

Sweet Signs Help with Marketing

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For most producers, making syrup is a lot easier than marketing it. However, if your marketing strategy relies entirely on a sign at the end of the driveway, it had better be a great sign. Research shows that signs, love them or hate them, are the most efficient and effective means of communication. They work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. They tell people who you are and what you are selling. Signs do not require direct attention like radio or TV ads do. Everyone looks at signs – even children notice and recognize them. If you have kids and have ever tried to drive by the golden arches of McDonalds or an ice cream shop you know what I mean. Even people who are sign naysayers have seen the impact of how a good sign brought them more business. How many times have you taken a side adventure while traveling to see something because of a sign that caught your attention?

Considering Americans travel over 3 trillion miles by automobile annually, you should think about effective signage to draw them to your sugarhouse. A sign will help people develop a memory of your business. If they remember and recognize your sign, they will find their way back faster. If you have your logo on your custom labels then that needs to be part of your signage. In the advertising world this is called branding. The more you brand your operation and products differently than the competition, the more you stand out.

Before you put up any sign you must check into the local regulations and restrictions. In many communities there are more regulations on signage than there are building codes. Never

dig a hole for a sign without calling for a utility line marking. The cost of a sign will go up astronomically if you hit a fiber optic or other utility line. Using professionals in sign design is advisable. They should know local regulations and what will work best to promote you over others. They will also make sure things are spelled correctly, and can help you ensure that you're avoiding confusing messages.

Yes it's shocking, but there is a government office that studies signs and how they convey information to people. The United States Sign Council has a website with resources to determine sign size and placement to reach road travelers. For the best success follow the "CBS" rule of sign design: Clear, Brief, and Simple.

On average a sign has five to seven seconds to convey its message. The size of the sign needed is dependent upon the road and the posted speed limit, not the higher speed people drive. For example, 10" letters allow for 8.2 seconds of viewing at 25 miles per hour. At 55 miles per hour, the viewing time for 10" letters is just 3.7 seconds. Both of these scales are at a maximum of 300' between sign and reader. In short, the larger the letters the easier it is to read, and the more likely it is that it will be read. Bigger letters will require a larger sign. A larger the sign may involve more regulations and increased costs.

Signs will get you noticed if they are noticeable. Adding dimension to the sign helps, like if your sign is the shape of a sugar maple leaf, is painted on the side of an old sap tank, or includes

Signs continued on page 26

Signs: continued from page 25

some brightly colored painted sap buckets on the signpost. A U.S. or state flag can help, but remember US flags must be illuminated at night. Lighting works well for drawing attention to the sign, but it is critical that you maintain the lights. If bulbs burn out the sign may convey a mixed message or a bad message. If the "S" of an illuminated Shell gas sign is burnt out, what does it read then?

Equipment dealers sell signs, and most carry signs with your state's name on it. These signs work well for at the end of the driveway if selling "farm gate" or from your home. However, if you put that sign up several intersections from your location with a direction arrow there is no guarantee visitors will get to you, especially if they pass other maple producers using the

same sign on the way to. The more you brand with your operation or family name or logo on signage, the more likely they will find you. If there are multiple producers on a road with the same last name (i.e. Miller) then it is critical to use the sugaring operation name so customers get to you.

Sometimes the less said the better. I've seen signs showing a stack of pancakes and a bottle of maple syrup with the only words being "Maple Syrup, 1 mile" and a directional arrow. That paints an immediate, clear image for the person passing by. With little wording they know that if they go 1 mile that direction they are going to find maple syrup. It is highly recommended you put the exact distance you are from the sign. If your sign says 1 mile then you better be 1 mile away and not 2 ½ miles away, or people will give up and turn

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Example 1: Sign at an intersection and what was actually 2.3 miles down the road.

around disappointed.

Sorry, but if you live off a two track not much wider than a cow path you might think twice about pointing people to drive up your road. They may only get stuck and aggravated that you led them into a trap. Some folks don't appreciate a good coat of mud on their Mercedes Benz like we do on our old pickup trucks.

If you use an auto wrap, decals, bumper stickers or magnetic signs to promote your sugaring operation remember that if you wipe the mud off just the sign and the rest of the vehicle looks like it just came out of the swamp it sets a poor image of the quality of your product. If a vehicle with your sign promptly displayed on the sides is operated badly it could provide advertising you don't want.

The main points in my "Sugarhouse Aesthetics, What The People See" ar-

ticle in the February 2016 *Maple Syrup Digest* apply equally to signage. Signs along the road will get dirty. Keep them as clean as you can. For one, it makes them easier to read. Also, it sends a better image to the cleanliness of your operation and your product. Remember the public tastes with their eyes and nose as much as they do their mouth. Signage has a very good cost benefit ratio if done properly. A good sign will pay for itself in a short time and a bad sign will cost you money for a long time.

Author note: These articles are to be helpful for you to think about your operations while being practical and applicable to a broad range of producers. They are not intended to be judgmental. If you have suggestions for practical application articles you would like to see please contact me. I will not use names or specifics unless you ask me to use them. graham.124@osu.edu



Example 2: Sign at an intersection and what was actually 1.4 miles down the road.