

How many times have we complained about customers being too cheap or not understanding the cost involved in producing a sign? Why is it the sign maker and the customer have two different perceptions of what a sign should cost? More importantly, how do we bridge this gap?

A while back I went to dinner with some friends at an upscale restaurant. A hamburger sounded good to me. When I checked the menu, the price was \$8.95. My first reaction was “\$8.95 for a hamburger!?” I decided to go ahead and order this pricey hamburger with an aside to my friends (making sure the waiter heard) that it had better be one helluva burger.

When our food arrived and my plate was set before me, there was a huge and delicious-looking hamburger with a ton of french fries and a pile of extra tomatoes, onions, and even avocado. It was a big meal, served fresh and, proved to be a truly great-tasting burger.

#### **Was it worth it?**

Was it worth \$8.95? You bet! I suddenly realized what all customers are looking for: value for their money. Did I get a great deal here even though initially the price seemed high? You bet I did. Here’s the important thing: as a customer I perceived that I got a great meal even though I paid a fairly high price.

Could I have gotten a hamburger cheaper somewhere else? We all know the answer to that question. Would I have received the same high quality and quantity at a cheaper price? Of course not. At \$8.95 I expect a really great hamburger. At \$1.99, I’m smart enough to know what kind of hamburger I’m really getting.

#### **Our customers are just like us**

We often complain about our customers not understanding how much a sign should cost. But we must remember that we are customers, too. And they, like us, need to perceive that they are getting real value for their money. It’s been said before that as sign makers we need to educate our

# Now, how would you like that burger?

by Ralph “Doc” Guthrie

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**An \$8.95 hamburger has a lot to teach us about marketing our work.**

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customers about the value of a sign. Why should they pay \$895 to me when they can get “the same thing” somewhere else for \$199?

We all know the truth is that they can’t. We need to explain to them the value of a quality sign: using premium materials, sealing the edges against moisture, priming all surfaces (yes, even the back), using durable oil-base enamel lettering paint or premium-grade vinyl, and most importantly of all, designing a sign that “works”, with good emphasis, good value contrast, no distorted letters, and pleasing negative space.

Our portfolios and a good preliminary sketch can point out all these factors. Courteous service when dealing with the customer and meeting the promised dead-

line are both important, too. I’ve had plenty of customers come in looking for a bargain-burger sign and ending up with a gourmet steak-burger sign, and understanding why they paid more and actually feeling they got a good value.

#### **A low price or a good value?**

Remember, we are all customers, too—and we’re always looking for a bargain. Sometimes we pay more for something, but if we perceive we really got value for our dollar (which is a pretty good definition of bargain), then we are happy customers and more likely to return. Make sure your customers understand and feel they got value for their money—just as you like to feel when you’re a customer. □

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