Southerners love a great story, so it is only natural that the Branded Environments (BE) experts in our Atlanta office have become masters of designing new ways to tell brand stories through physical, virtual, and social environments. Three recent projects in particular call attention to how highly specialized place-making integrates the key components of an organization's identity: communicating the essence of the organization, representing its beliefs and impacting public perception. A branded environment is where the philosophies of branding meet place, places that thoughtfully engage employees and customers and channel an emotional connection to their brands.

LISTEN DEEPLY

We recently participated in the relocation of a major Atlanta-based insurance organization. Through interviews and brand immersion sessions with the company’s senior executives and primary project stakeholders, our brand experts identified the company's DNA, brand drivers, and opportunities to tell key brand stories throughout the space.

In this case, in the company's network of some 120+ offices in 26 countries communicated their strength, perspective, and global presence as one of the largest property and casualty insurers in the world. The team saw value in communicating this messages as an essential element in the design of our client's new space with a thoughtfully integrated and designed location map including custom branded graphics and communication elements strategically located on a prominent wall frequently passed by office visitors, industry partners, and staff.

After the re-opening of this office, we found there was much greater appreciation for the integration of brand-related stories in an environment that could otherwise have been pretty
mundane. The executives, the administration, and all the staff members really appreciated the fact that their stories were being communicated in an exciting way within the built environment. In fact, they found themselves touring their clients through areas of the office in effort to share their brand as opposed to marching them directly into a conference room for a meeting. The integration of brand has resulted in better inter-office communication, increased knowledge of the company, and opportunity to build stronger relationships internally as well as with clients.

**REFLECT THE BRAND**

Another example concerns the new Atlanta headquarters and showroom of a fast-growing creator of children’s products. The client needed to reflect its playful brand and reputation as a design-driven innovator. The Branded Environments team designed equally creative and innovative ways to tell their stories within the space.

The soaring, 35-foot high showroom ceiling and walls expressively embrace over 200 products displayed within customizable flexible shelving and branded communications systems. The space becomes the mechanism through which various branded product categories are merchandised and showcased on specialty fixtures that act as individual stages for each of the company’s brands.

Upon their B2B customers entering this uniquely crafted environment, there is a welcome area featuring a beautifully detailed teakwood screen with a stainless steel integrated brand logo that curves around two red Arne Jacobson Egg chairs and a white Eero Saarinen pedestal table, directly reflecting the company’s passion for true classic and contemporary design and attention to detail. A presentation area anchors the center of the showroom where “nesting” becomes an apparent brand driver of the design concept.

The company’s primary brand color palette is carefully integrated into this exuberantly branded environment, while not competing with the brightness of the products themselves. Along the 30-foot high by 100-foot long unobstructed glass storefront, a boldly colored drapery continuously swoops up and down to provide another specialty branding moment in addition to shading the showroom space. Within this spectacular space, branding truly meets place.

The lesson learned on this project was that a client is not necessarily interested in a designer’s interpretation of who they are, but instead, they are interested in the collaborative process in which a designer gains a thorough understanding of their brand to develop and design a true representation of who they are. As a result, the place became the brand.

**A CATALYST FOR REPOSITIONING**

When is an architecture firm also a story-telling marketing agency? It helps when the value of consistent, integrated messaging running through all branded touchpoints, including the
physical manifestations of site, architecture, and environmental design are recognized as essential to a design.

Recently, a leading Atlanta-based community bank understood this notion and chose to engage the Perkins+Will Atlanta BE team to strategize, concept, design, and implement all of the bank’s corporate brand and consumer communications, including the repositioning and redesign of their retail banking environments in effort to deliver a completely holistic customer experience. The institution’s brand values were reflected as key attributes within the development of a warm, fresh, approachable, professional, progressive and iconic brand experience.

The team went as far as repositioning the bank amongst its local competition by redesigning the bank’s overall identity, inclusive of their name and logo, to reflect the institution’s steadfast community heritage and their forward-thinking leadership. Perkins+Will also developed the company’s new tagline to communicate “Tradition Reinvented” in order to embody the traditions of the organization’s history while showcasing the bank’s innovative thinking regarding the future.
While clients often begin with a very narrow view as to how branding can enhance every aspect of their clients’ experience, in this case, we learned that our client’s eyes could be opened and we could influence their success and their growth by leveraging their history to focus on their future.

In all these examples, a client engaged our Atlanta BE team with the hope of taking their company’s identity and translating it in the physical environment. Although each company provides different services to the community, our BE team was successfully able to listen, reflect and tell the story of these brands in the design of their spaces.