

Ask the questions that lead to sales

...for both you and your customer

By Dan Mika

Besides speaking about the basics of a sign (colors, size, cost, etc.), the initial contact with a customer is an opportunity to do two additional things. First, to help determine the placement of a sign so that it will reach the maximum number of people (see *Great sign. But will they see it?* SignCraft July/August 2001); and second, to ask some questions that may bring more sales to both you and your customers.

These questions deal with what customers want to say to their potential customers through signs. What you ask your customer during the initial interview makes their communication needs—and the solutions—apparent.



Open signs at a 90-degree angle to the street do a great job of getting into the sight lines of passersby. This one caught my eye from a distance.



Businesses may not look open, especially at unusual hours. That's when an *Open* sign can help. This sign was done by Pacific Signs, Eugene, Oregon. Designed by Richard Knox

Is the business open at an unexpected time?

A couple of good “opening” questions are: “Is your business open at a time when people may not expect it to be and so just pass by? Do customers ever tell you that they thought you were closed?” Many businesses are open at unusual hours, 24 hours a day, holidays or weekends (an example would be an insurance agent open Saturdays 9-12). Depending on the business, these may be times when passersby don't expect them to be open.

If there's nothing visually different about these places at these times, many potential customers don't realize they're open. The business must cue the public with an *Open* sign. I've found that banners, window splash- es, neon, *Open* flags and A-frames do a great job of this. (In some towns, *Open* signs are informational and don't count against the maximum square footage of permitted signage.)



This highly effective *Open* flag is visible from far down the street.

Can they cash in on their neighbor's customers? Plenty of businesses are adjacent to other busy stores, shops and offices. These businesses could profit by directing signage toward the customers coming and going from those businesses. Often, as I leave a business and head toward my car, there's absolutely nothing to indicate what other business is to my right or left.

One business that did advertise to their neighbor's customers was a specialty-food business that began offering sandwiches for lunch. I interviewed the manager who said that after they placed an A-frame sign announcing the new product, facing the entrance of the busy copy shop next door, their sales in that product increased 40 percent. Diagramming of the sight lines will reveal any adjacent stores and can lead to a discussion of the profit opportunity available by advertising to the neighbor's customers.

Do they have sales events or advertise in other media? A sign as a primary means of advertising is often a much better directed ad than any other. Signs can reach the neighborhood that a business is located in, at a very low cost per person. They can advertise in-store specials or strong pricing, too, perhaps on a banner or window sign.

Signs can also serve as a reminder or backup for ads in other media—print, TV and radio. They'll reach people that the other media might never reach. Not everyone is going to see the ad in the paper or hear the radio spot or watch the TV station that your customer advertises on. But, many people in your customer's neighborhood will see your customer's ad if it is expertly placed in the sight lines of those who pass by. They'll be able to act on that information immediately, unlike with other media ads.

Are there hidden products, features or services that people should know about?

I once spoke with the manager of a new car dealership who experienced a 30-percent increase in sales of a particular make of car by simply putting the name of the make in the window in large letters. The name of the

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■ **Great sign. But will they see it?**, July/August 2001



Unexpected business hours may include weekends, late hours, early hours or 24 hours a day. Scot Campbell, Portland, Oregon, did this window sign.



Hidden features can be advertised with signs. This pet store sign grabbed my attention.



A lot of businesses do periodic hiring. Signs may be their best method of advertising.



Traffic stops for a red light next to this auto center. It's a great opportunity to advertise "hidden services."



Many people are drawn magnetically to sales as this one, which I saw in a store window. They'll come in when they see a *Sale* sign. Some show up only for sales, but others become regular customers.



Signs help businesses reveal their “secret products.” This window-filling neon sign made a strong impression as I drove past.

dealer was generic so they could sell a variety of makes, but being specific paid off.

Often there’s a lot going on inside a business that passersby are unaware of. I once kept hearing radio ads for a kitchen and bath showroom that had 40 units on display. Whenever I passed the business with its narrow storefront, I thought, “There’s just no way.” Finally, I went in and discovered the store was a lot deeper than I had assumed. The front windows were eventually lettered to reflect this “hidden feature” saying 40 KITCHENS & BATHS ON DISPLAY, VISIT OUR 7000-SQ.-FT. SHOWROOM. If your customer is hearing “I didn’t know you had this or sold that...” from their customers, it’s a good bet a sign would help sales.

Do they offer gift certificates? Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Christmas and other holidays are an opportunity to make people’s shopping a little easier with gift certificates. (I know I appreciate it!) And, it’s a profitable advance sale for a business. Two ways to get a sign like this into drivers’ sight lines are by using a temporary add-on to a pole sign or by placing an A-frame sign by the road.

Is the parking situation obvious? Unless the parking situation is self-evident (as in a mall or plaza), the split-second impulse decision to stop and shop may hinge on whether there is a sign giving quick directions about parking, such as *Parking In Back*, *Parking Across the Street*, etc. The percentages vary depending on the business, but most businesses rely on impulse shoppers for added income. If there’s a parking problem and there’s an available solution, the customer needs to state that on a sign. Individual signs that say *Parking for XYZ Company* may also be needed.

Do they need *Now Hiring* signs? Many businesses do periodic hiring. Signs can be a low-



Signs can advertise in-store specials of all types. This sign delivers a steady response for this auto service center.



Gift Certificates are profitable for all sorts of businesses. Cutouts can be mounted on a pole sign as an add-on, or ground mounted like this one, which I saw at a car wash center.



Neon *Open* signs can be added to pole-mounted signs, as in this sign whose layout stood out as I drove by.



When I asked this store's owner about this sign, he said, "It cost me \$200, but within one week it brought in six paying customers."

cost, effective method of filling this need. (Check out the cost of a six-line ad in the *Help Wanted* section of your local paper!) In case you don't already know, signs have the lowest per-impession cost of any media.

Is the business just opening?

Grand Opening and *Entrance/Exit* roadside signs (and for the doors) might be needed. *Hours* signs for the doors and various signs for inside the store might be needed, too. Just mentioning these signs could begin the process that results in a sale.

When a business is first opening up, it's a great time to ask some questions about their various other sign needs. After that, they may get so busy that additional signs become just another thing on a long list that "they've got to get to." Many owners, though, are open to good, new ideas anytime.

Besides getting information from businesses I have worked with, a good source of information has been signs that catch my attention. I often stop in and ask about them. I'm usually pleasantly surprised at the open response I get from management. I may even get an insight or two I can use in the future. The signs pictured here (with credit given to the sign makers where possible) are examples I've photographed in my travels. •SC



Dan Mika is a sign analyst. He is interested in the many ways signs bring more customers into businesses. He can be contacted at signanalyst@hotmail.com.

We'd like to see your changeable-copy signs...

...sometimes called readerboards. *SignCraft* and Dan Mika are collecting photos of these signs and others for future articles—those hard-working secondary signs that seldom get photographed. Here's what we'd like to see:

- Changeable letter signs, illuminated or not, including unusual ones
- Real estate developer signs (They're usually larger than *For Sale* signs and try to project an image.)
- Unusual A-frame signs, especially those using figures and graphics
- Nice-looking *Enter/Exit* signs
- Under-canopy signs

Send your photos to *SignCraft*, PO Box 60031, Fort Myers, FL 33906, or e-mail them to signcraft@signcraft.com today. We'll return all photos.