

Your visual message: Is it hurting or helping your sale?

I went to visit one of our clients to discuss making some revisions to their company's trade show booth. We'd designed a "perfect" new corporate identity for this client a couple of years ago and also a corresponding trade show exhibit. Everyone agreed that it was very striking and interesting, and an exciting extension of their handsome new corporate look.

The trouble was, that in faithfully marrying the booth to their design system, we all lost sight of some critical pieces of information. And this actually hurt their sales.

We neglected to step back and take into consideration their potential customers and what they might be looking for. That is, while the booth makes this client look important and helps them stand out; it doesn't clearly state what business they're in, show what kind of products they make or convey how they're different.

Of course this was be fixed—and fast. But the meeting taught me a good lesson about the importance of relevance and how it can make (or break) a great visual presentation... and help or hurt a sale.

The story of three storefronts.

Let's take a window-shopping walk down an avenue in a foreign city. We come upon a striking storefront that makes us stop and look twice. The architecture and design are of the highest quality, extremely elegant and beautiful—like nothing we've seen. But the store has a name we can't pronounce or understand. The window display is very creative and clever, but it doesn't quickly make clear what kind of merchandise they have for sale inside.

What are the chances of us going inside to look around? Probably not very good.

While the beauty of their presentation makes us say "Wow!" the irrelevance of their presentation makes us say "not for us!"

We come to second store.

This one has a bunch of commodity souvenirs in the window. The presentation of their wares is nothing fancy, just a lot of stuff with prices all over them.

Will we be compelled to go in? Maybe—if one of the items in the window appeals to us. But all those price stickers will also make us wary and suspicious. Are they just come-ons? Are they selling quality merchandise? Will they stand by their product if something goes wrong?

It might cause us to think that there are probably a lot of stores selling the same thing; and that, if we do a bit of shopping, we can probably find the item for the same price somewhere else—at a store that feels more reputable.
We walk on.

Now we come to a third store.

This one looks like nothing we've seen before. They have a great name, a great look, and their wares seem like "our kind of stuff"—but with a unique design twist and style. It looks like it's going to be fun going inside this shop. It promises to be a great shopping experience that won't disappoint. And it looks like we're going to be rewarded with merchandise, service, and a shopping experience we just can't get anywhere else.

Do we go in? You bet we do!!! And we'll purposely shop hard for something interesting to buy, too!

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Revisit your storefronts.

Your visual presentations are just like these store's window displays. Unspoken, they need to communicate a unique and relevant message or they will hurt your sales.

Your logo. Your card. Your letterhead. Your ad. Your package. Your office. Your truck. Your advertisements and brochures. Your Web site. And your trade show booth.

Are they unique and look like nothing we've ever seen? Do they also say that your wares are "our kind of stuff?" but offered with a unique design twist and style?

Do your visual messages convey that it's going to be fun for a customer to go inside? That he's going to have a great shopping experience and that he won't be disappointed? Is your design relevant—does it communicate that he's going to be rewarded with merchandise, service, and a shopping experience he just can't get anywhere else?

I use uniqueness and relevance as "gold" standards to measure the power of the brands I work with. And from now on, I promise that I'm going use those standards to measure the success of every visual presentation I'm involved with too.

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