



## What is the “Cocooning Effect?”

### If You Care About Branding, You Need to Know

What is it about the feelings we get when we're in a comfort zone? Consider this situation: We need to be at an evening meeting at a building on a campus we've never been to before and it's raining. Our GPS leads us to the right parking lot, confirmed by the branding signs we saw upon entering the parking area. We exit our car and follow the well placed illuminated signs at the pedestrian walkway to the conspicuously branded building entrance. We walk into the lobby area and a nice kiosk directs us to the third floor. Upon leaving the elevator, an interior wall directory leads us to the right hallway. When we arrive at the conference room on time for the meeting, we are greeted by a wall sign that identifies the room and the meeting, confirming we're at the right place. We join the meeting feeling good about our experience so far. Even though it's a dark and gloomy night, it's almost like we've been in a protective bubble since entering the property and it has left us with warm and fuzzy impressions. We call this the “Cocooning Effect.”

Joseph Forgas, a social psychologist and fellow of the American Psychological Society, says emotion or affect has been found to influence human cognition and that affect has been shown to effect our rational thinking, information processing, memory, reasoning, judgment and decision making. When relating these research findings to wayfinding, we can see why there are certain places we enjoy going, and certain places we do not.

So what are some of the things in a wayfinding system that could have positive emotional impact on our thinking? It's all about brand image. Effective wayfinding plays a big part of the overall brand message, with well-placed, legible and easily interpreted signage incorporating consistent themes, colors and materials, both inside and outside, which eliminates, or at least minimizes, frustration of not knowing where to go, how to get there or being late for appointments. The degree to which an

organization executes day-to-day operations in support of that brand image is one of the primary reasons a customer might choose to do repeat business. The best wayfinding systems tend to make the total customer experience as pleasant and trouble-free as possible.

It's clear that the value of wayfinding systems exceeds just words and directional arrows. Whether it's for a hospital, an airport, a university, an office park, a shopping center, an amusement park, or a government complex, signage systems should be designed with the overall customer experience in mind; and



Left: Airport Wayfinding, Roanoke, VA  
Center: Directory at Ferrum College, VA  
Above: Entrance to Towne Center West, Richmond, VA

the “cocooning effect” encompasses all aspects of facilities that impact a person's comfort level, not just the signage. In that respect, wayfinding systems should rank with architectural design, landscaping, heating, cooling and plumbing systems, internet service, lighting, and security, which all work together to create a cocooning effect at a facility. They all form an organization's overall brand, elevating people to a level of comfort they will cognitively remember and share with others.

*“The degree to which an organization executes day-to-day operations in support of its brand image is one of the primary reasons a customer might choose to do repeat business.”*

Contact: Mark Hackley, Account Executive  
mhackley@holidaysigns.com (540)416-3154