

House Sign Advertising Design and Graphic Application Imperatives

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INTRODUCTION

Rational individuals and organizations constantly seek ways to make the world a better place to live and do business. No area is this made more manifest than the environment where various types of corporeal property such as land and house constitute a critical factor of shelter and socio-economic growth. Governments, for instance, collate data on buildings for proper street-naming, house numbering and to determine the prospects of internally generated revenue (IGR) from that direction. The property owner also ensures that the house, bought or built with hard earned money, is well maintained in order to enhance its rent and lease value. Similarly, marketers develop clever strategies regularly to sell their products and services, using the most appropriate medium that gives the best mileage in terms of sales and goodwill. The *House Sign*¹ is an advertising design medium through which the marketer can showcase a brand in an attractive and a favorable way on a site provided by the property owner.

The House Sign has a design concept that features three basic elements - *house number*, *street name* and a *message*. Street names and house numbers provide the easiest way of identifying or describing a building in a civilized society where no street should exist without a name and a house without a number. Street naming and house numbering are key issues in urban development. Postal services and police rely on the proper identification of buildings for distributing mails and securing lives and property. The House Sign provides yet another innovative dimension to house numbering in the area of advertising.

This presentation, intended as a springboard for a global discourse on this new medium, has the following objectives:

- To describe how the House Sign works.
- To articulate the artistic, advertising, design, print and graphic application characteristics of the House Sign system.
- To underscore the value of House Sign to identified stakeholders.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The outcome of a preliminary investigation on house numbering conducted in Nigeria² showed that house numbers were haphazardly posted. This unsystematic trend was also noticeable in several other African countries including Egypt, Kenya and Ghana (see also *House Numbering in some Countries*). Number colors were washed off while the plate bearing the number appeared unkempt in many cases. The house sign had been developed as a below-the-line advertising design system to address these issues.

Advertisers are proactively shopping for “multiple-objective” (Bell & Carpenter, 1992:383) ways to expose their products. They are giving new business models a tryout by conducting investigational campaigns and examining the “capability criteria” (Goslar, 1986:81) in order to determine their effectiveness. These efforts are imperative since “it has become increasingly difficult to use the same marketing mix strategies for all consumer groups” (Cui, 1997:122) all the time.

It is surprising, however, that scholars have paid a little or no attention to house numbering as a medium of advertising. Few articles seen have concentrated only on narrow areas (Sitton, 1986:172-181; Robinson, et al. 1981/1982:173-178). In the 16th and 17th century England, huge signboards had been used as ornaments

to identify houses as house numbering did not exist at that time. Such ornaments posed a danger where they existed. According to *The Musical Times* (1904:636):

In 1718, one of them actually dragged down the front of a house in London and killed four persons by the fall thereof. No wonder that by Act of Parliament signboards in London had to go...House-signs began to be replaced by numbering towards the close of the eighteenth century...A curious and interesting London house-sign of the sixteenth century was that of the Organe Pype, situated in the parish of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, the supposed residence of a certain Mr. Howe, an organ maker.

Therefore, the house-sign of the 16 and 17th England should not be exchanged for the one in this presentation. The concern in this article is the House Sign. One reason for developing this medium is to challenge the advertising industry (especially the outdoor aspect), hopefully in the manner that the ascension of television did in 1955 (Harvey, 2001:191).

General Artistic Description of House Sign

Design Description

The House Sign features a design system of three basic elements namely: street name, house number and a message (Omojola, 1997:1). The message displayed may be socially or commercially motivated. The House Sign is a micro-targeting medium whose audience includes families, children, men or women residing in the particular house that has it. Visitors to the building and passersby who need to locate an address using the house numbers are also targets. Figures 1 and 2 further illustrate the House Sign.

In the event that the street in question is well known in the neighborhood, its name can be exempt from the design as shown in Figure 3. A House Sign is posted to be visible to passers-by, visitors and the residents of the building.

Design Characteristics of House Sign

The House Sign is a visual medium for transmitting messages. It has the following characteristics.

- Every House Sign posted is unique as it bears at least one digit which identifies a building.
- House Sign can be designed on a flat sheet, panel, lighted signage, or rotated on computerized display.
- The medium of the House Sign may be small or big in size. The panel bearing the design can be as small as 186 m² (2ft²) to as big as 1.11m² (12ft²). The size of the site where the House Sign is fixed or posted will determine to a large extent the enormity of the House Sign.
- A small-sized House Sign does not tolerate excessive text.
- A House Sign design should demonstrate contrast, unity, proportion and balance in art and color. Balance ensures that the elements have equal or similar weight in terms of placement. Contrast stipulates that elements in a design should differ appreciably from one another. Unity of design is such that when the House Sign is viewed as a whole, it gives a logical, coherent and agreeable description as conflict is reduced to the barest minimum. The distance between a House Sign and its audience is important. The investigation carried out in Nigeria showed that House Sign was still visible within a distance of 30 feet.

Figure 1. House sign featuring street name and house number



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