



How to Choose the Best **Wayfinding Option**

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER



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What is Wayfinding?

Put simply, wayfinding is an information system that guides people through a physical area. It's particularly important in complex buildings or on campuses that have multiple structures for people to navigate. In large, spread-out or more complicated environments, people need more directions and visual cues to help them get to their destinations.

Helping your visitors get from point A to point B quickly and easily relieves their stress, gives them a feeling of security and safety, and optimizes the overall visitor experience.

Wayfinding can be as simple as verbal directions using landmarks – the Eiffel tower, a fountain in your lobby or a hospital parking garage – or traditional signs and directories that use labels and arrows to point people in the right direction. Today, it can also be digital.

Digital wayfinding is becoming ubiquitous with large screens showing maps and directions in airports, shopping malls and on campuses. This is a modern, exciting way to help your visitors get where they're going, but there are different approaches to successfully guiding your audience.

Which Option is Right for You?

Each organization has different types of visitors and different goals. Are you trying to alleviate congestion in lobbies? Do you need to lessen the burden on your receptionist or information desk? Are you trying to prevent latecomers for appointments? Do you want to direct people to meeting rooms more easily? Digital wayfinding can help with all of these.

When evaluating digital wayfinding methods, you should always focus on the visitor experience. You want people to enjoy their time in your facility and walk away feeling welcome and comfortable. Here are four options, each with its own requirements and benefits, to help you with that.

Traditional Digital Signage

When we say "traditional", we're talking about non-interactive screens. If you're already using a digital signage system and don't need interactivity, you can incorporate wayfinding right away.

Design and schedule a message with your map and a list of names, rooms or events alongside it just like any other message. Or, you can show a map on one part of the screen and feed your events list or directory from your CMS to a message beside it.

You can also have multiple maps on displays throughout your facility turned to show realistic orientation and a "you are here" indicator that's tailored to that location. Your audience is already moving through your space, so anticipate what they might need to know at certain locations and help them on their way.

The upside to this method is that you can save money and time by foregoing expensive touchscreens and coding for interactivity. The downside is that it isn't as good as other options for the visitor experience.

You can't tailor wayfinding to the person – like showing visual paths from their location to their destination. However, if you have a building that's relatively easy to navigate, this might work for you.



If you go traditional, be sure to invest in some really good map design. We suggest you display your wayfinding messages full screen, and that you show them most of the time, so visitors don't accidentally miss them when your other playlist items are showing.

Pros:

- Less expensive displays
- No coding required
- Good for small facilities

Cons:

- No personalized wayfinding experience for visitors
- Requires thoughtful design for readability
- Should have a detailed plan that anticipates audience questions at key locations
- Can get lost if mixed with other items in playlist

Interactive Kiosk

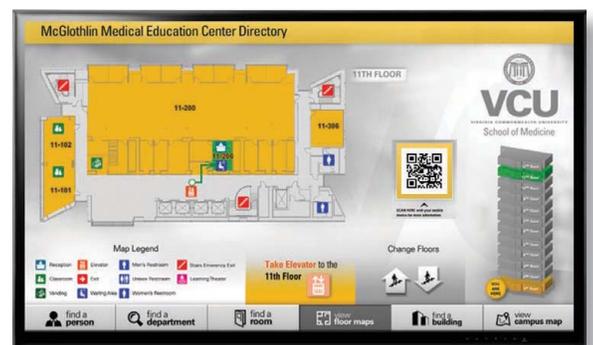
Touchscreens are more expensive than non-interactive screens, but you can offer your visitors a much more robust wayfinding option. Think of your screen as ad space. By using a touchscreen, you can pack a lot of information into your screen real estate, just like a website does.

Show as many interactive maps for campuses, buildings and floors as you need to. Visitors can choose from a variety of directories – rooms, events, departments and staff – that are tied to your maps so you're covered no matter what they need. And you can add buttons to launch other applications or webpages, like shuttle maps or queuing systems. Let your audience decide what they want – you supply the data.

Consider installing kiosks at various locations throughout your facility like entrances, elevator banks and high traffic areas to be sure visitors are welcomed and assisted when and where they need. Each kiosk's "you are here" indicator would be tailored to that screen's location, and visitors could get point-to-point directions and see highlighted visual paths from where they are to where they're going. You can also include buttons for common destinations like restrooms, stairs, elevators and fire exits.

If you choose touchscreen wayfinding, make sure the screens are easily accessible. ADA requirements may prompt you to include navigation at the bottom of screens for shorter users or visitors in wheel chairs. And you may also want to consider vision-impaired or color-blind viewers when choosing your design colors and elements. Also, if you have a multi-lingual audience, you may want to rely more on icons and color systems than text.

Coding for interactivity and database integration are specialized skills, and interactive projects will require experienced designers and developers. The good news is that once the project is coded, you can make updates to your room, event or staff lists in your database which will show on screens immediately.



You can dedicate your kiosks to wayfinding, or you could use them for traditional digital signage layouts showing daily messages and include a button that launches the full-screen wayfinding. You can also split the screen with messages on one side and interactive maps on the other – whatever you think your audience might find easiest.

Another great idea is to include an SMS option in your digital wayfinding. SMS lets visitors enter their phone number on the screen, and the kiosk texts them turn-by-turn directions to their destination.

Alternatively, you can also include QR codes so visitors can download maps and directories, or go out to webpages for more information. You could also use the QR code to launch a responsive mobile site.

Pros:

- Personalized wayfinding experience for visitors
- Fit more information on screen
- Include a variety of directories to choose from
- Feed events or directory information from databases for real-time updates
- Use hot spots to launch other applications or traditional digital signage playlists
- Incorporate text messaging and QR codes

Cons:

- Touchscreens are more expensive than static displays
- Requires experienced designers and developers
- More time required for design, development and implementation

Responsive Mobile Site

This option takes your interactive kiosk project and makes it available on the web. Because it's designed to be responsive, your wayfinding will automatically size to be easily readable and navigable on any screen – displays, desktops, tablets or phones.

If you offer a mobile site, you might not need as many kiosks throughout your facility. It's a great option because it allows your visitors to walk away from the kiosk and still access the full resources of your wayfinding system. They can either scan a QR code to access the site, or you can advertise the URL for direct access. A mobile site is something your audience will already be comfortable with, since people today are used to using their mobile devices to get information.

Not everything that works on a kiosk is relevant to a mobile design. The primary difference on the responsive site is that you won't include a "you are here" indicator on maps since the viewer is assumed to be moving around. For the same reason, you can give directions and highlight destinations, but you won't show visual paths. Also, if you're including daily messages on your kiosk, you should skip that on the mobile site – keep it to wayfinding so your audience has only what they need to navigate.

When designing your responsive site, you'll need to optimize the size and placement of directories, buttons and other elements for each. Don't just design for 55-inch display and then try it on a phone – start with all possible screen sizes in mind.



Pros:

- Could need fewer kiosks
- Allows visitors to take wayfinding with them
- Looks good and easy to navigate on all screen sizes

Cons:

- Requires additional design and development
- Dependent on visitors to access the site online
- Visitors need internet access (wi-fi, etc.)

Wayfinding App

You can take the responsive site idea several steps further with a mobile wayfinding app. This is a self-contained app designed specifically for smartphones. Instead of accessing your wayfinding via a browser, visitors download your wayfinding app from the app store.

You can include all the fun parts of your wayfinding design – maps, directories, point-to-point directories – and throw in a few more, like event schedules or social media links with mobile navigation. However, the size, colors, contrast and placement of all elements have to be tailored to small screens. This requires an experienced mobile designer, as well as a developer who can create your app, get it in the app store and update it regularly.

What's really cool are the push notifications and extras you can add. A geofence and beacons are two ways you can engage your visitors from the parking lot all the way to their destination. Here's how they work:

The first time someone opens the app, they'll get a pop-up notification asking them to turn on their location services (GPS) and enable Bluetooth communication.

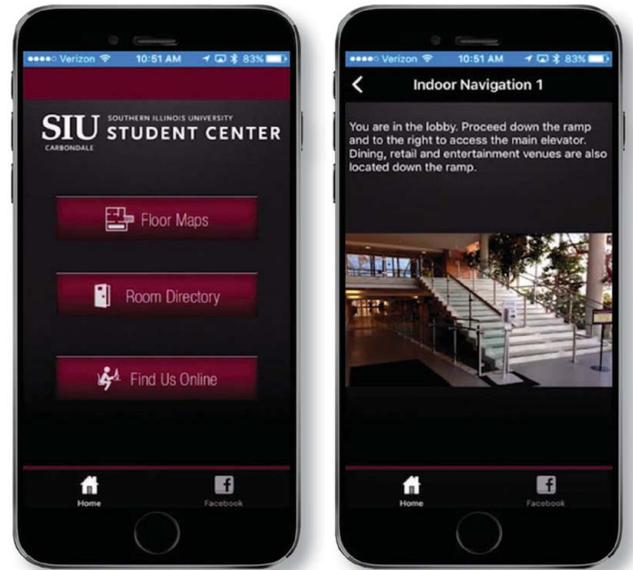
A geofence is a virtual radius drawn around a building or campus in the app software. Once someone with the app on their phone crosses that virtual barrier, the geofence sends them a welcome message and starts guiding them with their first set of directions. This usually leads them to your lobby or a reception area.

Once they reach the first landmark, beacons will take over navigation. Beacons are small Bluetooth units that you mount at major navigation points or landmarks. They register phones both coming and going, and can reach up to 150 feet. Each time a visitor approaches a beacon, they'll get a picture of where they are in the building with text directions for where to go next. For example, when you enter the foyer, your phone will have a picture of the foyer and text that says "Rooms 1-10 right, Rooms 11-20 left."

This is the best engagement tool of the four digital wayfinding options, because it's right in the visitor's hand, starts interacting with them outside the building and gives them beautiful, easy navigation every step of the way.

You can't use a geofence or beacons with kiosks, mobile sites or traditional digital signage. However, you could always offer one of those options in addition to the mobile app to be sure you're anticipating all your visitors' needs.

Remember that you'll need to advertise your app on your website, in your building and on your kiosks, so people know how and where to download it.



Pros:

- Doesn't require any displays – only personal devices
- Most engaging wayfinding option
- Geofences can push welcomes and engage visitors immediately
- Beacons allow you to show photos with directions
- Include social media or web links for additional engagement

Cons:

- Requires specialized design and coding
- Dependent on visitors downloading the app
- Depending on visitors allowing push notifications using GPS and Bluetooth

User Experience Pros & Cons

Again, the priority for your wayfinding is a great visitor experience. You should always evaluate your wayfinding options from the visitor's point of view.

- What kind of experience would you want to have?
- What information would you want when you walk into an unfamiliar space?
- If you can only have one kiosk, will people have to wait in line to use it?
- Do you want people to be able to access wayfinding when they walk away from the screen?
- How much burden will you put on the audience to access wayfinding information?

The following chart gives you some great pros and cons to consider for the user experience:

	Static Digital	Interactive Kiosk	Responsive Web	Mobile App
Display needed	Yes	Yes	Kiosk version – yes Mobile version – no	No
Smart phone needed	No	No	Yes	Yes
Wait time to view information	Possible	Possible	Kiosk version – yes Mobile version – no	No
Integration of other information	Yes – traditional digital signage, social media feeds, QR code	Yes – traditional digital signage, social media feeds, external websites, QR and SMS	Yes – social media feeds, external websites, QR and SMS on a kiosk version	Yes – links to social media sites, external websites
Pre-requisites to the user view the information	None	None	Kiosk version – none Mobile version – have a smart phone and know the URL	Yes – download the app, accept the GPS integration, have Bluetooth turned in
User need to update	No	No	No	Yes – update the latest version from the app stores

Technology Pros & Cons

All of these options involve technology, so you'll need to consider the hardware, design elements and expertise you'll need to make each one successful.

If you need a little more guidance on what's involved in planning and executing a successful wayfinding project, read our white paper - [10 Steps to Successful Interactive Wayfinding](#) – for details on logistical and technical requirements.

In the meantime, consider these technical pros and cons for each of the four digital wayfinding methods:

	Static Digital	Interactive Kiosk	Responsive Web	Mobile App
Display medium	Static display	Interactive display	Interactive display and/or mobile device	Mobile device
You are Here indicator	Static	Interactive	None	No...yes to geofence and beacon
Designer/Developer Staffing Need	Maybe	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ease of updates	Fairly easy	May have to manually re-implement content	Very easy	Easy to update – users must download updated version
Interactive maps	No	Yes	Yes	Probably not
Interactive directories	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interactive mapping	No	Yes – paths or indicators	Yes – indicators	Yes – indicators and/or beacons
QR or SMS integration	QR (if displays are reachable)	Both	Both (for kiosk version only)	No
Traditional digital signage integration	Yes	Yes	Yes (for kiosk version only)	No

How to Choose?

Choosing the right digital wayfinding option starts with the user experience, but you also have to consider your resources and goals. You'll need answers to these questions to get started:

Budget – What type of hardware can you afford? Will you get more bang for your buck with one interactive display in the lobby or multiple displays around campus? What kind of fees are involved in the development, implementation and upkeep of your project?

Staffing – How many people and what skills will you need to launch your wayfinding? Do you have designers or developers on staff? Are they experienced in map design, databases and app development? Who will manage the project? Who will update it?

Facility – How complex are your maps and how many of them do you need? What's the natural traffic flow and how congested will areas with wayfinding kiosks be? Will your audience be best served by a single screen, multiple screens at various locations, a mobile wayfinding app, or a combination of these?

Directories – How many types of destinations do you want to offer your users? Do you want to show lists of buildings, rooms, departments, staff or events? How will you feed the directory information to your displays? Are you already using a database program? Who will be responsible for updates?

Bells and Whistles – Do you want to just have wayfinding maps and directions, or do you want to include other options on screens? Should you show daily messages or visitor welcomes? Do you want to link out to your website or social media pages? How about including QR codes or SMS options for visitors?

One of the best ways to consider your choices is to do an actual walkthrough as a visitor. It's easy to forget how a newcomer might feel the first time they visit your facility, so putting yourself in their shoes will give you a better chance to anticipate their needs.

Whether you have everything you need to launch a digital wayfinding system in-house, or you need someone to do it all for you, your visitors will thank you in the end.

Want to learn more? Contact us at salesteam@visix.com.