Spell Check

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Spelling is an important part of sign making.

“Analysis.” I remember standing on the stage at the citywide spelling bee in middle school, blinking into the lights as I debated whether there was a “y” or an “i” in the word. I went with the “i.” And the shame of being eliminated from that spelling bee has not left me after all these years. Analysis is a word I will never forget how to spell because of that harrowing night.

If you’ve ever been in a spelling bee, you’re probably thinking of that one word that put you out of the running for the shiny trophy. And I bet it’s forever ingrained in your own mind now. Sorry to dredge up the bad memories.

But the shame of stammering out a misspelling and being eliminated in front of your peers is nothing compared to the shame of a misspelled word forever emblazoned in print on a point-of-purchase display, identity sign, or even worse—a billboard.

We’ve all seen these errors—the signs that make us stop not because of the excellent design or layout, but because there’s something not quite right. *The New York Post* recently brought up this issue when it investigated a misspelling spray painted right outside of a school in New York City: “Shcool X-ng.” The error remained on the street for months, and it wasn’t until the *Post* took an interest that the DOT fixed it. How do we expect to teach our kids proper spelling when we let glaring errors like that slide by?

I was in Vegas a few years ago for a sign tradeshow, and I remember looking at some posters that advertised the sights and sounds of the area. There was a glaring misspelling on one of them, and I was immediately turned off to the company and whatever event it was they were trying to sell me.

And that feeling was either a side-effect of my English major, which has lead me to put spelling and grammar on a pedestal, or more likely a natural reaction to an unprofessional sign. Spelling

is just as important as layout, graphics, font, materials, and all the other aspects and elements that go into a sign or display.

Consider what misspellings in a sign can lead to:

1. The dismissal of the sign and its message or whatever it is selling
2. A lack of confidence in the brand/product (If they're not putting in the effort, why should we?)
3. A misunderstanding of the intended message (especially in the case of wayfinding or street signs)
4. A poor reflection on the people who put the sign together (regardless if it was the fault of the customer for providing the misspelling, or failing to catch it in the approved proof)

Of course, a misspelling may lead to more attention for the sign and its message, but I think it's safe to say that the negative feedback would outweigh the positive.

So with this in mind, what does your shop do to prevent misspellings and other errors on your signs? Do you have a designated shop copyeditor? Do you check the sign once, twice, and then a third time? Let us know in the comments (with proper spelling, please).

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