

WHO'S IN THE PROMOTION  
OF PUBLIC SIGNS

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Abstract

There is a possibility of finding a discipline to sponsor and incorporate in its scope the study and application of signs. Because signs - as promotional carriers - are related to marketing, some debate among behavioral theorists, marketers, and other disciplinarians may be started on who can better design, organize, and utilize everyday signs (no advertisements) so that they become more effective.

Introduction

An evolution in signs, beyond advertising posters and billboards has been taking place. Signs, like other living organisms, change with the passage of time. Today, we observe signs in the streets, doors, and other sites with different content than before. They appear congenial, inviting, and conducive to action/response which they request. Old strict verbs commanding conformity and obedience have been replaced by "Love Somebody - Use Seat Belts". If signs are the promoters of services and ideas in society and business, and if their existence and purpose is to activate responses and changes in behavior, then the state of art and evolution of this communication medium deserves attention.

Partial Classifications of Signs

Signs may be grouped into those informing the reader about something, aiding in his preferential selection of objects, and inciting behavioral response-sequences. Classification of signs by message/content produces three major categories: (1) to inform, (2) to prohibit, and (3) to activate. Signs intend to create a response -- make the receiver do something (or not do something). Signs, therefore, may be treated according to their dispositions to request action or behavior.

Sign content can bear inherently intensity and strength. Verbs such as "Do Not Enter," "No Change, No Ride," "No Credit Cards," etc. indicate strong prohibitions or request conformity. There is a trend toward motivating the reader to a favorable response through friendly persuasion rather than by demanding compliance through a compulsive style of direct orders.

On Semiotics and Marketing

New signs can be designed and pretested through experimentation so that the expected outcome (intent of message) can be measured, improved, and placed forward to achieving specific objectives.

Human civilization is dependent upon signs as signs involve or affect behavior. The term semiotics -- the theory of signs -- was adopted by John Locke from the Greek word "semeion." The theory is concerned with forms and manifestations of signs, whether in animals or humans, whether normal or pathological, whether social or personal. Semiotics is thus an interdisciplinary field of study.

The theory of signs embraces the following three fields: (1) syntactics, which is concerned with the formal characteristics (postulates) and relationships among signs; (2) semantics, which is concerned with the rules and relationships among signs; (2) semantics, which is concerned with the rules and relationships among messages contained in the signs; and (3) pragmatics, which is concerned with the relationship (interpretations) between signs and the users of signs. Some discipline, whether it is called semiotics or marketing can help in an integrative effort toward the goal of making better signs.

Who Will Sponsor the Study of Signs?

As other media of communication, signs are true expressions of our age -- an age of exploding information and instant dissemination. There is no doubt that signs can be improved so that they can assist in transmitting information of value and help solve immediate problems (endeavors, concerns) of business and the public. If promotion - as a part of marketing - is responsible for the communication process among the publics, institutions, and businesses, then the "nurture of signs" may not be far away.

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Engel, James, et al., Promotional Strategy (Homewood, Ill.: Richard Irwin, Inc., 1979).

Green, Paul and Donald Tull, Research for Marketing Decisions (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979).

NO PETS	YOUR PET MAY WAIT OUTSIDE	WE LOVE PETS BUT REGULATIONS WANT THEM OUTSIDE
DO NOT LITTER	PITCH IN  KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL	PUSH IN FOR ECOLOGY