

Friday, July 4, 2014

Five Destination Branding Principles to Boost Economic Recovery

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Friday, June 25, 2010 1:03 PM

By Bill Baker of Total Destination Marketing, author of *Destination Branding for Small Cities*.

Branding, although misunderstood at times, offers cities the key to enhancing their reputation as an attractive place to visit or do business. During these tough economic times, five of the central tenants of branding should be at the heart of the marketing programs of forward looking cities.

Rather than turn away from marketing, economic downturns present an even greater urgency for city leaders to unify stakeholders, and to focus resources, behavior and decision-making around those competitive strengths that make the place distinctive, attractive and respected. This is the time to activate and adapt the city's strategic marketing plan in order to lead the economic wellbeing of the community.

There are five core principles that should be at the heart of every city's marketing. These principles are also important elements of a brand management strategy and are catalysts for decisive actions when more has to be done with less. These principles are:

1. **Be Customer-centric.** This is the time to be closely connected to your best customers. Don't hold back on researching and monitoring their behavior because this recession has changed them. Ensure that messages are strongly resonating and experiences are delivered in ways that delight them and build word of mouth and repeat visitation. Focus on what matters most to them now. As much as budgets will allow, marketing communications should be maintained because those that sustain a strong share of voice are most likely to gain market share from competitors and emerge strongest from the recession.
2. **Constantly Innovate.** Just because budgets may have been cut doesn't mean that fresh and creative ideas must, too. It may be necessary to move quickly and introduce creative new messages, products, partnerships and methods of communicating relevant to this changing environment.
3. **Deliver Outstanding Value.** Focus on what is really valuable to visitors and customers. This goes beyond simply offering value for money (your competitors will do that as well), but develop those attributes that add value to their experiences and your distinctive competitive advantage. This can come from how you and your partners combine and package your greatest strengths. Aim to build referrals and repeat business.
4. **Leadership and Co-operation.** Maintaining the potency of a city brand in tough times requires the active support and participation of key stakeholders and partners more than ever. The city's marketers need a rallying point to focus their combined resources on key messages, targeted markets and products in ways that enable them to also strengthen their individual marketing and cross selling opportunities. This can expand the size of the pie for stakeholders to get a larger share, rather than relying on pricing to steal share from each other.
5. **Razor-edge Positioning.** More than ever there is a need to maintain a tight focus on your place in the customer's world based on the new realities of the economy. This involves closely aligning your value proposition, customer needs, competitors and the overall trends in the marketplace. These elements underpin the strength of your positioning and create a rallying point for business networks to thrive. Successful brands are clear, valued, and occupy sustainable point of distinction in the minds of their

customers.

A genuine brand management strategy embraces these principles and serves as a beacon to ignite a private-public partnership to enable the city and its partners to focus and organize around its key competitive advantages.

Your brand strategy should contribute to economic recovery in ways that enables the city to unite partners, stand apart from competitors, optimize resources, better resonate with key audiences and boost the local visitor economy.

City marketers who adopt these principles and invest in a brand strategy as a toolkit for decision-making and focus will be in the best position to resonate with key audiences and win market share, particularly during the economic recovery.

Ambitious cities have to overcome the temptation to put their marketing on the shelf during these tough times. Instead, they need to regroup, then proactively build their brand reputation and develop a brand management strategy to generate increased marketing efficiency to lead the city's economic recovery.

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Bill Baker is the founder and President of Total Destination Management. TDM is a team of destination branding, tourism planning and marketing specialists. Bill is recognized internationally as an expert in developing brand strategies for destinations and communities of all sizes. He is a popular speaker and author of Destination Branding for Small Cities.

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