

20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$

The rule of signs that sell

Suggestion:

Storefront signs should be perpendicular to the street (blade signs) and of uniform height and size, making it easier for motorists and pedestrians to see what is available.

Signs should be decorative to increase the perceived value. Use no more than six words on a merchant sign, and preferably four or fewer. Avoid script lettering. The general rule regarding lettering height: one inch for every 12 feet of distance.

Create a co-op sign program. This would create a “jury of peers” to develop effective and decorative retail sign standards to address banners, window displays, sandwich boards and blade signs. Blade signs are an absolute must if you want visitors to know what you have to offer. Lethbridge (both photos right, bottom center) has developed blade signs that will withstand 100 MPH wind loads. Banff (bottom left) also uses blade signs. Every successful town allows and uses blade signs in their downtown shopping districts.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Examples shown here include (top left) Carmel, California; Nantucket, Massachusetts (center) and Leavenworth, Washington (top right). Using the American measurement system, the bottom of the signs should be no lower than 7 feet, and no higher than 9 feet. Maximum width of a sign should be in the 42 inch range. It's important that this is consistent throughout town to avoid sign clutter. Only one sign should be allowed per business. Once these signs are up, remove facade-mounted signs, plastic banners, and other types of signs.

But, once again, don't do this step until you have a brand or theme for downtown. Then signs can be designed to fit that overall theme. As part of a merchant-driven program, they can work together to create a buying cooperative, which will often save nearly 35% of the cost of individually ordering signs. This way they can work with a single vendor who will understand the sign ordinance, the overall look, sizing, and other elements of the program.

Notice that on the signs shown on this page it's easy to tell what each business is actually selling: food (restaurant), model trains, collectibles, chocolate, leather, etc. Merchants need to first promote the "primary lure" that will pull customers into the store, not necessarily the name of the store. Notice in the top left photo the second sign back says "Concepts." What does this store sell? Customers, if it's not obvious, will pass rather than take a chance.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Can you tell what is in the shops in the top two photos? The only way you can read the signs is if you stand in the street or across the street and look back, or wait until you are right beside each shop looking in the windows.

Merchants should let customers know they are there! The best way to do that is to use blade signs like those shown on the previous page. The restaurant sign (top, right) is far too high and can only be seen from a distance. It's above the awning and nearly impossible to be seen by pedestrians.

Every successful retail shopping district we have seen uses blade signs and beautification to pull customers in.

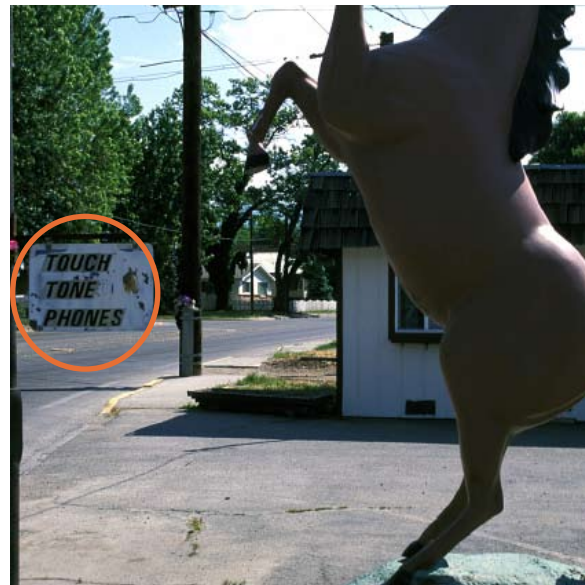
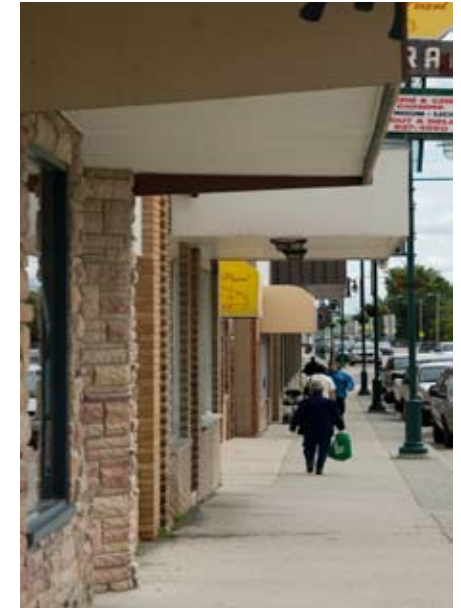
Suggestion:

Always promote what it is you are selling - your top lure - before you promote the name of the business.

This motel (bottom, left) is promoting its touch tone phones. Is that enough of a lure to entice people to stay there? Probably not. If they promoted "a comfortable bed," that might lure people in.

When Grizzly Rick's Market added signs promoting their snacks and treats, business began booming. In fact, sales went up nearly 35%.

Always promote your greatest "lure;" the thing that will pull customers into the store, not the name of the store.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

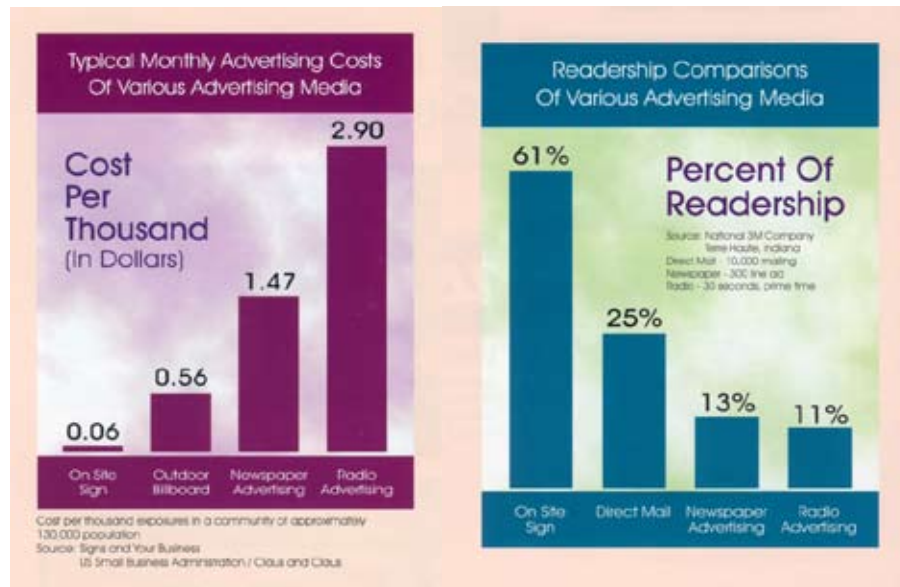
Signs are a great investment, if they are done right. Denise's Bistro has perhaps the best merchant sign in Pincher Creek. It is a great teaser. Suggestion: paint the pole (again) which is starting to rust. Keep it fresh and looking new.

But, the beautification is non-existent (bottom right). Add pots, outdoor dining, hanging baskets. Where is the entrance? Do not close it off so much. It must look inviting and welcoming, but in this case it almost has a boarded-up look. Imagine hanging baskets, planters, directional signs to the entrance.

When consumers have to make a decision, which is typically made in a matter of seconds, here's the list the go down, in order:

- 1) Signage: Does it grab the attention, and convince us to go to step #2.
- 2) Overall curb appeal: Does it look like a nice place to eat, stay, shop.
- 3) Entrance: Is it open and inviting. Does it pull us in.

In the case of Denise's, the sign easily passes the first test, but fails the other two.



Real Men Don't Ask for Directions

The Rule of Wayfinding

Suggestion:

There are two primary sign issues that are critical to the success of any community: gateways and directional (or wayfinding) signs. Gateways introduce visitors to your community and provide a sense of arrival. Directional signs help visitors (and residents) navigate the area, telling them what attractions and amenities are available and where to find them. The importance of easy-to-follow wayfinding can not be overemphasized. If a visitor cannot find what they are looking for, they will head down the road.

Cardston sets a good example for all other communities in Southern Alberta, in terms of “connecting the dots” through wayfinding signs.

Add directional signs to downtown along Highway 6 (bottom, left). We had a difficult time finding the museum and downtown, passing right on past twice before finally spotting it.

After we completed the assessment process, someone told us that two new signs directing people to downtown were put up, but we missed them totally, driving past them time and again. The reason: They should be at least three-times larger than they are.

The lettering should be at least 6” to 8” tall, never use condensed type, and the sign itself should be much, much larger so that it can be read from a distance. The rule is 1” letter height for every 12’ of viewing distance. The larger the lettering the longer we have to make a decision on whether or not to turn towards downtown.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Where are the Fair and Rodeo and Cowboy Poetry events held (top right)? “Father’s Day Weekend” can barely be seen unless you stop. Add a directional arrow. Once again, no more than eight words on a sign.

The Welcome billboard (bottom left) is attractive, but signs tacked onto other signs look a little, well, tacky. It creates sign clutter. Remove them. They really serve no purpose. Use the billboard as a teaser to get people to stop at the visitor information center, or to visit downtown, or the museum.

Suggestion:

We had no idea about the walking trail, until we asked where the pathway leads. We suggest that you promote your activities. Tell people about the trail. It will increase spending. The more there is to do, the longer people will stay, and the more they will spend, and the more likely they are to come back again.

Give the trail a name, “Pincher Creek Walkway,” perhaps.

Provide information about it: How long is it? Where are the entrance points? Is it pedestrian only? Where does it start and end? How long will it take to walk the trail?

Make the signs decorative (bottom, right). Is it really necessary to point out the “Bylaw #1471?” If this is a real problem, visitors may want to just pass. Instead of rules and regulations, consider a few “welcome to the trail” signs so we don’t start with a negative experience.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

We drove by this sign (right) probably half a dozen times and never saw it. After being told it exists, we had to find it.

Can you read it?

Suggestion: It needs to be three times this size. Always test your signs for readability. It is a very nice sign – just hard to spot and too small to read, even at 50 kph. If the sign is redeveloped, consider the following word choices:

- 1) Shopping District
- 2) Pioneer Museum
- 3) Visitor info & restrooms
- 4) Pool & arena
- 5) Golf course

No more than five lines of text.

Make your directional signs fit the “brand” the image you want to portray. Appleton, WI has developed decorative wayfinding signs with an apple motif. Carson City, NV is working on developing its brand, and that will include signs that fit their “western” image (bottom, right).

Suggestion:

Pincher Creek should develop and implement a professionally produced Wayfinding System. This is a science as much as it is an art. Determine the community brand first, so your signs can reflect that. Are you going for the windmill theme? Cowboy theme? Adventure theme? Choose one so that you have some consistency in your signage and marketing efforts.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Where is the Cowboy Poetry? Where is the Agriplex? We thought we found it, when we found the Community Hall. (below left) Is it the field (far right) and the community center combined?

For big events, tell people where they are held! Provide signs and “connect the dots,” so people can find the locations. Wayfinding in Pincher Creek should be a top priority. You can spend all the money you want to pull people to the community, but if they can’t find your attractions and amenities, a good portion of that marketing effort will have been totally wasted. There were NO directional signs to the community’s largest annual event. Not good.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Pincher Creek should develop and implement a Wayfinding, Gateway & Merchant Signage Plan and program to address:

- Wayfinding
- Gateways and entries
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays

Not only will your wayfinding signs help visitors find your attractions, they'll also help inform your residents what you have to offer.

Determine your brand first, and design all your wayfinding signs to reflect that.

These photos show the new wayfinding signs developed for the town of Moses Lake, Washington, who is creating a "water-sports" theme for their desert town. All their wayfinding signs will coordinate and enhance their brand. These photos show the signs being "tested" for readability, distance viewing, setback distance from the highway, etc.

Washrooms attract more than flies and other notes of convenience

The Rule of Visitor Amenities

Suggestion:

The number one reason people stop is to use washroom facilities. Take advantage of that by providing and identifying washrooms, and promote them in your signs. They translate to spending. Make sure they are located where visitors can spend time and money.

Businesses should never just say “no.” Tell visitors where they can find the public washrooms. This attractive shop (bottom right) in Wickford, RI, posts a sign (bottom middle) that lets customers know how to find the washrooms.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Visitor information should be working 24/7, 365 days a year.

Provide information for visitors - make it easy for them to find out what attractions and amenities you have to offer.

Visitors don't travel only during business hours, so it's essential to provide information that is easy to find around the clock. These examples of different kinds of visitor information kiosks are only a few ideas.

The "Information Station" (top left and center) was built and maintained by volunteers in Moses Lake, WA. You could certainly improve on the graphics, but they have the right idea. The Teton Pass Trail kiosk provides simple information specific to the trail and they are planning on developing 14 of them around the valley, each cross-selling to other attractions and amenities. The Chamber of Commerce information panel (bottom left) is located in Ashland, Oregon, and offers information regarding lodging, dining, events, and includes a map. These are good examples, except for the fact that they don't include brochure distribution, which is critically important.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Let visitors know where to stay, what to see and do, prices and hours. Provide brochures in weather-proof brochure holders as well, so visitors have something to take with them.

Cross-promote other Southern Alberta towns and attractions. The more there is to do collectively, the longer visitors will stay and the more money they will spend.

Locate your visitor information and washrooms in a place where people can spend money - in the heart of downtown. Once visitors get out of the car, you have a four times greater chance of getting them to spend money. Gig Harbor, Washington (two right photos) made sure visitor information was available at each of their public washrooms. Jackson, Wyoming (bottom left) has this information rack under a large overhang at their information center.

At the Pioneer Museum in Pincher Creek, there are plenty of opportunities and places for visitor information (bottom center) but these are being utilized as a bulletin board instead.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Nationally, less than 5% of visitors go into a Visitor Information Center, so offering information throughout the entire area in well-placed kiosks is vital.

The town of Stevenson, WA, recruited high school students to build the kiosk (top, far left) eliminating previous vandalism problems.

24-hour visitor information can be as simple and easy as installing brochure holders on the door to the visitor center (bottom left).

This kiosk (bottom right) was built from a kit by local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, and is stocked by volunteers. It includes brochure distribution.



Critical Mass is Not Just a Religious Experience

The “Mall Mentality” Rule

Suggestion:

The number one diversion of visitors is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian setting. This is also where nearly 80% of visitor spending takes place. To attract visitors and keep them longer, it is necessary to have the critical mass. In a two-to-three lineal block area, there should be:

- Ten destination retail shops (not neighborhood retail)
- Ten dining/treats shops
- Ten places open after 6:00 p.m. (entertainment is preferable)

Sometimes it's necessary to “rearrange the furniture” downtown to create the right blend of businesses to meet the rule of critical mass. Work with the property owners and businesses downtown to create incentives for the most effective mix of businesses to attract visitors (and residents) to frequent downtown.

Destination Retail includes:

- Antiques (not second-hand stores)
- Home furnishings/accents
- Galleries, collectibles, gifts
- Clothing and logo gear
- Outfitters
- Food: candy, fudge, ice cream, restaurants, cafes, wine shops, coffee shops, bakeries, bistros, etc.
- Lodging
- Artists in action
- Open air markets
- Movie theaters, performing arts
- Brand-specific businesses: western wear, tack shops, hunting gear, camping goods, outfitters, and other specialty-retail shops.



Develop Gathering Places & Narrow the Streets

Places for Events, Places to Hang Out

Suggestion:

Create gathering spaces and places to hold events, shows, and activities. This has worked for centuries in Europe and works very well in North America. People are drawn to gathering places. These are critical to the success of any tourism-oriented community. These spaces provide a home to open-air markets, farmers markets, arts and crafts fairs, shows, entertainment of all types, and best of all, having spaces like this allow you to recruit “outside events” to the community, such as classic car shows, RV shows, snowmobile shows, exhibitions, and entertainment.

In this case, Kalamazoo, Michigan, tore down an old building and built the Arcadia Creek Festival Place. It has a 20' x 50' stage (right photos), with a vinyl covering that can be removed during the winter months or during heavy winds. The plaza area hosts more than 80 events a year, making this town a very successful event town drawing visitors from more than 100 miles away.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Another example of a gathering area in Kalamazoo, MI (top left.) This is perfect for performances, fairs, other events, or simply having a picnic lunch.

In Nelson, British Columbia, the city allows restaurants to put portable decks out beyond the sidewalk, during the peak season, to create outdoor dining and activity areas. During the winter months, these are put in storage for snow removal. They lose a few parking spaces, but the activity in downtown is so outstanding, people don't mind the fact they might have to walk a block or two to the nearest parking area.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Some other examples of gathering spaces and locations for performances: another covered performance area with public art in Kalamazoo (top left); a simple outdoor amphitheater, with seating on the lawn (below right) in Battle Creek, Michigan; and an outdoor dining area, defined by planter boxes filled with annual flowers (below left) again in Nelson, B.C.



Other Notes and First Impressions

Suggestion:

These fellows (top right photo) were very friendly, but were looking for money. I was “panhandled” in Pincher Creek six times in the course of three visits - more than in any other community in SW Alberta.

Ideas to deal with loitering:

1. Create an ordinance that does not allow loitering and enforce it.
2. Create an ordinance that does not allow “panhandling” with ten feet of a retail shop’s entry.
3. Create a spot or a park for “locals” to enjoy that is close to downtown.
4. Add even more benches.
5. Pipe classical music throughout downtown.
6. Recruit loiterers to help with “jobs,” or, better yet, find talents and let them help downtown to bring in money.

Suggestion:

Bring downtown to life. If local Aboriginals have talents that can add to a downtown’s vibrancy, that would be wonderful.

Festivals, events, crafts fairs, open markets, street musicians and performers, all help create a lively downtown, one that visitors and residents can enjoy.

In Greenville, South Carolina, there are many small plaza areas (right) where performers gather on weekends, making downtown THE place to be.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Recruit street musicians to add a sense of festivity and activity to downtown. If the music fits the brand, so much the better. Towns that have done very well using college musicians and local talent include Asheville, North Carolina (top two photos), Nelson, British Columbia, which has street entertainment nearly every day of the year - yes, during the winter months as well (bottom left), Victoria, BC; Vancouver, BC (Gastown, Granville Island, Robson Street) and many others. However, start small and do this during the peak season. Perhaps to start on Thursday, Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons.

When you don't have musicians, and depending on your brand, this type of entertainment might be replaced with exhibitions: experts showing how to cast a fly, or pitch a tent, or rope a calf (using a fiberglass calf). Artists in action: chainsaw carving, pottery demonstrations, glass blowing. Culinary exhibitions: food festival, barbecue classes, campfire cooking demonstrations. Added to the mix can be farmers markets, in season, arts and crafts festivals, car shows, motorcycle shows, snowmobile events, etc., etc.

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

The Information Center is excellent. Suggestion: Add to the sign (top, right), "And Pioneer Village." We were looking for the museum.

Beautiful landscaping and picnic tables make it inviting. Suggestion: Post the hours on the sign and on the building, so travelers can read it from a car. (bottom right)

Very well done. Even the landscaping makes you want to linger longer - and that translates to increased spending. The center fits the pioneer "brand" and museum perfectly. The gift shop and interior displays are very, very nice.

The staff here is also exceptional and bend over backwards to make sure people have a good time and get the information they are looking for.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Use every display case available to promote other events, such as the Cowboy Poetry, or even downtown shopping. This is a missed opportunity. In this case (top left) the display case is empty during the peak time of year.

Pioneer Village is top notch - a wonderful experience. Visitors can relive what it was like to live in those days.

The fact that you can actually walk in and touch the displays makes a huge difference in reliving the experience. This is one of the better museums we have visited throughout the U.S. and Canada. A great job.

Suggestion: Tell lots of stories to demonstrate what life was like living in a mud or sod house, like the one shown here (bottom left).