relatively inexpensive.

Like other specialized endeavors, it takes talent and experience to develop and design the best signage. That's why people come to us. But we don't mind sharing some of what we do in the design studio. We hope you find this insider information helpful in understanding and appreciating the importance of good signage design.

Questions about Signage Design?

If you have any questions about signage design, particularly how the right design can translate into effective signage for your business, we'd love to provide you with answers.

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