

Implications

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Graphic Design and the Built Environment

Graphic design may seem unrelated to the built environment. However, consider the logos and signage used on the interior or exterior of a building, the signs used to direct passengers using transportation, the design of an exhibition, or point-of-purchase displays in a retail space. Have you ever noticed an environment that reflects the color, shapes, or tone of a logo? These are just a few examples of how graphic design and its sub-disciplines permeate the built environment. Understanding the subtleties of how graphic design components influence the way we experience spaces can create a seamless integration between all designed elements, ultimately impacting the user.

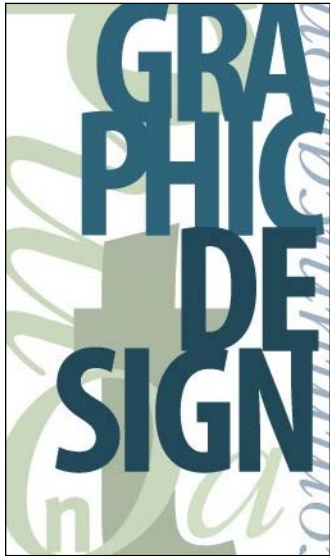
Taking this idea a step further, consider buildings that have to accommodate multiple businesses, groups, cultures, or ages within one structure. Each entity must portray a strong identity to differentiate themselves from others. A logo, signage, interior design, architectural massing, and other factors become crucial for developing a unique and individual identity for that firm. Each aspect affecting the built environment must work together to create a successful

identity. These elements must relate to the actual service and product for a successful and memorable user experience.

An excellent example of the interaction between architecture and graphic design is the identity of the University of Minnesota's Weisman Art Museum (<http://hudson.acad.umn.edu/>). In this instance, the graphic designer translated the physical properties and form of the building, designed by Frank Gehry, into a logo identity for the museum. Architecture informed graphic design to create a symbol that heightens the memorability of both the logo and the building.

By being attuned to the subtleties and sophistication of the client's goals and objectives, as well as existing structures, a graphic designer can develop elements that share properties (color, form, size, etc.) that ultimately aid in creating a consistent, successful user experience. While no two components of a designed system are the same, a graphic designer provides a fresh translation that aids in building a deeper identity.

—Randy Pierce, Adjunct Faculty
University of Minnesota



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InformedesignSM
Where Research Informs Design

Wayfinding: Which Way to Go?

Have you ever entered a building for the first time and searched a business directory, looked for signs pointing out your destination, or followed room numbers to find a location? These activities are examples of wayfinding, or the process of navigating in a new, unfamiliar environment. Probably when you were trying to find your way in that unfamiliar building you thought to yourself, "I wish there was a clear sign pointing the way," or, "wow, that sign was really hard to find and read."

As a designer of the built environment, these obstacles to wayfinding are important issues to address in the schematic phase of the design process. Factors such as floor plans, the placement and type of signage, visual access, user type, and the use of symbols or textual graphics are important to consider when designing not only the tools that occupants will eventually use to navigate the space, but also when designing the structure and interior.

Because of the important role that signs, text (typography), and symbols can play in wayfinding, it is crucial to involve a graphic designer in the signage design process. By working together, designers from different disciplines can create environments that are easy to navigate. Be sure to search Informedesign (enter the term wayfinding in the Search Research Summaries box) and you will find 11 research summaries concerning wayfinding. Here are a few:

Signage:

"Unreadable Signage Can Cause Problems for Older Adults" — *Journal of Interior Design*

Occupant Type:

"Wayfinding for Children"

— *Journal of Environmental Psychology*

"Wayfinding as an Individualized Experience"

— *Environment and Behavior*

Interior and Outdoor Environments:

"Navigating the Interior Environment"

— *Journal of Environmental Psychology*

—*Kate Bukoski, Graduate Research Assistant
University of Minnesota*

Working With a Graphic Designer

Graphic designers have a variety of specialized skills and expertise that benefit clients. One service that a graphic designer can offer is the development of an identity system. You may be interested in creating a new logo and image for your firm, or one of your clients may be reassessing their public image as part of strategic planning. An identity system may be exactly what these situations call for. But, what is an identity system?

An identity system is just that, a system of visual communications developed for a product (anything from toys to computers) or service (from interior design services to industrial manufacturing) that conveys a particular image. The system includes a series of designed pieces, or touch points, such as advertising, brochures, direct mail pieces, annual reports, a Web site, and business system (logo, wordmark, letterhead, and business cards). By having a consistent form or shape, color(s), typography (see the article below), photography or illustrations, and copywriting, the elements of the system work in concert to build a consistent tone for the identity.

But, what do these elements do? The various touch points of the identity system disseminate and market the product or service. Each element is designed to convey and reinforce the objectives of the project, which are defined by the strategy and goals of the client. In turn, the identified strategy and goals ultimately further the company or organization based on its unique qualities and strengths. Further, the strategy takes into consideration the competition.

How is the identity created? Creating a new identity is a collaborative process in which the graphic designer and client must work together. The image that is developed will bridge the gap between the intangible (the public's perception of designed elements) and the tangible (the physical elements). As an expert in creating and understanding visual communication, the graphic designer works to ensure that every gesture within the identity system ties into a purpose that reflects the strategy and positioning of the client and meets the functional objectives of the project.

The positioning and strategy are identified and shaped in a collaborative process in which the



client's core competencies and the competitive landscape are evaluated and considered. The graphic designer then takes the client's goals and strategy and holistically translates them into an approach, or concept, that guides and shapes every aspect of the project, from

typeface to color to the size of printed materials. The finished products that a graphic designer delivers will offer more opportunities for success by recreating, emphasizing, and extending the client's business strategy. This in turn creates a stronger identity and brand persona for the client.

Today we have an “experience economy,” where the built environment is a product in and of itself. We are living in a post-technology bubble where corporate scandals are rampant. As a result consumers are especially critical and aware of all products and services. It could be devastating if a consumer believed that there was a big difference between their experi-

ence with a product or service and its portrayed image. It is crucial that the brand or persona presented to the public through designed elements is consistent and truly reflects the nature of the product or service. Working together with a graphic designer to create an identity is the first step.

There are many excellent examples of graphic design, interior design, and architecture complementing one and other. Take a look at these familiar places:

- The Nike swoosh informs the interiors of Niketown stores. (www.nike.com)
- The London Underground's familiar red circle with a blue bar provides signage for passengers. (www.thetube.com)
- The form of the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty are reflected in the logo for the New York City Visitor's Bureau. (www.nycvisit.com)
- The golden arches inform every aspect of the McDonalds' experience (www.mcdonalds.com)

—Randy Pierce, Adjunct Faculty
University of Minnesota

Following the Rules

So you're at the tail end of working with a graphic designer or branding professional in designing a new identity for your firm or a client, and they hand you an identity system manual.

First of all, what is this thing? To help you understand the identity system and to aid in the maintenance and upkeep of your new image, or brand, your graphic designer has prepared a useful manual illustrating the dos and don'ts of working with the system. The manual will likely contain pages describing the correct font, size, and leading (space between lines of text) to use in all business communications, the correct sizing and placement of a logo or identity mark, the amount of blank (white) space to leave

around a logo or identity mark, what not to do with the logo (stretch it, screen it behind images, etc.), and more.

Next, you might think, what do I need this for, I've got my new logo, letterhead, business cards, and signs - I can surely figure out how to use the logo! As your graphic designer will inform you, it is crucial that you maintain the integrity of the identity, or brand, to present a holistic, unified image to the public. While you may think that the "rules" set forth in the manual are strict, following them will have long-term positive effects on the recognition and presentation of your new image. Additionally, they will save you time and energy. Why recreate a business memo form from scratch each time you sit down, when you can use the designed template? Surely you want to present an image to your clients and the public that is professional, consistent, and uniform. Following the identity system rules will help you achieve these goals.

Just remember that as you are an expert in a particular area, your graphic designer or branding professional is an expert in developing, implementing, and managing identity systems.

—Kate Bukoski, Graduate Research Assistant
University of Minnesota

Legibility: Evaluating Printed Text

The key to communicating clearly and effectively through printed text is legibility. You may use this word in your everyday life, but in reference to typography it means the way in which individual letters and words are understood, or how easy is it to read a word, sentence, or paragraph. For example, have you ever glanced at a document or sign and misread it, only to take a second look and realized that the letters you thought you saw were not what was actually presented? Visual and reading impairments

aside, the problems you had reading that text concern legibility. If typography is set well and legible readers will not be forced to reread.

Loosely defined "typography" refers to the style, arrangement, and appearance of characters and symbols on the printed page. Translation: the nuts and bolts of setting alphabetic characters and any related symbols (numbers, punctuation, etc.) on a page. When Europeans discovered printing in the 15th-century the process involved individual characters that had to be placed and spaced one at a time. The process was labor intensive and required specialized skills. Imagine having drawers full of characters the size of this text, and selecting and spacing each individual character in this paragraph.



Through the centuries printing has improved. Today computers help set type and have streamlined the printing process. However, while the process of getting words to paper has become much easier, the technicalities concerning setting type, or typography, have not diminished. The computer is only a tool that can help manage the various factors concerning how type should look when printed.

While typing up a document in a word processing program can never replace the technical skills of a typographer or graphic designer, it is helpful to understand some of the basics of typography. Following are a few guidelines and an introduction to some type basics that can improve the way you communicate with others.

- Avoid setting sentences, paragraphs, even head-

ings in ALL CAPS. The lowercase characters' ascenders and descenders help readers quickly identify words. ALL CAPS removes visual clues for readers and impedes legibility.

- Avoid using "fancy" fonts for large bodies of copy. The font you just adore with the curly frills or rounded ends may be appealing, but it impedes legibility by altering the familiar shapes of letterforms. Stick to the basics when typing a document and reserve that fancy font for something else.
- Never force justify text. Force justifying is when a paragraph is stretched or shrunk to fit a specific space - the last line of a paragraph is then FORCED to span the entire length of the space. The result can be a short word that has lots of extra space between each letter making the word VERY hard to understand.
- Avoid justifying text when the space is narrow. For example, when you have a one-inch wide space do not justify because words will be forced to span the space, making the paragraph, and your valuable text very hard to read.
- Always use ONLY ONE space after a period. Two spaces after a period are a remnant of the typewriter. The computer has a much more sophisticated system for working with type. Move into the 21st-century and with one space after a period!
- The next time you are reading something consider how easy or hard the text is to read. Would it help to have more space between the lines (leading), or a larger type size? Making minor adjustments can have a dramatic impact on legibility!

About Typography

Ascender: the part of a character that extends above the meanline

Guidelines: typographers use these lines to aid in character alignment.

Capline: the height of capital letters

Meanline: the height of lowercase letters measured with the letter x

Baseline: the bottom of lowercase letters measured with the letter x

Descender: the part of a character that extends below the baseline

Type size: measured in points, the type size is actually a bit larger than the tallest or longest characters of a font

Notice that parts of the letters dip below or above the mean- and base-lines. This is called **optical adjustment**. If rounded letters stayed within the guidelines they would look too small!

The mission of Informedesign is to facilitate interior designers' use of current, research-based information as a decision-making tool in the design process, thereby integrating research and practice.

Leading: the space between lines of type measured in points - the name comes from actual bars of lead that were historically used to space metal type

While these guidelines just glean the surface of typography and legibility, being more aware of these issues will improve the way you communicate with others and help readers understand information quickly and clearly!

—Kate Bukoski, Graduate Research Assistant
University of Minnesota

Graphic Courtesy of:

Kate Bukoski



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