

Brand Guardian

A graphic language first developed for the paper now extends to all the Guardian's activities, including its new home

Last month Guardian News & Media (GNM) moved from its Farringdon Road headquarters to a new building on Kings Place, near King's Cross station in London. Prior to the influx of staff, the floors occupied by The Guardian and The Observer newspapers, guardian.co.uk, and all its supporting media, were decked out with a new wayfinding system courtesy of Cartlidge Levene. The results reveal the extension of a project that began with The Guardian's own redesign in 2005.

A graphic language that was initially devised to meet the needs of the newspaper (from its typography to its colour palette), now extends to the look and feel of guardian.co.uk, Wieden+Kennedy's advertising campaigns and, finally to the environmental design within Kings Place. The tone of voice and personality of The Guardian has been made flesh, whilst the project also adheres to the media company's strict environmental credentials.

CR spoke to Mark Porter, The Guardian's creative director, and designers Ian Cartlidge and Melissa Price from Cartlidge Levene, about the project.

CREATIVE REVIEW: How does the new signage system relate to The Guardian's own redesign, both in print and online?

MARK PORTER [GUARDIAN]: It was a clever surprise that grew out of the newspaper being redesigned. When we were working on the redesign we were totally focused on the printed paper, the only moment for marketing or branding came up when I proposed changing the logo from David Hillman's. It was done as a piece of editorial design but it seems that, almost accidentally, we had laid the foundations for a strong branding programme. Editorial design is almost instinctively branding design: when you work with a newspaper you understand the values and how you can express that graphically. I didn't realise how strong and flexible a piece of work it was.





We changed ad agencies after the redesign. The art director at w+k, who pitched for the new ads, had worked with me on The Guardian before and he came in with the attitude that as we had a strong visual language, why not use it for our visual communications? A no-brainer really: I'm surprised it doesn't happen more. So the strong look and feel of the ad campaigns: the typeface, the colours on a white background, those were all elements of the paper's redesign. Put those elements together and it looks like The Guardian.

These first developments, coincidentally, were formed while working on the website redesign. Part of the thinking was that, with more and more channels, we needed to express a single personality. There were restrictions on a fast moving website of course, colours, type etc, but we ported the spirit of the redesign to the web. When the site launched, we had a coherent tone of voice, which is ongoing

in other areas as well, like video, motion graphics. When we decided to move, it was obvious that any environmental graphics should grow out of that.

CR: As the designers, which parts of The Guardian redesign influenced the 3D design and wayfinding?

IAN CARTLIDGE [CARTLIDGE LEVENE]: We had admired the newspaper redesign and immediately saw potential for the design principles, established in the paper, online and in advertising, to be translated into the 3D environment. There were some key aspects of the newspaper design that translated well into signage: the Guardian font, the broad colour palette and specifically the What, Where, When? boxes which are used in the paper and online to reference articles. The directional signs are 3D versions of those boxes.

Aside from the design, it was The Guardian's unique voice and brand of journalism that also

LEFT HAND PAGE AND ABOVE LEFT: Details of the Kings Place entrance branding sign, showing the apparently random arrangement of letters when viewed from the side. Photography: Marcus Ginns.

ABOVE RIGHT: Close-up of a directional sign showing the cardboard construction; cardboard directional sign and level number on a stair landing. Photography: Marcus Ginns

influenced our approach. We looked for ways that each element could express this: for example, the cardboard signs express a certain attitude towards the environment, the window vinyls express a particular approach to journalism, with words taken from a key essay written by the newspaper's founder, CP Scott. The entrance branding expresses a creative and intelligent approach to brand recognition, relying as much on recognition of the font as the logos. It is a dynamic solution which changes depending on your point of view.

CR: How did the practicalities of the project develop?

MELISSA PRICE [CARTLIDGE LEVENE]: In an office environment, the wayfinding and the brand expression are of equal importance. It's as much about creating a visual language and integrating with the interior design as it is about providing information – the 'soft' side of signage, not just >



< the hard-working directional aspect. We needed to provide wayfinding functionality with the minimum number of signs, as most people who occupy the building are full-time staff and just need gentle prompts. However, we did have to strike a balance to cater for freelance journalists and visitors. Also it's important to consider the person seated near the stairs who is constantly interrupted by people trying to find a particular department.

CR: What constituent parts make up the signage?

IC [CL]: Our brief [for the York Way entrance] stipulated that we couldn't fix anything onto the exterior or interior of the building. We therefore had to come up with a free-standing solution and created individual letters that make up The Guardian and The Observer logos, mounted on brightly coloured posts. We played an optical game with the letters so that they appear to be perfectly

aligned when approaching the building from King's Cross, however, the individual letters are pushed forwards and backwards so that as the viewer gets closer to the building and reaches the entrance, the logos break up to form a random arrangement. This was a challenge to set out and could only be done by moving the letters around in situ. First we produced a full size mock-up to test the concept and when the finished letters were delivered we arranged them ourselves to get the kerning exactly right from the key viewpoint. Melissa stood outside in York Way, shouting instructions into a mobile while I was inside moving each letter so that it was perfectly kerned.

MP [CL]: For the directional and informational signs we thought it would be interesting to take an existing Guardian graphic device of text contained within the What, Where, When? boxes and develop it into a three-dimensional form. This was

ABOVE: Entrance branding sign as viewed from the street. **Photography:** Marcus Ginns.

Project Credits: Design: Ian Cartlidge, Melissa Price, Ben Tibbs and Matt Busher (Cartlidge Levene). GNM creative team: Mark Porter, Giles Brenard, Alexie Sommer and John Timmins. GNM management team: Luke Dodd, Sheila Fitzsimons and Alison Hall. Interior design consultants: TP Bennetts. Signage fabrication and installation: Artis Projects

developed into a family of three standard forms of different dimensions: hanging directional signs in square profile, wall-mounted room identification signs and facilities signs that were perpendicular 'flags'. A bespoke icon set was produced to work alongside the Guardian font.

Cardboard was chosen as a green, lightweight alternative to the usual materials used for signage, such as MDF or aluminium. It was important to express the material by constructing the boxes as simple open-ended structures with the fluted edges exposed. There are also nice subtleties to the signs close up, with the fluted ridges slightly catching the light emphasising the cardboard construction. The boxes were screen-printed in vibrant colours with text reversed out to reveal the white card surface.

IC [CL]: The building also has a large number of glass-fronted meeting rooms arranged around the main open plan spaces and we had to deal with



some basic practicalities such as buildings regulations [eg all glass must carry some kind of marking in order to render it visible] and create a certain degree of privacy for meeting rooms. Our starting point was to use the two sides of the glass to express 'plurality of opinion' through using opposite word pairings on doors and windows. Through a close creative working process with The Guardian it was decided to pick up on CP Scott's A Hundred Years essay, written in 1921, which outlines the principles and aims of the newspaper. For the vinyl treatment a series of word pairings were chosen, working with the editor-in-chief, Alan Rusbridger, to work across the glass.

MP [CL]: Colour was a very strong feature for every element of the scheme and the range was drawn from The Guardian's broad palette, as used in the newspaper, website and for advertising. We decided to use colour to differentiate the four main

floors of the building, and selected a range of three 'close colours' for each floor – this method of using close colour ranges is part of the Guardian's identity guidelines. These colours were then mixed randomly across floors to create an overall colour tone without becoming monotonous or overly 'corporate' in appearance. We also worked closely with the interior designers, TP Bennetts, to integrate the colour palette with their scheme.

CR: The Kings Place development is known for its green credentials and environmental concerns are also at the forefront of this project. Can you tell us a bit about the decisions you made here?

MP [G]: Kings Place is a very green building and there's been work here to reduce our carbon footprint, to become a carbon neutral company. So this made us reject the standard wayfinding materials: metal, plastic – they were wrong for the attitude.



ABOVE, LEFT AND TOP: Vinyl graphics featuring word pairings from CP Scott's 1921 essay, A Hundred Years, applied to meeting room glass.

ABOVE, IN PANEL: In 2005, when The Guardian's creative director Mark Porter re-designed the newspaper (first front page and the new font by Christian Schwartz and Paul Barnes, shown) the project wasn't considered a branding exercise per se. However, the typography, use of colour and tone of voice then dictated the look and feel of guardian.co.uk, the newspaper's advertising (by Wieden+Kennedy) and, latterly, Cartidge Levene's wayfinding and signage graphics for The Guardian's new headquarters in Kings Place

MP [CL]: Although environmental considerations should be implicit in all projects, GNM and The Guardian have led the way on green issues over the years. This led us to use cardboard as a main constituent for the signage and to express it rather than conceal it. Kings Place was built using green technologies, so it was interesting to work on a project where the green aspect runs deeper than is usually found in a typical office building.

MP [G]: The cardboard signs are my favourite part of the whole project. While sustainable, they also have a light touch, they're not invasive, and as there are things we can't do to the building, it made sense to make signs which were light and can be easily changed. We start in the new place with a plan for day one but it will change over the years. The newspaper business is in turmoil, with resources and space given over to audio and video, so I have no idea what we might have in five years' time. ■