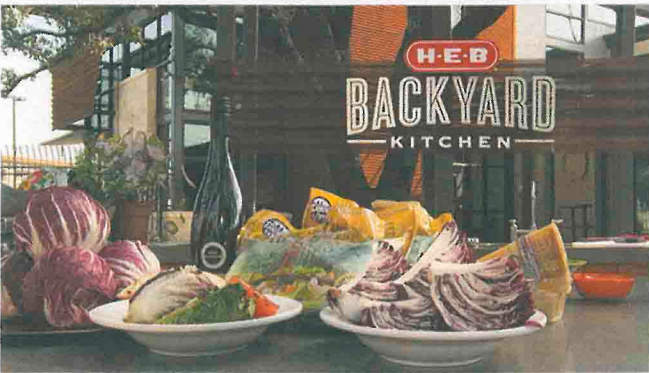
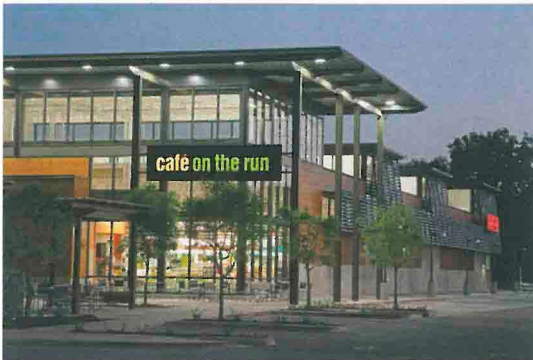


# Vital Signs

Supermarket signage is advancing through the implementation of LED and other technologies.

By Bob Ingram



**A**s Bob Dylan might say, if he worked in a supermarket, “The signs, they are a-changing.” And those changes in supermarket signage are the result of strides in lighting technology, material use, and the almost universal prevalence among shoppers of smartphones and other personal devices.

“Signage technology continues to advance at the same rapid pace as the LED industry,” notes Erich Bockley, signage portfolio manager at Osram Sylvania, in Danvers, Mass. “Supermarket signage, both interior and exterior, is inevitably going to convert to LED. The energy, life, maintenance and image benefits for supermarkets in exterior applications are too great to ignore. This includes new construction and the retrofitting of existing signs. Additionally, the ease of installation and application of LEDs in interior signage applications will provide supermar-

kets with an array of options to enhance the shopper experience; direct the attention of shoppers in vibrant, engaging ways; and differentiate the brand of the supermarket from competitors.”

In San Antonio, Mikal Harn, president of Comet Signs, notes that his company has been a sign supplier for the past 10 years for H-E-B Grocery Co. there, one of the leaders in retail food marketing, and that “they force us to be on our toes.”

Harn points out that the improvements in LED technology from both cost and performance standpoints have resulted in 75 percent energy savings, adding that for a 120,000-square-foot H-E-B unit, according to Comet’s payback scenarios, there can be dramatic savings.

For exterior signage, Harn explains, “We focus a lot more on attraction and brand consistency. One of our taglines is ‘Bringing your brand to life.’”

He sees interior signage as being all about customer



## SIGN LANGUAGE

H-E-B “makes it fun for a sign company,” notes Mikal Harn, president of fellow San Antonio company Comet Signs.

engagement. "It's not just about informing," he says, "but literally using different materials and treatments to attract the customer."

Harn cites the evolution in materials as another leap forward in sign-making. He sees advances in computer routing, materials like steel and aluminum, and digital innovations as adding a lot more flexibility to sign manufacturing.

H-E-B, according to Harn, "really engages us in the design process. When you add a sign company at the end of construction, you're not going to get as good a result. The difference is interacting during the design phase."

He adds that H-E-B customizes its signage based on customer research for each store, and that every store is focused on the community it serves. "They're not afraid to try something," he observes. "That makes it fun for a sign company."

### Bright Ideas

At Osram Sylvania, Bockley notes that there's an entirely new product line of LED BackLED and BoxLED modules specifically targeted to illuminate channel letters and box signs in both interior and exterior applications. These products have higher efficiencies and longer lifetimes than the traditional neon and fluorescent products that they replace, and will

lower the energy consumption and maintenance costs for supermarkets.

"The brand image of the store can also benefit from the bright look of LED-lit signage, and there is the immeasurable benefit of having signage that doesn't suffer from outages or dark letters," he points out.

Bockley says that for interior retail applications, Osram Sylvania has introduced a line of LED Thin Panel products available in a variety of sizes to hang on a wall, in a window or from the ceiling, much like a picture frame.

"They are edge-lit with LEDs to produce a bright, uniform background to light signage graphics, photos, advertisements, point-of-purchase information, menu boards or specials — and changing the graphics in them is literally a snap," he emphasizes.

Bockley notes that Osram Sylvania also offers a line of highly flexible LED Border Flex tubing in a variety of colors mimicking the look of neon. "With the use of LEDs," he says, "supermarket signage will become an integrated design element of the store that serves to inform, direct and delight customers as soon as they walk through the doors."

Rick Leeds, Osram Sylvania's vertical marketing manager, observes that the use of smartphone GPS as a method of tracking consumers and identifying their purchasing needs, is an emerging technology for lighting and signage. "Imagine that a customer who has recently been searching for recipes on the internet comes into a store," he says, "and suddenly the signage reacts to their presence and directs them toward the specifics needed, and specials. That same customer receives emails or texts with instant coupons for those same items. It's a developing technology, but it's not perfected.

"I think that the future of supermarket signage could also include interactive tools that include consumer-specific messaging right at their cart, tailored specifically to their needs and purchasing preferences," continues Leeds. "As people interact more and more with their media devices, they desire content that is specifically tailored to their lifestyles."

Comet's Harn agrees. "It's going to have a big impact," he says. "There'll be smartphone apps to control signage at store level. There's a lot of work going on there. Care has to be taken because of privacy issues, but the younger people don't mind that."

And that's yet another sign of the times. **PG**

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—Erich Bockley,  
Osram Sylvania

## Sign Retrofitting Made Easy

At GE Lighting, in East Cleveland, Ohio, the new GE LineFit Light LED System was designed as a simple replacement for upgrading fluorescent cabinet and box sign lighting with energy-efficient LED lighting, providing 58 percent to 75 percent energy savings compared with T12HO fluorescents.

Available in 11 sizes and three color temperatures, the LineFit Light LED line offers versatility for a multitude of double-sided signage and styles, according to Mark Shepard, GE Lighting's global product manager.

Using existing fluorescent sockets for a four-step installation, LineFit Light LEDs can be up and running in just minutes per fixture, slashing installation time and costs. Additionally, specialized rotating end caps ensure proper alignment and ultimate light output directed toward the sign face.

Shepard adds that GE's patented OptiLens technology ensures that light is used efficiently, while at the same time helping to protect each LED against moisture, humidity, damage and corrosion. Unlike fluorescent options that emit light in a 360-degree pattern, each LED module is optimized to capture otherwise wasted light and redirect it where it's needed toward the illuminated surface of the sign. OptiLens also eliminates the striping and shadows on the face of the sign that can occur with fluorescent tubes.

GE Lighting also offers a Tetra Signage design tool to enable customers to determine the type and quantity of the company's LED sign-lighting products.