

BY BRUCE SMITH

# LEVERAGE YOUR STOREFRONT FOR BUSINESS AND BRAND

## What are you saying about your brand to passersby?

**C**onsider the storefront and pylon from your customers' point of view — while they are driving past in a minivan, late for a soccer game, low on gas, with three rowdy kids. Will they know what you sell? Will they remember you are there? Will they even see you?

Store exteriors are often the most under-leveraged brand building asset a retailer has. Hindered by by-laws, landlord criteria, and a harsh natural environment, this first impression of your brand is often overlooked and left to the lowest common denominator — the lowly back-lit sign box.

### LEVERAGE YOUR ASSET

But there are opportunities for leveraging this asset. They include graphics and com-



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munications, windows, architecture, merchandising, and technology.

Did you ever wonder why yellows, reds, and oranges

dominate exterior signage? It is because they are all high wave-length colours that attract the eye and are more likely to attract attention, even at 100 km

per hour, than more mundane blues, purples and greens. The result is an instantaneous brand impression and the chance to grab a little bit of mindshare —

## OUTDOOR MERCHANDISING

Taking the store to the street by stocking merchandise on the sidewalk can both increase the retail footprint and communicate the brand. What better way for a hardware store to tell the public that it sells ladders than to inventory a limited supply outside the store? For the customer, merchandise outside the storefront can add the entertaining and impulsive element many modern shoppers are looking for.

with the hope of turning it into market share.

Of course, when there is a sea of yellow and red signs, the effect may be lost, so retailers are experimenting with new ways of expressing weaker colours. (Consider what BMO bank is doing with its strong colour massing of bright blue.) And there are more tools, such as shape. Best Buy is a great example: their iconic price tag logo is turned into an over-scaled architectural element.

With only a split second to communicate to the speed-

ing car, logos go a long way in communicating an instantaneous message through their association with the brand. If I see a Nike logo, I know right away what is sold and the value proposition.

Also important are the words that appear on a building exterior. When Benjamin Moore created its banner program, many were named "Decorating Centre" or "Colour Experts," to move the value proposition beyond a product that many consumers see as just a commodity. Recently, Loblaw added "Great Food" to its signage, predisposing the customer to its offering.

### LET THE SUN SHINE IN

Your store's windows allow natural light to flood the space, thereby saving costs and making the retail space physiologically more comfortable. Windows make us feel welcome and safe. Would you even consider entering a store that had an opaque façade and doorway?

Windows provide retailers with the opportunity to display products and engage customers. They are a means to communicate specialization and seasonal change. For example, a retailer might display barbecues in the spring and snow blowers in the winter with no incremental promotional costs.


Technologies, such as cable signage systems and scrim, provide a medium for com-

municating brand and marketing messages. Retailers can "speak" to potential customers with targeted messages that reach into the public space and are always within a few feet of the retailer's products and problem-solving staff.

### EXECUTION IS KEY

Many of these great tools are lost in execution. Tattered and sagging vinyl banners, letter boxes with misspelt words, hand-printed signs taped to the front door, and dirty win-

dows do little to prepare customers for a great brand and shopping experience.

On the other hand, great design coupled with attentive execution can deliver a prominent brand touch point that will work 24 hours per day, seven days a week. 



*Bruce Smith of DMD Retail Design assists retailers by bringing design and business realities together to create great branded experiences.*



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