



Righting our Directional Sense with

WAYFINDING

A consulting firm shows why one size doesn't fit all in wayfinding projects.

In considering wayfinding design for a complex organization, we often think of an equal playing field—with all visitors to the site utilizing the wayfinding signage in the same way and deriving equal benefit.

However wayfinding experts will tell you that the reality is there is a great deal of diversity in how we approach navigating through an environment.

Add variables such as age, disabilities, and other challenges, and the system is no longer one-size-fits-all.

Enter wayfinding consultants. Their job is to analyze the scenarios that would be most difficult for a range of populations and create solutions that will meet the location's needs.

Carpman Grant Associates (www.wayfinding.com) of Ann Arbor, Michigan was founded in 1986 by partners Janet Carpman, Ph.D., and Myron Grant, with the goal of providing wayfinding services to organizations with large, complex

facilities where everyone (customers and staff alike) has trouble finding their way around. And their work here can prove inspirational to your shop when it comes to wayfinding.

“Our goal is to reduce the stress of disorientation for users and the costs of disorientation for owners,” says Carpman. “We are passionate advocates of wayfinding ease for everyone—from those who are able-bodied and in possession of good perception and thinking skills to those for whom wayfinding is particularly difficult.”

Specifically they aim to pay special attention to people with disabilities, elderly people, people for whom English is a second language, people who cannot read, people who are directionally challenged, and others.

Working closely with Dick Nicolson of Nicolson & Associates for their sign design needs, Carpman Grant Associates' services run the gamut of wayfinding offerings—from architectural design review to detailed wayfinding analysis, plan-

ning, and implementation (design of signs, maps, and wayfinding-related programs), as well as ongoing wayfinding system management.

Their clients include hospitals and medical centers, museums, universities, and government buildings.

“Organizations come to us with all kinds of wayfinding needs,” says Grant. “They may want to improve customer satisfaction and decrease complaints about wayfinding, or they may be planning a new facility and want to be sure it will be easy to navigate.

“Or they may have a new corporate identity and need to re-design their institution’s signage, or they may be wondering whether or not wayfinding technology—such as smartphone apps, digital signage, and kiosks—can solve disorientation problems in their facility.”

Finding Awareness

In recent years, there’s been an uptick in awareness of wayfinding as malls become more complicated and hospital sites merge to form even larger complexes.

Carpman says that professionals are almost always familiar with the term and understand its importance, and these days, many so-called “ordinary” users also know about wayfinding.

“However both groups tend to expect that disorientation can be completely remedied by signs,” she says. “They don’t understand how aspects of design (site planning, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, etc.) and operations (terminology, training, maintenance, etc.) affect wayfinding.

“While well planned, designed, and implemented sign systems are essential for wayfinding ease, there is much more that can—and should—be done.”

Look at State-of-the-Art

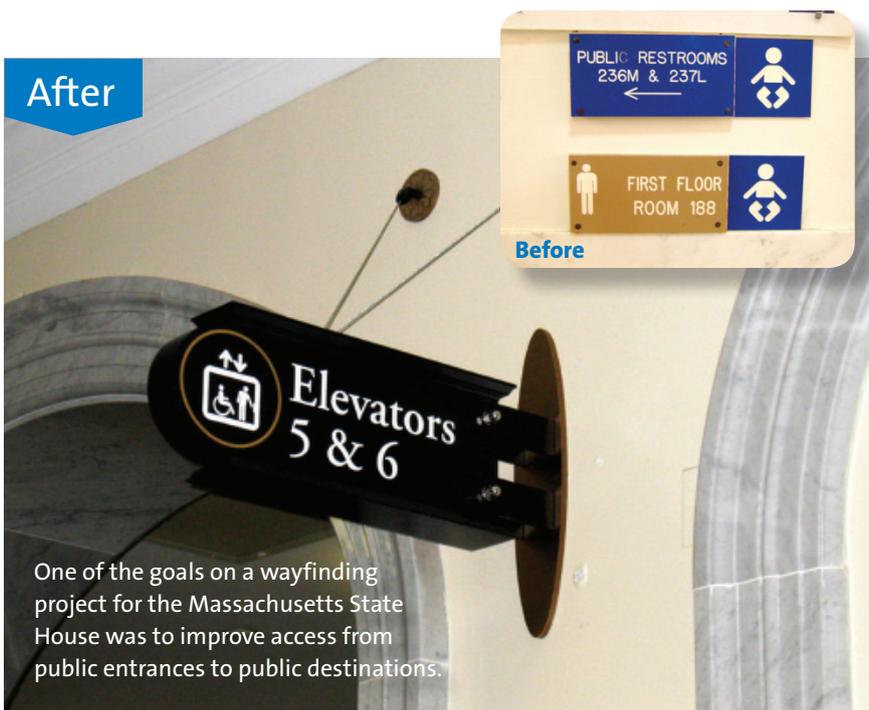
Today every industry utilizes some form of wayfinding, whether it’s a company that helps employees navigate, a university that directs students and visitors, or an airport that communicates essential information on terminals, gates, and other airport features.

“Clients understand that the wayfinding bar has been raised. They can no longer serve customers well if their facilities are time-consuming, frustrating, and confusing to navigate,” says Carp-



Clients come to Carpmann Grant Associates for a variety of wayfinding needs: to improve customer satisfaction, to place signs in new facilities, for rebranding purposes, and even to incorporate new technologies.

Successful wayfinding systems require more than signs—they also require good design and the proper terminology and maintenance.



One of the goals on a wayfinding project for the Massachusetts State House was to improve access from public entrances to public destinations.



Before

RETURN TO SIDEWALK
AND TURN LEFT FOR AN
ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE

On the Massachusetts State House project, Grant and Carpman, together with design partner Nicolson Associates, created a cleaner “You-Are-Here” map system.

man. “The state-of-the-art in contemporary public facilities is to understand and meet user needs and expectations and to provide the best customer experience possible.

“Making it as easy as possible to find, navigate, and exit their facilities is part of living up to that commitment.”

What is also prevalent today is new technology being incorporated into wayfinding, such as digital sign displays. But are these added features substantial improvements or just “pizzazz?”

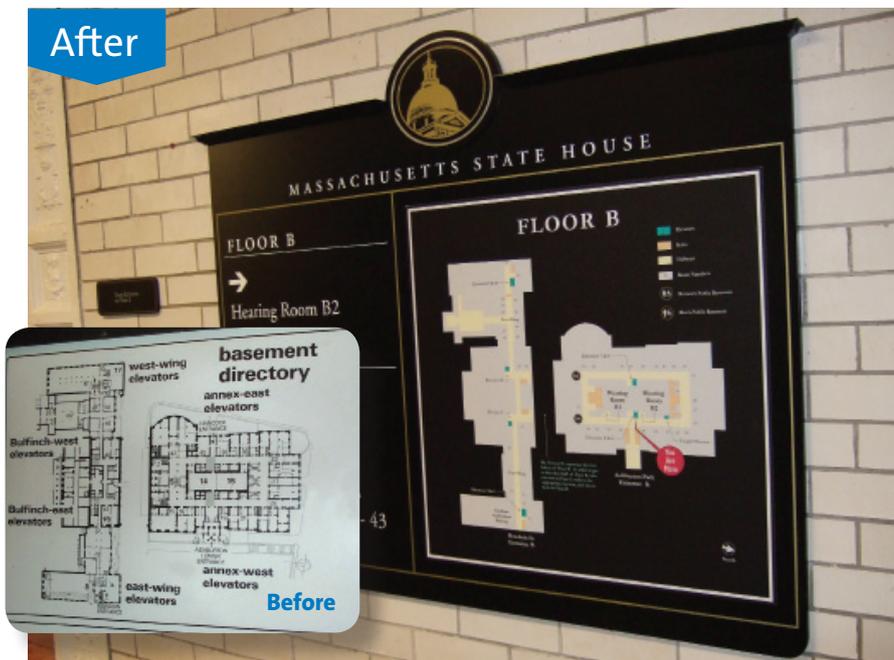
“Technology can be beneficial in helping people navigate, but its effectiveness depends on a number of factors,” says Grant.

“These include whether or not users prepare in advance (good in theory), the accuracy of the directions or maps on display (often accurate, sometimes less so), the legibility of the graphics (varies), etc.”

Just as a number of factors determine the effectiveness of wayfinding technologies like digital signs and apps, these state-of-the-art aids should also be one of many tools used in creating wayfinding.

“We don’t see traditional signs and maps disappearing anytime soon, but we anticipate them becoming better integrated with the new types of wayfinding technologies,” says Carpman.

Grant agrees, “Technology is most



After

Before

MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE

FLOOR B
→
Hearing Room B2

FLOOR B

basement directory

west-wing elevators
annex-east elevators
east-wing elevators
annex-west elevators

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useful when it's considered one of an arsenal of wayfinding tools, but it's not a panacea."

Design Intent Drawings

The first stages of working on a new wayfind project include moving through several iterations of sign design with the client, followed by a bid package that includes sign location plans and message schedules that tell the fabricator where the signs are to be located and the text for each sign.

Design intent drawings (DIDs) and performance specifications are also drawn up. "DIDs let bidders know how we expect the signs to look, the materials to be used (including durability requirements), and to some extent, the fabrication techniques that should be employed," says Carpman. "Our specifications allow each shop to make adjustments that optimize their strengths in a way that makes the signs better and more economical."

In working with fabricators on sign development and installation, Grant and Carpman prefer to include only pre-qualified, invited bidders who are capable of fabricating the project.

"The pre-qualification process typically requires prospective bidders to answer questions about their business practices and policies, as well as their fabrication, installation, and project management capabilities," says Grant. "We are sensitive to how much effort goes into creating a bid, so we like to make sure that all participants stand a real chance of winning the job."

Once the bid is awarded, they work closely with the fabricator, taking the first step of walking through the site with the client together to review each sign location.

"The fabricator provides finish samples and prototypes as requested in the bid documents," says Carpman. "They also provide pen-plots of each sign and thorough shop drawings for each sign type. The pen-plots, which can also be inkjet prints, are proofed for spelling, layout, and typography quality.

"Shop drawings are reviewed for fabrication techniques, sizes, and materials, as well as mounting and installation methods. Some sign types require a stamped drawing from a structural engineer. It is the responsibility of the fabricator to acquire the stamped drawing."

Throughout the fabrication and installation process, Grant and Carpman remain available to answer questions

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and resolve concerns. Once substantial completion has occurred, they perform a punch-list review.

Stately Wayfinding

Beyond the for-profit sector, non-profits such as museums and government buildings present special challenges for wayfinding design.

One notable wayfinding project that Carpman Grant Associates worked on was for the Massachusetts State House in Boston. As a multi-use public building, it houses the governor's office, offices for all state senators and representatives, chambers for the state Senate and House of Representatives, meeting and hearing rooms, and event spaces.

"The State House is also the number-one tourist destination in Massachusetts, as it contains many art, historical, and cultural artifacts and treasures," says Grant, "therefore it serves a large number of diverse visitors who have widely varying missions."

Built in 1798 by architect Charles Bulfinch, there have been additions over the years, including a rear annex in 1831 and east and west wings built from 1914

In recent years, there has been an uptick in an awareness of wayfinding and its importance.

through 1917. Set on over six acres, the state complex overlooks the Boston Common, the oldest park in the U.S.

For this project, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had several goals: provide better access to the State House for all citizens, improve access for people with disabilities, address security concerns, respect the historic architecture, and ideally create a model wayfinding system for other state buildings.

"In addition to a host of contributing factors, two features made wayfinding especially difficult at the State House," says Carpman. "One, the annex and the main building do not connect on some



After



Before.

The biggest challenge was to respect the historic design of the architecture, (including an eighteenth century font style), while providing the quality, durability, and functionality of a contemporary wayfinding system.

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You are Here: Incorporating Wayfinding Ease into Projects

According to Janet Carpman, Ph.D., and Myron Grant of Carpman Grant Associates, the following are several important considerations to factor into a wayfinding project:

- ☞ Wayfinding ease can be improved even in the most challenging architectural and operational environments.
- ☞ Sign and “You-Are-Here” map design can achieve high levels of function and aesthetics.
- ☞ Wayfinding implementation can be phased.
- ☞ Needs of people with disabilities can and should be addressed by a wayfinding system.
- ☞ Users and managers should be involved in wayfinding system assessment and planning.

- ☞ Ongoing audit/evaluation is needed as situations, locations, and priorities change.
 - ☞ Making wayfinding as easy as possible for all users is a fundamental part of serving citizens who use public buildings.
 - ☞ Be respectful of the needs of all users and of the client’s budget and other project constraints/realities.
 - ☞ Do your best to prevent marketing/advertising information or artwork being placed where wayfinding information is needed.
 - ☞ Strive for information comprehension and legibility.
- For more information, visit www.wayfinding.com and www.directionalsense.com.*

floors, although room numbering could be interpreted to indicate that they do so.

“And two, tightened security as a result of the terrorist attacks in 2001 has left only three of the original twenty-one entrances open and the main public entrance—leading to key tourist destinations—closed.”

As part of their work on this project, the firm drew up detailed wayfinding analyses of the exterior and interior physical environment and conducted interviews and focus groups with visitors, staff, and management.

The analyses found that the public entrances were difficult to find, internal circulation was problematic, direct access from public entrances to public destinations was non-existent, most signs and maps were out of date, wayfinding was hard for people with disabilities, and that exits were tough to find.

With these findings in mind, Grant and Carpman designed a wayfinding master plan. With design partner Nicolson Associates, they also created new exterior and interior signs, as well as a cleaner “You-Are-Here” map system for the State House.

“The sign design challenge was to respect the historic design of the archi-

itecture, including colors, details, and an eighteenth century font style, while providing the quality, durability, and functionality of a contemporary wayfinding system,” says Grant.

The feedback on this project has been overwhelmingly positive, with an emphasis on the ease the change has brought.

“People *finally* understand where they’re going and can figure out how to get there—no small feat in a building notoriously disorienting for the thousands of tourists, legislators, lobbyists, and others who pass through it every day,” says Patrick Reed, former deputy superintendent for administration in the Bureau of State Buildings for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

What this classic wayfinding project revealed was that nothing can replace the solid training and years of experience that goes into planning a wayfinding project for a large, historic site with many variables. [SBI](#)

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