



Indiesigns' COVID-19 signage helping commercial buildings reopen - by Ari Grazi

July 10, 2020 - Owners Developers & Managers



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When the pandemic first hit, many commercial buildings and businesses were forced to close for the sake of public health and safety.

Fast forward to today, and New York is safely entering the next phases of reopening. But things are not going to look exactly as they did before the pandemic, and businesses are navigating a new reality. In a world where congregating is now a health risk, New York City—a metropolis that is fundamentally defined by shared experiences—is enduring a special kind of suffering. We yearn for

crowded gallery openings, for lunches in our favorite cafés, for chats around the coffee pot. Even the thought of the packed subway ride brings with it a tinge of nostalgia.

As businesses begin to welcome customers and clients back inside, etiquette for congregating and socializing continues to evolve. Cushman & Wakefield has published a 'Retail Readiness' checklist—an eight step guideline—to help business owners create a CDC-approved retail environment, with a heavy focus on safety, hygiene, and distancing protocols. Successful implementation of safety standards will mean containing the virus further, which will mean more businesses reopening and growth of the economy. This means it is crucial for businesses to develop a strategy to ensure the health of their workers and customers, while maintaining a positive customer experience in the process.

Commercial environments are relying heavily on signage to help instruct and encourage best safety practices. At Indiesigns—an e-commerce shop where businesses can purchase safety signage created by independent artists—the goal is to help businesses reopen safely without compromising on design. That means signage that follows CDC guidelines but is also visually appealing and friendly. If we're going to live in this new normal for a while, let's at least have it be pretty. At the end of the day, patrons need to 'see' that their wellbeing is being taken care of, whether they're residing, working, shopping, learning, dining or traveling; seeing is believing.

Visual communication and branding sets the tone for what kind of experience patrons should expect. It provides both the emotional context and individual personality for the space that informs how to act and what the patrons' connection to their environment should be. Signage need not sacrifice aesthetics—in fact, quite the opposite; signage should prioritize aesthetics when the message being communicated is one fraught with hardship, and perhaps even some trauma and grief.

The New York commercial business experience is now somewhat defined by sanctioned rules: Social distancing, sanitization, and mandatory PPE. An affordable and effective way to communicate behavioral requirements is not only important for reiterating the safety message, but also to communicate to clientele that the business has done its "homework" and is following guidelines closely. Taking the form of floor decals, wall signs, and peel-and-stick signs, signage that can be customized to suit the specific needs of the business will help to inform customer and employee navigation and prevent any confusion or disorientation. Giving credence to the notion that 'clean is the new green,' business owners need to consciously work to rebuild the trust of the clientele, who has become educated on the risks associated with stepping foot inside the building.

In the future, we will see an uptick in signage featuring innovative, aesthetically-forward graphics, but the same informational signs we were familiar with pre-pandemic will continue to exist—it just depends on the culture of the business, the brand perception, and the degree to which this becomes part of their official game plan, or whether it's just the bare minimum they do to comply with the CDC guidelines.

At the end of the day, visual communication and signage are the primary ways a business

communicates with its customer base; this experience should be a positive one. Indiesigns believe that at a time like this, we all need to do our part bringing more joy to the world. The only real way to help create a positive customer or client experience is to utilize the resources that encourage health and safety, because our collective health and safety is a win for both individual wellbeing and the economy alike.

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