

WAYFINDING *Feature*

Finding your way through wayfinding

These days the term wayfinding has become a common phrase in the sign industry, and many architects and clients seem to understand what it means, but it wasn't always so.

Things were very different says Nicholas Hawksworth when he set up Wayfinding Consultants Ltd in 1999, which works with sign companies, planners and architects to research, develop and design, project manage and install wayfinding schemes.

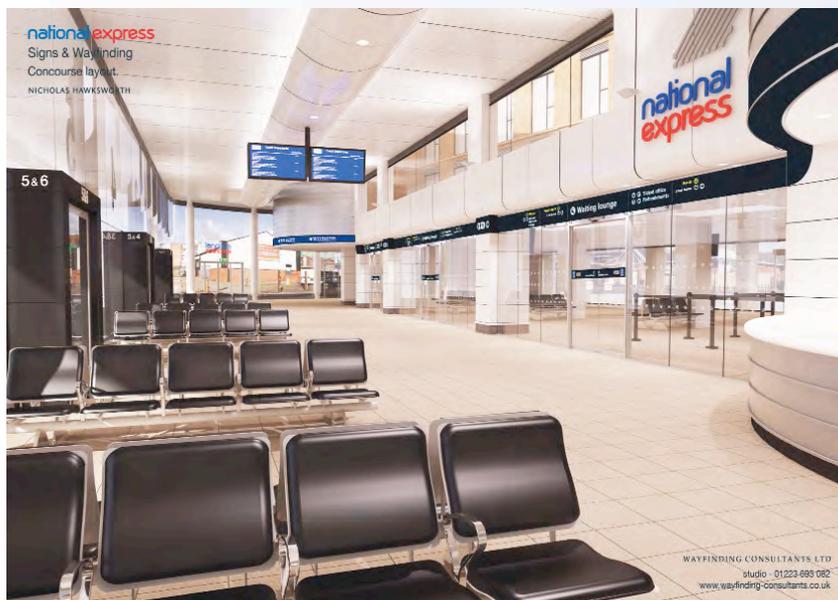
"At the beginning we often had to explain to architects and potential clients what wayfinding meant. But there was an explosion in wayfinding and accessibility signage around 2002-3, and we now find that many of our clients understand what wayfinding is, and how good wayfinding and good, well thought through sign schemes greatly improve their profile."

"It's brilliant that the market has expanded but even though awareness of wayfinding is good, we still find that the budget on a project is often very small or just added at end. Signs are in the last fix but they're often the first thing people look for and interact with. Sign companies and sign / wayfinding consultants need to be involved earlier," he explains.

Nicholas says many customers these days now look at the wider picture and accept the need for expertise to produce solutions, of which in terms of a journey, sign are a significant part. One trend he highlights is the move away from standard off-the-shelf systems to bespoke signage.

"We promote bespoke to our clients rather than off-the-shelf systems so we can control typographic layout and effectively integrate the design to the architecture and landscape."

Trevor French is Sales & Estimating at Simplex, a trade only supply company where wayfinding systems make up a significant proportion of the business.



Wayfinding solutions from Wayfinding Consultants Ltd.

He says: "Each customer wants their own individual identity and people are moving away from flat standard signs to more modern styles with greater variations. 'Flavour of the moment' is curved wayfinding signage."

"Popularity of bespoke wayfinding signage is definitely on the rise but the market for standardised products is far from dead. We supply for lots of contracts, especially around colleges and universities where they go for traditional fingerposts, pole and plank and directory types."

"Things can change quickly and we often have to advise clients to allow scope for extra names to be added or things to change," puts in Trevor.

Digital printing revolutionised the sign industry, and wayfinding is no different. Digital printing has enabled wraparound text, pantone colour matching, and given greater design freedom; and its affordability has led to the advent of disposable and adaptable wayfinding signage and more short term displays.

Lesley Coleborn, European Product Manager – Sign Systems & Displays at Spandex, says "The need to update the message regularly is what determines the type of wayfinding solutions that customers choose."

"The communication world is moving at a rapid pace and the demand for more information is being driven along with that. These days you walk into a reception or exhibition hall and you expect to have lots of information readily available. Now more things such as electronic displays, tracker screens, and LEDs can be put in wayfinding displays and they can be updated regularly, even hourly. It's very exciting, almost scary, but in a good way."

Nicholas agrees, saying "Customers expect more and are being delivered more. This is the Information age; we're all more switched on and used to reading and understanding maps and following different types of signs and wayfinding devices"

"A catchphrase at the moment, and not just in the sign industry is 'Convergence Technology', which is where a device does many different things, such as the multiple applications on an i-pod or a monolith type sign that gives information not just on where you are going, but also other local attractions, and an opportunity to interpret local history, all in many different graphic, visual and digital ways."

But how much information is the right amount to include?



Curved Wayfinding signage, 'Flavour of the moment', from Simplex.