

Pathways to Success

The Benefits of Wayfinding Signage

Effective and appropriate wayfinding solutions don't happen by accident but instead require careful planning and forethought. In order to derive the greatest financial benefits, an organization must integrate wayfinding at the beginning of its facility's design and construction process rather than at the end. Fortunately, modern wayfinding solutions – from flexible modular signs to interactive digital displays – excel in meeting just about every need an organization may have, whether it's enhancing a visitor's experience throughout a facility or reinforcing the organizational brand, or both.



The Benefits of Wayfinding Signage

You don't need an intimate knowledge of the history and science of **wayfinding** to understand its critical importance in your life. Good signage can get you from Point A to Point B, but without a carefully constructed wayfinding plan, signage without strategy isn't wayfinding – it's visual clutter.

Imagine yourself standing in the middle of a hospital lobby, with corridors radiating in three different directions. You know where you should be – say, the maternity ward – but not necessarily how to get there. Hospitals in the 21st century, of course, are defined by change. Their architecture is in constant flux, with mergers, architectural renovations, construction detours, and even housekeeping emergencies effecting rapid shifts in the way traffic flows. You realize **that wayfinding isn't simply about signs but about guiding people smoothly and effortlessly through the confusing thicket of change and transition that makes up modern life.**

Kevin Lynch, who is credited with coining the phrase *wayfinding* in 1960, wrote, “[L]et the mishap of disorientation once occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being.”

Being in a hospital – or even trying to locate the proper entrance of a hospital – can be troubling and stressful enough without the added tension of a failed wayfinding plan. When most businesses and organizations design and build their facilities, traffic flow is always considered in most architectural planning; however, signage is often considered only as an afterthought, a realization towards the end of construction that signs are needed before the facility can open. In fact, in most cases the integration of signage to complement wayfinding is added so late in the project that it's nearly always useless or at least of very little assistance to visitors and staff. More thought is placed on the design of the signs themselves rather than on their logical placement. Even less thought is devoted to the directional information and messaging that will allow visitors to navigate their way.

For wayfinding to truly work, it must be integrated into the architecture of a facility at the beginning of the design and planning process, rather than simply tacked on at the end. Doing so will also allow the institution to develop signage that not only achieves its wayfinding goals but also extends its brand throughout the completed facility. Wayfinding can thus be thought of as not only a means to an end – literally – but a way in which an organization can leave a favorable impression in a visitor's mind long after he or she has left the premises. In addition, an appropriate and properly implemented wayfinding solution can also improve employee productivity and efficiency and even reduce maintenance and administrative costs.



Challenges Of Modern Wayfinding

Wayfinding is partly about signs, but signs aren't necessarily about wayfinding. We've all had the experience of being confused by too many signs – the very opposite goal of wayfinding. However, for many companies without a proper wayfinding plan, that's exactly what the immediate thought is when a layout is clearly not working: "We need more signs!"

The problem is exacerbated by the reality of much of modern facility construction and maintenance. Some of the wayfinding challenges that facility managers, builders, developers, and public officials face include:

Rapid changes in architecture: Facility managers at university campuses must oversee the maintenance of existing buildings and plan for the construction of new ones. Hospitals in particular face tremendous stress as they merge, buy out other facilities, and expand existing ones.

Complexity of modern architecture: Occasionally a facility may inadvertently place more emphasis on the design of its interior and not enough on the actual logic of the space. Chances are, you've been in the all-too-common situation where your search for the nearest restroom leads you in circles around an expansive, attractive, but not too visitor-friendly environment. A good wayfinding plan, however, can accommodate even the most esoteric design, but it must be incorporated as early in the planning stages as possible.

Lack of time in creating a wayfinding plan: Despite a builder's or project manager's best intentions, all too often wayfinding gets little attention or remains low on the priority list during construction, renovations and expansion. The resulting signage thus lacks the proper messaging and may not meet the facility's wayfinding needs. Conversely, allocating the time and resources necessary to fully address a comprehensive wayfinding system can and will produce flexible and strategically placed signage solutions that can grow along with the facility itself.

Variety of choices: Nowadays, companies can choose from a number of signage options, depending on the goals they want to achieve with their signage plans. They may want signage that's not only directional but also informational, or they may want signage with a color scheme that distinguishes one building from another on the same campus. In fact, signage may not be necessary at all or may be a part of a larger, more comprehensive wayfinding solution. Successful wayfinding can be achieved using both signage and natural identification and/or architectural elements, e.g., designing a building to create an obvious main entry point. The larger and more complex a facility, the more complex the signage system may be and the more planning that's required in order to conceptualize and create it.

Expense of replacement: Many facility managers, facing tightening budgets, want to replace outdated or inaccurate signs but fear the financial consequences of doing so. Even though they may understand the immediate and long-term benefits to the company, they may find it difficult to convey them to management and executives who still believe that wayfinding is merely about signs and do not often realize the "hidden value" behind a comprehensive wayfinding program.

Maintenance of a current wayfinding program: With many institutions undergoing changes on a regular basis (i.e., hospitals, colleges and universities, and other large facilities), maintaining a consistent brand as aging or outdated signs are replaced can be a challenge. How do you make sure that your staff has the most up-to-date branding information when they re-order signage? How do you ensure that as your facility expands or takes over a new building, your brand remains consistent throughout the campus?

Quality of visitor experience: Great signage that does its job often goes unnoticed. For a wayfinding system to succeed, an organization must know its visitors and how they will navigate the facility so that it can create the appropriate signage that reflects proper messaging, language, visibility issues, and placement that will result in a great visitor experience.

Quality of staff experience: Many companies with poor wayfinding plans may not realize how much staff time is wasted because of bad signage. How often are employees interrupted in their work by visitors asking for directions because of lack of signage? How often are employees themselves lost on their way from one building to another on a sprawling campus? What about time and money wasted when employees at a hospital, for example, must wait on patients who arrive late because they couldn't find the right treatment room or they couldn't figure out where to park?

A good wayfinding solution can go a long way towards meeting these and other challenges head-on and creating a more harmonious and efficient environment for both visitors and staff.

Companies and organizations have a number of wayfinding signage solutions to choose from to meet their needs, whether they want a flexible digital solution for a hospital lobby or a colorful exterior sign that includes a company's brand identity. Depending on an organization's objectives, a wayfinding signage solution for them may incorporate any or all of these elements:



Digital Solutions

A university may wish to employ a digital signage system throughout its campuses to not only provide directional guidance to visitors, students and staff, but to also convey information, news and campus updates. Companies use digital signage to provide news about current corporate activities, offer meeting schedules and even recognize staff members. Hospitals can effectively use digital signage to announce conference locations, welcome distinguished guests, recognize donors, convey emergency messages, and even provide the latest updates about critical research currently being undertaken at their facility. Digital signage has a number of advantages, including their flexibility, ease of use and interactive capabilities to further engage your visitors and staff.



Exterior Solutions

The first step in welcoming a visitor to your facility is to ensure that they actually find your facility. Exterior signage should not only communicate your organization's brand identity but also be appropriately sized and strategically installed to ensure maximum visibility. The exterior signage must also properly guide visitors to the appropriate entrance location to help them start their interior experience in the right place.



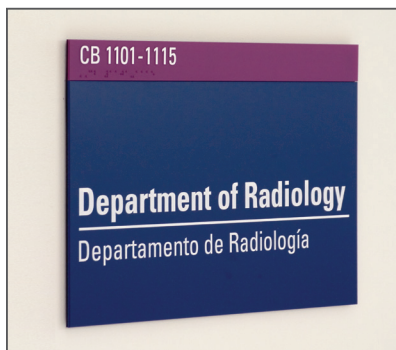
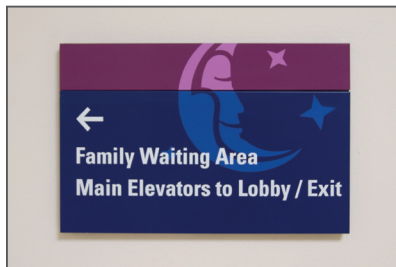
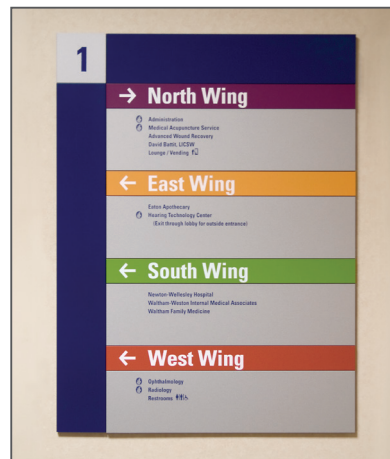
Interior Solution

Building directories, room signs, hallway signs, restroom signs – all of these should be developed and created with care and forethought so that they achieve their objectives of helping visitors and staff locate their respective destinations with little or no fuss while also extending your organization's branding and design throughout your facility. In addition, interior wayfinding must also take ADA code requirements into consideration so that the desired solutions are fully compliant.

In 2003 Children's Hospital Boston (CHB) began a multi-year expansion and reorganization project that would reflect the hospital's commitment to expanding its services to patients and providing a world-class facility recognized throughout the world for innovation and healthcare leadership. Part of the plan involved creating a cohesive and logical wayfinding system throughout a campus that had grown significantly in size and breadth over nearly a century. The many expansions and upgrades over the years had created a hospital with a confusing layout that generated undue stress and disorientation among patients and staff alike.

ASI worked closely with CHB to design and develop a flexible, comprehensive wayfinding system that could easily accommodate the many changes that the hospital layout would undergo as the renovation took place. ASI's modular Infinity System allowed for changes in color scheme and faceplate replacements as departments and staff relocated during renovations. With its versatility and ease of installation, the system provided the perfect solution in this rapidly changing environment.

The complexity of the CHB reorganization required the development and installation of nearly one hundred sign types and over 15,000 signs overall during the course of the project. To facilitate the order fulfillment of such a massive task, ASI created a unique online catalog system that allowed the client to quickly order additional signs using preformatted templates that reflected the colors and design of previously ordered products. The system thus not only expedited the order and delivery of new signs but also further maintained consistency in the facility's overall branding objectives.



The Business Benefits Of A Great Wayfinding System

As if helping your visitors find their way to their destination weren't enough of an incentive, here are five business benefits to creating and implementing a proper wayfinding solution:

- 1. Increased productivity and efficiency:** Proper signage can quickly and easily direct visitors to their respective destinations without having to interrupt staff for directions, thus freeing up your employees' time for more productive work. You can also minimize the number of patients who arrive late for their appointments because they got lost.
- 2. Improved quality of visitor and staff experience:** How many times have you heard someone complain that they will never visit a facility again because it was so user-un-friendly? Proper signage will help ensure that your visitors will come back to you again and again as they discover how easy and stress-free it is to navigate your facility.
- 3. Enhanced visibility of your facility:** If people don't know where you are or how to find you, they can't do business with you. Good signage will not only locate where you are in a space, but also direct visitors right to your door.
- 4. Brand visibility and reinforcement:** Organizations spend a lot of money and time developing a unique brand that reflects their values and differentiates them from their competitors. The brand is thus not only a company's calling card but a visual reminder or message to the world of its commitment to its customers. A great wayfinding system will not only direct visitors throughout a facility but also extend the organization's brand through color, font, graphics, or a combination of all three. Visitors will thus have numerous "contact points" with the company's brand, strengthening their experience with it and reinforcing their overall impression of their visit.
- 5. Reduced maintenance and administrative costs:** This is where doing it right the first time, i.e., choosing the proper signage at the beginning of your project rather than at the end, contributes directly to the bottom line. Good signage that reflects your facility's unique needs and layout will take into account not only the current structure but also future contingencies such as expansion, merger, renovation, rebranding, or staffing changes. For many facilities anticipating rapid changes, for example, a modular or digital system will be much easier and more cost-effective to maintain and/or replace than a fixed installation.



If you're interested in developing a wayfinding solution for your company or organization, visit ASI's website at www.asisignage.com, email us at marketing@asisignage.com, or call us at 1-800-274-7732, to request a signage consultation. ASI has 45 years of experience designing

and installing wayfinding solutions to companies and organizations around the world, including hospitals, educational institutions, and nonprofits, and can help you develop the best and most effective wayfinding system that will meet your needs.