

Branding Your Borough

Why and how branding techniques used for products can help your borough with economic development.

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Each year major brands in foods, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and technology spend billions of dollars growing and protecting their brands.

Each year major brands in foods, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and technology spend billions of dollars growing and protecting their brands. From Coca Cola to McDonalds, it is the public's understanding and acceptance of the brand that makes the names more valuable than the products.

Brands have become power houses in the destination industry as well. Disney World, Hershey Park, and Napa Valley are all powerful brands that attract millions of visitors each year.

At the community level, however, the concept and application of branding is nearly always a missing piece of the planning that needs to be included to complete the community picture.

While the brands mentioned earlier spend billions to build their reputations, municipalities often have little or no money available. But lack of funds should never be a reason to not use the principles of branding to attract development and prioritize improvements at the borough level.

The need to differentiate your community from the thousands of others around you is just as great as the need for one cereal to differentiate itself among the rows of other cereals in the grocery store. It's just that municipal officials are rarely trained to think that way.

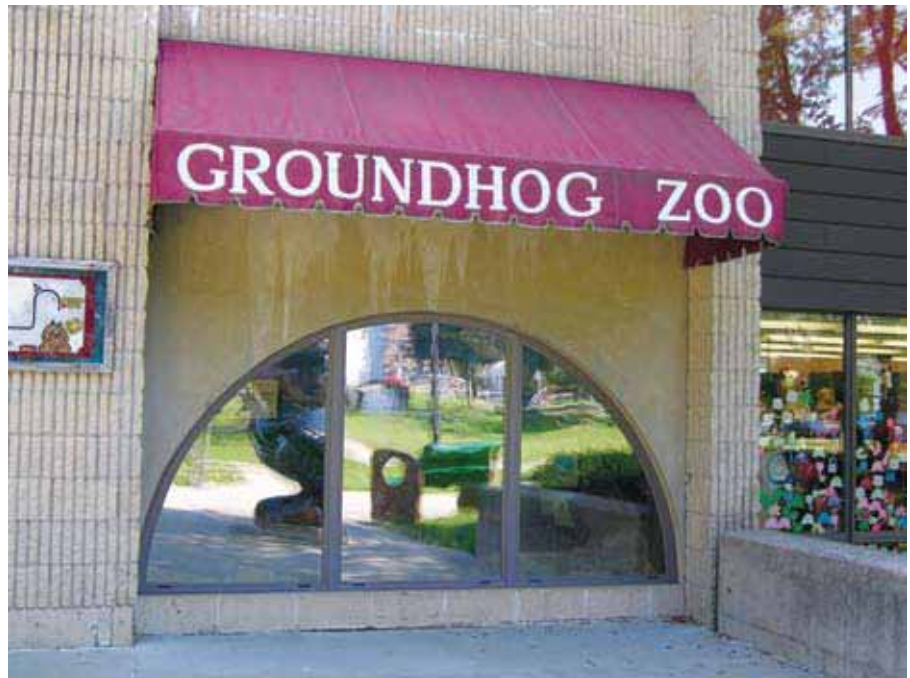
The process of creating a brand for your community is similar to what is done in the for-profit world. In today's market, the processes are increasingly complex due to the ever-expanding array of media where brands exist. Brand integration must happen over a variety of mediums, with web marketing and signage as two of the most important for communities.

Branding is not just for multi-billion corporations. Branding is used by both small and large companies. At the municipal level, branding techniques make it possible to stay focused on what is best for your community and how to establish priorities on where funds should be spent on issues as basic as street and sidewalk repairs, trash pickup, schools, parks, business development and residential needs.

An understanding of why a successful brand still doesn't appeal to everybody (think of Coke and Pepsi), can help you to understand which decisions you should be making at the community level (knowing that you can't always please everyone).

The lessons learned from nearly a century of product and destination branding show why marketing for communities should not be approached from an advertising or selling perspective. Marketing for your community will be successful when you have made the name of your community into a brand by establishing a unique identity in the minds of residents and visitors.

The result of successful branding is economic. A generic product is just like a generic community. There are no distinguishing differences in generic products. The store brand of ketchup is cheaper than Heinz. Not because it costs less to produce, but because people will not spend as much money for generic as for the brand.



WORLD RENOWNED Punxsutawney Borough attracts visitors from around the world to celebrate Groundhog's Day.

Perhaps the best way to help you think about the success potential of branding is to get you to think about one of the most basic products consumed every day — water.

Where water was once just something that you got from the faucet when needed, today the market for "branded" water makes it one of the most profitable industries in the country.

In most communities, there is absolutely no reason to pay exorbitant prices for bottled water. The tap water is just fine. Yet consumers do it day after day. Consumers think nothing of paying \$1.29 for a 16-ounce size of branded bottled water. The equivalent in the price paid for gasoline for their cars would be \$10.32 per gallon – an outrageous price!

But branding of bottled water has changed and influenced consumer perceptions about the product so that they spend money on it without thinking. Branding has the power to do that for communities as well.

If you are a community attempting to attract economic development dollars through new business investments, expansion of existing businesses, entrepreneurial interests, and capital improvements, it will be easier, and you will be more successful, if your community is a brand. Become a brand that people want to be associated with, and you will become a thriving community.

Perception is Reality

The perceptions about your community become the reality, regardless of whether they are true, false, exaggerated or underplayed. When looking at using marketing techniques to develop your brand, the first rule is that you can't sell what doesn't exist. You need to take an objective look at the community.

This is best done through an assessment. Assessment techniques create an objective picture of your residents, workers and visitors. When taken to a deeper level, assessments can also identify the

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areas where you have the best opportunities for success, the greatest potential for improvement and the right ways to plan for growth. Through assessments you can create the community you want.

More is Not Always Better

One of the lessons communities can learn from product branding is that too much growth can have a negative impact on a brand. In branding this is called the Law of Expansion. Over-expansion has knocked many well-known brands out of first place. For example, Chevrolet and Crest were once the best-selling brands in their categories. Over-expansion with new models, or new knock-offs and spin-offs of products, made it possible for second place brands to move to the top.

Community development that is done from a brand perspective creates growth that enhances, improves and distinguishes the community instead of just expanding it. Those distinctions lead to development that is viable and sustaining.

A Singular Focus

Another lesson that communities can learn from product branding is the value of being known for just one thing instead of trying to have broad appeal. One of the temptations when looking at development is the desire to attract a lot of different investment so there is variety in the community. The downside of this is that unless someone is looking at whether the investment is complementary or not, development can be a lot of single entities that combined have no singular appeal.

Perhaps in branding this lesson is best demonstrated by Starbucks. The business grew to be dominant in an area where there was truly



THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT Saxonburg Borough pays homage to John Roebling, the founder of the borough and designer of the Brooklyn Bridge.

no need. Prior to Starbucks anyone who wanted a cup of coffee had no trouble finding places to go to buy one. A cup of coffee was not something that was impossible to find. It was easy.

But because Starbucks focused on just coffee, it was able to move into the #1 brand position for getting a cup of coffee. Because of the #1 position, Starbucks could charge more for their coffee without any negative impact in growth. It wasn't until they started introducing first breakfast foods, then soups and lunch foods, and broadening their scope that Starbucks started to falter. By broadening the menu, Starbucks lost its singular identity. In branding, this is the Law of the Category.

Reinvention

Communities often fall into the trap of reinvention. Instead of taking the aspects of the community that have the most intrinsic value, decisions are made to "turn the

community" into something it is not. This is expensive, time-consuming and usually leads to neglect of what is the most important aspect of the community identity.

The more valuable approach is to enhance and improve the assets that already exist. Then create opportunities for growth that complements and expands the assets. It is extremely difficult to achieve success by changing a brand. That is because changing a brand creates confusion in the mind of the consumer.

The one exception to this is if you actually don't have a brand to begin with. If there is no pre-established identity for your community, then you can create an identity by inventing the type of community you want to be and taking the appropriate steps to make it happen. **(B)**

2009 Marketing Your Municipality Training

Spend a day getting the training and tools to use branding and marketing techniques for your community. This day is designed to be fully interactive, with hands-on participation that will give you the know-how to improve your community projects.

Carol Aubitz, instructor for the "Marketing Your Municipality" workshops, will be guiding attendees through all of these aspects of branding, and many more not covered here. Aubitz says that "This one-day series of community marketing classes will be full of activities that will help each person attending see the unique qualities of his or her borough. By the end of the day, each community will have a marketing plan and strategy ready for building their brand."

You'll do a community assessment and a marketing assessment. You'll work on developing your unique brand, create your advertising message, and get an insider's understanding on how to choose and use media.

This is a fully-packed interactive day and is designed specifically to help elected and appointed officials, Main Street managers, planning personnel and community and economic development directors. 6 CBO Credit Hours are being offered.

In addition, Ms. Aubitz can provide residential profiles for each community represented at the workshops. The only requirements are that your reservation must be confirmed three weeks prior to the workshop date, and there is an additional charge of \$100 for the residential profile output. As a cooperative effort between PSAB and Excelsior Marketing, this is being offered at a significantly reduced price to attendees as an added value to the course material.

Register online at www.boroughs.org/training

Questions? Contact Terri Dickow at tdickow@boroughs.org or 800-232-7722 x42 (B)

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