

*Paul Williams, founder of Idea Sandbox (www.idea-sandbox.com), is an expert at helping brands develop remarkable marketing programs that increase sales and allow companies to stand apart from their competition.*

# Guide To Better Awareness Through Signage:

## *Design Technique*

If you want more people to visit your business, you've got to:

- Let them know you're there
- Pique their interest
- Communicate clearly a compelling reason to enter

Some essential tools that help achieve these goals include your exterior signage and presentation. Designing signage that is easy to read and understand at various distances helps alert a customer to who you are and what you do.

In this article we cover technical components related to effective signage design; this includes size, colors, and typeface. Check out our other article with a focus on [Guide to Better Awareness Through Signage: Creating Great Messaging & Alluring Offers](#).

When a potential customer is considering doing business with you, everything they see and experience from your website to the curb of your location either contributes to or detracts from the decision whether or not to enter your business. Details from the paint color of your building, the cleanliness of your sidewalk, to your signage and in-window merchandising inform a customer whether your business is for them.

## Signage & Message Type By Distance

Customers learn about your shop from the outside in three distances.

### 1. Branding From Afar (10 to 100 feet)

From a block away, from a passing car or from across the street customers should see your company name and hopefully understand the type business you're in (restaurant, retailer) and your offering (Italian restaurant, paper goods retailer).

### 2. Offers From The Sidewalk (5 to 10 feet)

Signage at this distance provides more specificity.

- The most authentic Italian food in town
- Paper good supplies for home crafting with unique offerings for this season

### 3. Details At Your Door (1 to 3 feet)

At the front of your shop, customers can stop and peer into your windows to see what products you offer, read your restaurant menu, or get a better understand of your pricing.

Thinking about signage this way helps you choose what to feature from what distance.

The graphic below provides some guidelines for crafting signage to be appropriate and effective at different distances.

Different types of signage should be designed to accomplish different tasks, and the messaging should reflect that.

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### Font Sizes For Ease of Reading: Distance & Close-Up

The readability of your signage will vary depending on where your potential customer is. There are at least four key distances to consider - at your storefront, on the sidewalk, in a passing car or bus, and standing on the opposite side of the street.

WHERE AM I?	At Your Storefront	Walking on the Sidewalk	Passing in a Car or Bus	Opposite Side of the Street
WHAT AM I DOING?	Looking at window display. Reading restaurant menu. Looking inside to ensure you're open. Looking inside window to see if offering looks enticing.	Passing by to see if you offer what I may be looking for.	Identifying business and offering. Does your business look enticing. Are you worth finding a parking space? Consider the viewer is moving at 15 to 25 mph.	Identifying business type and offering. Does business look enticing. Are you worth crossing the street for?
DISTANCE FROM ENTRANCE	0 to 2 feet	2 to 10 feet	30 feet	50 feet
LEGIBLE LETTER HEIGHT	At least 1/4" tall or 16 points	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">1" tall</div> Letters 1" tall or 72 points	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; font-size: 2em;">4" tall</div> Letters 4" tall or 288 points	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; font-size: 3em;">6" tall</div> Letters 6" tall or 431 points

**ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EASY READING:**

- Use upper and lowercase lettering, ALL CAPS is harder to read.
- Use traditional fonts like Arial, Times New Roman, or similar, or your company's official font.
- Don't put type on top of a picture.

Diagram prepared by Idea-Sandbox.com. Source: USSC Foundation, The Signage Foundation.

# Basic Technical Considerations

There are at least three basic concepts to consider to make sure your signage works. Is it a) visible, b) legible, and c) easy to understand?

## A) Visibility

- Regardless of what is on your sign, can customers even see it?
- Is your sign big enough and mounted in a conspicuous place?
- A flush-mounted sign works well to read from across the street or from a passing car. However, should you also consider a blade sign that sticks out and can be seen from your sidewalk? (if permitted)
- Is it properly illuminated at night?

## B) Legibility

- Readable Size: Is the lettering big and clear enough to be read from the appropriate distance?
- Readable Type: Is the type treatment simple and easy to read?
- Coloring: Does the color of the lettering and background work together to allow the message to stand out, but also be consistent with your brand?

The graphic below provides recommended color combinations that are easy to read, and even take into account color blindness. A designer and signage shop can help you with these.

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### The Best Contrasting Color Combinations For Ease of Reading

To ensure ease of reading, create strong contrast through the optimal combination of background and foreground colors. The **TEXT COLORS** indicated below provide the best readability against the **BACKGROUND COLORS** in the left column. Combinations not shown are not recommended.

	Text Color								
Background	Black	White	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Tan	Brown
Red		White			Yellow			Tan	
Orange	Black								
Yellow	Black		Red				Blue		Brown
Green		White						Tan	
Blue		White			Yellow			Tan	
Purple		White			Yellow				
Tan	Black			Orange			Blue		Brown
Brown		White			Yellow				
Black		White		Orange	Yellow			Tan	
White	Black		Red			Green	Blue		Brown

If you have a lot of text, It is easier to read dark text on a light background than on a dark background.

Diagram prepared by Idea-Sandbox.com. Key Source: "Wayfinding: People, Signs and Architecture" by Paul Arthur

## **C) Easy To Understand**

- Is it clear from the name of your company what you do? Is there a piece of artwork or icon that represents what you do? (ice cream cone, shirt, wine bottle)
- If not, does your target audience at least understand what it is you do?

Now that we've discussed distance, size, legibility and understandability – let's talk about other aspects

## **In-Window Merchandising: Let Your Products Tell the Story**

Practice “showing”, not telling. Consider your shop windows as venues for your products, whether they be mouth-watering food, stylish home accessories, or a mannequin seasonally well-dressed with matching handbag and shoes. These techniques allow you, in an appealing way, to showcase the quality of what you do. Furthermore, they contribute to impulse purchases.

## **Quality Out = Quality In**

The quality of your presentation has a direct relationship to the amount customers may be willing to spend with you.

If you're wondering why customers aren't spending enough or as much as they used to, part of the problem may be that you aren't making your business look like the kind of store worth shopping.

If signs appear old and worn, with bent corners, or information has been crossed out instead of reprinted; if your food or product photos are old and faded; these are all indicators that you're cutting corners and not paying attention to detail. They're signaling “lower quality.”

It makes customers think twice when you're cutting corners with these highly visible things, and perhaps wonder what other ways might you be cutting corners behind the scenes with your ingredients or products?

Be sure to make the best impression and pay attention to these and all the subtle details customers consider when choosing where to spend their money.

## **More Isn't Better**

Just because you have space, doesn't mean you must use it. More signage, more messages isn't better. In fact, it creates visual noise for your customers and can deter rather than attract customers.

A best practice is to de-clutter your messaging now. Take away non-essential messages and signage that detract from the essential things you need and want to communicate. And, next time you want to add a new message, make it a requirement that you take an existing message away. This will help you avoid future clutter.

## **Not Sure What to Do? Follow the Big Brands**

Sometimes it is easy to feel discouraged. How the heck can you compete with big brands who have budgets, research, and resources we can never afford?

All the research you need is available for free at the local mall or shopping district. You'll see how 100s of brands have applied their research and efforts in signage, merchandising, product selection, and more.

You've got a camera on your phone – do some reconnaissance. No excuses!

## **In Closing**

There is a lot to think about, plan and design when it comes to effective signage. But, none of it is rocket science. And it isn't expensive. It just takes common sense and attention to detail.

Using these tips and techniques will ensure your business is seen, understood and considered as a quality place to do business.