

SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RETAIL WAYFINDING BEST PRACTICES



Retail wayfinding—heavily driven by analysis and best practices—is set apart from other wayfinding initiatives. Profitable stores tend to be meticulous record-takers and constant tinkerers, always tweaking approaches in an attempt to attract customers. At the same time, there is an adherence to long-established methods that note the complex interplay between merchandising, distribution, promotion and customer experience.

This dynamic and ever-growing field, then, is rife for study. *Retail Wayfinding Best Practices*, developed by the Sign Research Foundation, does just that. It explores the way retail methodologies impact wayfinding, complete with numerous case studies highlighting creative and positive results.

3 TACTICS THAT IMPACT

STRATEGY AND STORE DESIGN

Wayfinding begins with the development of a strategy for managing in-store customer experience.

- **Psychology of shopping:** History has helped retailers understand what motivates shopper behavior—and what influences their decisions to purchase. But this area is changing based on new customer expectations of a holistic experience.
- **Store layout and signs:** While the overall strategy for store layout has not changed, some companies have grown famous at breaking traditional store layout models and redefining the role of signs to support them.
- **Experience design:** This relatively new field helps companies transform from creating products/services to packaging experiences. It requires consistency between the wayfinding hierarchy of websites, marketing materials, signs and physical stores. Consistent brand nomenclature and terminology across media is a core strategy for retailers looking to improve their overall image with customers.

CASE STUDIES

While many of the retail wayfinding concepts presented in the report are cutting edge, a number of retailers do employ them—and well. The case studies included were based on recommendations from leading design and retail experts, and analyzed with consideration to overall organizational strategies.

Strategy and Store Design

Wegmans™

Integrates a traditional supermarket layout with a central “street” market.

Clifton Market™

Reduces store clutter with digital signage, interactive kiosks and clear display.

City Creek Center™

Contrasts elaborate gateway elements with simple and highly legible signs that help shoppers navigate parking and key amenities.

Effective Retail Signs

Shake Shack™

Type and icons define both the exterior identity and the interior wayfinding, informational signs and packaging.

Walgreens™

Walgreens focuses on vertical separation to make signs more visible in flagship stores. There is a clear separation between floor fixtures and signs highlighting each area, as well as a rigorous consistency of sign heights.

TD Bank™

Tight integration of marketing, signage and fixtures reduces clutter and maintains organization.

Read the Full Report at www.signresearch.org/retailwayfinding

RETAIL WAYFINDING

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE RETAIL SIGNS

For many years, signs were considered the most disposable part of retail stores. Now, with an eye toward the growing importance of customer experience, signs are considered a vital investment that must be treated with the same care as other fixtures.

- **Legibility:** Stores increasingly use modeling software to analyze viewing corridors. Effective stores also focus on the use of more legible type, scale and contrast when developing signs.
- **Dimensionality:** Stores are beginning to incorporate sign innovations developed for exterior architectural signage for in-store wayfinding programs. This includes the use of channel letters, projecting signs and awnings.
- **Modularity and material quality:** Modular sign systems have always been an integral part of store signage, but are now sometimes linked to store merchandise fixtures, even becoming part of the same system.
- **Illumination:** With new LED technologies, stores are transferring exterior illumination approaches to the inside of stores, utilizing both internal and external lighting methods.

RETAIL DISCIPLINES

Signs alone do not create effective wayfinding in retail environments. Successful store navigation requires bringing together architecture and display to create complete environments that both direct and inform.

- **Window and visual displays:** Signs strongly support this central retail discipline. In recent years, increased transparency of store architecture through removal of enclosed boxed windows has resulted in display being a much greater part of the overall store design, as well as a primary supporter of wayfinding. Display designers use themed displays to entice visitors into stores, serve as landmarks and promote specific sales.
- **Visual merchandising:** Signage in visual merchandising is often seen on two levels: Macro-level signs that identify key areas of the store, are relatively fixed and not easily changeable, and point-of-purchase, point of sale and promotion signs that are flexible and adaptable to the environment. Wayfinding sign excellence is often seen in the close correlation between how the macro and micro levels of signs are managed.
- **Marketing and promotion:** Marketing departments have an outsized impact on wayfinding signs in the environment. With access to high-quality large format printing, retailers are working to turn promotion into part of the wayfinding process through large-scale marketing materials integrated into light boxes, fixtures and window design.
- **Branded environments:** In retail environments, the nexus of signs, branding and architecture has resulted in stores that share design attributes from other institutions including airports, offices and residences. Signs and wayfinding programs in this environment often have greater permanence and are closely integrated with their interiors.
- **Digital wayfinding:** Digital systems have begun making significant headway in in-store networks, particularly for content-intensive retail categories like electronics and communications. The next frontier for these systems is interactive content, influenced by customer behaviors and purchases. Retailers believe that responsive content will allow them to truly realize the value of digital investment.

Retail Disciplines and Wayfinding Signs

URBN™

Each store is unique and frequently changes with new merchandise mixes. This approach makes every store visit a chance to make fresh merchandise discoveries. At the same time, the stores focus heavily on display management with consideration to how distinct products interact and how they impact purchasing habits.

Time Warner™

A combination of passive and interactive digital technologies helps communicate a complex mixture of products and services.

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