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Guide To Better Awareness Through Signage: *Creating Great Messaging & Alluring Offers*

As customers drive and walk past your business, they judge a book by its cover. The impression you make through your outward appearance – from signage to cleanliness, presentation of your employees, to the merchandising of your products – all of these elements send messages to potential customers.

This article will focus on your signage, specifically the content and messaging you should provide.

For effective design tips and techniques, check out the Guide to Better Awareness Through Signage: Technical Design for effective design tips and tricks.

The Three Customer Shopping Situations

Before we start discussing types of signage and messaging, let's first think about the circumstances that bring customers to our businesses and what it takes to get them into our door.

These are:

1. The Planned Visit (Destination)
2. Shopping Trip (Potential Customer)
3. An Impulse Visit (Impulse).

1. Destination: The Planned Visit

In this situation, the customer has planned to visit your shop. You are their intended destination. They know where you are because they're either a returning customer or may have used a map to find you.

The **planned visitor** merely needs to see your company name on a sign to confirm your location. If they're using a map or directions, all they need is your building number or primary signage to confirm your location. Unless they're somehow distracted they will enter your business.

2) Potential Customer

This customer is “going shopping.” They know what type of product or service they want (lunch, a gift for a friend, after-dinner sweet treat), but they don’t necessarily know where they’ll ultimately make their purchase. You may be on their list of places to visit, or they might discover you while out shopping. Typical examples include clothes and shoe shopping. Customers plan and expect to shop around, visiting several businesses, to find what will satisfy their needs.

The **potential customer** needs to understand that your offerings meet general and specific criteria they’ve set in their mind for the thing they’re seeking. We discuss this more in a moment.

3) Impulse

Finally, there is the **impulse** customer. They weren’t necessarily looking for what you’re offering – however, you’ve done something to pique their interest to check-out your business.

Don’t worry about appealing to the impulse shopper, as accidental purchases aren’t a sustainable strategy. We want to be the best at providing a core product to a particular audience. The good news is the **impulse** customer needs the same information as the **potential customers**.

Information Potential Customers Need

As customers explore their options to determine whether your business provides what they are looking for, the following considerations/needs are used as filters to make their selection:

- **Your Name/Business Category** – what is your company name, and are you the type of business they need (restaurant, retailer, dry cleaner, bike repair, etc.)
- **Availability** – that you’re open for business
- **General Offerings** – you offer and have the type of thing they’re looking for
- **Convenience** – can they get to you easily
- **Appropriate/Specific Interest** – do you have the size, color, kind, etc. that the customer is looking for
- **Credible** – trust that you can deliver a quality product or service
- **Perceived Value** – when the customer is doing a quality to price comparison

Here is an example...

Mary is hungry for lunch and today wants a healthy salad. She want protein, but would prefer not to have meat on her salad. As she looks across the street, she looks to see...

- Is this a restaurant? Do I recognize the brand? (Name/Business Category)

She has determined there is a restaurant, as she gets closer she is now confirming...

- Are they open? (Availability)
- Do they serve lunch? And, if so, do they have salads? (General Offerings)

At the same time, she is considering (Convenience)...

- Is there a closer option? Is there parking? Does it look like they have a long wait? Is this the kind of place that only takes cash? Will there be a place to sit?

Looking in the window, she confirms they have salads, but...

- Is there an option without meat but with protein? (Appropriate/Specific Interest)
- Do they look freshly made in a sanitary environment by clean employees? (Credible)

Finally, with everything she has seen and experienced so far, does she feel the vegetarian salad is reasonably priced? (Perceived Value)

Knowledge Is Power

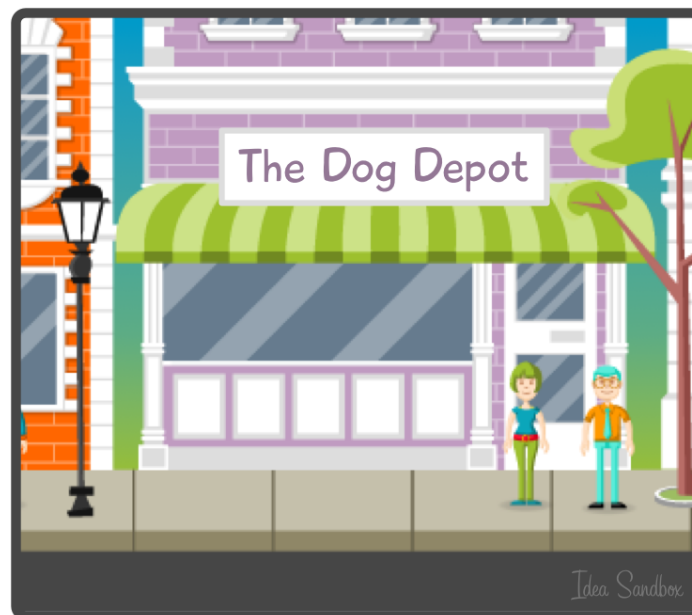
Understanding what information potential customers need when making shopping decisions provides us with clear direction on how to approach our signage, merchandising and communication.

Let's dig deeper into each of these needs and describe how to meet those needs.

Your Name/Business Category

This is the most basic filter. What is your name? Do I recognize your brand? What business category are you? That is, what is it that you do?

For example: Donna's Dog Depot.



Donna needs to make sure her sign gives us a little more information. She could be a doggie spa, a pet store, or even serve gourmet hot dogs. Putting an icon on her sign or a secondary line will solve the challenge.

Donna's Dog Depot – Pet Food & Supplies –

This is information that's critical from a distance. If Donna did serve the most delicious gourmet hot dogs and bratwurst, she doesn't want people dismissing her as a dining destination because of a vague name.

Availability

Are you open for business? This sounds basic, but if your windows are dark, or your sign doesn't light up at night, customers may not know you're open. If you're a coffee place that opens early, it may be worth having a "now open" sign in your window at 6:30 am. You may need an illuminated sign for the dessert or drink spot open late, and be certain that your website information is up to date.

General Offerings

What do you offer? Back to our Donna's Dog Depot example, she needs a "modifier" to communicate if she's a restaurant, a retailer, or a service provider. Adding words to your company name to clarify what you do, such as...

- Cafe
- Bar & grill
- Shoe repair
- Diner
- Men's formalwear
- Irish Pub
- Taco bar
- Salon and spa

Convenience

Convenience includes having amenities like:

- The ability to park
- Speed of service that will allow me to order, be served, and enjoy my food within my lunch break
- If you take credit cards
- If you have enough rush hour seating
- If you offer free WiFi

It is no mistake that Starbucks is everywhere. They know the importance of convenience. It is one of their differentiators and a key reason they are frequented.

Be sure to promote your amenities:

- Additional free parking in the rear
- 15-minute lunch specials
- Credit card icons in your window
- More seating upstairs
- The Free WiFi logo

Appropriate/Specific Interest

You've seen these people – they stand outside your shop and look in. They're assessing. They look into your window looking at your merchandising, the food on customer tables, your window menu or display. Do you offer the size, color, kind, or that vegetarian salad I'm looking for?

Your window signage, in-window display, and elements visible from the sidewalk should help communicate some of these details.

Note that the goal is simply to get them to enter your shop, not to tell them everything. Too much information on the outside can work against you making it more confusing, not easier. More isn't better.

Credible

For a restaurant, do I trust your food handling, your food quality? For a retailer, can I tell that your products are well made? Do you have a fair return policy or product guarantees that reduce my perceived risk?

Word of mouth and online reviews contribute to our sense of credibility. If you need to boost your credibility, be sure to:

- Post your awards and reviews
- Publicize your health inspection score
- Publicize who provides your quality ingredients and where they're sourced
- Make freshness dates and indicators highly visible

Perceived Value

Does the customer feel they're getting fair value in exchange for their money? We all know the actual cost to make or serve something is far below the retail price.

Does your branding, presentation, service, employee appearance, quality, attention to detail, ambiance, and environment make me feel it is worth it?

If your products are higher priced, be sure to clearly promote your quality assurance and guarantee signage. Mention the grass-fed beef from the local ranch. Promote “always fresh, never frozen.” Mention the company who hand-stitches your suits.

In Conclusion...

There are many factors to consider when developing signage and communications, but it is all doable and doesn't require a big investment of money or time to do it properly.

Your brand signage, menus, and product information, play an incredible part of presenting who you are, what you do, and whether you are worth it to potential customers.

As you're out being a customer yourself, pay attention to the signage and communication tools you spot that help you understand what a company does and how they do it.