

# Signage is the key

*Visual cues and messages bombard shoppers as soon as they walk into a store. Signs help customers make sense of it all*

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Shoppers receive messages from all aspects of a store. The storefront, layout, product selection, displays and lighting all convey information about what you, the retailer, have to offer. Think of these bits of information as a secret code sent out to each shopper about your store.

Our minds process this information so quickly that we don't even stop to think about it. All day long, we take in information, constantly sorting it and making decisions according to our personal tastes.

For many stores and products, shoppers

are familiar with the code and the information. They know how to find their way around the local supermarket. They have favorite places to shop for clothes. For routine purchases, they usually don't need help to find what they need. Many of these stores use similar layouts and have product lines the shopper is familiar with.

Hobby and specialty stores are a bigger challenge for shoppers to decode. Customers require more information about the products before making a decision. Specialty retailers and many of their customers are experts in their hobby. Experts know the jargon, understand the products and often know just what it is they're looking for. In short, they get it.

But what about new customers interested in learning a hobby, gift givers and casual shoppers? To these people, the hobby shop can seem like an alien landscape.

Consider that to these customers, the product selection, categories and displays can be overwhelming. It can be a tough decision just to decide which way to go, let alone how to find the products they're interested in.

You can help these customers feel comfortable as soon as they walk in the door, even before you speak to them, through good signage.

## Create a signage plan

Effective signs help shoppers feel comfortable in an unfamiliar store. It helps them understand new products. By creating a thoughtful, cohesive signage plan, you can lead your customers through your store step by step.

Unfortunately, in many stores, signs are created haphazardly, one at a time as needed. Sometimes it appears that too many signs are being used. Instead of decoding the store for the customer, they add to the confusion.

Often, the problem isn't that there are too many signs, but that there are too many colors, too many fonts, and too many sizes used with the existing signs.

When store signs are carefully planned, they strengthen your store's brand. They guide shoppers to the products they're looking for.

A signage plan should be considered as a whole package. Signs in different areas of the store have different roles. Each sign style is defined by its placement, size, color, font size and type of message.

When creating a signage plan, consider the following styles of signs:

### DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

When the shopper first enters the store, he pauses to get his bearings. He looks around the store to understand the layout. Directional signs help him decide where to go.

These signs are large, simple and easy to read. They are overhead, above eye level. They either hang from the ceiling or are mounted on the walls above fixtures.

Define departments or categories with these signs. They are meant to be understood at a glance. Use one or two words in a large, easy-to-read font. Directional signs are meant to be viewed when the shopper enters the store. Even small stores should consider using directional signs or category signs. They'll help customers quickly find the right section of the store.

### SALE OR PROMOTIONAL

Sale or promotional signs are important to many retailers. Choose one basic style for sale signs. If more than one size of sale sign is required for different areas of the store, keep the design, layout and font consistent between sizes. Sale signs can be used as posters, fixture signs, or shelf talkers (attached to the shelf edge) to draw attention to good deals in the store.

Most people associate sales or discounts

## SIGN SMARTS

All the signs in your store should have:

### 1 No more than three fonts, or font variations

A basic rule of thumb is a display font for occasional headings, a sans-serif style for the majority of the text, and a bold weight of the text style. Once the fonts have been chosen, use the same ones for all signs.

### 2 A simple color scheme

A good basic is black or white text with one or two high-contrast colors. Another color can be used to highlight sale or special merchandise.

### 3 A similar layout and design

Signs should coordinate with each other, not compete for attention. Ideally, the signs will coordinate with the store's other marketing materials and Web site.

with the color red. If you use red for sale signs, don't use it for other signs in the store. This will help your customer identify discounts at a glance.

### FEATURED, NEW OR SPECIAL PRODUCTS

These signs are useful for feature displays. They can also draw attention to specific products within a category. As with sale signs, these signs can be posters, fixture signs or shelf talkers.

### FIXTURE SIGNS

These signs are placed close to eye level. They describe the products found on one fixture. They may designate a subcategory, new products, or a price point. The font used is smaller than directional signage. These signs are meant to be read as the shopper is walking through the store. The text is still limited to one to five words. The sign attracts the shopper's attention to the merchandise on that fixture, encouraging them to pause and take a look.

### PRODUCT INFORMATION

As the shopper gets closer to the merchandise, he slows down and takes more time. The signs right next to the product can be smaller and more detailed. These signs provide the basic information that a shopper needs to make a decision. Include the product description, a few feature bullet points and the price.

Signs at this level may stand on a shelf or table top, or be attached as a shelf-talker. For general product information, a 3" x 5" size works great.

You don't need product information



**An example of a well-designed signage plan. Signs include (clockwise from top): department, fixture, sale, sale with product information, shelf price label, product information. Note detail of the product label below.**

signs for every product. Be selective.

Here are a few ways to use product information effectively:

- compare features of similar types of merchandise
- educate shoppers about new products
- suggest products for different skill levels
- suggest complimentary products

### PRICE LABELS

Price labels are crucial. If you are not pricing your products clearly, you are losing out on potential sales.

Many retailers price merchandise individually, with a label affixed to the product. Often, this is the best way for some products to be sold. Another alternative is to label the shelf. This works if the product is always placed in the same location.

Having the price on the shelf allows the shopper to easily compare prices between products.

Some stores do a combination of both of these methods. Pricing on the shelf helps with restocking. Having the price also on the package assists salespeople at the cash register.

### STORE POLICIES

Store policies need to be displayed for customers, usually near the cash register. Try to keep the number of policy signs to a minimum. State the policy wording in as positive a tone as possible. Use the same font and colors as the rest of your signage.

Many times, retailers will simply write out their policy signs in marker and tape it to the counter or on the wall behind the register. It is not long before these signs are peeling, torn or used to test pens. Take the time to get your policy signs printed and posted professionally. A simple color print out in an acrylic stand presents a more polished image.

Every store is different. You may not need to create a sign style for each of these categories. Sometimes, one sign style can do double duty. For example, a product information sign can also be used to highlight new products.

Still, every store needs an effective signage plan. It will help all your customers decode the store, making it easier for both new and expert customers to find the product that's right for them. ■



**Close-up of a sample 3" x 5" product information sign. It could be attached to the edge of a shelf as a shelf talker, or used in a sign holder on a shelf or table top. Another option is to print on card stock and fold as a tent card.**

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