

Wayfinding

-Julie Brinkhoff, Great Plains ADA Center

Most of the time, people are in familiar surroundings and getting to a destination or through a building is fairly simple. Memory, landmarks, or a few well placed signs are all that is needed to navigate the environment. But when people are in new locations, navigation becomes much more complex and dependent on a number of cues such as maps, signs and symbols. This navigation through a new environment is called wayfinding and it is supported by systems such as maps, signage, symbols, sound, colors, mobile apps, digital kiosks, and other wireless technologies. When these systems are well designed, they greatly enhance our ability to “wayfind”. All of us, however, have probably experienced situations when wayfinding “cues” were not available or poorly placed and the resulting frustration and anxiety of not being able to find our way in a new place. Now, imagine what navigation would be like for someone who is blind and in a new location with no wayfinding cues; or a person using a wheelchair trying to find an accessible route with no signs indicating where accessible entrances or elevators are located. It becomes obvious that people with disabilities need wayfinding systems that provide support for their specific needs.

Fortunately, wayfinding systems have grown and improved significantly over the past few years. Design professionals and assistive technology specialists have found an increasing number of ways to combine different types of environmental “cues” to enhance wayfinding for people with disabilities. Technologies such as Radio Identification Finding (RDIF) literally let structures speak directions to people who are blind. Digital maps allow users to quickly locate accessible bathrooms and elevators on multiple floors. Airport trams now routinely “speak” destination locations.

The result of these improvements is not only better wayfinding for people who are blind or have mobility impairments, but better wayfinding for a wide range of populations including the elderly, people with learning or cognitive disabilities and non-English speakers. The principles behind wayfinding systems for the general population and for people with disabilities are becoming integrated into a universal design model...one in which the focus of design is how to use combined systems to support and enhance wayfinding for everyone!

To learn more about wayfinding, visit the resources provided on this page. Examples of wayfinding supports are provided on the following page.

[What is Wayfinding?](http://segd.org)

segd.org

[Top 5 Tips for Placing Digital Signage](http://visix.com)

visix.com

[Digital Sign Content Best Practices](http://University of Michigan Digital Signage)

University of Michigan Digital Signage

[Universal Design New York: Wayfinding](http://Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, University at Buffalo, SUNY)

Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, University at Buffalo, SUNY

[Wayfinding Design: Hidden Barriers to Universal Access](http://InformeDesign, University of Minnesota)

InformeDesign, University of Minnesota

[Wayfinding](http://Project Action, Accessible Community Transportation in our Nation)

Project Action, Accessible Community Transportation in our Nation

[Designing a Wayfinding Strategy: A Common Sense Approach](http://travelwayfinding.com)

travelwayfinding.com



“Meeting room 15 is to your right 30 feet. Men’s restroom is behind you 55 feet.”

This audio guide, developed by Macular Degeneration Support, provides audible directions based on prior mapping of a facility. The map can be easily downloaded to a user’s smart phone.



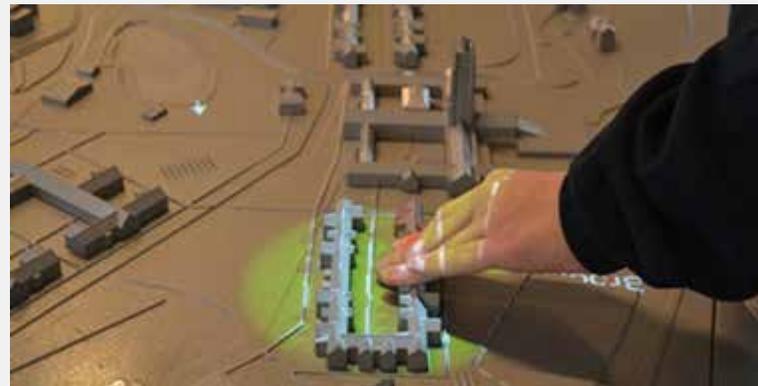
Color is used here to make it easier to remember and identify different floor levels.



A “pathway” helps people navigate this airport. The color and high contrast is particularly beneficial to people with visual/perceptual impairments. High contrast paths and signage can be especially helpful for the elderly in wayfinding.



Note how this digital kiosk is placed in the reach range for wheelchair users.



The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA) and Touch Graphics create 3D maps that vocalize information about a building as well as how to get there when touched.