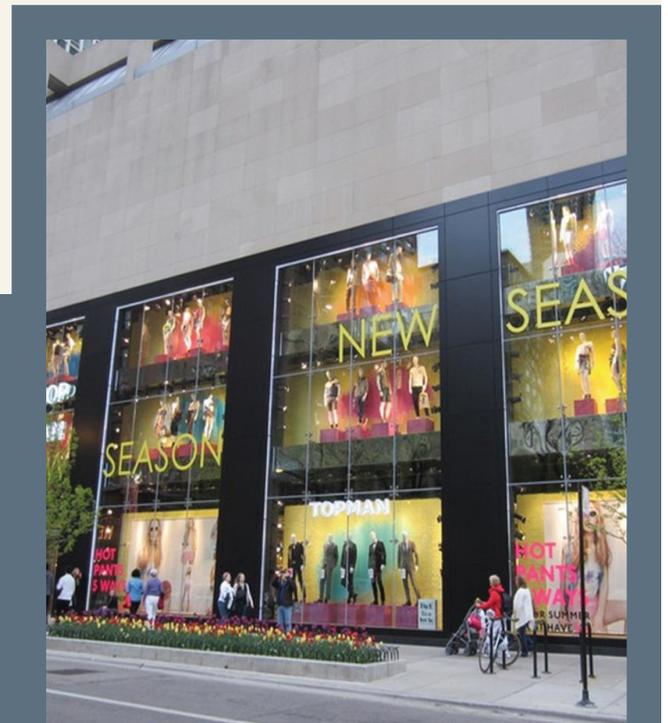


SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SIGNS AND THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE



Signs increasingly are viewed as key drivers of brand strategy for cities, retailers and institutions – prompting design innovations to play a larger role. Improved legibility, use of quality materials, modern lighting and integration into buildings and landscape all have moved the industry forward.

These best practices can indeed be vehicles for community and business improvement—but to what extent?

“Signs and the Downtown Experience,” by Craig Berger for the Sign Research Foundation, offers insight through three distinct components: The Landmark Design Survey; the Digital Sign Design Survey; and Urban Wayfinding and Identity.

Working with 80 participants in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, the effort used 13 weighted attributes to perform design & perception analyses. The list included attributes such as well-designed, memorable, not distracting, high quality, enjoyable to view, etc. Participants in the focus groups were shown various signs through slide show, walking tour and trolley tour; after which, attributes for various sign systems were ranked.

“By reviewing the status and importance of different attributes,” Berger wrote, “we can compare the effectiveness of different approaches, and by comparing them to different strategies and economic trends, we create a clearer picture of how effective signs enhance commercial institutions, and play an important role in enhancing the community and environment.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This report identifies three key takeaways from each of the research efforts reviewed.

THE LANDMARK DESIGN SURVEY EXPLORED THE ACCEPTANCE OF INTEGRATED DESIGN CONCEPTS IN LANDMARK SIGNS, AS WELL AS HOW THEY COMPLEMENT COMMUNITY FABRIC AND SUPPORT/PROMOTE COMMUNITY IDENTITY.

- Landmark on-premise signs now play a central role in a community’s overall identity.
- Legible and informational signs outweigh all other influences.
- The integration of quality materials has more of a positive impact than a heavy reliance on graphics.



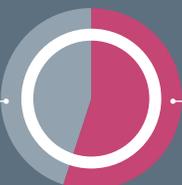
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Study participants were selected from volunteer research sites

90% were outside of design or fabrication professions

GENDER

45% male



55% female

DIVERSITY

40% minority

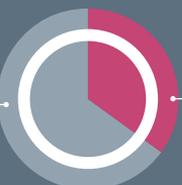


AGE

41
years old on average

CAR OWNERSHIP

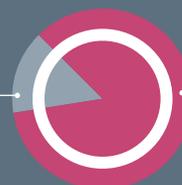
35% owned a car



65% did not own a car

DRIVEN IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS

15% no



85% yes

These demographics roughly correlate with those of urban and suburban areas in the United States.

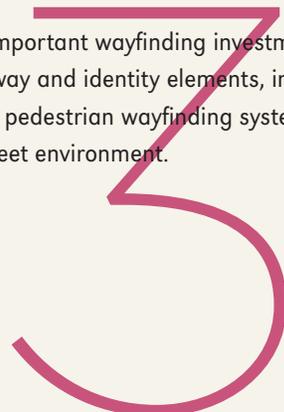
THE DIGITAL SIGN DESIGN SURVEY SET OUT TO HELP ESTABLISH A SET OF METRICS, ENCOURAGING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DIGITAL SIGNS AS PART OF AN OVERALL BRANDING AND DESIGN STRATEGY RATHER THAN STAND-ALONE MESSAGING.

- Growing familiarity with digital signs has led to a decrease in tolerance for illegibility, lack of quality and poor messaging.
- The most successful solutions provide clear, legible information; important content; architectural integration; or a combination of the three.
- Survey participants want more rigorous standards and requirements for suburban digital signs, particularly for legibility at a high level.



THE URBAN WAYFINDING AND IDENTITY SURVEY MEASURED THE VALUE OF WAYFINDING AND IDENTITY SIGNS COMPARED TO OTHER STREETScape AND LANDMARK INVESTMENTS.

- Attitudes toward urban infrastructure projects are very positive, particularly for improving urban and community brands.
- There is a need to extend many of the design features found in larger cities to smaller cities, towns and neighborhoods.
- The most important wayfinding investments are large-scale gateway and identity elements, in addition to small-scale pedestrian wayfinding systems integrated into the street environment.



HEAD TO HEAD MATCHUPS

The study compared several manufacturing, lighting, and design strategies to find interesting results. Survey participants were asked to choose the better of two options. Here are what they selected as the stronger sign type:

STRONGER SIGN TYPE	vs.	COMPARISON SIGN TYPE
★★★★★★★★★ Integrated sign	vs.	Pylon sign ★★★★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Tall pylon landmark	vs.	Low pylon landmark ★★★★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Internal illumination	vs.	External illumination ★★★★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Dimensional pylon	vs.	Non-dimensional pylon ★★★★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Multiple graphics	vs.	Media board ★★★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Information board	vs.	Graphic information board ★★★
★★★★★★★★★ Interior/external media	vs.	Graphic interior board ★
★★★★★★★★★ Media integrated in fixture	vs.	Graphic integrated in fixture ★★★★★

Read the full report **Signs and the Downtown Experience:** www.downtownsigns.org

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