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What NOT To Do When Hiring A Signage Company



As all general contractors know, experience counts when it comes to construction.

Every job is different and even with the best planning, things change, and things come up. Being able to tap into a vast reservoir and repertoire of knowledge about what solutions work, and when, is critical for maximizing efficiency, productivity and minimizing project costs. And when planning and executing signage for a development project, leveraging experience couldn't be more important. Incorrectly produced or installed signage can cause delays right at the end of a project and hold up project final inspections and approvals, adding to project costs and client frustrations.

At Priority Architectural Graphics, we use our 20+ years of experience producing quality architectural signage and strong client relationships to closely partner with our general contractor clients - from design to project management, fabrication and installation. And having been hired by literally hundreds of contractors, we know how to advise prospective clients about what NOT to do when hiring a signage partner.

Here are our top 5 recommended tips about what not to do when hiring a signage contractor (and how to hire the right one).





Are They Able To Provide References Associated with Requirements Similar to Your Project's?

All signage contractors will be able to provide at least 3 references for your job. That is never a challenge. But can they produce 3 job references which address the **unique requirements** of your project in terms of the volume of signage, deadlines for approvals, types of signage and necessary certifications?

Listen carefully to what references say in your conversations with them about a particular signage company and make sure to ask them about:

- The **number of projects** they have completed with the contractor
- The contractor's **depth of experience** designing, fabricating and installing across product-types
- Their **consistency in performance** across projects
- **Timeliness and budget-adherence**

See if they can provide client testimonials from specific contractors you trust.

Clark Construction is a good role model here. They score their signage contractors based on many of these attributes and then rehire based on those "quality scores".

2

Customer Service & Problem Solving: How Do They Do It?

Excellence in customer service goes a long way in every business. It's what clients remember. It's why relationships and client loyalties drive so much business. The opposite also applies. One bad job and a signage company is not likely to be rehired. In construction, that really matters because you can be rehired so many times, over and over again by the same client.

Problem solving is, in itself, a big part of customer service. When things go wrong, true character always surfaces. So understanding how signage companies conduct themselves in terms of customer service and problem solving is key.

You should ask them about particular "use cases" of real project problems you've encountered in past jobs with signage companies such as:

- *making up lost project time to make deadlines*
- *miscommunication with signage company teams and your team about requirements*
- *identifying incorrect signage specifications*
- *fixing incorrect installations*
- *addressing bad relationships with certification authorities*

What you are looking for to find out if they demonstrate in their responses:

- Proactiveness
- Reliability
- Flexibility
- Technical proficiency
- Communication skills

Good management begets good customer service as well. Do they invest in their team such as offering training for their team members in client service? What is their staff turnover rate? Can they provide employee testimonials?

3

Ask Them About Their Investments in Innovation

The signage industry, historically, has been “old school” with many sign contractors, particularly smaller operations, not having the interest or capital to invest in new technology and capital equipment. But no longer do we live in a world of **screen printing and engraving**. To better compete, the more progressive and creative signage companies have learned to invest in innovation.

- *Have they mastered LED arrays and freestanding LED signage? What about photopolymer signs?*
- *Do they have internal communications platforms which enable in-company real-time collaboration across design, fabrication, installation?*
- *Do they use the latest cloud-based project management software such as Plangrid to communicate with general contractors and other subcontractors in real time?*

A good signage partner manages their operations to ensure they have the capital to reinvest in new technologies and fabrication processes. Make sure yours does.

4

Are Their Installers Unionized?

General contractors understand the realities of working with labor from hiring, training, management to termination. But working with unionized labor, not necessarily. A key question when it comes to signage contractors should always be “do you work with union labor” particularly when it comes to sign installation. It makes a difference.

For example, working with non-union labor, depending on local ordinances, can cause delays in sign installation due to the need to install after workday hours. And union-trained installers who have gone through a formal sign installation training or certification program can sometimes deliver faster and better installations – even if they are more expensive to employ. Finally, a signage contractor who uses unionized labor understands union relationships, management practices and how to navigate issues on the job to keep installations moving forward and get them completed on time.

5

How Tight Are Their Relationships With Approval Authorities?

The success of any construction project is measured by quality execution, on time and on budget. But if the project doesn't get final approval, even if the building is beautiful, none of that even matters. Delays in approvals can also have a significant negative impact "on time, on budget". This is why hiring a signage contractor who values the importance of focusing on relationships with certification and approval authorities matters so much.

Experienced signage companies build these relationships, proactively, in 3 key ways:

- 1. Demonstrating a thorough knowledge and experience with the latest regulatory codes and requirements*
- 2. Bringing approval authorities into the planning process early on*
- 3. Reaffirming confidence in the contractor through consistent performance; approval of quality, correct signage with no hiccups.*

Hiring the right signage contractor is a long-term investment. Put the time and necessary effort into pre-screening your subcontractor and you can benefit from a long stream of successful projects and relationships you will value for years to come.