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- [Legal](#)
- [Life-Work](#)
- [Management](#)
- [Marketing](#)
- [News](#)
- [Motivation](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Profiles](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Sales](#)
- [Startup](#)
- [Technology](#)

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First Impressions

Catch more customers with a compelling sign

by *Eric Butterman*

Everybody knows the old saying: You can't judge a book by its cover. But when it comes to choosing where to shop, that maxim doesn't always apply. Chances are, most potential customers will judge the quality of your business by the appearance of the sign out front. If you've spent your budget making the inside of your store look professional, but your sign hasn't been updated since 1983, it's time to reevaluate—and revamp—your signage.

Mark Wagner, president of Wagner Electric Sign Company, says it's important that your sign grabs potential customers' attention.

"A sign shouldn't read like a business card," Wagner says. "It should represent a feeling you want to give viewers." Experts recommend using contrasting colors, attractive graphics and as few words as possible to keep it both eye-catching and readable from a distance.

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What's this?

Your sign is more than a land marker that identifies your business: It's an important tool that can boost clientele.

When George Kimson, owner of Aurora, Ohio-based Bertram Inn, suspected his sign wasn't attracting new customers, he knew it was time for a change.

"The hotel is known for its stately columns out front, so we wanted to incorporate that in our sign," Kimson says. "To be able to see that as you're driving brought in new business and helped people who were getting lost. We also wanted changeable copy for announcing specific events or deals. If you're having a dinner special, you want local traffic to know about it. That makes them stop even if they're not buying a room."

For Kimson, it came down to percentages: "Your sign is a direct reflection of your business," he says. "You can make 99 percent of your decisions right, but if that 1 percent wrong is your sign, that's all people who pass by will ever see."

Maximizing Your Signage

Keep it visible. A sign must be in clear sight of passersby in order to be effective.

Grab attention. Use graphics, contrasting color and electronic messaging to reach out and command the attention of potential customers.

Keep it simple. If your sign is crowded with words and images, those who

pass by your business won't be able to read it from a distance.

Make it memorable. Make your business' name and product easy for viewers to remember.