

Your Image Is Their First Impression

Light up your brand — success will follow.



By Ted Stouch

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Creating a lasting impression in the minds of your customers that keeps them coming back only takes a few seconds. What does your signage say about your company's image? What message does it give? A bad impression circulates five times farther than a good one. It is far more expensive to gain a new customer than it is to retain one. However, it's never too late to make a good first impression!

So, what is the first step in making sure a lasting impression resides in the minds of your customers? You brighten your brand by illuminating your image! In order to maintain a consistent and vibrant brand image that continues to create a lasting positive impression, companies are placing a heavier emphasis on proactively retrofitting their signage with LED (Light Emitting Diodes) lighting.

With traditional sign illuminating technologies, you will constantly be replacing broken or flickering fluorescent lamps or neon tubes. In the long run, this causes a great deal of stress on other electrical components of the sign, including the transformers or ballasts which, in time, will decrease the overall useful life of the sign. Loss of light occurs over time, but it isn't easily noticeable until it reaches a critical level. Striping and hot spots are eliminated when retrofitting signs with LEDs and the overall impression of your brand is enhanced.

LIGHTING UP WITH LEDs

LEDs have been playing an increasingly large role in the signage market. Over the past few years, more and more signs have been illuminated with LED lights, whether it is with initial manufacturing or retrofitting.

There have been many discussions regarding the use of LEDs in sign applications. There are ongoing debates as to which is better: LED, fluorescent or neon. There is a strong sense that LED usage in signs is becoming more common, particularly in channel letter and box sign illumination.

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A LITTLE LED LESSON

LEDs are semiconductor devices that convert electrical energy into a distinct color of light. The original red LED was invented in the 1960s. Shortly after, LEDs became different colors such as amber and green. The development of high-brightness LEDs then came in the early 1990s. This technology advancement made LEDs go from indicator lights to sources of illumination. LEDs are finally carving new paths into areas once dominated by fluorescents and neon.

Unlike fluorescent and neon light sources, LEDs are compact devices that have no filaments to break, no moving parts, and no glass components of any kind. In addition to being virtually unbreakable, LEDs are low-voltage devices that generate very little heat, contain no mercury and emit a specific wavelength of light that can match the same color of the sign face material.

LED systems are more energy-efficient than typical fluorescents and neon systems. The inherent benefits in retrofitting illuminated signs with LEDs will improve your ROI by providing a significant reduction in component costs, energy output and sign maintenance.

The LED retrofitting process begins with coordination of technicians to work with store operations to minimize disruption and maintain optimum customer flow and safety at all times.

LED lighting technology pro-

vides an environmentally sound solution for cost-effective sign illumination. Some advantages common to all LED signs:

- Fast installation.
- Reduced energy usage by over 50%.
- Reduced maintenance costs.
- Double life of signs.
- Increased visibility (brighter and more clear image).
- Reduced fire hazard.
- Improved performance in cold weather.
- Fewer required primary electrical circuits.

THE FUTURE

The demand for LED lighting in channel letter applications is growing and will continue to grow as LED system manufacturers expand their LED colors to include white. On an overall perspective, white LED technology is not as developed as saturated color LEDs. However, white LEDs are currently being used in channel letters and other backlit sign applications. They are constantly mainstreaming adoption into different markets and will require improvement in both performance and cost of white LED technology.

Sign Leasing & Maintenance Pricing Guide, 10th Edition (2008) estimated that fluorescent tubes require regular maintenance, which can cost over \$750 per visit in a box sign. That is for a repair crew and bucket truck or crane costs every time a fluorescent tube burns out and needs to be replaced. Imagine the expense for multiple locations. LED

lighting can save an impressive amount on maintenance costs because its rated system life is up to four times longer than fluorescent lighting.

LED lighting can be used in a wide variety of sign applications and they allow for a more efficient installation process. The market for LED signage system applications is clearly in the growth stage, but has become more established and consistent over time.

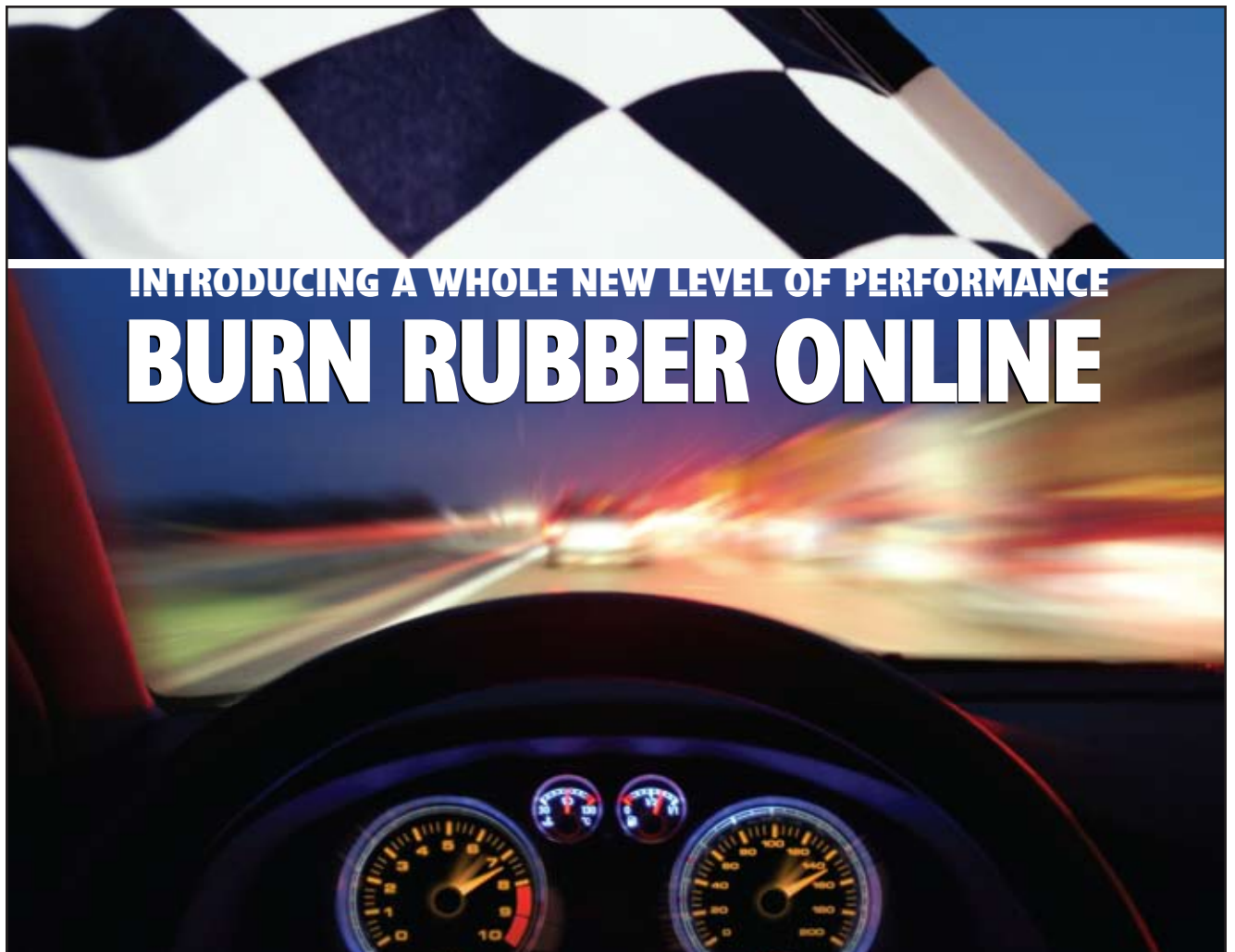
CONCLUSION

In today's increasingly competitive environment, companies are searching for new innovative marketing campaigns to increase their competitive advantage. They are spending millions of dollars on corporate identity programs to effectively communicate their brand in an effort to distinguish them from the competition, drive customer preference and increase consumer loyalty.

The most important thing to remember regarding your brand identity is your customers' first impression. A lasting impression begins with a vibrant illuminated sign that will create a traffic stopping brand image. It is imperative that your brand strategy be seamlessly integrated throughout your entire company and implemented at every single point of public contact, including the first element that a customer views when passing your location: your main identity signage. It is critical that your brand be carefully managed and maintained to ensure that you receive the maximum return on your investment. Your brand is the foundation of your corporate marketing, your messenger, your corporate identity and your essence — and should be revered as one of your most valued assets.

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Ted Stouch is president/CEO of Aston, Pennsylvania-based Action Services Group.



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