

Maximizing Value

in a Signage Program

Architectural signage should be a functional part of a facility and must blend architectural styling, ADA guidelines, brand identity, and long-term functionality. While marketing and branding are essential components of maximizing the value of any signage program, clients must also consider design, budget, maintenance, and sustainability.

All these points comprise the value offering of a signage solution, and they can be applied across many different industries, whether healthcare, educational institutions, museums, zoos, or corporate facilities.



Clients should attempt to educate themselves about how to maximize value in a signage program before approaching a vendor. Selecting the right signage partner is just as important as selecting a great designer. The designer, signage partner, and client all need to be part of the process from the beginning. They all need a seat at the table to streamline costs and set accurate expectations for delivery, which results in the best program for the client.

Steps to developing an effective signage program:



1. Involve all key players in the development of the signage program

The decision maker for your facility – that is, the marketing director, facility manager, or architect – should aim to include the signage partner as early as possible in design development. The goal of the signage partner is to advise the designer and the client about how to get the maximum value out of an architectural signage solution at an affordable price without sacrificing aesthetics and functionality. Budget and price, after all, are the overriding factors in determining what signage solution is implemented at a given facility. The only way to properly and successfully plan for a comprehensive signage solution is to make sure all key players are involved, and the signage partner is a necessary part of that team. If the signage partner isn't involved in the process, the designer and the client will often lack crucial information about a signage solution that will work and has staying power.



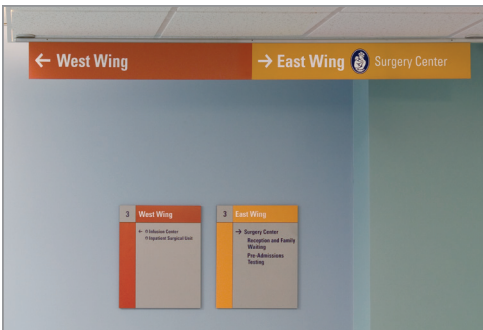
2. Identify facility needs and goals during the planning stage

It's vital that clients identify goals for their signage program. Do they plan on expansion? Clients must understand the planning stage first in order to understand the points that follow in how to maximize the value of their signage solutions. Proper planning must not be pushed aside by money considerations and worry over deadlines. There are many aspects of maximizing the value of a signage program which clients need to understand – how to comply with ADA guidelines, for example – and clients can't get the most out of their signage solution until they know what they need to do.



3. Understand program costs and signage budget at the beginning

Clients often expect that budget, time and design can all coexist. Clients can be reluctant to make changes once they have been through the design process of reviewing design concepts, proofing, revisions, and then design approval. When designers, general contractors, and clients exclude signage providers from this process, it often results in an unhappy client. Why? Since clients did not have comprehensive information about the signage solution to truly understand the cost, complexity, and long-term management involved, they were unable to make informed signage decisions.



4. Over-signing a facility is just as ineffective as undersigning

Over-signing is a fairly common mistake. It can happen when too many signs are placed in a facility, which confuses the wayfinding message, or when signage design is too extravagant to effectively communicate the message. Either way, clients lose money by over-signing. By including the signage partner early in the process and learning about value points – planning and budget, design, materials, longevity and branding – and what it takes to implement them, clients can educate themselves to choose a solution that has longevity and constitutes not just a lot of signs but an actual signage program.

Key Points to Achieve an Effective Signage Program

To maximize value in a signage program, clients must educate themselves on key areas that affect a successful program. By gathering facts clients can empower themselves to make better signage decisions for their facilities, resulting in a program that can enhance their organization and ability to maintain the program over time.

Planning and Budget

Each signage program must be established through a planning and budgeting process. Each client has to determine a budget that encompasses all costs to implement a signage program. The benefits of working with a signage partner from the beginning of a project should be obvious: better, more accurate estimates allow for better design ideas that ultimately will meet the signage goals.

Clients must understand their signage goals in terms of how they wish to maintain their growth as a business. It's unwise to focus just on low cost and quickest turn. Instead, clients should focus on maximizing value over the long term.

For example, the client may indicate a merger is in discussion that is a few years out. How does this affect the solution? Perhaps a design that allows for the change of a brand in upcoming years or choosing a less expensive solution because it will be replaced in a few years.

Other areas that will be uncovered during this process include the maintenance of a program after implementation. If frequent changes are required due to facility dynamics or planned growth – it is critical to address this due to the process and cost of signage re-orders.

From the planning phase, many important aspects are uncovered that lead to the development, implementation and maintenance of a successful signage program. Most importantly a budget can be developed to cover the design, manufacturing and implementation of the program. Benefits of starting the process out with a clear expectation with all involved parties can streamline the process, as well as ensure budgets and program goals are achieved.

Wayfinding and Codes

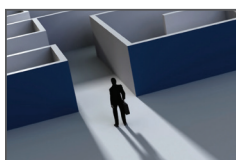
Effective wayfinding and code compliance is the foundation of a successful signage program. When visiting a facility, visitors look for signage to get a sense of direction for where they want to go. If the signage is done properly, it provides visitors with a sense of comfort. This is not done by coincidence, but through a wayfinding process. Wayfinding is a science that takes into account traffic patterns, messaging, terminology and essentially the most effective way to get someone from point A to point B. Wayfinding can be implemented through a variety of strategies from interior signage to digital signage, to graphic displays and natural elements that provide visual clues.

By proper planning during this phase, clients can ensure that the facility is not over-signed or under-signed, but that the proper signage plan is in place.

Understanding Local, State and Federal codes which impact wayfinding plans and ensuring proper identification and messaging throughout the facility is of equal importance. There are four primary types of signs represented in wayfinding solutions: Identification, Directional, Regulatory and Informational. All need to be considered and can impact Certificate of Occupancy and reduce the risk of fines due to not meeting established code guidelines.

ADA-compliance is another crucial element in planning a signage program. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that signage must meet certain standards for use by people who have disabilities. Costs associated with ADA-compliant signage, including techniques used in its manufacture, must also be taken into account so that they will fit into a client's budget.

Temporary signage that meets ADA guidelines and communicates wayfinding information can be used in a facility if there is no time to get the actual signage into the facility before it opens. This simple and cost-effective service allows the client to ensure the most functional signage solution is being implemented for the long-term, in the event the signage program was not able to be properly planned from the beginning.



Inefficient wayfinding can be costly and create stress for staff and visitors. Several studies have been done to quantify the return on investment or costs associated with wayfinding. One healthcare entity conducted research relating to wayfinding within their facilities and concluded that:

- 30% of first-time visitors and 15% of repeat visitors reported confusion
- 40% reported idle staff when patients are late
- 25% of staff members cannot find their destination within the hospital
- Average 2.4 minutes per interaction of staff time to provide directions to lost individuals
- 28% reported creating their own workarounds to compensate for the weaknesses of the existing wayfinding system

* Source – Medical Construction & Design, September/October 2011 issue

Key Points to Achieve an Effective Signage Program

Design

The purpose of architectural signage is to aesthetically complement the built environment. The design of a signage program has several influencing factors: budget, time, brand, and sustainability. Good design should be the goal of every program regardless if the project is big or small. Shortchanging the design process results in a solution that could negatively reflect upon an organization. Signage is a very visible component of an environment; it reflects the brand and impacts the user experience.

One key consideration in the design process is to determine if a highly-designed signage solution could be implemented in key areas of high-visibility. This allows for the most frequented traffic area to get the maximum benefit of a high-design solution. Also the reverse could apply to implementing a lower-design solution in less-traveled areas where the signage functionality is needed, not the extravagant design incorporating wood accents and other brand elements. This approach can ensure the complete program is designed to flow throughout the entire facility and due to proper planning and design strategy; the costs can be streamlined as much as possible.

Material selection can have a big impact on the cost and functionality as well as the cost of installation. In addition, the materials need to be evaluated so the design can maximize the material sheets to reduce waste and reduce costs.

Branding

To maximize value in a signage program, the client's brand identity must be integrated into the proposed signage solution. Clients are concerned with properly presenting their company's brand identity, and promoting the brand identity through architectural signage is just as important to get right as it is in any other form of advertising or marketing. One particular challenge when promoting brand identity through architectural signage has to do with the interior and exterior architectural style of the facility. This is where commercial and architectural signage take different paths. Commercial signage packages are heavily branded and often wrap the physical exterior of a facility - consider convenience stores and gas stations as an example. Architectural signage, by comparison, has to serve three needs: to complement the architectural environment/design, accurately communicate a wayfinding message, and

integrate the client's brand identity. Therefore, brand identity must be integrated into the initial design of any architectural signage solution.

Marketing departments want

to make sure that supports and promotes the most up-to-date version of the brand. Nobody wants to be the last to incorporate the latest logo; this pertains to hospitals, colleges, museums, zoos, corporate facilities, and all institutions that utilize architectural signage. It's an emotional point, and it's how clients garner brand appeal. There are many strategies that effectively incorporate a facilities brand, from color applications to graphic techniques. An efficient signage solution incorporates brand where possible to achieve maximum value from the brand and signage program.

Smart design is truly achieved when materials and functionality are understood. Often clients will request an application that only adds to the product and/or install cost, when a different, more effective material can be selected.



An example of how branding is a major factor in maximizing the value of a signage program can be found in the solution ASI created with ConAgra Foods World Headquarters. ConAgra, a global food manufacturing company, changed its brand identity to bring its endeavors under the umbrella of a single brand. They needed newly branded exterior signage and a renovated wayfinding system to match its new global branding image.

The shape of the signage and the colors used had to match the exacting standards of the new brand's look and feel, and the solution, internally-illuminated signage and building identification, helps to brand ConAgra as a whole while helping people better navigate their way around the corporate campus.

Key Points to Achieve an Effective Signage Program

Materials

Through sensible use of materials, signage can be created that has an expensive look without being costly. For example, the signage manufacturer can use a faux finish and get the same desired visual appearance as an expensive material. That's one of the principles behind value engineering. Value engineering can also be leveraged by engineering simple modularity and designs to make a signage solution more streamlined and thereby easier and less costly to implement and maintain. To maximize signage program value, clients must talk to signage providers about which materials will result in the best and most affordable signage solutions for their facilities.

Common signage materials include metals, plastics, and woods. For metal signs, clients could opt for aluminum, zinc, or stainless steel. Depending on the client's needs, aluminum signage might be a good choice for maximizing value. Aluminum, unlike steel, doesn't rust, and it can be customized to achieve various looks: painted, polished, or brushed. When it comes to materials, expense is relative, depending on the needs of the client. Weight, too, is a factor. Since a steel sign is heavier, it requires more expertise to install and will leave a scar on the wall if it's ever removed. With metals, the key is to strive for lightness and flexibility. Plastic, too, is durable. Wood is an aesthetically-pleasing material for interior and exterior signage, but depending on the intended usage, a woodgrain-laminate might perform better at a fraction of the cost of real wood.

Clients should consider the quality and type of paint finish as well. The effects of ambient and artificial lighting should be considered and evaluated before the final signage solution is implemented.

Longevity

To have a signage program that is more effective than the day it was installed, the program must be properly maintained. Change is expected and should be planned in the initial signage program design. However how do you create a signage program that can handle change? From the initial planning process, a signage program should be implemented that works with your facility. Common solutions include incorporating modular functionality into the signage design to allow for frequent message changes and creating an internal facility management process that audits and facilitates periodic updates to the signage and wayfinding plan.

A relevant example would be visiting your local hospital and seeing that a component of a wayfinding directional sign is taped to the wall because it needs repair or a make-shift message has been taped to the sign. This solution creates a perception of either "is this information accurate" or "this hospital is getting run-down." The underlying cause is that there is no process in place to maintain the signage program or the sign program implemented was not properly designed to meet the needs of the facility.

An effective way to ensure longevity of a signage program is to have in place a continual reordering and brand management system between internal staff members and the signage provider. This is critical to maximizing the program value and ensuring that your initial investment is in place as long as possible. If a program is not maintained, you might have to start over again from the beginning with a new program, which can be costly.



ASI developed a value-engineered signage solution that would complement the regional wood material and frosted glass accents used in the interior design of Lafayette General Medical Center. A power-coated woodgrain finish was applied to the curved accent of each wall-mounted sign and a photo-quality woodgrain image was printed on the subsurface on the insert lens. In addition, frosted acrylic accents were incorporated into the sides of signs located at key destination and decision points in the hospital.



As part of the planning process, St. John's implemented their signage standards on ASI's re-ordering site. This allowed for an established process to be in place as new signs where needed when changes took place.

Solutions for maximizing value in a signage program directly translate to tangible benefits for a client's business. Clients must examine multiple points that comprise maximizing value, and then decide which options are right for their facilities' particular needs. The more clients know, the better equipped they will be to make good decisions when choosing a signage solution that will be affordable and designed specifically for the facility's architecture.

Key Points:

1. Through proper planning, goals and budgets for the signage program can be established up-front. This will create a plan that will be the driving force throughout the process where the other decisions are made. With all parties involved up-front, you will save a considerable amount of time and money, and reduce the risk of an ineffective program.
2. Effective wayfinding has been proven to reduce costs and burden on staff. Wayfinding can also contribute to brand value, as users will have a stronger emotional connection with the brand based on a positive experience.
3. You can choose design options that work throughout your facility, depending on your unique needs, saving money by not having to go fully high-end throughout.
4. Proper branding through signage results in superior brand identity, which plays a vital role in customer acquisition and customer retention.
5. By making choices in materials that are appropriate for your facility – your facility's needs as well as the climate in which it is located – you'll save money by reducing the maintenance on your signage.
6. The greater the longevity of a signage program, the greater is its value, and more money is saved by not having to redo or implement a new solution. A fully comprehensive maintenance plan can extend the longevity of a signage solution by making reordering easy and costs known up-front.
7. Higher sales and ROI are achieved as a result of proper planning and superior branding through an efficient, well-designed signage program.



If you're interested in developing a signage program 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.