

## Avoiding Six Signage Peeves: How to Improve the Drive-by Visibility of Your Center

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Urgent care is a retail storefront for general medicine. Unlike specialists who rely on other physicians to refer patients, urgent care centers appeal directly to the general public, who chooses on its own to use the center when faced with a minor or acutely rising medical issue. One of the most common reasons consumers choose an urgent care center over other options is they first became aware of that center driving by and noticing it's sign. Paid media advertising and grassroots involvement further raise awareness of when and how to use the center but they work only insofar as patients first know where the center is located. Thus, visible and effective exterior signage could be considered a prerequisite to effective marketing that will also enhance the return of all other marketing activities.

So, given the importance of signage in driving urgent care visits...why is exterior signage an area neglected by so many centers? Perhaps one reason is that the center's providers and staff approach the center from the back of the building and use an employee entrance, never evaluating the curb appeal of the center from the patient's perspective. At least once a week you should drive the exterior of your center, considering the following six common issues with signage in urgent care centers that could potentially be limiting your center's volume:

### **#1: Non-illuminating exterior signage or exterior signage turned off when the center is closed.**

While there may be some energy-saving justification to turning off your center's exterior signage at night, doing so also undermines the "marketing value" of your sign to drive-by traffic.

Many people consider evening and weekend hours to be defining characteristics of urgent care centers. During the winter months, some areas of the country turn dark as early as 5:00pm, so if your exterior sign does not illuminate at night...you are potentially missing out on consumer visibility during your remaining opening hours when patients most expect you to be available.

Even after your center has closed for the evening, consider keeping your sign illuminated until at least midnight, if not all night. Consider the cost of billboard advertising—typically \$3,000 to \$5,000 a month or more depending on visibility and traffic counts. A highly visible center sign acts as a billboard to drive-by traffic so if you turn off your sign upon closing, you are potentially foregoing thousands of dollars in "free" exposure to future potential patients driving by.



**#2: "Open" sign left illuminated when the center is closed.**

Having an illuminated open sign is an important signal to consumers that the center is, in fact, open and ready to meet their needs. An open sign can help enhance visibility of the center at night. But an "open" sign that's left on after the center has closed is equivalent to answering your phone "hello and now, goodbye." Using a timer is probably the easiest way to assure the sign is illuminated only during center hours.



**#3: Operating hours not visible from the street, parking lot or automobile.**

If you are going to post opening hours on your center's exterior door, those hours should be in a sufficiently large font to be read from an automobile. It's an annoyance to drive up to a closed facility and have to get out of a running car to read the "fine print" some centers post as their hours.



#### #4: Signage in disrepair.

Urgent care should be about delivering quality medical care, so what kind of quality is conveyed to consumers who see a sign that is broken, faded, or burnt out? Would you walk around a party wearing a nametag that is smeared, soiled and falling off? Your center's sign is its nameplate and brand...it should present your center's brand in the most favorable "light."



#### #5: Not taking advantage of seasonal promotional signage or pre-opening "coming soon" signs permitted by many municipalities.

Many communities offer businesses the ability to post banners, flags or other tools to raise their visibility during sales, promotions, and grand openings. The period of time allowed may range from 7 to 90 days, once or multiple times per year, and may require a license or permit with fee paid. To not take advantage of this opportunity to draw eyes to your center is to miss a low-cost marketing opportunity.



## #6: Window blinds closed.

While not a “signage” issue, per se, when an open center closes its window shades (even if for legitimate reasons, like to reduce glare)...the center appears closed to drive-by traffic. If exam room blinds must be closed for privacy purposes, or an Eastward or Westward-facing center struggles with morning or evening sun, consider one-way reflective window tint, advertising window decals, neon “open” sign or another option to avoid leaving your center with a “closed” appearance.



Attractive, visible, and functional exterior signage is key to raising awareness of urgent care to drive-by traffic and it is the pre-requisite for all other marketing activities that make your center patient’s first choice when seeking medical care. To neglect your signage is, in effect, to turn away patients—something few centers can afford to do. At least once a week—if not daily—you should do a walk-around of your building and ask yourself, “does this signage look good?” Or better yet...“would a prospective patient think this signage looks good?” If the answer is “no,” then you have some work to do.