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RETAIL EXPERTS

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Merchandising begins on the street, a sign does more than give out information

It takes the average shopper less than ten seconds to walk by a storefront and about one second to drive by. It is within this short amount of time that a retailer must capture a shopper's attention, convey its store's image, and entice the shopper to enter the store.

The message - merchandising begins on the street. A store's sign does more than give out information -- it offers the consumer a message as to the retailer's identity and what's inside the store. Without a sign to attract a consumer, a retailer is missing out on an effective way of branding and merchandising its business.

Unfortunately, all too often, retailers are stymied by the myriad of varied governmental regulations designed to restrict the size, location and type of signs which may be placed on a store. These regulations, if not fully analyzed and understood, can cost the retailer time and money, and, worst of all, may re-



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sult in the delay of a store's opening.

In order to prevent this from happening, a retailer should take the following steps:

1. Obtain a copy of the sign regulations of the municipality in which the store is located (many municipalities regulate the size, the placement, the location, the number, the color and the content of signs).

2. Analyze the sign regulations and determine if the proposed signs can be erected by permit or if a variance or special exception is necessary. (Study

the regulations carefully, rather than simply relying on your sign contractor's

why should your store be granted a variance? Is your store elevation unique, is it

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assurance that the proposed signs are "standard" and should be permitted by code.)

3. Determine if simple modifications can be made to the existing building signs or proposed signs in order to avoid the necessity of obtaining a variance (e.g., reduce the size, move the location, or change the content).

4. If a variance or special exception is required, what is the procedure, timing, and cost to obtain the approval and, historically, have such approvals been granted by the municipality? If other stores in the shopping center have applied for variances to permit oversized signs during the past year and were denied,

hidden from view, is it wider or larger than the other stores, or is your store name or logo larger? These are all factors to be considered.

5. Evaluate whether one or more of the proposed signs or, alternatively, temporary signs may be installed "as of right" while going through the variance process. For example, if the zoning ordinance permits a front elevation sign, but not a side elevation sign, the front elevation sign may be installed by permit during the process of obtaining the variance approval to permit the installation of the side elevation sign.

6. Determine what signs you actually need to adequately convey your message to your customers, and

then take steps to obtain those signs. Do you actually need multiple signs on each elevation and in the windows, or will one sign on each elevation suffice?

Recently, a major retailer moved into a freestanding store in a shopping center. Preparing for its grand opening and in keeping with its marketing theme, it painted the exterior of its building in a pattern resembling a cow. The municipality determined that the paint scheme of the building was designed to "attract attention" in the same manner as a sign; therefore, it classified the entire building exterior as a sign and would not grant a certificate of occupancy for the store until the building's exterior was repainted. The moral of the story is, "Do your homework before erecting any retail signs." This will save you time and money in the long run.

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