

Book

10



# Experiences are the Brand

‘Experiences are the Brand’, is the tenth in a series of e-Books from **Bill Baker of Total Destination Marketing**. It provides valuable insight for leaders who are considering launching a branding initiative for their community.

## The Experience is the Brand

Satisfaction with place brands is driven by what customers feel, think, remember, taste and hear about a place. They seek opportunities to do special and “brag-able” things. They want to immerse themselves in the local culture or lifestyle that’s distinctly different from everyday life. This has resulted in a seismic change in destination marketing that brings a new focus centered on experiences.



Today’s visitors want to go beyond being passive observers. They’re looking for more than just another photo of where they’ve been. Their tastes, behavior and needs

have evolved to where they’re now wanting more hands-on, interactive and immersive experiences.

An experience is not the same as a product, service or location. An experience provides emotional connection and immersion with the place, its activities, its people, and ambiance. The ideal experience stimulates emotions and provides enduring memories.

### Action Point:

Experiences are the inescapable reality of a destination brand.

### Visitor Experiences are Job #1

Delivering outstanding experiences is more important than ever. However, product development and experience design are frequently missing from place branding strategies. However, their inclusion is essential to ensure that the place consistently delivers on its promise and remains relevant and competitive. Destination marketers must be sure that there are no gaps between customer

expectations and the reality of their city. Delivering memorable destination experiences requires a 360° focus by many partners. Today, an unsatisfactory experience will spread like wildfire through social media and seriously set back the city's branding efforts. It's now a two-way encounter, no longer totally controlled by the destination and its partners.

For a small city to remain to remain relevant and in demand, product development, placemaking and experience management should receive the same level of focus and investment as communications and sales.

Robert Govers, founding chairman of the *International Place Branding Association*, highlighted the importance of experiences when he said, *"In the experience economy an integrated place branding strategy is needed to capture the hearts and attention of visitors. This means that the city's brand should be supported by policies, innovations, events, structures, investments and symbolic actions."*<sup>1</sup>

Malcolm Allan, of PlaceMatters provides guidance for cities in linking their brand to city priorities, *"Obviously, not every single action, policy, investment or event of the city will be fully 'on brand' and some of them will even likely be 'off brand'. But it's important that key stakeholders identify which of the multitude of their city's activities have significant impact on the brand that they wish to manage and market them as a priority."*<sup>2</sup>

### **Action Point:**

Experience design, wayfinding, and placemaking should be essential elements in place branding strategies. Their inclusion is essential for both economic development and to ensure that the brand fulfills its promises.

## **Design and Stage Memorable Experiences**

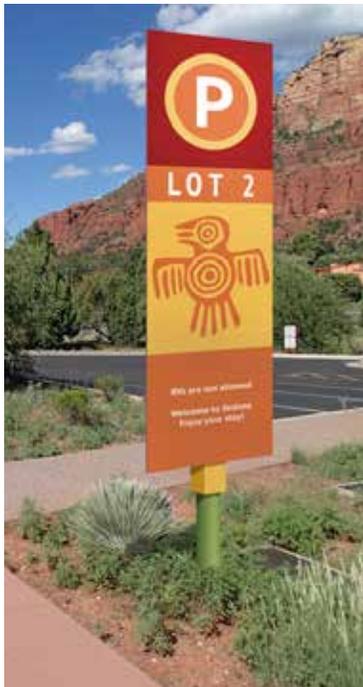
Outstanding experiences rarely happen by accident. Great experiences don't just happen. They are carefully crafted and staged. Partner outreach and education specifically related to communicating and

<sup>1</sup> Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

<sup>2</sup> Destination Branding for Small Cities – Baker – Creative Leap Books

delivering the brand experience should be custom-designed for executives and business leaders, sales and marketing, and front-line personnel. In some cases, it's beneficial to engage a qualified outside specialist to develop these brand experience development programs.

Phil Bruno from *Treat 'em Right* highlights the importance of experience design, *"If your community does not understand the importance of staging unique, personal, memorable experiences that provide time well spent, you are in trouble. In other words, if your brand is promising that spending time with you will provide a transformational experience and your partners are producing generic experiences that are simply nice, easy, and convenient, you'll lose customers to the innovative competitors that are staging more*



*engaging and, in some cases - customized experiences. It not only essential that communities be vigilant at their key delivery points to ensure that they are all in tune with the brand promise but are delivering experiences that are designed to be fresh, innovative and memorable."*

### **Action Point:**

The increasing sophistication of today's customers calls for a more strategic and creative approach to the design and management of tourism experiences.

### **Branding in the Streets**

Signage and wayfinding systems serve vital roles. They not only inform, guide, and motivate visitors and residents, but are also attractive and functional expressions of the brand. They help shape the city's identity through their style, design, colors, lettering, content and placement. Wayfinding combines the disciplines of

graphic design, architecture, storytelling, industrial design and landscape architecture.

Todd Mayfield, principal of Axia Creative, captured the vital link between wayfinding and place branding in saying, “In addition to helping visitors navigate through a place, wayfinding can help support a brand. Where advertising and marketing communications make a brand promise, wayfinding will help keep it by packaging an environment with brand-supportive graphics”<sup>3</sup>.

### **Action Point:**

Wayfinding presents physical evidence of the brand and connects people to the built environment and the city’s brand identity.

### **Make it a Special Place**

It’s often easy to tell where attention has been paid to placemaking and the aesthetics of a city. This may include preserving or enhancing its natural qualities and built environments. Cities like this gain a reputation for being a “special place” or a “fun place to hangout”, and this goes a long way toward supporting their brand

reputation. Placemaking like this is an important catalyst for attracting, holding and dispersing people through the city.

Placemaking may involve streetscapes, public art, wayfinding, landscaping, parks and public amenities and is implemented through place management programs inspired by the brand.

### **Action Point:**

Consider the role of placemaking in your brand strategy and what is needed to create a special sense of place.

### **Success Stories**

#### ***Medford and the Rogue Valley OR***

Situated in Southern Oregon, Medford and the Rogue Valley region includes the cities of Medford, Ashland and Jacksonville. The area is renowned for its outstanding cultural events, most notably the internationally acclaimed Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the nationally known acts at the Ginger Rogers Theater, the Britt Festival concert series featuring national headliners, the Medford Jazz Festival, art events, and burgeoning

<sup>3</sup> Destination Branding for Small Cities – Baker – Creative Leap Books

boutique wineries, and excellent artisan food outlets.

Despite the attractive region surrounding the city, Medford had a negative and bland image and was not considered to be an appealing tourism destination. The tagline used for more than a decade was “The Center of It All” which had not gained traction with target audiences.

Following extensive internal and external research the brand strategy was founded on positioning based on the opportunities to experience the creations, personality and entertainment of local makers, actors, artisans, and artists in theatres, galleries, food outlets and wineries. The strategy identified opportunities to activate even more performances by the region’s artisans and actors. It formed a unifying framework for the CVB to focus and prioritize communications, product development, investment and partnership outreach.

### ***Meet Chicago Northwest, IL***

Chicago Northwest is a cosmopolitan region on the northwest edge of O’Hare Airport, comprised of eight cities, including Arlington Heights, Elk Grove Village and Schaumburg. The region was marketed as Woodfield Chicago Northwest and was not well known. Individual communities did not identify with the regional name and there was no consistent, unifying message or positioning.

Brand research revealed that Woodfield Chicago Northwest is Illinois’ most outstanding regional combination of lodging, shopping, dining, cultural, sporting and visitor attractions. TDM defined the brand strategy and positioning to distinguish the region and provided the foundation for a local agency to complete the strategy by designing the visual identity and brand guidelines. The CVB adopted a new destination name, “Meet Chicago Northwest” and adopted the tagline, “It’s better on the edge” to capitalize on its convenient location at the edge of the Chicago Metro.

## 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](mailto: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.

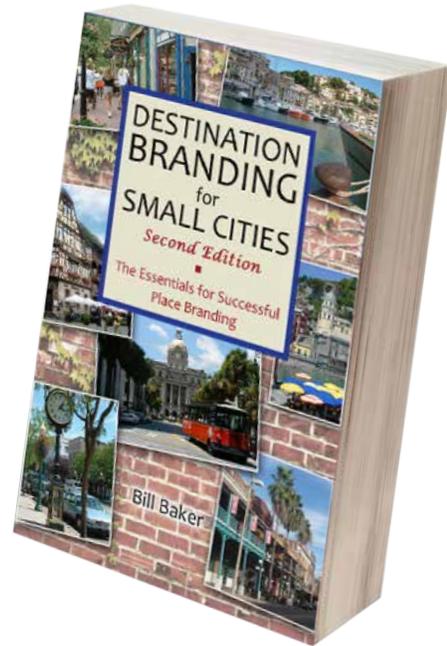
**TDM's Brand Discovery Lab** is an intensive 4 to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

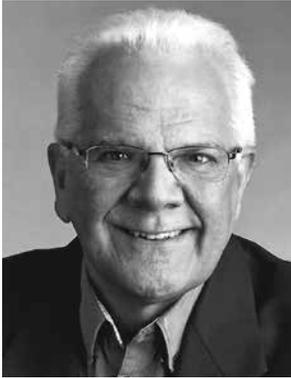
**TDM's Destination Branding Strategy** follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

## 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**





Bill Baker is Chief Strategist for Total Destination Marketing, and is recognized internationally as an author, speaker and for his extensive work in creating brand strategies for places of all sizes, from nations to small cities.

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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](http://placebrandobserver.com).*





**Total Destination Marketing**

Leaders in Place Branding