



Secrets of Successful Wayfinding

Metro Sign and Awning

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Introduction to Wayfinding

Each of us has probably encountered this basic experience: you enter a building for the first time, and you find navigation difficult. You can't easily get oriented, and so you can't easily find the place you're trying to go.

This happens so often because interior and exterior wayfinding signage is one of the most complex tasks a signage company can face. Sure, you can provide maps and arrows, but it's still tricky to make them clear and easy to follow.



Happily, the rewards of a successful wayfinding signage program are immense: there's not only great utility, but great pleasure in providing visitors with well-designed wayfinding signage that unravels the complexities of a shopping center, hotel, office building, hospital, or campus.

Like other types of signage, wayfinding signs can be illuminated or not, feature dimensional letters, and a wide variety of colors, styles, and materials.

What's most unusual about wayfinding signage is its purpose: its goal of wayfinding is to provide information - directions, really - more so than advertising. Of course, every wayfinding sign represents a chance - and a couple of square feet of space, at least - that can be used to enhance an organization's brand and image.

[*Read more about Wayfinding here.*](#)

7 Secrets of Successful Wayfinding

As sign professionals, we have been schooled in the principles of effective wayfinding design, which we like to summarize in a series of simple, practical suggestions.

1. Start with the "big picture."

It's important to grasp the overall design and flow of the building or complex requiring wayfinding signage, including where people are likely to enter and exit, and what destinations they will aim for. Restrooms, exits, stairs and elevators are key elements in any wayfinding signage plan. Even more important are the major and minor "decision points," where people will make choices about where to go next. Only when you understand the big picture, do you have the basis on which to develop an effective wayfinding signage program.



2. Go for simplicity.

Long-winded explanations will not be read or followed. Instead, you want wayfinding signs to be short, clear, and to the point. Each message should be conveyed by means of a few words, a pictorial symbol, and/or a directional arrow.

3. Test the signage program during construction, when possible.

There's no substitute for group cooperation and shared thinking, so we like to put up paper versions of our wayfinding signs as early in the process as we can. Then we invite construction workers, delivery people, and other visitors to pencil in additions, corrections, or ideas as they find their way around. Many of these comments actually get incorporated into the final wayfinding signage program.

4. Adjust the wayfinding information to suit the users.

When people are in a hurry, under stress, or involved in conversations, they don't want to take the time to puzzle out the meanings of your wayfinding signage. That's why it's important to use consistent, unambiguous wording and symbols that visitors are likely to expect and understand.

5. Organize the information in some useful way.

Many decision points need to provide information on multiple destinations, so it's crucial to minimize visitors' time and effort in finding what they need to know. Depending on specifics, wayfinding information might best be organized alphabetically, or from the closest destination to the farthest, or directionally - with all of the left arrows together, followed by all the right arrows.



6. Exit routes matter, and not just for evacuation in emergencies.

Think about it: every visitor who enters will later want to leave. Wayfinding signage pointing to individual exits is instrumental in helping people find their preferred points of departure.

7. Lighting also counts.

Materials that look good in soft conference room lighting may not work so well in dim hallways or in the glare of full sunlight. Reflective materials, for example, work best when the sign is purposely illuminated.

Of course, these few guidelines just skim the surface of all that needs to be considered in developing effective signage programs. Read more about the [7 Secrets of Wayfinding](#) here.



5 Things to Know About Powerful Wayfinding

"Wayfinding" is a fascinating word that conveys its own meaning very clearly - which is precisely what you expect from "wayfinding signs" themselves. But it's far from easy to create a series of signs that are unified, logical, and authoritative in design, yet variable enough to convey highly specific information clearly and unambiguously to people who are quite often in a hurry, stressed, confused, and possibly lacking in local language skills.

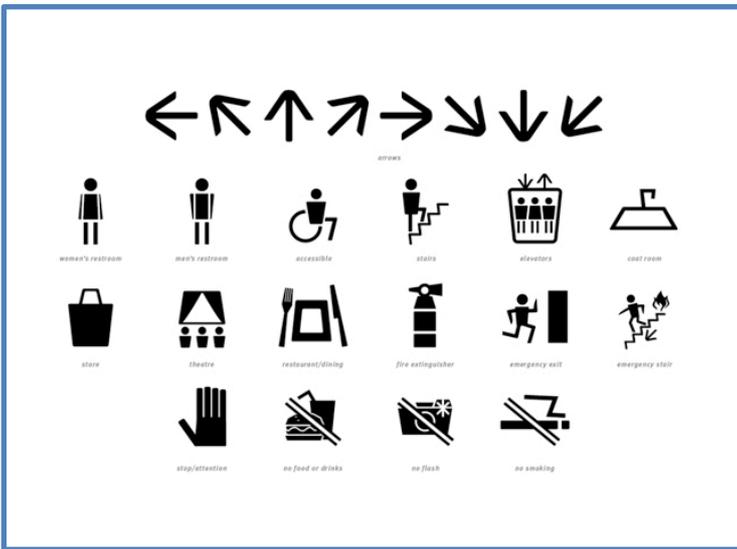
So it's no surprise that, to many designers, wayfinding signage projects are among the most challenging tasks in all of signmaking, and - when satisfactorily accomplished - among the most rewarding. Here are some interesting facts you probably don't know about wayfinding signage.



1. Powerful wayfinding offers more than a simple map.

Wayfinding signage is obviously aimed at "spatial" concerns: telling people where they are, allowing them to find the place(s) they want to go, and giving them clear directions regarding the best route(s) for getting there. But maps have been in use since humanity's cave-dwelling days. Today, modern wayfinding signage must fully address far more intricate concerns than a simple map ever could.

2. Powerful wayfinding goes beyond the standard AIGA symbols.



There are standard American Institute of Graphic Arts symbols for wayfinding signs. But these are sometimes inadequate, needing to be augmented or modified to meet the full set of requirements involved in many wayfinding projects. For example, the basic symbol set may require adjustment to suit the designer's choice of font for the lettering, to enhance readability, or to minimize wasted space on crowded wayfinding signs. In some locations - such as a zoo or a specialized facility - a wayfinding project may require one or more completely new symbols.

3. Powerful wayfinding finds a balance between too few and too many signs.

An effective wayfinding system seeks to present information at precisely the locations where users (travelers, visitors) want it, but not overload them with details. A key goal is to give people confidence so they can comfortably move toward their desired destination, and then to provide them with additional information (for example: not only distance to the destination, but also the expected travel time), as appropriate, just before they begin to feel they need it.

4. Powerful wayfinding incorporates major landmarks.

Major landmarks naturally provide both common destinations and excellent locations for wayfinding signage. In addition to obvious landmarks - something like the "campanile" or bell tower on a college campus - there are often lesser landmarks that signage system designers can select for use as wayfinding markers or waypoints.

5. Powerful wayfinding adapts to the times.

Modern wayfinding signage has progressed along with the evolution of villages, towns, and - more recently - large cities. Today, wayfinding signage projects seek to present a form of visual logic that minimizes language demands and cost-effectively conveys both denotative information ("how to get there from here") and connotative information ("look and feel," "branding"). With smartphones so commonplace today, many people now expect the top of a map to be the direction they are moving, rather than North, which for hundreds of years was the standard.

[Read more about Powerful Wayfinding here.](#)

Wayfinding in Action

Wayfinding Signs Key Part of National Cemetery Expansion Project



Fabricated from long-lived materials, our wayfinding signs at Bourne National Cemetery will continue to do their job for years to come. If you ever have occasion to visit, we'd love to hear your reaction.

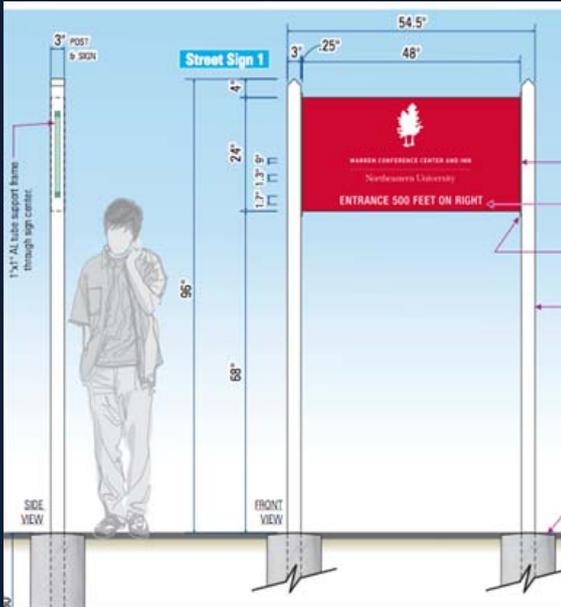
Metro Sign and Awning worked with general contractor Spanish Springs Construction to provide all the wayfinding signs at the completely refurbished Bourne National Cemetery on Cape Cod. Bourne National Cemetery is one of only 122 official interment sites for our nation's brave veterans.

For most people visiting a national cemetery - understandably coping with a powerful mixture of pride, grief and distress - it can be difficult to keep your wits about you. That's why the wayfinding signs must be extremely clear, concise, unmistakable, and - when they're subject to the harsh weather that is so typical in New England - durable.

In service to our nation and our veterans, we made a special point of living up to our pace-setting, quality standards, delivering these signs right on time, and right on budget. We're beyond proud of their effectiveness in guiding veterans' loved ones to their destinations.

[Learn more about the National Cemetery Expansion project.](#)

Experienced Sign Designers Give the Best Directions



Design, materials and craftsmanship are critical to any sign project - but not every signage fabricator has experience in wayfinding projects.

Consider the wayfinding signage you see when you visit an airport, college campus, hospital, or municipality. Each sign must serve different users - namely pedestrians and automobile drivers - and withstand not only four seasons of weather, but also all of the special stresses associated with being accessible to humans, dogs and other animals and elements. Your wayfinding signage must be on the job 24/7, providing not only explicit directions but also presenting a good impression no matter how many inches of snow or hail land on it, no matter how many graffiti artists stop by...

Well, you get the idea. Well-designed and properly constructed wayfinding signage will enhance your customers' and visitors' experience, reinforce your brand, and look great - regardless of environmental conditions - for many years. While its primary purpose isn't advertising, it can and should promote your image. To get the best return on your investment, work with signage experts experienced in wayfinding projects.

Questions about Wayfinding?

If you have any questions about wayfinding signage, particularly how an updated, modern wayfinding signage system might be helpful to people navigating your location, we'd love to provide you with answers.

Contact
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