Environmental Graphics

What are they and when do you need them?

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Before entering a business or organization, many people have expectations of what it should look like before they even enter the establishment.

For example, we expect a daycare center to feature, bright colors, engaging visuals, educational materials and other visual elements specific to preschool children. Likewise, entering an attorney's office is likely to be a more subdued experience framed by a more contemporary or conservative look, mirroring the formality of legal interactions.

Environmental graphics is the art of layering creative elements such as colors, typography, graphics and textures to create engaging spaces that invoke emotion. It's a multifaceted approach to design that incorporates a range of disciplines, including graphic design, architecture and interior design. Working harmoniously together

these elements are essential in their ability to create an atmosphere, guide visitors or communicate brand identity or values of an organization.

Any professional space can benefit from environmental graphics, be it a hospital frequented by patients; a train station teaming with passengers all trying to figure out their destination; or designated use area in an office work environment.

How Environmental Graphics Influence Our Visual World

Any signage or decorative elements that connect people to their location can be considered environmental graphics. It could be a dimensional logo on a department store, exterior identity building signage, or signs to indicate a specific area of a public park.

Some of the most common environmental design elements are:

» **Murals are large-scale**, immersive visual art experiences that serve as a focal point. They are most often painted or applied to a wall or a surface.

» **Digital signage** involves the use of electronic displays to display digital images, videos, web pages, menus and other information. Additionally, these types of displays are an effective means of advertising.

» **Wall and floor graphics** are decals that can be applied to communicate messages, direct foot traffic or add a touch of vibrancy to otherwise blank spaces. They accomplish this through symbols or depiction of art, adding splashes of color to otherwise mundane spaces.

» **Wayfinding systems** are a collection of tools that when used together, help people navigate their physical environments and orient themselves in each space. They usually include signs, kiosks, symbols, floor graphics and other communication tools.

Today, environmental design is evolving to accommodate technology and sustainability to create increasingly functional, visually appealing spaces. All the elements mentioned above can be blended to contribute to these experiences.

Benefits of Environmental Graphic Design

Whether consciously or unconsciously, most will likely encounter environmental graphics at some point during the day. They play an integral role in shaping user experiences in public-facing areas and business-to-consumer environments, including wayfinding, culture building, donor recognition and placemaking.[2]

HELP IN THE WAYFINDING PROCESS

Wayfinding signs help people navigate company spaces, helping visitors to determine where they are and guide them to where they want to go. This function doesn't have to be relegated to signage on the walls It can be incorporated into an environment as arrows on a floor, for instance, to guide visitors through high-stress and high-traffic areas such as hospitals, airports or other urban areas.

Wayfinding includes directional signs, maps, symbols and other visual cues to tell you where to go, how to get there and what to expect. Well-designed, easy to understand, well-placed elements (executed thoughtfully in terms of design, typography and color) give visitors a sense of mastery over unfamiliar environments, and even add a decorative touch.

SHOWCASE COMPANY CULTURE

Using experiential graphics is a great way to reinforce your brand, promote company messaging, display core beliefs that bring employees together, and inform your customers what drives your business. Wrapping a long hallway with a mission statement, or filling spaces like lobbies, stairwells or elevators with carefully placed graphics expressing company values, are attention grabbing ways to showcase a company's philosophy and mission.
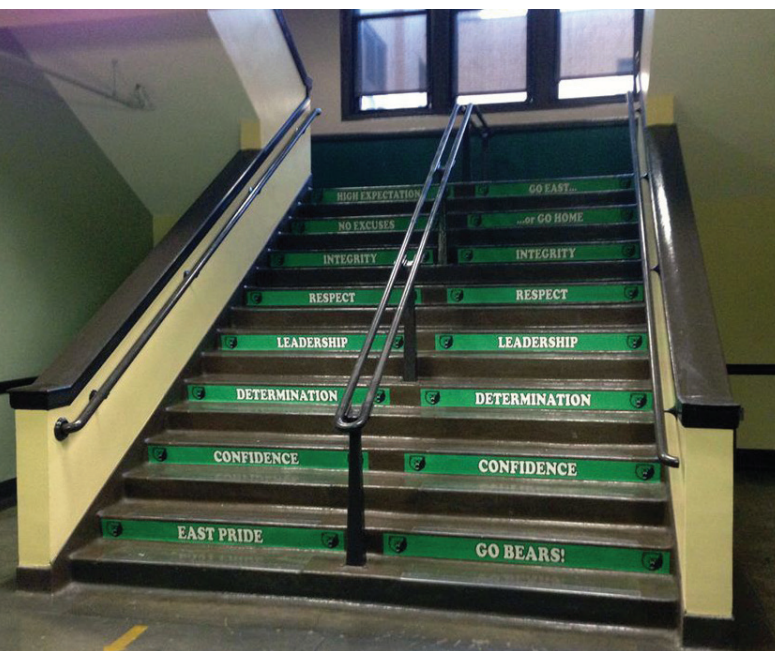
CELEBRATE DONORS

Create a space to celebrate the individuals responsible for your success, highlighting your biggest supporters through donor walls and timelines. These kinds of displays, when executed with the perfect mix of media, can be a great way to honor your most important customers and elevate your brand through storytelling.

ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The right environment can have a positive impact on an individual's psychology within that space. Research suggests that factors such as color, lighting, layout and texture can contribute to the creation of harmonious spaces with the power to positively impact people's moods.[3]

With that in mind, it's crucial to design spaces that work not just for the benefit of your branding and your business, but also for the benefit of every guest that experiences them.

INCREASE FOOT TRAFFIC AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER RETENTION

On a hot day, catching a glimpse of an ice cream truck with colorful graphics advertising tantalizing treats could draw a crowd. Likewise, a well-placed sign on a storefront, or a digital display strategically positioned just inside a lobby, might be just the thing to attract new sales. This is particularly true in high-traffic areas and urban centers.

Signs, graphics and other design elements can inspire positive emotional responses, like a smile, a laugh or a childhood association that can leave memorable, lasting impressions on customers — enough to keep them coming back for more.

Designing Effective Environmental Graphics

Being aware of your audience's needs and expectations is central to developing successful environmental design ideas. Car dealerships, for instance, include wall graphics showcasing their latest vehicles, promotional banners to call out special financing or signage that calls out key features of their best sellers. Likewise, nonprofit offices may utilize murals depicting images of various demographics to connect with their community.

ORANGE	RED	YELLOW
Competition Energy Force Success Encouragement Productivity Potency/Vitality	Action Desire Passion Determination Power Potency Love	Happiness Caution Warmth Joy Intellect Warning Vision
BROWN Wholesomeness Elegance Security Stability Honesty Friendliness Simplicity	**WHITE** Purity/Goodness Beginnings Illumination Understanding Cleanliness/Sterility Possibility Sincerity	**PURPLE** Ambition Spirituality Mysticism/Magic Dignity Inspiration Wealth/Luxury Royalty
BLACK Authority Strength Power Fear Rebellion Sophistication Formality	**GREEN** Optimism Nature/Environment Relaxation Fertility Rebirth/Growth Healing Youth	**BLUE** Authority Reliability/Integrity Intelligence Confidence Loyalty Truth/Trust Peace

USING COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

Color psychology plays a central role in environmental design, as different colors can elicit specific emotional and psychological responses.[4] For example, choosing design elements in blues and greens can create a sense of calmness and relaxation perfect for hospitals and yoga studios. Bright reds and yellows, on the other hand, introduce an element of energy and excitement that plays well for amusement parks or play centers.

A sense of harmony in the workplace can be further supported with features such as acoustic panels and ceiling clouds to limit noise and localize conversations. Other materials like wood or stone incorporated into wayfinding or other graphics foster a connection to nature.

When it comes to the psychology of space, one thing's for sure: paying close attention to the details can create a sense of well-being for employees and customers alike, resulting in spaces that not only look good, but feel good too.
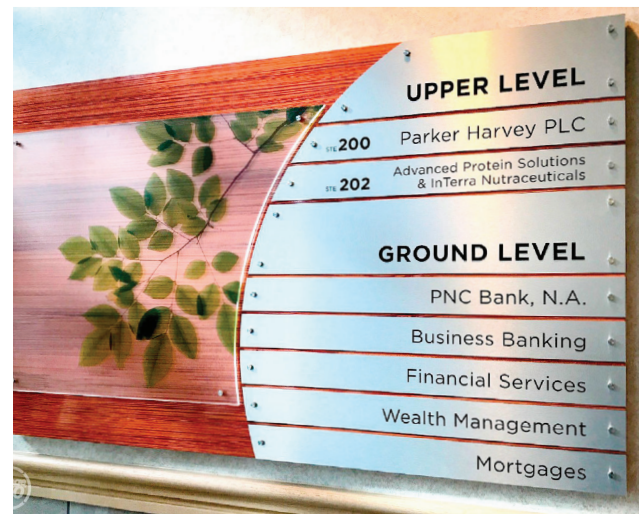
UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

The following steps can help target your audience:[5]

1. **Look at the data.** The foundation for any consumer should be based on data. This could be information collected from online, at tradeshows, through surveys, during focus groups or elsewhere.

2. **Create buyer personas.** Buyer personas further frame the desires of a target audience by classifying them into archetypes (for example: executives, engineers and students). The exercise of creating personas helps businesses focus on what the wants and needs of these individuals to help connect to them with better brand experiences.

3. **Conduct surveys.** Surveys are an effective tool for learning specific answers from customers about what's important to them, including how they see a brand. Questions can be framed to elicit both general statements and specific details about customer preferences.

4. **Monitor audience feedback, comments and engagements**. Watching how customers respond to a brand over time through feedback (such as surveys and online engagement on social media) gives life to these interactions, both positive and negative. The consistency of feedback helps shape expectations for brand experience.

COLLABORATE WITH PROFESSIONALS

Once you've defined your audience, it's time to enlist the help of professionals – specifically a creative team that can bring these branded experiences to life.

Your creative team on an environmental graphic project should ideally include professionals such as architects, graphic designers and more. Together, they'll work with you and communicate throughout the entire process to bring every space together in a way that enhances the environment while still adhering to your company's brand standards.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Eco-friendly and sustainable design can help demonstrate your commitment to the environment – and it looks great, too. Using materials such as repurposed wood, recycled plastic or architectural films that mimic natural materials like stone can create a pleasing, natural aesthetic throughout your workplace.

You can also implement an environmental graphic design strategy through a multifaceted approach[7] that reduces an organization's carbon footprint using energy-efficient practices in graphics production, and the use of renewable energy sources. Minimizing waste generation and focusing on sustainability during the entire design process also creates the opportunity to promote environmental awareness and encourage personal responsibility. Doing so also goes a long way to appeal to more eco-conscious customers and enhance your brand reputation in that way.

Additionally, there are economic benefits as these materials promote durability and longevity in design, while driving greater cost savings through the efficient use of resources.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Project scope varies greatly across all kinds of design projects – whether you're adding a single wall mural or banner to a small area or trying to create a vibe that flows through an entire complex. Regardless of the size of a project, though, it won't be successful without the right resources dedicated to it.

Savvy project managers rely on a combination of hi-tech and various techniques to predict and allocate the right balance of resources for a project. These allocation methods include[8]:

» **Setting limits.** With most projects, unexpected changes, including newly imposed budget restrictions, or other project changes can cause scope creep. This is when imposing limits or caps on resources is important, as design projects tend to expand exponentially if left unchecked.

» **Connecting with the right information.** Understanding available resources – whether it be dollars, materials or people – is crucial to successful allocation and project management. For example, knowing which aspects of a project are more likely to overrun enables more effective budget allocation.

» **Effective data visualization.** Collecting all this data isn't enough on its own. It takes effective data visualization to effectively pivot when faced with new challenges. Project managers must take all the evidence into account before they can make a quality decision. Often, this type of data sorting and identification can be greatly enhanced by resource management software.

» **Resource leveling.** Sometimes, resource allocation will require resource leveling, or the diversion of funds from one project to another. Complexity comes with the moving parts projects contain. It's crucial to identify where a resource is needed and analyze the impact of resource allocation holistically.

EMERGING TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

It's been said that if spaces could speak, they'd do it through environmental graphics.[9] It's an artform that continues to grow in its creative execution to create unique impressions. In 2024, the digital revolution is rapidly changing environmental graphic design, presenting new options and trends that bring refreshed vibrancy to every space. Increasingly, designers are shifting their focus to create work that is aesthetically inviting, accessible, and sustainable.

A large push within contemporary environmental graphic design is towards making spaces more accessible and inclusive. This is accomplished through clear and effective wayfinding signage, symbols, typography and graphic elements that make navigating spaces easier and improve user experience.

Additionally, interactive touchscreens and AR projections encourage new tech-powered interactions that create new wayfinding elements, as well as opportunities to engage with a brand through education and

storytelling. Of course, the art of storytelling can be extended to walls in the form of custom wall coverings and other visual elements that build narratives around history and culture through art.

There are also some notable sub-trends, including **biophilia blooms**, or infusing indoor spaces with the beauty of nature; minimalism, which embraces clean lines, simple forms and monochromatic colors; and hyperlocal hues, or immersive experiences that contribute to the urban regeneration of communities through elements that mirror the local culture, traditions and residents.
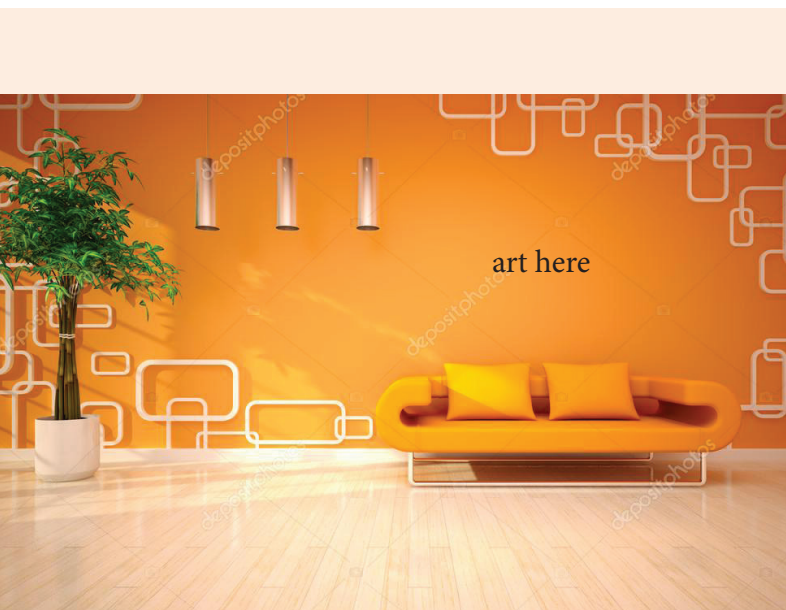
CONCLUSION

Environmental graphic design is nothing new; however, with thanks to contemporary design trends and new technology there's many exciting possibilities ahead. They'll continue to play a role in guiding interactions, wherever there's a need for inviting spaces — to educate, to navigate, to inspire and even create a sense of well-being. For businesses and public-facing spaces, thoughtful environmental designs can also serve to bring communities of people together, forging valuable connections between disparate groups through commonly shared identities, as consumers, employees or members of a community.

[1] [Intro to Environmental Graphic Design: Design Meets Environment (hivo.co)](hivo.co)

[2] [6 Benefits of Using Environmental Graphics | signgeek blog](signgeek)

[3] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25539020

[4] [The Psychology of Space: How Design and Layout Affect Mood and Well-being - Archute](Archute)

[5] [Proven Ways to Know Your Audience Better (hubspot.com)](hubspot.com)

[6] [Architects Vs Graphic Designer: Differences, Similarities, Duties, Salaries, And Education (architecturelab.net)](architecturelab.net)

[7] [Eco-Friendly Design: How Sustainable Graphic Design Can Drive Positive Social and Environmental Change - KGK Genix](KGK-Genix)

[8] [Effective Resource Allocation | Methods & Strategies (prosymmetry.com)](prosymmetry.com)

[9] [Trends in Environmental Graphic Design for 2024 (biggerdot.com)](biggerdot.com)

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