

Book

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Introduction to Small City Branding

'Introduction to Small City Branding', is the first in a series of PDF e-Books by **Bill Baker of Total Destination Marketing**. It provides valuable insight for people who are considering launching a branding initiative for their community.

Introduction to Small City Branding

Cities, downtowns, Main Streets and regions of all sizes find themselves striving more fiercely for attention. The USA has approximately 20,000 cities, 3,400 counties, 126 America's Byways, and 12,800 designated National Historic Districts. And that does not include the states, regions, resorts, and downtowns that are also clamoring for attention. This makes it imperative for communities, no matter their size or composition, to clearly differentiate themselves and to convey why they are special and should be considered as preferred places to live, work, invest or visit.



The Branding Small Cities series outlines a variety of issues and essential steps for community-based organizations and stakeholders to develop a brand strategy for their city or region.

Is Your Community Ready to Play?

If your community doesn't proactively manage its image and reputation, it may be positioned by your customers, competitors, and the media, and probably to your disadvantage. It may also be tagged with attributes and an image you may not want. A brand strategy is the best way to address this situation.

While brand marketing has been applied to consumer products for decades, the concept of branding countries, cities and regions really only appeared in the mid-90's to enable them to compete and stand out more effectively in an increasingly competitive world.

In the context of a place being the focal point for the promotion for economic activity, it makes sense that it should be

managed as a brand because this can help manage its image and perceived value. Ambitious small cities are recognizing that branding programs directly contributes to a clearer understanding of what makes them special and how they can better connect with their target audiences.

Action Point:

Branding provides the guidance system for communities to stand out and excel in a crowded world.

Who is Your City?

Brands are very much like people, and this becomes a valuable metaphor for the character of places. A place without a clear and appealing identity is like a person with a dull or bland personality. They blend into the crowd, are seen as uninteresting, and don't get the attention and respect that they need or deserve. On the other hand, like a person, a community or destination can have a distinct and compelling personality, strong values and strengths, and a particular look and style. Defining and consistently conveying these distinctive

traits is at the heart of successfully branding cities.



Many communities have the added disadvantage of trying to compete with an image that is out of date, inaccurate, or unbalanced. It may also be invisible to prospective customers, whether they are prospective visitors, new residents or site selectors. The perceptions surrounding a city, whether accurate or not, are the reality that people must use to judge whether to visit, study, invest, or relocate there.

Action Point:

Your city's personality informs the tone and voice for how the community presents itself and at customer touchpoints.

What is Small City Branding?

A destination brand is not a logo or tagline. It's also not a physical entity. It exists only in the customer's mind. A brand is a collection of associations and thoughts held by prospective customers. The challenge for successful place or destination marketing is to ensure that these are as positive as possible.

In a nutshell, your brand is your promise of distinctive value and helps your community stand out in a crowded marketplace. It enables you to build the brand and competitively position and influence positive perceptions of your city or region. If you want your city to become a preferred destination for visitors, talented people, investment and business, the thought of managing your brand identity and reputation is really not an option – it's essential!

Action Point:

A genuine brand makes and keeps a clear, single-minded promise that must be consistently delivered.

It Pays to be Proactive

No longer can cities afford to stand by while their image is shaped by events and organizations outside of their control. Successful cities have found that they must be proactive and constantly strive to make themselves relevant and respected.

A carefully designed brand strategy provides the framework and guidelines that, when fully implemented, can lead to increased social and economic benefits for the entire community.



Cities that are crystal clear about what they stand for, know their brand identity, key messages, and invest in visitor experience design are in a better position to manage

their identity and be more competitive.

Branding is strategic!

Yes, branding may provide attractive logo designs, but more importantly it's a strategic tool. It's about revealing who you are, who you want to become, what differentiates your community, the key messages and the factors that will guide your focus and consistency. And you really can do it on a small budget by optimizing all resources and communications that are already in play.

Action Point:

A brand strategy should act as a strategic guidance system and provide a framework to prioritize and facilitate business decisions.

Branding Cities Calls for a Different Approach

The path to revealing your destination's brand is likely to involve a multitude of stakeholders and will depart from

the process that's generally followed for branding corporate products and services. One reason for this variation is the composite nature of places that are a compilation of many independent and competing businesses, products, and experiences that are owned and managed by many different organizations.

There's no single custodian or owner of the brand.

When discussing the differences in branding places and consumer products with friends in advertising agencies, they frequently maintain that there is no difference between the two. To some extent they are correct. However there are differences that have a profound influence on the process and outcomes. These relate to the complexities of ownership, consultation, decision-making, and product development.

Community-based brands must withstand a level of public debate that consumer



brands rarely endure. A city brand must stand the test of time, political scrutiny, media questions, and the analysis of marketing partners. The best way to insulate the brand from this scrutiny is to generate buy-in and involvement through an open consultative process with a branding agency experienced in branding cities.

Inga Hlin Palsdottir at Promote Iceland suggests, “It can be tempting to latch on to a new idea or a quick opportunity and there are a lot of tempting ideas and offers out there that claim to be able to save the image of your destination, or are vital to the image , and so on. Stick to your strategy, stick to what you have decided and keep a clear long - term focus.”¹

Action Point:

The best way to insulate the brand from this scrutiny is to generate buy-in and involvement through an open, proven consultative process.

Success Stories

Mankato MN

The Mankato brand positions the city as a compelling place rich in trails for cyclists, runners, hikers, skiers and kayakers. It has the greatest combination of local, county and state trails in Southern Minnesota. It’s also a place where enthusiasts can then unwind in a vibrant downtown offering



cultural encounters such as headliner concerts, theatre, music, visual arts, and lively night entertainment. The tagline, “Now Playing” and logo capture Mankato’s charm as a bike-friendly, small city with enriching cultural encounters that are reflected in the design style and color pallet.

¹Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

Sitka AK

TDM teamed up with Great Destination Strategies and Axia Creative to develop a new brand for Sitka, Alaska. The team considered Sitka's mixed heritage, included the native Tlinget people and the Russians in the late 1700s. These two cultural flavors were combined with the prominence of the local arts into an experiential "Art Meets Wild" brand. The brand also set the foundation for expanding the city's cultural programs for visitors. The resulting logo included a stylized font treatment that borrows form elements from the totemic designs with a hint of Russian character. It is central to creating a unified destination through innovative marketing, signage and wayfinding systems featuring the designs.

Oshkosh WI

Oshkosh, while well-known for Oshkosh B'Gosh had an unclear image and no definitive positioning as a tourism destination. The Convention & Visitors Bureau had been using the tagline "Oshkosh on the Water" for fifteen years. But this tagline no longer reflected what

was attracting the majority of visitors to the city or the best prospects for economic development. Research also revealed that residents did not have a positive image of their own city.

Following extensive research that engaged hundreds of residents and sought the opinions and perceptions of prospective visitors it quickly became apparent that Oshkosh's extraordinary calendar of events and event venues were critical to defining the city's brand.

The competitive positioning for Oshkosh was defined as "Wisconsin's Event City" and this was also adopted as the city tagline. After several years the brand continues to resonate with visitors and stakeholders as the city attracts new events and is now establishing a major entertainment center.

How Can We Help?

When you're ready to start your brand planning and design, we can introduce you to techniques specifically designed to meet the special needs for branding and marketing cities and regions.

Free Consultation: Take advantage of a no-charge consultation with a destination branding expert to discuss your community branding challenges and needs.

To get started, send us an email at: billb@destinationbranding.com

TDM's One-Day Branding Retreat is the ideal way to kick-start your branding journey through an intensive day that features interactive presentations, brand workshops and discussions.

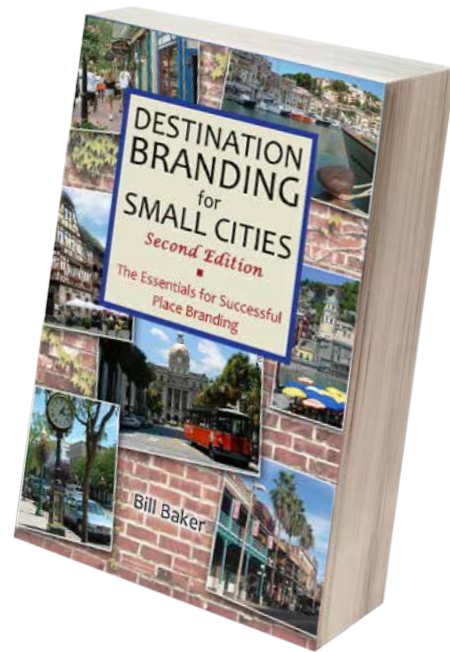
TDM's Brand Discovery Lab is an intensive 4 to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

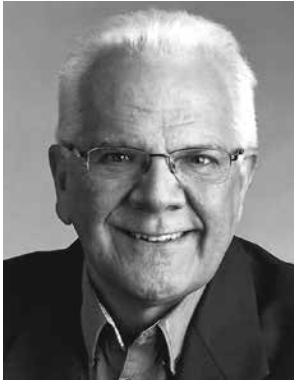
TDM's Destination Branding Strategy follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

Destination Branding for Small Cities

If you liked this e-Book, you'll love our comprehensive book, Destination Branding for Small Cities. This best-selling book cuts through the theory, advertising-speak and jargon to simplify and clarify the practice of branding places improved tourism, economic development, placemaking and urban design. It provides real world examples, as well as affordable, proven tools, templates and checklists to help breathe life into small city branding and marketing.

Available at
amazon.com





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Todd Mayfield is a Principal and the Group Creative Director for Axia Creative. Axia is an industry leader in the design of brand identity, wayfinding and visual communications for destinations throughout the US and Canada.



Both Bill and Todd serve on the international expert panel for the Place Brand Observer which is a library of research, case studies, lively expert interviews and reflections on latest trends, ideas and opportunities. We invite you to visit and explore placebrandobserver.com.





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