

Features

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I Saw the Sign

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“Where’s the bathroom?” “Where’s the checkout?”
“Where are the tomatoes?” “Where did you say the bathroom is again?” “How much does this cost?”
“Where’s the bathroom?”

Cue Ross Gellar from Friends: “BUT WE HAVE A SIGN!” Yeah, yeah, but lots of people don’t read signs. Or they don’t see the signs. Or the signs are too busy. Or they’re too sparse.

Can you achieve a Goldilocks state of signage where you never have to answer the question “Where’s the bathroom?” again? Well, there’s a reason Goldilocks is a fairytale. However, some tweaks can make a big difference if you open up your eyes.

Pictured 1: A simple department sign at Rockledge Gardens in Florida. No logo needed! • 2&3: This rainbow crystal table at Seed to Stem in Massachusetts is gorgeous and Instagrammable, but not useful if you don’t know what the rocks are. They could hang a laminated pictorial guide off to the side like the houseplant sheets spotted at Rockledge Gardens in Florida, to help customers identify the stones. This could work with air plants, too!

DIY Sign Audit

Take a walk through your garden center before you get busy and do a quick audit. To serve customers best, most garden centers need three types of signs along an easily identifiable pathway.

Sign types:

- Directional/Safety: “Where’s the bathroom?” and light-up Exit signs
- Informational: “Perennials: Come back every year” and “Hosta Alien Tongue: Perennial, full to part shade,

medium water”

- Actionable/marketing: “Sign up for email (QR Code)” and “Sale!” and “Not included in sale” and brand-specific POP like tall signs for the shrub section

Sign pathway:

- Road
- Store entrance
- Main corridors
- Sections/Departments
- Bench/Genus/Plant type
- Take-home
- Exit

There are some caveats. If your store is tiny, you might not need much directional signage, but I always recommend a checkout and bathroom sign, with the checkout sign preferably suspended from the ceiling over the checkout counter so it can be seen from all points.

Logos: Yes or No?

Swedish pop group Ace of Base tells us that “Life is demanding without understanding.” Honestly, these days, life is demanding, period. Let your store be a respite! Reduce visual noise. Especially with your signs. Especially on your signs. There’s a temptation to put your logo or your business name on everything.

I talked with Josh Howard of Garden Center Marketing about that at MANTS. (We recently started doing a little work with them so I wanted to get to know their product better.) I looked up at their big twirling display of department signs.

“Can places add their logos?” I asked.

“Nope,” he said.

“I guess doing that would be really extra,” I said.

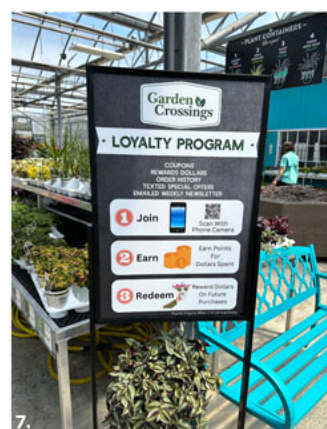
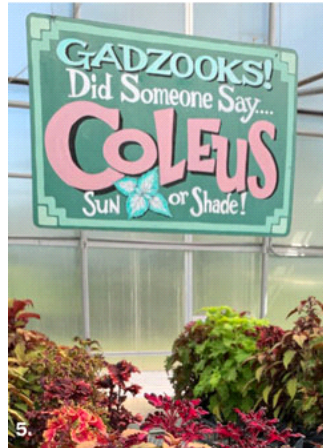
“Exactly. And the cost of customization for most places using these really isn’t worth it.”

I watched the tower twirl.

“I feel like adding a logo to this type of big department sign would make it really noisy, anyway.”

People KNOW they’re in a particular store. They don’t need to use precious attention to process that information over and over and over again.

Pictured 4: Tap into larger retail aesthetic trends with your signage to help customers connect their experience at your store with experiences outside of it. Koetsier’s in Michigan got in on the modern farmhouse look with their custom container sign. • 5-6 : The coleus sign at Bakers Acres and alocasia sign at Groovy Plants



Ranch, both in Ohio, use the garden centers' fonts for a cohesive look. No logo needed. • 7: This is a well done branded loyalty program sign at Garden Crossings in Michigan. Logo: check. Easy 1-2-3 steps: check. At eye-level: check.

Timothy Howard, owner of Garden Center Marketing, said "Now, I haven't done a bunch of research on when to add logos and when not to, but you can bet that the big box stores have."

He sent me some pictures he took inside one of them. A few had a small mark in a bottom left corner—a starburst, a bulls-eye. Definitely no names. But most just had the department. "Grocery." "Pharmacy."

When it comes to adding logos, I'd stick to: Front entrance, actionable marketing (like "Sign up for our text club"), take-home materials and Exit (door: Thank you for visiting Bogart's Awesome Garden Center!). Those are the points where you benefit from customers connecting with your brand and where a logo isn't going to eat up cognitive processing time in the store that could cut down on shopping.

"There are all kinds of ways to provide a positive, cohesive, branded experience beyond putting your logo everywhere," Timothy said.

Indeed! Some of those include creating a fully custom sign look for the entire store, which is something Groovy Plants Ranch in Ohio, does. Their signs are a big part of their store experience. Tonkadale Greenhouses in Minnesota does this, too. Not everyone has the budget or interest in creating a huge custom sign program and that's OK. Pictured are some examples of small sign tweaks that work. **GP**

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