

# Tricks-of-the-Trade in Wayfinding

There are several steps sign professionals can take

today to help protect themselves throughout the current economic storm. For example, one can choose to work with a high-quality product that won't breakdown; select a modular sign system to work with (one that will provide a wider answer to all of your project needs); choose a "green" system to maximize attractiveness and appeal and, of course, to contribute to the conservation of the environment; and decide to offer (or outsource) ADA signs to their customers.



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The following is a review of several tricks-of-the-trade that can help you better include ADA and wayfinding solutions for your customers.

## Conforming to ADA Standards

As a sign professional, you have to stay on top of the latest government regulations when it comes to ADA signage. I turned to Matt Williams of DIXIE-GRAPHICS ([www.dixiegraphics.com](http://www.dixiegraphics.com)) in Nashville, Tennessee, to get his opinion on the best way to stay updated. "The easiest method is through the [www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov) Web site," he says. "This site lists both ADA accessibility guidelines that were more than twenty-five states, as well as current accessibility standards."

An additional tool presented by Reuven Rahamim of Accent Signage Systems, Inc. ([www.accent signage.com](http://www.accent signage.com)) in Minneapolis, Minnesota is using his company's manual *How to Create Great-Looking Interior Signage Using the Raster™ Method of Fabrication*, which is updated annually and is therefore a key to staying on top of government regulations. There's also a page on international contacts for information on other countries around the world.

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Sign professionals looking to create ADA signs should know how to be legally compliant with both federal and state laws. Each state has the right to legislate more restrictive regulations than those set by the federal laws. Accordingly, as a sign professional, you should view federal laws as the minimum standards for compliance and be sure to look up your state regulations to ensure compliance with ADA code.

Once you've studied the rules and regulations, our ADA experts have a few tips to help you overcome some of the basic challenges you may face.

Williams states that the main issue to keep in mind is the materials and finish chosen. For instance: Will the material chip or crack under the intended weather conditions? Will the materials used tarnish or fade? How easy is it to replace the contents of the sign (if needed)?

Rahamim recommends using UV-grade material for interior signage, as many buildings utilize fluorescent lights that emit UV rays that may result in color fading. He also points out that the consistent use of design elements is key to the production of signage. This includes the use of one typeface style, a unified color palette, and consistent placement of signage elements—such as text, Braille, and pictograms.

Finally let's make sure the signs are actually readable to the visually impaired:

☞ Wording should be to the point, without containing abbreviations and punctuation.

☞ Signage should be arranged in a standard order (with pictograms and symbols on top, followed by text and the Braille at the very bottom).

☞ The characters within the sign must contrast with the background mate-

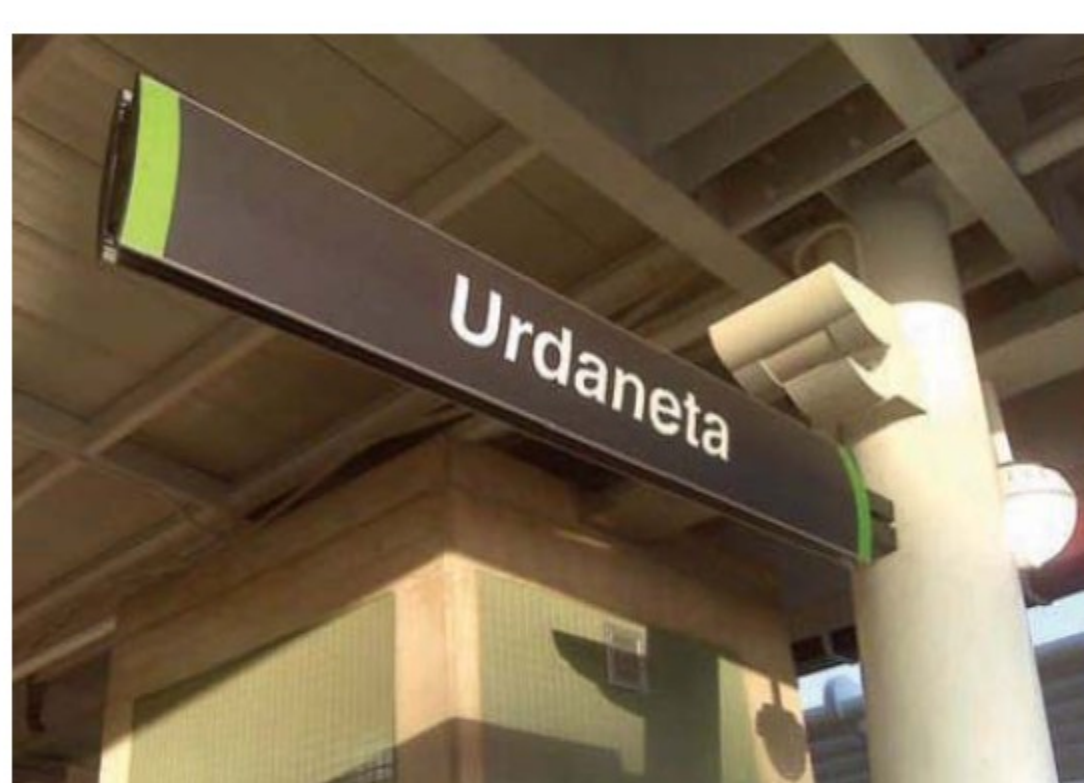
rial so that they're noticeable and readable. For the visually impaired, the wrong combination of contrast can leave signage impossible to read.

☞ Lettering should consist of uppercase letters in a sans serif font to ensure readability. The usage of highly decorative lettering may be visually appealing, but this doesn't lend to easy tactile reading. Contrast between the raised and recessed areas would be the main concern here.

☞ Make sure the room is well lit or at least in the vicinity of the sign.

## (Way)finding the Solution with Modular

Another important tool is learning how to choose a modular sign system. Even if you consider yourself a "custom shop" or a "specialized manufacturer" for specific types of signs (like electric or vehicle graphics), it's a good idea to



be able to offer a modular sign system. It's only a matter of time before your customers request that you supply them with wayfinding solutions.

It would be wise to invest some time and research when choosing a favored system, as switching systems too often can prove to be a waste of time and money spent on training, planning, and correction of errors. With this in mind, how does one choose a single, preferred system with the number of systems being offered? The following points should help you choose the system that

is right for you:





**Samples.** The first step is to ask for free samples. A company that will not offer free samples indicates that their marketing strategy and overall level of awareness to service are low and should be avoided.

Check to see if the system offers reasonably priced sample kits. Some companies will offer their kits at cost or below cost but will ask you to cover the cost of shipping. Look for a vendor that offers a number of sample kit options to fit most budgets. Some will even offer

to customize the kit to your specific needs.

**Design.** Although there are exceptions, in most cases—whether the system is flat concave or convex shape—it's important that it boasts a modern, contemporary, and clean look.

**Quality of materials.** It's not always easy to assess the quality of materials used by the manufacturer, so make sure to request data sheets that reflect the specifications of the system, its ability to withstand the elements, and its compatibility with indoor/outdoor use.



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How difficult is it to paint or anodize? Check the stability of the components before and after assembly.

A sense of a "flimsy" finished product may show a divergence in the system components. Don't hesitate to put the system components to the test by checking their resilience. Unfortunately they'll have a good chance of being mistreated in the field.

In addition, check for compatibility with the types of graphic and sign making equipment you currently have available in your shop, without making further investments in new technology and equipment. It's advisable to choose a flexible system that allows for a wide range of graphics and techniques. Systems that have been designed to "frame" or "hold" other substrates usually prove to be more flexible and accommodating both to the customer and the designer.

**Simplicity.** Try to choose a system that's simple to use, assemble, and install. Save yourself the wasted time, frustration, and aggravation of dealing with a poorly designed system, which often results in an overly complicated system.

**Wide range of sizes.** Consider a system with a wide range of sizes. This will reduce the chance of your system being rejected by the customer or designer. It's advantageous to use a single product line per project. Look for a comprehensive system that can cover signs from the parking lot to the employee's desk. Using a system that offers only a partial solution may only complicate a cohesive install.

**Braille compatibility.** There are a number of technologies available today to create compliant Braille signage, each with its own special features and price. It's imperative that the system you use is compatible with as many Braille/ADA sign methods as possible, in order to maintain both cost effectiveness and versatility when competing on projects. It would be very restrictive to limit yourself to only one or two methods.

**Your preference.** Finally choose a system that you like. It will show when you sell it. ☐

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