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The potential of place branding

In an increasingly globalised world, cities and places vie for the attention of tourists, talent and investors. Place and city branding is a key way in which regional and national bodies are attempting to attract these core groups, and increase their competitiveness. Place branding is also a way to create an identity to engage and develop an area for its residents and inhabitants. It is this synthesis of long-term development, strategic vision and branding which is key to effective place branding initiatives.

This briefing outlines some of the key elements to place branding, considers the lessons on how to do it successfully and outlines some case studies.

1 Place branding

Place and city branding is a concept which has emerged from place marketing in the last 10-15 years.

While marketing focusses on promoting certain current elements of a place which appeal to an audience, branding is about creating a bigger, longer term strategy. Branding centres on reputation building and creating a broad understanding of the values that drive a city or place. In some cases this requires changing the perceptions or the culture of behaviour relating to a place.

Tom Buncle, marketing chief of Destination Scotland has described branding as the "who" of a place - who you are and what you represent - and marketing as the "how" - how you communicate this to your audience.

Although place branding can apply at different scales (local communities / towns /regions /countries), city branding is perhaps the most common.

Case study: The place branding manifesto

The consultancy Phønix identified 7 key elements to place branding in their place branding manifesto:

1. **Every place is a brand** – the importance of stories and reputation.
2. **Actions speak louder than logos**– the importance of actions and tangible change, not just slogans and hype.
3. **The world is a stage and your place has a role to play** – the importance of competitive advantage and brand positioning of a place.
4. **If you can dream it, you can do it**– the importance of shared visions, ideas and clear goals.
5. **It takes a village to brand a place**– the importance of internal marketing and citizen engagement.
6. **It takes a team to get places**– the importance of cooperation between stakeholders and good brand management.
7. **It takes strong leaders to rock the boat**– the importance of role models and strong ambassadors.

2 Partnership and Inclusivity: IAmsterdam

One of the most successful strategic branding strategies of recent years comes from the Netherlands, in the form of IAmsterdam. The local authority was keen to engage multiple stakeholders in the creation of the brand in order to showcase every aspect of Amsterdam as a city, creating a brand which was representative of life in Amsterdam as a whole.

As a result, the IAmsterdam branding is used by transport, government, heritage and culture, schools, shops, businesses and has a strong digital media presence including a Facebook page, Twitter account and YouTube channel. This immersion in the brand has normalised its use in everyday life, creating a concept which local people and tourists alike can recognise and associate with.

In 2014, the IAmsterdam letters which were erected in front of the Rijksmuseum were one of the most photographed items in the city, being photographed over 8,000 times on a sunny day. Other cities have followed this example in launching new brand strategies, for example the participatory approach to Glasgow's new city brand 'People make Glasgow'.

3 Rising from the 'grey years of dictatorship': Barcelona

I The ability of city branding to have a transformative effect on the perception of a place is epitomised by Barcelona. It features in a number of case studies (here, here and here) which highlight the transition of the city (via the 1992 Olympic Games) into a tourist hotspot, technology/ business centre and cultural hub.

With a population of 1.6m people, Barcelona is Spain's second city and the regional capital of Catalonia. Following a relative grey period during the dictatorship of General Franco, over the last 20 years Barcelona has pursued a long term strategy to redefine what it means to live and work in the city.

Its success has been attributed to its versatility - those responsible for the strategy stressed the need to promote all of Barcelona's assets, not just one element, and it is now known globally for its culture, heritage, sport, food and innovation in business and technology.

Another key factor was the fact that Barcelona's key city and regional leaders came together with individuals from business and civil society to create and implement the vision for the city's future.

4 Liverpool 2008 Capital of Culture: lessons from practice

In a paper produced in 2014, academics attempted to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Liverpool city branding campaign which centred around the city being awarded the European Capital of Culture (ECOC). Other follow up studies have considered the long term impact of the event on Liverpool's identity and its city brand reputation. All of the studies highlight some of the challenges faced by Liverpool and what other cities can and have learned from Liverpool's experience.

According to one study by the University of Liverpool, the branding impacts were felt across 5 core areas: cultural access and participation; economy and tourism; cultural vibrancy and sustainability; image and perception; and governance and delivery process. Statutory, private and third sector collaboration was key in delivering the brand strategy to ensure that these impacts were met.

The evaluative study concluded that Liverpool showed the importance of not relying too heavily on a single event to shape a city brand. While an event can be used as a catalyst, it should not be the central focus as it leaves the brand lacking long-term direction once the event is over (for example, the ECOC). That same report also stressed the importance of co-branding – an event brand and city brand cannot exist in isolation from each other but should reinforce the desired effects.

5 The potential value of place branding to local authorities

Councils have traditionally been less likely to spend money on strategic marketing and communications and when they do it is often on localised, short term promotion of activities and events.

Branding is not really a question of large marketing budgets however, it is about focusing existing resources, planning for the future and recognising and using the assets of a community to promote internal investment. This is where it can be a useful tool for local authorities.

The team behind the place branding strategy in Melbourne, Australia emphasised that place branding promotes the visitor economy and inward investment locally as well as having the potential, if done well, to generate external investment. It stimulates community and businesses to interact to create a joined-up response and by focusing on values can create an attractive, coherent identity visible to external observers.

The team also highlighted some challenges for local authorities in creating a branding

campaign. Compared to businesses, whose brand makes up a key element of their marketability and their ability to attract custom, local government is faced with a unique set of challenges which branding teams must recognise:

> A complex web of stakeholders

> Natural tensions created by community involvement

> Pressure to justify 'non-essential' spending for branding projects, when other services may be subject to cuts

> The necessity to think long term

> Organisational structures which can prove resistant to the types of changes promoted by branding projects

> Decision-makers who are subject to the need for accountability and to political change.

Within the UK, Business Improvement Districts are key partners with local authorities in town and city centre management. Their activities are additional to those of a local authority, although they should be complementary, and many are becoming more strategic and focused on place shaping.

For example, in 2013 the London Bridge BID developed a place brand strategy, summarised by the phrase "A globally significant, historic and vibrant place of modern commerce, enterprise and creativity" and the strapline "London Bridge Revealed". In the process of creating and implementing the brand, lessons included:

> Delivering a place brand slowly and strategically through carefully chosen projects gives it more credibility than launching it with a one-off fanfare. It is much easier for people to relate to something when they see evidence of it working as designed

> You can't let preconceptions cloud thinking. Sometimes truly surprising things are discovered about a place in the process of creating a brand proposition and in ongoing conversations with local consumers and visitors, and these must be embraced rather than questioned out of hand.

The Association of Town and City Management also ran a programme from 2013 to 2015 supporting the development of Town Teams. The free resources produced included a 'personality test' to help identify the unique character and assets of towns, which could be built on by branding.

6 Conclusions

As the trend for promoting and managing a city and its assets turns towards branding as a key strategy, more and more places will search for ways to make themselves appear unique.

There are 5 core elements of best practice which re-emerge consistently throughout the literature when we think about the practical application of place branding strategy:

> **Be different** - every place is known for something

> **Tell the truth** - do not make up assets; use what you have or invest strategically

> **Get stakeholders excited and engaged about what really matters** - ask people what their vision is for the place; engaging people will make them more invested in the brand and its values

> **Use place ambassadors** - advice and personal experience can strengthen your brand

> **The launch is a beginning, not an end** - maintain momentum by integrating the brand into everyday lives

7 Further reading

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