

Book



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Branding is Strategic and Long-term

'Branding is Strategic and Long Term', is the third in the series of PDF e-Books by **Bill Baker at Total Destination Marketing**. It provides valuable insight for community leaders who are considering launching a branding initiative for their community.

Branding is Strategic and Long-term

It possibly took decades, or maybe even centuries, to form your city's current image. And we know that the "old brain" is much stronger and inflexible than the "new brain" when it comes to replacing old images and stereotypes. This means that it's difficult to change perceptions and views in the short term.



We know of many post-industrial cities where their smoke stack industries closed decades ago, yet those cities are still regarded by some as "grimy" industrial cities. Similarly, if a city wants to reposition

itself to be known for something different to the past, prospective visitors won't catch on to this overnight unless you have a huge budget and you can sustain the communications and deliver new experiences.

The brand should first and foremost be regarded as a part of a strategic toolkit and the central decision-making framework for building and projecting the city's competitive identity. Changing the city's image for the long term requires a well-planned and systematic approach that goes beyond a new logo or quick fix advertising campaign, no matter how creative the campaign may be.

Branding is Strategic!

Too often branding 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 experience 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.

Too often the tagline and logo get the lion's share of attention. While they do have a role to play, they are only two of the elements in the city's brand toolkit. Taglines and logos alone will not help you attain your city's goals.

Action Point:

Branding is strategic and takes a long term focus.

Benefits are Short and Long Term

Sebastian Zenker from the Copenhagen Business School put it nicely when he stated, *"Branding is not a sprint but a marathon! It can only develop its strengths if you keep the brand content for many years. For a long-term success, the brand themes*

*should stay the same and only the specific stories (giving content to the brand themes) should vary."*¹



Branding can, and does, bring short-term benefits but the true value is long-term and cumulative. Successful place branding is achieved with many small victories, again and again. A city's image is the result of thousands of influences and influencers over an extended period. On the other hand, a Grand Slam approach to branding a place on the basis of one big ad campaign is a sure fire way to blow the budget with little long-term impact.

True success will only come from the consistency of messages and outstanding experiences from many sources hitting their mark time, and again. The benefits of city branding are considerable, however they will not materialize overnight because the brand needs to gain traction within the

¹Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

community, among key partners and with key markets. From the outset, you must be sure that the objectives are clear and realistic, programs are well funded and that there is an understanding of what branding is and isn't. This includes ensuring that no one expects a magic wand. And when the brand strategy is finally revealed, that's when the hard work really begins!

Action Point:

Magic wands don't work with place branding.



Vigilance, Energy and Focus

It is an old marketing truism that we get tired of our marketing long before

our customers do. Some organizations ever so slightly depart from their brand strategy one a small step at a time as they stray from the agreed Brand Platform and guidelines. While the brand may be defined with a long term view in mind, brand managers must remain vigilant and “trim the sails” depending upon the addition of new city assets, competitor actions, changing consumer tastes and needs, and the trends that may be impacting the overall business environment.

Julian Stubbs from Up There Everywhere, Sweden observes, *“We see too many places spend all of their focus and money on developing a brand and platform, to then go and change everything when a new raft of politicians is elected. Strategies need to be long term, and only the execution and narrative need to change.”*²

Action Point:

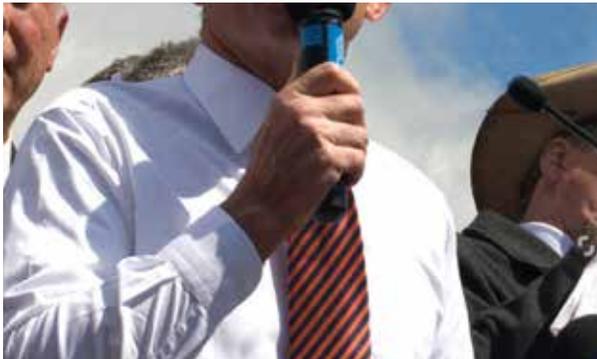
Long term success means believing in your brand and constantly trimming the sails in a changing world.

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Do Elected Officials Understand?

The branding and marketing of cities can be complex and sometimes, controversial. In order to avoid or minimize controversy, political and opinion leaders must understand the assignment and embrace the many benefits that the strategy will bring. If they persist in regarding it as a process to deliver a new tagline or logo for the city, the project will achieve less than stellar results.

They must understand that this is a strategic assignment to enhance the city's economic well-being and competitiveness.



It may go to the core of everything that the city will do when presenting its best

face to the world. When they fully grasp and support this, they are not only able to deflect criticism of the brand but may become influential brand champions who signal that this project is important to constituents and the future of the city.

Action Point:

Engage elected officials early in the process.

Saddle Up for the Long Term

Another obstacle to the sustainability of city brands is the turnover in leadership, especially elected officials with term limits. As Joao Freire from Universidade Europeia in Lisbon, Portugal observes, *“the public nature of a place brand is condemning it to its unsustainability. The changing of politicians, governments and those responsible for the brand makes the maintenance of long-term strategies difficult, as goals and priorities may change together with the new governing professionals.*

At this early stage, give consideration to the longevity and sustainability of the project by including people who are not likely to leave the city, elected office or their respected position in the near future.”³

From time to time pivotal people who are essential to the vitality of the brand move on. They might be the head of the tourism organization, elected officials, board members and key partners. This is when it is important to ensure that there is continuity in understanding, knowledge and energy in regard to the brand strategy. Without this attention, the brand investments may become diluted and gradually fade away. What may be left is a lonely logo searching for meaning and relevance.

Todd Mayfield at Axia Creative based in Florida offers a similar sentiment, *“Graphic style, promotional campaigns and urban development can be innovative and creative, as long as the basic brand message remains at the foundation.*

³Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

Sustaining a brand is a multi-year commitment that must be managed by an empowered lead organization that has oversight authority.”⁴

Action Point:

The brand must be built to withstand the turnover in leadership and the terms of elected officials.

Ready for Change?

After decades of place branding assignments, I recognize that they are fundamentally an exercise in change management. A successful city brand often requires changes to regulations, laws, systems, budgets, processes, resources, and recruitment. Above all, it may call for a change to attitudes, relationships and focus.

The first casualty in many successful place branding projects is a realization that the old “that’s the way we’ve always done it” attitude won’t work. For many people, the prospect of new focus, concepts, priorities, and partnerships causes extreme

⁴Place Brand Observer Expert Panel

resistance. It removes them from their comfort zone and challenges entrenched attitudes. In these situations, you need to expose them to the benefits that can come from the new approach so they can gain the confidence and trust toward the project and its outcomes.

Tearing down unhelpful barriers, attitudes, and processes are major steps forward. Collaboration, networking, and integration are the signatures of a healthy and sustainable brand. Some people and organizations may have no idea of their daily impact on the identity of their city.



Action Point:

The first casualty may be the “that’s the way we’ve always done it” attitude.

Essentials for a Successful Community Brand

The places that are most successful in developing and managing their brands are those that follow a set of key success principles. These include:

1. **Focus.** A well-researched and compelling brand establishes the priorities for content, messages, images, design, experiences and placemaking.
2. **Consistency.** Just as focus is essential, so is consistently and creatively deploying the agreed brand toolkit – time and time again.
3. **A Collaborative Mindset.** A successful brand frequently calls for everyone to adapt to new circumstances. This requires that there be no walls or “silos” in which people and organizations restrict on-brand actions.
4. **Build the brand from the inside out.** Ensure that key local stakeholders are involved in the process from an early stage.
5. **It takes a long-term commitment.** Just as your current image may have

evolved over many years, trying to change perceptions and behavior will not happen overnight.

6. ***Deliver on the Promise.*** The brand promise must be kept current and grounded in truth and reality.
7. ***Emotion.*** People travel for a different state of mind or to feel better in some way. It's that simple.
8. ***Experiential Focus.*** Be innovative in designing experiences for visitors to be engaged, stimulated and actively involved at a sensory level.
9. ***Pass the Baton.*** Make sure that subsequent generations of leaders, staff and partners are energized and well informed to ensure that the brand is not diluted or distracted over time.
10. ***Brand Education.*** Key stakeholders should understand branding and know how to best support and deploy the local brand.
11. ***It's a Marathon not a Sprint.*** Confirm that long term political support and funding resources are in place to build and sustain the brand.

SUCCESS Stories

Durham NC

Durham NC (pop. 220,000) is a colorful, creative, and entrepreneurial community and is the proud home of Research Triangle Park, esteemed Duke and North Carolina Central universities and a creative population. Despite having these and other strong assets and credentials, they were not always attributed to Durham nor were there common or consistent messages being communicated by the city.

The Durham brand strategy was revealed after months of research, analysis, and extensive consultation. The brand summarizes the Durham experience with the phrase, where great things happen. This accurately captures the spirit of Durham because it encapsulates its ambition, pride, history, energy, events, achievements, performances, and attitudes. Third party research has shown that Durham has a significant creative edge over communities of a similar size.

The overarching Durham brand strategy now provides a unifying framework to enable stakeholders to present Durham in a consistent and compelling voice as a place to live, visit, relocate, grow businesses, pursue education or seek health care – no matter who is communicating. It serves as an umbrella for all other Durham-based business, university, organization, and neighborhood brands. It has successfully encouraged local stakeholders to communicate the same messages and encourage the development of the city's creativity capabilities.



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.

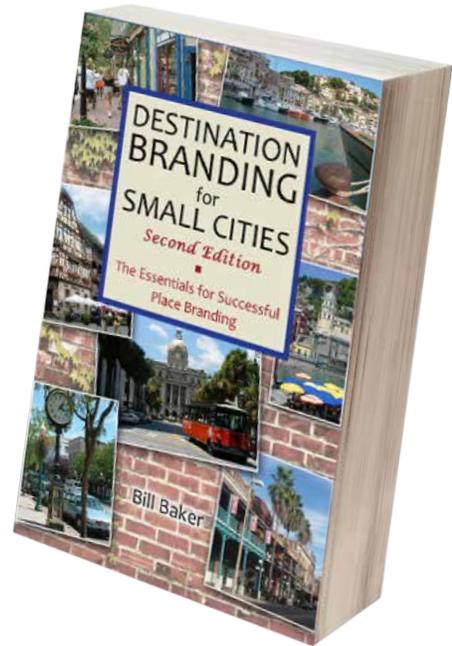
TDM's Brand Discovery Lab is an intensive 4 to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

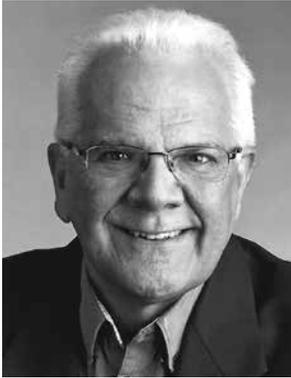
TDM's Destination Branding Strategy follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

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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