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Employees Get a Glimpse of Metro Design Studio's Secrets

BY JIMMY STROUP

(Dec. 28, 2005) Metro Design Studio recently treated some 40 employees from other transportation disciplines to a tour illustrating the ins and outs of creating the media pieces that define the agency's image.

Signs, maps, bus cards, calendars, ads – if it looks neat, is colorful and features the Metro "M," you can bet the Design Studio was responsible for drawing your eyes in that direction.

Most obvious to the regular Metro rider is the cornucopia of maps and signs that steer those needy for direction (or ripe for correction) onto the right path.

"Customer information and signage is a big, big, big project—and we've just started scratching the surface," said Lead Designer Neil Sadler.

Sadler said a major overhaul of the agency "look" is currently in the third year of a five-year plan. Where the agency's logo was once inconsistent in design and used willy-nilly, the Design Studio has made great strides to present Metro's image and logo uniformly.



Creative Director Michael Lejeune notes Metro campaigns are an important element of Metro's ability to effectively communicate with customers.

Replace older materials

By 2007, the Design Studio hopes to have replaced all the older material with current motifs and color schemes.

In addition to consistent design, Sadler said that a great deal of effort was made to rid Metro materials and signage of unnecessary words, replacing them with plain icons that meant the same thing.

Often, he said, people who dislike being told what to do with words will comply if the message comes by way of an inoffensive image.

"We're trying to send out a positive message all the time," he said. "And, for us as designers, there's a personality to it—there's a personality behind it."

One of the Design Studio's recent accomplishments was development of advertising and marketing materials for the opening of the Orange Line. The advertising campaign played heavily on the "Go Metro" theme, which has become the agency's slogan.

'A positive feeling'

"The marketing strategy [for the Orange Line] was to provide copy that would evoke a positive feeling, but also tell people exactly what it is," said Graphic Designer Sharleen Yoshimi.

That ad campaign especially featured photography, which some might be surprised to learn was mostly shot by the Design Studio's college interns Peter Watkinson and Suji Lee. Deniz Durmus was at one time an intern, too, but now actually contracts as a freelance photographer to the agency.

Where once the Design Studio relied on whatever photos they could get with whatever equipment they had, now freelance photographers and interns set up specific shots with a design in mind, said Senior Graphic Designer Elizabeth Bain.

"We feel like the photography really enhances our design," she said.

In an altogether different arena, the Design Studio is also responsible for the Metro.net website the agency uses as a means of imparting information to people over the Internet.

Webmaster Joe Simpson and Assistant Webmaster Kevin Woo maintain the site that features news about current Metro projects, as well as the "Trip Planner."

"By far, the Trip Planner is the most used thing on our website," Simpson said.



Assistant Webmaster Kevin Woo demonstrates an interactive information kiosk. Metro hopes the terminals will catch on with the public and will relieve some pressure from 1-800-COMMUTE by allowing customers to use the kiosk to get directions instead of calling for directions.

Interactive information kiosks

The webmasters are also contributing to a new touch-screen interactive information kiosk project that will give customers the ability to access information from Metro.net—including the Trip Planner and a real-time Southern California highway assessment.

"We're trying to install them in high-traffic areas and get a feel for how the public likes them," Woo said. "We're hoping this will catch on and be something that's beneficial."

The interactive kiosks will be placed in eight locations Metro-wide and should be installed by spring at the latest, said Jami Carrington, transportation planning manager, whose department is responsible for the kiosk program.

Creative Director Michael Lejeune is optimistic about the steps the Design Studio has made in the last few years – steps he said have led to tangible evidence of public impact. He cited a marked increase in name recognition, increased ridership, and a great improvement in the public's opinion of the agency.

"We're using design to change the perception of the agency," said Lejeune. "'Go Metro' is the lead image campaign, but all of our design acts together to enhance a customer's experience."