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Buying your first Sign?

We hope the following will help you with the process.

While most every person will at one point in time be involved with purchasing a home or automobile, those buying signs rarely know what to look for or what questions to ask. Purchasing a sign, for most, is a journey into unfamiliar territory. At The Graphic Garage we would like to make the sign buying process as easy and stress free as possible.

Take time to weigh your options. All businesses or organizations have a marketing budget that they have to stay within, but when it comes to making the most of those funds, looking to the value of your investment can make all the difference. Sure, a sign can be very inexpensive, but you still may not get your money back on the sign if it doesn't hold up. At times, going for higher quality signs is easier to do when you look past the initial price tag and look into how this sign will benefit your business or organization in the future. After all, this sign is going to represent your business, organization, or other affiliation for years to come.

There are many sign types and a plethora of materials of varying grades. Therefore, doing research will always be worth the time you spend in order to make sure you're getting the very best quality sign for the most reasonable price. Unfortunately, a person starting a new business will not have a lot of time to educate themselves and make an optimum decision.

A sign advertising your business effectively attracts customers, brands your site and creates impulse sales. If you're a business owner considering investing in a sign, you should first ask yourself some questions, such as "What is my objective in purchasing a sign?" "Will I be advertising my name, a product or service, or am I simply advertising a destination?" Evaluate all the reasons you might be intending this purchase. Your location and store frontage area play a big part in the type and size of sign(s) you can have, determining whether you can have a free standing sign, a wall sign or both. This will also determine the allowable square feet that your sign can be. Your sign will be restricted by city sign code. Additionally, your lease may specify what type of signs you are allowed per criteria specified by the landlord. Be sure to have a copy of your lease agreement with reference to the signage allowance, if applicable, when you meet with your sign company representative. This will prevent delays in the purchasing process.

Most sign companies offer free consultations for new sign buyers. A sales consultant or project manager will meet with you to review your ideas and to give you recommendations. After asking some questions and listening to your responses the consultant can suggest sign types, sizes and placement, review city codes and address other concerns you may have. It's a good idea to think about how the purchase will affect your business, what your objective is in buying a sign, and how much you've budgeted for before you meet with a sign company representative.

A compelling sign will help build top of mind awareness and draw in customers who may not have intended to stop at your business. Your sign should be visible and conspicuous. Having an illuminated sign is not a requirement, but is recommended as it works for you 24/7. Location should be as close to the roadway as possible (location and sign code allowing). Content should clearly define your product or

services, three to five words are best, save the details for the sale. Readable, white space is just as important as words and graphics and contrasting colors are best.

The sign company will need an electronic file of the logo and the font you've chosen for your sign for the designer to work from. Some full service sign companies have a designer that can create a logo for your new business if you do not have an art file that the designer can work from. Once an approved design has been created, the contract has been signed and 50 percent deposit has been received, the permit will be applied for, if applicable. Manufacture will not begin until the permit has been approved from the issuing building department.

Regulatory Requirements

Signage is usually regulated by a county or a city and you must obtain a sign permit and potentially an electrical permit. Your sign permit application may require a review by an "Architectural Design Review Board" that represents the governing municipality or occasionally the landlord. Generally, a new sign buyer leases space and their landlord has incorporated "sign criteria" into the lease. Sign criteria restricts signage as to the type of sign, height of sign, width of sign and how the sign will be attached to the building. The design of your new sign must incorporate the requirements of the governing municipality and the landlord. Most of the time, the design will be horizontally oriented. The process of purchasing a sign should be started right away, as sign design, landlord approval, permit submission and approval, fabrication and installation can easily take 4 to 6 weeks. Fabrication of the sign does not normally begin until the sign permit has been approved.

Sign Design

Within the parameters established by your landlord and your governing municipality, the design of your new sign should incorporate two key components – impact and readability. Impact will cause potential customers to turn their head to view your sign. Readability ensures that when the sign is viewed, it can quickly and easily convey the identity of your business and relay the scope of available products and services. The distance for optimum viewing of your sign can play a significant role in the size of your sign, the colors and the font style. Some colors such as red can be seen more easily at a distance compared to other colors such as blue. Block letters are much easier to read compared to cursive writing.

Electrical Signs

If you plan to purchase an electrical sign, you need to make sure there is "dedicated power (from the electrical panel directly to the sign)" at the sign location. The architecture of the building will be a factor if you must bring power to the sign location. If you are leasing a space that had an electrical sign, you may not need to provide electrical power. If you plan to place neon or other electrical signs in the windows (subject to municipal and landlord approval), you will want to provide power above or below the windows.

Sign Operation

If your new sign is electrical, controlling the on and off times of the sign may be a requirement or at least a consideration. A sign can be controlled by a timer (power is interrupted at the electrical panel) or a photo cell (usually attached to the sign). A timer provides more value to the sign owner because when using a timer, the sign can be turned on in the afternoon during the darker winter season. A photo cell will turn a sign on and off at dusk and dawn. An astronomic timer offers the most flexible operation, and it is easy to program. Another approach is to leave your sign on 24/7 which amounts to fairly inexpensive advertising of your business.

Sign Types

The majority of electrical signs are attached to walls, rather than freestanding. Within the category of wall

signs, channel letter signs and cabinet signs are the most common. Channel letter signs are individual letters with translucent faces that are internally illuminated with either neon or LED's. LED's are the dominate lighting system. The benefits of an LED lighting system are longevity, efficient use of electrical power and low cost of operation over the life of the sign. Cabinet signs are metal boxes with plastic faces and vinyl graphics. They may be illuminated with high-output fluorescent lamps or LED's. Cabinet signs are significantly lower in cost than channel letter signs, but most landlords require channel letter signs. If your landlord provides a freestanding tenant directory sign that is perpendicular to pedestrians and motorists, you should secure space on that sign as well.

In addition to purchasing a sign, all of your advertising (web page, vehicle graphics, business cards, etc) should be consistent. A logo design can look stunning on paper, but it may not be possible to identically fabricate it due to limitations of lighting systems and other fabrication considerations. So, if you utilize a graphic designer to create your logo, be sure to consult your sign company during the design process.

There are a many more details concerning the purchase of a sign. If you purchase your sign from a reputable, full service sign company, the important details will be taken into account during the process of design, permitting, fabrication and installation of your sign. A good source of finding a reputable sign company is to ask your landlord for a referral... or Call The Graphic Garage!

Visit these informative Web sites from the Small Business Administration, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the International Sign Association for guidance and suggestions with your sign purchase.

sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/start/pickalocation/signage/

uschamber.com/sb/marketing/signage/

signs.org/ (choose industry resources on the left).