

# SIGN DESIGN GUIDELINES

## CREATING SIGNS YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL READ

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### HOW MANY OF YOUR IN-STORE SIGNS DO YOUR CUSTOMERS ACTUALLY READ?

Sign pollution – unfortunately, it’s alive and well in retail environments today. Too many signs are one of the main reasons customers don’t read signs. Especially if they are poorly designed, or in too many colors, shapes, and sizes, and have too many words. Customers’ brains will simply bypass reading these signs because it takes too much time and energy to make sense of them.



3-D sign which could sit on top of a showcase. Photo by Retailworks, Inc.

Creating sign design guidelines will make your life with signage easier. They organize your signs via a set of coordinated design elements so all staff will be on the same page when creating and posting a sign. And the brain will be able to see and quickly absorb the meaning of the signs, resulting in customers actually reading them.

#### How do you create a set of sign design guidelines?

First categorize all the signs you have in your store, ie:

- logo
- department
- product information
- vendor
- promotional
- sale
- services offered
- store policies
- digital info: website, social media icons, hashtags

The second step is to create ‘design criteria’ for each category of signs:

- overall size
- font type and size
- max number of words

- color(s)
- graphic(s)
- material, ie: printing on paper, cardstock or sturdier substrate;
- frame and/or sign holder

When you consistently use a coordinated set of design elements, you train your customer to look for the “promotion” sign, and when they want information about a product, they look for your “product info” signs.

### Some sign design tips:

- *Less is more.*
- *Incorporate symbols, photos, and graphic images to communicate messages without using a lot of words.*
- *Don’t handwrite your signs unless you or someone on your staff has exceptional penmanship. Poor handwriting decreases the value of your brand.*
- *Don’t scotch tape signs to anything. Ever. Again, this cheapens the image of your brand. Instead, use frames or acrylic sign holders for a more professional look.*



An example of a cool logo (not a jewelry store, but an educational institution in Milwaukee, WI) on the wall behind the information counter. Photo by Retailworks, Inc.

Once you have the guidelines established, strategically place your signs. For instance, customers should quickly see department signs from your entrance. Your logo should always be on the wall behind your transaction counter and illuminated internally or by lights above. Don’t be shy about placing your logo in several places throughout your store to reinforce your brand. Policies and services\* offered should be posted on the counter.

\*If you offer services such as “special orders, online orders, custom work, shipping, gift wrapping,” be sure to have this information posted. It’s important to tell new customers, but you’d be surprised how many regular customers forget what all you offer.

Once you’ve created and implemented these guidelines, it’s still important to schedule several ‘sign audits’ throughout the year. Even with procedures in place, somehow “sign creep” happens, or the store runs out of standard sign holders, and someone ends up improvising. Remember, the consistent use of design elements is key to keeping your sign system looking good, and consistency in implementation is key to keeping the program running smoothly!

So, think before you just slap up a sign. Ask yourself: is it necessary, is it well designed, does it match our brand/sign guidelines, and will a customer see it when they need to see it? Knowing you can actually train your customers to find, read and understand your signage via the consistent use of design elements is a powerful tool.



Dutille’s Jewelers in Lebanon, NH. The sign identifies their “custom ring” and beverage counter and reflects their brand style. Photo by Dutille’s Jewelers.