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Make Signs People Will Read (and Use)!

Thank you research funders!
- Horticultural Research Institute
- USDA Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program
- Michigan State University’s Project Green
- Metro-Detroit and Western Michigan Flower Growers

Consumers read many signs.

Results from 2019 in-store shopping study showing average number of actions that 154 consumers engaged in by retail store and overall from a 12-minute shopping task to buy a $10 plant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store Identification Code</th>
<th>Q</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant interactions (look, touch, smell)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read signs with price</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read signs without price</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read tags</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Time to first fixation (in seconds) by customer segment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer segment</th>
<th>Sign type or plant</th>
<th>Plant type (73%)</th>
<th>Production method (20%)</th>
<th>Price (17%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production sign</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant ID sign</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price sign</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant material</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People find information they need fast!

How much of a sign do consumers read?
- What format (simple, moderately complex, highly complex) motivates more purchases?
- What format is perceived as more attractive?
- What format encourages people to read more?

Thank you!
Sign complexity level varied with the amount of information, images, and fonts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Complexity Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did we learn?

- Consumers rated complex signs higher (more attractive) and reported a greater likelihood to buy plants from displays with them.
- Consumer read a higher percentage of the information on moderately complex signs. Goldilocks effect?
- Consumers want to know more about the plant, but don’t always read about it. More info on the sign looks more complete (but I don’t have to read it all).
- Sign diversity helps as we are "wired" to see the differences.

Three types of attributes

- **Search attributes** can be readily evaluated before the customer makes the purchase. These would include foliage and/or flower color/shape/size and price.
- **Experience attributes** can only be evaluated after purchase. Drought tolerance, vegetable/herb flavor, flowering performance, sun/shade tolerance, fruit production.
- **Credence attributes** are more difficult to evaluate, even after purchase. Consumers rely on the brand and reputation of the seller. Production method (sustainable, organic), carbon footprint (intensive, limited), plant benefits (emotional, psychological, economic), plant guarantees.

Price

- It’s what you give to get something. Assignment of value.
- Can be a purchase barrier or driver.
- It’s a necessary search attribute.

How fast do consumers see high, medium, and low prices?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price Position</th>
<th>Left Average Seconds</th>
<th>Right Average Seconds</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.38 A</td>
<td>1.78 B</td>
<td>432.96</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>1.07 A</td>
<td>1.98 D</td>
<td>14.32</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>0.96 A</td>
<td>1.71 C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consumers see signs on the left faster than on the right. They see higher prices faster than lower prices. They see high and moderate prices on the left faster than on the right.

Sale prices are preferred and seen faster on the left of the display compared to the right side.

- Plant Type (38.1%) A
  - vegetable > petunia > herb
- Price (23.8%) B
  - percent off or B3G1 > regular price
- Price Font Size (19.3%) C
  - small > intermediate > large
- Sale Font Color (10.2%) D
  - black > red
- Sale sign location (8.6%) D
  - left > right

Michigan and Texas
N=154

Percentage indicates the relative importance of each attribute on the purchase decision. In other words, how important is the attribute related to the action in making a decision to buy the product?

Three types of attributes

- Search attributes can be readily evaluated before the customer makes the purchase. These would include foliage and/or flower color/shape/size and price.
- Experience attributes can only be evaluated after purchase. Drought tolerance, vegetable/herb flavor. To a lesser extent flowering performance, sun/shade tolerance, productivity.
- Credence attributes are more difficult to evaluate, even after purchase. Consumers rely on the brand and reputation of the seller. Production method (sustainable, organic), environmental impacts (water, media, containers), plant benefits (emotional, psychological, physical), plant guarantees.

Plant benefits facilitate purchases, especially at higher price points

Environmental benefits enhance value: bee-friendly insect management, recaptured water, sustainable potting media add to consumers’ value perception.

This is a good sign

Benefits

Price point for digitally identical plants

Information provided on sign

Feature: What the product is

Benefit: What the product does

People don’t buy features, they buy benefits!

Want a copy of these articles? Please email me at behe@msu.edu (and ask for benefits articles).

Use humor! Engage the senses!
Summary: What makes a good sign?

- The order and size font we use to communicate information is critical to purchases.
- People find the information they want – fast! Give them the opportunity to see more credence attributes (health and environmental benefits) before the price.
- People see higher prices faster, especially on the upper left side of the display.
- Have a higher priced item? Put the sign on the right.
- Have a sale item? Put the sign on the left.
- When the price is on the bottom of the sign, it helps purchase more than at the top or middle.

Summary: What makes a good sign?

- Think about all three attributes (search, experience, and credence). Communicate experience and credence attributes with products at higher price points.
- More benefits mean more value means greater likelihood to purchase.
- What are the environmental benefits? Reduced pesticide and water use? Low carbon footprint from growing on-site? Use of local labor?
- What are the emotional and health & well-being benefits? Use many from Charlie Hall & Melinda Knuth’s updated benefits articles.

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