

EGD You May Not Have Heard of It But Here's Why You Need It

By Christian Lachel, with Rich Procter



St. Louis' iconic Arch



Los Angeles Airport's Identifying Letters

Environmental Graphic Design (EGD) is communication design in the built environment that holds the space together for the guest, providing order, comfort and insight. It is a unique confluence of architecture, graphics and media that operates holistically to provide meaning, and tell an emotional story. EGD tells us where we are, where to go, what to do, and why doing it is important. EGD is where the building stops, and the experience begins.

You may never have heard of EGD, but you know what it is. It's a vital design element for themed entertainment venues... and museums... and mixed use retail environments... and airports... and hospitals... universities... and event venues. When EGD works right, it's invisible. When it's done badly, it's frustrating. Ever gotten lost in an airport? Couldn't find a bathroom in a museum?

Why do you care? Because well-designed, well-executed environmental graphic design can be more than a benefit to your project – it can actually become a signature element that helps drive attendance.

Here are five reasons why you should make an environmental graphic designer a part of your core team from the first day.

1) STYLE IS FREE

I got this one from ace business/design/big idea guru Seth Godin, talking about the Apple Stores.

"The store isn't just a place to exchange cash for computers, it's a place to create a genuine, emotional branding experience, one that lasts. It's so cool, people come back with their friends. Are the design, lighting, the carpeting choice, the layout – that stuff – expensive? Nope, they're free. Apple had to carpet and build out the store anyway, and the cost is in the thinking and the guts, not necessarily in the fixtures themselves"



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As the leader of BRC's Creative Development team, Christian Lachel partners with clients in telling timeless stories in new, exciting and environmentally responsible ways. Christian is currently leading design teams for BRC design projects at the National Health Museum/Museum of Liverpool, England, the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, the new Empire State Building guest experience in New York City, and a new visitor center in Niagara Falls. In addition to his TEA membership, Christian is a member of the U.S. Green Building Council and a board member of the Society of Environmental & Graphic Design (SEGD). He teaches courses in Experience and Environmental Design at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif.

You have to think about branding, wayfinding, identity graphics anyway. Why not make these elements an asset, like Apple does? If the task is tackled holistically,



The London Apple Store. Photo Courtesy of Apple.

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with a skilled environmental graphic designer, design “liabilities” are transformed into opportunities and assets.

2) IT REINFORCES YOUR STORY

One of the basic tenets of our industry is that places are immersive environments that create enchantment by putting guests into new and exotic worlds. Nothing should break that illusion, including the typeface on the trash cans. When you integrate environmental graphic design into your overall design, you ratchet up the delight. When you introduce jarring elements, as an afterthought, it's like watching *Gladiator* and seeing an extra wearing a digital watch – it pops your bubble of suspended disbelief.

3) INTEGRATING AN EGD INTO YOUR TEAM FROM GIT-GO CREATES HUGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR “BIG WOWS”

Think of the signature illuminated LAX sign that announces Southern California's biggest airport. Striking, memorable, simple – a Big Wow born of innovative design thinking. Think of the St. Louis Arch. Is this environmental graphic design? I think so – it announces the city of St. Louis, and brands it as the Gateway to the West. It is as big an iconic, civic “wow” as the Eiffel Tower is for Paris, or the Statue of Liberty is for New York.

4) EGD MAKES YOU WALK IN THE SHOES OF YOUR GUEST

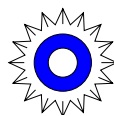
I'm a designer myself. I know the temptation for designers to get lofty, windy, and abstract. I've been in meetings (NOTE: This is an extreme example) where an architect pooh-poohed hiring an environmental graphic designer because, “My plan will be so intuitive that graphic wayfinding will be redundant and intrusive.” (Needless to say, an EGD person was hired on the back end of the project to prevent crabby, confused guests from relieving themselves in the fountain because they couldn't find the bathroom.) EGD is one of those things – like bad customer service – that you notice mostly when it hasn't been done well and a negative experience results. And like bad customer service, it has the potential to generate bad word-of-mouth, and the dissatisfied customers are the more outspoken kind.

The world is getting faster, more complex, more confusing and more disorienting. That's why integrating environmental graphic design into your project from the very beginning is vital. People expect well-designed, intuitive, delightful experiences. If you pay attention to EGD, your projects will be better and people will respond. Here's proof - the average Apple Store gets 11,000 people a week for a per-store revenue of 22.5 million dollars - 500% more than the average GAP. That's the power of design.



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