

LED Signs Managed Responsibly Improve the Community



LED signs have been given a bad rap over the years for being “tacky” and threatening to turn peaceful towns into “Las Vegas”. Although progress has been made as local leaders realize this new technology can be regulated reasonably, the old “Las Vegas” stigma still continues to affect the industry.

There are a couple of reasons why, and I would like to focus on the few here to help educate both existing and potential LED sign owners.

I saw a local news clip last week on LED signs in Florida. Unfortunately, some of the first words you hear in the segment are “tacky” and “distracting”. As I watched the clip, I was not surprised to see it go immediately to shots of Las Vegas with the reporter narrating about how you wouldn't want the place you live to look “like this”. It moved on to clips of LED signs, Hulk Hogan's new restaurant, and interviews with city leaders. It included some great examples of why LED signs still have a less than perfect reputation.

Quality

All but one or two of the LED signs in the clip had some sort of quality issue. This is a major problem for LED signs and it effects the industry as a whole. High quality LED signs that are working correctly do not look “tacky” or “distracting”. It's the broken, sub-par signs that give everyone else a bad name. Even if a sign is physically working, it doesn't mean it looks good. The news clip showed modules issues, color inconsistency, LED binning issues, missing pixels, etc...

No LED sign is perfect, but many of the signs in the story looked like this wasn't the first time they had issues. Surprisingly, one of these was a sign for a Hulk Hogan restaurant. It illustrates the fact that expensive and big, doesn't equal higher quality.

I know I speak for many in the industry who would plead with anyone getting an LED sign to Do Your Homework. Your business image is counting on it There are great manufactures right here in the USA that can provide you a quality sign. You may pay a little more, but it's worth it. I'm not saying that every single US manufacturer is guaranteed to be great, but your research is much easier to do when it's domestic and you can talk directly to the people making your sign.

Content

Poor content is almost as bad as a broken sign. People expect more from LED signs these days, and the viewers will only get more picky as the technology improves. The content must be clean, readable, relevant and beautiful. Showing a 30 second long firework animation won't get people into your business anymore. You need real content, with real information. People are looking to LED signs as they would look at their smart phone: quick, relevant information that they can use.

If you're doing your own content, make sure it's on par with the other signs out there. Having talent in house is good, as long as they keep the sign fresh with updated content. If you don't have your own designers or time to do the content yourself, use a content creation service. It's worth the investment.

(Cont'd) If you have an old or lower quality sign, don't be afraid to experiment with colors and fonts that DO look good on your display. White backgrounds are usually a bad choice for a low quality sign. Keep it simple and strong with dark backgrounds, thick text and deep colors. Blues and greens work well, but stay away from light blue, light green, light yellow, etc... Find what works with your display and stick to it.

Brightness

This is a big one for me. I still see a number of signs out there that are way too bright at night. I believe most of this is due to a lack of education on the subject, but there are still some out there who think that brighter = better. This is simply not the case at night.

When a sign is too bright, your audience will have less time to read the message. They may see the beacon of light from 5 miles away, but they will not be able to actually read the text until much closer than normal. If your sign is lighting up the freeway it's too bright. It may be cool to say "hey our LED is so bright it lights up the street", but that's about all it's doing. This is one of the bigger reasons for negative attitudes toward LED signs.

Take the time to really look at your sign at night. Is your audience spending their time seeing just the sign, or the actual content. You want them to see the content. Compare the brightness of the LED sign to the brightness of other lighted signs in the area. The LED sign should be just a bit brighter, but not much.

Most LED signs give you the ability to change the brightness settings. Some use automatic sensors, and others use scheduling or a mixture of both. Sensors are not always the best method, as they can be affected by ambient light, and their own values (how much it dims according the light value) can't be set for every situation. If you can set these values, do it. If your sign utilizes a brightness schedule, adjust it. Every time I see these signs, I feel bad for the business because they may be unknowingly losing potential customers at night because they can't read the sign.

Reasonable Regulations

I've always been a proponent of empowering the people, but I've found that it's not always smart to directly confront the city code. If you want reasonable regulations, you have to be reasonable too. Being a good example, and using an LED sign in a reasonable way gives you much more power than if you drop in a huge sign, and literally try to run it like "Vegas". You're only hurting yourself at that point. The Hulk Hogan sign in the news story was a good example of what NOT to do in my opinion, but not for the reasons you may think.

If you're going to fight a battle, you need to have the best weapons to ensure victory. The quality of the sign in this case does them no favors and only supports the notion that LED signs are "tacky". The discoloration and module issues on the sign detract from the content, and even though the content is colorful and attention getting, it loses significant power on a broken sign.

I have a better scenario. Imagine a high quality 12-16mm with great color balance, and deep high contrast colors. The content is classy and tasteful with smooth fades between the messages, and subtle but effective animations supporting the content, but not overdoing it. This is much better for the operator, the community, and the reputation of LED signs. Instead of people saying "hey that's a cool looking sign, but it's kind of cheesy", they will see the quality and say "that's a really good looking sign, I wonder why our city doesn't like these".

Quality Hardware, Effective Content, Visibility at Night, and keeping it Classy will improve the look of your LED sign and your business. If you are on the lookout for an LED sign, please do your research and make sure you're getting the best quality you can, at a reasonable price. There are good resources out there (like this blog) that will help you with this. Remember, sacrificing quality for a cheap price is a short term plan in a long term game. Lead by example, and look good doing it!