

Book

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Why Bother with Small City Branding?

‘Why Bother with Small City Branding?’, is the second in a series of e-Books from **Bill Baker of Total Destination Marketing**. It provides valuable insight for people who are considering launching a branding initiative for their community.

Why Bother with Small City Branding?

Cities and regions of all sizes now find themselves competing more fiercely for attention, relevance, and economic wellbeing. Their customers, whether visitors, new residents or investors, have an abundance of other places from which they can choose. Some are even trying to compete with an image and messages that are out of date and inaccurate. These perceptions, whether accurate or not are the reality for external audiences who may be searching for a place to visit, study, invest, or relocate.

While community and civic leaders may debate and procrastinate over the issue of branding and marketing their town, those who actively value their city image soon recognize that developing and managing an attractive brand identity is not an option for their community – it's essential!

The Branding Small Cities series outlines

the basic issues and essential steps needed for defining and developing a compelling community brand.



The Benefits of a Brand Strategy

A community that has a clear, healthy and attractive image finds it easier to be selected in any competitive setting. It is seen in a positive light and has qualities and benefits that visitors, residents and investors want to be associated with. A brand strategy provides the most effective way for small cities to manage their identity and distinguish themselves as the ideal choice option for their target customers.

It provides much more than a logo and tagline. A genuine brand strategy should

act as a strategic guidance system to provide direction for how the place will present itself in terms of messaging and product development priorities.

A unifying city brand sets the directions for using one look, one voice and engaging common themes, images and words when presenting the city and its key precincts and experiences.

Action Point:

A brand strategy provides much more than a logo and tagline.



Is There a Gap?

If there is a gap between the reality of your city and the expectations and perceptions

held by outsiders, then you need the guidance of a brand strategy to bridge this gap. Regardless of whether people hold an overly positive or negative image, the community must address the situation since both of these scenarios can cause problems. An overly positive image can lead to disappointment, while a negative one will lead prospects to spend their time and money elsewhere, and possibly perpetuate negative word of mouth.

Your city’s marketing materials may look great, but without a well-researched brand strategy it will be a matter of luck as to whether there is consistency in their content, look, voice, and message – and whether the place matches the promises that it makes to customers.

Action Point:

Branding should bridge the gap between perceptions and reality, and ensuring that your city’s image matches its reality.

Is it Time for a Brand Strategy?

It may be time to develop a brand strategy

when you detect one or more of the following conditions:

- Key stakeholders ask, “who are we?”
- There is no clear positioning.
- The city is not leading with its most distinctive and competitive strengths and assets.
- It has a dated or inaccurate image.
- New developments, revitalization programs or a major event are likely to redefine the place.
- There is a lack of consistency in how the city is presented.
- A need for greater ROI from city marketing.

Malcolm Allan of PlaceMatters makes the point, *“Competing on tax breaks, tax credits, free land, soft loans and other financial incentives to attract investors is a zero sum game and clearly a race to the bottom. What is needed is a frank rethink about what the city offers of value and will offer in future. City branding is about being very strategic about the value and nature of the city’s strengths and experience,*

both of which need to be distinctive, and then deliberately creating, developing and demonstrating their value through appropriate on-brand actions.”¹

Action Point:

The need for a brand strategy should extend beyond wanting a new logo or look.

What’s Your Vision?

Those ambitious places wanting to define and promote their competitive identity should first answer three essential questions:

1. What do we want to be known for?
2. How can we stand out from other choices and be more competitive?
3. What thoughts and feelings do we want to come to mind when people are exposed to our community’s name?

These questions are at the heart of place branding. To successfully answer them the city needs to be customer-focused, strategic, imaginative and future-focused in order to reveal the brand in ways that will

¹Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

generate positive feelings, respect, and loyalty.

Malcom Allan, of PlaceMatters based in London says, *“Politicians, civil servants and stakeholders need to realize that place brand strategies are not a quick fix to current problems. They require time and continuing effort and require serious investment and ongoing funding.”*²

Action Point

Importantly, the city must be crystal clear about what it is, what it does, why it is interesting, and why it should matter to target audiences.

It Takes Way More Than a Logo

At the outset, successful city branding requires an understanding that branding is strategic and involves much more than designing a new logo, tagline or advertising campaign.

Hjortur Smarason from Phonix Brand Panel in London reminds us, *“Place branding is not a campaign. It is a constant process, without beginning or end. It is therefore important to have long term goals*

*which representatives of different industries and stakeholders can agree on and are willing to work together to achieve.”*³

A genuine brand strategy will act as a beacon to guide all aspects of the city’s marketing and inspire stakeholders to speak with one powerful voice and consistently present superior experiences that resonate with target audiences. Creating this strategy requires thorough research, extensive stakeholder consultation and outreach, a lot of creative thinking and an understanding of the nuances of city marketing and branding – for tourism and economic development.



² Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

³ Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

Action Point:

A genuine brand strategy will act as a beacon to guide all aspects of the city's marketing and sense of place development.



City Image = Income and Jobs

Another way to consider branding is as a way to establish the priorities and focus to allow you to manage the city's image and reputation in regard to key audiences. It should strengthen how the city is perceived and improve its capacity to compete for visitors, investors, talented people, and new residents.

The thoughts and associations that come to mind when people are exposed to your city's name is heard or read can have huge financial, political, and social value. Too few city leaders think about the number of jobs, businesses,

and other organizations that directly benefit from their city's image and reputation.

Unfortunately, a city's image and reputation can often go largely unrecognized, unappreciated and unmanaged. They never appear on the job evaluation of a Mayor, City Manager or elected official. With so much riding on its image and reputation, it makes sense to nurture, manage, and protect these most valuable of city assets. Ambitious communities have realized that they can't afford to sit back and leave these important influences without some form of monitoring and management.

Successful city brands are a private – public – nonprofit collaboration. If the brand responsibility sits on the desk of one person, it will fail.

Action Point

City branding generates jobs and has to be a team sport!

Branding Provides a Guidance System

The biggest challenge that many cities face is unifying partners in order to take

control of the city's competitive identity and reputation, which have been unmanaged for a long time. Without a brand strategy, a city may bounce from one set of messages and priorities to another without considering what they want the city to be known for.

Cities are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to proactively shape and influence what the world thinks of them and to position and market themselves with strategic intent, not simply by what seems like a good idea this month. It should provide them with a decision-making framework to consistently shape a strong identity and avoid the “ad of the month” syndrome with frequently changing content, messages, designs and lead products. It should lead to a higher ROI from their marketing investments.

Action Point

A place brand strategy is a guidance system that provides greater focus, synergy and consistency.

Success Stories

Yakima Valley WA

The Yakima Valley comprising five cities is one of the nation's largest producers of agricultural crops and provides more than one-third of the wine in Washington State. The region's positioning is founded on having the greatest number of Wine Country and farm fresh visitor experiences in the Pacific Northwest.



This was captured in the brand essence “Celebrate Food and Wine”, which summarizes the competitive focus for the region's visitor experience. This forms the guiding principle for the product development investments and communications of the VCB and its partners.

An important element in implementing the brand strategy is the development of the visitor information center as a portal to the region's outstanding food and wine experiences.

The result is increased efficiency, cooperation and a growth in visitor numbers that is exceeding the state average.

Janesville WI

Janesville is a small city in Southern Wisconsin that is undergoing redevelopment of downtown, the additional of a Riverwalk and gathering space, an outdoor performing arts center and the integration of local restaurants and bars. It is known as Wisconsin's park place. The new brand strategy was revealed after extensive research, analysis and consultation.

The process started with a brand retreat with the CVB Board and staff, and community leaders. An outreach program engaged residents and partners through

interviews, workshops, and a local public opinion survey. Market research was conducted in Rockford IL to assess community perceptions and attitudes toward Janesville.



The brand essence was defined as, “Year-round fun outdoors”. This fun in parks, trails, and rivers is integral to Janesville’s sense of place. These nature-based recreational attributes have a strong influence on Janesville as a compelling place for attracting new residents and visitors.

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.

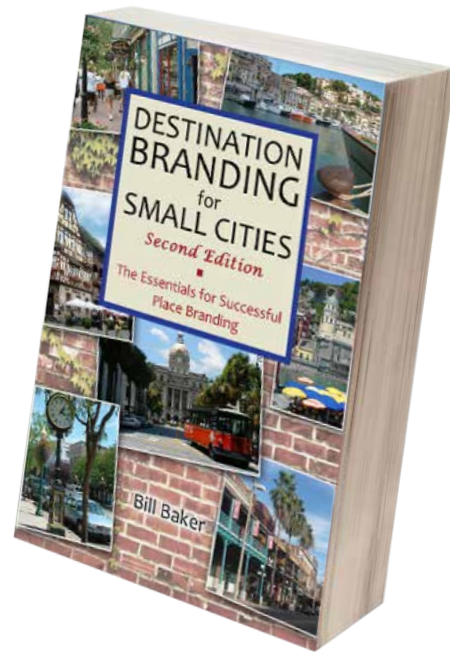
TDM's Brand Discovery Lab is an intensive 4- to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

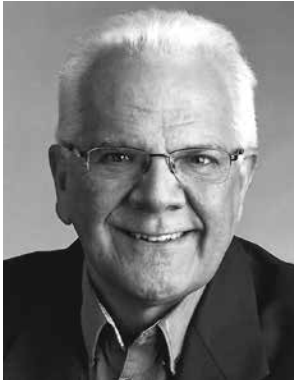
TDM's Destination Branding Strategy follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

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





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.





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