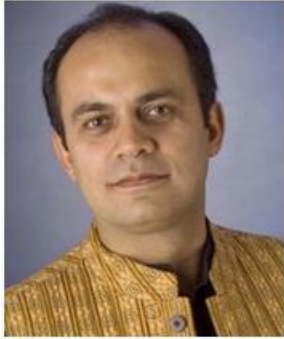


# 2015 National Signage Research & Education Conference (NSREC) Presentation Details

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**Topic: “Context and Signage Effectiveness”**

**Presenters: Vikas Mehta, Henry Hildebrandt, Christopher Auffrey**

Vikas Mehta is the Fruth/Gemini Chair, Ohio Eminent Scholar of Urban/Environmental Design and Associate Professor of Urbanism in the School of Planning at the University of Cincinnati. Dr. Mehta’s work focuses on the role of design and planning in creating a more responsive, equitable, stimulating and supportive environment. He works on various dimensions of urbanity through the exploration of place as a social and ecological setting and as a sensorial art. Dr. Mehta is the author of *The Street: a quintessential social public space* (Routledge, 2013 and 2014) which received the 2014 Book Award from the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) and was also a finalist for the 2014 Francis Tibbalds Award for Best Book of the Year. He is currently completing a 4-volume anthology titled *Public Space: Critical Concepts in Built Environment* (Routledge, Forthcoming 2015).

Henry Hildebrandt is Professor of Architecture and Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs in the School of Architecture and Interior Design at the University of Cincinnati. As such, he coordinates the



academic areas of the undergraduate programs in Architecture and Interior Design. This involves the coordination of courses and teaching faculty within each undergraduate program and the coordination of opportunities for undergraduate students. Additional assignments include teaching Senior Project Studio, and various levels of design studio and seminar/lecture courses. His research interests include Interior Design & Architecture Pedagogy Drawing Skills & Graphic Communication and Environmental Graphic Systems.

Christopher Auffrey is Associate Professor of Planning and Associate School Director for the School of Planning in College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati. His research interests include understanding the role of signage in urban communities and how this role might be optimized through public policy. He co-authored the *Economic Value of On-Premise Signs* study completed in 2012. Dr. Auffrey has professional experience with urban revitalization projects in Los Angeles and an urban infrastructure consulting firm in Washington, D.C. He also served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay. He has co-authored three books and authored or co-authored numerous journal articles and technical reports.

**Abstract:**

The communication effectiveness of on-premise signs depends on how all the elements of the signs’ design, fabrication and placement respond to the environmental context in which the sign is situated. This effectiveness is important because on-premise signs are essential elements of the built environment that contribute to the sense of place and social-cultural wellbeing of a community. Such signs are a powerful medium that helps create and reinforce a community’s identity, viability, and sustainable economic health.

Problematically, the specific contextual conditions and physical environmental factors in which identical and brand-standard, on-premise signs are placed can vary tremendously. Yet consideration of how these conditions and factors affect a sign’s impact is often overshadowed by narrow criteria such as minimizing short-term costs, political expediency, traditional fabrication processes, and an inability or unwillingness to address the intangibles of localized social and cultural factors. Because the economic and social wellbeing of a community, whether a neighborhood, commercial strip, or historic square, require effective signage, well-designed on-premise signage that responds to its specific context is essential and becomes an important factor in sustaining a healthy commercial environment.

Based on data collected throughout the country -- along streets, roads, commercial strips, and within neighborhoods and downtowns -- the presentation will provide evidence of how a community's contextual environments influence the effectiveness of on-premise signage and ultimately the community's sense of place and quality of life. The ensuing discussion will argue that effective on-premise signage requires design and placement that explicitly considers multiple aspects of the sign's surrounding built and natural environment.