

Planning and Practicing the Sign System for AEON MALL HANYU

- Welcoming universal design -

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Abstract: We are conducting research aimed at the creation of a new system of design evaluation and diagnosis that will allow for and clarify gaps in users' evaluation of designs according to differences in their professions, areas of specialization, lifestyles, living environments, or other factors. The aim of this project was to raise the level of hospitality of shopping centers, using Aeon Mall Hanyu, a shopping center that opened in Hanyu City, Saitama Prefecture in November 2007, as a case study. In concrete terms, indoor and outdoor signs for customers were used to display the essential 'enjoyment of space' aspect of the shopping center, while providing multifaceted information and promoting understanding of the sense of location. This was therefore an exercise in the construction of guidance systems and in sign design. The project went through an entire cycle, beginning with a study of existing shops, using the results of this study to inform design, implementing the design and following through with a post-implementation evaluation. Results of this evaluation showed improvements in ease of understanding and remembering information, and clearly demonstrated that the overall consistency of image of the space was highly rated.

Key words: *Sign Design, Universal Design, Shopping Center*

1. Introduction

Shopping centers are used by a broad range of people, including the young, the elderly and the disabled. They must be designed to be usable by all comers, and universal design (e.g., installing escalators and elevators instead of stairs) is an important part of ensuring shopping centers are user-friendly [1]. In recent years, shopping malls have become increasingly large and complex. This raises the need for design that allows visitors to travel smoothly to their desired shops and facilities and, upon leaving, to find the right exit without becoming disoriented. What is more, shopping centers must offer visitors an enjoyable shopping experience that provides a counterpoint to their daily routine. Therefore, centers must be designed to be something, exciting and everything in between. Based on the concept of " Welcoming

Universal design”, this project aims to formulate a system of signs for shopping centers that are easy for visitors to understand, and that allows them to use the centers in comfort and to have fun.

2. Identifying problems through field studies

We visited existing shopping centers and conducted a questionnaire of shoppers to study current signage systems in order to identify five main problem areas:

- (1) Problems with overall systems.
- (2) Problems with individual spaces within shopping centers.
- (3) Problems with the placement of signs.
- (4) Problems with the display of signs.
- (5) Problems with ancillary facilities and information.

The results of the study were sorted in accordance with each of these perspectives. The survey brought a range of problems to light. Respondents said signs lacked zone-specific characteristics so it was hard to get an instinctive understanding of location from them; that they were too small and hard to find; that they were, in some places, cluttered with too much information; and that they were not continuous from sign to sign. This indicates that visitors to shopping centers get lost in many cases because they are unable to identify their whereabouts. Therefore, we established three objectives for the creation of our signage system. These were: to make it easy for people to get an instinctive feel for their location by looking at signs; to ensure signs were continuous from one to another so as to guide people to their intended destination; and to give zones within the shopping centre a distinct “theme” on signs so as to create a uniform identity within each zone and differentiate it from others.

3 Sign planning

3.1 Planning sign locations

In light of the spatial configuration of the shopping centers and visitors’ behavioral characteristics, we chose a system of sign location that combined the grid and tiered systems. Grid layout involves displaying information uniformly throughout the pertinent area. It attempts to show all possible routes of movement—not identify a particular start point or end point. Conversely, the tiered layout identifies a start point and displays information along the way to undetermined end points.

3.2 Displaying information on guide signs

We established several rules about how signs would display information, and designed them accordingly.

- (1) Signs were to be divided into two types: “function signs” that guided people to the type of facility rather than the individual facilities themselves and those that guided people to stores, entrances and exits.
- (2) Function signs should use color in accordance with direction.
- (3) Information should be displayed on different surfaces and using different font colors in accordance with content.

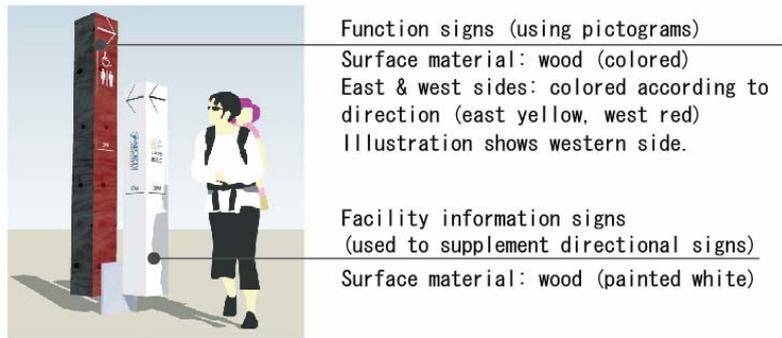


Fig. 1: Information display rules

3.3 Colors

When a visitor to a shopping centre attempts to ascertain their whereabouts, it is important that they can identify on a sign the direction in which they entered the centre and the direction in which they are moving. In some cases, people forget text-based information, but the addition of “color information” makes it easier for them to remember instinctively, and makes it possible for small children, who may not yet be able to read, to express that information. In addition, the use of traditional Japanese colors is intended to bring a serenity and sophistication to shopping centers and express the uniqueness of Aeon Malls [2].

- Basic color: All signs use black and white as their basic colors.
- Directional colors: Warm colors are used to indicate north, south, east and west. Colors are assigned so as to be easy to recognize in conjunction with the basic colors.
- Zone colors: Colors are used to indicate areas within the shopping centre. These, too, are assigned so as to be easy to recognize in conjunction with the basic colors.

Aeon Mall Hanyu, where we recently installed signs, has its store area stretching east-to-west and sandwiched by parking areas to the north and south. On all signs in parking areas and entrances to the mall, the basic color against which “north” and “east” are set is black, while “west” and “south” are set against white. As mentioned above, we chose a warm color for the lettering and other indications of each of the four directions—colors that all people can easily recognize and name. This was particularly pertinent to indoor signs as well. These were designed so that there was continuity of color as people headed east or west (the main directions in which the mall extends), thus making it easy for people to determine the right direction.

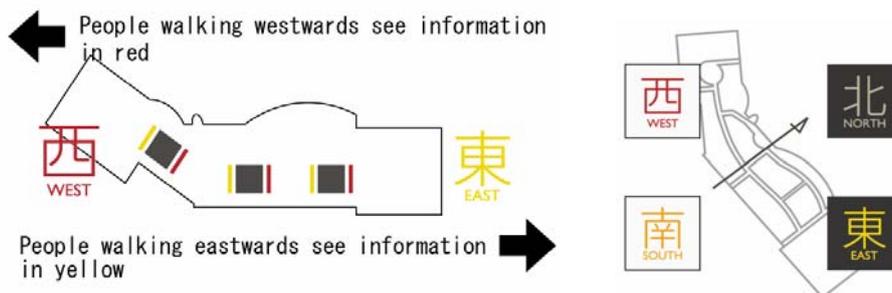


Fig. 2: Sample sign from Aeon Mall Hanyu following color rules

3.4 Signs design

All signs are comprised of signboards and posts. By using this format, we intend that repeated exposure to the idea that information “signs = signboards + posts” provides visitors to shopping centers an innate understanding of what to look for when they want to find a sign, and also to contribute to the uniformity of appearance within the pertinent area. We also endeavored to ensure that signs were unique to their zone through format, font colors and dot patterns. Indoor signs were generally floor-mounted, and colored wood surfaces were employed. Wherever possible, signs were designed to be decorative, and to contribute to a rich and sophisticated atmosphere rather than to simply provide information. For instance, sign installations that incorporated benches and plants were used.

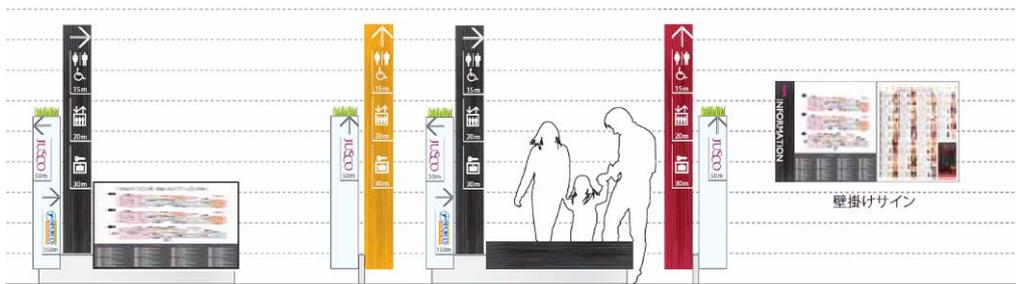


Fig. 3: Indoor sign design examples

4. Conclusion

A questionnaire of shopping centre visitors conducted after installation of the signs we designed showed that people rated them highly for ease of understanding, impression of quality and user-friendliness. It can be concluded that the signs are a successful representation of our intended concept of “the universal design of hospitality”. Moreover, the popularity of the signs’ continuity throughout them all and contribution to uniformity within their zones indicates that the signs had the intended effects on mall users. However, the terms of reference of this project did not include mall maps. Thus, given that map information has not been coordinated and the fact that small text size was nominated as a problem, we intend to tackle this issue in the future.



Fig. 4: Signs in Aeon Mall Hanyu

5. Examples Citations

[1] Kajimoto Hisao, Universal Design no Kangae kata – Architecture, City, Product Design –, Maruzen Co.Ltd. 2002

[2] Date Chiyo, Color Rules – iro to de zain ni tuite shitteokitaikoto, Mdn Co,Ltd. 2006