

The importance of signage and interior in branding

A brand is expressed in many different ways. Today, there is much talk about websites, apps, mobile phones, e-readers, and digital visibility. But brands also have physical dimensions. In this article, we look closer at the role interiors and signage play in branding.



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Signs give the city its identity

Think about when you are out walking on an ordinary shopping street in just about any Norwegian city. Then you can't help noticing the shop signs from the household retail

industry, such as Kiwi, Rema 100, and Coop, clothing shops like H&M, Cubus, Lindex, and VOLT, and chemists and perfume shops like Apotek1, Boots, and Vita. Today, many retail property agents have also opened brick-and-mortars, and so it is likely that you will also see signs for Krogsveen, Aktiv, and Privatmegleren. It is also worth bringing up the convenience store industry that has located itself on many attractive corners in Norway's cities, represented by names like Narvesen, Deli de Luca, and 7 Eleven. We used to see a lot of banks on the streets but, today, there are few banks here.

“The interior should be an extension of the visual identity in a physical environment. It should expand the understanding and perception of the brand — while generating internal pride.”

— Karl Martin Sætren

DNB took a new path when it rebranded a couple of years ago, with branches at street level that are more similar to a café bar or a shop. Here, the bank products are on shelves, like convenience goods, and the premises are enriched with carefully selected fragrances to stimulate the sense of smell. In 2014, Mission developed an exciting retail concept for the banks in Eika Bankallianse. Gone were the elements that signaled authority and in came a natural and open environment that ties the customer closer to the bank. And then Eika also has the objective of being Ved din side (By your side). Clear signage is also extremely important for SiO, with its student residence areas dotted around the capital city. They signal the brand not only to the thousands of students who use SiO but, at the same time make others aware of SiO, even if they are not in the target group. For the many small shops, convenience stores and eateries around Norway, signage is often the only marketing surface they have. It is important that the signage sends the right signals to the viewer.

Without signage, our cities would look very different. The city would lose its features and lack an identity. A city consists of brands that interact to create the life and activity that good city life needs. Without the signage, we would struggle to find our way around. The signage helps to communicate the brand. When we see a sign for a kind of

business, this evokes associations in our heads, and we can make a decision on whether or not this is something we are interested in.

Interiors give the brand somewhere to hang its coat

A long time ago, old general stores on the street were the only shops where you could buy your coffee and milk. Today, we have a variety of options to choose from, not just in physical shops but also in the ever increasing host of Internet shops. In other words, it is easy to shop and it'll become easier if we are to believe the retail experts. People are forever thinking up new ways to get people to shop more. These tactics aren't only found online. We are witnessing a revolution in the design of shops because we still want to shop in physical stores. This is because shopping is part of our culture. The social aspect, the interaction with both the salesperson in the shop and friends and family we meet on a shopping trip, is an important part of our lives. Shopping has become a way of spending time with those we care about most. This is particularly important for the Millennial Generation. Shrewd retailers have long realised that the battle is taking place in physical shops. The social aspect of shopping, in particular, has meant interiors and signage are becoming incredibly important.

Global brands usually invest considerable resources so that their interiors are in harmony with the rest of the brand's message and objectives. Apple is a good example of this. There are many companies selling computers, but no one does it like Apple. At Apple's flagship store on Regent Street in London, they have very ingeniously created the illusion of sitting in the park with green areas and trees. Ideally, with a Mac on your lap of course. Apple wants you to spend time there. The fact that you are there means that you dig them and that's something Apple loves.

When it comes to shopping, we don't get outside the shopping centre. It is the nature of things that these are built so that we spend time there and spend money — a lot of money. But a select few go to incredible lengths to ensure that we stay for a long time. There is practically nothing the biggest shopping centres don't have to offer. Regardless of whether you want to dive in a gigantic aquarium with tropical fish, do downhill skiing, drive a dodgem, go on a roller coaster, take your beloved to a restaurant with Michelin stars or go to the theatre: there is a shopping centre for you. And that's without us even starting to rattle off the thousands of shops that live there. But independent brands also flex their muscles and are very conscious of their choice of signage and

interiors. To name a few at random: Puma, Nike (sport), Uniqlo, Anthropologie (fashion). The Australian cosmetic brand, Aesop, has also opened two stores here in Norway, both with their completely individual twist on the interior. In winter, things were finally ready for Oslo Airport's expansion where they have taken steps to make the interior more in keeping with the times. There, you will find Norway's biggest convenience food chain, Narvesen, where Mission has rebranded the identity, including the interior. All these brands use the interior to attract us. While luxury brands want us to feel exclusive, it is even more important for the household retail industry and convenience stores to have clear signage, functional shelves and displays that mean that the products come into their own, look inviting at first glance and that we customers feel like putting several of them into our trolleys.

Tasks dictate the interior

We first understood the importance of the interior at work a long time ago. Many people, and particularly young people, apply to employees who prioritise the aesthetic design of the workplace. In today's open-plan office, we are preoccupied with flexibility and, for this reason, many companies have chosen to introduce open-plan offices. These provide better visibility, greater fellowship among colleagues, and freedom about where you sit and work. An open plan area also demands respect for each other's peace to work. It is easy to get distracted. A well-thought out office interior prioritises the tasks it's important for the company to perform. An open-plan area could be favourable for creative occupations, while concentrated thinking and planning need to have dedicated quiet zones. The most innovative go even further. Epic, for example, has fitted corridors to look like a NYC subway compartment . At Google, you can sit on a slide and travel between the floors. Facebook has a separate room full of arcade games. At Barcode in Oslo, Deloitte has set up a quiet room according to the Japanese model, where employees can rest, gather their thoughts or take forty winks.

Interiors and signage belong in employer branding

Nowadays, self-assured employers take a more holistic approach to recruitment than used to be the case. We spend a lot of hours at work: for some of us more time than at home. So it is rather important that employers can create a place people will apply to come to, a place they want to, and don't just need to, spend the best hours of the day at. The employers who succeed in this make sure their employees are surrounded by brand bearers throughout the working day, from when they arrive at work with outdoor

signage on buildings on to indoor signage on doors, at lifts, in corridors and other places. Also, every minor bit of the interior is well thought out and fit-for-purpose for the company's line of business and the employees' duties.

Only then are we talking about a holistic and strong branding concept where signs and interiors are given their proper place.

This article was written by [Ole Abildsnes](#), and was first published on Mission's website. [Find out what other fascinating issues we write about.](#)

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