

Pay Attention to Small Visual Marketing Details

Marketing covers a wide range of activities and tools.

If you ask a small-business owner about his or her marketing, you probably will get a list of traditional media campaigns and maybe his or her social media efforts. You also may hear about the person's efforts to target customers and ensure that those customers become the business's ambassadors.

"Business owners also may discuss their customer service efforts," says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). "They might include offering a greeting when the customer enters the store right through to having customer support and service for the products purchased."

All of these efforts are, indeed, part of a good marketing program.

"Yet fewer business owners will bring up their visual marketing efforts," says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service's rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. "And rarely will an owner talk about keeping his or her store neat, clean and tidy."

When a person enters a new store, he or she often is struck by how bright the store seems. Aisles are often wide, the paint sparkles and every inch gleams on opening day. So as you think about how the store was then, take a look at the store today. As they walk in today, customers often see something less than what they saw on day one.

Everyone realizes that time and traffic makes keeping things the same as when a store first opens nearly impossible. For example, replacing the flooring and changing display cases can be both disrupting and expensive. Yet other things such as messy shelves, paint chips and burned-out light bulbs are easy to fix and can keep the store looking in great shape.

Start with some simple steps.

First, pay attention. Do a walk-around with a notepad. Try to view your store through the eyes of your customer. What needs attention? What catches your eye? If it is something positive, great. If it is a distraction, get it on your list.

Areas that catch the eye of customers include dust, lighting, floors and general clutter. Your public bathrooms are another key place. Keeping them neat has been found to leave an overall impression about how well you maintain the rest of your store.

Then prioritize your list. Put some thought into how much time and resources each item might take. A pile of items that need to be restocked is easy. So is a floor that needs a good cleaning.

Make time each day to work on one or more items on your list. If you have employees, assign them a task and then follow up. Also ask them for their ideas and thoughts. Demographic differences and upbringing give each of us a different set of priorities.

And as you ask your employees, ask your customers about their impressions.

Do a walk-through each morning and each evening with your notebook. Make it a routine

“Obviously, these efforts are focused on the customer who knows and comes to your place of business,” says <Insert Last name>. “Yet remember that these individuals are also part of your ambassador squad. You need to make sure they retain a positive impression of how the place looks.”

Visual marketing certainly includes lots of big elements. This is just an encouragement not to forget the small parts.

For more information, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

You also can get help from your local chamber of commerce, as well as the Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.