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- [Wednesday, Jun. 9, 2010](#)
- [Tuesday, Jun. 8, 2010](#)
- [Monday, Jun. 7, 2010](#)
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- [Thursday, Jun. 3, 2010](#)

[« Back](#)

Go to date:

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- [Tuesday, Jun. 8, 2010](#)
- [Monday, Jun. 7, 2010](#)
- [Friday, Jun. 4, 2010](#)
- [Thursday, Jun. 3, 2010](#)
- [Wednesday, Jun. 2, 2010](#)

[« Back](#)

Go to date:

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- [Tuesday, Jun. 8, 2010](#)
- [Monday, Jun. 7, 2010](#)
- [Sunday, Jun. 6, 2010](#)
- [Saturday, Jun. 5, 2010](#)
- [Friday, Jun. 4, 2010](#)

[« Back](#)

Go to date:

Search Notices:



[Home](#) > Article

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Hey There! What's Your Sign?

LORI TURNER

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Advertising icon, Stuart Henderson Britt, believed that “Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does.”

It seems obvious, but so many business owners use a “build it and they will come” growth strategy sans advertising. This rarely works, absent a brilliantly differentiated product or service that creates significant word-of-mouth on its own.

Advertising channels are abundant. An oldie but a goodie is billboard. It can be an effective tool for quickly building brand awareness and generating trial, especially if you have a fairly broad target.

One of the most successful of the early adopters into the billboard-advertising arena was Burma Shaving Cream. From the 1920s to 1960s, Burma ran a series of billboards, typically featuring six consecutive small signs posted along the edge of highways, spaced out for sequential reading.

While such multi-sign messaging is no longer as economically feasible, billboards are still a viable advertising channel.

Modern-day billboard options include digital billboards, which allow you to change your message more easily and inexpensively, and mobile billboards, which can target a specific neighborhood.

Think beyond the traditional billboard with nontraditional guerrilla signage. McDonald's converted an everyday streetlight into what looks like a piping hot stream of coffee by painting the post brown and placing a large McDonald's coffee cup above it.

I ran across one of my favorite examples of guerrilla signage in Manhattan a few years ago. To promote a season of its series “The Sopranos,” HBO hung what looked like the arm of a whacked mob boss – adorned with mob ring, cuff links and shiny suit for effect – from the trunk of New York City cabs, along with a Sopranos bumper sticker.

You don't have to be a big brand to have the budget for guerrilla billboards. Consider writing clever messages with sidewalk chalk to attract pedestrians or using street teams to hold signs in front of your store.

Consider what's already available that can become part of your billboard. A cigar shop brought wooden telephone poles to life by wrapping large paper cigar bands around them – transforming them into cigars.

Guerrilla billboard advertising isn't just for traditional businesses; nonprofits and municipalities are in the game, too. Denver Water launched a simple, brilliant billboard campaign using only one-third of a billboard, leaving a completely bare billboard frame across the other two-thirds.

The message: “Use only what you need.” They are demonstrating they mean what they say by using fewer materials in construction.

So as you're planning your next strategy, look around the market with fresh eyes. Maybe you will see a “sign” about a different kind of sign that can bring your message to life.



Lori Turner

Lori Turner is managing partner at RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com.

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MORTGAGES	122	250	9,905
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	27	66	5,516
BUILDING PERMITS	358	358	17,942
BANKRUPTCIES	79	164	8,440
BUSINESS LICENSES	20	38	2,534
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	125	279	11,578
MARRIAGE LICENSES	23	56	2,292

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2

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