

Book

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# Prepare for Your City's Brand Journey

'Prepare for Your City's Brand Journey', is the fourth 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.

## Prepare for Your City's Brand Journey

Like an athlete preparing to compete in a major event, branding a city or destination calls for a lot of careful and detailed preparation before getting to the starting line. This e-book looks at some of the preliminary actions needed to prepare for the support, understanding and endorsement of the community's branding initiative.

The Branding Small Cities series outlines the basic issues and essential steps needed for defining and developing a sustainable community brand.

### Take the Lead

One of the unexpected benefits of a comprehensive branding initiative is that it provides an unprecedented opportunity for the City, destination marketing organization (DMO) or Chamber of Commerce to showcase its role as a community and industry leader. Time and again, we have



seen the process become the rallying point to re-energize the community, the organization, its constituents and the presentation of the city. But the big challenge is to sustain this heightened enthusiasm and use it as a catalyst to consolidate the lead organization's position as one of the city's most valuable future-focused organizations. It's an ideal time to move people beyond turf building, internal politics and the dated opinions that may have prevailed in the past. Lead organizations rarely have a better chance to display their value to the community than through a consultative brand audit.

### Action Point:

A branding initiative can unify and energize city partnerships.

## 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.

## Great Leaders Lead to Great Brands

Cities are dynamic with myriad agendas, visions, objectives and egos - all in play at the same meeting. Most cities have multiple centers of influence and while many individuals and organizations are very customer, business, and future-oriented, others may be firmly locked in the past or may not want to see any changes. Communicating the benefits of branding to local citizens and organizations will help in winning support and boosting community pride.

Successful place brands are more likely to emerge when leaders step out and show vision, courage and creativity. Their lead can be a powerful signal to everyone involved and may stimulate out of the box ideas and collaboration among some of the most unlikely of partners.

Gunter Soydanbay from the Canadian brand consultancy, Soydanbay offers some excellent advice, “the guiding entity must embody self-assurance without hubris, knowledge without dogma, and authority without domination. Being in command, not in control is what a place management team should aspire to be.”<sup>1</sup> We couldn’t agree more.

### **Action Point:**

Place brands emerge best with thorough research, extensive consultation and politically neutral leadership.

### **It’s Gotta Be the CEO’s Baby!**

While the City Manager, Mayor or CEO may want to delegate aspects of the day-to-day management of the branding

process to the marketing manager or other staff, he or she must remain intimately involved in crafting the strategy. This visible engagement by the CEO will ensure that he or she:

- Makes a strong statement to everyone that this is important.
- Strengthens their personal relationship, and that of the lead organization, with key constituents.
- Fully understands and takes an active role in shaping the rationale of the brand.
- Can eventually present the brand with authority and enthusiasm.
- Ensures that the brand thrives in all areas of the organization and at critical points of contact with customers.
- Leads the educative role in furthering the understanding of the brand.

### **Action Point**

Make sure that the CEO and key leaders are fully and continuously engaged.

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

## What Are Your Objectives?

The world in which any city or destination lives is dynamic. There are many forces that constantly influence its relevance, including customer needs, competitors, cultural trends and the broad political, economic, technological and social environments. Over the years, these forces have a profound impact on the appeal, relevance and image of every place.

There may be many reasons for developing a brand strategy. It may be to:

- Redefine and strengthen how the place can stand apart from other choices.
- Foster a more accurate, contemporary and positive image.
- Provide a new unifying and strategically focused approach to marketing and placemaking.
- Generate improved results for tourism, economic development and residential growth.
- Stimulate community pride and a renewed sense of purpose.

## Action Point:

What are you looking to achieve? Be aware of what a brand strategy can and cannot address.

## Success Takes Objectivity

One of the greatest challenges for community members involved in the branding process is being objective and customer-focused. Some people may find this difficult. After all, this may be the place where they were born, educated, and now live. Hence, their bias may limit their view of the community from the perspective of an outsider. This highlights the need for outside advice to lend the impartiality and objectivity that may be difficult for locals to contribute.

Engaging outside specialists also allows the community to harness the experience and skills that may not be available locally. The outside firm can guide the group through all of the difficult analysis, discussions and decisions that may be overlooked or glossed over by locals.

To gain the perspective of outside audiences, the brand audit should include customer research, an assessment of competitors and interviews with marketing partners and messengers outside the city such as tour operators, site location experts and media.

### Action Point

It takes experience and objectivity to reveal the authenticity and honesty of the brand.

### Engage the Right Expertise

We frequently encounter situations where advertising, web design, visual design and communications agencies pitch for, and win, the development of brand strategies for cities and regions. They often end with disastrous results. While each of these agencies may have been excellent in their field such as advertising, web design, graphics or PR, very few have any genuine place branding experience.



In some cases, unsuspecting panelists on agency selection committees have been lured by the “glitter” of the advertising examples presented by these agencies, causing them to lose sight of their original

Request for Proposal (RFP). The lure of these colorful design portfolios also cause them to forget that they have a tiny advertising budget and could never afford similar advertising campaigns. We understand the need for ambitious cities to have great advertising, designs and communications. But those actions come after the brand has been revealed following extensive research and consultation.

Otherwise, it’s like engaging a painter to design your home, instead of an architect, simply because you like the colors he chooses and how he will finish the job.

The first step is to establish the right architecture for the house with a specialist

architect, just as engaging the best specialist place branding team to establish the competitive strategy is important to cities and communities.

### **Action Point**

Place branding calls for a more than advertising and designs.

### **Who Should You Work With?**

Once it's been decided to develop a place brand, the city's next critical decision is how to undertake and manage the process. Will it attempt to handle the research, analysis and strategic



development internally or should it engage the services of a specialist? If the decision is made to engage qualified specialists, the

consideration then becomes which firm and under what conditions.

The selection of the branding agency will have long term repercussions. Therefore, project leaders must first agree on the overall objectives and clarify exactly how they interpret “branding” (perhaps it’s being confused with a marketing communications, logo or advertising campaign). This will go a long way toward the best use of resources, making difficult decisions, and recruiting the right specialists.

Knowing how to go about the selection process itself is equally important. There are countless firms that claim to have expertise to guide you through place branding, so you need to assess each firm’s specific capabilities and detect those that are most likely to over-promise and under-deliver.

### **Action Point**

Does the firm truly understand the branding of places and have the specific experience and expertise relevant to your initiative?

## **Success Stories**

### ***Gulf Shores, AL***

This Alabama beach community on the Gulf of Mexico has been a popular family destination for generations, but it experienced challenges recovering from hurricanes and the BP oil spill of 2010.



Our extensive and in-depth research revealed that Gulf Shores competitive advantage was its small-town atmosphere and the traditional beach experience prized by parents with small children and retired couples. The brand has enabled The City of Gulf Shores to focus programs and policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the destination based on its family values. The central component of the new brand was a new logo with the tag line, “Small Town. Big Beach”.

TDM and their strategic partners, Great Destination Strategies and Axia Creative assisted Gulf Shores with their brand launch. Support materials included a series of announcement mailers, a billboard to unveil the new logo and tag line, vehicle graphics, a press kit, website landing page and several branded give-away items.

A comprehensive wayfinding system was designed and deployed throughout the city to create a more unified sense of place and to aid navigation between important points for tourists.

### ***Louisiana’s Bayou Country, LA***

Terrebonne Parish is located in southern, coastal Louisiana, the main city is Houma. The region is often referred to as the heart of coastal Louisiana and for good reason. It’s a watery wonderland with six major bayous, numerous waterways, several lakes and access to the Gulf of Mexico.

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was devastating to local businesses, particularly those related

to tourism and sport fishing. Research revealed that the region's competitive advantage is based on it being one of America's largest and most productive wetlands.



Our extensive research and analysis helped define its brand identity as the Cajun culture influenced by the extensive system of waterways and bayous, and one of America's most productive wetlands areas. The bayous have shaped everything about the area, from its cultures and lifestyle to its recreational opportunities. By laying claim to "Louisiana's Bayou Country" puts Terrebonne Parish on the map as THE place for definitive bayou and Cajun experiences.

The brand strategy included the design and deployment of a comprehensive Parish wayfinding system. It also inspired a visual identity and communications to project the inter-related brands for the Parish, City of Houma, Houma Convention & Visitor's Bureau and regional wayfinding.

## 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.

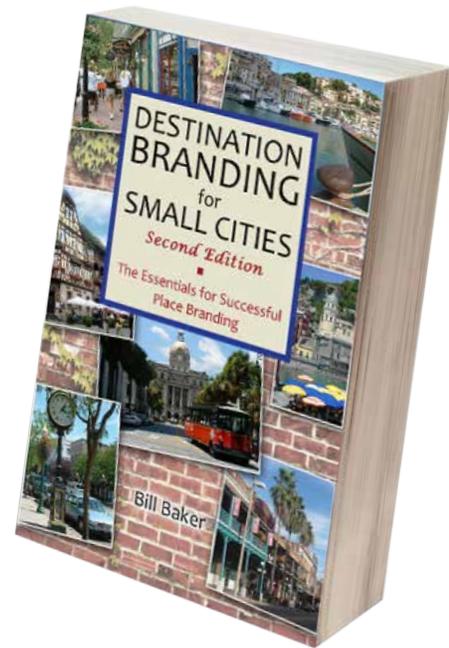
**TDM's Brand Discovery Lab** is an intensive 4- to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

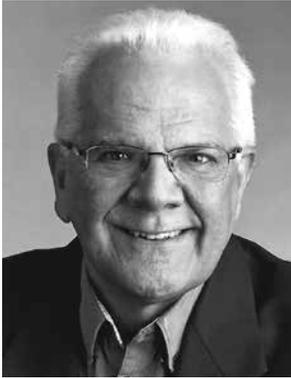
**TDM's Destination Branding Strategy** follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

## 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.

Connect with Bill Baker:  
Email: [billb@destinationbranding.com](mailto:billb@destinationbranding.com)  
Twitter: @CityBrander  
Website: [DestinationBranding.com](http://DestinationBranding.com)

Connect with Todd Mayfeld:  
Email: [todd@axiacreative.com](mailto:todd@axiacreative.com)  
Website: [AxiaCreative.com](http://AxiaCreative.com)



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