

Small signs lead to big frustrations, research finds

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UC researcher James Kellaris examines a small sign through a magnifying lens.
Credit: Lisa Ventre, University of Cincinnati

Signs that are too small or unclear to consumers seem to be a growing national issue, leading some business owners to lose potential customers, according to University of Cincinnati Marketing Professor James Kellaris.

"This persistent, growing national problem is frustrating for [consumers](#) and can lead to loss of [business](#) and, by extension, loss of tax revenue for the community," Kellaris said.

Kellaris, the James S. Womack/[Gemini](#) Chair of Signage and Visual Marketing in the UC Carl H. Lindner College of Business, will present this research during the October 10 -11 Fourth-Annual National Signage

Research & Education Conference (NSREC) in Cincinnati.

Through a UC analysis of a market research survey of North American households, Kellaris found that inadequate signage could be construed as a communication failure.

"About half the population surveyed in 2011 has driven by and failed to find a business due to signage and communication failure," he said.

While communication failure affects all groups and ages, the study found that women experience signage communication failure more than men.

Shoppers, Kellaris noted, favor signs that are visible, legible and informative, but those preferences contradict current trends of smaller, more uniform signs, using non-verbal symbols/icons.

Kellaris said that shoppers are drawn to unfamiliar stores based on clear, attractive signs, and that often, these stores convey personality and character as perceived from [signage](#) quality.

The resolution, Kellaris says, "is to find the right balance between the interests of shoppers, businesses and the broader interests of the community."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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