

# **GUIDE TO PLANNING YOUR INTERPRETIVE SIGN PANEL PROJECT**

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# 1

## **DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE**

Whether you plan to do your own sign panel design and provide Vacker with electronic files from which your signs will be printed, or have Vacker design and prepare your files, consider the following “best practices” in developing your message.

### **ESTABLISH YOUR COMMUNICATION GOALS.**

What do you want the visitor to learn? What at the site needs explanation? What questions might the visitor have that would otherwise go unanswered?

Determine the most effective means of communicating your message—usually a combination of text, photographs and/or illustrations.

### **KEEP YOUR MESSAGE CONCISE AND EASY TO READ.**

Keep the message short. Use short sentences and paragraphs.

# CONSIDER THE 3-30-3 RULE.

Visitors are willing to spend varying amounts of time reading / viewing an interpretive sign. Provide something to be gained by visitors who are willing to spend 3 seconds, 30 seconds and 2-3 minutes of their time viewing a sign panel.

Research suggests that the average length of time viewing an interpretive sign is just 45 seconds, with few people willing to invest more than 2 minutes.

An effective title and central photo or drawing can communicate something in 3 seconds. The use of inviting subtitles, short paragraphs and photo captions draws the visitor to content of interest. Highly visual content organized in a logical flow pattern facilitates the visitor in navigating the sign panel in its entirety.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.

Engage your visitors by posing questions and using words like “you”, “your”, “we”, “ours” and “us”.

Use quotations to help personalize a message.

Entice your visitors to be active by looking for something at the site or in the landscape.

Use questions to inspire wonder and curiosity.

## SHORELINE HABITAT

Shorelines are a busy and important place of transition. They bridge the distance between land and water and are home to many living things. Healthy shorelines also help keep our waters clean by reducing runoff, preventing erosion, and filtering out pollution.

Unfortunately, many of our shorelines have been damaged by human activity and development. Non-native lawn grasses and the spread of invasive species have also harmed our shorelines. We need healthy shorelines to support our waters, local ecosystems, and ourselves!

### A Diverse Community

There are many different kinds of living things that can be found in and around healthy shorelines.

- Birds
- Plants
- Invertebrates
- Fish
- Insects
- Reptiles and Amphibians

Healthy shorelines provide many smaller habitats, increasing biodiversity which strengthens the ecosystem.

Deep-rooted plants prevent erosion by holding soils in place.

What do you see living on the shoreline?

A healthy shoreline and clean water helps improve recreational activities like fishing, paddling, and bird watching.

# 2

## DESIGN BASICS

### EXPRESS YOUR MESSAGE VISUALLY.

Photos, illustrations, graphics and symbols are more effective than words. Strive for a high reward / low effort ratio. Reward your visitor with information for minimal effort. Where appropriate, use symbols or icons in place of, or to compliment text.

### CONSIDER HIERARCHY AND FLOW.

Include a central photo, illustration or diagram to serve as a focal point. Organize content in a logical flow pattern.

### OFTEN, LESS IS MORE.

Studies suggest that few people are willing to read beyond 250 words on an interpretive panel.

**Titles** 60-72pt

**Subtitles** 40-48pt.

Paragraph text 24 pt.

*Photo captions* 18pt

## **RECOMMENDED MINIMUM TEXT SIZES.**

See above graphic for recommended minimum text sizes.

## **TO THE LEFT.**

For paragraphs, use left aligned with ragged right text and no hyphens.

## **CONSIDER READABILITY.**

Avoid use of capital letters in paragraph text, and long lines of text in general. The optimal number of characters per line is 50-60.

Don't use script or fancy font styles. Ensure that text has sufficient contrast to background. Go easy on the eyes in the sun by avoiding white or very light colored backgrounds.

## **LEAVE SOME AIR.**

Avoid crowding. Provide ample space for margins and between lines of text.

# 3

## IMAGES AND RESOLUTION

When searching and acquiring images to be placed in your sign design, be sure to consider photo resolution. To avoid appearing pixelated, images should be a **minimum of 150 dpi** (dots per inch) at the size they will be placed in the design.

### WHY IS IMAGE RESOLUTION IMPORTANT?

Digital images are made up of many pixels (blocks of color), and the number of pixels in the image determines its resolution. The resolution determines how clear the image will look – the higher the resolution, the clearer the image and the better it will look in a design. Low resolution images can appear pixelated (blurry). Because the resolution for the web is much lower (around 72 dpi), **images taken directly from the web or search engines** will usually **NOT** work in printed materials.



# HOW CAN YOU TELL WHAT THE RESOLUTION IS?

Without a photo editing program like Photoshop, it can be difficult to determine the resolution of a photo. While not ideal, it is possible to get a fairly good idea of the resolution of an image by looking at the size of the file.

Although not fool-proof, it is possible to gauge the resolution of an image by looking at the size of the file itself. The more pixels an image contains, the larger the file will be on your computer.

## Use these general guidelines for determining the usability of an image:

- Less than 125 KB .....likely not suitable for print
- 125-500 KB.....likely usable as a small thumbnail sized photo
- 500 KB-1 MB.....likely usable at 2"×3"
- 1 MB-1.5 MB.....likely usable at 4"×6"
- 1.5 MB-2 MB.....likely usable at 5"×7"
- 2 MB-3.5 MB.....likely usable at 8"×10"
- 5 MB or higher .....likely usable at 12"×18" or larger

## RESOURCES FOR IMAGES

Digital libraries associated with the agencies like the National Park Service, USDA, US Fish & Wildlife Service and other photo deposit websites can be good sources for images, and typically provide the opportunity to download images in a range of file sizes. Images taken **directly from the web or search engines** will usually **NOT** have the resolution needed for an interpretive sign.

## COPYRIGHTS

When acquiring images, pay careful attention to copyright details and creative commons license agreements associated with image use. Correct citations and credits are your responsibility.

# 4

## DETERMINING AN APPROPRIATE SIGN SIZE

Interpretive signs are typically angle mounted with common sizes listed below. A sign should be large enough to accommodate the placement of paragraph text at the **recommended minimum size (24 point)** with visuals placed at a size for easy viewing.

COMMON SIZES	APPROXIMATE CONTENT
<b>12×18"</b>	1 photo/illustration, a short paragraph of text and an agency logo.
<b>18×24"</b>	2-4 photos/illustrations with text.
<b>24×36"</b>	A central image/diagram/ illustration, or multiple panel sections including 5 or more photos/illustrations with supporting text.
<b>24×42"</b>	Suited for timelines, panoramic photos.
<b>36×48"</b>	More common for uprights.

# 5

## **SELECTING A MOUNT STYLE AND SIGN PANEL MATERIAL TYPE**

### **DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT YOUR SIGN PANEL WILL BE MOUNTED WITH A FRAME OR FRAMELESS.**

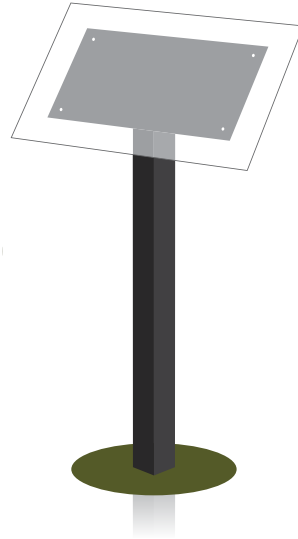
Consider that a frame will cover about 5/8" of the panel perimeter. For framed sign panels, keep critical graphics and text a minimum of .5" from the inside edge of the frame. For panels that will NOT be framed, it's suggested that graphic elements (text, photos, drop shadows, or any other elements that are not intended to bleed off the edges, are placed no closer than .5" to finished edges. The standard finishing bevel is 1/8".

# ANGLE MOUNTS

An angle mount sign is intended to be accessible to all (mounted 28-32" from grade) and invites the visitor in. An angled orientation suggests interpretive or educational in nature.

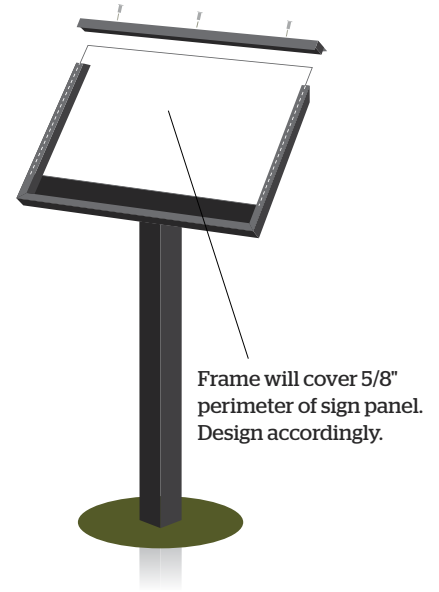
## FRAMELESS ANGLED

For use with a **1/2" thick self-supporting high pressure laminate sign panel**.



## FRAMED ANGLED

For use with **1/8" thick non-self-supporting sign panel, in high pressure laminate or Tuff Panel**.

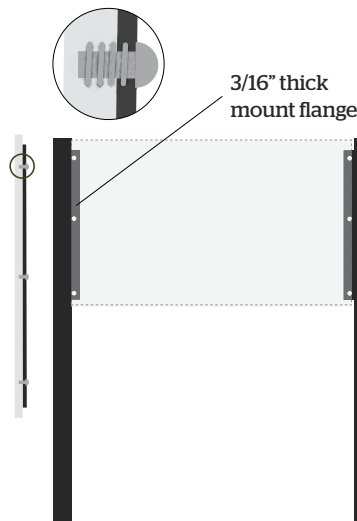


# UPRIGHT MOUNTS

Entrance, warning, rule, directional and map signs are typically mounted upright. The vantage point of the visitor / reader should be considered when determining sign and text size. A sign should be large enough to draw the attention of the visitor, and readable from the anticipated vantage point. It is easy to underestimate an appropriate size of an upright sign if the vastness of the environment and vantage point of the reader are not considered.

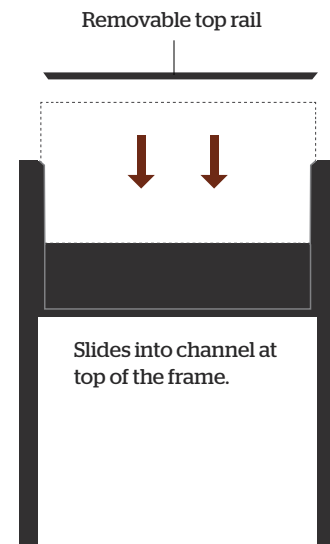
## FRAMELESS UPRIGHT

For use with a **1/2" thick self-supporting high pressure laminate sign panel**.



## FRAMED UPRIGHT

For use with **1/8" thick non-self-supporting sign panel, in high pressure laminate or Tuff Panel**.



# 6

## **DETERMINE WHO IS GOING TO DESIGN YOUR SIGN PANELS**

If you haven't already done so, determine who is going to design your sign panels. Options include doing your sign design and file preparation in-house, contracting with a graphic designer, or utilizing Vacker Sign's design staff.

# 7

## NEXT STEPS

### FOR PANELS DESIGNED BY IN- HOUSE STAFF OR CONTRACTED GRAPHIC DESIGNER:

- Forward Vacker's **"File Preparation Guidelines"** and Vacker's **"File Submission Checklist"** to your designer. This will help ensure that your files are properly prepared and that your project will proceed in a timely manner once your project is moved into production. File preparation issues can disrupt the production process and cause delays.
- Encourage your designer to contact us directly if they have any questions.
- Request / accept a proposal from Vacker Sign for specific sign products. Please outline desired items by sign panel size, sign panel material type, and mount style (for example: 24"x36"x.125" Tuff Panel to be mounted with NPS traditional style frame with posts for in ground installation) as well as your shipping address.
- Sign proposal and return by email to confirm acceptance of proposal.
- Upload production files to us as outlined in Vacker Sign's **"File Preparation Guidelines"**. Please reference project name and contact.

# FOR PANELS DESIGNED BY VACKER SIGN:

- Determine desired scope of design services and anticipated sign panel sizes:

## **Basic sign design and file preparation services.**

Preparation and file preparation services for interpretive sign panel layout with **client provided** text (edited), high resolution images, illustrations and logos.

## **Basic-Plus sign design and file preparation services.**

Preparation and file preparation services for interpretive sign panel layout with client provided text (edited) high resolution images, illustrations and logos, **plus Vacker created** illustrations and / or **acquired** high resolution images.

- Request a proposal from Vacker Sign for desired scope of design services and specific sign products. Please outline desired items by sign panel size, sign panel material type, and mount style (for example: 24"x36"x.125" Tuff Panel to be mounted with NPS traditional style frame with posts for in ground installation) as well as your shipping address.

To estimate Basic-plus Design services, we need to understand the nature of the "**plus**" services desired. What additional resources do you want us to acquire or develop? For example, if you seek an illustration, what do you want illustrated and what is the communication goal?

- Sign proposal and return by email to confirm acceptance of proposal.
- Organize content in folders and upload to us at [spaces.hightail.com/uplink/vackersign](https://spaces.hightail.com/uplink/vackersign).