

Becoming an ADA Sign Provider: It Is Easier Than You Think!

Do you see opportunity to grow your business by providing interior ADA-compliant signage? If you do, you are not alone. The signage industry in general has been expanding for the past decade and grew at about 20% per year for the past 3 years according to a recent survey in Signs of the Times Magazine. Furthermore, the market for interior ADA-compliant signage has been growing much faster than almost all other segments in the sign market. So, are you taking full advantage of this expanding market?

This article will describe the knowledge, capabilities and collateral materials that if developed, will act as a springboard for sales into the ADA-compliant signage market. If your company is committed to growth in this segment, here are 7 key ingredients for successful growth:

1. Gain a basic understanding of ADA law and ANSI regulations for Signage.
2. Create or procure samples and collateral materials.
3. Know the Buying Decision-makers and What their Concerns are.
4. Know the Basics of Graphic Design.
5. Find a Reliable Outsource or Develop In-house Production Capability.
6. Learn to Speak the Language of Architects with regard to Signage.
7. Develop and execute a sales/marketing plan.

This article explains each ingredient. This seminar on ADA signage will provide detail and 'how to' instructions. For more information, you can purchase the manual, "How to Create Great-Looking ADA Signage" from Accent. This 'how to' manual will guide you through topics from marketing to fabrication.

The following provides key information for each of the 7 ingredients for growth:

1. Gain an Understanding of ADA Law.

Now, before your eyes glaze over completely, we should tell you that even though the ADA Accessibility Guidelines go on for hundreds of pages, only a few small sections cover signage. All you really need to remember are a few simple rules-of-thumb.

As with anything else, your best defense is knowledge. The ADA website (www.ada.gov), the U.S. Department of Justice website (www.usdoj.gov), the ANSI website (www.ansi.org) and Accent's website (www.accent signage.com) are all excellent resources, offering both the letter of the law and "plain English" versions.

Don't forget to check your state laws. Some states follow the ADAAG, some have adopted the more strict American National Standards Institute (ANSI) guidelines, and some (California, for example) have their own codes. These guidelines are open to a certain amount of interpretation; you may need to check with a building inspector or with your state legislature to find out what's really required.

Keep in mind that it's easier to design compliant signage from the start than to make an existing sign compliant. If you work with a designer, make sure he or she is aware of the requirements of the law at the beginning of the project, to help avoid any surprises later.

2. Product samples and collateral materials.

To state what you know already, signage is a visual system and your customers will expect to see what your products look like. Architects, designers, and facility owners will primarily be interested in function, budget and aesthetics (how will signage compliment the image created by the building's interior design?). However, there are likely to be other 'hot-buttons' such as turn time, maintenance, upkeep, and vandal resistance. Your samples and presentation materials should address ALL of these areas.

If you do not have in-house capability to produce your samples and collateral materials there are a couple good ways to do it. The first is to find a supplier that offers generic collateral materials and sample boards that you can customize with your company's logo and contact information. For example, Accent Signage Systems, Inc. offers these products. The second is to hire a designer that specializes in signage to custom create some layouts for samples and/or literature and then outsource. The advantage of this approach is that you get customized samples for your business alone, and can pick sample types that will appeal directly to your customers. Naturally, this will cost a bit more and can take quite a bit longer to produce.

3. Know the Buying Decision-makers.

Signage decisions are typically made by one or more of the following players:

Players	Typical Primary Concerns
a. Facility Owner/Manager	Budget, Compliance, Aesthetics
b. Architect	Compliance, Non-proprietary ¹
c. Designer	Aesthetics, Flexibility, Image
d. Engineering or Maint. Manager	Maintenance, Upkeep, Ease of Use
e. Marketing	Aesthetics, Image
f. Purchasing	Budget

Occasionally building contractors may play a role too. Now, in any situation, the trick is to discover just who is involved in the decision and what their key issues are. There may be just one decision-maker or there could be all of the above.

As you can imagine, your job will be to help them understand just how your product offering meets each of the needs. For example, at Accent we have this clearly spelled out for our ADA signage products and can address every issue noted above.

4. Know the Basics of Graphic Design.

Obviously, the designers and architects will expect this. You already know it if you are in the sign business.

5. Find a Reliable Outsource or Develop In-house Production:.

If you choose to outsource there are several issues other than price to pay attention to. Here is a checklist we recommend (and subject ourselves to):

- a. Does the supplier have excess capacity such that they can turn jobs fast enough?
- b. Can they provide expert advice regarding ADA compliance?
- c. Does their Braille comply with all elements of the current standards? (If they are using the Raster[®] Method for Braille it will comply, others may not)
- d. Do they have a reputation as an expert producer of ADA signage?
- e. Do they have a designer or creative technical person on staff to assist in proto-type and sample creation?

¹ Architects often prefer sign systems that are not proprietary. This enables a bid situation.

If you choose to develop in-house production capabilities you will need an engraving system, the Raster® Method for Braille, a source for engraving sign materials, and someone to operate the equipment. If you choose to go this route, your best bet is honestly to call Accent and we can get you pointed in the right direction in terms of selecting equipment and getting up to speed.

6. The Basics for Architects.

Architects frequently use the term “wayfinding” to describe signage. Wayfinding is simply the process of directing a person to their destination, helping them “find their way,” if you will. Makes sense, right?

The objective of wayfinding is to get a visitor to where they are going and back out of the building in the easiest or shortest path. A good wayfinding system will gradually narrow its focus, from the grounds, to the building, to the wing, and finally to the desired room. A few key elements such as Braille, pictograms, and simple, clean text make sure that everyone can follow this path.

The key to a wayfinding system is the word “system.” If a pictogram looks a certain way in the parking lot, it should look the same on the third floor. Braille should be in the same place on every sign. Simple conventions like this can make the difference between happy visitors and lost visitors (or happy clients and lost sales).

Of course, the signage has to look good, too. It is becoming common practice for an architect and an interior designer to work together with a sign supplier to create signs that fit the building’s aesthetics. Once upon a time, ADA-compliant signage was ugly, boring, and seen as a necessary evil by most architects. Those days are gone; today, ADA signage blends seamlessly with the architecture of the building and the designer’s vision. Finally, if you think about it, when the \$40 million construction project is finished, you see the carpeting, walls, furnishings and signage. The quality of the signage is integral to the image of the facility.

7. Develop and execute a sales/marketing plan.

This too, can be a very simple and straight-forward process. We recommend you think about this in a few basic phases:

- a. Tap into a construction information resource. There are national level resources such as CMD and Dodge reports as well as local reports from organizations such as a Builder’s Exchange. These documents let you know when projects go out to bid and what stage of the planning process they are in.
- b. Network and collaborate with facility and construction professionals. Architects, Designers, Facility Managers & Building Contractors, are primary decision-makers and are generally looking for signage solutions.
- c. Prepare and deliver presentations to the players listed in b. above. Utilize all the previous points in this article when preparing to present. High quality samples, knowledge of ADA regs, knowing the decision-makers, etc. are what you need to close the sale.

As you can see, growth opportunity for interior ADA-compliant signage is at your fingertips. Take advantage of the expanding market by utilizing the resources in this article to help extend your knowledge and launch your sales of ADA-compliant interior signage.