

Place Branding

Are we here yet?



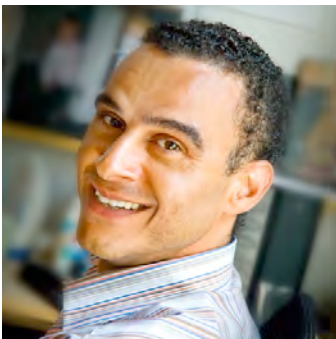
Shikatani Lacroix is a leading branding and design firm located in Toronto, Canada. The company commissions assignments from all around the world, across CPG, retail and service industries, helping clients achieve success within their operating markets. It does this by enabling its clients' brands to better connect with their consumers through a variety of core services including corporate identity and communication, brand experience design, packaging, naming and product design.

About the Author

Roberto Caruso, Account Manager.

A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design, Roberto brings diverse industry experience and a strong project management background to the SL account management team. He is extremely detailed, and his drive and prowess working with multilevel budgets has been instrumental in the design, coordination, and execution of plans for such clients as the University of Calgary, Calgary Health Region, Seneca College, and Toronto Airport Authority to name just a few.

Roberto's leadership and broad industry knowledge guarantee superior client service, and he can always be counted on to successfully coordinate and deliver projects on time, on budget and to specification.



Navigational Tools and wayfinding systems establish the feel of a place and a brand

People and Spaces

When walking through our urban spaces, parks, and recreation centres, we often neglect to stop and look around. We should take the time to notice design and the critical role it plays in establishing place branding as we travel during our daily lives.

If places were not branded with signage, how would we know when we had reached our destination? How would we fully discover and experience spaces? In environments ranging from large to small – from shopping malls to airports – stop to think about why our clients invest in designing the right wayfinding systems.

Place branding is an important means of heightening consumers' awareness of their spaces and of distinguishing one venue from another. Whether through graphical application, technology, or traditional wayfinding techniques, navigational tools and wayfinding systems establish the feel of a place and a brand, directly impacting a visitor's first impression and overall experience. Signage and design also directly contribute to place branding because they can provide a preview to all the experiences the space has to offer. Done poorly and visitors become frustrated and disconnected; done well, and wayfinding can reassure visitors while providing them with additional information and a positive brand experience.



Turns of the Century

Signs help a renovated fitness centre connect with its community.

By Peter Saunders

The city of Brampton, Ont., recently approved an initiative to expand and modernize the Century Gardens Recreation Centre, one of its growing number of community centres serving the public's fitness needs. As part of this project, the city brought Toronto-based design firm Shikatani Lacroix Brandesign (SL) on board to develop a wayfinding system that would encourage community participation and create a sense of belonging. "We responded to a request for proposals (RFP) from Brampton in the summer of 2008," says Roberto Carras, SL's awarding project manager. "Then we had to meet a fast turnaround time, with the centre reopening in the fall."



Different Strategies for Different Spaces

When designing great wayfinding systems, it's important to ensure that the overall look and feel of the signage matches the surrounding environment: a park, for example, should have signs that orient visitors quickly and identify the best routes particular to that space, such as walking paths, trails and lookouts.

The remainder of this discussion will focus on how distinctive branding strategies apply to specific types of public areas, such as libraries, parks, and hospitals.

Public Spaces

Spaces that are open to the public are the fabric of wayfinding and place branding. These spaces include an extremely wide range of environments: parks, plazas, playgrounds, and the grounds of public buildings; even college campuses and shopping malls. Each of these spaces are used differently, and each should have their own distinctive wayfinding system. For example, parks and malls each serve different functions and therefore have different wayfinding priorities.

A park is a social leisure space where people engage in activities such as roller blading, hiking, or picnicking. Therefore, a park does not require meticulous navigation; it just needs to reflect the surrounding natural space. In a park setting, wayfinding usually ties into nature through the choice of visual design and materials, such as wood finishes. Nature-inspired icons and colourful zoning for the activities found throughout the park are also effective.



People go to malls to do one thing: shop. We often go to the mall knowing what we want, so when we arrive, the most important navigational tool is found right as we enter the door: the multi-layer skewed view map again uses colour as a coding system, but in a different application. Here, it categorizes stores alphabetically and locates them in the space by colour zones.

Each environment employs different wayfinding principles depending on the environment's purpose and characteristics. The function of most spaces is to provide visitors with the ability to complete tasks. These experiences fall within the general category of recreation, which is becoming increasingly valuable in the formation of our social environment.

Wayfinding and place branding strategies for public spaces include the following tools and techniques:

- Design for the needs of the local residents
- Concentrate activities in a cohesive map
- Increase foot traffic through the space
- Maintain good community visibility from the exterior
- Section activity areas cohesively from a main path
- Arrange signs in a strategic and attractive manner
- Clearly define entrances
- Provide neighbourhood bulletin boards at entrances
- Provide 'you are here' signs at principle points
- Include directional signs to important locations or events





Case Study: Downsview Park

Toronto's Downsview Park is part of an urban development revitalization project that will last until 2015. This space will share the land with new housing redevelopment, a botanical garden, lakes, public paths, and recreational activities such as soccer and paintball. Downsview Park will also host some of Toronto's main public events like Edgefest.

Branding is essential for differentiating the latest recreation centre from other centres in the surrounding community, and for distinguishing a newly developed recreational park from existing spaces. Technology is a particularly useful tool for creating a branding experience, and seems to be the preferred formula for Downsview Park when it comes to capturing the future look and feel of the space. LED screens offer a glimpse of how the revitalized park will look through visual renderings of the future park, while functioning as an upcoming community event board as well.

On its own, technology offers a variety of design and marketing options, each with its own price tag. Lately, the use of LED screens and scrolling media screens have been an acceptable choice in terms of cost because this technology is purchased in units. Downsview Park, for example, has worked with SLD to incorporate a variety of different sized screens within their wayfinding program. This strategy is preferred by our design team because whether clients have allotted a small or a large budget for technology, LED screens can be sized accordingly--without breaking the bank.

We felt at SLD that in order to capture the variety of indoor and outdoor events that happen all year round at the park, a flexible, interchangeable medium was required. To some it's a new method of navigation.

The use of led screens is one method of adding technology trend of wayfinding

One of the most innovative wayfinding strategies involves using the environment itself as a wayfinding tool

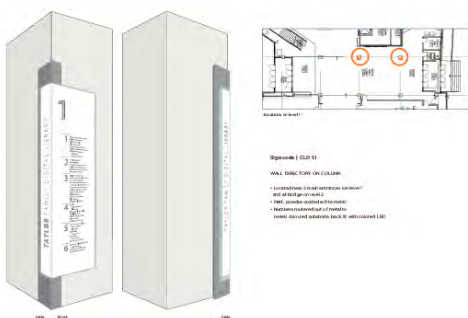
Learning Together

The design of the library should reflect the needs of its users. If the principle concern when designing libraries is to facilitate book/information searching, “the searcher must quickly learn how to use the system in order to improve the chances of finding what is sought. Wayfinding is not only important within the library; in many cases it is also important in getting to the library” (Deasy, C.M, FAIA. *Designing Places for People, pg. 70*), This is especially true when finding the library requires navigating your way through a busy metropolitan university campus.

One of the most innovative wayfinding strategies involves using the environment itself as a wayfinding tool. For example, the Taylor Family Digital Library, designed by Kasian Architects, uses our wayfinding ideas in design tied directly to the architectural elements, yet uses a punch of colour so that you don’t miss the signage.

Key wayfinding and place branding strategies to consider when designing library and campus spaces include the following tools and techniques:

- Provide library identification signs visible from any approach
- Clearly identify the entrance
- Place an information centre inside the entrance
- Provide ‘you are here’ maps at the entrance
- Provide identification signs for departments and sections
- Provide descriptive titles for zoning



design lounge
enabling thought leadership



Waylearning Through Icons and Symbols: Reinventing the Traditional

SLD has coined the term “Waylearning” because we believe that signage and wayfinding can do more than communicate place names. Signage can enhance the visitor’s experience of the brand and the surrounding environment. “Waylearning” is linked to types of technology that can provide the consumer with visual representations of features the particular space has to offer, and directions to where they can be found. Essentially, through technology, you can teach consumers to use visual cues, text, symbols and digital maps to quickly orient themselves and confirm their destination. This type of technology is also easily interchangeable and perfect for Downsview Park, because as the park transitions into its new identity, the LED technology will adapt easily in comparison to traditional static signs. By placing LEDs strategically throughout a wayfinding program such as a park, this technology can further enhance a place branding identity program.

“Although the design profession works with different materials and employs different techniques to solve their problems, they share the same client--the human race--in common.” (C.M. Deasy, FAIA. *Designing Places for People*, pg. 45)



Although LED screens will capture the viewer’s attention, there are many other tools and techniques that effectively attract people to places. Spaces are constructed to recreate the designer’s visualization of the visitor’s experience. Whether in a recreation centre or an arrival terminal at the airport, markers, marquees, icons and symbols play a vital role in establishing a great wayfinding program.



Hospitals: Symbols, Icons and Markers

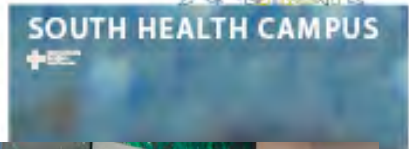
In SLD’s experience, large general hospitals are the most complex spaces for place branding and wayfinding. The hospital mix is so rich and varied, and hospital activities are so fast-paced and complex, that it is easy to understand why television audiences are fascinated by the drama of the large general hospital environment.

Hospitals themselves seem to be getting larger—changing from what was once a series of smaller buildings into a vast space that sometimes spans two or three football fields in length.

Alberta Health Sciences is a new institutional building venture in Calgary. It is approximately three football fields long, and it will not be fully completed until 2025. How do you sign a future space that is ever growing? Through the use of maps, symbols, icons, and markers. Design a modular system that is easily updated and that allows the hospital to add to each sign as each new department and clinic is added. In Calgary, one of SLD’s senior wayfinding designers is using symbols, icons, and markers as part of an interchangeable system that works much like a subway map. SLD felt that this technique could again use colour to zone the active areas open to the public, and grey areas to represent sections of the hospital that are yet to be developed. Symbols, icons, and markers appear all along a promenade, which has markers like station names. However, in this case zones are used to orient people, in a format like a block in a neighbourhood. Each zone is broken down in sections along the ‘subway map’, directing visitors along the path to specific neighbourhoods within the hospital.

Our design team considers what the consumer will see at entrances, parking spaces, and areas that are not accessible in each phase. Although it can be overwhelming to look at floor plans for spaces that are three football fields long, and developed over a number of years in phases, it helps to take a comprehensive look at immediate signing needs and at what will be phased into the wayfinding program over time. It is important for us to look at projects as a

Level 1 B Directory



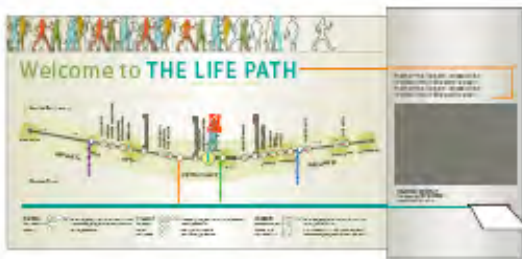
“hospitals must address the complex challenge of how to get a variety of people with vastly different needs around a large medical centre...”

whole, so all of the signage and messaging required is planned as though the whole is building is in the first phase. Once this is established, planners should start to block off the messages that immediately apply and provide signage space for the future areas.

“Hospitals must address the complex challenge of how to get a variety of people with vastly different needs to and around a large medical centre: visitors, patients, doctors, nurses, and support staff. In hospitals, all of the challenges inherent to wayfinding are present; designers must identify the site, including the approach and entrance. If there is any confusion or uncertainty about these points, it will inconvenience not only the patients, but also their friends and visitors” (Deasy, C.M, FAIA. *Designing Places for People*, pg. 102).

The following provides basics for hospital wayfinding:

- If the site is large, post signs at all corners
- Identify the building with well illuminated signs
- Mark the staff, patient and visitor’s entrances with pylons and illuminated signs
- Provide a highly visible entrance
- Develop a hospital plan that can be explained easily to newcomers
- Provide a series of ‘you are here’ maps
- Provide comprehensive colours, symbols, and sign systems to guide people through the hospital
- Equip the physically impaired with accessible tools and waylearning



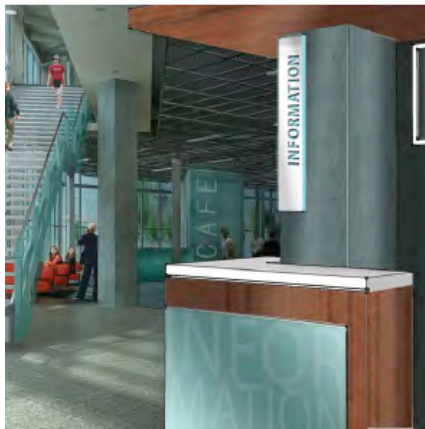
Once patients, family and friends enter the hospital, their wayfinding needs are by no means over; challenges arise in terms of integration



and continuity throughout the visitor's experience. Take for example Hamilton Health Sciences, a series of buildings located across different areas in Hamilton. Hamilton Health Science's main mission is to unify the wayfinding system, so whether a patient or visitor is at the General or at the Henderson, the entire look and feel of the wayfinding system is the same. Often in a hospital setting, people are required to move around to get a variety of tasks accomplished; the same patient may have to get an ultrasound and blood work, for example. At HHS, these tests take place in two different locations in two different buildings. A unified look is therefore essential: colours, symbols, logos and nomenclature should be continuous across different locations.



Conclusion



Spatial Branding is ever evolving. Leading the change is the investment and commitment from stakeholders to incorporate wayfinding into every new aspect of revitalization projects. Too often we as a team are brought into a project after every aspect of design is flushed out and presented as a whole; we are then left to figure out a design, a wayfinding ‘look and feel.’ This is often a mistake: wayfinding and place branding designs need to be addressed during every phase, even during the ideation and conceptual phases of a project. When the architect draws the first line of a plan for a hospital, or the landscape designer chooses the first pallet in a park environment, wayfinding designers should be right there, helping to make these decisions. If wayfinding is considered a secondary thought, the system will be difficult to implement.

When planning project budgets, wayfinding should be considered an important factor of the overall picture in terms of design. The key elements in implementing a place branding initiative are the signs-- signs that say who you are, what you represent, and why visitors should stop in. A place branding initiative should not skimp on technology, materials, fabrication, method, or execution. When investing in a space revitalization project, wayfinding and navigation should be considered a serious design need. Without it, you will never know if your there yet.

Reference Materials

Leach, Neil(ED.). *Designing For A Digital World*. West Sussex: WILEY-ACADEMY, 2002.

Castle, Helen(ED.). *4dsocial interactive design environments*. London: International House, 2007.

Deasy, C.M, FAIA. *Designing Places for People*. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1990.

For more information, contact:

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, President
Shikatani Lacroix
387 Richmond Street East
Toronto, Ontario
M5A 1P6
Telephone: 416-367-1999
Email: jplacroix@sld.com