

Book

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# Start Your Branding Process

‘Start Your Branding Process’, is the fifth 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

Your city may have distinctive natural and cultural attributes that mark it as a special place. However, without strong and effective leadership, a thorough planning process and genuine collaboration the brand will never reach its optimal potency. It takes the right people investing time, expertise, knowledge, finances and the long-term power and commitment to make a community brand successful.

Brand planning must be based on open exchanges and collaboration to capture the information and insights needed to reveal the strongest brand identity possible. This may call for leaders and managers to break down territorial silos between, and within key organizations. This helps to ensure that there is no gap between what the city promises and the actual experiences that customers can enjoy.



### Prepare to Start: Mobilize the Forces

This project must not only be **seen** as a partnership between government, business and non-profits – it must actually **be** one! If it is dominated by government officials and their staff it will almost certainly fail to gain traction. City council members often do not have the breadth of experience, perspective, and credibility to critique the technicalities of the brand in detail or to objectively generate the cross-city enthusiasm and partnerships needed for success.

The other guaranteed formula for an unhealthy brand is where the city council appoints the brand committee comprised

of people who have passed their political or friends test. Place branding is a team sport, best played with people of all ages and interests with a healthy dose of what's best for the common good – and with an out of town coach in the form of a qualified place branding specialist.

**Action Point:**

Place branding only succeeds when it is treated as a team sport.

**Who is Your Brand Manager?**

In addition to the lead organization managing the brand, it requires an individual to nurture, deploy, manage, and “police” the brand as it is bought to life across platforms and partners. This person is the brand's most important friend. He or she is the brand manager and should be involved in the project from its earliest days.

The brand manager must not only lead the efforts inside the lead organization, but also energize the outreach programs and briefings for members, marketing service vendors, and local partners. The

manager is the enabler and protector who is responsible for activating the resources, talent, creativity, focus, and consistency to oversee and grow this asset. He or she is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the brand by ensuring that all content, images, design, messages and experiences conform to the brand strategy.

**Action Point:**

The Brand Manager's responsibility is to nurture, deploy, manage, advocate and “police” the brand.



**Match Your Goals and Budget**

Whether your goal is to attract more visitors, new businesses or students, or to address an unfocused image, you must define your goals and objectives from the

outset. Be certain that you have allocated sufficient funds to facilitate the most thorough brand planning process possible. These funds should be sufficient to engage a branding specialist to lead the process.



It's important to be realistic in setting goals in the context of available resources. Funds should also be secured for consistent brand investment for the foreseeable future. When requesting the budget, it's important to secure additional resources for the launch and deployment of the strategy. This one-off allocation will prove to be a smart investment because the brand strategy can then be launched with the greatest impact possible, and without delay.

### **Action Point:**

Be certain that goals and budgets are in sync.

### **Separate Branding From Marketing**

There are some places that seem to decide that they need a new brand every few years. Too often these are simply to replace a logo and tagline that are becoming dated. It's critical that from the outset, the brand be defined in a consultative manner and reveals competitive and distinctive values that are perennial.

One thing is for sure: there is no “silver bullet” or one-size-fits-all solution that will quickly deliver a sustainable brand strategy for a city or region. Brand planning typically includes the following steps:

- Situation Assessment and Analysis
- Defining the Brand
- Brand Communication
- Brand Experiences
- Managing the Brand

Decades of working with countries, cities and regions has led us to create

our specialized and highly successful 7A Destination Branding. As the name implies, the 7A Destination Branding leads places through seven steps to encourage thoroughness and to ensure that important voices are not overlooked or minimized.

### **Action Point**

Be sure to employ a proven system or methodology that's designed for places and communities.

### **Who Should be Involved?**

Successful implementation of the brand will require buy-in and support by more than just the City Council or CVB. Within the city, there are possibly hundreds of prospective brand partners, stakeholders, and interested parties who should be involved at some level.

Canvassing the opinions of stakeholders can reveal great ideas and perspectives and provide important clues as to where the likely trouble spots may be later in the process. Importantly, outreach is extremely valuable in clearing the way to reveal the

brand. Within the community there are residents, businesses, and political and opinion leaders who will have comments, and insights that should be considered. After they are identified, the level and nature of their involvement in the project can be decided.



The task of uniting people with diverse political, cultural and social interests can sometimes seem like an impossible task. Don't hesitate to invite critics and or those who may be cynical about such projects, as they may change their opinions or often gain greater respect for your efforts and provide support. At least getting them to "neutral" can be a catalyst for success.

### **Action Point:**

Be sure to employ a proven system or

methodology that's designed for places and communities.

## Separate Branding From Marketing

Brand strategy and marketing implementation are not the same thing. The project should be divided into two stages:

1. the formulation of the brand strategy, requires thorough brand research, analytical and strategic skills, as well as a detailed knowledge of tourism, visitor markets, experience design and placemaking,
2. implementation or deployment of the brand involving marketing communications, possibly requiring advertising, web design, public relations, and social media.

While some firms will claim to do both strategy development and implementation, it pays to gain a clear understanding of the depth of their experience in researching and defining city and destination brands.

It's important to recruit specialists appropriate to each phase.

Marcus Osborne from [Fusionbrand in Malaysia](#) observes, "Far too many destinations give the responsibility of building their brand to creative advertising agencies. These agencies are called advertising agencies for a reason. They do advertising. Even if the advertising stands out and is acknowledged by the audience, what then? The first thing that audience will do is look for the opinions of people like them before making an informed decision on a destination choice. If the destination isn't delivering on what it's promising, the advertising is wasted."

The place branding firm selected for strategy development must have the capacity to also address organizational issues, partner relations, tourism and relocation dynamics, economic development, experience development and investment, as well as placemaking and wayfinding – and yes, they must also be creative and capable of designing a

knockout visual identity system (but only once the brand is ready).

### Action Point

Branding is long-term and strategic, while marketing is short-term and tactical. Keep this in mind when engaging firms for the separate tasks of branding and marketing

### Build Branding Know How

The best outcomes from the brand planning stages, and then the launch and brand deployment happen when participants are knowledgeable about brands - and how to use the city brand. This can strengthen the place identity at all levels.



We have found that conducting educational seminars, briefings and books for those

who will be actively involved in the process creates a more rewarding experience for them, and builds support and confidence in the project. Many also take the newly acquired knowledge back to their own businesses and apply it there.

### Action Point

Deploy the brand in ways that it builds the capacity of partners to lift the city to the next level.

### Beware the Pitfalls

The path to a compelling brand can be tricky and the process can be easily derailed. Some of the common pitfalls are:

1. ***Our Logo is our Brand:*** No. It's just one element in your branding toolkit. It acts as a cue to trigger positive thoughts and feelings. But, it's not your brand!
2. ***Our Tagline is our Brand:*** This is the same syndrome as found in #1. While it can play a limited role, it's only one tool in your branding toolkit.

3. ***We Don't Need to Consult Anyone:*** The brand must be able to stand the test of time, public debate, political scrutiny, and get a thumbs up from stakeholders. It deploy extensive community outreach and market research.
4. ***Lack of Awareness of Branding:*** Briefings should be built-in to ensure that key opinion leaders are well-informed about branding and what success involves.
5. ***Forgetting the Customer's View:*** Some efforts are focused too much on what locals like, rather than on what is attractive to visitors and new residents.
6. ***Weak Positioning:*** Don't try to be all things to all people. The brand must be based on what's special and sets it apart - or it will be weak and irrelevant.
7. ***Trying to be Something That You're Not:*** A brand must always be truthful, realistic, and deliverable. Otherwise it will simply be hype and have a very short life.
8. ***We Can do it Ourselves:*** Some cities fail after attempting to reveal the brand themselves. They soon discover that it takes unbiased outside objectivity, specialized experience, and a proven process.
9. ***Political influences:*** The preference of some to adopt risk averse, parochial, inclusive, self-interest, or popular positions on issues can run counter to the best interests of trying to create a truly distinctive brand.



## **Success Stories**

### ***Lane County, OR***

Lane County is a large region that embraces the Cascade Mountains, the McKenzie River Valley, stretches of the famed Oregon Coast, as well as the cities of Springfield and Eugene in the Willamette Valley. The Visitor & Convention Bureau felt that their tagline “See All of Oregon in Lane County”, which had been used for 10 years, was not providing a sufficiently clear and meaningful point of difference.

TDM's research confirmed that the name Lane County and its positioning were not resonating with audiences, nor was unity around key messages.

Research validated that the county's strength was in offering an extensive variety of nature-based adventure activities that were easily accessible in many ways. Hence, the tagline, “Real Adventures. Real Close”. The name of the region was changed to “Eugene, Cascades & Coast”. The CVB became “Travel Lane County.” As well, they opened an Adventure and

Information Center off busy I-5 to act as a portal for the region's adventure experiences.

The brand has clearly differentiated the region and it has been widely adopted by private and public sector partners. Importantly, the adventure focus is providing a clarity and consistency to messages that is increasing inquiries, visitation and new product development.

### ***Fairfield, IA***

Situated in S.E. Iowa, Fairfield is a colorful, artsy community that moves to its own beat and was recently named by Smithsonian Magazine as “one of America's best small towns”. TDM research revealed that Fairfield



is Iowa's most creative and eclectic small city. For a city of its size, it's bursting at the seams with painters, sculptors, musicians, singers, dancers, and poets.

Residents have a freeing belief that art belongs to everyone, and everyone can be an artist. TDM and AXIA conducted extensive research, consultation and a series of brand workshops to engage community leaders in defining the brand. The result is a brand strategy and visual identity that is being embraced by the City of Fairfield, as well as the convention & visitors bureau.

## 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.

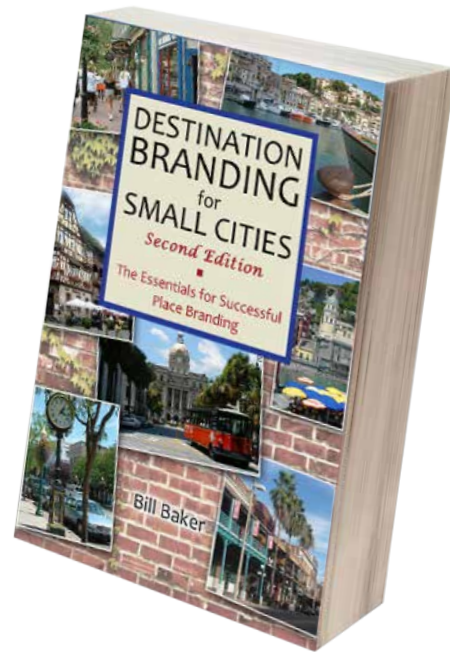
**TDM's Brand Discovery Lab** is an intensive 4- to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

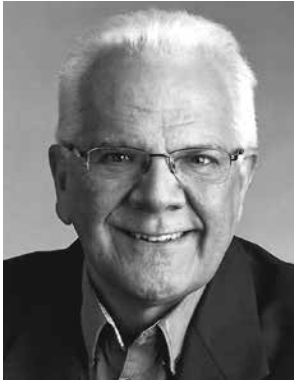
**TDM's Destination Branding Strategy** follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

## 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