



Enhancing interiors through graphic design to maintain a strong institutional identity

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Graphic design can contribute more to the branding of an interior than the obvious logo above the reception desk. It can make creative use of existing materials, allowing clients to achieve their design goals even within a tight budget. And it can help them establish and maintain a strong institutional identity while making visitors and employees feel welcome and at home.

A recent project for Moody's, a venerable financial services firm that had decided to give up its historic headquarters in Lower Manhattan for a set of floors at World Trade Center 7, is a case in point. Given the fact that the company logo would no longer be prominently displayed on the outside of the building, a creative way was found to instill the interior with history, creating large-size murals of bonds and other financial documents in the elevator lobbies and in a conference center. This approach had grown organically out of the clients' holistic design approach, which had started out with a much more basic signage and wayfinding assignment.

Most companies will engage a graphic design firm to create a consistent signage and wayfinding package to help plan how people move through the space. To ensure that the system is flexible enough to be updated quickly, easily, and economically, standards and guidelines are typically developed that will allow the client to maintain the basic look and feel of the design as space use and designations change. For a recent financial services client, for example, Design360 created a set of templates that could be easily updated in Microsoft Word.

Allowing graphics to become part of the design or the conceptual process from the get-go is a smart way to start the project. In other words, a graphic designer can be more effective, if brought on board early in the project. This ensures that signage and branding elements will be better integrated and not come across as an afterthought.

Having said that, it is not unusual to be pulled in to help with environmental graphics after a basic signage and wayfinding package has already been put in place. The reason for that can be that a client decides to step up the branding of an existing space. Open-plan office floors have a tendency to look alike, and signage and creative uses of graphics like the ones described earlier are economical and effective ways to communicate to visitors in particular what space they are in—not to mention helping them navigate through unfamiliar terrain.

In other cases, the reasons can be more pragmatic. Quite recently, we were asked to help clarify restroom access for an educational institution. Students kept ending up in the restrooms dedicated to the opposite gender, and the school finally decided to do something about it!

As with all other design disciplines, good environmental design depends on a deep understanding of the clients' needs and good teamwork, in this case with architects, facilities managers and interior designers. Another important factor is knowing when to stop. Just like in interior design, less can be infinitely more!

Jill Ayers is the creative director of Design360, New York, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540