

5 Costly Signage Mistakes That Kill First Impressions (And How to Avoid Them)

The insider checklist every KZN business owner, property developer and event company needs before ordering a single board.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- Why the wrong material can cost you double in under a year
- The design mistake that makes expensive boards look cheap
- How to avoid by-law fines and forced removals
- How to read a quote so you're not comparing apples to mangoes
- Why sign planning must happen at the start — not the end



1

MISTAKE #1 OF 5

Choosing the Wrong Material for the Environment

WHO THIS AFFECTS: Small businesses, property developers, event companies

THE PROBLEM

Most sign buyers pick a material because it looks good in a photo — without thinking about where the sign will actually live. A beautiful ABS board installed in direct coastal sun will warp within months. Perspex in a high-traffic lobby gets scratched and loses its premium look. Chromadek in a wet outdoor area starts rusting at the edges.

PRO TIP

Coastal KZN sun and humidity are among the most punishing environments for signage in South Africa. Always specify your suburb when getting a quote.

REAL EXAMPLE FROM KZN

A Durban property developer ordered brushed-silver ABS boards for an open-air complex in Ballito. Within eight months, heat and UV had buckled three panels — costing a full replacement job.

THE FIX

Match the material to the environment **FIRST**. Outdoor & coastal = marine-grade Chromadek or UV-rated Perspex with protective laminates. Indoor premium = ABS or 5mm Perspex. High-traffic = textured or anti-scratch coated boards. A good sign supplier will ask about location before recommending anything.

PROGRESS: 1 of 5 mistakes covered

20% complete

Next: Mistake #2 — Designing for Print Instead of Distance

2

MISTAKE #2 OF 5

Designing for Print Instead of Distance

WHO THIS AFFECTS: All business types — especially retail and hospitality

THE PROBLEM

Your logo might look incredible on a business card, but that same file blown up to 1.2m x 0.6m often becomes a blurry, pixelated disappointment. Worse — thin, decorative fonts that are elegant on screen become completely unreadable from 5 metres away. Signage has one job: communicate fast, from a distance, in any light.

PRO TIP

A good rule: if your logo file is smaller than 1MB, it is almost certainly not print-ready for large-format signage.

REAL EXAMPLE FROM KZN

A Durban salon owner submitted a beautiful Instagram-style logo saved as a 72dpi JPEG for their fascia board. The printed result was visibly grainy and the script font was illegible from the pavement.

THE FIX

Always supply vector artwork (AI, EPS or PDF) at 300dpi minimum for print. Use bold, high-contrast fonts for the primary message. Test legibility by squinting at the design from across a room. Contrast beats style every time — dark text on light, or light text on dark, always wins.

PROGRESS: 2 of 5 mistakes covered

40% complete

Next: Mistake #3 — Ignoring Local By-Laws and Body Corporate Rules

3

MISTAKE #3 OF 5

Ignoring Local By-Laws and Body Corporate Rules

WHO THIS AFFECTS: Retailers, property developers, commercial tenants

THE PROBLEM

eThekweni Municipality and most commercial parks, malls, and sectional title buildings have strict rules governing sign size, illumination, placement, and colour. Getting a sign made without checking these rules first is an expensive gamble — you can be ordered to remove it and absorb the full cost of a compliant replacement.

PRO TIP

eThekweni Municipality requires permits for most illuminated and projecting signs. Many landlords have their own specs on top — get both in writing.

REAL EXAMPLE FROM KZN

A restaurant in Umhlanga installed an illuminated projecting sign without approval. The body corporate issued a compliance notice. The sign came down. A second, compliant sign had to be redesigned, manufactured and re-installed — doubling the total spend.

THE FIX

Before briefing any sign company, request the sign spec guidelines from your landlord, body corporate, or estate manager. Check eThekweni's outdoor advertising by-laws for road-facing signage. A reputable sign company will flag these issues before quoting — if they don't ask, you should.

PROGRESS: 3 of 5 mistakes covered

60% complete

Next: Mistake #4 — Getting One Quote and Assuming Price Equals Quality

4

MISTAKE #4 OF 5

Getting One Quote and Assuming Price Equals Quality

WHO THIS AFFECTS: Budget-conscious SMEs and event companies

THE PROBLEM

Sign pricing varies wildly in KZN — and not always for the reasons you'd expect. A cheap quote often means thinner substrate, lower-grade vinyl, no UV laminate, or cut corners on installation. An expensive quote doesn't automatically mean better quality either. Without knowing what's included, you're comparing apples to mangoes.

PRO TIP

Always ask: is UV laminate included? What vinyl brand? What substrate thickness? These three questions separate professional suppliers from cut-rate ones.

REAL EXAMPLE FROM KZN

An events company went with the lowest quote for their exhibition stand panels. The supplier used 3mm corflute instead of the specified 5mm ABS — the panels bowed under overhead lighting and were unusable after just one event.

THE FIX

Get at least 3 quotes and ask each supplier to specify: substrate brand and thickness, vinyl type, whether UV laminate is included, and what the warranty covers. Compare line items — not just totals. The best value is rarely the cheapest or the most expensive.

PROGRESS: 4 of 5 mistakes covered

80% complete

Next: Mistake #5 — Leaving Signage to the Very Last Minute

5

MISTAKE #5 OF 5

Leaving Signage to the Very Last Minute

WHO THIS AFFECTS: New businesses, event companies, developers at handover stage

THE PROBLEM

Signage is almost always the last thing on the list — until it becomes the most urgent. Quality boards take time: artwork approval, material procurement, printing, cutting, and installation all have lead times. Rushing this process means compromises: wrong colour matches, skipped proofing, or an install team that can't get site access in time.

PRO TIP

The best time to brief a sign company is the day you confirm your lease or event booking. Lead time cannot be manufactured.

REAL EXAMPLE FROM KZN

A new Durban CBD office planned their launch event for a Friday and called a sign company on the Tuesday prior for a full lobby installation. Temporary vinyl was rushed for launch — the proper Perspex signage arrived two weeks later, long after the moment had passed.

THE FIX

Build signage into your project timeline from the start — not at the end. Standard turnaround for custom boards is 5 to 10 working days. Complex or large-format installations need 2 to 3 weeks. Brief your sign company when you brief your builder or fit-out contractor.

PROGRESS: 5 of 5 mistakes covered

100% complete

Get Your Signage Right, First Time.

Pro Graphics Durban specialises in custom Chromadek, ABS and Perspex signage for businesses, property developers, and events across KwaZulu-Natal.

We help you choose the right material, navigate the by-laws, and deliver signage that works as hard as your business does.

WHY PRO GRAPHICS:

- Fast turnaround — 5 to 10 working days standard
- All materials stocked locally in Durban
- Artwork assistance & proofing included
- Installation teams across KZN

GET A FREE QUOTE TODAY

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prographics.co.za

** Mention this guide for a FREE design consultation on your first order **

“

The Pro Graphics team helped us navigate body corporate rules we didn't even know

— Retail tenant, Umhlanga

“

Turnaround was faster than quoted. Signs looked exactly like the proof — no surprises.

— Event company, Durban CBD

“

Finally a sign company that asks the right questions before quoting.

— Property developer, Ballito