

Simple Steps for Effective Shop Signage

How effective business signage can dramatically boost your brand name and bottom line.

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Photo courtesy Gurney's Automotive Repair

Bill Gurney knows the importance of attracting new customers. In fact, he believes the future of sustainability of shops will heavily rely on new customer rates.

“As cars are made better and service intervals are pushed out longer, you don’t see repeat customers as much throughout the year. Years ago you might have seen customers three times a year, and now it’s just twice a year,” says Gurney, owner of Gurney’s Automotive Repair, a two-shop operation in New Hampshire. “As I look to the future and see what’s going on with cars, we’re not going to lose customers, but we’re going to see them less frequently. So you need more customers to do the same amount of business.”

The problem, though, was that Gurney’s shop only brought in 166 new faces each year. Thinking toward the future, he knew his shop needed to attract attention from a much broader portion of passersby.

So Gurney transferred his attention to advertising, and quickly stumbled upon one glaring issue - signage. Few people took notice of the shop’s old, boring, black and white, static sign that stood outside, and it was no longer adequate to effectively display community and business messages.

“I wanted to grow my business, so I knew I had to attract more visibility and add another level of professionalism to our image,” Gurney says.

The problem came with an easy solution: Get a new sign. Sounds simple, right? Well, sometimes the most significant and realistic improvements come from the most obvious of changes. And Gurney's sign adjustment is a prime example. With a new sign in place for just one year, Gurney witnesses a 50 percent increase in brand new customers and nearly a six-figure revenue boost - numbers that he carefully tracks and can directly attribute to the signage.

Attract Attention

Gurney assessed several options when looking for new signage to get his shop noticed. He ultimately selected a design that includes two part. The first is a 39 inch by 90 inch digital LED sign that allows for color lights and moving, changeable images and words. On top of that sits a large, oval-shaped sign that includes the shop's name and logo for branding purposes.

"It's the biggest sign I could get based on zoning regulations," Gurney says. "It's very eye-catching and appealing, and catches the essence of who I am."

Of course, Gurney's old sign also stood tall and included his brand name. So why invest in something new that essentially does the same thing? Business signage expert John Kunze, director of the sign division for Watchfire Signs, says color lights and images obviously draw more attention. But more importantly, simply making a change causes people to look.

"There is a term in the marketing world called 'habituation.' As people drive down the street and look at things, if there is something that doesn't change, they begin to tune that item out," Kunze says. "The ability to have changing elements on an electronic sign combined with an interesting design give a hi-tech, modern look. There are a lot of positives in terms of what a new sign design communicates to the public."

One of those positives, Gurney says, is professionalism. Consumers perceive signage to be a direct reflection of who you are and your commitment to quality, and road signs are your best opportunity to build a proper image from the street.

"You can't be stingy when it comes to your brand," Gurney says. "That's the first thing that people see, and what they use to decide whether to visit your business."



Sign Design

John Kunze of Watchfire Signs says Gurney's business improvements are common. He's watched businesses throughout several industries accomplish the same feat in his 23-year career as a signage expert. But, he says, you've got to do it right to make the investment effective.

If you're looking to update or add new signage at your facility, Gurney and Kunze offer several tips to help:

1. Reflect your brand

Your signage should coincide with your company image, Gurney says. It should include your name, logo, color scheme and slogan to illustrate who you are.

2. Have clear visibility

Your sign should be easily visible from the road, Kunze says. Make sure it's not blocked by any trees, power poles, traffic signs and/or buildings. Assess your local zoning regulations to identify height or placement rules that might apply.

Include colors. Gurney says the use of several colors adds visibility and vibrance compared to monochrome signs. Colors also allow for more design freedom if you wish to include images or seasonal themes.

3. Use lights

Kunze says to make sure the sign is well lit, which helps shops to generate attention after business hours and at night. LED signs like Gurney's can operate on typical 20 amp circuits, and cost roughly 61 cents per day to operate.

If you go that route, Gurney warns to carefully assess your sign provider to make sure you purchase a quality display with quality parts. Assess the company's installation services, maintenance package and warranties.

4. Make it changeable

If possible, don't create a permanent, static sign, Kunze says. That's because you want to be able to update your messages regularly with new phrases, slogans or messages. That allows you to promote short-term specials or local events, for example.

5. Be concise

Don't get too wordy with signage messages, Kunze says. People should be able to read and understand it very quickly as they pass by.

6. Update your messages

Shops should have a rotation of four to six messages that reinforce key business or community initiatives, Kunze says. He recommends changing the message daily so that people always have something new to read as they pass by in order to draw continuous attention.

Gurney alters his messages regularly to reflect new business promotions and community events. With his digital sign, he's able to remotely log-in and make changes from a computer or tablet device.

Bring in the Business

Gurney has every customer complete a questionnaire that asks how they heard about the business. He provides eight categories to select from, one of which specifically states "Signage/Saw us from the road." Within 12 months after installing the new sign, Gurney brought in 259 new customers who reported coming in because they "saw the facility from the road," while 89 of those customer specifically mentioned the sign as the reason for their visit.

That's a 64 percent increase compared to the 166 customers who saw the shop from the road the previous year. And those 259 new customers amounted to exactly \$90,037 in additional revenue - a 53 percent increase in revenue generated by new customers compared to the prior year.

“I know this is factual because I tracked this stuff long before I put the sign in,” Gurney says. “My location didn’t change; nothing changed with the business except for the sign.”

ROI

Quality business signs don’t come cheap. Digital light-up signs like Gurney’s can actually be pretty expensive, Kunze says, who reports a range of \$25,000 - \$50,000. But they last a long time, and shops should consider their long-term return on the investment.

Gurney, for example, more than exceeded that investment within 12 months, and he expects the payoff for the life of the sign to be even greater since his revenue improvements don’t account for new customers who will make repeated visits or additional customers the shop will continue to acquire.

“You get what you pay for,” Gurney says. “Sometimes you’ve got to make considerable investments into your brand to get a considerable amount of value back out.”

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You can view it online at:

www.ratchetandwrench.com/RatchetWrench/February-2014/Create-Traffic-Building-Shop-Signage/