



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Making My Way - Wayfinding

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Welcome

Wayfinding refers to the ways in which people and animals orient themselves in physical space and navigate from place to place (Source: Wikipedia). Wayfinding provides a methodology for people to find their way to and around a destination. The term "wayfinding" was first used in 1960 by architect Kevin Lynch in his book, *The Image of the City*.

Subtle but effective use of wayfinding cues will create an innovative meeting experience for participants. Use this issue of *Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events* to find your way around the topic of wayfinding.

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Wayfinding Defined and Designed

After Lynch coined the term, “wayfinding”, environmental psychologist Romedi Passini expanded the concept to include signage and other graphic communication, clues inherent in a building's design, space planning, audible communication, tactile elements, and provision for special-needs users. (Passini, 1984)

Wayfinding is the process of using spatial and environmental cues to navigate through an environment. Properly designed, a wayfinding system integrates with the surrounding architecture, landscape, interior design and lighting, making it easier for people to access and understand the environment.

Basic goals when designing a wayfinding system include:

- Allowing people to know where they are, find the best route, recognize the destination and find their way back
- Creating clues that are appropriate and legible
- Developing a unique system that functions well
- Integrating the system into the overall architecture and aesthetic
- Communicating to a multilingual audience

Blending wayfinding elements into key communications like advertisements, marketing brochures, registration, and Web sites provides meeting participants with the information they need - even before they arrive on site.

Why this Way?

Why is wayfinding important? Most organizations strive to hold meetings that are user-friendly and member- or employee-focused. Wayfinding systems help achieve that goal. By eliminating disorientation and enabling wayfinding, you create well-designed and well-managed meetings.

More specifically, a focus on wayfinding improves:

- Functional efficiency
- Accessibility
- Safety
- Feelings of comfort

Good wayfinding decreases:

- Frustration and stress
- Late arrivals
- Time spent giving directions

Wayfinding During Site Visits

When viewing a potential site for a meeting, most people unconsciously consider wayfinding elements. Architecture and design elements on site are the first level of

wayfinding clues. Effective architectural and design wayfinding clues include:

- Building layouts
- Corridors
- Lighting
- Use of color
- Use of patterns
- Use of texture

All these clues allow people to quickly grasp and understand the environment.

On site visits, check for:

- Clearly identified arrival points
- Delineation of areas (meeting spaces, public spaces, etc.)
- Memorable landmarks along corridors and at key decision points
- Consistent lighting, floor coverings and architectural finishes in specific types of spaces

Sites with good wayfinding are created through a collaborative effort of design professionals--architects, designers and sign makers. The site will help shape the experience for meeting participants.

Wayfinding Meeting Systems

A wayfinding system for meetings incorporates branding, signs, maps and directional clues that tell participants where they are, where they want to go, and how to get there.

When determining what types of wayfinding elements you need for a meeting, start with these design issues:

- What is the function of a meeting wayfinding system? What are the needs for this meeting?
- Who is the audience? Are they residents or from out of town? Is there more than one user type? How will each navigate the space differently?
- What is the sequential context? In other words, where are people coming from? Where might they be headed? How will they be using the various wayfinding elements?
- What is the medium? Will it be printed, viewed on the computer? What size will the final piece be?

Building a Better System

Your wayfinding system may consist of some or all of these elements:

- Signage
- Maps

- Directions
- Symbols
- Audible clues
- Landmarks
- Trails
- Tactile communication

Don't limit your wayfinding strategies to signage only. Wayfinding is using the entire surrounding environment to help people get around.

Signage

People scan signs very quickly. If they can't find the information they need, they'll look for another source of information. Signs need to be easy to see, read and follow. Their design and positioning should be consistent. Well-designed signs group and emphasize information. They link text and arrows clearly and use color appropriately.

Carol Sconzert identifies the types of signs found at meetings:

- Identification – used to establish a destination or to define the activities as belonging to the meeting. Example: Event Name, names of places or functions “Speaker’s Lounge”
- Informational – provide background or information. Example: Exhibit Hours
- Directional - assist attendees in moving safely and efficiently. Example: signs with arrows

(Sconzert, C. 2005. In G. Ramsborg (Ed.), Professional Meeting Management (5th ed.). Page 438. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.)

In addition, when planning a meeting you may also need to consider signs for internal and for external use. Or whether it is necessary to have signs for vehicles and people on foot.

Signs should be consistent across these factors:

- Typefaces
- Type sizes
- Design
- Names
- Colors
- Symbols
- Positioning/Locations

While this issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events won't touch on all these factors, it is worthwhile to remember a few basics in sign design.

Typefaces: No single typeface provides optimum legibility, but sans serif typefaces are easier to read on signs than serif typefaces. For signs, you should:

- Use a bold sans serif typeface with a large x-height and thick stems
- Use upper case for the first letter and lower case for the rest of the word

Names: Names, locations and destinations should always be listed in a consistent, understandable and logical way. You can list them in one of the following ways:

- In alphabetical order
- By function
- By direction on directional signs
- By floor

Arrows: How text relates to the arrows will affect how easy directional signs are to use. Arrows should:

- Be clearly linked to relevant text
- Show the appropriate direction
- Not be separated from text by too much white space
- Have a consistent style, size and position on all signs

Positioning: Signs should be located where people need to make a decision. Locate signs:

- At a consistent height so people know where to look
- Where people approaching from all possible directions can see them
- Close to eye level wherever possible so people with visual impairments can read them from a close distance
- Where people can stop and read them without causing an obstruction

Maps and diagrams

A well-designed map will be a great wayfinding aid for many people. A simple site diagram can help them understand the meeting site and see where they need to go.

Maps should show:

- Important details
- Text in a legible size
- Landmarks or prominent site features

Check the final product for readability and impact. Ensure that color is used effectively and consistently throughout.

You may want to consider using 3-dimensional diagrams. 3D diagrams are especially useful if there are changes in level at the meeting site.

Written directions

Depending upon your meeting or your participants, you may find it beneficial to include written directions. This is especially true if a location is especially difficult to find.

Write directions in bullet points. Directions should:

- Be short and simple enough to remember
- Include road names (as appropriate)
- Include times and distances between stages
- Include landmarks or features people will recognize
- Refer to what the signs on the route and at the site will say

Participants may ask for directions from on-site staff, staff at area hotels or restaurants. Depending upon the scope of your meeting, ensure that staff working in places proximate to your meeting are aware of your meeting and able to assist your attendees with directions.

Symbols

Symbols or icons can work by themselves or in conjunction with maps, signs or other visual representations. At their best, symbols can contribute simplicity, clarity and personality to a wayfinding system.

There are some internationally recognized symbols that are useful for signs. AIGA, a professional design association, developed 50 symbols that are available on the web, free of charge. Signs are available in EPS and GIF formats at <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm?ContentAlias=symbolsigns>. International Symbols is shareware that features generic symbols, pictures, and drawings that can be used for international signage. The free software can be found at http://www.download.com/International-Symbols/3000-2185_4-907871.html

If you create new symbols for your site, their effectiveness will depend on:

- How easy understood the new symbol is
- How the symbol appears on signs in terms of size and legibility
- How complex the meaning of the symbol is

You should test new symbols to find out if people understand them. Check the legibility of the symbols from the distances they are to be viewed. Also, if your audience includes people from other cultures, determine if the symbol signifies something different to them.

Another common mistake is using too many symbols. This will cause confusion just as color coding breaks down when too many colors are used. While there is no set rule on how many symbols can be effectively used, pre-testing will help you avoid this mistake.

Audible Communication

Audible communication plays an important role in wayfinding. Audible wayfinding clues includes verbal instructions, public address (PA) systems, elevator chimes and water fountains.

When planning a meeting, examine the site for any audible wayfinding elements.

- Are visitors or guests greeted prior to stepping up to the information or check-in desk?
- Can the staff easily describe a route to a likely destination for your meeting?
- Are house or self-help telephones available at all check-in/information desks?
- Are staff (airport shuttle drivers, bell staff, and wait staff) able to help guide visitors to their destinations?
- Are the elevators equipped with audible chimes?
- Are there audible landmarks, such as water fountains, in the lobby or other waiting areas?

Many people would rather ask for directions than use signs. The information staff give is a key part of your wayfinding system. It is important that directions are accurate and easy to follow. Staff giving audible directions must use names that are consistent with those used on signs and maps at the meeting site.

Depending upon the size and complexity of your meeting, you may need to provide information for staff to provide verbal directions. Or you may need to provide additional written instructions for staff to hand out. You can determine whether verbal (audible) or written descriptions are necessary based upon:

- The number of changes in direction and floor level along the route
- Whether there are landmarks they can refer to
- Whether signs on or in the buildings supplement the instructions
- Whether they can divide the route into three or four instructions

You can create audible clues during your meeting through the use of music, by locating certain locations near a water fountain, or by using audio logos to signify the end to a presentation.

Other Wayfinding Clues

Other wayfinding clues include landmarks or trails. Your meeting may or may not take advantage of outdoor landmarks or trails. However, even inside, look for landmarks to help your attendees navigate the meeting site. Venues may establish "shorelines" and "trails" between major destinations using materials having differing resiliencies, such as concrete and carpet. The meeting site may use texture to differentiate between different areas. The site may have "rumble strips" at the landings of stairs and escalators. Tactile communication, achieved by textured floor coverings assists all visitors, not only the disabled. Other tactile communication includes raised letters, Braille and textured door knobs (to differentiate between public and non-public spaces).

Color

In developing wayfinding elements, color may help your meeting participants more easily navigate your meeting.

When using color-coding, it should be:

- Identified as a color-coding system, not just as decoration
- Explained in a legend
- Used consistently on all wayfinding information, such as maps, signs and on architectural and interior features
- Perceived easily especially for first-time attendees or people with a visual impairment

Other tips:

- Don't use colors that could be confused with safety sign colors.
- Don't use more than five colors.
- Don't use colors that are not sufficiently different from other colors.
- Don't use white with yellow, instead always use black or a dark color with it.
- Don't use two variants of the same color, such as dark blue and light blue.

Freebies: [12 Additional Wayfinding Tips](#)

Freebies: [12 Additional Tips for Wayfinding Success](#)

1. Coordinate all wayfinding strategies into other communications like marketing materials, banners and websites.
2. Communicate clearly and consistently throughout wayfinding elements.
3. Standardize names for all buildings, services and destinations, and display them consistently on all graphics applications.
4. Use easily understood "plain" language.
5. Establish consistency in sign placements and graphics layouts.
6. Size messages and signs appropriately for viewing distances.
7. Furnish generous spacing between letters, words and message lines.
8. Provide an orientation point such as a North indicator, a "you are here" star.
9. Provide participants with wayfinding information prior to the meeting.
10. Include wayfinding details in confirmation letters to speakers.
11. Select letterforms and color combinations that comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines. If you have attendees with visual impairments, consider those needs.
12. Train on-site staff to mark individualized paths on hand-held maps for attendees.

More Freebies:

If you want to learn more about the underlying theory of how people navigate...by landmarks, routes or maps, please email me for this extra Freebie. It contains a few tips about gender differences too! (You know, men asking for directions...)

stinnish@ameritech.net or ([People and Directions](#))

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be working with the International Association of Conference Centers to present a culinary teambuilding program open to all meeting planners on the afternoon of Thursday, March 21 at the Marriott Oak Brook Hills (3500 Midwest Rd, Oak Brook, IL 60523). If you are interested in receiving an invitation to this event, please email me at stinnish@ameritech.net, ([Culinary Teambuilding](#))

Or see me in action at the following conferences:

HSMAI's Affordable Meetings Mid-America
April 11-12, 2007
Navy Pier
Chicago, IL
[HSMAI's Affordable Meetings Mid-America](#) or
http://www.affordablemeetings.com/mid_america.html

HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West
Tuesday, June 19 & Wednesday, June 19, 2007
San Jose McEnery Convention Center
San Jose, CA
[HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West](#) or <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html>

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

Virtual T.I.M.E. and T.I.M.E. Gone By

Many back issues are posted on my website at www.suetinnish.com. Or if the issue is not on the website, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues ([Back Issue Request](#)):

2007

Chaos & Meetings (January)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March), Building Bridges (April), Positive Posters (May), Cruises (June), Moving Knowledge and Talent (July), Relaxing Meetings (August), Keynotes (September), Podcasting (October), Unique Meeting Venues (November), Deja View (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post- Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child care (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication (March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August), Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

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