

THE KEY BENEFITS OF AN EFFECTIVE WAYFINDING SYSTEM

There are multiple benefits from having an effective wayfinding system and these include:

‘You are welcome’

The wayfinding system should be encountered soon if not immediately on arrival at a destination. It lets the visitor know they are welcome and that the town intends to look after them, giving them the guidance they seek to make the most of their visit. It is the destination’s welcome mat.

Efficiency

The vast majority of visitors will have an upper limit to the amount of time they can spend in a destination. Given they have such a limit it is imperative that we help them maximise the use of their time and avoid wasting any of it looking for places only to find they have gone in the wrong direction and doubling back etc. A good wayfinding system will help the visitor to create their itinerary and plan out where to go during their visit and in what order. The very first system developed by Streetwise was in Edinburgh in 1998-2000. At the time there was a high volume of visitors arriving by coach and given four hours only to visit the city centre. We cited this as one example whereby it was essential we help visitors to get the most out of their visit and we talked of that even if we make them only 15-30 minutes more efficient that would be sufficient time for them to perhaps enter more shops, buy a coffee etc. It was a common sense approach but one that had a foundation in the reality of that scenario.

Encourage exploration and adding activities to do

Visitors do have a strong tendency to keep to the well-trodden path. An effective wayfinding system will allow them to have a much clearer understanding of all that is available in the destination and how to get there. It encourages exploration and thus spreads and very likely increases the economic benefit to an area as a result. They are likely to have come with the idea of doing certain activities and a good system will show them that there is more to see and do than they had anticipated, in most cases.

Encourages walking

One of the core aims of any wayfinding system is to help visitors assess and realise whether something is easily reached on foot. There is a tendency to misunderstand just how easily something can be accessed by walking - and it is our experience that, given this information in an easily understandable format, people are increasingly happy to leave the car in one location and walk from one place of interest to another. This obviously has benefits in terms of health but also in terms of traffic congestion, breaking the habit of using private transport to change location in a city when it was unnecessary to do so.

Reduce anxiety and increase 'liking'

When arriving at a new destination there is in most people a degree of anxiety related to concern that you will not find things, get frustrated etc. This does not necessarily help visitors to like a location. A good wayfinding system helps to give visitors the confidence required to explore it as discussed previously. It also helps them to feel 'comfortable' with its layout and this contributes to their propensity to like the place and how quickly they begin to 'feel at home' once they understand how things relate to each other and how easy it is to move from one place to another.

Curiosity and missing out

One of the greatest assets for any destination is the natural curiosity of visitors and their desire not to miss out on something. A good wayfinding system will tap into this, letting visitors understand what there is for them in the different quarters and giving an outlet for these natural tendencies. This is especially useful when wishing to encourage movement from one location to another and the creation and presentation of what are clearly different quarters within a destination can lead to visitors wanting to make sure they visit more of them to ensure they do not 'miss out' on something.

Enhanced visit and increased satisfaction

As a result of the above, the aim is to enhance the visitor experience, increase visitors' satisfaction levels and ultimately for them to do more and therefore spend more during their visit. They are then more likely to stay longer, come back more often and recommend the destination to others.

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