



Comparing Apples to Apples

Why All Electric Signs Are Not Created Equal-Part 1: Channel Letters

CORE PROBLEM

It was interesting to discover how the “compare apples to apples” phrase genuinely makes sense. As I was reading the blog of Tysons Corner luxury fitness club, Equinox, I found that some apples are better than others for good health.

According to the article: “One study that caught author Jo Robinson’s eye was research done on a group of overweight men in which half took the “apple a day” adage literally, adding a Golden Delicious apple to their daily diet to see if it would improve their health. The results were shocking: The apple-eaters actually had higher levels of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides at the end of the study, making them more at risk for heart disease than they had been at the start. The explanation was the kind of apple they used: The Golden Delicious variety has such high sugar content and is so low in phytonutrients, that eating one daily may have actually been detrimental to the health of the study participants.”

Reading further I found out that red-skinned varieties were a better choice. Just like apples, all electric channel letters do not produce the same effects. Effectiveness, and perhaps sometimes cost, of a company’s channel letters result from various degrees of design, although sometimes you need to be careful because one sign company’s marginal designs may cost the same or more than another’s superior solutions!

Three ascending levels of effective channel letter design(not all sign companies offer the same level of attention to detail in electric sign projects):

MARGINAL SIGN SOLUTIONS

- Consider Code Restrictions Only

AVERAGE SIGN SOLUTIONS

- Consider Code Restrictions
- Consider Durability
- Consider Energy Cost

SUPERIOR SIGN SOLUTIONS

- Consider Code Maximization
- Consider Durability
- Consider Cost to Power and Maintain
- Consider Readability & Aesthetics:
 - Viewing Angles
 - Viewing Distance
 - Assessing Competing Signage and Designing for Attention to Attract Business
 - Overall Community Impression
- Consider Sustainability



A well-designed set of custom channel letters on an oval backer pops the wording off the brick wall and produces a whimsical mood that draws in curious customers from the road.

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES!

Understanding how various design factors add value is important. Most licensed electric sign companies can produce signage that meets local codes. Even if your sign meets code, be careful to know that some sign companies may design your channel letters using the least durable materials, and will not be overly concerned about providing site-specific solutions that ensure your new channel letters will be noticed and remembered.

When comparing sign proposals, ask about the materials specified for the job: Some companies utilize higher grades of aluminum; thicker aluminum for returns; consistent computer-formed letters versus hand-formed graphics; thicker and better brands of acrylic for faces; LED versus neon lighting; higher density and more reputable brands of LED lighting; better power supplies; thicker raceway material; higher grade primers and paints; and the list goes on.

The average sign company can design a set of channel letters within code with durable materials, but few take the time to interpret sign codes in favor of the client that gain maximum exposure, assess customized site visibility concerns, or offer options for sustainability.

An apple day really can keep the doctor away...if you choose the right variety.

“Understanding how various design factors add value is important.”

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Be careful that your channel letter vendor uses long-lasting materials, but also be sure that he does his homework so the lettering you buy will be seen and effectively attract new customers. The example (right) is often the type of channel letters retailers receive when opting for the lowest proposal. Often it won't cost much extra for a more durable, custom look that turns more heads!

