

Book

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Keys to Successful City Logo Design

'Keys to Successful City Logo Design', is the seventh 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.

Keys to Successful City Logo Design

The path to creating a successful logo for a city or region can be an interesting and challenging journey. Logo design looks easy and fun. It's also a subject about which most people have definite opinions. The reality is that reactions to design are personal and a subject that can arouse negative, apathetic and enthusiastic responses, all from within the same group.

I find the observations and advice of the late Paul Rand to be very helpful in ensuring that designs of community-based brands are of the highest quality. Paul Rand has a stellar reputation and was once called, "the greatest living graphic designer" by Steve Jobs. Rand is responsible for the iconic designs for IBM, Westinghouse, ABC, UPS, and NeXT. The advice in his seminal

book, "Design, Form, and Chaos"¹ is invaluable for everyone involved in evaluating logo designs.

What is a Logo?

In answering the question, "what is a logo?" Rand states:



- "A logo is a flag, a signature, a street sign giving direction.
- A logo does the not sell (directly), it identifies.
- A logo is rarely a description of a place or business.
- A logo derives meaning from the quality of the thing it symbolizes, not the other way around.
- A logo is less important than the product (or place) it signifies; what it represents is more important than what it looks like.
- The subject matter of a logo can be almost anything."

Logos comprise custom-lettered words, symbols, illustrations, emblems, or a combination of these elements. After consistent use over time they should act as a trigger or

¹"Design, Form, and Chaos", Paul Rand, Princeton Architectural Press

cue to aid recall of the positive associations for which the place is known.

Action Point:

A logo is not a brand. It's a cue or trigger to remind people of positive thoughts and associations.

Challenging Times for Logos

Too frequently, the power and role of a logo is over-emphasized. Nobody will respond positively to a logo and immediately decide to visit a place if they haven't also been exposed to other compelling stimuli about it.

Logos are faced with more challenges today than a decade ago. The wide use of mobile and other digital devices often require logos to be compressed for use on small screens. An added challenge for place logos in our globalized society is that they must transcend cultural, national, and linguistic barriers. It's an arena in which simplicity works best. A complicated design will make a logo difficult to reproduce and maintain, and will most likely fail to engage

the audience. Rather than adding complex elements, consider instead that less can be more powerful.



Think of the shell in Shell's logo or the Nike swoosh or even the heart in I Love NY.

Action Point:

The functionality and role of logos is evolving.

It's Not the Ark

We have all seen those logos where a city has tried to cram everything into the design in an attempt to please all stakeholders. That may have worked for Noah, but it doesn't work with logos. This was often the situation with city shields or crests when there was a belief that every city attribute had to be represented. A logo is not a City crest nor is it intended to be an advertisement. Due to the complexity of a place, a logo can rarely provide a

summation of all of its elements. If tried, the result can be a confusing collage of features that are unrecognizable and are rendered meaningless, particularly when reduced in size. One of the challenges is to balance simplicity without being seen as boring or unimaginative.

Action Point:

Simplicity in logo design is essential.

Nix the Contest

Another mistake some places make is conducting a competition among residents and students to design their new logo. The old adage, “be careful what you wish for because you might get it” comes to mind when looking at the competition winners for some cities. After conducting the competition for a tagline or logo they find themselves with designs that may be nice, but are unrelated to the city’s

competitive identity or the benefits that customers are seeking. A competition may be free or cheap, but believe me, places following this approach usually get what they pay for.

Action Point:

Forget about conducting a logo competition – unless it is between professional design professionals

Less is More

Logos rarely stand in isolation.

When evaluating prospective logos it is important to consider the context in which the design will be used and how it will be linked to images and text about the city. The most impactful and enduring designs are often those that feature a striking, singular symbol.

Despite having worked on logo designs for many months, the



recommended design may not always be greeted enthusiastically when it is first revealed. Don't be dispirited. Customers, and stakeholders for that matter, don't always immediately understand the meaning of a design. Even the citizens of the USA didn't immediately grasp the meaning of the nation's flag, the Stars and Stripes, when it was first introduced.



Betsy Ross simply created an interesting design featuring stars on a piece of fabric. It took many more years of tumult and triumphs to build its meaning and relevance in the hearts of Americans. Logos can face similar challenges.

Action Point:

Logos need time to connect, gain meaning and resonate.

Does the Subject of a Logo Matter?

Rand advocates that the subject matter or content of a logo does not always play a significant or important role. For example, we could ask, what relevance did a "swoosh" have to a pair of running shoes – before it was given meaning?

No matter its subject or content, the city's logo can only take on real meaning after it's associated with the reality of the location. The design and its meaning are tied to the quality of the experiences it symbolizes. If the experiences of the city or region are second rate, the design will eventually be seen as second rate. No logo (or tagline) can do its job before the audience has been conditioned through communications and experiences.

Action Point:

Logos very rarely stand alone.

What's Essential?

It seems that ultimately, the only essentials in the design of logos are that they be

distinctive, memorable, and clear, Rand tells us. The designs for Sitka AK, Gulf Shores AL and Tillamook Coast OR possess these qualities and meet the criteria in the evaluation checklist.

Evaluation Checklist

The following provides some basic criteria to assist in evaluating various logo designs.

- Does the design capture the Destination Promise and brand essence?
- Is the design original and distinctive?
- Is the design simple and clear?
- Is the design memorable?
- Will the design appeal to key audiences?
- Is the design likely to have a long shelf life?
- Is the design flexible and versatile i.e. it can be reproduced in different sizes, B&W, different mediums?

Committees and Logos

Committees have a pretty bad reputation in designing great art, poetry and

symphonies. But the committee can play a valuable role in determining the visual and verbal identity, provided they don't micromanage or try to re-design the logo (or tagline) themselves. From the outset it's important that the role and responsibilities of committee members be defined and that they understand the criteria for evaluating the various options that will be presented to them. Branding professionals understand the principles of creating stunning designs and engaging words for taglines that are reflective of the brand and help distinguish it from competitors. Too often however, the design process can get bogged down by committees trying to control every aspect of design decisions. This can lead to too many compromises and often bland, uninspiring and generic results. Or worse, the logo contains everything in it but the kitchen sink leaving the community without a clear visual identity.

Action Point:

Committees shouldn't micro-manage logo design.

Success Stories

Hudson County NJ

Hudson County is comprised of twelve authentic, vibrant and creative municipalities with dozens multi-cultural neighborhoods that have a pulse all their own – and has a fascinating story to tell. This rich tapestry of cultures can be experienced in vibrant neighborhoods within minutes of Manhattan.

The Hudson County brand captures its distinctive sense of place and personality as a tourism destination in ways that are attractive, persuasive and deliverable. It provides a unifying framework through which all stakeholders and partners can present Hudson County in a consistent and compelling voice.

The brand strategy was revealed after considerable research, analysis and consultation. The process started with a brand audit which involved interviews with a wide range of government, nonprofit and business stakeholders. This strategy was

developed following a local public opinion survey and site inspections. The strategy was created by TDM in close consultation with Division staff.



The destination descriptor for Hudson County is: “Celebrate America’s Mosaic.” The Hudson County Brand is visually represented by three key elements in its logo: the mosaic graphic, logotype and the state name, New Jersey. The mosaic graphic symbolizes the harmonious integration of the county’s cultural diversity. In a symbolic sense, the arrangement of shapes presents a unified tapestry of neighborhoods. The shapes are arranged to resemble a capital “H”. The slanted elements represent progressive movement and energy.

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.

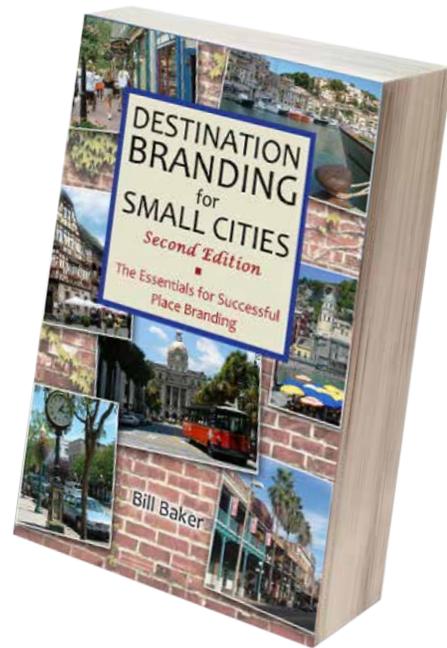
TDM's Brand Discovery Lab is an intensive 4- to 6-week program that is custom-designed for communities wanting to fast track their brand.

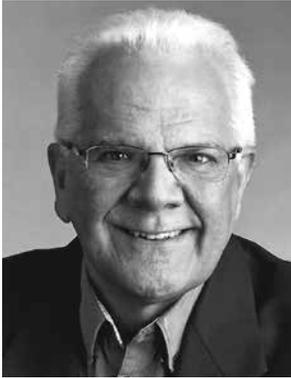
TDM's Destination Branding Strategy follows our proven 7A Destination Branding process. It involves extensive qualitative and quantitative research to enable solutions deeply grounded in thorough research in your operating and competitive environments.

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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