

The Art of Branding:

The power of narrowing your focus



The Art of Branding a Community | Handout

Introduction to Branding

Branding is the art of setting yourself apart from everyone else, and making you the destination of choice for investment, business opportunities, and as the place to live and visit.

The entire idea behind branding is to import more cash into the community than you export when locally earned money is spent elsewhere.

All of the rules in this handout apply to business as well as to the community.

The Four Ingredients of Change

1. We are slowly climbing out of the private-sector recession, but we are just entering the public-sector recession. As the federal government and just about every state or province struggles to balance budgets, cities, towns, and counties must now act and think like a business, finding ways to import fresh cash into the community - your tax base.
2. Just about every community in North America was founded on a natural resource: timber, fishing, mining, agriculture or were founded on transportation: close to major freeways, railways, or waterways. Manufacturing uses the combination of both natural resources and transportation. But now that we're in a global economy, core industries are dying as are the cities and towns that supported those industries. In a nutshell, communities are now looking for their "second act." Everyone wants a piece of the tourism or economic development pie.

Sad fact: there are more ghost towns in the making today than ever before in North American history.

Every year hundreds of communities are working to diversify their economies.

3. The Internet has changed everything. 90% of the population now has immediate access to the web, and of that group 94% use it to determine where they will live, work or play. Yet 70% of web users are frustrated because you're marketing communities and geographic locations, and they are looking for experiences - job opportunities, best restaurants, things to see and do that cater to them. Your location is second.

If you want new business, residents or visitors, it starts in front of a computer screen.

The web should be your number one marketing priority. BUT it MUST be good enough to close the sale. Period.

4. We are exposed to 5,000 marketing messages a day. We are drowning in advertising overload.

Billions of dollars are spent marketing communities every year and 97% of that is ineffective. That's right: 97%. This includes chambers of commerce, destination marketing organizations, economic development agencies, cities, downtowns, counties, districts, regions, states and provinces.

We simply block out anything that doesn't appeal to us directly. So ask yourself this one question: What do we have that the people we are hoping to attract can't get or do closer to home? Whatever it is, you need to hang your hat on that. We have the world at our fingertips in seconds. What sets you apart from everyone else?

Communities, like businesses, have been forced to specialize yet most are stuck in the membership-mentality of being all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they have "something for everyone"?

Welcome to the era of the brand.



1. You must Jettison the Generic

The narrower your focus the stronger your success will be. You simply cannot be all things to all people and win. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Look at your taglines and marketing text. If it can fit anyone, toss it and start over.

Don't just market what you have, but what will close the sale. You must separate your primary lure from your complementary or secondary activities.

Lure: What sets you apart from everyone else.

Complementary activities: Things we can do closer to home but will do while in your community. They include shopping, dining, entertainment, historical attractions, walking tours, etc.

Amenities: Local parks, parking, visitor info, lodging, dining, shopping, medical, etc.

Ambiance: Historic downtowns, beautification, landscaping, street trees, benches, etc.

The Art of Branding a Community | Handout

Icon: The photo opportunity that shows I was really there.

And avoid marketing lists. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had a great list of things to see and do?

Words and phrases to avoid:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| - Explore | - Discover |
| - Outdoor recreation | - Unlike anywhere else |
| - So much to see and do | - The four season destination |
| - Historic downtown | - Center of it all |
| - Best kept secret | - We have it all |
| - Experience... | - Visit (name of town) |
| - Beauty and heritage | - Naturally fun |
| - Gateway | - Close to it all |
| - Your playground | - So much history |
| - Purely natural | - The place for all ages |
| - ...and so much more! | - Home away from home |
| - A slice of heaven | - It's all right here! |
| - Recreation unlimited | - The perfect getaway |
| - The place for families | - Start your vacation here |
| - Recreational paradise | - Take a look! |
| - Unique | |

You MUST Jettison the Generic! Always promote your truly unique selling proposition. And remember that primary lures cannot succeed without the complementary activities.

FACT: The number one complementary activity of visitors, in the world, is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian-friendly intimate setting - your downtown. This is where 80% of all non-lodging visitor spending takes place. Why do you think Disney built Downtown Disney just outside each of its parks? To capture than 80%.



2. Logos and slogans are not brands

They are just marketing messages used to support and reinforce your brand. Its an exclamation point on your key marketing message.

The rules of slogans or tag lines:

- No more than seven words (three is best)
- It must be specific. If you have to explain it, toss it.
- It should convey a feeling or bring a picture to mind.
- It needs to be obvious what you're about.
- It must be unique in your market

Brand identities, or logos, make up 2% of a brand yet get 98% of the political attention locally. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had a great logo?

A word about logos:

- One simple graphic
- Easily recognizable
- Unique to the community
- Rarely do good logos contain a physical item (Think Nike, Toyota, Chevrolet, Reebok, Coca-Cola, Apple...)
- They need to convey a feeling



3. A brand is a perception

What people think of you when your name is mentioned. How perceptions create a brand:

- Visual cues as we pass through the community
- The people and local attitudes
- Word of mouth
- Publicity, the news, social media

This is why you build a brand using public relations. Advertising is used to maintain your ownership position. The goal is to "own" your brand in your market. Nashville "owns" the country-music brand. Napa Valley "owns" the wine brand.

Sometimes communities need a "repositioning" or "rebranding" effort. A brand is also a promise - that you will deliver on that perception when we arrive.

Check out Asheville, North Carolina, one of the best branded communities in the U.S. They do a good job conveying the feeling of a hip arts and "foodie" community and the "feeling" portrayed supports that.



4. Your name must be synonymous with your brand

Country music capital	- Nashville
Gambling/Adult fun	- Las Vegas
Kids & Family	- Anaheim, Orlando
Music theater	- Branson, MO
Graceland/Elvis	- Memphis
Winery capital	- Napa Valley, CA
Frozen tundra	- Green Bay, WI
Hershey, PA	- Chocolate
Gettysburg, PA	- Civil War
Lancaster, PA	- Amish
Washington, DC/Ottawa	- Government
Hollywood	- Movies and stars
Detroit	- Cars
Silicon valley	- High tech
Stratford, ON/Ashland, OR	- Shakespeare
Your town?	-??????

5. Successful brands are built on product

You must champion the cause for product development. Product sells itself. All successful brands are built on product, not just marketing.

Round Rock, Texas: The Sports Capital of Texas. The product: A 500-acre sports park, baseball team, sports-oriented community.

Jefferson, Texas: The Antique Capital. This town of 2,500 residents has an antique dealer for every 20 residents in the town! (125 antique dealers). Because so many people drive four hours from the Dallas area to visit Jefferson it's now become the official B&B capital of the state.

Jackson, Wyoming: The home of Western Living. This town of 12,000 residents boast 110 galleries and western living shops in its downtown. And the town hosts nearly four million visitors a year.

Product development never ends. You can never rest on your laurels. Avoid hiring any branding company that doesn't concentrate on product development.

6. You NEVER use focus groups

You heard that right: You NEVER use focus groups to build a brand. If it has to be explained toss it. The focus group mentality results in generic mediocre brands that are rarely successful.

You CANNOT do branding by public consent. You build your brand on feasibility, not just local sentiment.

A brand is "earned" - good or bad. After all, it's a perception - what people think of you.

The Seven Phases of a Public Project

1. Enthusiasm
2. Planning
3. Disillusionment
4. Fear & Panic
5. Search for the guilty
6. Punishment of the innocent
7. Praise and honors for the non-participants

The Art of Branding a Community | Handout



7. You never “roll out” a brand

You never roll out a brand until you can deliver on the promise. It is earned, over time (good or bad).

Sometimes you have to create a “Bridge Brand” that will cover the gap of where you are today and where you hope to end up - your brand direction.

Remember that brands are what people think of you. Changing that perception can take time - sometimes years. And those perceptions change based on product and local attitudes. Brands always start within the community and then spread outwards.



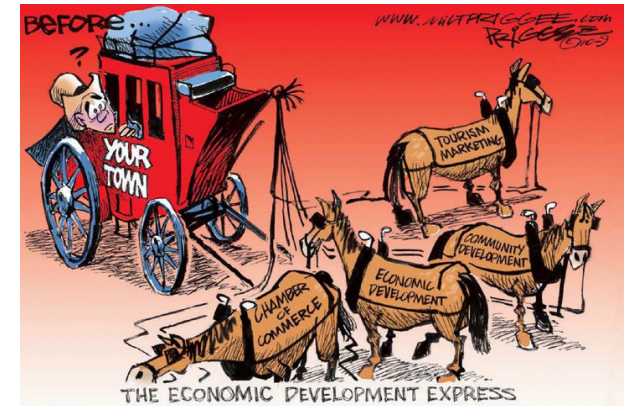
8. Great brands always start with a plan

Branding (what it is you want to be known for)
Development (the needs to be done so you “own” it)
& Marketing (how to tell the world)
Action Plan (the to do list)

No more strategic plans! An Action Plan includes:

- Each recommendation in chronological order of when it will be implemented
- A description of the recommendation
- Who would be charged with its implementation (it takes a village to win)
- The cost of implementation
- Where the money would come from
- When it would be started and completed
- The rationale for making the recommendation

The best plans are less than 100 pages in length. You want a plan that will NOT end up on a shelf gathering dust. The days of Strategic Plans are over.

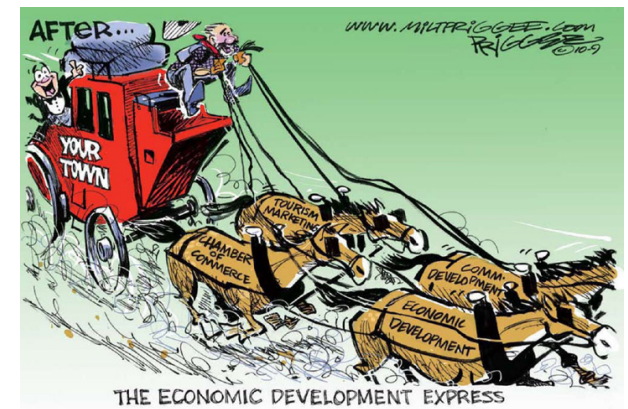


9. Branding is a team sport!

The biggest, most powerful effect of branding is getting everyone on the same page pulling in the same direction. Once again, it takes a village to win. You'll be far more powerful as a single unified voice than as a bunch of independent singular voices.

Have everyone on your team memorize this exercise, repeating after you. Say it at every meeting:

- “I promise to promote only what’s truly unique”
- “I promise to be different”
- “I promise not to repeat what other people say!”





10. Don't let politics kill your branding efforts

There are only three killers of any branding project. There is never a fourth. Ever.

1. Local politics - and this is worse with membership organizations than with elected officials.

2. Lack of champions - those who are willing to take some hits for narrowing the focus and who will push the brand forward.

3. Lack of money (both public and private) - the best brands are built on private investment, not public:

- Napa Valley
- Anaheim, Orlando
- Nashville
- Silicon Valley
- Hollywood
- Hershey, PA
- Lancaster, PA

The bottom line: If you have the right champions on board, they will get past the politics and will find the money to make something happen.



Branding is not a top-down exercise

"A by-product of brands 'for the people' is the committee that compromises and kills a potential brand home run.

This is why you never see statues of committees in public parks. You see brave leaders."

Cities, towns, counties, states & provinces can help fund & facilitate the process, but shouldn't lead the effort. The business community should always champion and pioneer the effort.

We surveyed 400 successfully branded cities and towns and only three were top-down efforts.



Umbrella brands

Multi-community organizations often need to create an "umbrella brand" that encompasses its various communities, each with their own unique brand.

Think of Chevrolet. Its umbrella brand is "Buy American." Its slogans are "Heartbeat of America" and "An American Revolution." But they don't run ads that say "buy a Chevy."

They market the Malibu to families looking for a mid-priced sedan. They market the Corvette to, primarily, baby boomer guys. The Aveo caters to those in their early 20s looking for a high-mileage inexpensive car. The Suburban is marketed to people looking for a large SUV. And then each ad is tagged with the umbrella brand "An American Revolution."

BUT your umbrella brand still must differentiate the county or region from all others in the marketplace. It's not so easy. In fact, if this process was easy everyone would be doing it!