

# Put window graphics to work

21 ways to help maximize the advertising potential of storefront windows

By Dan Mika

Lots of goods and services move thanks to window signs. New products are introduced, specialties are advertised and ads from other media are backed up as a point-of-purchase reminder. The names of businesses are repeated at a height where passersby can easily read and respond to them.

**In some situations window signs get the message across better than the storefront identification signs do.**

Window signs work because they are right where the visual action is—at eye level. They're at the height of both driving and walking traffic, so sometimes do a better job of advertising than does the main identification sign. Because of this, window signs can present a golden (and many times unregulated) advertising opportunity for business owners. And the closer you get to a business, the more important they become.

But window signs present challenges unlike any other types of signs.

- Glare and reflections on the glass decrease legibility.
- Signs on the inside of tinted glass have reduced visibility.
- Windows are usually oriented away from the best sightlines of passersby, so signs must be readable at a glance.
- Window signs may reduce the light coming in through a window, or block the view from the inside.

Some window signs work much better than others to overcome these challenges. For example: illuminated window signs draw attention 24 hours a day. Also, signs on the outside of the glass overcome reflection and tinted glass. Simply moving a sign to the outside of the glass can multiply its effectiveness



**1. Large signs work:** When the customer has large windows, it pays to use them. For example, if there's an office or store for rent, wouldn't a really large sign be a good idea? It's costing someone hundreds or thousands of dollars each month that it sits vacant. This 112-ft.-long showroom window splash is the work of Pierre Tardif, P.Tardif, Inc., Val-Belair, Quebec, Canada.

many times over.

In general, window signs are more effective when they are bold and simple. Less is read by more. People have only a moment to grasp the message that the window sign is attempting to convey.

Windows that are under a canopy, like in a plaza, present their own challenges because the direct sunlight doesn't reach them. In this situation signs on the outside of the glass really stand out. So do neon signs and illuminated window signs.

There are times when even the best window sign will not do as good a job as other signs. I recently spoke with the owner of an antique shop that was invisibly set back into a plaza. Their best sign solution was to place an A-frame sign in the parking lot. So during the initial interview with the customer, it's important to ask, "Is a window sign the best place to put this message?" A-frames and ground signs should be considered since they may put the vendor's message in a better proximity to the sightlines of passersby.

But once a window sign is chosen as the best or only option, using the "What works?" examples that follow can help you select the window sign that will yield the best results. Each one of the pictured signs works within its particular set of circumstances to do just that. Using it may help boost the value of window signs within your customer's advertising mix. \*SC

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**2. Banners work:** Indoors or out. Outdoors, banners can span many windows or cover window dividers. Exterior attachment methods include eyehooks and bungee cords. Even large suction cups on the glass are often enough to hold up small banners in sheltered areas. Indoors, conduit or dowels through pole pockets hooked to suction cups or chains will hold them. There are also banner-mounting systems that make hanging and changing easier, such as Banner-Trak [ImageOne Impact, 800-818-0222, www.image1impact.com]. Graphics can be handled with vinyl, paint, screen-printing or digital prints. Sign maker unknown.



**3. Light boxes work:** A great-looking window sign won't be working as hard as it could if the cover of night prevents it from being seen. Installed in a light box, the same layout could be working 24 hours a day. Illumination provides bright, attention-getting signs that can change the character of a business. Some situations that may benefit from an illuminated window sign include:

- When no exterior light illuminates the sign, and when information must be communicated after dark
- When the windows are lightly tinted (Heavily tinted glass requires signs on the outside of the glass.)
- When there's a low-light, daytime situation, such as under a plaza canopy
- When the main identification is not illuminated
- When signs must stand out on cloudy days, (which is much of the winter in some areas)

Illuminated cabinets work both day and night. One caution: due to the shallow depth of light boxes, "hotspots" (bright areas that show the fluorescent tube) may occur. Ask the companies listed below for their thoughts and solutions.

You can get illuminated cabinets for window signs from your sign supply house or the following manufacturers:

- TecArt Industries Inc., 800-886-6615, www.tecartinc.com
- Uniko Manufacturing Limited, 888-272-0276, www.backlit.com
- Marv-o-lus Manufacturing Co. Inc., 800-236-0553, 773-826-1717
- Stop Look Sign Company, 800-447-4467, 562-690-7576 (incandescent bulbs)
- Dynamic Displays, 800-356-7446

There's more on  
[www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com)

Click on *Features* to read Dan's article:

- This reference chart sells more signs, November/December 2001
- and several of Dan's past articles

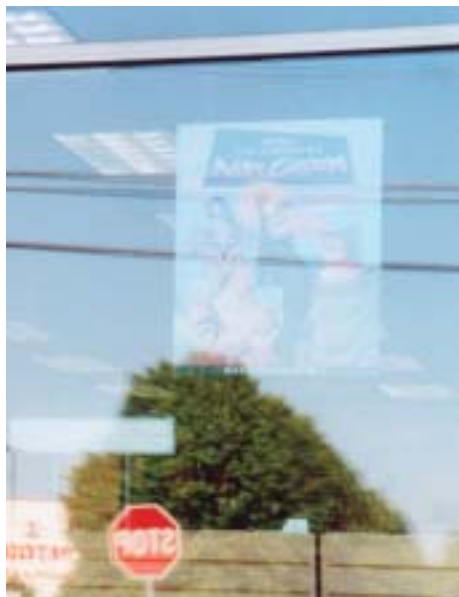


Static-cling film

**4. Easily removable signs work:** Easily removable signs on the inside or outside of the glass come in handy for seasonal, reusable or temporary signs. Substrates come in a range of removeability for almost any application.

Here are some of the popular options for removable window signs:

- **Banners:** The best window sign is sometimes a banner in front of the window.
- **Easily removable ink-jet material:** This low-tack, ink-jet medium (in white or clear) is offered by many vinyl manufacturers. Some of these films can stay up for a year or more.
- **Static cling:** You can buy precut kits of static-cling letters [Joseph Struhl Company, Inc., 800-552-0023, [www.magicmaster.com](http://www.magicmaster.com)] and resell them to customers, or buy rolls of static-cling film for hand-lettered or screen-printed graphics. Static-cling film can also be printed on a thermal-transfer printer (like the Gerber Edge®). It comes in clear and several colors. Remember to keep it away from window molding to maintain adhesion.
- **Masking vinyl:** This may be suitable for some window signs. Most vinyl manufacturers offer it, usually in white. The cost is low, and it's easy to peel off. You can paint it (test first!) or cut letters from it.
- **Easy release vinyl:** This vinyl film can be removed cleanly and relatively easily for up to two years after installation. This can be cut as lettering and it's available from Oracal (series 631), Avery Graphics™ Specialty (Easy Removable), Gerber (InstaChange™) and other manufacturers. Easy-release vinyl is also suitable for short-term vehicle graphics, too.
- **Tyvek:** Window splashes can pack a lot of punch. Some people paint them on the glass; others paint or screen print onto Tyvek™ [Tekra Corporation, 800-448-3572, [www.tekra.com](http://www.tekra.com)] material, which can be secured to the window with clear, double-faced tape [see the feature on Pierre Tardif, *SignCraft*, May/June 2001].
- **Styrene:** This can be printed or finished with vinyl graphics and held in place with clear, double-faced tape.



#### 5. Signs on the outside of the glass work:

Work better, that is. The problems of reflection, glare and tinted glass are overcome by putting signs on the outside of the glass. Depending on the reflection, lighting and tint of the glass, that difference in impact can range from mild to intense. In this case nearly all value of the sign was lost.



**6. Side-facing windows work:** This window is naturally angled toward the sightlines of passersby, making this sign much more effective than if it were in the front window.

With expert placement, window signs can be in the sightlines of passersby for a longer period of time. The result is a better value. If the sign maker isn't familiar with the customer's windows, having the customer do a simple sketch of the windows will help determine if the windows could be used more efficiently.



#### 7. Paper (and paper substitutes) work:

Though white paper is often used, fluorescent packs a punch. You can also use Tyvek™, which is paperlike, but water and tear resistant. It can be painted or lettered with vinyl graphics.

You can get both white and fluorescent paper to letter or print on from your sign supply house or these sources:

- **Screamers!** [Associated Repro Inc.], 866-224-3294, [www.screamersigns.com](http://www.screamersigns.com)
- **Lazer Images**, 800-875-7446, [www.lazerimages.com](http://www.lazerimages.com)



**8. Gold leaf works:** Gold leaf adds class to a message. These graphics are SignGold [845-692-6565, [www.signgold.com](http://www.signgold.com)] 22k gold leaf film. Ornaments are from the *Main Street Collection* CD by Golden Era Studios [800-361-0815, [www.goldenstudios.com](http://www.goldenstudios.com)]. Pictorial is a digital print output on the Gerber Edge® [Gerber Scientific Products, 800-222-7446, [www.gspinc.com](http://www.gspinc.com)], and Gerber Etched Glass film was used for the panel of vertical bars behind it.  
*Garland Graphics, Alden, New York*



**10. Repeating the store name works:** It brings the businesses' name down to the level of both pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The closer to a business that traffic is, the more important this becomes. The store name can be repeated with neon, paint, vinyl, a light box, etc.

In this case it was the window sign that caught my eye as I was walking by. I stopped in to inquire about it, and the owner asked how I liked the main identification sign. I had to say that I hadn't noticed it. Window signs work because they're down where pedestrians are. They can turn strollers into shoppers.  
*Garland Graphics, Alden, New York.*



**9. Rigid signs work:** Polystyrene, foam core board, PVC, aluminum, corrugated plastic, show card—all these materials and more can be used for signs or mounting of digital prints. Besides the colors the materials come in, applying vinyl film over the substrate makes even more colors possible.



### 11. Repetition works:

Repetition helps messages sink in.  
Repetition helps messages sink in.  
Repetition helps messages sink in!

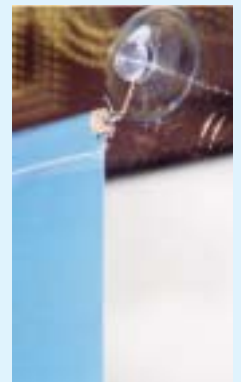
## Hanging and mounting window signs

There are a lot of ways to put a sign in a window—plastic extrusions (hung with fishing line or chain), suction cups and more. You can also choose from patented systems for hanging banners and window signs. Keep in mind that the further the sign is hung behind the glass, the more its visibility is decreased.

Plastic extrusions are inexpensive and make a neat, clean installation. They cost a couple dollars for a 4-ft. section. Suction cups come in a variety of sizes and strengths. (Adams Suction Cups makes one that can hold up to 25 pounds.) When buying, there may be a minimum order (sometimes waived for a fee), but you may be able to mix sizes and quantities.

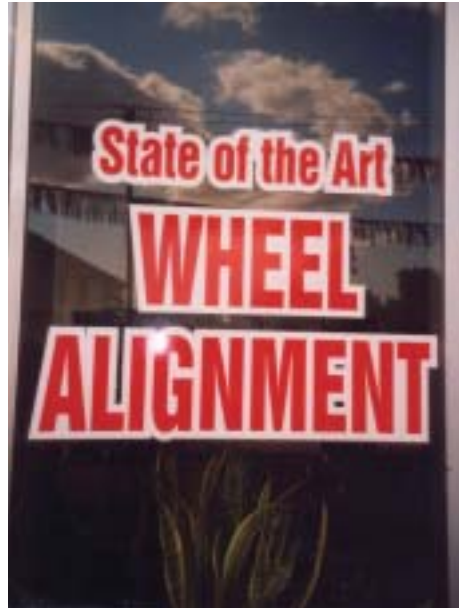
The following suppliers offer products worth investigating. Check with your sign supply house to see what products they stock for the task, too.

- Adams Suction Cups, 800-237-8287, [www.suctioncups.com](http://www.suctioncups.com)  
They sell only through distributors like K International, 800-323-2389, [www.kinter.com](http://www.kinter.com)
- Hang-Ups Unlimited, 800-461-8154, [www.hangups.com](http://www.hangups.com)
- Marv-o-lus Mfg. Co., Inc., 800-236-0553, 773-826-1717
- ImageOne Impact, 800-818-0222, [www.image1impact.com](http://www.image1impact.com)





**12. Changeable-letter signs work:** These signs work when a business has a new message fairly often. There are window-sign kits available that you can buy at wholesale and resell. Some are illuminated; some aren't.



**13. Bold outlines work:** Simply using a bold outline on a light- or medium-weight letter will increase visibility dramatically. This sign is more effective because of the heavy, white border on the letters, and because it's on the *outside* of tinted glass.



**14. Bold and simple works:** Passersby have only a moment to read window signs, because windows are not usually perpendicular to the sightlines of the passersby. Making them easy to read helps get the message across. What to say on a window sign? Say just a little.



**15. Panels at the top of windows work:** These signs—called valence signs in years past—were once used on many storefronts. Today they are still very effective. Parked cars are a consideration as to where on the windows the signs should be placed. Sign maker unknown.



**16. Window splashes work:** Window splashes can be done right on the glass or on various other materials such as masking vinyl, static cling or Tyvek™. The latter two choices are handy for reusable signs for holidays and sales. Screen-printed and painted window splashes can be done directly on Tyvek™. These signs are then secured to the glass with double-faced tape. [See Pierre Tardif's profile, *SignCraft*, May/June 2001.] Choose from enamel, acrylics or acrylic latex when doing window splashes. Sign maker unknown.

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**17. Neon works:** Neon can send a strong message and give a business certain vitality. If you're selling custom neon signs, work with a wholesaler with a good reputation in the trade, or ask for references—and check them. Improperly made and installed neon can be dangerous. (Make sure you have adequate liability insurance, too.) Ron Turchiarelli, Turch Signs, Buffalo, New York



**18. Signs down low work:** For plaza storefronts, signs work mounted low on the glass because most driver's and passenger's eyes are no higher than five feet above the ground—even in an SUV. Sign maker unknown.



**21. Digital prints work:** Window signs can communicate ideas, but digital prints can communicate emotion. Picturing the product or service at eye level may be worth 1000 words. There are many digitally printable substrates including papers, films, banner fabric and more. If you can't print them in-house, there are plenty of service bureaus that can turn your files into digital graphics in a reasonable time. Again, simple images seem to work best—just as bold and simple copy works best.



These window-filling digital prints communicate to plaza-goers at eye level. Imagine trying to communicate this emotion and glamour with words instead of a picture.

**19. Fluorescent works:** Though not appropriate for all businesses, in certain situations fluorescent works well. It also stands out well and fades less when there is no direct sunlight. You can use panels, splashes, banner fabric, paper letters or fluorescent cling letters.

**20. Letting the light through works:** When the business owner wants signs that don't block the view or the light, signs that allow the outdoor light to enter a business interior may be used. Options include signs on Mylar, static-cling film, clear acrylic and individual letters on the glass.

Perforated vinyl is another possible solution. You've probably seen this on the windows on bus wraps. You can see through it from the inside, yet graphics are visible from the outside (albeit with lessened impact). It can be used outdoors with overlamine and edge sealer. It can be screen-printed, airbrushed or digitally printed.

- 3M, 888-364-3577, [www.3M.com](http://www.3M.com)
- Gerber Scientific Products, 800-222-7446, [www.gspinc.com](http://www.gspinc.com)
- Clear Focus Imaging, Inc., 800-307-7990, [www.clearfocus.com](http://www.clearfocus.com), [One Way Vision™ film]
- Avery Dennison Graphics, 800-231-4654, [www.averygraphics.com](http://www.averygraphics.com), [Avery® MPI 4002 perforated window film]



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](mailto:signanalyst@hotmail.com). Dan photographed these photos in his travels and is grateful to the shops and businesses involved for their permission to showcase their signs.