



Issaquah Tourism Organizational Plan

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Issaquah Tourism Organization Plan

Executive Summary

The recommendations in this Tourism Organizational Plan are designed to position Issaquah to potentially become a popular and successful visitor destination. Central to this achievement is a branded theme and identity for the City that works for tourism as well as the rest of economic development. A branding plan will create the focus that is needed to achieve early successes and provide benefits to the hotels (increased occupancy) and to their guests (a reason to spend the night in Issaquah.) This will justify additional investment and marketing dollars for tourism.

Our recommendations for this organizational plan of action are:

- Create a Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan. While that is being developed,
- Form the Visit Issaquah organization
- Start work on a wayfinding system (when the branding plan develops the “look and feel” of the brand, that can be incorporated into the wayfinding system)
- Wean non-compliant uses of the lodging tax funds off that source of funding. Lodging taxes are not grant funds.
- Establish how the lodging tax funds should be spent with a focus on return on investment.
- Hire a contracted director to implement these beginning recommendations.
- Develop the “Best of Issaquah” brochure to encourage increased spending. When you promote your anchor tenants, all will benefit.
- Move the Visitor Information Center into the spending district, add kiosks, prep for a mobile visitor information center.
- Recruit outside events into Issaquah – a great low-cost way to jump-start the increase of visitor spending.

Once the branding plan is developed, begin implementation. A key part of that plan will include product development investments, a change in marketing tactics, and other initiatives beyond this introductory plan. With the branding plan will come the need for increased funding and the knowledge of how the money should be spent and what the return on investment will be.

Introduction

Roger Brooks International, (RBI) was retained by the City of Issaquah and Issaquah Chamber of Commerce to assist the community in structuring an organization to lead Issaquah in tourism development and marketing. The purpose of this plan is to provide recommendations for structuring the development of tourism in Issaquah. The plan addresses tourism’s economic benefits, organizational structuring, funding, budgeting, priority marketing, target markets, seasonal issues, development opportunities and phasing.

Roger Brooks International consulted with the project’s Steering Committee members on a regular basis and interviewed forty-four Issaquah stakeholders for their advice and opinions. Names are listed in the Appendix. Specific emphasis was given to restaurant owners, hotel owners/managers, outdoor and recreation advocates, tourism attraction proprietors, city officials/employees, and community leaders. From our experience, the number of participants at the different round table discussions we held was better than average. Participants were very engaged, spoke their minds, and were enthusiastic about Issaquah and the undeveloped potential it has to offer both residents and visitors. Many of their ideas had to do with the need for positioning and increasing the awareness of what Issaquah has to offer; however, there were also significant opinions put forth that certain physical assets within the City need improving or further development in order to take them from good to great. During a Branding Action Plan project, returning to these individuals for further discussions would be fruitful in determining high priority action recommendations.

Roger Brooks conducted an on-site visit of Issaquah to explore the community, assessing tourism product and currently available amenities and attractions. Roger also presented a two-hour public presentation in Issaquah discussing seven important rules of successful community tourism. The content included the economic benefits of tourism to communities and examples of successful tourism destinations and the principal lessons each one illustrated.

RBI reviewed existing public and private tourism and recreational marketing materials and digital media for events, attractions, and local amenities, for the purpose of determining the positioning and content of current messages in the marketplace. RBI also reviewed the historical revenues and expenditures of local Lodging Tax funds. The current agreement between the City and the Chamber of Commerce for tourism promotion was also reviewed.

The recommendations made in this plan will provide the strongest and fastest return on investment of lodging tax receipts. This is by no means a complete tourism plan, which should be part of a larger, and recommended Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan. However, the recommendations herein are the first steps to help the City of Issaquah increase local and visitor spending and begin to make Issaquah a visitor destination of note.

There are only eleven recommendations in this plan, but each is vital to the economic well-being of the city, and each will bring in a solid return on investment once implemented. Other than creating a tourism organization and Best of Issaquah brochure, these recommendations are important for Issaquah regardless of the eventual brand (what Issaquah wants to be known for.) Wayfinding, for instance, will increase local resident spending, as well as increase consumer spending from surrounding communities and visitors passing through the area. And so will a relocated visitor information center, visitor information kiosks, and a portable Info Center. The Best of Issaquah brochure will encourage visitors – and area residents – to experience the best of what Issaquah has to offer.

The Benefits of Tourism for Issaquah

Tourism is the purest form of economic development. Visitors arrive, spend money on food, retail shopping, accommodations, attractions, and then head home. You need no additional services or infrastructure, and if you attract the right type of visitor, no additional police or other forms of intervention. Tourism is also the front door to your non-tourism economic development. Site selectors and commercial realtors arrive, first, as visitors. Is Issaquah the kind of place that their client would invest in or do business in? Visitor expenditures are spread widely throughout the community. These infusions of capital offset resident expenditures outside their own community (when locals head to Bellevue and Seattle to spend their money), and, therefore, offset monetary leakage. Communities that receive more income than they lose are economically healthy.

Washington State benefits from about seventeen billion dollars in visitor expenditures each year. About half of that amount is spent in King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Because of Washington State's huge export activities, it is the only state where tourism is not one of the top three industries. Tourism is the fourth largest industry in the state.

Communities that appeal to their residents also appeal to the leisure traveler – meaning that if locals don't "hang out" in Issaquah, neither will visitors. Visitors like to go where you, as locals, go. So, by making your downtown more appealing for locals to spend their time in, you are also making it more attractive for visitors.

Tourism-related businesses are the number one type of small business, and they are the fastest growing type of business in the country. Tourism creates thousands of family-owned businesses.

Issaquah's Tourism-related Assets

Ambience

Issaquah's young resident population, fast growth, high household income, well-educated residents, historic downtown and bucolic setting combine to give the city an environment or ambience within which tourism attractions, activities and amenities can thrive. In this regard, Issaquah has assets that are superior to many other destinations within the larger Seattle metropolitan area. Desirable ambience develops over a long period of thoughtful infrastructure development combined with attractive geography and topography. Issaquah possesses both.

City plans have been formulated to preserve and expand on this superior environment. "Confluence Park" adds desirable open space near the downtown corridor. Improved Lake Sammamish State Park facilities are being discussed, and, hopefully, they will be implemented in the near future. The Park will likely be incorporated into the City. There are proposals to enhance

park athletic fields with artificial turf. Hiking trails on Squak, Tiger and Cougar mountains as well as Grand Ridge are well maintained and, in some cases, will be extended. New biking trails are in the planning stages.

Within this environment, no less than twenty-six types of events take place each year, most of them active, outdoor-recreation related. The capacity for more events exists, particularly with the addition or upgrading of Lake Sammamish State Park, hiking and biking trails, and athletic fields.

Attractions

Attractions in Issaquah include both primary and diversionary activities. Primary attractions are those strong enough to lure visitors from a distance away – from their point of origin to the community. Diversionary activities are those not powerful enough to prompt the trip by themselves, but are nevertheless enjoyed by visitors once they are in the destination. Both are important, as 80% of visitor expenditures are spent on diversionary activities.

Issaquah’s Primary Attractions are (alphabetically):

- Cougar Mountain Zoo
- Hiking Trails in the “Issaquah Alps”
- Lake Sammamish State Park
- Mountain biking trails such as Duthie Hill
- The Issaquah Salmon Hatchery
- The Village Theatre

Issaquah’s Diversionary Attractions are (alphabetically)

- artEAST
- Boehms Chocolates Swiss Chalet
- Fox Hollow Farm
- Gilman Town Hall Museum
- Gilman Village
- Historical Train Museum & Depot
- Poo Poo Point Para Gliding
- XXX Drive In

Amenities

Issaquah possesses substantial amenities – those items that make the visitor experience easier and more comfortable. Examples include relatively easy parking, park benches, public restrooms, public Wi-Fi, shade, access to certain retail needs like drug stores, visitor information, and water fountains. Issaquah lacks one important amenity that is critical to the visitor’s enjoyment of the destination but also vitally important to the economic optimization the visitor. That is wayfinding, or vehicular and pedestrian navigational aids. Issaquah has three distinct and separated town sections: 1. Old town and south of Interstate 90; 2. The commercial area east of the freeway; and 3. Issaquah Highlands and Grand Ridge. Creating a navigable wayfinding system to maximize awareness and use of each of these three sections of the city is important to the success of local tourism.

Activities

Ambience, attractions and amenities are the price of admission to a successful tourism effort. They provide the foundation for the real reason visitors will come – the activities Issaquah provides that either visitors cannot get closer to home, or they are better than visitors can obtain elsewhere. Experiences are what visitors want. Issaquah offers many event-based activities:

- Art/Wine Walks in Historic Downtown (monthly in Spring/summer)
- Basketball tournaments

- Beat the Winter Brews at Gilman Village (February)
- Chocolate, Wine and All That Jazz (July)
- Concerts on the Green eight weekends in the summer
- Evergreen Trail Runs
- Fenders on Front Street (June)
- Foam Fest – REI sponsor in June/July
- Hydroplane racing
- International Music Day (June 21)
- Issaquah Highland Green Halloween
- Issaquah Highland Highlands Days
- Kayak Academy – weekly events
- Lake Sammamish Half Marathon
- Marathon Maniacs Organization – Grand Ridge.
- March Kayak Heron Tours
- Mountain to Sound annual run
- Mountain Bike race series
- Northwest Paddle Festival on May 1.
- Northwest Epic Series
- Salmon Days
- Snoqualmie Indian Tribal Meet
- Softball Tournaments
- Squak Mountain Trail Run
- Triathlon
- Village Theatre Production

Issaquah tourism has demonstrated some success through these reoccurring events. Taking tourism to the next level will require a more focused organizational approach to development and marketing as well as refined definitions of Issaquah’s unique selling proposition, narrowed focus, and ultimately a brand awareness in the marketplace.

Spending

One of the challenges Issaquah faces is getting visitors to stay longer. If you can captivate the visitor for two hours, spending doubles. But overnight visitors spend four times that of day visitors. While Issaquah is an increasingly popular “day trip” for the greater Eastside and Seattle, it has lacked the product to keep visitors overnight. This is why creating a Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan is critical to Issaquah’s future for all forms of economic development.

Target Markets

Issaquah’s geographic primary market is the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA Metropolitan Statistical Area with an estimated population of three and a half million residents. That includes King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties and more than half of the State’s population. Within that area, the drive times are up to one hour. Using the four times rule, Issaquah must offer four hours of activities for every hour of drive time.

The target market can be further defined by the numbers who participate in activities that Issaquah excels in offering. The two most important destination activities Issaquah offers are outdoor recreation and theatre arts. By far the largest of these

is hiking, followed by biking, then amateur team sports. A niche market is theatre performances and plays, drawing primarily local residents. An underdeveloped outdoor asset is Lake Sammamish State Park that, if developed with recreation, rental, entertainment and food concessions, would attract an additional market subset. At one time it was the busiest state park in the system.

Because these outdoor recreation activities are mostly free or low cost, the value of visitors to Issaquah comes by offering paid additions to each activity such as event registrations, rental and vendor spending, and by encouraging pre- and post-diversionary activities that include spending such as dining, shopping and hotel accommodations.

Opportunities

Issaquah's opportunities to further the economic benefits of visitor spending through the community exist because of the city's excellent foundational ambience, primary and diversionary attractions, existing amenities and current activities and events.

Here are our recommended "immediate" opportunities:

- Narrow the scope of what you want to be known for in order to differentiate yourself from competitive destinations and create a stronger brand awareness in the marketplace. "Outdoor recreation" are the two most overused words in the industry, and, as such, they don't create a strong appeal. Everyone promotes outdoor recreation. What's different or better about Issaquah's outdoor recreation? The most successfully branded communities are based on private-sector investment: Nashville and country music; Branson, Missouri and its 49 music theaters; Napa Valley and wine; Walla Walla and wine; Hershey, Pennsylvania and chocolate; Orlando with Disney and another 171 attractions. In every case these successful communities started with a narrow focus. What do you want Issaquah to be known for besides a quality Eastside bedroom community?
- Focus attention on tourism events that take advantage of existing recreational infrastructure and existing arts resources. These would be general events without a branded focus at first. We recommend a dedicated "Visit Issaquah" board and staff person to accomplish this.
- Maximize visitor spending for those you attract by improving navigational wayfinding within the city. The longer you keep visitors in the city, the more money they will spend. Even local residents like Roger Brooks, who lived just six miles from downtown Issaquah, avoided shopping in Issaquah because of the difficulty finding specific retail shops. Wayfinding has been shown to increase retail sales and services by an average 18%. And the number one activity of visitors, regardless of why they visit, is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian-friendly setting. But if they can't easily find Gilman Village, Boehms, XXX Root Beer, or visitor information, they give up, and they're gone.
- Improve regional day visitor volumes to create participant and vendor hotel occupancy. While visitors may not stay overnight, the event leaders, vendors and contractors who manage events can increase overnight stays.

Funding

Additional funding is a discussion that should take place when Issaquah determines what direction the city's brand will go. Raising and allocating additional funds on marketing what the city already offers will not dramatically improve spending because Issaquah has no central focus, and has not positioned its current products in a convenient and organized way. Unfocused marketing will not get people to spend the night. We recommend that once you determine your brand direction (what you want Issaquah to be known for that differentiates you from every other Puget Sound city), funds can then be raised for product development initiatives that support the brand direction. What you are currently spending on general marketing is sufficient for now. We do not recommend charging other organizations for services, or attempting to tax visitors in other ways until a brand direction determines what is required for developing the product that will give visitors a reason to spend the night in Issaquah.

Summary:

- Decide what you want Issaquah to be known for – specifically. This needs to be that one thing that will really put Issaquah "on the map" as the place to live, establish or relocate a business, and visit. A Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan will provide that direction and the details of how to achieve success.
- Design, fabricate and install a wayfinding system. This will, by itself, dramatically increase local, regional, and visitor spending.

- Begin work on product development initiatives that will make Issaquah an overnight destination in its own right.

Finally, as the product is developed, you tip the scales more and more to marketing. So any funding would come from recommendations made in the Action Plan. It's premature to talk about funding when there's no focus on how it should be spent. As noted earlier, just spending more won't necessarily increase your overnight stays given the nature of your current tourism assets.

Tourism Promotion Area (TPA)

It would be beneficial for Issaquah to pursue a TPA in order to strengthen the goal of overnight stays in Issaquah hotels. The TPA should include destinations of the Cascade experience: North Bend, Snoqualmie, Fall City, and Snoqualmie Pass. Issaquah cannot compete with larger Eastside communities like Kirkland and Bellevue and should not be a part of a TPA with those destinations. But, it can distinguish itself by becoming the "base camp" for Cascade experiences like hiking, parasailing, mountain biking, skiing, golf and the like. Issaquah possesses a metropolitan feeling, yet is just 35 minutes from the Cascade Mountains and Snoqualmie Pass. In other words, Issaquah should be part of a marketing effort that would include Snoqualmie (golf and the falls), North Bend, Fall City, and Snoqualmie Pass, rather than trying to compete with Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond and other Eastside communities. We recommend addressing this opportunity after Issaquah completes a branding exercise, knows what its focus is, and has begun installing the city-wide wayfinding system, probably in about two years. Chapter 35.101 RCW of Washington State sets the legal guidelines for the formation of TPAs. Washington State areas that have TPAs include Skagit, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties, the City of Wenatchee, Seattle Southside, and others.

Recommendation #1: Create a Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan

Who takes the lead:

City of Issaquah and a Visit Issaquah organization

Approximate Cost:

Approximately \$70,000

Possible funding idea:

Lodging Tax fund, City general funds, and possible private sector contributions

Rationale and/or details:

There are 546 cities and towns in Washington and information about every one of them is instantly available to us via the Internet. The challenge is that people do not search for cities and towns – they look for job opportunities, business opportunities, homes, neighborhoods, activities, and attractions, and THEN (secondly) add a general geographic area. In order for Issaquah to compete with dozens of other Eastside communities, let alone the other 545 in the state, it must find its unique selling proposition – that one thing that sets Issaquah apart from the dozens of other bedroom communities in the Puget Sound Region.

Issaquah should determine, articulate and graphically present its unique brand – what they want Issaquah to be known for. Narrowing Issaquah's focus will strengthen its brand image, create greater awareness, and drive through the din of other, less-focused destination messages.

Billions of dollars each year are spent marketing communities for economic, residential, business and tourism development, yet a full 97% of that is ineffective. Why? We are exposed to 5,000 marketing messages a day – far more than the mind can absorb – so we automatically filter out generic marketing messages and those that don't cater to our needs or desires. The days of being "all things to all people" are over. To be successful – in business or as a community – you must differentiate yourself from everyone else. Find that one feature that really sets you apart and build on that as a foundation. This is the art of branding.

Once the brand is identified, the Visit Issaquah organization can play a critical role in attracting the people, businesses and events that reinforce and support the brand. The sooner this is achieved, the more effective the Visit Issaquah marketing tasks will become.

An Issaquah Brand would focus on development of tourism as a driver of the economy, but it should be structured to include other business development. There should only be one brand. For example, the City of Round Rock, Texas, adopted a sports

brand with the slogan “Game On!” They just spent \$17 million on a facility dedicated to attracting sports events. The rest of the business community adopted this brand in their marketing messages – “Game On! We mean business.” Even the local hospital recruited its physicians and employees with “Game On!” to live and work in Round Rock.

Communities that successfully adopt and integrate brands into their product development and marketing generally see an increase in spending within the community of 30% to 300%. Return on Investment numbers for a new brand are impossible to calculate. Imagine trying to calculate the ROI for specific business categories from public funding of Safeco Field or CenturyLink Field before they were built. But cities invest in branding themselves because it sets them apart from other destinations and assists with economic development and development of a larger tax base. Please review Appendix B – The Art of Branding and Appendix F – 13 Steps of Destination Branding. We are providing you with examples of other small cities that have invested in creating an identity and developing their tourism base. See Appendix C and Appendix F.

Return on Investment

It is not possible to forecast the economic effect of any given new event. That would depend upon the type of event, the duration, the distance from which it would attract participants, the amount of marketing dollars, etc. Because you do not yet have a brand that would provide direction for the types of events that would support the brand, our thinking is that any additional events in the short term might help the bottom line. They could range from car events to quilting displays to recreational competitions. We can recall the example of Solvang, California’s experience in inviting car clubs to their town. They provided the welcome, but the club did the promotion, logistics, bathroom facilities etc. The event attracted about 10,000 people over four days. The organizers and car owners filled the hotels and spent money at restaurants and local shops, contributing to the local economy. They reserved the same dates for the next ten years. This was simply by inviting the club to Solvang.

Recommendation #2 - Create a Visit Issaquah organization

Who takes the lead:

While the Branding Plan is being undertaken, the Issaquah private sector should establish a new tourism organization and operate it. We are very reluctant to create additional boards and layers of bureaucracy, and therefore recommend that the Board of “Visit Issaquah” include the existing LTAC Committee members supplemented with three or four private sector representatives (champions of tourism development for Issaquah, e.g. the Tourism Steering Committee). The Mayor can take into consideration this additional role of LTAC committee members when making his appointments.

Approximate Cost:

Administrative time/cost to set up a non-profit organization

Possible funding:

In-kind services of the City Attorney’s Office or funded by the private sector to incorporate and register the organization with the IRS. Operational funding would come from lodging taxes and later, from additional resources, once an action plan has been developed.

Rationale and/or details:

Create a stand-alone organization – The “Visit Issaquah” Program (VIP). This should be established as a 501 (c) 3 tax-exempt organization, which can accept charitable donations, or as a 501 (c) 6 nonprofit “civic” and “commercial” organization. The latter is used by business leagues, chambers of commerce, real estate boards, and boards of trade that are not organized for profit, and when no part of the net earnings inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual. It’s your call. The organization would be the recipient of funding from the lodging taxes collected by the City; however, private sector contributions could ultimately be accepted. Local legal advice can make a recommendation as to which form the organization should be registered.

Visit Issaquah would not produce events, but act solely as a tourism product-development and marketing organization – or DMO: Destination Management Organization. The Visit Issaquah organization would work collaboratively with the Economic Development Department of the City, the Economic Vitality Commission, the City’s communications office, the Issaquah Chamber, Salmon Days and other festival organizations.

Visit Issaquah would replace the current agreement between the City of Issaquah and the Issaquah Chamber of Commerce for the Chamber’s tourism activities and would constitute a fully dedicated Board and one full-time staff person. The Board would

be the LTAC Board, plus other members. A contracted full-time “Director” would report to the Board.

Funding for the Visit Issaquah Program would be derived from two primary sources: \$100,000 from the City LTAC funds and any additional cash or in-kind contributions from the visitor industry’s private sector partners.

The VIC budget of \$100,000 per year would be allocated as follows:

Director’s contract	\$65,000
Director’s operational expense allowance	\$ 3,600
Rent, if required	\$14,400
Website, Social Media marketing, Publicity	\$12,000
Best of Issaquah brochure	\$ 5,000
Total	\$100,000

If rent were not required, these funds would assist with distribution of the Best of Issaquah brochure (in local hotels, kiosks), development of a photo library, development and installation of several visitor information kiosks, and assistance with recruiting and managing logistics for outside events being produced in Issaquah.

Recommendation #3 Contract for the Development of a Wayfinding System

Who takes the lead:

City of Issaquah

Approximate Cost:

Approximately \$90,000

Possible funding idea:

Transportation grants (federal, state)

Rationale and/or details:

Create a Wayfinding System for Issaquah. The more you have to offer, the longer visitors stay and the more money they spend, and a good wayfinding system will tell people what you have to offer as well as how to find it. Destinations that install wayfinding systems see an average of 18% increase in their retail sales. The key is to make it easy for visitors to become aware of and navigate to the major attractions, activity and spending venues in Issaquah. Wayfinding works best when a city brand’s logo and color palette are incorporated into vehicular navigation signs, pedestrian directional signs, gateway signs, kiosks and interpretative signs as well as street banners and destination merchandise.

Wayfinding begins with an inventory of city attractions, discussions with city officials, and the mapping of potential sign locations. Different sign types are identified and concepts are designed to support the character of the city and its brand. Messaging for each individual sign is developed, reviewed and refined. Locations and sign content are plotted digitally for multiple reviews and online edits. Preliminary costs for sign fabrication and installation are aligned and phased with available budgets. Finally, bid documentation for sign fabrication is prepared with detailed specifications and drawings, and bid oversight is provided.

This is not a public works project. A good wayfinding system is as much a science as an art, and the system should be planned and designed by professional wayfinding experts. And this is an investment, not an expense. Studies have shown that wayfinding increases retail sales and services by an average of 18%, which is substantial. The city should proceed with a system that will make it easy for visitors to realize you actually HAVE a downtown, and will direct traffic between the Interstate, downtown, your theatre, your sports facilities, hiking and biking trails and parks.

One final note: Vehicle navigation systems are not a substitute or replacement for a wayfinding system. We recommend that you watch the 60-minute video in the Roger Brooks All Access Library, “The Art of Wayfinding.” This video provides a lot of details regarding costs, why wayfinding is important, and how to contract with wayfinding expertise.

Quite often this can be funded by federal transportation grants with local matching funds. No matter what, the very top priority is to install wayfinding signage from your freeway area hotels to downtown.

Please see Appendix C for an outline of the Wayfinding Process.



Recommendation #4: Expend lodging tax dollars as economic development funds, not as grants

Who takes the lead:

The L-tax Committee and the City

Funding:

L-tax funds

Rational and/or details:

According to Washington State law, lodging tax dollars are to be spent on the development and marketing of tourism. The U.S. Travel Association defines tourism as a visitor who travels 50 miles or more and spends time in the destination. The goal is to put “heads in beds” in Issaquah. An overnight visitor spends four times that of day visitors. Any organization requesting L-tax funds must demonstrate that they are contributing to overnight stays. For example, if 5% of the people buying tickets to the downtown theaters are staying overnight in Issaquah hotels, then no more than 5% of their marketing dollars should come from L-tax funds – unless those funds are specifically used to market theater events to residents outside the 50-mile radius. If events hope to receive L-tax dollars, they should demonstrate that the expenditures will be dedicated to bringing visitors from further than 50 miles, even if they do not stay overnight. And, we have never seen a Downtown Association funded with L-tax dollars except for specific visitor-oriented events. The bottom line is that organizations requesting L-tax funds need to demonstrate a return on investment from definable visitors. We recommend a three-year process to wean current L-tax recipients from these funds, unless they can demonstrate the return on investment. This can be done with intercept surveys produced by non-interested parties, perhaps by Bellevue College students or other educational programs.

We are enormous proponents of downtown and cultural arts programs, and funding must come from appropriate sources. To comply with Washington State law, L-tax funds must be dedicated to the “promotion and development” of tourism. Local events and organizations that cater to local residents should not be funded with lodging tax funds under state law. Communities that have tried to fund civic centers and even community pools and parks for the benefit of local residents have been forced to stop this practice.

These are not grant funds. They are economic development funds. Every expenditure should demonstrate how it is being spent to attract people from outside a 50-mile radius of Issaquah with a focus on getting them to spend the night in local lodging facilities.

Recommendation #5: Establish how the funds should be spent, with an eye on ROI

Who takes the lead:

The L-tax Committee

Funding:

L-tax Committee

Rationale and/or details:

Marketing dollars should be spent in the following ratios:

- 45% on digital media, including a website and social media marketing
- 20% on print ads that drive readers to the website
- 20% on public relations
- 10% on print materials
- 5% on billboards, trade shows and other forms of advertising.

Advertising should include experience-based key words using Google’s pay-per-click platform. Visitors will always search for experiences first and consider the location only secondarily. For instance, common search terms might include:

- Parasailing Seattle area
- Classic car shows Issaquah
- Best Italian restaurant, Issaquah, WA

- New residential communities in East King County, WA
- Job opportunities, Bellevue area

Details of the website, including whether or not to have advertising on the website, are premature since a brand direction for the destination has not been established yet. Most DMO websites offer very limited advertising since their focus is to be a resource, not a profit-making enterprise. The more advertising you have, the less weight the website carries as a reliable resource.

Recommendation #6: Hire a contracted Director to implement these beginning recommendations.

Who takes the lead:

The Visit Issaquah Board

Funding:

Included in Recommendation #2

Rationale and/or details:

Once a brand direction for the city has been adopted, that will determine what specific experience or expertise the Director should have, and that will also help determine their compensation. Until then, a person with general marketing and public relations skills would suffice and \$65,000 would be a typical compensation for this role. The initial Director would spend 60% of their time recruiting new events into Issaquah, and assisting with their logistical interface within City departments. The Director would also manage the Visitor Information Center(s), create the Best Of Issaquah brochure, and eventually, help get the branding action plan produced. The Director would be a non-employee, independent, contracted position without benefits. This structure will save money and facilitate annual reviews and performance-driven contract renewals. In order to keep overhead low, the Visit Issaquah Director would work from the City-owned Visitor Center building. Compensation for this Visit Issaquah office space could be handled one of two ways. Either the Visit Issaquah Program would pay a monthly rent to the Chamber of Commerce, or the City would reduce the Chamber of Commerce’s Visitor Center rent by a similar amount. In the second case, the City would be covering the space rent internally and allow more lodging tax funds to be spent on marketing – which is our recommendation.

Director’s Job Description

The primary role of the Visit Issaquah Director is to seize the opportunity to recruit multi-day tourism events that take advantage of existing recreational infrastructure and existing arts resources in Issaquah. By doing so the Director would leverage regional day visitor volumes to create participant and vendor hotel occupancy.

Even though most of the visitors will be day-visitors, Visit Issaquah should create an environment where vendors, contractors, artisans, musicians and others will fill local hotel rooms, particularly on weekends. The Annual Juried Art Show at Bellevue Square is a great example of creating a large daytime population of visitors with substantial overnight vendor and artisan hotel stays.

For example, the Director would recruit outside events to Issaquah:

- Car shows and clubs
- Art guilds
- Motorcycle shows
- Quilt guilds
- Hang gliding and other recreational sport shows
- Biking shows and exhibitions
- Taste of Issaquah culinary events
- Mountaineering and recreational shows
- Flower and garden shows

He or she should develop a database of regional clubs and organizations and would reach out to them, inviting them to host

their events in downtown Issaquah. Further, the Director would also work with the hotels to recruit small meetings and events – corporate retreats, training sessions, team-building events, etc.

The Director would also manage the cadre of 25+ volunteers presently managed by the Chamber of Commerce to staff the Visitor Information Center, assist the Downtown Association with event logistics and coordinate with the city government for closing off streets, portable restrooms, traffic mitigation, keeping kiosks filled with brochures, etc.

The Director would create a FAQ telephone- and website-based inquiry response system in order to handle visitor inquiries more efficiently.

The Director would direct public relations efforts to promote existing and new events. No event advertising funding would be included in the Visit Issaquah budget. All of the marketing would be handled by the organization producing the event, working with the Director.

An important task would be the expansion, modification and weekly management of the Chamber's WordPress website landing page, that would include content development (photography, videography, calendar of events, etc.). We recommend that the URL for the website be changed to VisitIssaquah.com (if you own it), or TravelIssaquah.com, which is available. The website should be updated every two weeks. Other digital tasks would be the creation of a monthly e-newsletter, and a Constant Contact-type database. The need for an optimized search engine presence of a first class destination Issaquah website cannot be overstated.

The Director would ideally be a very personable, high-energy, self-motivated person, both enthusiastic and experienced in tourism promotion. Outreach to attract both leisure and corporate events is essential. A director of convention sales at a quality hotel, with a good success record, might be an ideal candidate for this position.

Recommendation #7 – Create “The Best of Issaquah” rack brochure and distribute it locally

Who takes the lead:

Visit Issaquah Director

Approximate cost:

\$5,000 with featured businesses contributing another \$5,000

Possible funding:

A public/private project paid with lodging tax funds and private participation funding

Rationale and/or details:

Always promote your “anchor tenants.” These are businesses and activities that people would drive 45 minutes to an hour, or more, to visit specifically. You cannot let politics get in the way of promoting your “best ofs.” The reasons for creating this brochure are many:

- The most asked question at any hotel, B&B or visitor information center is “Where’s a good place to eat?” and visitors don’t want to be handed a list. By promoting your best restaurants, retail shops and activities, you ensure a good experience, which is often instantly noted on Facebook, in Twitter posts and in on-line reviews such as Yelp and TripAdvisor. If friends or family were visiting you where would you take them to eat?
- Success breeds success. No successful mall is ever developed until the anchor tenants are committed. And most people go to the malls, not because there’s a Radio Shack, Hallmark store, GNC Nutrition outlet, or a dozen cell phone dealers, but for the anchor tenants. Chances are good they’ll stop into Radio Shack, Hallmark or a number of other smaller shops while they’re at the mall. The anchor tenants attract the shoppers to the mall, and all the other shops benefit as well. Would you go to Orlando if Disney World weren’t there? If you said no, you just insulted 171 other attractions. But they all know that Disney is the anchor tenant and does the heavy lifting in terms of promotion, and they all benefit from Disney being there. Additionally, Disney is glad Universal Studios, Wild Kingdom and the other attractions are there because, collectively, they make Orlando worth a trip from just about anywhere on earth.
- By promoting your very best restaurants, retail shops, and activities, you encourage the others to raise the bar so they can be included in future “Best Of” guides, which should be produced each year. Note the criteria below, and encourage those not selected to work on those criteria so they too can be promoted in the guide.

- “Best of” restaurants, retail shops and activities make Issaquah worth a special trip, particularly from neighboring communities such as North Bend, Snoqualmie, Bellevue, Kirkland, Renton, Redmond and Seattle.
- One of your recruitment objectives is to recruit one, two or three anchor tenants into downtown Issaquah. Just like malls, few downtowns become successful destinations without anchor tenants. You need to recruit them, and then make sure you help market them, specifically, creating an incentive for them to invest in Issaquah.
- The “Best Of” guide is a 4-inch x 9-inch rack brochure that can include up to 20 businesses and activities, and is typically made up of 24 panels (12 panels per side). It should include perhaps 12 to 20 businesses and activities, plus and front and back cover, a panel explaining how these were chosen, and a panel that talks about Issaquah: Your location and what the city is all about.

Here are the criteria you might use to determine who should be invited as a participant:

- They must be open at least six days a week. The day they can be closed is Monday.
- They must be open until at least 8:00 pm all six nights. As an FYI, 70% of all consumer retail spending now takes place after 6:00 pm. This is why all successful malls are typically open until 9:00 or 10:00 pm seven days a week.
- They must have good curb appeal and window displays. They must be inviting.
- They must be highly regarded by someone other than themselves. This means that they must have an 80%+ positive reviews on TripAdvisor, Yelp, Urban Spoon and/or have been written up in regional publications such as Seattle Magazine, Seattle Metropolitan, and Pacific Northwest Magazine.
- They must be organic to Issaquah. This means you can’t include franchises and businesses that can be found in just about every city. Why drive to Issaquah if I can enjoy the same shop or restaurant right here in Seattle?
- They do not all need to be located downtown. While we hope they can be recruited to downtown, it’s not a requirement to be included in the guide.

These folks are each invited to purchase a panel in the guide, making this a public-private marketing partnership. Typically each business or activity would pay in the range of \$400 for their panel. The remainder of the cost is covered by lodging tax funds. Many activities, such as historical attractions and parks, have little or no marketing budgets, and their panel would be covered by the lodging tax funds.

It’s very important NOT to include businesses just to sell more panels. You should have a good balance between restaurants, retail shops, and activities: perhaps six of each. But if you only have four restaurants that are truly outstanding (remember you MUST deliver on the promise of it being worth an hour’s drive) only promote four. The same goes with retail shops and activities.

We recommend printing at least 20,000 copies and distributing them as follows:

- Every room in every hotel or have them available at the front desk. Housekeeping would make sure one is in each room. Guests, of course, are encouraged to keep the copy they pick up. An alternative would be to hand the guest one on check-in.
- In your visitor information center, and at visitor information kiosks designed and installed as part of your wayfinding system. You should have kiosks at Gilman Village, the Village Theatre, downtown, at Swedish Hospital, at the malls, and at your sports facilities and major parks.
- One should be sent to every household in Issaquah, in a #10 envelope (yes, snail mail) with a small card that reads, “The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and family. We hope that you will hang onto this brochure so that when you host visitors, you will show them the very best of what Issaquah has to offer. After all, every dining room table should be a concierge desk.”
- At other visitor information centers along Interstate-90, and others within an hour’s drive of Issaquah.
- At city hall, the library and at other public assembly spaces. This one brochure is a good way to get regional visitors to stop in Issaquah, a great way to get hotel guests to go beyond a quarter mile of the interstate, and a good way to educate locals of what you’ve got and where it’s located. For each featured business, include a photo (interiors sell the experience better than exterior shots), their logo, address, phone number, website address and a description of why they are so good and are a “must visit” and “worth the drive” destination. Each would get a full panel. You might

consider adding a QR code next to the logo or at the bottom of each panel where a person could easily pull up their website or menu. The guide should also be available on the VisitIssaquah website for viewing and for download. The guide should be produced every year. Finally, the reasons no lodging facilities are included is so that they will hand the brochure to visitors without fear of promoting their competitors.

Recommendation #8: Relocate the Visitor information center and services

Who takes the lead:

The Visit Issaquah organization

Approximate Cost:

Included in Recommendation #2

Rationale and/or details:

We recommend that a visitor information center be located in the heart of a shopping district – in downtown (old town) Issaquah. Once visitors are out of their vehicles, you have a four times greater chance of getting them to spend money. The historic Shell gas station would be a great visitor center for this reason. Another great location would be within Gilman village. The current center is difficult to find (particularly without adequate wayfinding) and visitors typically don't get out, get info, then get back in the car, drive three blocks, find parking, then get out again. The key word that drives tourism is "convenience." Once they are out of the car, this is your chance to get them to say, "While we're here, let's get something to eat – something to drink." "Let's check out that shop over there." This is exactly why car dealers work very hard to get people out of their cars. The current location is not desirable because visitors have to get back into their cars, and once they do, it's just too easy to get back onto the freeway and head to the final, or next, destination.

A second part of this recommendation is to take advantage of a new, evolving trend of having a second portable VIC in a trailer or modified van that can be moved to where crowds are congregating. Imagine having a portable visitor information center at Salmon Days, at Lake Sammamish State Park during peak weekends, or in the Costco parking lot on occasion, at other special events, car shows at the XXX Drive In, etc. Once again, convenience can lead to increased spending. Visitors walk up to these rather than enter them. A staff person manages the portable unit. It may contain a flat-screen TV depicting itineraries and things to do in Issaquah, and would contain brochures including the Best Of Guide. Apps are not a substitute for a VIC, and the customizable information that can be obtained by speaking with a knowledgeable person is invaluable. Issaquah could see a tremendous return on educating visitors of what the city has, where it's located, and providing information about the many activities, such as the zoo, that most visitors aren't aware even exist.

We encourage the city and local organizations to watch the Roger Brooks video (rogerbrookslibrary.com) "Visitor Information Centers in the Digital Age," which includes a lot of valuable information regarding all aspects of VIC facilities and services.

A third part of this recommendation is to have standard low-tech kiosks at strategic locations around Issaquah, each containing brochure distribution. Year-round kiosks should be regularly stocked with brochures, including the recommended "Best Of" brochure. When visitors are home, planning their trip, brochures account for only 32% of their decisions, but once at the destination, visitors use brochures to help make decisions 81% of the time - they are a greater resource for visitors while in their destination than the Internet.

Recommendation #9 – Recruit new events into Issaquah

Who takes the lead:

The Visit Issaquah Board and Director

Approximate Cost:

Included in the organizational budget

Rationale and/or details:

It would be virtually impossible to develop 100 to 200 event days if every event were locally produced. So about 60% of the Visit Issaquah Director's time would be spent inviting outside organizations to host their public events in Issaquah, with a substantial number of these in downtown Issaquah. All of these would bring their own vendors, their members or "tribe" (in social media terms), market the event, set it up, and manage the event. They will fill hotel rooms and bring their own

audiences, fans, members, and associates with them. It is the Director's job to bring in perhaps 100 multi-day events each year. Ninety percent of these events should be multi-day events of at least two days.

For instance, hosting a visual arts event, such as the Annual Juried Art Show held at Bellevue Square. The event set-up might take place on a Thursday and the event would run all day Friday, Saturday and until Sunday afternoon. The goal is to attract day visitors, local residents, overnight vendors and "tribe" members.

The goal is to have Issaquah play host to at least thirty weekend events, all worth a drive from Tacoma or Everett – and beyond. With enough consistency in weekend events, consumers can reasonably expect that something is happening on most weekends, and they will automatically ask the question, "I wonder what's happening in Issaquah this weekend?" and search out event's details. This also creates "top of mind awareness," bringing Issaquah to the front of the line of places to spend evening hours and weekends.

The Director will also leverage events already occurring in Issaquah, working with event organizers to find ways to expand those events into additional activities. For instance, if the city host's a soccer tournament, perhaps the awards banquet or ceremony could take place in a local restaurant. Or create complementary activities that will pull these visitors into the heart of your spending districts.

The Director would also lead a team of volunteers in working with event organizers, once recruited, to help meet their needs with a variety of logistics. Once a brand is established there should be the opportunity to charge for some of these services. Examples include:

- Police, security and maintenance
- Closing off streets to vehicle traffic. Establishing temporary parking sites.
- Coordinating sound, lights, staging, seating, power access, set-up areas, fencing for outdoor beverages, etc.
- Adding portable toilets, garbage barrels and other needs.

The Director is the coordinator between the city's departments, the downtown and its retailers, the Chamber of Commerce, and the event organizer. The Director calendars the events and publishes them on the Visit Issaquah website, in social media and creates press releases so that everyone knows what's happening in Issaquah on a weekly basis.

Recommendation #10: Once the branding, product development and marketing action plan is developed, begin implementation.

Who takes the lead:

The private sector, and the city will each have tasks to accomplish

Funding:

The plan needs to outline the cost of individual tasks. Some will be private sector investment, while others will require public investments. Some will be for product development or upgrades and others will be for brand marketing.

Rationale and/or details:

Once a focus of the Issaquah identity for economic development is known, the rationale for investments that support that identity or brand will be clear. And from THAT will come the need for increased funding. Investors will know how the money will get spent and what the ROI is.

Recommendation #11: Hold a Tourism Summit for City Council and Staff

Who takes the lead:

The City of Issaquah

Funding:

\$7,500 – a four- to six-hour workshop/retreat

Rationale and/or details:

Roger Brooks of RBI would present concepts, best practices and examples of tourism funding issues, branding, tourism

development and answer questions from City Council and staff about tourism and how it works with a community and economic development. This retreat would inform City officials and staff as to the issues faced by other destinations of Issaquah's size and assets, successes and failures and would set the stage for city decisions regarding their tourism development.

Recommended Project Sequence

We recommend that Issaquah –

- 2014** Hold a Tourism Summit with City Council and staff
Fund and begin a Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan
(Recommended funding: City general funds, L-tax funds, and any private sector donations)
Create the "Visit Issaquah" organizational structure
Put into place a marketing budget for 2015 that begins the reduction of grant funding of organizations that cannot demonstrate overnight stays or visitors from over 50 miles from Issaquah.

- 2015** Start inviting events into Issaquah
Fund and start the Wayfinding System project
Move the VIC downtown and/or create the mobile VIC

- 2016** Improve the visitor website
Determine additional funding resources
Install the wayfinding signage
Create initial success through Branding Plan action items and generate community support for branded product development and marketing.

APPENDIX A – Stakeholders Interviewed for this project

First Name	Last Name	Position
Karen	Abel	ArtEast Director
Eileen	Barber	FISH/Ltax Committee/Salmon Days
Robyn	Barfoot	Cougar Mountain Zoo
Matthew	Bott	Issaquah Chamber of Commerce
Jim	Davis	Holiday Inn
David	Duarte	Tutta Bella
Amy	Dukes	Development Officer/Arts Coordinator
Alan	Finkelstein	EVC Commissioner Issaquah Chamber Board Member
Amy	French	Tutta Bella
David	Fujimoto	City of Issaquah Office of Sustainability
Richard	Gabel	Issaquah Chamber Chair/Meadow Creek Business Center
Tyson	Garbusjuk	Boehm's Candies
Christy	Garrard	Director Special Event Planner Issaquah Highlands Council
George	Grongeth	Kayak Academy/Issaquah Paddling Sports
Barbara	Gronseta	Kayak Academy/Issaquah Paddling Sports
Jennifer	Hagge	Manager Grand Ridge Paza
Bob	Harrison	Issaquah City Manager
Ross	Hoover	City of Issaquah Parks & Recreation
David	Kappler	Issaquah Alps Trails Club
Stacy	Karacostas	Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
Robin	Kelley	Salmon Days
Jane	Kuechle	Friends of the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery Executive Director
Andrea	Lehner	City of Issaquah Economic Development
Jamie	Lilly	Village Theatre Dir. Of Marketing
Erica	Maniez	Issaquah History Museums
Erin	McCullaugh	Swedish Hospital
Anne	McGill	City of Issaquah Parks & Recreation
Katie	McPhail	NMTA/NW Paddling Festival
Matt	Mechler	City of Issaquah Parks & Recreation
Roger	Michel	Evergreen Trail Runs/NW Epic Mountain Bike Series
Larry	Miller	Windermere
Nina	Milligan	Highlands Council Communications/Issaquah City Council Member
Mark	Mullet	Zeek's Pizza/Ben & Jerry's
Will	Parkinson	Hilton Garden Inn/Issaquah Chamber
Kelli	Phelan	Tutta Bella
Sean	Quinn	Flat Iron Grill
Skip	Rowley	Hilton Garden Inn
Lisa	Smith	NMTA/NW Paddling Festival
Karen	Sonoras	Downtown Issaquah Association
Lori	Sutich	Swedish Hospital
Jody	Turner	Swedish Hospital
Brian	Twiggs	Salmon Days
Gwynne	Williams	Issaquah Soccer Club Ex. Director
Mike	Winkler	Realtor Paragliding Festivals Committee

THE ART OF BRANDING A COMMUNITY

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, rail-ways, 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.

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, its 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

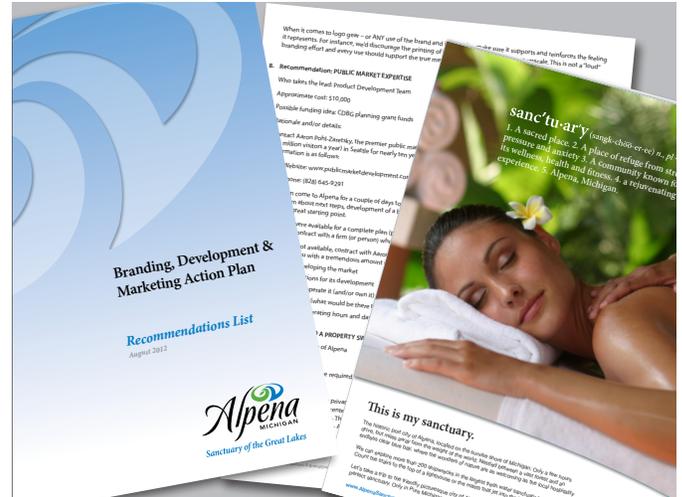


7. You never “roll out” a brand

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.



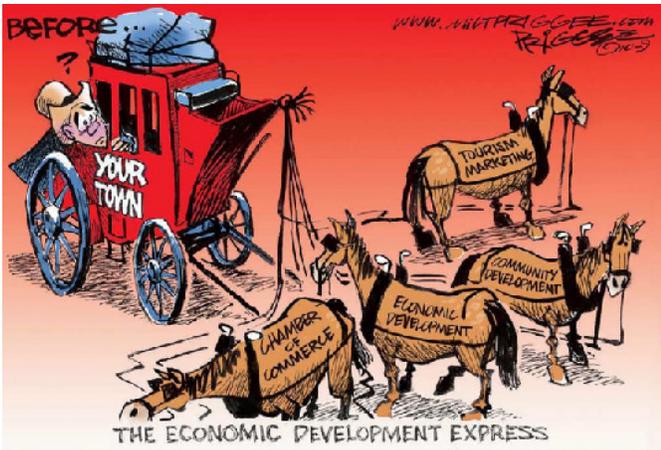
8. Great brands always start with a plan

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!

APPENDIX C - City Branding Case Studies

1. Coos County, New Hampshire

Population 32,096. This branding initiative has really put Northern New Hampshire (a collection of seven towns) “on the map” as one of the best destinations in the Northeast. In fact, in just the second year of the branding effort, they saw tourism revenues (spending) increase by 27%, more than five times more than the rest of the state - or any state in New England. In their case it was packaging what they already had, so they had a quicker turn around in seeing the return on investment. They continue to break records.

Coos County is the northernmost region of New Hampshire, bordering Canada and the states of Vermont and Maine. The region was primarily known for its dying timber industry (3 of 5 paper or pulp mills have closed in recent years) and the loss of these manufacturing jobs. A few years ago Coos County was branded as “The Great North Woods.” Around the county there has been investment in this brand, from local marketing brochures touting “The Great North Woods” to businesses using The Great North Woods in their name (i.e. “Great North Woods Realty”). Unfortunately, when folks from outside New Hampshire, whether in Massachusetts or Seattle, are asked about The Great North Woods they associate with Maine or Minnesota., not New Hampshire.

Coos County, particularly the areas north of Mt. Washington (a resort area popular with skiers and hikers), had no real identity as a destination. There is plenty of outdoor recreation – everything from whitewater rafting to snowmobiling – but to date there had been nothing to truly distinguish the region from other areas in New England offering the same opportunities. However, located in the region are three Grand Resorts, all built during the Gilded Age of the late 19th century. These resorts are located in unique, beautiful settings, and feature beautifully restored buildings evoking the late Victorian era. All three offer a variety of activities for guests, such as skiing, snowshoeing, golf, tennis, hiking, children’s programs, and include meal plans.

The Brand Promise (One Sentence version) adopted was to combine the “grandness” of the hotels with the “grandness of nature.” Northern New Hampshire, the land of grand resorts and grand adventures, is truly grand in every way. Contacts: Cathy Conway, Vice President, Northern Community Investment Corp.(NCIC) phone: 603-788-2700, x2141, email: cconway@ncic.org or Jon Freeman, President NCIC, phone: 802-748-1888, email: jfreeman@ncic.org

2. Alpena, Michigan

Population 10,300. Alpena is in the beginning phases of implementation, but is already making great progress and is on the right track.

Alpena is faced with a three-fold challenge:

1. It is seen as a manufacturing location with a lower-than average quality of life
2. People in downstate Michigan, for the most part, know little – if anything – about Alpena.
3. The western shore of the state commands the lion’s share of tourism in Northern Michigan.

In fact, more than 90% of visitors traveling north on Interstate 75 are headed to the Traverse City area, Mackinac Island, or the Upper Peninsula.

On the positive side, Alpena has some great assets it can build on:

1. The only fresh water marine sanctuary in the world with a world-class interpretive center (NOAA) and related activities.
2. A stunning downtown, waterfront, marina, and first-class amenities including Island/Duck Park, a great hospital, a college and Besser Museum.
3. Alpena, for the most part, has a clean slate to work from: most people in the major markets you’re hoping to pull from really have no perception of Alpena. When they visit nearly all are amazed with the natural beauty, overall feeling, and amenities Alpena has to offer.

Over a 13-month period Alpena’s Convention and Visitors Bureau spearheaded Alpena’s branding effort, culminating in a

week long “BrandCamp” in mid-August 2012 where the community’s “Brand Development Committee” created the direction, key marketing messages, and supporting product that will make Alpena one of the Midwest’s most desirable destinations for business (new and existing), as a place to live, and as a place to visit time and again.

The primary goals of this effort:

1. To become an outstanding destination for both local residents and visitors.
2. To create small business opportunities and to strengthen existing businesses.
3. To create lasting opportunities for Alpena’s youth: jobs, business opportunities, and gathering places. The future of Alpena is in its youth.
4. To make Alpena the destination of choice for those looking for healthy activities, serenity, learning opportunities, visiting the National Marine Sanctuary, and to spread these activities throughout the year. This is NOT about competing with Traverse City and other popular destinations, but to spread out tourism throughout the year with small numbers who stay longer and want to be away from the crowds.

They have taken on the brand of a “sanctuary” place, “As the Sanctuary of the Great Lakes, Alpena truly embodies the haven from the stresses of everyday life: the culturally rich place to relax, rejuvenate, and inspire the happy, healthy, and creative you.” Their latest report is as follows:

- The Convention & Visitors Bureau hosted a film crew from the Outdoor Channel for the filming of the TV show called “Major League Fishing” on the Outdoor Channel. It is a reality/documentary-style show that brought 24 of the country’s best bass anglers to the Alpena area for a week-long environmentally conscious fishing tournament. The tournament is filmed and from the footage an entire season of shows will be produced. The CVB and entire community of Alpena worked really hard to bring the show to Alpena. Fishing is an integral part of our history and culture and the show aligns perfectly with the idea that anglers can travel here for incredible fishing and relaxation in a tranquil environment.
 - Alpena is the first season where they will use the community branding in their production (i.e., Sanctuary of the Great Lakes).
 - It is also the first season where they used multiple bodies of water (of which Alpena has many)
 - It is the first season where they broke numerous tournament records
- The Alpena Rotary Club adopted the city’s bike path as their 2013 project. They will be working on a plan to re-brand it, add markers, clean it up, etc.
- We hosted the Harley Davidson Owners Group state H.O.G. Rally this summer. While motorcycles may not be on our list of “silent sports” the motorcyclists were persuaded to come to Alpena because we offer a venue that promotes relaxation, low-key adventure, and genuine grounded authenticity. They could enjoy their favorite activity within a beautiful serene setting.
- Beginning to develop a number of “Navigational Guides” for enjoying your Sanctuary of the Great Lakes:
 - Fishing Your Sanctuary of the Great Lakes
 - Sinkhole Exploration Guide
 - Biking Your Sanctuary of the Great Lakes
 - Photography Adventure Guide
 - Canoe & Kayak Journey Guide
- Recruiting events that align with the Sanctuary of the Great Lakes brand. Have joined Pure Michigan Sports to attract silent sports types of events that use our areas of natural resource as the venue.
- Began working with the local TV station to produce a once-per-week feature on exploring the adventures available in the Sanctuary of the Great Lakes <http://youtu.be/yKHTyiCROkY>

Contact: Jeff Gray, Superintendent, Thunderbay National Marine Sanctuary, 989-356-8805, x12, j.gray@NOAA.gov

3. Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

Population 15,200. Mt. Vernon suffered from local resident economic leakage, who spent time and money elsewhere. The downtown was too quiet. Residents and visitors alike had no reason to go there.

The brand promise they adopted stands for:

“Celebrating creativity through a series of festivals, artisans in action, and a vibrant downtown market.”

“The Midwest’s Festival City. Artisans, music & creativity with a twist.”

When you tell someone, ten years from now, you’re from Mt. Vernon, you want them to respond:

“Oh yeah! I know Mt. Vernon! You’re that place with all those very cool art studios, festivals and that awesome market!”

Here is an update from the tourism director:

We are well under way with our wayfinding project with the assistance of Merje Design. The design for the signage is almost done and the location plan is partially completed. That is a major step for the branding project.

We are working on the market at the former armory, too. We tested a few “market days” outdoors last summer on the armory grounds and have found smashing success. We are doing a combination of farmers market, flea market, and crafters with food, live music, and a kids’ area. People are flocking to it. We have more than 100 vendors and probably 2,000-3,000 visitors each time. Amazing! Downtown hasn’t looked so alive in a long time! A contractor has been hired to remove asbestos and to replace windows in the armory building.

Here is an excerpt from an email I received a while back from a young mom – just random out of the blue –

“I loved the last market days event! I brought both of the boys out and scored some great deals and food. I would say that it was probably one of my favorite things that I’ve done in a while. Great job on that. My mother-in-law and I are talking about getting in on the action and getting a booth for September.”

Many of the other projects in the recommendations guide are in the works or have been completed as well. We have a new visitors guide, a new quarterly “Destination Mt. Vernon” publication, a new website for tourism, a streetscape project took place on 9th Street and we are adding new events at a rapid rate. It is exciting times and exhausting! Be careful what your wish for, yeah?

Other updates about the city:

- From 2010 to the present, they’ve had over \$13 million in re-investments in the community
- City Manager Ron Neibert said the branding process not only gave Mt. Vernon a new look but “a new attitude in the community. We’re having a sense of unity in terms of the theme and excitement in how we want to present Mt. Vernon.”
- The city has had more than \$1 billion in private investment projects over the last five years.
- Exciting things are happening, particularly downtown.

Mt. Vernon’s branding has breathed new life into the community and you can see with the investment going on there.

Contact: Bonnie Jerdon, Tourism Director, Phone number: 618-242-6843, Email - tourismdir@mvn.net or Ron Neibert, City Manager, Mt. Vernon, IL, phone: 618 242-6802 citymanager@mvn.net

APPENDIX D – The Steps of Developing a Community Wayfinding System

STEP 1– Project Area Analysis

a. Research

- Review previous plans and studies
- Review applicable regulations
- Interview and/or survey representative front-line staff and stakeholders
- On-Site Visit (Research)
 - Informal interviews with representative staff and stakeholders
 - Meet with steering group
 - Identify definable destinations
 - Identify vehicular and pedestrian decision points
 - Analyze traffic flow, traffic speed and planned roadway improvements
 - Review and photograph existing conditions and in-place wayfinding devices
 - Identify and photograph proposed sign, kiosk and gateway locations

b. Strategy

- Develop preliminary system framework
- Establish signage types
- Identify proposed sign, kiosk and gateway locations
- Establish design criteria
- Define messaging concepts
- Create online, interactive map with sign locations
- Create password-protected project website
- Submittal #1: Planning Summary
- Workshop with steering group to discuss Submittal #1

STEP 2 – Wayfinding System Design

- Generate concepts and approved strategy / program from Phase 1
- Provide probable implementation costs
- Update online, interactive location map
- Submittal #2: Concept Summary
- Interface with local transportation representative
- Revisions to concepts and program
- Develop approved concept into all sign types
- Submittal #3: Design Development Summary
- Finalize design and apply any final refinements
- Submittal #4: Bid Documents (draft)

STEP 3 – Bid Documentation Preparation

a. Design Intent Document

- Scaled drawings of all sign types
- General Specifications
- Colors and finishes schedule

b. Message Schedule

- Proposed messages
- Phased Recommendations

c. Sign Location Plan

- Submittal #5: Final Bid Documents & Production-Ready Art

d. Project Resources

- On-line, Interactive Map
- Password protected project website page

Steps 1 thru 3 Deliverables

- Submittal 1: Planning Summary
- Submittal 2: Concept Summary
- Submittal 3: Design Summary
- Submittal 4: Bid Documents (draft)
- Submittal 5: Final Bid Documents & Production Art

STEP 4 – Fabrication Oversight

a. Bidding

- Offer technical support during bidder's question period
- Advise on bidder's submittals
- Participate in short-list interviews (teleconference)

b. Fabrication (for initial implementation phase if divided into a multi-phased program)

- Review fabricator's shop drawings and sample submittals.
- Provide on-going technical collaboration with the fabricator.
- Perform a post-installation assessment.

Proposed Step 4 Deliverables

- Submittal 1: Qualified Bidder Summary
- Submittal 2: Post Installation Assessment Report

APPENDIX E – Examples of Northwest Tourism Destinations

You don't have to look far to find successful branding case histories:

1. Ocean Shores and “Washington’s Favorite Seaside Destination.”

The city of 3,000 residents went from 49th in Washington in terms of lodging revenues to number 11 in just four years. Their visitation increased from 1.8 million visitors to nearly four million. Tourism spending quadrupled in just three years. BUT it was all based on the \$300 million in development projects Roger Brooks recruited into Ocean Shores: The \$40 million Shilo Inn Resort and Conference Center, six new hotels, four timeshare projects, tens of millions in infrastructure improvements including a new golf club house, tens of millions in new retail - and they still have a lot of work to do. The city, to this day is seeing a 600% annual return on investment (in just sales, lodging, and property taxes) from the work we did there.

2. Walla Walla

Once a very struggling downtown with no focus and 30% vacancies, the city went from being known for its prison, to onions, and now as THE premier wine destination in the Northwest. There are no downtown vacancies, it's become an outstanding destination and tourism spending there went up substantially in just a few years. A fantastic “rebranding” example.

3. Think about the “best branded” towns in the Northwest:

- Leavenworth went from a dying timber town to a town that hosts 2.5 million visitors a year and its only “slow” months are November and perhaps May. They are now seeing visitors from around the world. Not bad for a town of 2,500 people.
- Westport’s “deep sea fishing” brand has made it one of the premier charter fishing destinations on the entire west coast.
- Look at the branding of the Oregon coast communities:
- Astoria and its maritime history
- Seaside and its “family destination” brand
- Cannon Beach and its “upscale arts” brand based on the incredible Stephanie Inn and dozens of top notch eateries and galleries
- Newport and its fishing brand and Oregon Coast Aquarium
- Bandon and the Bandon Dunes true Links Golf Course (now world famous)
- Florence and its sand dunes
- Redmond and high tech: now as big as any tech center in Silicon Valley

4. Walnut Creek, California

This East Bay city of 60,000 residents is home to “Northern California’s Definitive Shopping and Dining Destination” based on their outdoor European mall, Broadway Plaza, and the incredible Creekside District, which boasts 85 restaurants all within a five minute walk. It's one of the few downtowns that features an Apple Store, and new Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Nordstrom and every other high-end retailer. How's their brand working out? Downtown produces just under a billion dollars a year in retail sales and services. Not bad for a city that has to compete with downtown Oakland, just 25 minutes away, and downtown San Francisco, just 45 minutes away.

While it's impossible to pull actual numbers attributed to “branding” the results are very, very obvious. For instance, the Seattle Seahawks have a very powerful brand - now that they won the Super Bowl. So what does that mean in terms of ROI to the city? Or the Seahawks organization? It's very subjective and almost impossible to calculate. The same could be said of having voters vote and pay for a \$450 million stadium: is there a return on that investment? And how do you calculate how it puts Seattle “on the world map” in terms of exposure and publicity (earned media). There is no hard and fast rule on ROI of a brand, but just go to ANY well branded community, anywhere in the world, and you'll easily see how successful they are compared to the every-day bedroom community without a focus.

Bellevue is the “Premier shopping and dining destination in the Northwest.” Bellevue Square is the most upscale mall in the Northwestern five states. Billions have been invested in downtown Bellevue. It has become THE place to “be seen” and to do business. How do you put a figure on that? There’s no way to do that, but ask Kemper Freeman how powerful the brand is. He’s about to invest another \$1.2 billion in expansion plans in downtown Bellevue. And it will all be very upscale. He’s not putting any Dollar Stores. Everything is about the “upscale brand.”

APPENDIX F - 13 Steps of Destination Branding

1

Brand Development Committee

This is the group of stakeholders who will take the lead in developing the brand direction. Typically keep it to 13 people, or fewer. As you know, the

larger the committee the less likely you are to get things accomplished.

Typical members might include:

- Economic Development
- Chamber of Commerce
- Tourism
- City/county elected official
- City/county senior staff
- Downtown representative
- Planning director
- Six business sector representatives

These folks will help decide on the final brand direction. They need to be “heavy hitters” locally.

Get an outside facilitator

It’s extremely important to get an outside facilitator - someone with no political ties locally, and not in business locally. This way politics won’t get in the way. Someone who has nothing to gain or locally should help facilitate the process.

If you had a sports retailer as your local facilitator, and then sports ends up being the most feasible brand direction, the community will assume that he or she steered the brand that direction, thus eliminating the non-biased opinion.

The facilitator will also be charged with helping to “sell” the community on the brand once it’s been decided, so make sure you have a good speaker who can excite the community about the brand direction.

2

Educate locals on what a brand is

Now it’s time to educate local stakeholders, organizations, businesses and business leaders, as well as the general population on what a brand is and why this is important to do. Otherwise, you’ll end up with a population sending you just slogans and logo concepts.

Prepare a 20-minute presentation and give it at local board meetings (Chamber, City Council, Auxiliary organizations such as Rotary and Kiwanis, school boards, hospital boards, etc.

Also include the press on the brand education so they understand it and will also educate local residents and business leaders.

Inventory your assets

What do you have that makes you a desirable community for establishing a new business? As a place to live? Or as a place to visit? Make it specific. Do NOT use “quality of life” on the list. Break it down. What, specifically, makes you special. This can be quite the list.

Then take the list and if some items can be found closer to the markets you are hoping to attract, move it to the “diversionary” or “secondary” list. You are hoping to find one or two things the markets can’t get or do closer to home. This may take some time and you may need to really dig deep.

You are looking for possible building blocks or a foundation upon which you can build your brand.

Ask the community

This is where the community can weigh in and have their chance to provide input. Here are ways to ask:

- Hold an open house and provide places for people to provide input. Often this can be combined with educational workshops.

- Do an online survey using Constant Contact or another service like Survey Monkey.
- Interview local stakeholders asking for specific input.
- Through the press: radio, television, print media.

Yes, you'll get some sarcasm, and yes, you'll get some slogans. That's okay. Take it all in.

Find your "anchor tenants"

Take the "seven questions quiz" to local meetings such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Chamber and other organizations and ask them the questions. You'll find out, quickly, who your "anchor tenants" are in terms of restaurants, retail shops and activities.

Here's a sample list of questions you can start with:

1. Where can I get the best dessert? Name the restaurant and the dish.
2. Where will me and my partner have the best dining experience? It can be fancy, great food, great ambiance, or great characters. Breakfast, lunch, or dinner.
3. Where can I get gourmet items for a picnic?
4. Where, specifically, can I see a breathtaking sunrise or sunset?
5. Where is the best place to take a memorable photo that says I was really there?
6. Where can I check my e-mails?
7. Where can I get the perfect gift? Something locally or regionally made?

Then have your audience put these in order of an itinerary as if a guest was coming into town on a Friday evening, and spending the weekend in town.

This is what every visitor is looking for. Itineraries from the locals. You **MUST** promote your "anchor tenants." They make you worth a special trip and an extended stay. Everyone will benefit from them. Think Orlando and Disney World.



Identify the markets

The next step is to identify the markets you are hoping to attract. This is not just about tourism, but also the types of markets you are looking for in terms of business (jobs).

Those markets should include:

- Geographic areas (primary and secondary)
- Demographics (Young people? Creative Class? Retirees? Families?)
- Lifestyle or psychographics: Identification of personality characteristics and attitudes that affect a person's lifestyle and purchasing behaviors.
- Primary and secondary markets.
- Industry: The type of industry best suited for the area based on your points of differentiation.



Go through the filtering process

Take the entire list from the community (over perhaps three or four weeks), combine similar concepts, and then remove the ones that are too generic or can

fit other communities within the markets you are hoping to attract.

This will typically shorten the list from perhaps 100 different items down to, in most cases, less than ten items.

Keep track of items you heard from multiple people. Perhaps these can be used as niche brands or as supporting activities to the final brand direction.

Run the ideas through the 10-point Feasibility Test

These are listed in the previous section. Run each item on the list through the feasibility test and see what's left. If you're lucky, you should have it narrowed down to just one or two items. The goal is to get down to one item.

In many cases there may be no items left on the list. Don't despair! This gives you a clean slate to build a fresh brand, still using the assets you listed earlier. Look for other ideas. Dig a little deeper. It's ok to duplicate another community's brand as long as it's different from what the markets you are hoping to attract can get or do closer to home.

Identify the niche and sub-brands

Sub or niche-brands are smaller well-defined brands where you can market to that group specifically. Typical niche brands include:

- Sports
- Bird watching
- Fishing and hunting
- RV'ing

Make sure there is good "cross-participation" between the primary brand and niche brands. For instance, art and food go well together. Sports and entertainment are a good fit. Birding and gardening are compatible brands/ niche-brands.

By identifying these, you'll be able to provide your primary brand with "legs" - or offshoots.

Pick one and only one

The natural tendency will be to pick several and to head down the path of "we have something for everyone!" Don't even try it.

Pick one that the Brand Development Committee can buy into and that makes sense. If someone else has this brand in a different market, check it out. How's it working for them? Can you reasonably duplicate it or exceed it?

If you have to develop a new brand, don't panic about the time it will take to develop. We'll get to BridgeBrands in a minute.



Create the Brand Leadership Team

Your Brand Development Committee got you to this point. They "developed" the brand. Now that you have the brand direction, you need to shift the focus to

those who will "lead" the brand - The BLT.

The entire branding effort will hinge on the efforts of this group of people. Once again, keep it to 13 people. Seven of them should be from the private sector and should have a vested interest in the brand direction. They are most willing to champion the cause because their paycheck depends on it.

The other six people would include the supporting organizations. There might be a wholesale change from the BDC to the BLT.



Develop the "Brand Bank"

These are the ideas that will reinforce and support the brand. When Leavenworth, Washington decided to become a Bavarian themed town, the ideas included:

- An amphitheater where they would produce The Sound of Music annually.
- Maypole dances, long-pipe festival, and other Bavarian-oriented events.
- Facade improvements.
- Bavarian eateries, retail sales of goods made in Bavaria.
- Bavarian artists in action, art shows.

And the list goes on. They did such a good job that 40% of Leavenworth's population is now from Germany. Remember that brands are built on product, so this should be the focus.

Look for partnership opportunities.

7

Write the brand promise

This is the paragraph that describes what you will be ten, 15 years down the road. Not today, but what you aspire to become. This is the goal that you are aiming for.

Make sure it's not generic. Read it, rewrite it, and keep fine tuning it until it is very specific and would make you want to go there or move there when it's in place.

Business prospects should read this and think "Gee, there's a business opportunity for me here." You can develop a long version (three paragraphs or so) and a short version, which would be just one paragraph of no more than five lines.

Short, to the point, very specific, and well defined.

8

Create the look and feel of the brand

We're finally to the look and feel of the brand: the logo or brand identity, color schemes, tag lines and all the marketing elements that will be used as you

develop the brand and claim ownership of it. This is where communities go sideways, typically putting this first without going through the other 13 necessary steps.

Hire professional services to do this for you and remember that you are selling a feeling more than the physical attributes that support the brand.

Develop a Brand Style Guide and include all your local marketing organizations. Continuity is critical at this point.

Remember that the logo and tag line make up 2% of a brand, but will get virtually all of the attention. You cannot do this by public consent. Do NOT make this a public process. It can kill your entire effort.

9

Developing an Action Plan

All successful brands are built on product so develop a Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan. No more strategic plans. You

need action steps - a to do list - as opposed to strategies, goals and objectives.

For each recommendation provide the following:

- A description of the recommendation
- Who would be charged with implementation. It takes a village to win.
- When it would be implemented.
- Cost of implementation
- Where the money would or could come from.
- The rationale for making the recommendation.

The marketing action plan

Telling the world is how you stake your claim - ownership - of your brand. Like the product development plan, the marketing plan should include the same elements and should incorporate all partnering organizations. Everyone has a role to play in a successful branding effort.

The plan should include graphics, advertising, public relations (a cornerstone of the branding effort), photography, video, marketing materials, web and Internet marketing initiatives, brand-building posters and give-away items, etc.

Always promote the businesses, specifically, that reinforce and support the brand. Don't let politics get in the way of marketing your "anchor tenants."

Define the roles

As just noted, it takes a village to win. Every organization plays a role. For instance, Kiwanis or Rotary might take on the development of new entry points (fitting the brand), while the city may take on the development of a Wayfinding System (decorative directional signage that fit the brand). This can extend into downtown business recruitment, facade improvements, event development and a host of other brand-specific assignments.

When you get everyone on the same page, pulling in the same direction, this becomes fun. This is where you put it all together.

10

Make something happen

This can be a new wayfinding sign or entry sign. Or even something as simple as new business cards or the redevelopment

of an existing website. People are impatient, so having something physical they can see will help sell the brand, and will tell the community you're serious and this won't be another plan sitting on a shelf gathering dust.

The best way to develop a brand is to slide it in slowly. All of a sudden a new sign goes up with a new identity and tag line on it. Then another, and over time, it becomes pervasive throughout the community.

Sell it! Begin the outreach program

One of the big responsibilities of the Brand Leadership Champions are selling the brand to the community and creating buy-in opportunities for local organizations.

This will include your "BridgeBrand" as well as your long-term branding goals and implementation of the plan.

Every member of the BLC should be charged with speaking at three, four, five or six events a year. They need to be good speakers, enthusiastic and able to convince others to jump on board the band wagon.

This process doesn't end for years until the brand has taken on momentum of its own.

11

Keep the energy high.

The first year is ALWAYS the toughest year when implementing a branding program. Because you are narrowing your focus, you will undoubtedly run into

opposition who want your community to be all things to all people – that you really do have "something for everyone." Even though that marketing approach no longer works, the blogs will light up with dissent and so your brand champions must just let it go and MUST work to keep the energy high.

Once the branding effort starts taking hold, people will come on board – slowly at first – and as they "get used" to the new direction, and businesses begin to invest in it, it will garner strength over time. Nobody in Napa Valley complains about it being the world's "wine capital." Nor do they complain about Nashville owning the country music brand. Over time it became organic to the community – who they are. The same holds true with your community.

Just remember that there are only three killers of any branding effort. Period:

1. Local politics – and it's far worse with membership organizations than it is with elected officials.
2. Lack of champions – No branding effort can succeed without tireless pioneers who champion the cause – especially in the face of criticism – but push the agenda forward and never take no for an answer.
3. Lack of money – both public and private. Almost every well-branded city, town, county, or destination in the world was founded on private sector investment and marketing. Consider these:
 - a. Orlando, Florida and Anaheim, California (Disney – kids & family)
 - b. Napa Valley, California (wine)
 - c. Nashville, Tennessee (country music)
 - d. Memphis, Tennessee (home of Graceland)
 - e. Hershey, Pennsylvania (chocolate)
 - f. Lancaster, Pennsylvania (Amish)
 - g. Hollywood, California (movies and stars)
 - h. Silicon Valley, California (high tech)

Finally, every community is full of CAVERS – people who don't want change and will fight it. What's a CAVER? Citizens Against Virtually Everything.

Keeping the energy high is the make or break it for any branding effort.

12

Tell the world

Once you have the product – and people – in place, it's time to tell the world of who you are, what separates you from everyone else and makes you THE destination of

choice. Now it's time to drive your stake in the ground that you "own" your brand. After all, brands are about owning your niche in the marketplace.

You build your brand through public relations. Advertising is used to maintain your ownership position. Remember that brands are a perception – what people think of you when your name is mentioned. And perceptions are created from first impressions, visual things we see once in your community, what we see on the news or read in print publications, and now what we "hear" in social media.

This is where you put together a detailed Marketing Action Plan – with all of your local organizations at the table (branding requires continuity) and craft a plan on how you are going to tell the world what you're about – specifically.

When it comes to marketing budgets, here's a guideline to use:

45% - Website | Pay Per Click | SEO | online advertising | social media | apps | anything that is Internet-related.

20% - Public relations – getting articles written about you, creating video contents, professional photography reinforcing the brand, creating brand-specific itineraries – getting the word out there.

20% - Advertising. And this is to drive people to your website, which must be good enough to close the sale.

10% - Printed collateral materials. With the advent of the Internet, apps, and PDF docs available on smart phones, tablets and laptop computers, the need for printed materials is declining fast. They are still important, but should not be the priority.

5% - Trade shows, billboards, other forms of marketing.

13

Revisit the plan

And do it every year, if not every few months. Do NOT let your plan sit on a shelf gathering dust! Keep your focus narrow, go right down the list and make sure your branding "partners"

are keeping up with their assignments and the timelines outlined in the plan.

Branding is a fluid process that is crafted and molded over time. You may end up adding to-do items to the plan, moving some things around, but it is ALWAYS your to-do list and the plan that will lead to your success.

If you need to, bring back your facilitator every four months, six months, or once a year to pump up your champions, to cut through any red herrings, or to address challenges you're having along the way. A good facilitator can help you update the plan, on the spot, or as a contracted service.

And finally, never, ever give up. Branding and stamina go hand in hand. The plan is your guide.

The Bridge Brand

It can take anywhere from three to 20 years to fully "own" your brand. Rarely is it a shorter or longer process. But what can you do between now and then? How do you "bridge" the gap while you're developing your brand?

This is where the BridgeBrand comes to play. If you want to become a culinary destination, then start by promoting your best restaurants, a culinary school, and culinary events. Don't tell the world you are a culinary destination, but start to market the small things that are the foundation or building blocks of your long-term brand direction.

BridgeBrands are often used as a "repositioning" or "rebranding" effort. Often communities have a negative perception that needs to be turned around before implementing the final brand. Look at the case histories in this kit where BridgeBrands for Stockton and Oxnard, California are displayed. Also look at the League City, Texas BridgeBrand.



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