



Upgrading Existing Buildings to Fit Your Brand

The power of branding is consistency. My vacation this summer was a 10-day train trip from Vancouver to Toronto. As we passed through towns and cities from the Canadian Rockies to Niagara Falls, it was interesting to notice that Ford Dealerships, Starbucks, Citibank, and other familiar brands looked exactly the same all over Canada as they do in the United States.

When most of us think of a company's visual brand we think of a defining logo like the old cattle brands. Architecture speaks brand too. There are always challenges when an organization acquires a building that was part of a previous brand. In banking, we see it all the time. One company buys another and has to re-brand itself using the old infrastructure. Sometimes a bank is so successful it grows super fast, acquiring new buildings at a rate faster than it can keep up with its own brand. When it comes to visual branding and signage, all of a sudden there are buildings and signs of all different shapes, sizes and colors and consistent branding becomes difficult.

Such was the case with Franklin Federal Savings Bank of Glen Allen, Virginia, that was founded in 1933. Holiday Signs has been working with Franklin Federal's internal marketing and facilities executives to help the organization re-brand itself across eight branches and its corporate headquarters. Earlier this year the bank opened a new branch in Mechanicsville in a stand-alone building previously occupied by Union First Market Bank. Signage was designed to fit this particular re-branded site, adaptable for future and existing sites.

Building shape, colors, materials, lighting and signage are all considered elements of brick-and-mortar branding. It's the way a brand is recognized and evaluated from the street. Many people today are focusing on their virtual identity, but brick-and-mortar identity is still extremely important. Surveys say most people prefer the internet to find and qualify a brand they are interested in before becoming their customer. Even so, constantly passing the company's brick and mortar branding and recognizing a positive *brand continuity* strengthens brand image and serves as a reminder of that brand.

During a 2012 Bank Marketing Conference, Mary Beth Sullivan, Managing Partner of the Capital Performance Group of Washington, DC, stated that brand image is the top driver of customers choosing their primary financial institution. In the

course of the conference, Dean Browell, Executive Vice President of Feedback, Inc., recommended that financial retailers continue to think of brick-and-mortar as a strong marketing tool, stating the average bank customer visits the lobby or drive-thru four times a month. These are big reasons why on-premise branding and advertising continue to be important. Just as positive branding attracts customers, negative aspects of a brick-and-mortar brand resulting from rapid growth and inconsistency across the branches is a detraction and makes investments in branding new sites as well as re-branding existing facilities a worthy cause.

Many of our most successful clients like Franklin Federal are looking hard at their on-premise signs to determine if they convey the right image and are effective at attracting new and retaining existing customers. Clients such as these know they never get a second chance to make a first impression.



Top: Franklin Federal Savings Bank, New Branch in Mechanicsville, Virginia; Bottom: Citi Financial Brand, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

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