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## **I**NTRODUCTION TO WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

The South African Constitution stipulates that public services must be made available equitably to all South Africans. This is a daunting mandate, which is made even more challenging by the fact that a large proportion of the historically disadvantaged members of our community are illiterate or only semi-literate. In addition, the country has some eleven official languages.

Thus, the question we have to answer is, how do we ensure that all these people, many of whom live in remote rural areas, are able to access public services and get what they need? Clearly, the first thing we need to do, before we can start explaining the nature of our services, is to help the people find us.

There are basically two stages to this process; first people have to know how to get to the building in which our offices and services are located and then they need to find their way within the building to locate the particular service they require. The first stage is normally relatively simple as most buildings can be located relatively easily by using a street map of the town or city. The more frustrating part for customers is normally having to find their way around the particular building to the relevant floor and office or room and then they frequently have to find the right queue, before anyone attends to them.

The challenge to frontline managers and staff is to make it as easy as possible for customers to access their particular services.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to help departments or components and in particular front-line offices to introduce a user-friendly wayfinding system that is effective and easy to understand. The guide is descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, it describes the options available for the implementation of a successful wayfinding system and provides some practical suggestions, but it does not prescribe a particular approach. Each department should devise a system best suited to its own needs and circumstances.

If implemented properly, bearing the customers' needs and circumstances in mind, a wayfinding system should lead to noticeable improvement in service delivery and customer satisfaction.

The guide:

- ❑ explains what is meant by a wayfinding system;
- ❑ explains why such a system is necessary and what outcomes the system should achieve;
- ❑ provides a set of guidelines for an effective wayfinding system;
- ❑ identifies various categories of signs, with suggestions on how they might be used;
- ❑ suggests how functionally illiterate and disabled persons could be accommodated;
- ❑ explains how to develop a wayfinding system;
- ❑ identifies the various role players involved in the development of such a system;
- ❑ provides key indicators of a successful wayfinding system; and
- ❑ invites departments to share their best practice experiences on wayfinding and signage.

The approach of the guide is user-friendly and it tries to avoid technical jargon and detail. It provides a broader overview of wayfinding as well as practical suggestions and attempts to give short answers to questions you may have in connection with wayfinding.

## WHAT IS WAYFINDING?

A simple definition of wayfinding is: "To find one's way to a specific destination."

A wayfinding system comprises all the elements required to help one find one's way to a specific destination. These elements could include a number of things, the most important of which include:

- ❑ signs or signage, including maps, arrows and graphic illustrations as well as words and numbers;
- ❑ a help or information desk;
- ❑ guides, including customer relations officers;
- ❑ physical devices such as hand rails, ramps, etc; and
- ❑ electronic devices such as touch pads and public address systems.

An effective wayfinding system should help a customer locate the required service point from the time he or she leaves home. In other words, it should reach out to customers, beyond the confines of the particular building or venue where the service is accommodated.

Wayfinding should not be considered a separate or different activity from traditional "signage design", but rather as a broader, more inclusive way of assessing all the environmental issues that affect our ability to find our way.

Signage means an object, mark, lettering, signboard or other visual or audible device, conveying information or a special message. Although, signage plays an important role in wayfinding, the process does not rely exclusively on signs.

However, well-designed signs, strategically placed, will greatly enhance the effectiveness of a wayfinding system. Faulty or poor sign design is frequently the reason why many visitors do not read signs, as it is often easier and more effective to ask for directions.

Wayfinding problems are not confined to signs alone, for example, adding more signs may not necessarily solve the problem. Instead, designing an environment that identifies logical traffic patterns that enable people to move easily from one spot to another without confusion, can unravel such problems. Signage cannot be a remedy

for poor architecture and illogical space planning, but a well-designed wayfinding system can help enormously to overcome the limitations imposed by “difficult” buildings.

***People who find themselves in unfamiliar environments feel insecure***

People who find themselves in unfamiliar environments feel insecure. They need to know:

- ❑ where they actually are in the building or facility;
  - ❑ what the layout of the facility is; and
  - ❑ the location of their destination,
- so that they can orientate themselves and decide where to go next.

As mentioned, en route to their chosen destinations, people are helped or hindered by the facility's architecture and signage. The success of any wayfinding system depends on how customers perceive the physical environment and whether the system is easy to use or not.

## **O**BJECTIVES OF A WAYFINDING SYSTEM

To put it simply, the objective of a wayfinding system is to provide visitors/customers with a way of:

- ❑ knowing where they are and where their destination is in relation to them;
- ❑ choosing the best route to their destination;
- ❑ recognising the destination;
- ❑ accessing the appropriate service; and
- ❑ finding their way back out.

When people cannot do any or all of these things, outside or inside service facilities (buildings/offices) they become disorientated.

Research and experience have shown that visitors are typically under extraordinary stress during a visit to public facilities. In addition, facility environments (in particular health care facilities and institutions) are often complex and intimidating to visitors and patients.

***Signage plays an important role in the first impressions customer form of the facility***

The appearance of signage in and around facilities plays an important role in the first impressions customers form of the facility. All too often, wayfinding and signage programmes prove to be inadequate and ineffective as a means of communicating building identification and directional information to the public.

It is hard to ignore the symptoms of a poor wayfinding system; people are lost, they constantly end up in the wrong place, they compensate by asking for directions, often distracting staff, security officers or other customers.

The sooner visitors feel they know their way around an environment, the sooner they feel comfortable and safe. A well-designed and implemented wayfinding system conveys a warm sense of welcome and helps visitors feel at home. It reassures them that they are in good hands, that service staff respect them and their time. By sparing visitors the anxiety of feeling lost or confused, a good wayfinding system frees them to focus on what brought them there in the first place. The result is a more pleasant experience, a more positive impression of the facility, more effective service delivery and a greater likelihood they will value your service.

If you want to pride yourself on realising a customer-driven vision and being user-friendly, wayfinding is something you should take seriously. Often, the little things make a big difference to customers.

## **LINKS TO LEGISLATION**

We have already, in the introduction to this guide, mentioned the relevance of the Constitution to wayfinding; the public service is mandated to make sure that all citizens are able to access the services they require. Without well-designed and adequate wayfinding systems, it will be impossible to meet these requirements.

## **LINKS TO *BATHO PELE***

The main *Batho Pele* principle that wayfinding addresses is, of course, “access”. Without a functional wayfinding system, it would be impossible to provide proper access to public services. But wayfinding strikes a much deeper cord, in harmony with the spirit of *Batho Pele*; it reaches out to the customer, it recognises that the customer comes first and that no matter what the situation or condition of the customer, his or her dignity must always be respected in the process of providing appropriate public services.

Wayfinding and signage cannot ignore the fact that the customer might:

- ❑ be illiterate, blind, deaf or physically challenged in other ways;
- ❑ be old and frail;
- ❑ have cultural sensitivities;
- ❑ be unaccustomed to large buildings and urban environments; and
- ❑ only speak one of the official languages, for example, Venda.

Whatever the circumstances of the customer, we should never lose sight of the fact that, while his or her right to services may be enshrined in the Constitution and reinforced in the *Batho Pele* White Paper, in the final analysis, access to those services depends largely on an effective wayfinding system that respects the dignity of all.

## OUTCOMES

A well-developed wayfinding system will have the following outcomes or results:

- ❑ Improved service delivery – because customers find the right place, building, office, queue, etc, quickly and easily, services are provided more effectively and efficiently.
- ❑ More satisfied customers and fewer complaints – customers have a more pleasant experience, a more positive impression of the facility and there is a greater likelihood that they will appreciate the service.
- ❑ Staff morale improves.
- ❑ Government service facilities are clearly identified.
- ❑ The organisation's corporate image is enhanced.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- ❑ Signage and help/information desks installed in departments.
- ❑ Lack of bottlenecks, queues at information desks and people wandering about.
- ❑ Handrails for visually impaired people.
- ❑ The presence of guides or customer relations officers.
- ❑ A decrease in the number of complaints.
- ❑ An increase in the number of satisfied customers and compliments received by the department.



## **C**HALLENGES AND RESPONSES

### **Challenge:**

#### ***A dilution of the department's corporate identity***

Public service institutions may use different wayfinding systems and especially different signage formats, which could dilute their corporate images and confuse customers.

### **Response:**

It is advisable to use standard formats, especially within a single institution or in any one department so that customers become used to the system and feel comfortable and confident using it.

### **Challenge:**

#### ***Signs become an end in themselves***

#### ***Scarce financial resources are "wasted" on costly signs***

Frontline staff and/or operational managers can become totally engrossed in the technicalities of signage and spend large amounts of time and money on making beautiful signs that are not necessarily effective.

### **Response:**

Always try to adopt the customer's perspective to ensure that the signs are functional and serve their main purpose of helping customers find their way. Ask the opinion of colleagues. A simple, well-positioned sign, made of cardboard, can be more effective than an expensive sign that is too small or difficult to read and that is placed where people cannot see it.

### **Challenge:**

#### ***Regimented service delivery***

A preoccupation with signage can lead to an autocratic approach to service delivery, which can undermine the quality of the services being provided. For example, in a hospital environment signs are very necessary to help patients and visitors find their way, but over-regimentation could undermine a caring culture and lead to a situation where patients are treated without empathy and warmth.

### **Response:**

Constantly confirm that signage meets the customers' needs. Ensure

that the spirit of *Batho Pele* remains alive and well and is not smothered by over-regimentation. Do not lose the human element in your service delivery.

## **G**UIDELINES FOR OF AN EFFECTIVE WAYFINDING SYSTEM

The following guidelines will help create an effective wayfinding system:

- ❑ Create a unique identity.
- ❑ Create separate identities for different locations.
- ❑ Involve customers and staff.
- ❑ Use landmarks.
- ❑ Create well-structured paths.
- ❑ Place signs at decision points.
- ❑ Provide visitors with a plan or map of the environment/location.
- ❑ Draw visitors'/customers' attention.
- ❑ Limit choices.
- ❑ Furnish architectural clues.
- ❑ Keep messages brief, clear and direct.
- ❑ Consider typography.

Each of these will be discussed in detail.

### **Create a unique “corporate identity” for the department or component**

The wayfinding system, especially the signage, should reflect and reinforce the corporate identity of the facility. Ways of doing this are to:

- ❑ include a departmental logo on all print communications, including stationery, signage, etc;
- ❑ always use the standard typeface as specified in the facility's corporate identity manual or, in the absence of such a manual, the facility should be encouraged to settle on one typeface and to use this consistently in all written communications, including correspondence, reports, publicity material and signage; and
- ❑ incorporate significant cultural, heritage or architectural elements from the community, town or building in the signage (this is particularly useful when creating sub-identities or separate identities for different locations of the same facility or service as discussed in the next paragraph).

The more customers are able to identify with the facility or department, the more comfortable they will be using the services being offered. If all the visual manifestations of the “corporate image” are consistently the same and all the signs are similar in appearance, it will reassure the customers and make it easier for them to find their way to the service point.

### **Create a specific identity for different locations**

Customers must be able to distinguish between different functional areas such as reception, security, display, work and service areas, within a particular location of a specific facility and between different locations of the same facility.

Clear signage is very useful in this regard, for example, a sign above a desk that reads “Information” or one on a door proclaiming “No admission except for office staff” immediately identify the usage assigned to a particular area. Other means of creating a distinction between different spaces is to use furniture layout, for example, chairs arranged in cinema style to denote a waiting room or reception area or desks placed where people are expected to fill in forms before proceeding to the next phase of service delivery are helpful in communicating the purpose of the space or location to customers.

It is very important that customers are able to identify service spaces, especially where departments share facilities.

As mentioned above, different components of the same department may wish to have their own identity without detracting from the overall corporate identity of the department. For example, within a department of health, it would be useful if different hospitals had their own identity without undermining the department’s identity. This could be achieved by incorporating unique architectural or geographical elements or themes in their specific corporate identities, including their signage. In this way patients would feel secure within the corporate identity, but comfortable in the knowledge that different services may be provided at different locations and service delivery would have been enhanced. That is after all the main purpose of wayfinding and signage.

### **Involve customers and staff:**

As wayfinding is intended to benefit customers, it is important that they

be consulted on what they require and what they believe will make life easier for them. Similarly, frontline and other staff who interface with customers on an ongoing basis and who frequently have to direct customers to service points and offices in the department or building, should also be consulted to get their input.

Some suggestions are:

- ❑ Involve customers with the development of a wayfinding and signage system that appeals to them.
- ❑ Monitor queries from customers for directions. This will help with the creation of the system and ensure the continuous improvement of the system.
- ❑ Consider the predominant needs of customers in the service area, to help determine the amount and type of signage that is required.
- ❑ Solicit wayfinding information from staff familiar with the functions of the department or component at all levels. For example, customers frequently ask maintenance and security staff for directions to get to certain service points, offices, rest rooms or specific individuals. These people are an important source of information about the "real life" of the facility and can be very helpful in identifying user patterns and destinations and understanding how a facility operates and how occupants and visitors can be moved through spaces and directed to their destinations most effectively.

### **Use landmarks**

Landmarks can be very useful in providing orientation cues to help customers remember specific locations or routes to specific locations.

- ❑ A landmark is a recognisable point of reference in a larger space, which helps customers to orientate themselves and to "know where they are". A landmark can also be a memorable place that helps one recognise one's location instantly, for example, a dam alongside the road or a well-decorated and appointed waiting room in a hospital. Landmarks provide the basis for verbal or written descriptions of locations or routes. A simple example of a landmark is Table Mountain in Cape Town. It instantly identifies one's location as being Cape Town and it is a useful reference point in directing people around the peninsula.

The following are useful tips when incorporating landmarks in a wayfinding system:

- ❑ Use landmarks sparingly. Placing too many landmarks in a space belies their usefulness as memorable and unique locations.
- ❑ Situate memorable landmarks along corridors and at key decision points, for example, statues or water features in a reception area, a particular painting or poster in a corridor, etc.

**Create well-structured paths or routes.**

Well-structured paths are continuous, have a clear beginning, middle, and end when viewed in each direction in order to direct visitors from one point to another.

Some simple pointers relating to paths are that they should:

- ❑ take the simplest and safest, not necessarily the shortest, route to a destination;
- ❑ provide the visitor with critical information in a readily understood format; and
- ❑ confirm progress and distance to a destination en route.

Landmarks are the anchors along which paths are defined. The relationship between landmarks and paths is graphically illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

## LANDMARKS

When deciding where to place signs, ask the following two questions:

❑ ***Should a sign be placed here?***

If the likelihood of a visitor making a wrong choice is high, a sign is necessary.

❑ ***What destinations should be included on the sign?***

Consider how frequently a destination is in demand, its importance or potential to be memorised (a landmark or a place that could be used as a point of reference) and how close it is. For example, a stranger to our country travelling by car from Durban to Johannesburg via Pietermaritzburg, Harrismith and Villiers, will want to be reassured from time to time that he or she is on the right route to Johannesburg, but also that the next town is Pietermaritzburg, Harrismith or Villiers, as the case may be. The road signs should confirm this. Reaching each of these towns will further reassure the traveller that he or she is on the right route to Johannesburg, while confirming progress.

**Draw visitors' attention**

Give the visitor a more extensive view in a particular direction or place an interesting or eye-catching object at the end of a corridor to draw the visitor in that direction. To draw a person forward through a main corridor, place an item of interest, for example, an exhibit, at the end of the main corridor, which is visible from the entrance.

## ROUTE



### **Furnish architectural clues**

Effective architectural wayfinding clues, such as building layouts, corridors, floor coverings and lighting, provide cognitive maps or mental pictures that allow people to grasp the environment quickly.

To furnish such architectural clues:

- ❑ Improve office layout to allow for maximum accessibility by customers.
- ❑ Clearly identify arrival points, for example by way of a reception desk, signage pointing to “entrance” or “reception”, etc.
- ❑ Simplify the geometry of hallways by, for example, avoiding obscure corners, arranging furniture practically, providing good lighting, making sure that sight lines to the reception are not blocked out by plants or furniture, etc.
- ❑ Provide convenient parking and accessible walkways located adjacent to each public entry point.
- ❑ Place elevator lobbies so that they can be seen upon entering the building.
- ❑ Make elevators conspicuous by using special lighting, finishes or orientation, for example, by ensuring that they face the entry point or foyer.
- ❑ Use consistent lighting, floor coverings and architectural finishes in primary public corridors.
- ❑ Design public waiting areas that are visually open to corridors.
- ❑ Use varied finishes, floor coverings, colours and lighting to distinguish areas/pathways.
- ❑ Ensure that floor numbers between connecting buildings are the same or integrated.
- ❑ Number levels logically. Many buildings avoid floor 13 for superstitious reasons and go straight from 12 to 14. Be sensitive to cultural preferences or taboos.
- ❑ Number rooms logically, beginning at entrances or elevator lobbies.
- ❑ Standardise names for all buildings, services and destinations.

## **MAKING YOUR OWN SIGNS – “keep it simple”**

In all signage the golden rule is K.I.S. – Keep It Simple. The following tips will help you apply the KIS principle to the signage in your wayfinding system:

- ❑ The sign message must be simple and should convey only one idea. Too many ideas compete with each other and cause confusion.
- ❑ The primary message should be brief, just a few words to get the idea across. An additional line or two may be added, but this should be secondary, not detracting from the main thrust of the message.
- ❑ Take care with the use of personal names and even component names on signs. Make sure they do not confuse the message you intend to convey.
- ❑ Use the fewest possible messages per sign. Many people simply do not have time to absorb sign messages that are long and complicated. Keep destination names short so visitors can read them at a glance.
- ❑ Messages should be easily readable and simple to understand.
- ❑ Use established pictures or graphics and colour coding together with words to facilitate comprehension of written messages. A good example of the power of graphics is the standard “No smoking” sign which simply uses the graphic device of burning cigarette in a circle with a line through it; words are in fact unnecessary.

The computer revolution has brought sign design within the reach of virtually every person who has access to a computer. You do not have to make use of a professional sign writer or signage company. With a little practice and employing some basic guidelines, you can produce your own, very acceptable signs, using the standard software on your computer.

Below we provide some useful information on making your own signs. Topics such as sign location and visibility, the message, letter size, colour, type style, logos and graphics, layout and special effects are covered. However, we must stress that, if you want durable signage in special materials such as plastic, brushed aluminium, steel, bronze, etc, especially for outdoor use, it is advisable to contact a signage

specialist. But if you do not have the budget or time to use the services of a professional, the following pointers or guidelines should help you produce very satisfactory signage, using your computer.

- ❑ Keep the number of signs to a minimum. Too many signs become “invisible” and are thus useless. If customers are presented with a whole host of signs, they simply will not bother to read them.
- ❑ Employ uniform signs in terms of colour, typeface or font, wording and placement throughout the department or component. A variety of different “styles” will not only look garish, but will tend to distract rather than instruct customers.
- ❑ Limit the number of typefaces you use in one sign to no more than two different styles. Also consider how the two type styles complement each other. Do not mix a light with a dark style.
- ❑ Popular type faces or fonts to use are Ariel, Helvetica and Universe.
- ❑ A simple rule to help you decide whether a sign is needed or not is: “If it will help customers find what they are looking for, create a sign”.
- ❑ Avoid hand-written signs if at all possible. However, in emergencies or in remote areas where there are no professional sign writers, any sign is often better than no sign at all. For example, if there is a crisis such as a flood situation or an outbreak of disease in a rural area, where large numbers of people have to be assisted at short notice, hand-written signs on a piece of cardboard can be very effective. However, guard against such temporary measures becoming permanent fixtures.
- ❑ Budget for the regular maintenance, repair or replacement of signs.
- ❑ Choose appropriate signs for your main group of clients (children, elderly, visually impaired, etc).
- ❑ In instances where the information on the sign may have to change from time-to-time, use signs with inserts that can be updated easily and cost effectively. For example, a sign on a door giving the name of room occupant. Signs with inserts reinforce the idea that certain information on a sign is changeable and temporary. Inserts have the following advantages:
  - quality typesetting;
  - a choice of materials; and
  - easily updated at relatively low cost.

- ❑ If vandalism is a problem, place signs only in high traffic areas. Regular maintenance as a result of graffiti or damage is required to maintain the quality of signage and this can be costly.
- ❑ Use simple, plain signage. Fancy or ornate signs are often difficult to understand, while customers can easily identify straightforward and uncomplicated signs.
- ❑ Provide generous spacing between letters, words and message lines. Signs with cramped writing are not easily read or understood and remember, many of your customers may be functionally illiterate.
- ❑ The writing on signs should be in normal sentence case, in other words, in upper and lower case, rather than in capital letters, as research has shown that it is easier to read messages in sentence case.
- ❑ Graphic devices such as wall and floor graphics, the strategic placement of works of art such as pieces of sculpture and paintings, are potential elements in a successful wayfinding plan.

**BLACK AND YELLOW**

## LANGUAGE USAGE ON SIGNS

In our multilingual society, the use of dual-language signage systems is often mandatory. As space for messages on signs is fairly limited, determining when and where to use the two languages and how to communicate the messages effectively, ensuring speedy comprehension, using the least possible number of words, demands careful consideration. The following tips will help you cope with these particular issues:

- ❑ Use clear and concise language. Short words and easy-to-understand phrases help to eliminate confusion in the minds of customers.
- ❑ Consider the language preferences of the majority of your customers. For example, in Gauteng you may wish to use two languages on signs, namely English and the predominant local language, which may be either South Sotho or Setswana.
- ❑ Use pictograms (symbols) to promote word economy and comprehension. For example, the “No smoking” sign, or if cameras or cell phones are not permitted in a certain area, the same circle with a diagonal line through it can be used, with the cigarette replaced by a simple drawing of a camera or cell phone, as the case may be.

The old saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words” is certainly true in wayfinding. International style symbols or a “picture language” are often more effective than words in communicating a message.

## SIGN CATEGORIES

**Signs can conveniently be broken down into the following categories:**

- ❑ identification/orientation;
- ❑ directional;
- ❑ information;
- ❑ regulatory;
- ❑ maps; and
- ❑ placards or posters.

### Identification/Orientation Signs

- *Identifying the department or component or institution*
- Identify the department or component so that it is immediately recognisable and inform customers of the available services.
- Identification signs introduce and welcome visitors to your facility. These signs should be large and easily visible at a distance. They should incorporate your corporate livery, that is, your logo and colour scheme, and they may be illuminated, if this will assist customers in finding your facility, especially at night.

A typical example of the need for illuminated signs is at a hospital, especially to indicate where “Casualties” is, as many accidents occur after dark and good, well-designed and well-lit signage can often help to save a patient’s life.

Identification signs should be placed at the primary points of entry to the department or component.

- Secondary identification signs identify particular buildings or locations on your site.
- Banners and/or bunting could be used, together with intelligent garden layout and pathways, to lead customers to the main entrance.

### Directional Signs

This type of sign is located at decision points and major routes to guide users to locations within a facility. Typically this signage involves a list of names and/or facilities, with arrows indicating path directions to key destinations.

### Information Signs

Information signs are intended to simplify the customer’s task of finding a particular facility.

- Locate a facility directory in the main lobby while overhead signs point out information desks. A printed directory should be available at each desk. Group departments alphabetically per floor heading such as “first floor” or group the names alphabetically and allocate floor numbers against each name. The latter option is often the most effective in that customers do not have to read through the names on every floor.

- ❑ Locate floor directories at major entrances on floor levels, such as lift lobbies. These directories list information pertaining to that level only.
- ❑ Directories typically contain information pertaining to the names of facilities/departments, floor levels, components/service locations and special areas.
- ❑ Staff names should preferably not appear on facility directories, but rather on individual floor directories.
- ❑ It is often helpful to use “street” and “avenue” names for sections, main hallways, major intersections and corridors of buildings. For example, a corridor in a hospital leading to the consulting rooms of medical specialists, could be named something like “Surgeon Avenue”.
- ❑ Wall-mounted directional signs/maps should illustrate the “streets” visitors are walking along, the location of all destinations on that “street” and the intersections on that “street”.
- ❑ Where elevators serve different floors, it is helpful to locate elevator directories within each band of elevators.
- ❑ Establish a floor numbering system that relates to a building's main entry.
- ❑ Installation heights are, 2500 millimetre from the floor to the bottom of a sign for suspended signs and 1500 millimetre from the floor to the middle of the sign for surface mounted signs.

### **Regulatory Signs**

Regulatory signs aim to regulate behaviour, normally in the interest of customers' health and safety.

- ❑ These signs can conveniently be grouped in the following three categories:
  - Prohibition signs in the form of a circle with a diagonal line through it. They aim to restrict access or activities and are mandatory, for example, no access (one-way), no smoking, etc.
  - Warning signs in the form of a triangle. They aim to caution and warn against definite hazards, for example, biohazards, hard-hat areas, low overhead beam, etc.
  - Information signs in the form of a square. They are used to indicate emergency equipment and facilities and to provide guidance on services, transportation and general information



such as, emergency exit routes, access routes for disabled persons, etc.

- ❑ Installation height is, 1500 millimetre from the floor to the middle of the sign.

### **Maps**

Maps have similar characteristics to most of the above-mentioned sign types. Some useful tips on using maps are:

- ❑ Place maps at all parking exits, entrances to facilities and at major decision points.
- ❑ Give a detailed printed map of the facility and services to every customer who requests one.
- ❑ Provide standardised "you are here" maps of the facility that include an overall map of the complex and more detailed maps of specific areas. These maps are particularly useful in large facilities, such as hospitals, where other types of signage can be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the facility or complex.
- ❑ Use maps depicting the entire building on one face and each specific service area on the other.
- ❑ Make a floor plan on each level for people to see as they step out of the elevator or emerge from the stairs.
- ❑ Integrate maps with building layouts, such as denoting on maps that "up arrows" mean "ahead".
- ❑ Consistency is key to the effective use of maps. The use of one consistent format from application to application reinforces recognition and orientates the visitor.
- ❑ Three-dimensional mapping (perspective or isometric) corresponds most closely to the user's experience of space and is the most effective.
- ❑ For maps displayed on walls, the installation height is 1500 millimetre from the floor to the middle of the map.

### **Placards**

By placards we mean a poster or other notice intended for display. Because they are easy to mount, departments tend to locate placards indiscriminately in elevator lobbies and against walls. This practice creates visual clutter and has the potential to ruin a wayfinding and signage system. Preferably:

- ❑ include placards in your formal wayfinding and signage system; and

- ❑ provide special or designated display areas for posters , and preferably suitable frames or notice boards, at strategic points.

## **CATERING FOR THE FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE AND**

### **DISABLED PERSONS**

Recognising that about 45% of South African adults are illiterate and that approximately 500 000 people in this country are visually impaired, of which one third are blind, it becomes clear that wayfinding systems play an important role in making public services more accessible to this section of the population.

The following section of this guide focuses on:

- ❑ audible communication;
- ❑ tactile communication; and
- ❑ tactile sign design guidelines.

#### **Audible communication**

This involves communication through verbal instruction and public broadcasting systems. Some general guidelines are:

- ❑ Use audible public address systems at facility entrances and major decision points. We only have to think how lost we would all be at airports and railway stations without the help of public address announcements informing us of the departure and arrival of planes, trains and other commuter services.
- ❑ Provide attendants, trained as professional receptionists and who are thoroughly familiar with the facility, at all public entrances and information desks.
- ❑ Provide self-help telephones at all information desks.
- ❑ Provide attendant personnel to accompany visitors to their destinations.
- ❑ Equip elevators with audible chimes to identify floor levels and services. It is interesting to recall that in the early days of elevators or lifts each elevator had a “driver” who used to open and close the elevator doors, as the were not automatic, and at each level the “driver” would announce the floor level and the services, offices or functions located on that floor. It is perhaps to be regretted that this very helpful and user friendly wayfinding service has been sacrificed in the name of progress.

- ❑ Position audible landmarks at major decision points to help locate information desks, elevators, rest rooms and other key destinations. For example a water feature with running water in a reception area is an audible landmark

### **Tactile communication**

Tactile communication means communicating through feel and touch. It includes the use of Braille, hand rails, knurled door knobs and textured floor coverings to assist customers who are visually impaired. However, many of these devices, such as textured floor coverings, for example, will assist all visitors, not only the disabled.

Some useful guidelines are:

- ❑ Install interactive audio-tactile maps at entrances and lobbies.
- ❑ Establish "shorelines" and "trails" between major destinations and information areas using materials that have differing "feels" underfoot and to the touch, such as concrete, tiles and carpets.
- ❑ Install "rumble strips" at entrances and on stair landings and escalators.
- ❑ Locate signs consistently in places where one would expect to find them – consult with visually impaired customers to ensure that the system is user friendly and effective.
- ❑ Create signs that serve a dual purpose, namely, visual and tactile communication. For example different floor coverings with different textures and colours are helpful to visually impaired and normally sighted persons.
- ❑ Tactile designs need to meet as many of the needs of as many people as possible.
- ❑ Provide knurled doorknobs where appropriate, to denote entry to service areas, stair wells, rest rooms, etc.
- ❑ Provide a raised star symbol on elevator control knobs to indicate the ground floor.
- ❑ Provide tactile signage on the inside of elevator frames to assist with identifying the appropriate level when elevator doors open.
- ❑ Provide guide rails along corridors and next to stairs and ramps.
- ❑ The minimum tactile signage required is signs that identify permanent facilities, such as rest rooms, stairs, floor markers inside stairwells and elevators and room numbers and names deemed important by the department.

The South African National Council for the Blind and the South African Blind Workers Organisation can be contacted for information and assistance with the design and manufacturing of tactile and Braille signs. Departments should also obtain the publication entitled; Code of Practice: Access of Buildings to Disabled People (Code 0246) from the South African Bureau of Standards.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A WAYFINDING SYSTEM

## STEP 1

### ESTABLISH OWNERSHIP

It is critically important that everyone in the component, especially management, takes ownership of the wayfinding system and buys into the process of devising, implementing and maintaining it. In order to achieve this, you need to:

- ❑ Get top management buy-in and commitment, including an in principle decision to make the necessary resources available. To do this you will need to explain the mandates and linkages to legislation and *Batho Pele* and convince them of the positive impact the system will have on service delivery.
- ❑ allocate the responsibility for the development, implementation and maintenance of the wayfinding system to a designated person. This person must be enthusiastic about the process and understand the impact it will have on service delivery.

## STEP 2

### ESTABLISH WAYFINDING PROJECT TEAM

Once management has bought into the system you will need to meet with fellow staff members and management to:

- ❑ select a project or wayfinding team;
- ❑ elect a project leader, who preferably should not be the same person to whom you have delegated responsibility for the system, under step one above as, at the end of the process, the team hands over to the responsible person; and
- ❑ allocate responsibilities to team members.

## STEP 3

### CONDUCT WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE AUDIT

This is one of the most important exercises as it will establish the current state of wayfinding and signage in the department so that when the desired state is defined, the “gap” between the current and desired states will become clear.

Thus, the team’s task is to:

- ❑ assess the current state and effectiveness of wayfinding and signage through interviews, public meetings, focus groups, needs assessments, facility review and analyses; and

- ❑ establish the best office layout to allow for maximum accessibility by customers.

## **STEP 4**

### **DEVELOP A PRELIMINARY DESIGN HIERARCHY**

This is where the project really becomes exciting and starts to unfold.

A design hierarchy refers to all the elements and stages in planning the wayfinding and signage system. It includes:

- ❑ a wayfinding plan – if the plan includes the use of information desks or counters and attendants to provide information and conduct visually impaired customers to their destinations, appropriately qualified individuals need to be identified or employed to fulfil these functions;
- ❑ a sign plan, including the use of corporate image and architectural clues and specifying quantities, locations and functional requirements;
- ❑ sign message and wording; and
- ❑ the compilation of design documentation.

Once this has been accumulated, you need to submit it to your principal or supervisor for review and approval. It is important to involve management at every step to retain their interest and buy-in, but be careful to ensure that their involvement is perceived to be adding value and not as a waste of time or a “rubber-stamping” process.

## **STEP 5**

### **DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

After the design hierarchy has been developed and approved:

- ❑ Expand and refine wayfinding and signage plans, paying particular attention to details such as design, lettering and typography, the use of colours, logos and graphics, types of signs, exact locations of signs and information desks, etc.
- ❑ Confirm materials and manufacturing, in other words, what materials are going to be used and who is going to make the signs.

When all the detail and costs implications have been determined, make sure that management is again brought into the loop to review and approve the final design of the wayfinding system.

## STEP 6

### COMPILE SPECIFICATION DOCUMENTATION

This is the last step in the planning phase, before one goes into production.

The following need to be finalised:

- ☐ Construction drawings.
- ☐ Written specifications.
- ☐ Tender documentation, if the actual manufacturing and installation of the signs is going to be contracted out, which is highly recommended in most instances, to ensure a professional appearance.
- ☐ Criteria for assessing tenders.
- ☐ Evaluation and approval of tenders.

## STEP 7

### MANUFACTURING AND INSTALLATION

When all the planning has been completed and finally approved and the tender awarded (if applicable), it is time for action.

The task of the project leader and his or her team now is to:

- ☐ oversee the manufacturing of the signs (in-house or contracted out);
- ☐ oversee the installation (in-house or contracted out); and
- ☐ test the effectiveness of the wayfinding system and signage.

## STEP 8

### MAINTAINING WAYFINDING SYSTEM

Once the project team is satisfied that the system works as planned, the team hands over to the designated responsible person. This person must then ensure that:

- ☐ staff throughout the facility are trained in the basics of the wayfinding system, using simple tools such as a system outline, support materials and/or an orientation video; and
- ☐ ownership is cultivated in all staff.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

For a wayfinding system to be successful, specific roles and responsibilities must be assigned to various staff members while the



system is unfolding and being bedded down. Departments should consider the following:

❑ ***Establish ownership (accountability and responsibility) for the system in a designated person***

Wayfinding and signage is part of each department's own management function. Accountability for the system can be vested in the head of corporate services, with a further delegation of responsibility to either workstudy or the facilities manager, usually situated in the provisioning administration section of the department. Alternatively, as wayfinding and signage is basically a special form of communication, accountability for the system may be vested in the head of corporate communications.

However, as mentioned at the beginning of this guide, one should never lose sight of the fact that wayfinding is not something separate from the services provided by a department or facility, it is an integral part of the service delivery of each and every department or component in the Public Service. For example, in a hospital offering inoculations against cholera, the signage telling patients how to get to the immunisation centre is absolutely a part of the immunisation process. It is not something separate that the medical staff can simply overlook, thinking that it is not part of their job, because, if patients cannot find the immunisation centre, they cannot be inoculated. The same applies to producing ID documents; if the customers cannot find the right office and the relevant queues, they cannot get an ID book.

As illustrated by the Service Delivery Chain on page 9 of this guide, wayfinding is an essential link in the service delivery process and not something separate and less important than the actual service itself. As we all know, any chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

❑ ***Wayfinding team members***

The following role players should be represented on the team:

- The accountable person (head of corporate services or communication) or the designated responsible person (workstudy, facilities manager or provisioning administration). As mentioned, this person should preferably not be the team leader, as at the end of the exercise, the wayfinding system has to be handed over to him or her.

- Representatives of the department's or facility's customers.
- A representative from workstudy.
- The facilities manager, if this person is not the project leader.
- Consultants/advisors in cases where the design and/or manufacture of signs are contracted out.

The National Department of Public Works (NDPW), which has the core function of providing and maintaining the functional accommodation needs of national government departments, is involved as follows:

- When providing new accommodation the NDPW will provide basic signage, e.g. room/door numbers, escape routes and security signs, as part of security equipment.
- As custodian of all state-owned accommodation, the NDPW's attention is required when interfering with the conformity and structure of such accommodation.
- Being responsible for all leased accommodation, the NDPW must be informed when changes to such accommodation require the landlord's approval.
- The NDPW will endeavour to incorporate wayfinding and signage as required by the client department when building new or renovating existing facilities.

Provincial Departments of Public Works have a similar role at provincial level.

## **USEFUL REFERENCE**

This guide on wayfinding and signage does not claim to be the final word or the definitive work on wayfinding and signage. It is intended to be a practical guide to help frontline managers devise and implement a basic wayfinding system that suits their needs and helps to improve service delivery. As such it should be seen as being a living document, which should be updated regularly in the light of best practice experiences of all departments.

Departments are invited to share their best practice experiences with us and are welcome to contact us for further information.