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# To make your sign stand out, be prepared to spend

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**Q: My business is on a busy street. I seem to get most of my new business from referrals so it seems to me that I do not really need to invest a lot of money in a big sign. My budget is limited and I think my marketing dollar would go further elsewhere. But where?**



## Ask an Expert

By Steve Strauss

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### Aaron

**A:** I think you might be missing a golden opportunity. Sure, right now you may be getting most of your new clientele from word of mouth, but just consider how much more business you might get if in fact you did have a big, bold sign?

Your question reminded me that just last week I went into a business I had never frequented before, although I had driven past it many times. Now, why did I finally go in? Because previously, I had no need for what they sold (pet supplies, we have a new puppy). But now I did, and when the time came for me to choose a company to give my business to, I chose them. Why?

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Because of their sign.

Although they have a big, friendly sign, I usually never even noticed it. Except that obviously I did, subconsciously even. And when I needed some puppy supplies, that business was top of mind because of that sign.

So let me suggest that one of the first and main benefits of having a great sign is that it creates consistent branding; every time someone drives by your business and sees your sign, you get remembered just a little more, a little deeper.

Not only that, but beyond branding, a good sign also

- Generates impulse purchases
- Attracts new customers

Think about fast food restaurants – **McDonald's** for instance. They always have big, bold signs, right? In fact, McDonald's spends, on average, \$40,000 on signage for every store. Why? Because studies have shown that that \$40,000 can generate up to \$600,000 in sales. A recent survey (over 10 years) of businesses who had installed a new sign looked at the source of new customers. 45% of those new customers said they came into the business for the first time because of the sign.



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So how many people drive by your business every day? If you had a great sign, that's how many people would take note of your business on some level, and many just might need what you sell. You can nab your share of them, just like the pet supply store got me, but only if you have a powerful sign.

You will notice that I keep saying you need a "great" or "powerful" or "bold" sign. The reason is that there are *a lot* of signs out there. Most are easily and quickly forgotten. Those are a waste of money. But every now and then you will see a sign that grabs your attention. That's the ticket.

What you want is a sign that will work day or night, that stands out, and that is not too busy. That last point is essential. As people drive down the road, they are obviously concerned about driving and not your business or its sign, as they should be. They don't have much time or interest in reading your sign. So you have to make it simple, clear, and direct. It has to relay the essential idea quickly. For instance:

- Western Pet Supply – "We have it all, for less!"
- Carpet World – "Elegance Underfoot"
- Tito's Tacos – "Voted the best in town"

You will notice that each sign conveys a benefit to the consumer, simply. I think that is key. You may also want to add your phone number or URL, but the need for more than that is questionable. Remember, time is short. People drive by quickly. Sometimes when I see a sign with tons of info I wonder who the owner thinks will take the time, or have the interest, to read it all.

Getting that valuable sign is a matter of locating and working with a good sign company. They will help you analyze your building and needs, understand the potential revenue you might generate, discuss legal and zoning issues, get the permits, and help design and then install the sign.

Obviously, price is important when choosing a sign and sign company, but it should not be the driving consideration. The profit you can make should be.

**Today's tip:** One last thing to consider: Sure, a five-figure sign sounds like a lot, but how long will it last? Spending \$10,000 on a sign that will last, say, 10 years sounds might just be a barga

*Ask an Expert* appears Mondays. You can e-mail Steve Strauss at: [sstrauss@mrallbiz.com](mailto:sstrauss@mrallbiz.com). For an index of his columns, go to [smallbiz.usatoday.com](http://smallbiz.usatoday.com). Steven D. Strauss is a lawyer, author and speaker who specializes in small business and entrepreneurship. His latest book is [The Small Business Bible](#). You can sign up for his free newsletter, "Small Business Success Secrets!" at his website — [www.mrallbiz.com](http://www.mrallbiz.com). Follow him on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/stevestrauss) at <http://twitter.com/stevestrauss>.

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