

Visual Exposure: Farm Logos and Signs Tell Your Story

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Deciding what sign and logo best represent you is a challenging and important business decision. Signage and logo make a statement about the farm and the people behind it. The objective is to reach out and hit a target audience of customers you are striving to connect with, while at the same time motivating a positive response by communicating what you are about. These are marketing tools that make a promise of quality, in the mind's eye of what your public perceives.

Perception is a subconscious response computed in the course of a fleeting moment. Webster's Dictionary defines it as intuitiveness, sense of awareness, insight, and understanding – rolled into one. What perception is generated from your logo and signs? If your enterprise does not have a logo already,

now is a good time to take this on as a project. It also could be that an existing logo might need an update or face-lift.

It is easy to keep a daunting task like deciding on a logo on the back burner. An already-too-long list of immediate things-to-do provides good justification. Then, there is not knowing how to begin and not knowing how much it is going to cost to get this done. These seem like reasonable excuses. Priorities should relate to payoff, and your investment in marketing will pay off over and over again. Take it slowly. This is not a project to be completed in an evening or a week, but one that should be slept on so your subconscious can help out.

A good starting point is thinking through where the farm began, and where you are going. Every farm is a unique story. Usually, it is a good story. Your story is about history, family commitment, land stewardship and environment, heritage, lifestyle, and passions. Typically, these represent the same reasons consumers want to support you and will acknowledge their appreciation through their dollars. Make lists of key words that represent what is important in your mind. These key words are your message ingredients. Next, cluster these into groups to identify relationships and characteristics that naturally fall together until a theme emerges or an image formulates in your mind. The logo and signage convey personality and place.

If the exercise seems difficult, a different tact is to define the audience you are targeting – customers who may think like you do and seek the products and services you can supply. All customers are not the same, so your marketing challenge is finding those who need what you have to sell. Your logo and signage

Signs: Things to Consider

- Avoid using the shapes and colors the highway department uses, so your sign will stand out.
- Keep the sign well-painted and well-managed. Appearance is very important.
- Place it out in the open, where it will be lighted by the sun not shaded by a tree or building.
- Avoid tall grasses, fences, trees, and houses for readability.
- Know zoning restrictions and state and local regulations, including setback restrictions.

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VISIBILITY

Maximum number of words which can be read by the average motorist traveling at various speeds				Distance from which sign must be visible to be fully read (feet)	Minimum letter height (inches)
30 mph	40 mph	50 mph	60 mph		
4	2	1	0	50	1.75
8	5	4	3	100	3.5
15	11	8	3	200	7
22	16	13	10	300	11
30	22	17	14	400	14
38	28	22	18	500	17.5

tones and consider finish options. Weed out the colors that do not fit, and bring home chips that you think do. Take enough time, remembering that it is OK to change your mind, scrap it, and start over. Ask a local art teacher, relative, or print shop to look at what you have come up with, and ask their opinion. Ask what your image says to them to see if it is in line with your intentions.

Original artwork may be expensive, unless a willing friend or family member has

will help customers find you and your products.

Thinking through your marketing niche is thinking about your customers. What are the people you hope to reach looking for, and what might drive them to connect with you? Why is your farm or enterprise one that they should want to connect with? The point of this, of course, is that consumers want to find local suppliers who are bringing to the marketplace the products they want, grown or made in a way that fits their philosophy. They are searching and screening to see if what they want are the products you, as seller, have. The consumer, as buyer, wants you to reach out and make a connection. Your image, communicated through your signs and logo, can be the lifeline.

As the farm's image is planted in the minds of neighbors, business associates, and customers, it becomes a familiar identifier and acts as a reminder that the farm is in business and invites patronage. The logo can be put on anything and go anywhere. It should be used on letterhead and invoices, business cards, point-of-sale tags and cards, vehicles, and Web site. It can work hard and extend your message beyond people driving by the farm. The value of familiarity is immeasurable, and exposure is key.

Detail is important. Color, design, size, and materials all make statements. By selecting carefully, a package will evolve into your trademark that expresses your vision. Colors should be chosen to reinforce your intentions. If color is not a forte of someone in the family, your local paint store is a handy resource. Browse the displays of paint shades and

talent. Trying some pencil sketches can help crystallize everyone's thinking. Cost can be managed by using a computer-generated image instead of hiring an artist for an original rendering. A local design company using "desktop-publishing" software may fit the bill, and later modifications, such as sizing, can be handled easily.

The ultimate goal is a picture that reflects the essence of the message you want to send. Now it is time to make a budget. There are options. This expenditure should be thought of as an investment important to the credibility of a business venture, but how much to spend can be hard to decide. Cost considerations can be managed by breaking down the project into steps and by extending the development or the execution over time. Artwork can be purchased one year, leaving the building of the permanent sign until the next. Meanwhile, the logo image can be applied to letterhead and point-of-purchase signage. Once scanned into your computer, it can be placed on invoices and any print fliers, posters, or other disposables tailored to an event, function, or mailing.

Implementing step-by-step is a good way to manage cost. Your list might look like this. Year one, get the artwork for the logo, get it scanned into the computer for application on print materials, and have business cards made. Year two, have farm sign made, buy the hardware and posts, and put it up. Year three, add flood lights and an attractive base around the sign pole and have vehicle decals made and applied. Year four, have sale price tags, price board for retail site,

posters, farm brochures, etc. made. Now, your marketing program is well underway and affordable.

One more thought about the stand-alone sign. It is usually the biggest expense item, depending on materials used and who builds it, size and complexity, and how it will be affixed. When planning the sign you really would like to have, do not forget to research and cost-out the style of post and hardware needed to support your theme and design. The post, hinges, and metal hangers can cost as much as the sign itself. They

might not be readily available locally and may need to be handcrafted or ordered. Also include costs if someone will need to be hired to put it up. Check out fees for state and local permitting or zoning, and, if the sign will be placed on someone else's property, will there be rent? Research town or highway restrictions to be sure your plans will be in compliance.

When approached in small steps, your sign and logo can be achieved.

