

Invest in Beautification

Nothing sells like beautiful places

Suggestion:

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return - it attracts customers, makes them want to linger and builds customer loyalty.

A research study had four towns plant street trees every 30 feet (10 meters) along one block (bottom, left), and then surveyed sales in that block for a year, comparing them to sales in the rest of the town. Sales in the block with street trees increased 18 percent - three to four times that of the rest of the town.

LaRua in Whistler, BC is a great example of their beautification efforts. Although founded as a ski resort, Whistler now hosts more visitors in the summer than the winter - and their beautification efforts are a big reason.

The local garden club in Sisters, Oregon, (bottom right) is actively involved in downtown beautification. It pays off - Sisters boasts the highest retail sales per capita in Oregon State.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Create “softscapes.” Soften the transition from façades to concrete. Make it stunningly beautiful. People like to “hang out” in beautiful places.

Neenah, Wisconsin (population 5,000) did a downtown makeover. Notice the photo, top right with the typical building façades meeting the sidewalks. Now look at the shops shown, bottom left, just one block down. Which set of shops would get your attention? The block with the plantings brings in nearly 25% more customers than neighboring blocks.

Note the outdoor retail display of the antique, flower and gift shop in the photo bottom right. It makes shoppers want to slow down and come in. Curb appeal is vitally important for retail shops, restaurants, golf courses, and lodging. This shop owner spends 20 minutes each day setting up the exterior displays, but says the sales are well worth the time it takes to do so.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Soften the transition between the buildings and the concrete. (top right) Create barriers between the dining and semi-trucks. Use planters filled with flowers, shrubs and trees to make an inviting atmosphere. This does NOT look like a good place to eat outside.

Continuous asphalt, concrete, brick and stone looks harsh and uninviting. Adding planters and trees will take away that hard edge, and attract more customers. (bottom left)

This is a great little café (bottom, right), but has no curb appeal. It would be simple to add hanging baskets and planter boxes, and that would make a big difference.

Downtown merchants should get together, create a buying cooperative and purchase perhaps 100 planters, and each business should put six or so in front of their businesses. They should be placed every meter or so down the street. Then they can cooperatively purchase the topsoil for the planters, along with the necessary plants. As a team, Claresholm could be beautiful and that would slow traffic down and get visitors to take a second look.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Attractive merchant displays and outdoor dining turn a downtown into a place visitors want to linger.

Note how simple it is to create an appealing outdoor dining area (both photos). Just a little space on the sidewalk, some planters with greenery, hanging baskets, and attractive signage, and you've got a place that invites passersby to stop.

These two photos are of the same shop, Grandma's Attic, an antique store located in Omak, Washington. After I took the photos, I walked around town and when I came back there was a line of customers coming out the door and halfway down the block. I took a closer look and sitting in the two chairs were kids eating ice cream cones. When visitors walking downtown saw the kids, they assumed the shop must sell ice cream, which was only noted on an easily missed sign in the window, and they lined up for a cone. When my turn came, I told the merchant she should give those kids free ice cream all day long and make them sit out there. She noted that kids do get free ice cream if they eat it there, but limits it to one cone each, per day. Does giving kids free ice cream translate to sales? The merchant said that nearly 70% of her sales come from people coming in for ice cream then purchasing antiques, home accents, and

other retail items. Every shop should create a lure - something to pull visitors into their stores.

Most merchants wouldn't dream of ignoring the decor or displays inside their shops or restaurants. The outside is just as important - customers see the outside first.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

We assumed this restaurant (bottom, right) was out of business, because it looks so “vacant.” Add an open sign, beautification, use the reader boards, add hanging baskets and the like. Remember, curb appeal can account for 70% of visitor sales. This restaurant, in reality, has terrific food, but driving past most visitors would have no desire to stop.

This is a great little shop (below) but would attract more customers with beautification. A couple of planters with greenery, a small bench would add a lot of appeal. Paint the building to look more colorful. Bring it to life.

Note:

The merchant (top right) knows the art of creating inviting displays of merchandise. Bringing some of the merchandise and beauty outdoors attracts customers. If you were walking by would you stop? This is a great example that could help every business in Claresholm attract more sales.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Nearly every successful destination makes a strong effort at making their locale attractive - places people enjoy lingering. If the streets in Claresholm's downtown followed any of the examples on this page, retail sales would increase and people passing through would see a town worth stopping in.

Some key elements include building facades (note the shutters and planter boxes top right), the use of umbrellas - not just for shade, but to create a sense of place - planters filled with flowers and shrubs, street trees, outdoor furnishings and dining, the use of special paving materials, attractive signs and lighting.

Even during winter months, the shop (top left) still looks inviting. If locals won't "hang out" in your downtown, neither will visitors. People are drawn to where other people are, and so creating spaces like the one shown to the left, will attract both locals and visitors.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

This store is very attractive (top right), but could still benefit from “softscaping.” The window boxes are great, but adding planters directly on the sidewalk would soften the brick/concrete look. Perhaps trees or juniper in pots between the arched windows? Of the retail stores in Claresholm, Elford’s has set a great example. It’s obvious they are in business and it “looks” like a great place to shop. But they can’t succeed by themselves. This needs to be spread around to other merchants.

Suggestion:

The Bluebird Motel does an excellent job: the bench, shutters, hanging baskets, flowers, and the colors of the building - the whitewashed look with red shutters and blue roof - very attractive.

The park (below) is a great asset to the motel. In fact, when visiting the area we stayed in this motel. Why? Because it “looked” like the best place to stay in the area.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

This merchant (bottom left) understands beautification. Hanging baskets, planters (there could be more) and some color and life. They and Elford's cannot do it alone. If other merchants make the same effort, the town could be stunning.

Claresholm has some great "bones" to work with (right and bottom right). Good architecture and varied structures. There's no reason why Claresholm can't evolve into a "destination community," with a brand (what you want to be known for), some business guidance (business mix, facade improvements, beautification), and some good marketing. The time to do this is NOW before the proposed bypass removes a great deal of traffic away from the city. You must become a "destination community" BEFORE this takes place. That way people will take an exit to come downtown because they know it's a great place to stop and spend some time.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$ The Rule of Signs that Sell

Signs placed perpendicular to the building allow drivers and pedestrians to read them easily, even from a distance. Note the use of blade signs in Leavenworth, WA (top right) and in Nantucket, Massachusetts (bottom right).

Perpendicular signs are seen ten times more frequently than facade-mounted signs. If you're walking down a street, you don't notice the facade-mounted signs until you're right up to the store. If you're driving past, you may not be able to see the signs at all.

Blade signs should be decorative and placed between seven feet (bottom edge of the sign) and nine feet (top edge), and typically no more than 42 inches wide. They should be double-sided, and fit the ambiance of the town and its architecture.

The only way I can see what's in these buildings (bottom left) is if I'm across the street. Use perpendicular "blade" signs to help customers see what you have to offer.

Leavenworth, Washington (top right) and Nantucket, Massachusetts (bottom right) are a couple of communities that have established a perpendicular signage program. When walking down a sidewalk in Claresholm, or when driving by, it was virtually impossible to see what the stores were or what you have to offer. As noted, the only time we knew what was available is if we were standing across the highway and looked back at the signs high up on facades.

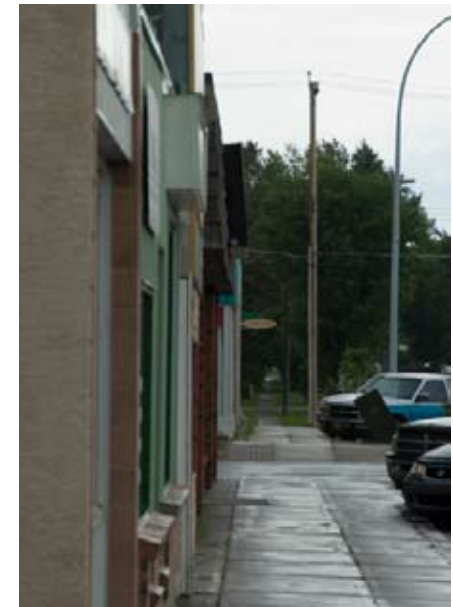


ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Can you see what shops and businesses are located along any of these streets? Blade signs will help customers find you, and help them know what you have to offer. Sales increase when customers have an easier time finding you and knowing what you have to sell.

Have a blade sign program implemented. Local merchants should be recruited to a “design review board” so that a jury of peers is created to make sure the program doesn’t get out of hand and is in keeping with the town’s overall brand or theme. Tie the program into a facade improvement and beautification program.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Lethbridge has a series of blade signs (bottom left and center, right) in use that would also work well in Claresholm.

The signs are hung from the same style hardware, and provide for a unified look, while still giving merchants the freedom to design their own signs. These are built to withstand 100 mph wind loads.



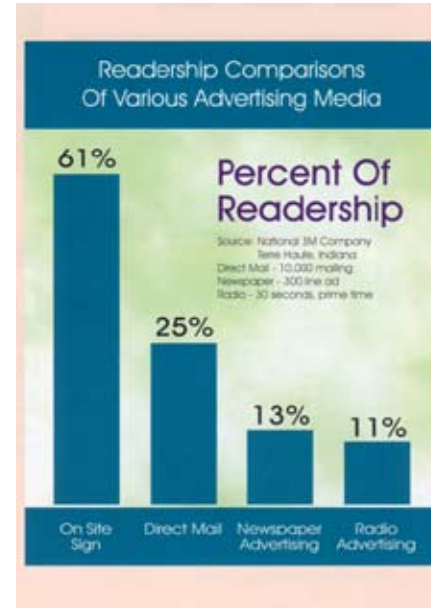
Note:

Carmel, California, known for its fine art galleries and high-end shopping, has some excellent examples of effective blade signs. (bottom right)

These signs are not expensive but do increase sales. The trick is to make sure they are all of uniform height and approximate width so it doesn't create sign clutter.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in - before you promote the name of the business.

Can you tell what type of shop the Laffin Crab is? What about The Black Swan? If customers can't tell what it is you're selling, chances are they'll walk on by. The Laffin Crab sold kites and windsocks, and they're no longer in business.

Signage can be an excellent investment, if done right, with the lowest average cost per month of various advertising media, and the highest percentage of readership.



Always promote the primary lure, not the name of the store. "Antiques" instead of "Grandma's Attic." Even for a restaurant, promote a primary lure. Something along the lines of "Famous homemade blueberry pie." A teaser that will pull people in the door.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Always promote your greatest asset or amenity. Not many people are interested in the future home of the Anza Borrego Desert Natural History Association, but many visitors would be interested to know that this was going to be a wonderful interpretive center. Promote the activity, not the name of the organization.

Promote “visitor information” over “chamber of commerce.”



Suggestion:

Both the Wood Merchant and Grizzly Rick's Market saw sales increase dramatically once they let people know what they had to offer: “Handmade gifts and furniture,” and “snacks, sundries, and drinks.”

Promoting “touch tone phones” sends the wrong message - if that is the best this motel has to offer, then it must not be very good. Make sure you do not leave dated signs out on your premises, because it can send the wrong message. Always promote the best lure that will pull people in. Don't be all things to all people.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Work with property owners on a “sign abatement” program (upper left) to get rid of unused sign posts and boards. Signs like this make it look as though Claresholm is headed in the wrong direction - a place where businesses can't survive.

The “great food” at The Roadhouse is overshadowed by the saloon, happy hour, and the liquor store. It can be a challenge attracting customers for the great food when the primary lure seems to be booze. Add greenery around the base of this sign to make it more appealing (top right).

At the Confectionery (bottom left), first impressions are lasting impressions. Combine the signs, paint the post, add hanging baskets. The sign clutter is ugly and confusing.

The Bluebird's readerboard is being put to good use - third party endorsements are a good selling tool. (bottom center) Good job.

It's a good thing we didn't see this sign first (bottom right). For southbound traffic, this sign (both sides) is not a great selling tool. If it can't be refurbished and landscaped to make it attractive, consider removing it.



Put Your Bait Out on the Highway

The Rule of Billboards and Exits

Do these billboards make you want to pull off the highway and visit the towns?

Lovelock's Frontier Days might make you want to visit - if you're driving by on July 27, 28, or 29th. What about the other 362 days a year?

What about historic Battle Mountain - they're a friendly service community?

Kellogg gives you two events - a festival, with its name and date partially covered by the banner promoting a basketball tournament.

Do these billboards give you a reason to stop? Don't just say "welcome" or introduce the town, take the opportunity to create a lure to get passers by to stop.



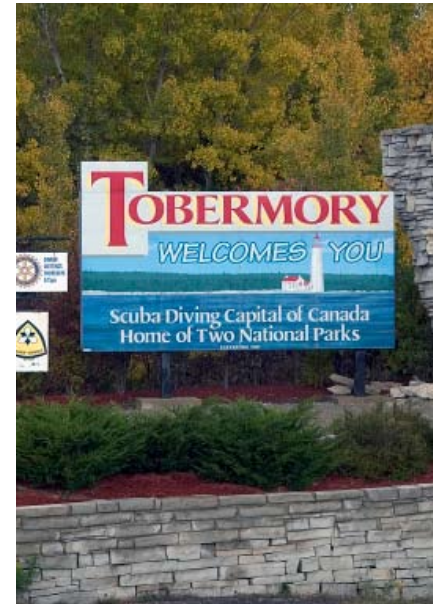
ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

- Always tell the visitor why they should take the next exit. Winnemucca gives you a good reason to stop - you might get rich!
- Pike Bay is trying to promote so many things, that drivers just can't read them all. When that happens, drivers usually just ignore the whole sign. Never use more than twelve words. Eight or less is even better. Never use more than eight words on a highway sign or billboard.
- Elko has a very picturesque billboard, but all of the telephone poles and wires, plus the chain link fencing just cancel out the ambiance the sign attempts to create. Make sure that what is around the sign does not cancel the lure or your message.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Keep it simple.

Give people a reason to stop - the Oak Tree Inn promotes its quiet rooms - no smoking, no slots, no noise. Tobermory promotes the scuba diving it offers.

The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center uses few words, a simple graphic, and white letters on a dark background.

Subway's billboard is very simple, and sure grabs travelers' attention.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Create a primary lure - a reason for people to stop.

By promoting its 35¢ ice cream cones and clean public wash rooms to weary travelers, the Little America Hotel has increased its business dramatically. The key is to give people a reason to stop. Free wine tasting (bottom right) is also an excellent lure. The restrooms and ice cream translate to nearly \$12 million a year in retail sales and services. Claresholm might consider a lure along this line. The Little America hotel, once there, has a gift shop, gas station, hotel, restaurant where the \$12 million is spent. The ice cream and clean restrooms are simply a way to get people to stop.

Use a contrasting background, few words, and one simple graphic like the Pahrump Winery has done near Las Vegas. Notice the “FREE wine tasting.” That’s a powerful lure to pull customers in. It is an excellent example of a billboard done right.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Here is a great example of creating a lure to entice travelers to stop. Huntsville, Texas, built the tallest statue of an American hero in the world, Sam Houston, along the freeway, outside of town, next to their visitor information center. The statue can be seen from six miles (10 kilometers) away and is one of the most photographed sites in Texas.

Travelers can't resist stopping to have their picture taken, and while they stop, they visit the visitor information center and gift shop. There they learn all the reasons to continue into Huntsville and visit their attractions, museums, restaurants and shops. This statue, even though its located several miles from downtown Huntsville, has helped dramatically increase sales in the town.



The Bottom Line of Billboards

Highway travelers have only four seconds to read your billboards, so it is essential to make your message as easy to read as possible:

- Never use more than twelve words - eight is better if not fewer than that.
- Billboards should never look like print ads
- Only use one graphic and make it a simple one
- Never use outlined or shaded letters
- Never use script type
- Tell my why I should buy from you, not just what you have
- Use #1 quotes, when possible

The A&W billboard (right) is the easiest to read - the others are too busy to read easily.

Travelers have four seconds to read a sign. When you have a number of billboards competing for the same four seconds, readers will pick the one with the fewest words. We drove past these three billboards several times, and then when asked to recall what the three billboards promoted, the only one we could remember was the A&W billboard. It is the ONLY billboard that follows the rules of billboard marketing. The others have far too many words, are too busy or have too many graphics, and one thing that hurts the effectiveness of all of the billboards is the fact that they are placed too close to each other.

This is why highway departments throughout North America have the “Rule of 500.” That no highway signs will be within 500 feet of each other.

