



Street Smarts

Kick subpar store exteriors to the curb.

BY MOLLY PETRILLA

this is the tale of two stores—or, more specifically, two parking lots. The stores sit across the street from one another, each with parking areas to one side. They're equally staffed, equally sized and equally priced. Both sell adorable year-round gifts and home goods, and have strong marketing campaigns. Yet there Store A sits, raking in the customers, while Store B is barely scraping by.

What's the secret of Store A's success—and the truth behind Store B's hard times? We told you this was a tale of two parking lots, and it's also the answer: Store A maintains a clean, well-lit lot with cheery and inviting flower beds, while Store B's lot is cracked, dirty and desolate. In short, Store B is severely lacking in curb appeal.

"Keeping the outside of your store looking its best is just as important as what you do on the inside," says Gary Petz, a partner at Discovery-Based Retail. "Many owners get blinders on when it comes to their curb appeal. They may notice something is wrong when they pass it the first time, but after they pass it a hundred more times, it kind of fades into the background."

But what exactly is curb appeal? And how can you make sure your store has it? Read on to discover the 10 most important things you can do right now to ensure that your store isn't losing out because of an off-putting exterior.

1. LANDSCAPE, LANDSCAPE, LANDSCAPE.

When it comes to your flowers, hedges or grass, aim for an impression of “crispness,” says Kevin Dent, CEO of DENTCO Exterior Services Management. “You want planting beds that have mulch and crisp edges, and turf that’s been maintained,” he adds. “And you certainly don’t want a bunch of weeds and dandelions sprouting up.” Dent also says there’s nothing worse than dead flora and fauna outside your store, so make sure you keep up with that, too.

2. STAMP OUT LITTERBUGS. It’s easy for the parking area or sidewalk outside your store to quickly become cluttered with trash. Maybe there’s a fast food joint next door, and discarded wrappers blow over to your parking lot. Maybe someone left a flyer in your door that fell out and has been sitting on your stoop ever since. Whatever the case, keep an eye out for any trash or debris and make sure it gets cleaned up immediately, Dent says.

3. WASH WITH FORCE. An easy way to remove dirt, gum, and other grime from your sidewalks or awnings is to pressure wash them. Dent recommends doing so on a regular basis, and Petz says you can even wash the sides of your building, too, to keep things sparkling.

4. LIGHTEN UP. Your building’s exterior lighting is important on a number of levels, according to Petz. First, you should make

sure that all your lights are always working and no bulbs need to be replaced. Second, you should provide enough light to both highlight your building’s exterior and sign and to make late-night shoppers feel safe in your parking lot, especially in the winter months. Once those are checked off, you can get into more advanced things, like bathing your building in soft light to help it stand out or uplighting or downlighting its façade, Petz says.

5. BABY, WHAT’S YOUR SIGN? Petz recommends asking yourself, “How well is my sign representing my business? Does it really speak to what type of business I am?” In answering those questions, consider whether the logo on your sign is current, and how long the sign has been there.

6. SEAL IN YOUR SIDEWALKS. Adding a seal coating to your asphalt areas can increase their lifespan, helping prevent cracks and humps and also offering “a huge aesthetic affect,” Dent says. “It makes everything look cleaner and more uniform.” Best of all, it’s something inexpensive that you can do yourself.

7. DON’T BE AFRAID OF COLOR. Petz has a telling anecdote about building color. He once worked with a store that stood next to a traffic light and wasn’t getting the foot traffic it wanted. “All we did was change the color of the building,” he says, “and the owner said

that over the next week, people were walking in and saying ‘I forgot you were here.’” Petz recommends updating your color periodically, and choosing hues that reflect the type of store you are. (See sidebar.)

8. MOVE IT, MOVE IT. Humans are programmed to notice motion—how else were we supposed to escape a spontaneous woolly mammoth attack? Petz suggests taking advantage of this with movement outside your building, whether it’s through flags or even a digital sign. “It’s like waving at people when they go by and saying, ‘Come on in here,’” he says.

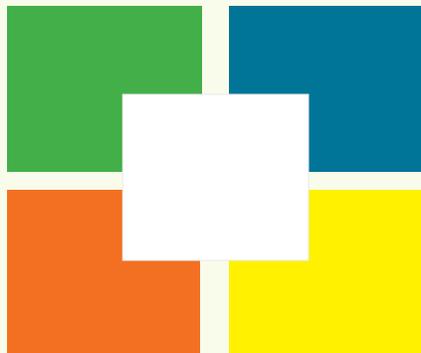
9. DON’T BE SHALLOW. Depth is one of the qualities people often look for in potential friends—and buildings too, apparently. To make sure your building offers passersby sufficient visual depth, keep your windows uncluttered and the interior visible, Petz says. “The windows are really what will invite them in,” he adds.

10. BE YOUR OWN WORST CRITIC. It’s easy to become complacent with your store’s exterior, and natural to stop noticing the problems with its curb appeal. Petz recommends owners grab a pen and paper and head outside to view their building as a potential customer would—from parking in the customer lot to walking up the sidewalk and opening the front door. **IS**

Increase Sales with a New Hue

YOU’VE DECIDED TO repaint the outside of your store and have no idea where to start, but you do know one thing: You want the hue you choose to send the right message. One obvious choice is to stick with your store’s color scheme, but if you prefer to color outside the lines, here are a few of the emotions you can expect to invoke with different hues, according to About.com psychologist Kendra Cherry.

► **GREEN:** relieves stress and offers a calming effect.



► **BLUE:** often described as peaceful, tranquil, secure and orderly.

► **ORANGE:** draws attention and brings to mind excitement, enthusiasm and warmth.

► **YELLOW:** the most attention-getting color, associated with cheeriness and warmth, though it can also invoke feelings of frustration and anger.

► **WHITE:** represents purity and innocence, but also described as cold, bland, and sterile.