

# Business Guide

Best practices for small businesses\*

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**Exterior & Interior Design**  
**Social Media Usage**  
**Website Design and Maintenance**

Guide created and designed by Yale Design for America 2021  
in collaboration with Town Green New Haven

\*Best practices still must abide to New Haven standards and ordinances

# Exterior Facade

A building's facade is its exterior front face. A welcoming and appealing facade attracts customers and positively contributes to the community. Factors that play a role in the quality of a business's exterior facade include: doors, windows, awnings, lighting, signs, colors, and landscaping.

## Getting started:

- Evaluate building appearance: Take a step back (literally) and note the entire building facade– not just the storefront. Aim for cohesion.
- Evaluate the building's surroundings. Maintain a clean front and sidewalk to attract customers.
- Maintenance: Maintain regular cleaning and repair of building and surroundings (roof, paint job, window frames, signs, sidewalks/curbs, etc.).
- Check city regulations

The following content was pulled primarily from the The City of Sault Ste. Marie Design Guide.

## Signage:

- Effective signage can inform passersby of the business's purpose and character.
- Regular maintenance: broken signs provide a negative impression of the business and the area
- Keep it short (under 7 words)
- No more than one main sign (ex. signboard or awning)
- No more than two additional smaller signs (ex. door or window).
- Use legible font
- Avoid excessively large signs that overpower the facade
- Use durable and quality materials for the signs

## Doors:

- Doors should be visually appealing and stylistically complementary to building appearance
- Avoid plexiglass as a glass substitute
- Transparent doors should be kept unobstructed and free from distracting signs, shelving, or posters



## Lighting:

Effective lighting provides visibility, safety, and appeal from the street.

- Use warm and inviting light spectrums. Avoid fluorescent or flashing lights that can cause distraction or glare)
- Direct all lighting downward to illuminate the entrance/sidewalks. Also use lighting to highlight points of interest (signs, entryways, etc).
- Illuminate signs from above (not from behind)
- Use light fixtures that complement the building style and architecture (style, size, color)

## Accessibility:

Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment helps both the business and the customer!

- Ramps should be available for entrances above ground level
- Doors width should be no smaller than eighty-five centimeters
- Use push/pull doors if possible
- Clean all building graffiti ASAP. It sends an unsafe and unwelcoming message. It also invited further vandalism.

## Awnings / Canopies:

Awnings and canopies can provide style, rain protection, and shade. They can also be used to display logos or signage.

- Make sure the dimensions are proportional to the spaces they cover (non-obstructive). Awnings should only cover an individual window or door opening. They should not be long and continuous.
- Multiple awnings/canopies should be at a uniform level
- Ensure the awning/canopy colors are complementary to the rest of the building
- The awning/canopies should be waterproof, fade and tear resistant. Avoid aluminum or plastic materials
- Lighting should be from above (not from behind)

## Windows:

Windows allow customers to peek inside. Attractive interiors draw in more traffic.

- Windows should be kept unobstructed and free from distracting signs, shelving, or posters
- If shades are necessary, use retractable shades to increase visibility to and from the street
- If applicable, place public spaces near the front windows and keep private spaces in the back of the store
- "Many people discover stores after-hours. Window display lights should be left on until 11:00 p.m. Timers can be used to automate this cycle."

## Landscaping:

Landscaping can help provide shade, noise reduction, and appeal to storefronts.

- Trees should not cover signage
- Use native plants/trees to the area
- Choose plants that are easily maintained/watered (no litter)
- Use sturdy plant containers



# INTERIOR DESIGN TIPS AND TRICKS

## SPACE AND LIGHTING

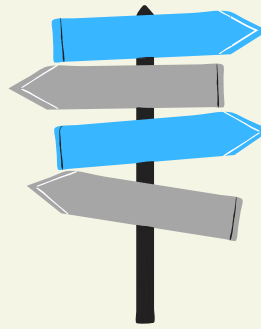
- Install large mirrors to make the inside of the store seem more spacious
- Multiple shelf levels provide appeal and take advantage of smaller spaces
- Avoid bulky/cluttered displays
- Don't overcrowd the store (prevents customers from bumping into each other)
- Shelving, drapes, and lighting effects can be used to expand vertical space
- Install large windows– natural light creates a welcoming environment
- Use lighting to highlight specific areas of the store

## COLORS

- Lighter colors generally make your space seem more spacious and comfortable / Avoid extremely bold colors (i.e. neon)
- Painting an accent wall can create attraction and make your store look larger
- Use more neutral colors above eye level to create more balance
- Consider painting the ceiling a lighter color to add height to your space
- Consider color coordinating your product displays

## SIGNS AND DISPLAYS

- Create aesthetic/photogenic areas that are great for pictures (i.e. fill the display with products and props that fit the theme and color palette)
- Signs help draw attention to important areas/promotions. Keep signs fresh and updated based on current sales and seasons. Use fonts and colors that are easy to read
- Use signs or displays as breaks to slow customers down within long uninterrupted aisles
- Consider using digital signage to easily update information and keep it interesting!
- Create interesting and engaging displays behind the checkout counter, while still maintaining simplicity (quality over quantity)



The pictures below demonstrate excellent use of a neutral color palette, natural lighting, layered shelves and floor-length mirrors to make the space appear bigger.



The signs in the image below demonstrate one way to use signs to slow customers down and break up long aisles as well as point out different areas and products within the store.



## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- Consider providing seating in your store (ex. outside the dressing room). This can enhance the customer experience and increase time spent in your store
- Place impulse-buy items near the checkout counter to encourage last-minute purchases
- Keep back-of-the-house operations (inventory, shipping, etc) concealed from customer view
- Have good background music to improve the shopping experience – you can find popular and appropriate playlists on Pandora, Spotify, and Apple Music

## CUSTOMER FLOW

- Think about customer flow (i.e. the pattern of behavior and way that a customer navigates through a store). An effective path will improve customer experience and increase exposure to products.
- Don't put merchandise in the decompression zone (near entrance) - it will be missed as customers are adjusting to the store environment
- Customers consistently turn right after entering the store!! Put high margin merch and valuable info to the right of the entrance outside of transition zone (clockwork navigation)
- Remove narrow aisles...women in particular (research shows) value personal space when shopping
- Have clear zones to make navigation easy

Two examples of ways to organize your store's layout are shown below.



visit <https://www.smartsheet.com/store-layout> for examples and more information on store layouts



## SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

Below we have summarized popular tips that successful social media content creators use to boost their engagement with their content and gain new followers. Taking advantage of social media is a cost-effective way to develop the authenticity of your brand and create a forum for customer care. At a time where technology use is at an all-time high, using social media helps your business stay relevant and in touch with your customers.

### Social media platforms

Each social media platform has different features and types of audiences that may fit your purpose. For instance, LinkedIn is a more professional setting where you can speak more about the accomplishments of your business and its vision for future directions. Choosing the right social media platform or taking advantage of multiple platforms depends on your goals for using them.

#### Popular platforms:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Youtube
- LinkedIn



## CONTENT



### 1. Know your audience

- Have your targeted audience in mind as you create your content for social media. This allows you to tailor your content to them and have an easier time grabbing their attention.



### 2. Have a consistent theme:

- A consistent theme refers to both the style of the content and the type of content. For instance, keeping the content playful or having a certain color palette. Having a consistent theme across social media accounts allows your audience to know what to expect and allows you to convey the personality of your brand.



### 3. Post regularly:

- Posting regularly allows your audience to know that you are active on social media and are interested in engaging with them. This also helps you stay relevant and on the minds of your consumers when they consistently see your posts.
- Tip: Make some posts in advance and schedule when they will be posted. Perhaps choosing a set day to release posts can help you keep track.



### 4. Add call to actions

- Encourage audience to like, comment, and share your posts



### 5. Share content not only about your brand, but about your "topic" or "area"

- Exposing your audience to your area and helping them understand more about it can capture their interest and encourage them to engage with your brand. For instance, if your brand is focused on selling environmentally friendly products, you may want to create posts informing people on environmentally friendly practices.
- Tip: Share other people's content that you find interesting or relevant
- Stay relevant with current events



### 6. Be visual

- Especially on Facebook, adding Gifs, photos and emojis can help give your content more personality



## INCREASING NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH POSTS



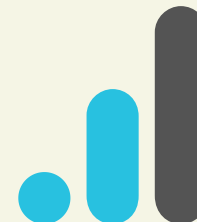
### 1. Collaborate with another brand or store

- Reach out to other businesses to see if they are interested in working with you. This allows you to tap into each other's audience and broaden your reach. This also opens up a lot of opportunities to create fun and new content such as hosting giveaways and contests.



### 2. Be responsive

- Respond to comments and chats in a timely manner with personalized responses.



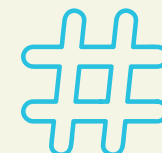
### 3. Be familiar with social media analytics tools

- One great upside of using social media to promote your business is that you are able to collect data about your audience engagement and the effectiveness of your advertising. Taking time to learn about the data is worth every minute, especially when many platforms are making it easier for you to do so. The data can also help show you when the most optimal times to post are.
- Examples of tools:
  - i. Google analytics
  - ii. Hootsuite Analytics
  - iii. Facebook Analytics
  - iv. Learn more here: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-analytics/>



### 4. Don't limit yourself to posts, take advantage of all the features of the platform

- On Instagram and Facebook, you can now use "Stories" to further engage your audience. Take advantage of new features like these to get customer feedback and engage with your audience members.
- Examples:
  - i. Polls
  - ii. Use Instagram stories for an "Ask Me Anything" session
  - iii. Test their knowledge with mini-trivia/quizzes



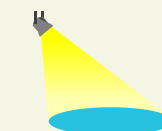
### 5. Add hashtags

- Adding relevant hashtags to your photos can broaden your reach to beyond your current follower base. You can also spend time looking at popular hashtags to identify trends and keep your content current.



### 6. Encourage your current employees to engage with your content

- If your current employees are comfortable and active on social media, encourage them to share your content and engage with them as well.
- Tip: Have a "day in the life" where employees can share their time working at the business



### 7. Spotlight your customers

- Show your appreciation for your audience by sharing customer reviews, experiences, and simply conveying your gratitude for your fans.

# WEBSITE GUIDE

An online presence is critical to the success of a business in this day and age. A well-made website is an effective way to attract as many potential customers as possible. A business website should solidify brand recognition by leveraging online content, design, and performance.

Click on the [underlined blue texts](#) for more resources!

## LANDING PAGE CONTENT

- Conveys the main purpose of the site
- Keep content succinct to optimize engagement
- [High-quality photos and videos](#) are key to engaging with the audience (quality over quantity)
- Use animations or hover features for more [interactive design](#)
- NO GRAMMATICAL ERRORS
- ALL CONTENT UP TO DATE



## ABOUT PAGE

- Use an about page to tell your story and make your business more personable
- Establish brand cohesiveness
- Include photos of the owners or significant brand elements



## CLEAN AND SIMPLE LAYOUT



- The menu should be easy to use and read
- Clear hyperlinks
- Buttons should stand out and be useful
- Simple breadcrumbs (i.e. back arrows) for clear page structure

## CONTACT US PAGE

- Include phone, email, etc.
- Include information about physical locations, as well as online platforms
- Link all social media accounts
- Should be accessible from all pages on the site (place in header or footer)



## MOBILE-FIRST CONSIDERATION

- Most site visits will come from mobile devices
- Focus on mobile content, layout, and performance before optimizing the desktop experience



## CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

- Design should be clear and concise
- Use complementary color palettes
- Use attractive, simple, and engaging [typography](#)
- Use aesthetically-pleasing layout
- Use effective forms of media
- Reliable user experience and design (3 clicks to any page)



## APPROPRIATE DOMAIN

- .com, .org, or other common domain name extensions are preferable
- Should be easily recognizable, memorable, and simple



## EASY-TO-USE FORMS

- Common places to include a form: contact us page, integrated service scheduling, or e-commerce portals
- Forms should be consistent and reliable on all browsers and devices



## CROSS-PLATFORM SOCIAL LINKS

- Include links to ALL social media accounts on your website
- This will boost the popularity of your content and organic traffic to all platforms



## HTTPS

- Secure Sockets Layer ([SSL](#))
- Encryption of information sent to and from the site
- Absolutely necessary if collecting user info
- Establishes trustworthiness and credibility



## PRODUCT CATALOGING

- Ecommerce offerings should be organized
- Products should be arranged by type at varying levels of specificity
- Site organization enhances branding, UX, trustworthiness, conversion, and more



## ACCESSIBILITY

- Site UX should be consistent and enjoyable for visitors with impairments
- A common site accessibility trick for the visually impaired is to add alternative text along with visual media to be screen-reader compatible



## METADATA

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO): optimizing to rank highly in browser search results
- [Metadata](#): data about the data (hidden, but used by Google to rank sites)
- Wix and other site builders have advanced tools to add site metadata for [page titles and descriptions](#)



## REASONABLE MEDIA SIZE

- The less digital information comprised in media, the [faster the loading time](#)
- A [balance](#) is needed between media resolution and load time
- If possible, the server that hosts your site should be as close as possible to your target population

