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The development of a more effective signage system in just six weeks' time paved the way for the repositioning of the airport in a competitive marketplace. A distinctive corporate design system characterizes the airport's new beginnings.

The tragic Düsseldorf Airport fire of 1996 left 18 people dead and more than 150 injured. The airport reopened after just a few days, but with an inoperative terminal, makeshift operations had to be set up in tents and hangars. It became vital to reassure passengers and airlines that order and safety would be returned quickly.

MetaDesign was commissioned to develop new directional and security signage for the airport – under the exceptional deadline of six weeks when vacation traffic was set to quadruple.

A team of designers from two MetaDesign offices was established in one of the airport hangars. The existing system was mapped and analyzed. About half of the signs were found to be unhelpful or served no purpose. The content and position of new signs were quickly defined and tested. As there was very little time for experimenting with different typefaces or colors, the team based on their experience made rapid, tactical decisions.

With the aid of software to partly automate the design process, MetaDesign's 3D team developed the signage hardware (at lower-cost than ready-made systems) and all 2,500 signs were completed and installed despite the six-week deadline.

Based on the success of the signage system, MetaDesign was asked to create a new graphic identity for the Airport. A series of workshops were held with Airport management to establish a common vision. The final logotype was selected and then applied to everything from refueling vehicles to visitor guides.

Düsseldorf Airport received the highest award for 'customer experience' by Stiftung Warentest consumer-guide magazine in 1998.

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Orientation and wayfinding signage

MetaDesign's signage system clarifies different types of information with a judicious use of icons and clear information hierarchies. The consistent reinforcement of location and direction helps customer orientation and provides a sense of security. The modular nature of the signage system allows for easy updating of information.

Pictograms

Clarity of information is essential in wayfinding, particularly in an international airport. MetaDesign developed a customized set of icons based on international standards that reflects key aspects of the airport's new corporate identity.



Brand development

To combat any lingering associations with the fire, MetaDesign was asked to reposition the airport as a safe and desirable destination. The result was a renaming of the airport as "Düsseldorf International" and a new identity system reflecting the stature of this important regional hub. The new identity appears throughout the airport, including employee uniforms.