

FYOUR SPACE COULD TALK, WHAT WOULD IT SAY?



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WHAT TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE INVESTING IN ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING

Workplace branding is more prevalent than ever.

This means that basic environmental branding is table stakes. The onus is on employers to be more thoughtful and strategic about their branding to provide a holistic and authentic branded experience that will resonate with their associates, business partners, and clientele.

While there are a multitude of ways to approach a new branding project to ensure it's both impactful and lasting, here are some important questions to ask yourself before you invest in a branded environment.

How can I leverage my existing brand guidelines to inform our branded environment?

A thorough review of existing brand strategy is the best place for a design team to start when it comes to concepting a branded environment. The guidelines will provide for the most accurate and authentic translation of your brand strategy so that the basic tenets can be conveyed through the branded experience.





We have so much to communicate via a branded environment. Where should we start?

Keep it simple and remember that with branded environments, less can be more. Start by considering why you need a branded environment. Is it to instill pride in your current workforce? To help with recruitment of future associates? Once you answer the question of "why?" then you can move on to the question of "who?" Who are you trying to reach? Consider working with an outside firm to complete a journey audit to analyze what zones throughout your workspace are most likely to reach different audiences. Finally, once you've answered why you need a branded environment and to whom you're communicating, then you can best focus your message and what you want to convey to each audience. Make sure that the message is direct and meaningful to each audience that you've identified.

Should our branded environment reflect or communicate our corporate culture?

There is likely a portion of your branded environment that can and should reflect your corporate culture. But those opportunities should be limited to areas that are accessed mostly by your current associates. Too often, we are asked to communicate a company's culture in areas that are mostly focused on external audiences. While your visitors and business partners might perceive that you have a positive culture, it's hard for them to correlate that culture with reasons why they should do business with you. Instead, consider communicating aspects of your brand that will instill better understanding of your brand so that your visitors and business partners are more likely to become brand ambassadors and brand evangelists for your company.

I work with a great agency. Should I let them work on my branded environment as well?

Most companies can be well-served by aligning with a basic ad agency or "full service" agency to complete a variety of marketing needs. But before investing a sizeable investment in environmental branding, it's important to make sure that you have the right agency partner. Be sure to review their recent portfolio of similar projects and ask how much of the work will be done in-house as opposed to being outsourced or completed by a freelancer. Also ask if there is a trained interior designer on staff who can consult with the graphic designers to make sure that the branded environment works well with the holistic design scheme for your workplace.

A new branding project doesn't have to be overwhelming for you or your business. By asking yourself these questions first, you'll be well on your way to bringing your brand to life in your space.





HOW TO TALK THE BRANDED ENVIRONMENT TALK



What is environmental branding?

While there are varying levels of awareness as to what it actually is, a large misconception is that branding is all about signage or even simply the use of your logo in your space. Signage is a commodity that's readily available but when it comes to branding, there's a strategic backbone behind what you're striving to achieve. It's not about putting an image on the wall but about the thought process and message behind it, the placement of it, and even the material used to make it. By using design strategy, you take a concept from 2D or digital format and bring it into the built environment. In short, branding uniquely defines your space enabling you to tell a story that resonates with people.

Many companies have brand standards and guidelines, but just aren't sure how to apply them. As you consider engaging with a team of creative professionals, you might not know where to begin or how to talk the branding talk. The most important thing you can express when strategizing with a creative team is the message you're trying to convey in your space and to whom. You'll also need to determine the action you're trying to get people to take and establish parameters for a budget so that the materials used in the design can be accurately specified to fit within that budget. Then you can begin the process of aligning designs to your typography, color scheme, and messaging and everything else begins to fall into place.

When talking with professionals, what other terminology should you be familiar with? Here's a short list to start:

Space Audit – a site assessment performed by a creative team to analyze your space to determine who's using it and how it's being used.

Journey Mapping – the process of understanding and documenting the experience that your target audiences (both internal and external) have within your space, to help identify where different branded elements need to be placed and the messages that need to be conveyed along the various paths.

Concepting – the initial ideation for how your brand can be applied to a space, which is not intended to be final and binding but rather to help pinpoint the best, most authentic design for refinement.

Elevation – a flat, 2D representation of a straight-on wall view, which can be drawn or computerized.

Rendering – a digital drawing that shows various perspectives of a branded element or space.

Fabrication – the part of the production process that brings designs to reality through tangible assets.





WHY QUALITY CONTROL IS CRITICAL DURING ALL PHASES OF A BRANDING PROJECT

From design to production to installation, quality control is one of the most important aspects of a branding project.

In fact, quality control is something that begins at the genesis of a project by accurately defining the message you're trying to convey in your space. Unfortunately, it's often not considered until the end of a project, when the product is being installed. If the branded environment you want to create isn't feasible, that error should be caught long before production begins, allowing for a solution to be devised. The sooner you can bring in experts to assess the quality control of your project the better.

After deciding to invest in a branded environment, you'll need to choose between a generalist marketing agency and a specialist such as Continental Office. Be mindful of this partner selection process. Generalist agencies tend to offer a more basic solution whereas specialists can evaluate designs from concept to completion. While a generalist might be more cost-effective in the short-term, consider the long-term effects of a branding project. Quality control will vary widely when the project is a two-week promotion as opposed to permanent signage.

Make sure your branding partner is checking in every step of the way and contributing directly to the process. If you choose to go with a generalist, check their references and make sure those references have completed a project similar to what you're considering. Working with industry experts that can show you graphic and material examples of how the project will be executed is just as important as the final design. A specialist will stand by their final deliverables and make sure that you're 100% satisfied, providing the highest quality solution allowed on a given budget within time constraints.

Quality control is a system of checks and balances and must come from every department. When everyone brings a carefully trained eye to the project, it ensures that the user experience is a great one and guarantees that:

- The message is told on brand and on voice.
- The color selection is exact.
- There are zero errors or typos.
- The quality of materials and imagery is high.
- All text is legible from appropriate viewing distances and angles.
- Accessibility requirements are met, such as the proper height for monitors or signage.
- The final product is perfect and lasting.



ROLLING OUT YOUR BRAND STRATEGY

You've decided to invest in a branded environment, sat down with a team of creative professionals to discuss your vision, and successfully seen your project through – from design to installation – ensuring quality control along the way.

Now, how do you get everyone on the same page, disseminating the same message you're striving to project? If you don't take the time to have an internal dialogue about your branded space and strategy, then any external work you do will fall flat. When it comes to brand updates or a branded environment, the roll out is a process that needs to start from the inside and work its way out.

Great companies and great brands tell their story and they tell it well. Associates need to be the ambassadors of your brand and story, and creating an environmental brand is one way to make that happen. When there's a narrative to your space, then people can't wait to bring others into the environment to share it. A thorough explanation of who you are, what you do, and why you do it should be a part of your new hire onboarding process and reiterated regularly for all associates. Imagine the failure that would ensue if you brought clients and external partners into your office and associates couldn't tell your story. It would make your message seem inauthentic and create a lack of confidence in your company and what you stand for.





Start building awareness around any branding changes by informing associates of what's to come. If you're branding your space, give everyone a heads up even if it won't impact their workstation specifically. After designs are up in the space, go through the process of providing client experience documentation and talking points to help explain the rationale and importance of your branded elements and why they're located where they are. Journey mapping is so important because each element throughout your space should speak to a specific audience. Your messaging could be internal-facing and only visible in employee-centric areas like a café or bathroom, or it could be external-facing in highly trafficked areas like your lobby or building exterior.

A new brand or branded environment really does change the mood and feel of an office. It did for us! We've seen a shift in the way that our associates react to our branded environment in a positive way. It's exciting and it makes people proud. It's much more than wall graphics or the use of colors or even digital assets like display walls or touchscreens. A brand is something you need to nurture. It will evolve over time and grow organically as your culture changes. A branded environment is part of the everyday environment and should really be given just as much attention as your desks and chairs. When you treat it with this importance, you'll begin to see your message become cohesive and impactful.

In reality, the strongest branded environments today are being constructed out of anything - from hard hats to shipping containers - and often the materials used are meaningful to the environment they're placed in. Not to mention, technology continues to evolve what is able to be produced with inventions like 3D printing. There is no template when it comes to branding your space. Every branding project should start with a blank canvas and then be customized in an authentic and unique way.

Now that you can talk the talk, it's time to walk the walk and set up an initial branding meeting with professionals. Get the conversation started by telling your story, then watch as it comes to life.





