

eum

KATE SYLVESTER

STAND OUT

Orders from retail clients have lessened over the past few years but, rather than laying low and weathering the storm, signage experts have embraced the challenge and driven their industry ahead. Now they're ready to wow their customers with exciting new products.



However, with budgets still tight it is very much about return on investment.

The best way to ensure your spend on signage is money well spent, according to Chris Norris, marketing manager for Sign of The Times (SOTT), is to select a signage company that understands branding. After all, he says, the way your brand is represented on your store directly influences a customer's perception of the products and services inside.

Daryl Matthews of Global Signage Concepts agrees. "More than anything, your signage needs to reflect your brand and everything that it embodies." Matthews adds that, while the trend is still for the cleaner, corporate look, your signage also needs to demand attention – putting your business in the foreground – so simple doesn't mean unsophisticated.

Learning from overseas markets is a great way to keep the industry fresh and innovative. Norris says choosing a signage company that travels and reviews international best practice is important. Ana Cunliffe, retail consultant for the DE Group, echoes this sentiment. However, she says, it can be a struggle to get New

Zealand retailers to invest in new overseas trends; but, again, this is a challenge they are prepared to take on.

One of the ways DE Group is helping its clients to achieve value for money, says Cunliffe, is by focusing on the life cycle of the signage. "It's not about printing once and throwing the collateral in the bin anymore," she says. Instead, it's about finding solutions that can be reused and fast, effective signage tools for changing-out promotions economically.

Box it

It seems display boxes are still popular for this very reason. Either illuminated or not, the use of great graphic images to complement products continues to be a winning combination. According to Peter Wethey at Pizzazz Graphic Display Systems, display boxes prove to be most effective when integrated into the design of the store – so they blend seamlessly into the landscape. The most effective way to achieve this, he says, is to ensure your signage suppliers work with your architects and designers during the outfitting stage.

To reduce the cost to your business, Wethey suggests using images that can be reused – such as seasonal vistas depicting spring, summer, autumn



Above right Screens by the DE Group at Magnum Mac.

Above left Tell it like it is with down-to-earth, bold signage – photographed on the streets of Auckland.

Left Media players, such as these from DPI Technologies, allow for advertising material to be played right at the point-of-sale.

and winter. He also recommends partnering with your suppliers and offering the display space if they provide the visuals. This is a particularly good idea for promoting new products and seasonal lines, he says.

Colin Francois, managing director of Sabre Signs, knows what it's like to help retailers work within their budgets. Offering a large range of signage which can be ordered on-line, it is able to respond quickly to the myriad of signage needs retailers have.

Hanging banners, he says, are one of their biggest sellers when it comes to the retail market, as well as footpath signs and free-standing units. Technology allows Sabre Signs to produce what is referred to as 'wallpaper' – graphic panels which

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Photo by Charlie McKay

Above left An example of Sabre Signs 'wallpaper'. Graphic panels applied just like wallpaper.

Above Scarpa, a destination footwear store, reflects the elegance of its wares in crisp, clear signage.

Left DE Group's interactive signage designed for Air New Zealand.

Below Recycled fashion store Tatty's signage.

Opposite Classic – the old and the new reflected in signage designed by Gascoigne Associates in association with Designworks for Telecom's concept store in Auckland. The lower 'modern' picture is interactive.



Photo by Charlie McKay

are applied just like wallpaper. Great for instantly transforming a bare wall into a stunning backdrop for your products, Francois says, and what better way to cost-effectively jazz up a temporary store?

Outdoors

Beyond the shop door retailers are using signage more and more to connect with their customers as they go about their daily lives. Outdoor signage is big right now. Cunliffe says this is thanks to the great creative ideas coming out of our ad agencies here in New Zealand. 3D lifelike billboards, lenticular, digital and LED are all popular, she says, adding that – due to advancements in lighting technology – signage is now moving into the night-time scene. Just another way retailers are making the most of their advertising spend.

Digital signage

Perhaps the most significant advancements of late have been in the area of digital signage. This technology is moving ahead in leaps and bounds

and is being embraced by retailers looking for an edge to engage the interest of their customers in a new and exciting way. Rather than replacing the more traditional signage forms, digital is happily sitting alongside it – enhancing the customer experience to a higher level.

Media players, for example, allow advertising material to be played right at the point-of-sale. DPI Technologies' Peter Hart says some retailers have reported up to three times as much product being sold where there is POS video advertising. Using a compact flash card for the storage of data means that these units can provide a continuous flow of information and require minimum staff input.

Better still, put a media player in your window and it will continue to work for you long after the store has closed. Choose an interactive display such as the InfoStation marketed by Pizazz Graphic Display Systems and your customers will even be able to activate the display through the window.

Peter Wethey at Pizazz says the benefit of the



interactive feature of the display is that it allows customers to be in control of the pace at which they learn about the product. They can also connect on a more personal level with your brand so they are able to make an informed decision as to whether they 'buy in'. "And, best of all, the benefit to the retailer is, it provides an additional sales assistant."

Pricing

Digital technology has also revolutionised the pricing of products with the introduction of electronic ticketing. Participating retailers no longer spend hours changing paper labels – a saving of both labour and printing costs. Perhaps most importantly though, you can feel confident that the price at the shelf matches the price at the till; so no surprises for the customer and no pressure on you to honour an incorrect ticket price.

NZ Electronic Shelf Labelling's Jared Thompson recommends this type of system for retail outlets with over 1000 active SKUs and, in terms of return

"Digital technology has also revolutionised the pricing of products with the introduction of electronic ticketing."

on investment, he estimates the payback period is around 12 months. An added bonus, he says, is that because the technology is purchased offshore, our strong rate against the US dollar makes it more affordable than ever right now.

Far from being limited to price, these labels can also display brand, discounted price, the value of savings, unit price per 100 g or kg and multi-buys. Taking this a step further, the newer e-paper labels – which can be as large as A5 – are being used for higher-priced items to show details such as

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product description, features and benefits, logo and warranty period.

Benefits

One of the main benefits of digital signage is the ease with which it can be changed. This means you can always ensure the content of your advertising is relevant and up to date. Imagine being on holiday, half-way across the world, and still being in control of how your business is promoted and how your products are sold.

Be warned though, there is a science to using digital signage and if not executed properly your investment can go wrong, says Cunliffe. She advises you to consult the experts and make sure you have the right gear, the right media – and ensure it is up to date at all times.

The recent work done by Retail Engine for the Telstra Window 7 launch is a great example of how far

digital signage has come – and where it is headed in the future. Using touch film behind a shop window, accompanied with rear projection film and surface speakers, Patrick Hancock, the New Zealand business director for Retail Engine, says it was able to turn a standard window into a digital display in which customers could become fully engaged.

The display replicated exactly how the mobile operating system works via a giant handset right on the shop's front window. Customers could swipe across the screen of the phone and interact with it – just like the real thing.

The possibilities, it seems, are limitless. ■

□ By Sarah Webb, a retail researcher, writer and owner of Retail Research Consultants and regularly contributes to NZRetail. Contact her at: retail.research@xtra.co.nz.



This bank of interactive display advertising is an example of InfoStation marketed by Pizazz Graphic Display System. It's positioned in Auckland's International Airport in time for the influx of visitors for the Rugby World Cup.



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