

# The Step-by-Step **SIGN BUYER'S GUIDE**

See how to select the  
right kind of sign every time.

Tim Harrelson - CEO



**The Step-by-Step Sign Buyer's Guide**  
is Authored, Published & Updated by  
Tim Harrelson, the Founder & CEO of TheSignChef.com, Inc.

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***“If you paid thousands of dollars  
to hire an Independent Sign Consultant,  
she would follow the same  
steps outlined in this Buyer’s Guide.”***

*the Sign Chef*

Tim Harrelson  
TheSignChef.com  
CEO

# WHEN YOU NEED OUTDOOR SIGNS OR LETTERS, WHERE DO YOU START?

## **STEP 1** ***Start With Accurate Measurements***

To start your project, 3 important measurements are needed of the wall where the sign will be installed.

### **HEIGHT**

What is the total height of the wall where the sign will be placed?

### **WIDTH**

What is the total overall width of the wall?

### **READING DISTANCE**

How far away does your sign need to be legible?





*Measure the Total Height & Width of the Wall.*



*What is the Distance from the Wall to the Road?*

## Step 1 - Measure

### Why are these measurements so important?

You already know sizes & measurements are important, *but why exactly?*

The most important reason for obtaining the dimensions of the wall is to determine the **maximum allowable size of the sign**.

For example, a wall measuring 30 feet across does not automatically entitle an occupant to a 30 foot wide sign.

**Local sign ordinances strictly limit the size of outdoor signs.**

Hypothetically, a new business may be restricted to an 8 foot wide sign on a building that is 50 feet wide. Once you have the measurements, the Zoning Department in your local area can provide specific information on sign restrictions & size limitations.

**Please note that the maximum allowable size may be surprisingly small.**  
**You won't know until you check with the Zoning Department.**

### What are the other advantages of knowing the measurements?

#### **SCRUTINIZE THE LAYOUT & DESIGN**

Once you know the total height & width of the wall, an accurate layout can be created so you can see the correct proportions of the sign in relation to the building. This will help you visualize the project as a whole to see if any design changes need to be made.

#### **ATTAIN APPROVAL & PERMISSION**

That same design can then be used to acquire a sign permit and permission from your landlord.

#### **PROPERLY SIZE LETTERS**

The reading distance is a critical measurement that will help you size your letters properly. We will cover this topic in greater detail under Step 3.



## Step 2 - Identify Restrictions

### **STEP 2** *Identify Local Sign Restrictions*

#### What Type of Outdoor Sign Are You Legally Allowed to Have?

The laws governing outdoor signs are stringent – sizes are restricted. Violations of local sign ordinances can result in fines up to \$500/day or 30 days in jail.

**Furthermore, if a sign is installed that is larger than local sign ordinances allow, you will be forced to incur the additional expense of having it removed.**



Fortunately, you have assistance readily available to you during this process because specific sign ordinances have already been established for the property & building you lease or own.

The staff at the zoning department will assist you by answering any questions you may have about the sign ordinances.

You will see the types & sizes of signs you are legally allowed to display.

## Step 2 - Identify Restrictions

### The Legal Requirements of Outdoor Signage

- Local sign ordinances have become increasingly restrictive on the size & type of outdoor signs allowed.
- The Building, Zoning or Planning Department in your local area can provide a copy of the sign ordinances.
- Once the size limitations are known, the next step is to determine the **EXACT TYPE** of sign allowed by the sign ordinances at your location.
- The sign permit application can usually be accessed & submitted online for final approval.
- Window lettering applied to the outside of storefront glass windows may also be classified as Outdoor Signage, thereby requiring a sign permit.
- A structural engineer's stamp certifying the wind load capacity of an outdoor sign installation may be required for your project.
- Getting final approval for the sign permit goes hand-in-hand with getting written permission from the Landlord.
- Applying for a sign permit is easy, requiring 1-2 hours to gather the information that is needed.
- Typical fees charged by sign companies for this service range from \$300 - \$600, plus costs. The costs are the usual out-of-pocket fees required by permitting departments for permit acquisition.

**You can literally save yourself hundreds of dollars by acquiring the sign permit yourself.**



## Step 2 - Identify Restrictions

### **\* ATTENTION \***

If you are leasing a commercial space, we highly recommend obtaining the landlord's written permission approving the purchase & installation of your outdoor signs.

[CLICK HERE FOR PERMIT GUIDE](#)

#### **Permitting Offices Usually Require a Written Letter From Landlord Approving:**

- The final design & colors
- Size & overall dimensions
- Placement of wall mounted signs shown on building
- Type of sign with specifications shown in a diagram
- Mounting details showing the hardware and installation method

### **STEP 3** ***Choose Your Words Carefully***

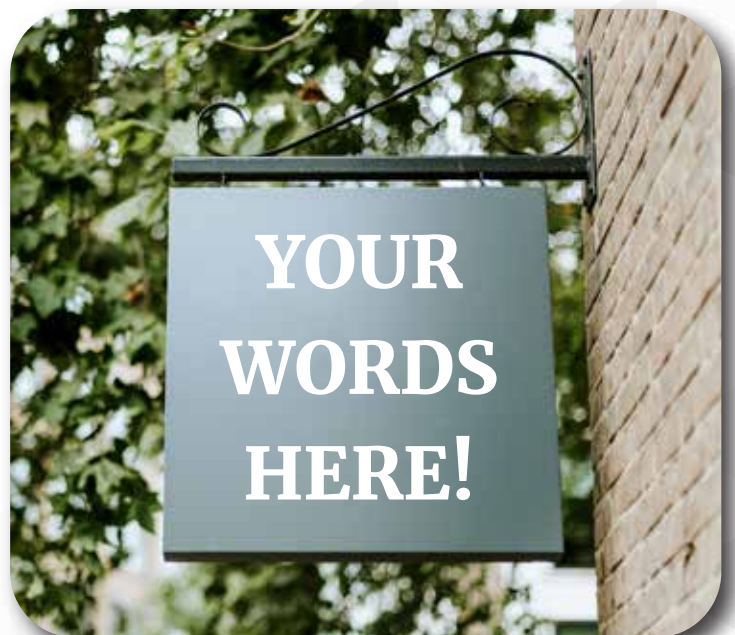
**What is the purpose of your new sign?**

In other words, what do you want the new sign to do, *for you?*

The wording of your new sign will be based on the current needs of your organization.

**What kind of Outdoor Sign do you need?**

- Main Identification Sign
- Branding
- Directional / Wayfinding
- Advertise Products or Services
- Plaques / Historical Markers & Dedications
- Sales / Promotions
- Announcements for Shows & Events
- Educational / Informational
- Healthy & Safety Warnings
- Support for a Cause
- Inspirational / Motivational Messages
- Employee Recognition & Appreciation



## Step 3 - Choose Your Words

For example, if the primary purpose of your new sign is to identify your business, you could start with the name of your organization.

**You may find it advantageous to include other information on signs:**

- A Tagline or Slogan
- Phone Number
- Physical Address
- Website Address
- QR Code
- Description of Products or Services
- Hours of Operation
- Free Estimates
- Free Delivery
- Commerical and/or Residential
- Directional Arrow



**As a word of caution, don't leave anything to chance when it comes to the wording on your sign.**

For example, a prospective client contacted us to get a price for his new business sign. The only thing he initially wanted on the sign was a single word – Zaffron's.



ZAFFRON'S

*If you were to guess what kind of product or service  
this business offers, what would you say?  
You have no idea, right? Neither did we until we asked.*

**Why fight an uphill battle with an unclear message?**

Make sure people can tell the type of business you are in from your sign design.

Otherwise, you will miss numerous opportunities to attract the attention & interest of potential customers who are in the market for your products and/or services. If you currently have a business name that doesn't make it apparent what you do or offer, you can always add a descriptive word or phrase that will do the job. For example, *Zaffron's Bakery*.



ZAFFRON'S  
BAKERY

*From confusion to clarity, with a single word.*

## Step 4 - Choose Letter Size

### **STEP 4** *Choose Letter Sizes*

**What size should the letters be on your new sign?**  
Choosing the right size letters for your sign is critically important.

If the letters are too small, your message won't be effective.

On the other hand, if the letters are **TOO BIG** for the wall, they may not fit!



9" T ← ----- 90 Feet ----- →

Using data from joint research studies performed by the **United States Sign Council & Penn State University**, we have compiled the sign industry's first complete **Letter Legibility & Sizing Chart**.



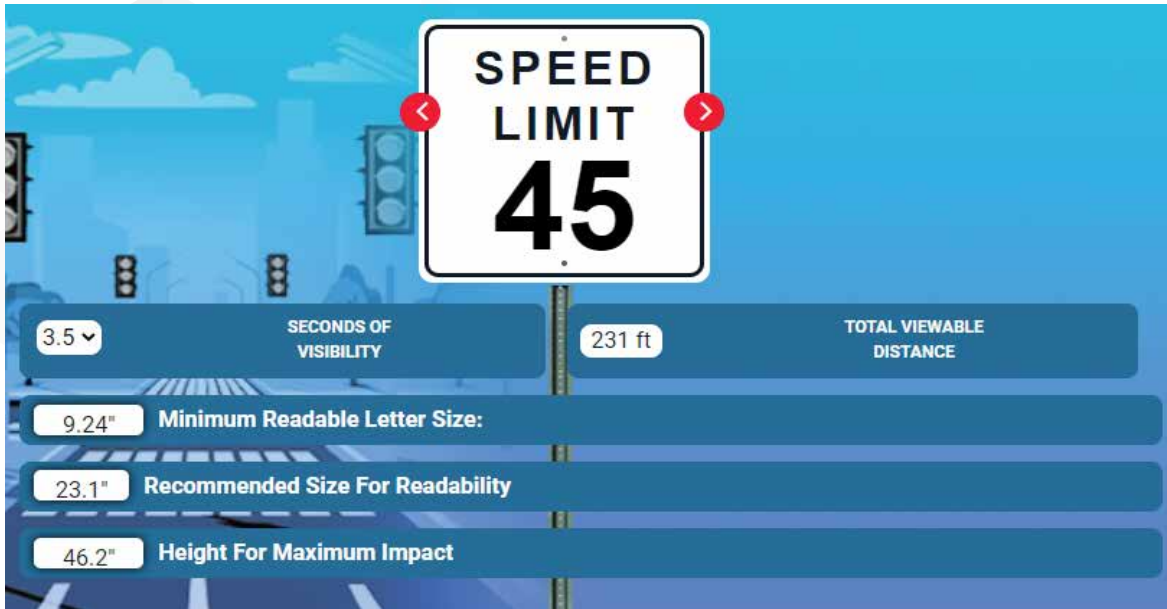


# Letter Legibility & Sizing Chart

Letter Height	Maximum Readable Distance	Distance For Easy Readability	Viewing Distance For Best Impact
3"	75'	30'	15'
4"	100'	40'	20'
5"	125'	50'	25'
6"	150'	60'	30'
7"	175'	70'	35'
8"	200'	80'	40'
9"	225'	90'	45'
10"	250'	100'	50'
12"	300'	120'	60'
13"	325'	130'	65'
14"	350'	140'	70'
15"	375'	150'	75'
16"	400'	160'	80'
18"	450'	180'	90'
20"	500'	200'	100'
22"	550'	220'	110'
24"	600'	240'	120'
26"	650'	260'	130'
28"	700'	280'	140'
30"	750'	300'	150'
32"	800'	320'	160'
34"	850'	340'	170'
36"	900'	360'	180'
42"	1,050'	420'	210'
48"	1,200'	480'	240'

## Step 4 - Choose Letter Size

Additionally, we developed the sign industry's first online **Letter Sizing Calculator** to help you determine the proper letter size.



*This unique calculator takes the speed of passing motorists into consideration.*

This easy-to-use tool is readily available on our website. On the calculator page, we have included an informative video which demonstrates a **unique mathematical approach** to sign design. After watching this 6 minute video, you will know how to properly size the letters on any sign.

### **Do you want your new sign to be readable from the road?**

If so, how far is the wall of the building from the road? How many feet, *exactly*?

- Let's suppose the front of your building is 150 feet from the road - that's where the viewing/reading distance *begins*.
- If passing vehicles have a clear line of sight, 200 feet in either direction, then the ultimate viewing distance is approximately 350 feet.
- With a reading distance of 350 feet, a 14" tall letter is the minimum size required for legibility.

## Step 4 - Choose Letter Size

For **EASY READABILITY** though, the sign industry's *minimum recommendation* would be **35"** tall letters.

Will your sign letters be Barely Legible or Easy to Read?

You are now better equipped to make informed selections regarding letter sizes.

## HOW WILL THOSE SIZES LOOK THOUGH, ONCE THE SIGN OR LETTERS ARE MOUNTED TO THE WALL?

*Would you like to see what the new sign will look like on your building, before you purchase?*

### GET A FREE LAYOUT IN 24 HOURS

Here are 3 logical reasons why you need a scaled layout:

- The letter sizing chart only reveals the recommended height of letters.
- The chart doesn't show the total line length because letter styles vary in width.
- A layout will help ensure the letter sizes you select will properly fit the space you have.

To get a free layout, send an email to [Art@TheSignChef.com](mailto:Art@TheSignChef.com) with:

- The 3 measurements.
- Any related art files or documents you may have.
- A straight-on picture of your wall.

**We will promptly show you what your new sign or letters will look like, right on your wall!**

**See what works for you - and what doesn't - *in advance.***

### **STEP 5** ***Select From a Complete List of Options***

**Which sign options should you consider for your project?**
































TheSignChef.com provides a complete range of premium options & solutions to choose from.

For instance, if you live in an area prone to high winds, the physical strength of the sign material is an important detail to consider.

*The chart on the next page shows how the strongest sign materials compare to the weakest.*



# Sign Material Strength Comparison

Sign Materials	Thickness	Outdoor Strength & Rigidity
Lighted Sign Cabinet	6" - 12"	
Western Red Cedar Wood	2"	
High Dimensional Urethane - HDU	2"	
High Dimensional Urethane - HDU	1 1/2"	
Rigid PVC Plastic	1"	
Dura-Wood	3/4"	
Dura-Wood	1/2"	
HDPE Color Board	1/2"	
Armour-Wood	1/2"	
Alumalite	1/2"	
Alumalite	1/4"	
Dibond	1/4"	
Dibond	1/8"	
 Acrylic Plastic	1/4"	
 Lexan Faces	3/16"	
 Acrysteel Faces	3/16"	
Aluminum	.125"	
Aluminum	.080"	
Aluminum	.063"	
Aluminum	.040"	
Aluminum	.032"	
BubbleX	3/8"	
Coroplast	3/8"	
Coroplast	3/16"	
Polyethylene	.06"	
Polyethylene	.03"	
Heavy Duty Vinyl Banner	20 Oz.	
Vinyl Banner	13 Oz.	

 Sign Materials Printed On One Side Only



# THE ULTIMATE SIGN CHECKLIST

The complete checklist below will help you make a thorough assessment of your project, *up front*.

As you use this one-of-a-kind checklist to perform your own due diligence, you'll gain key insights to ensure the successful outcome of your project.

**We urge you not to leave anything to chance.**

*Shall we begin?*

**How long does your sign need to last outdoors?**

You can balance the length of time the sign will be needed to the budget set aside for this project.

STANDARD GRADE No Protective Laminate	Durability Rating <b>12 - 36 Months</b>
PREMIUM GRADE Premium, UV Protective Laminate Added	 Durability Rating up to <b>5 Years</b>
ULTRA-PREMIUM GRADE 3M's Ultra-Premium, UV Protective Laminate	 Durability Rating up to <b>10 Years</b>
REFLECTIVE GRADE Maximum Solar & Weather Protection Added	 Durability Rating up to <b>10 Years</b>

**Our most popular sign products come with a  
Lifetime Guarantee.**



## Sign companies make signs in a variety of different ways.

The level of quality - or lack thereof - varies widely from company to company.

- One of the most common ways to produce a sign is to digitally print an approved design directly to the surface of the sign panel, like metal or plastic.
- This sign-production method is beautiful, colorful, fast & efficient.



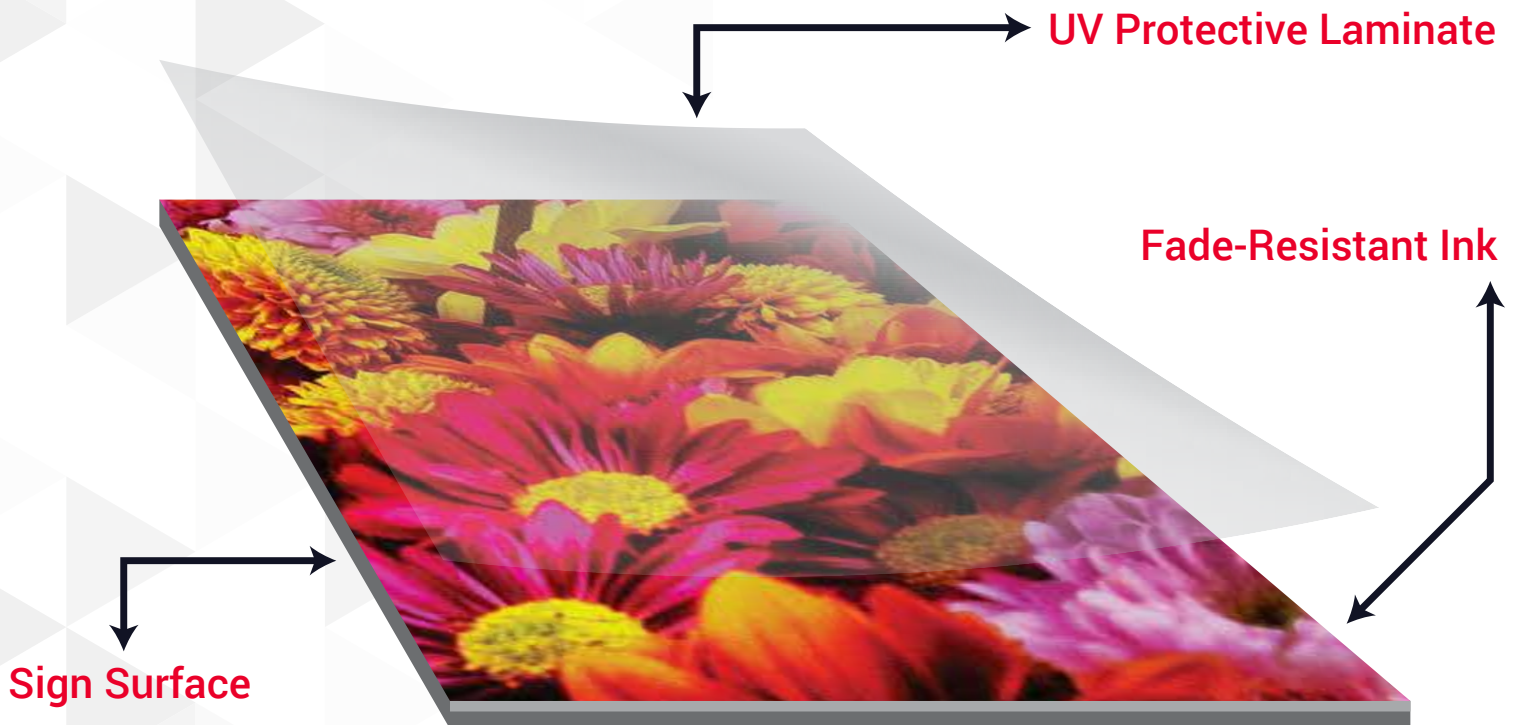
*We purchased this Vanguard UV Flatbed Printer because Kyocera print heads produce the highest resolution images in the sign industry.*



- The UV ink used in flatbed printers is **less fade-resistant** than true solvent ink.
- As a result, Standard Grade, UV flatbed printed signs are rated to last 12-36 months outdoors.
- Without a clear, UV protective laminate, the ink is subjected to the full force of the sun and the elements, *which accelerates deterioration*.

## Ultimate Checklist

- A Premium-Grade, Clear, UV Protective Laminate can shield the entire surface of the sign from rain deposits, road grime & the damaging effects of the sun thereby **extending the useful life up to 5 years**.
- The Ultra-Premium Grade, UV Protective Laminate manufactured by 3M, *provides the highest level of solar protection available in the sign industry*, backed by the longest warranty.
- Our Ultra-Premium Grade Signs are printed with the sign industry's most fade-resistant, true solvent ink, which is manufactured in partnership with the 3M Corporation.



- The Ultra-Premium Grade Laminate combined with the most fade-resistant ink in the sign industry provides the ingredients necessary to produce **America's Most Durable Signs**.

**You now have the option to tailor your needs to your budget.**

## Do you want your sign to be visible at night?

If you want your sign to be noticeable after dark, you have these options:

- Internal illumination
- Halo lighting / backlit
- Exterior lighting / floodlights
- Reflective signs & letters

## What are the physical attributes the sign material needs to have?

The physical characteristics of the sign will directly affect the appearance & longevity

## What type of an appearance do you want your sign to have?

- Smooth & flat
- Dimensional sign with background
- Individually mounted 3D letters & logos
- Engraved
- Metal Finish
- Distressed
- Weathered
- Natural
- Textured
- Carved

## Strength

Do you need a low-strength sign, medium or high-strength sign capable of withstanding high winds?

## Thickness

You can choose from paper-thin to super-thick signs and everything in between. The overall thickness will substantially affect the sign's rigidity, strength & appearance.

## Weight

The weight of a sign has a direct effect on rigidity & strength. From Lightweight to Heavy Duty sign materials, you have numerous options.

## Shape

Signs are available in standard & custom shapes - here is a list of the most common shapes:

- Square / Rectangle
- Circle / Oval
- Capsule
- Custom Shape
- Triangle
- Octagon
- Rounded / Inverted Corners

## Finish

The finish will affect the overall appearance of the sign. If you have a personal preference, these options are available on most of our sign products:

- High Gloss
- Satin
- Flat / Matte

## Border or Edge Treatment

The border or edge of the sign is an aspect commonly overlooked. You can add a finishing touch on your new sign with one of these options:

- Standard border
- Inset border
- Decorative border
- Edge cap
- Frame
- Plain edge



## Sides

Most signs are either 1-sided or 2-sided. We offer additional options:

- Single-sided
- Double-sided
- 3-sided
- 4-sided

## Mounting Holes

When signs need holes for installation, the correct diameter, placement and quantity is critically important.

- Diameter / Size
- Quantity
- Ensure the hardware matches hole size
- Placement

## How will the sign be installed?

The installation of the new sign should be factored into its construction. We offer a variety of options:

- Standard hardware
- Hanging hardware / chain / cable
- Decorative
- Studs
- Industrial-strength double-sided tape
- Blind (unseen) hardware using Z-clips
- Sign posts, frames & stakes
- Projection mounted
- Raceway
- Liquid high strength adhesive
- Velcro

## Installation Assistance

To help with the installation of a sign, we offer these do-it-yourself kits:

- Self-guiding installation templates
- Fully illustrated installation instructions
- How-to videos

## Measurements

The list below expands on the measurements discussed in Step 1:

- **Size of area**

What is the total area of the wall space where the sign will be mounted?

- **Reading distance**

How far away does the message on the sign need to be readable?

- **Overall size of sign**

What is the ideal size for the new sign?

- **Letter & logo size**

How tall should the letters be for easy readability?

- **Size of margins & negative space**

Are you allowing adequate space to avoid overcrowding?

## Type of Material

When you consider the type of material to be used in the production of your new signs, considerations include overall durability, brand requirements, appearance and personal preferences.

- **Metal**

We offer numerous types of metal signs.

- Aluminum
  - *Brushed Silver*
  - *Mirror polished silver*
  - *Brushed gold*
  - *Mirror polished gold*
  - *Painted or printed any color*
- Alupalite
- Bronze
- Copper

- Corten weathered steel
- Dibond
- Dry erasable metal
- Reflective
- Stainless Steel
- Steel ACM (magnetic receptive)
- Titanium

## • **Plastic**

Several different types of plastic are available to meet virtually any requirement you may have.

- Acrylic
- Acrysteel
- Acrylite SG
- Dry erasable plastic
- Ultra-foam core
- HDPE
- Lexan
- Plexiglass
- Polyethylene
- Rigid PVC
- Styrene

## • **Wood**

Most wood signs are painted and/or printed. When a natural wood grain appearance is preferred, there is no replacement for real wood. You have these options available:

- Armour-wood
- Birch
- Durawood
- Cherry

- MDO plywood
- Oak
- Pine
- Plywood
- Redwood
- Western red cedar
- **Other**

This list of popular sign materials doesn't fall neatly under the big 3 categories above.

- Decals
- EPS foam
- Fiberglass
- HDU (High Dimensional Urethane Board)
- Magnetics
- Mesh Banner
- Panaflex
- Perforated window vinyl
- Reflective
- Retractable banner (with stands)
- Table banner
- Trailer & vehicle lettering
- Vinyl banner
- Vinyl graphics
- Vinyl letters
- Wallpaper
- Wrap vinyl

## Design Checklist

### What is the brand image to match or create?

- Basic
- Fancy
- Upscale
- Corporate
- Bold
- Industrial
- Modern
- Contemporary
- Adventurous
- Fun / Playful
- Professional / Conservative
- Feminine / Masculine

### Font

Which letter styles will be incorporated into the design?

### Kerning

Does the space B E T W E E N the letters look uniform & consistent?

### Artwork

Will a logo, photo or other design element be included in the design?

### Color Scheme / Brand Colors

- What are the colors for the background, letters and/or logo?
- Is a certain color specified by a national brand?
- Will you need a custom color such as a Pantone (PMS) Color?

### Layout

How will the words and other design elements be arranged?



## Art Files

Do you have any art files available for your project? We can import & open numerous types of files including:

- **Vector-based file types**

- .ai
- .pdf
- .eps
- .dxf
- .svg

- **Raster-based file types**

- .pdf
- .psd
- .ps
- .jpg or .jpeg
- .tif or .tiff
- .png
- .gif
- .bmp



**Vector based files are ideal for sign production.**

**High quality raster-based files print beautifully on a wide variety of materials.**

**If you need any type of design assistance, our Art Department is at your service.**

## What type of signage are you legally allowed to display outdoors?

Here is a list of the most common types of outdoor signs:

- **Wall Mounted Signs**

Wall signs are referred to by other names including *building signs* and *storefront signs*. Less familiar references include signs mounted to the *facia* or *facade* (which means the *face* of the building.)

What TYPE of wall mounted sign are you legally allowed to have by your local sign ordinances? Lighted Channel Letters? Lighted Sign Cabinet with a Plastic Face? Non-Lighted 3D Letters? Dimensional Non-Lighted Sign? Wood Carved Sign? Flat Sign Panel? Projected Mounted Hanging Sign?

- **3D Letters & Logos**

- **Cast Bronze or Aluminum Plaques**

- **Roadside Signs**

Signs installed by the road are often referred to by other names including *freestanding signs*, *main identification signs*, *entrance signs*, *post & panel signs*, *monument signs*, *pylon signs*, and *pole signs*.

Are you legally allowed to have a sign out by the road installed? If so, what TYPE are you required or allowed to have? And what are the overall height and size restrictions?

- **Entrance Signs**

Low profile entrance signs may be allowed by the road, in addition to a main identification sign. These smaller directional signs often serve the public interests and are sometimes allowed. Be sure to inquire if you want the extra exposure for your organization.

- **Window Signs**

The sign ordinances regarding Glass Window Signs and Front Door Lettering vary widely. In most municipalities signs posted on the windows are considered **Outdoor Signs** and require permits. In other areas, if the advertisement is on the **INSIDE** of the glass, then the sign does **NOT** fall under the laws governing outdoor signs. Another odd variable is **ANY** signage visible to the public outside is considered to be an Outdoor Sign.

- **Front Door**

The same sign ordinances that apply to *glass window signs* usually applies to *front door* signs, but not always. Be sure to check the amount of signage you are allowed to have on your front entrance.

- **Vehicles Signs, Wraps & “Mobile Billboards”**

As sign ordinances have become increasingly restrictive, business owners have gotten creative! Wrapping a company vehicle in an advertisement parked by the street offers a tremendous branding opportunity. Local businesses have even purchased **LARGE BOX TRUCKS** to turn into roadside billboards. Some municipalities still allow this type of “outdoor signage.” However, a growing number of areas around the country are making this type of advertising illegal. Be sure to check your local sign ordinances to see if you are legally allowed to permanently park a vehicle with an advertising display in your parking lot.

- **Placement**

Where are you legally allowed to have new signs installed? The location where your signs will be mounted will influence the overall size you are allowed.

- **Dimensions**

On a wall the maximum length of the sign is usually restricted to no more than 75% of the space available. For example, if your storefront is 40' wide left-to-right, then your sign is typically limited to 30'.

- **Distance**

How far away do you want your letters to be legible? Knowing the viewing distance is critical to determining the proper letter size. Most people don't have a 100' tape measure laying around to get an accurate measurement. But there's a good way to estimate distance, with a vehicle - an SUV to be exact. The average SUV is 16' long. Since we are all familiar with vehicles and parking spaces, it's pretty easy to guess the number of car lengths from one point to the next. For example, I can tell it's about 5 car lengths from the front of our building to the road. We're pretty close. So that's a viewing distance of about 80 feet ( $5 \times 16' = 80'$ ). Using the letter visibility chart, a good size letter to start with is 8" for easy readability. The absolute minimum size through is 3" - 4".



- **Longevity**

Outdoor durability, weatherability and fade resistance is a strong consideration when choosing the type materials to be used for your new sign. How many years do you need your signs to last? **If you have a short term lease, there are different decisions to be made versus meeting long-term expectations.** The durability and weatherability of sign materials vary widely. Knowing you have options to invest less or more, will enable you to make fully informed decisions.

### You still need assistance - we're here to help.

TheSignChef.com is an “*online*” sign company, but our clients often tell us that we give them far better service than their local sign shops!

People usually seek us out to help them resolve a particular issue they have been struggling with.

**Our strength lies in providing highly personalized services to our clients.**

When you need further assistance, don't hesitate to contact us.

All the best!



Tim Harrelson

CEO

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

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