

Wayfinding



Expanding the Vancouver Convention Centre

A sign program
extends along the
water's edge.

By Udo Schliemann

The Vancouver Convention Centre (VCC) has been a popular meeting and convention destination since it first opened its doors in 1987 as the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre (VCEC). Operated by BC Pavilion, a provincial Crown corporation, it has welcomed thousands of delegates from all over the world to an increasingly sophisticated and cosmopolitan city; with a spectacular panorama of mountains, water, parks and urban life.

After the recent addition of its 31,665-m² (340,849-sf) West Building, the VCC now covers 111,484 m² (1.2 million sf), which includes 43,992 m² (473,523 sf) of pre-function, meeting, exhibition and ballroom space, with the rest used for retail space, walkways, bikeways and other open public spaces.



The 31,665-m² West Building opened in 2009, in time to host the International Broadcast Centre for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

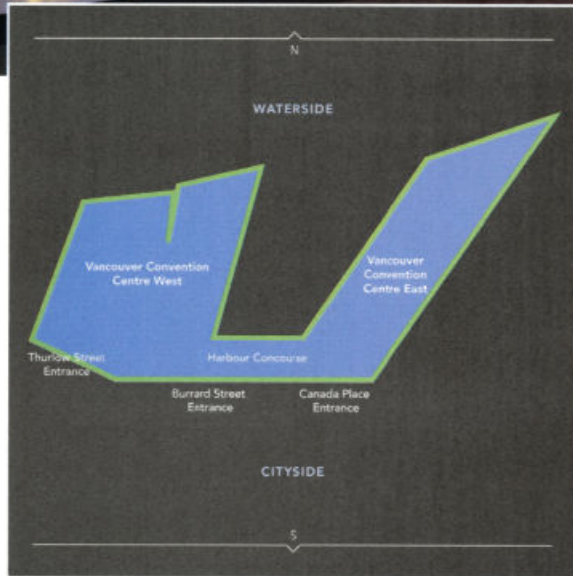
Toronto based design firms Gottschalk+Ash International (G+A) and Terry Heard Designers created a signage and wayfinding system for the West Building, which itself was designed through a collaboration between several architecture firms, including Vancouver-based Musson Cattell Mackey (MCM) Partnership and DA Architects & Planners, as well as LMN Architects of Seattle, Wash.

The wayfinding project included exterior and interior signage, as well as interactive kiosks featuring online directories. It also involved adding new signage to the existing East Building, which had been designed by Toronto-based Zeidler Partnership Architects.

Construction on the West Building began in 2004. It opened in April 2009, in time to host the International Broadcast Centre for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

A sense of place

Conference and exhibition attendees visiting Vancouver look forward not only to modern facilities, but also to the natural beauty of the VCC's location alongside the tides of Coal Harbour, between the ocean and the mountains. The wayfinding system was designed to enhance this sense of place, reflecting the colours of the landscape and reinforcing the image of the harbour as a gateway to Canada.



Like the existing East Building, the VCC's new West Building looks out upon Coal Harbour.



The sign system had to address the orientation and movement of multiple user groups, including cyclists and pedestrians.

Interactive kiosks feature online directories for wayfinding purposes.

It was also important to consider international standards with regard to architecture, communications and wayfinding design. Many conference and exhibition centres around the world have recognized the competitive benefits of developing and integrating signs and other wayfinding elements that can meet the needs of the convention industry, business people, trade show exhibitors, local communities and corporate partners.

The West Building was designed not only to attract international business, but also in line with the vision of Vancouver as one of the world's most livable, attractive and sustainable urban environments. Rather than isolating users from the surrounding environment, as some conference centres do, the building features curtain walls on all four sides, providing an enhanced space for visitors and residents alike—a meeting place for public assembly and a starting point for exploring the city.



Consistent signage was seen as one way to assist in fulfilling this vision. Just as architecture can determine the general mood of a space, so too can a wayfinding program serve as a public interface, communicating with the audience of users. Signs can have a directly positive or negative effect on visitors comfort level.

Along with other communication tools that deliver information about a facility, signs represent the voice and aspirations of that institution. Strategic design is called for to deliver strong branding, a positive public image, operational efficiencies, ease of access to services, customer satisfaction, employee motivation and enhanced business relationships.

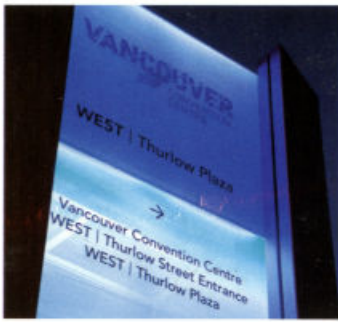
Multiple purposes

As mentioned, the scope of the project included interior and exterior wayfinding and signage system design for the facility. This encompassed the exhibition level, parking level, two meeting room levels, registration area, ballroom, pedestrian walkways, plazas, Canada Place Way viaduct and walkway connecting to the East Building. The interior signage program fully covered all front-of-house (FOH) and back-of-house (BOH) operations and the parking facility.

The West Building was part of a larger expansion project—managed by Stantec Consulting and contracted through PCL Construction Enterprises—that also involved extending the seawall and the harbour's greenbelt, adding more than 12,077 m² (130,000 sf) of new walkways and bicycle paths, increasing public access to the water's edge and adding more than 11,148 m² (120,000 sf) of new plazas.

The wayfinding system had to address the orientation and movement of multiple user groups, including conference attendees, cyclists and pedestrians. It also had to provide directions for vehicular traffic, marking access to parking entrances, interfacing with public transit, identifying pickup and drop-off zones and promoting efficient loading-dock access and operations.

One of the programs primary objectives was to help the VCC handle both present and future requirements by integrating its brand presence into information design to ensure a seamless and positive experience for users. The flexibility of an



Narrow-profile acrylic sheets and room number signs use low-energy LEDs for illumination.



Digital signs facilitate real-time content management, including event and schedule updates.

Internet Protocol based (IP-based) system was key, as wayfinding could then integrate real-time electronic content management and information display. Signs could serve multiple facility communications purposes, supporting visual paging, time- and event-specific updates and advertising opportunities for tourism partners, local stores, restaurants, regional attractions and other businesses.

The design team and the VCC explored kiosks and electronic displays that could help offset capital costs by generating ad revenue in this way. Such devices would have a direct effect on the industrial design of the wayfinding program, so a deliberate but flexible approach was needed. Visual display technologies that seemed to change on a weekly basis were considered in terms of integrating with static sign elements throughout the program.

Electronic displays and interfaces have already become paramount today in wayfinding and orientation, but issues of accessibility and maintenance need to be addressed, along with adequate ventilation and the provision of separate, shielded power and signal raceways in the sign cabinets' designs. For the VCC, a consistent infrastructure was required to deliver both static and dynamic information to users throughout the facility.

Modular and interchangeable components, along with a manageable array of panel and cabinet sizes, represent the most effective design philosophy when integrating these types of information and for supporting sustainable configurations.

Environmental leadership

The West Building was designed as a model of environmental sustainability. It has been honoured by the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC), becoming the first convention centre in the world to achieve platinum certification under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. It also won a 2010 Award for Excellence for the Americas region from the Urban Land Institute.

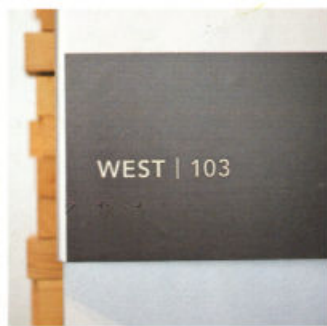
The facility's 2.4-ha (6-acre) green roof—the largest in Canada—support four beehives that produce honey for the VCCE kitchen. Natural light is maximized by the curtain walls, while a seawater heat-pump system assists cooling and heating. Part of the centre's foundation provides artificial habitats for mussels, seaweed, Starfish, crabs and fish.

For the sign program, too, function, esthetics and value needed to be balanced with sustainability. Durable components were selected with ease of assembly, disassembly, maintenance, modification and expansion in mind, extending their

International standards were considered with regard to wayfinding, communications and architecture.



Room ID signs feature tactile braille elements.



Free-standing signs had to be designed to withstand strong lateral movements, given the region's seismic forces.

longevity. These components, glass and aluminum materials were specified such that replacements could be sourced from a variety of fabricators and suppliers in the future, based on a minimum 20-year life cycle.

Environmental guidelines were met or exceeded with regard to energy consumption. Low-energy light-emitting diodes (LEDs) were embedded in narrow-profile acrylic sheets, for example, to internally illuminate meeting room numbers. Also, the signs were integrated with the architectural and mechanical infrastructure, reducing costs by avoiding the need for structural alterations or the addition of new support features.

The sign designs were based on a triangular aluminum support structure. This custom extrusion, owned by the VCC, allows each sign post to visually echo the angular slopes of the building's green roof. It is the base to which screens, information panels, room numbers and glass carriers can all be attached with clips.

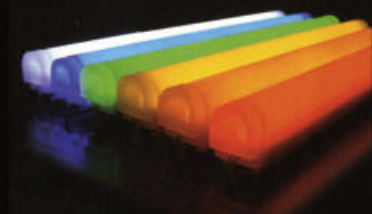
The different sign types included building identification (ID), pedestrian and bicycle path indicators, curbside posts and panels, information towers, directional signs, wall-mounted ID, cantilevered signs, room ID and back-of-house signs. Sign fabrication was handled by King Architectural Products in Bolton, Ont. Great care was needed during the manufacturing process, especially to ensure free-standing and hanging signs could withstand strong lateral movements, given Vancouver's seismic forces.

Udo Schliemann is design director at the Toronto office of Gottschalk+Ash International (G+A), part of St. Joseph Communications. For more information, visit www.gplusa.com.

New signage opportunities are around the bend with SloanLED tubing products



LEDStripe



Large-profile LED tubing with daytime color when non-illuminated. Factory bends to 8 inches radius; on-site radial bends to 14-ft radius.

Contact us for product info
or for Free product estimating service
www.SloanLED.com • info@SloanLED.com
Toll-Free 888-747-4533 • Fax 805-676-3206

