

# Is It Time for a City Branding Strategy?

by Bill Baker, President, Total Destination Marketing

*A well-conceived brand strategy can provide increased effectiveness and efficiency for all of types of destination marketing, whether it is for a country, state, region, city, downtown or Main Street.*

Branding is strategic. Too often it is narrowly viewed as being all about advertising, designs and catchy phrases. Instead, it should be a strategic framework to guide how the place should communicate, prioritize, and behave in regard to target audiences. It should guide the marketing, management and service delivery aspects of the city. If individual tactical decisions are driving the city's marketing programs, then it is time for the intervention and strategic discipline of a brand strategy.

A quick test to evaluate how the city is perceived is to consider the following questions:

- Is it well known?
- Is the image accurate?
- What is its reputation?
- Do target audiences care what the city stands for or what it can do for them
- Is there focus and consistency to the city's communications to external audiences?
- How does it stand out from other cities?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when people are exposed to the city name?

- Are these compatible with your marketing objectives?
- Do partners use common words and images when describing the city?



Your brand is your promise. There must be total alignment between what you say about your city and the experiences and benefits it delivers. When it is out of alignment the brand is not credible or sustainable. This can happen when the city is projecting itself as one thing, but the reality is far different. For example, the city promotes itself as a place for romantic beach getaways, but visitors find that restaurant service is a nightmare,

hotels are substandard, and that after-hour beach walkways are hard to find and poorly lit. Strong, successful brands don't display this kind of dissonance.



City marketers must constantly monitor customer satisfaction and “test drive” their own experiences to ensure that they are of a high standard and are aligned with the promises that they are making.

If there is a gap between the reality of your city and the views that outsiders hold about it, then you need a strategy to bridge this gap. Whether people hold an overly positive or negative image, you must address the situation since both of these scenarios can cause problems. An overly positive one can lead to customer disappointment, while a negative image will lead potential customers to spend their time and money elsewhere and possibly perpetuate negative word of mouth.

When individual tactical decisions are driving marketing programs, it's time for the intervention and strategic discipline of a brand strategy in order to coordinate those disparate activities and make the most of your scarce marketing resources.

The Websites and brochures of your city's various messengers may look great, but without a brand strategy it will be a matter of luck as to whether there is cohesion and consistency in their look, story, and message. So often, the “ad of the month” syndrome is at play where city marketers constantly change their communications in the hope of finding a message that will strike the right chord. Brand planning is the ideal way to avoid this kind of marketing schizophrenia where there is no consistency or clarity to the way the city presents itself.

It may be time to develop a brand strategy when you detect one or more of the following conditions:

- There is no clear and relevant positioning.
- There is the need to overcome a dated, confusing, or inaccurate image.
- New infrastructure developments or a major event are likely to redefine the place.
- A downtown or cultural revitalization program is being launched.
- There is a lack of unity among local partners, where the overall marketing messages of the city and its partners lack focus or differentiation.

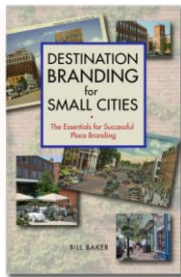
- A need for greater ROI from marketing.
- Constantly changing advertising messages and themes.
- A lack of unity and consistency in the communications of city messengers.
- Market share is suffering and a competitor has a disproportionate “share of mind”.
- Traditional markets are declining in size and value.
- Marketing resources are being applied in an inefficient or uncoordinated manner.

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**Bill Baker** is the founder and President of *Total Destination marketing*. TDM is a team of destination branding, tourism planning and marketing specialists. Bill is recognized internationally as an expert in developing brand strategies for destinations and communities of all sizes. He is a popular speaker and author of *Destination Branding for Small Cities* available from [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).

[WWW.DestinationBranding.com](http://WWW.DestinationBranding.com)

Bill’s Blog: [www.citybranding.typepad.com](http://www.citybranding.typepad.com)



*Destination Branding for Small Cities* by Bill Baker is drawing praise from industry leaders, marketers and academics worldwide. It’s a must read primer that demystifies city branding and provides affordable, proven tools, templates.

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