

Signs

OF THE TIMES



*Designing for Change:
A Tale of Two Communication Systems*



Designing *for* Change

A Tale of Two Communication Systems

MCD HAS CREATED EASILY ADAPTABLE COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS

Change is inevitable. Not too long ago, we were buying Enron stock, Martha Stewart was our hero, and we'd never even heard of Osama Bin Laden.

Change is especially unavoidable in image systems. Bus routes change, retailers move, and maps must be amended. Updating signs to accommodate such flux can prove cost-prohibitive to end-users without deep pockets. Consequently, a smart designer accommodates change on the front end, creating signage that customers can update themselves.

Two projects by Michael Courtney Design (MCD), Seattle, illustrate client and change friendly design principles: The Lodge at Bellevue Square and The Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (FHCRC) Shuttle.

The Lodge at Bellevue Square

For The Lodge, Kemper Development hired MCD to complete a comprehensive environmental graphics program. Part of a 110,000 square foot addition to the existing, well-established Bellevue Square shopping mall, The Lodge, designed by Sclater Architects (Seattle), simulates the lobby of an upscale, Northwestern resort.

Encompassing various high-end retailers and restaurants, The Lodge is separated from the primary mall by a road and sky bridges, so it's not easy for the facility's 16 million annual visitors to locate.

As such, MCD created "trail markers" (way finding signage) within the existing mall, pointing the way to The Lodge. Made of sanded, varnished Douglas Fir, the trail markers

"We're very fond of the sign system, especially the trail marker. It is a one of a kind solution: flexible, unexpected, and artistic. It is exactly the image we want to portray for the site," contributes Dan Meyers, Vice President of Design and Construction for Kemper Development.

mimic the rough wooden beams in the Lodge's ceiling. Each marker sports a rectangular copper plate with a black, etched leaf in the background and an attached "L" made of painted aluminum. Large trail markers include a Plexiglas® acrylic box in which items symbolic of the Northwest are displayed: river rocks, shells, feathers, and fly-fishing lures.

"When people go for walks, they bring back treasures, things they've picked up along the beach or a trail. The little museum box between the timbers helps embellish the story by incorporating these elements," MCD's Mike Courtney says.

Ten eight-foot-tall permanent trail markers are bolted to the floor at pedestrian intersections. Additional four-foot-tall movable markers are placed strategically throughout the mall and passageways to the addition. Courtney has dubbed these temporary signs as "bread crumbs" for shoppers. A frame attached to the side of the trail markers makes them even more adaptable. They allow Kemper to change posters in the frames for revolving events.

Directories are similarly adaptable, incorporating backlit panels and maps. The maps purposely include only numerals on store spaces, not retailers' names. Separate keys denote each store's number. MCD designed a key template and selected an appropriate paper stock on which the keys could be printed. Thus, Kemper staffers can update the templates as soon as new retailers move in.

"It's a good, smart, practical solution that really benefits the client," Courtney says.





Sharing stops with public transportation, the FHCRC Shuttle needed a unique logo to distinguish itself, as well as a way to display its frequently changing route schedule.

FHCRC Shuttle

Like The Lodge, the FHCRC Shuttle branding and environmental graphics program needed to accommodate changing messages.

Designed to transport patients, families, visitors, and staff throughout a nine-block campus of medical buildings in downtown Seattle – including the University of Washington Medical Center, Children’s Hospital, and the Pete Gross House – the FHCRC shuttle faced some unique challenges.

The shuttle needed a new identity and signage to help users readily identify it, distinguish it from other public and private transportation systems, and extend public awareness of the service. MCD’s way finding system features a custom bus illustration depicting the shuttle.

Each shuttle stop sign houses information that shuttle personnel can update themselves, such as digitally printed maps and schedule information. As with The Lodge, MCD designed the route templates so that the graphics looked consistent.

“We wanted to make the system as useful and as consistent for them as possible, while also keeping it low cost, long term,” Courtney explains.

When developing the signs’ color palette, MCD looked to the contemporary yet classic, brick and stainless steel architecture of FHCRC’s primary building. As such, aluminum became the fabrication



material of choice. The graphics incorporate the FHCRC corporate color palette, graphically tying the system to the master brand.

How has the shuttle’s sign program been received?

According to Shelly DaRonche, FHCRC’s transportation manager, “The new identity and signage are exactly what we wanted. The shuttle service is of great value to our patients, their families, and our staff. The new materials heighten its functionality by providing easy-to-recognize touchstones and increasing community awareness of this service.” □



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MCD is a full service graphic design firm, specializing in image management, including product, brand, corporate, and event branding programs; business communication systems; environmental graphics and signage programs; web design; and promotional design.

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