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Three Keys to a Successful SIGNAGE PROGRAM

Following these steps allowed administrators at Brandeis University to implement a signage program that's been well received.

In the 2005-2006 timeframe, administrators at Waltham, MA-based Brandeis University implemented a strong signage program that has been well received by students, faculty, and visitors. "It serves as a great expression of our energy and spirit," said Dan Feldman, Brandeis vice president for Capital Projects.

No doubt it does. The blue and yellow signs boast folded angles, creating an edginess that's bold and contemporary. "But not so much that they will look outdated in five years," said Feldman.

How can you be sure that your signage program will be as well received? Andrew Barresi, principal at Cambridge, MA.-based Roll, Barresi & Associates, which served as consultant on the Brandeis project, has the answer to that question. He says that there are three things his firm would recommend to an institution desir-

ing a successful signage plan.

1. Think of signage in terms of campus planning. "Establishing clear, concise goals and objectives is important," Barresi said, "but consider achieving those goals in the broader context of campus planning." Wayfinding challenges are solved by fixing poor circulation, realigning roads, strengthening sight lines, and siting buildings in a thoughtful and effective way, which are campus planning issues. These have a greater impact on a positive visitor experience than does signage.

Indeed, the Brandeis program developed as an extension of a campus master plan developed in 2000/2001. The university, which was founded in 1948 and has almost 5,300 undergraduate and graduate students, had reached a point where a master plan was necessary

to facilitate future development in a logical and coherent manner.

“The campus is not organized in typical campus fashion,” explained Feldman. “It was built on the notion of small, modernist pavilions nestled in the landscape. As the university grew and spread out, and as more and more buildings were added, the campus lacked clear and intelligible organization.” The new master plan allows for future organization, and signage was included as a critical element of the master plan.

2. Identify a small group of individuals who can contribute toward the goals and objectives but also have decision-making power. “While it’s important to get input from the broader community, someone has to make a decision about



Five Crucial Elements for a Signage Program

Barresi notes that there are five crucial elements for any signage program.

1. It considers the first-time visitor. Prospective students and their parents must be able to find their way to Admissions.
2. It has a sense of timelessness. Remember that the signage will be around for many years.
3. It is integrated. It’s important for the signage to respond to the landscape and architecture. The design must take into consideration where the signage will be placed.
4. It is flexible. As departments move and new facilities are built, signage must be able to accommodate these changes to accurately assist with wayfinding.
5. It has adequate funding. There must be enough funds to implement the program, bearing in mind that it doesn’t all need to be done at once. And factor in costs for maintenance and updating for changes.

the issues that come up during program development,” said Barresi. “Establishing a small working group is helpful toward keeping the project moving forward and coming to a solution.”

Brandeis administrators used a broadly collaborative process, which is one of the reasons it worked so well, noted Feldman. “We had superb and crucial guidance from Roll, Barresi and Associates. My office, Capital Projects, organized the process, and it included everyone at various stages.” He notes that the president, executive vice president, Office of Communications (who developed the standards), Department of Campus Operations (includes Campus Safety and Facilities Services), Admissions, Development, Academy (includes academic leadership), and students were involved.

3. Always remember the first-time visitor. “Seeing signage that is clear, consistent, legible, simple, and attractive communicates to the first-time visitor that we care about you and your experience,” noted Barresi. “It says, ‘We’re thinking about you when you arrive, and we’re trying to make your experience more enjoyable and welcome.’”

Feldman agrees, observing that Brandeis’ old signage wasn’t visually distinctive, nor was it always readable. In addition, there was so much signage that it resulted in information overload and drivers not having enough time to read what they were looking for.

The new signage definitely considers the first-time visitor. The campus is divided into Upper and Lower campus. The first sign a visitor sees is divided in half. One half points to Upper Campus

and below that are five or six main designations on the part of campus. Likewise, the other half points to Lower Campus and below that are also listed five or six main designations for that part of campus.

Following Barresi’s recommendations allowed Brandeis University to implement a campus signage program boasting four benefits. First, it made the campus more welcoming and accessible. Second, it improved wayfinding. Third, it provided a unifying visual theme. And fourth, it promoted the Brandeis character and spirit. “The goals we set have been accomplished,” Feldman concluded with a hint of satisfaction in his voice. [CPM](#)



Five Tips for Signage Success

Dan Feldman, who can now say, “Been there; done that,” about developing a campus signage program, has a few tips that may benefit other administrators seeking to develop a signage plan.

1. Think about what you need and what you want. “When you know, keep that on the table in front of you as you move forward, so that you don’t lose sight of your goals.”
2. Plan carefully, with lots of input. “Make sure every voice that cares about the project has an opportunity to be heard.”
3. Select experienced consultants. “Hire people who have demonstrated that they can provide what you’re looking for.”
4. Consider durability and maintenance issues. “You’re going to have your signs for a long time, and you’re making an investment, so you need to make sure they’ll hold up well.”
5. Pay attention to the quality of fabrication. “Visit the fabricator’s shop to view prototypes and reach a level of comfort about the signage’s durability.”