

When unexpected visitors drop by your house, how do you spend the precious seconds it takes your friends to get from the front yard to your front door? I typically take the 45 seconds or so to pick up newspapers or place any dishes in the sink or put the bedroom slippers away that I left by the sofa the night before. We can bump up expectations when we put a house on the market. We likely have a laundry list of items to be fixed, cleaned up or replaced prior to allowing prospective buyers to walk through. I actually know people who fixed up their house to sell and decided they liked it just fine after the work was done! Hotels have a term when their rooms are ready to rent: “guest-ready.” This means everything is working correctly, all amenities are in place, and everything is clean and straight.

In business, we have the obligation to ourselves and our profit margins to keep our businesses “guest-ready” every day. A few cost-effective things we can look at right now can provide huge return in appearance and appeal to our customer base—current and future.

Just about a year ago, small-city expert Robert Gibbs toured our Historic Downtown and was very impressed. He stated “Reid Avenue is one of the most attractive small main streets that I have seen in many years” with an historical and “old-time, main-street” feel. He also repeatedly stated we need to “freshen up what we have,” and the downtown district “contains numerous well-maintained, independent stores, offices and restaurants; however, in every area of each business district, deferred maintenance, crooked signage and decaying facades will detract and actually turn potential shoppers away.” Importantly, he stated, “Every feature of the business district needs to look like somebody cares.”

Your storefront does more for your business than anything else. According to retail expert Rick Segel, your storefront defines your business and tells how you feel about your business. Display windows create interest and make customers want to enter and buy. While the PSJRA is preparing to help each of you make your business more attractive, there are many things you can do along with this effort to increase business potential.

And now for the challenge: next time you enter your place of business, stop at the front and take an inventory of what 30 minutes of care can accomplish...or one hour...or one Saturday morning. Ask yourself a few questions such as the following: Are the windows clean? How about the window sills? Are there any left-over pieces of Scotch tape on the window? Are there outdated flyers on the window? Are there hooks or nails, rusted and empty, in the overhang? Has anyone thrown trash onto your overhang that is visible from the sidewalk? If you have furniture out front, is it clean and in like-new condition? If you have planters out front, are they free of chips or cracks and are the plants healthy and well-tended? Is the lettering on your window chipped or cracked? If your property houses a vacant business, are the old signs removed? Are any windows cracked or broken? What do potential customers see through the glass? Will the condition of your property help or hinder perception of business in the rest of the district? Is your building or property, vacant or otherwise in “guest-ready” condition?

One of the most effective tools we can utilize to increase business and attract new customers is to make sure every detail, every day, looks as though “somebody cares” and to keep every aspect of our businesses “guest-ready.”