



Gettin' Diggy With It: The Power of Non-Traditional Construction Signage

Whenever a municipality decides to undertake a construction project, no matter the size, the public perception is often one of inconvenience and ugliness. Construction can also negatively impact local businesses, especially during road closures. In reality, despite the inconveniences they impart, construction projects are always tied to something being improved upon or something new being created.

The Hartford Business Improvement District (HBID) recognized that the traditional construction signage provided by a contractor was going unnoticed, and needed to be redesigned in order to engage a disinterested and frustrated public. Traditional construction signage, meant to be helpful, is often bland and tends to blend into the scenery. Signs needed to be bright with eye-catching colors that would stand out amongst the various hues of orange and white that dot the construction landscape.

As best practice, HBID designs, prints and provides signs to aid local businesses affected by major construction projects. HBID created non-traditional construction signs to change public perception regarding the construction projects in the District.

HBID successfully utilized popular song lyrics and popular quotes in order to create signage that, instead of being ignored, was talked about, laughed about, openly praised, and shared on social media.

HBID saw the real-world success of these signs during the Pratt Street construction project. Pratt Street is one of the most picturesque streets in downtown Hartford, with a mix of restaurants, retail, and other businesses. Vehicular traffic was completely restricted on this historic, one-way street for nearly eight months. Although sidewalks and businesses remained open, the street itself looked "closed" and threatened small business revenue streams.

HBID knew that signage was needed that would grab the attention of pedestrians and remind them that all Pratt Street businesses remained open during construction. The construction project lasted months longer than originally planned, but the signs never felt stale or fell out of favor with local business owners or residents. All businesses on Pratt Street were able to sustain themselves during the street closure and remain open and thriving today.

Other business improvement districts have the ability to easily replicate these low-cost, high-impact signs. While HBID chose to do lawn signs and swinging signs, Uptown Greenville (Greenville, S.C.), who has already replicated these signs, used vinyl banners. The possibilities for signage variations are

endless. HBID has spent less than \$1,000 on signage for various construction projects over a three-year span.

HBID received positive feedback from small businesses, city residents, visitors and employees. On social media, photos of these non-traditional construction signs have been posted, reposted and shared. The posts stir discussions about the local businesses on District streets, encourage pedestrians to seek out the businesses, and help to promote overall civic pride.

While BIDs can never completely mitigate the effects construction may have on local businesses nor change the public's perception regarding major construction projects, HBID has shown that with the right signage in the right places, it is possible to generate tangible change in public perception, as well as support local businesses in a time of need.