

## **Icons and Wayfinding**

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An effective wayfinding system can add an important dimension to the image of an environment. If the words and images are meaningful and legible, they give user-friendly information and direction. They help people find their way into, through, and out of a town, a city or a state.

Icons can play an important role. They contribute simplicity, clarity and personality. They don't need translation and help us cross the maze of global language barriers created by words. They guide us on roadways and help us navigate on our computer screens. They enable the design of seamless communication systems, from website to road-sign.

When icons are too complicated to be recognized, or too simple to have meaning, they become decoration, or visual static, rather than communication. Determining the content and crafting the final form of a single icon requires packing a full range of communication qualities into a simple form. It is similar to writing poetry, but in a universal language.

Creating a system of icons is an effective way of identifying the different parts of a complex environment. It is important that all of the icons in the system have a common look. This will create a unified, easy to understand and easy to remember, branding image. It is also important that each icon is different, and can be identified in any language. A bell can be called a bell; a cat can be called a cat, in French, Chinese, Spanish, and so on.

A system of icons can be designed to have character. It can be friendly, authoritative, smart, joyful, etc. Icons inform and help people find their way. They should also contribute to the quality of everyday experience.