



Actions speak louder than logos.

Building place brands from the ground up.

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When place branding fails it is often because a city has dumbed down the exercise to a logo and tagline instead of thinking of it as a strategic blueprint, a plan for overarching growth and development, something that cannot be achieved by an icon on marketing material.

Place branding has never been more critical to a city's success. With over 3,000 cities globally targeting talent and investment, it is an extremely competitive market. According to Forbes, "In the last five to 10 years... cities have become much more conscious of branding as an effective strategy for altering their trajectory. Instead of jumping onto an existing narrative about their city, more are learning to shape it and promote eventual growth and revitalisation". Makes sense, right? And as cities become more conscious of this phenomenon, the place brand landscape has become more competitive, with new cities battling each other across hemispheres to attract tourists, talent and investment. Despite this, there is still an 86 per cent failure rate for city branding campaigns, testament to how difficult the process is but also a pointer to how many cities attempt it without sourcing appropriate external expertise.

Communicating a clear place identity is a difficult task. Is a place what 'they', the residents, say it is or what 'we', branding professionals, tell them it is? And whose role is it to decide? When the Italian city of Turin was rebranded, social scientist Alberto Vanolo asked who has the prerogative to define urban identities, and who 'lives the brand'? Ultimately, someone has to lead and define direction and, contrary to those with a pessimistic or negative mindset, place branding is not a Machiavellian attempt to attract people to a certain location with branding alone.

We cannot engage people merely by hoping and praying they'll hear about a place on the grapevine. Some people think it is wrong to think of places as brands at all (too late, it's happening the world over) and it shocks me when I hear intelligent, business-minded people fail to understand the power and importance of a great place brand. Do they want their city to flounder amid

myriad better branded, engaging cities? Are they prepared to farewell the significant social and financial benefits this could bring?

When place branding fails, it's usually because of poor management, with no clear criteria or clarity around goals and targets. This often occurs when cities dumb down the exercise to a logo and tagline instead of thinking of place branding as a strategic blueprint. What it should represent is a plan for overarching growth and development, something that cannot be achieved by an icon on marketing material. A sassy slogan and cool logo are not strategic drivers for improved liveability and pride, new platforms for business opportunities and job growth, or ways to increase visitation.

Place brands can create competitive commercial advantages, communicating why people should visit, open a business in a place or invest money there.

An effective place brand should drive

the attraction of investment, tourism and talent attraction and strengthen the prominence of the place and their exports. Place branding fails when approached in the same way as branding a service and product. So many more facets must be accounted for, including cultural, social, economic and geographic; the process is complex. This is why selling a location demands a deeply considered strategic solution, based on key pillars within a community or city, and not a logo.

The first step to creating such a strategic solution involves tapping into the honest, authentic, central idea of a community to identify what makes city or place different from others. This means celebrating and engaging those who form the city's fabric while creating a welcoming platform for new residents and businesses. This is how we make more inclusive cities.



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By reminding a community of its strong, core belief, a powerful message is consistently delivered across a multitude of media. As a result, you inspire existing residents and businesses as well as attracting visitors, new residents and new commercial opportunities; you change behaviour. Everything becomes interconnected: employment, education, transport and other infrastructure. This helps to future-proof your city, ensuring success now and for decades to come.

In Austin, Texas we see a powerful example. Originally a smaller cousin to Houston and Dallas, the city began promoting itself using a grassroots campaign positioned around Austin as 'the Live Music Capital of the World'. There was also the 'Keep Austin Weird' campaign, celebrating everything that made the place unique. This one is still referred to by locals as a guide to what is or is not appropriate for the city. The core campaign messages illuminated how much Austin valued

its quirky qualities. They inspired wide participation across the city and acted as a unifying call to action for diverse pockets of the community. Austin's bold stance attracted people to live and work in the city, many of whom were associated with the music industry.

Not only did this boost Austin's economic profile, but also its status as a cultural tourist destination. By 2014, its total of leisure and business travellers exceeded 45 million. Today Austin is one of the fastest-growing cities in the US. Of course, for another stellar example of a city turning its place brand around, just look at Detroit in Chapter 3 of *The Place Economy*.

Now we get to the second step in creating an effective place brand and this involves taking a multi-dimensional approach: you must apply layers for a place brand to be successful. An average city, with all its suburbs and precincts, has a range of varied and distinct flavours. There is a lot to be communicated,

something only achieved by layering the communication to articulate these nuances. There's very little a brand or logo can achieve on its own, but with the right strategy it can be a powerful symbol of a bigger message, one people can believe and support.

Layering mimics the depth and complexity of the cityscape and its inhabitants, giving people a richer taste of everything on offer and appealing to diverse audiences. Of course, you cannot appeal to all the people, all the time. Residents, local businesses, potential investors, big business and visitors all have a different hierarchy of needs from a city. It's a tough job taking all these into account. This is why it's crucial you have a clear set of objectives underpinning your place brand in terms of who it needs to speak to.

If you want more business growth and development, for example, then your target audience is investors. They need to

understand the advantages of investing in your city. The brand strategy developed for the London Bridge area exemplifies this. Despite being a small London borough, the brand's keystones cover target audiences and the different ways they can be communicated with. The result? A multi-layered brand that speaks to business, connectivity, heritage, liveability and entertainment. In other words, a full and rich representation of the area.

The third step to creating an effective place brand involves the future. A place brand has the ability to shape the outlook of a destination; you could call it a visionary tool. While analysing a city to understand what makes it unique you also get to determine what is missing. This is the time to look at the infrastructure, amenity and events that could help your city fulfil its true potential. It could be the catalyst for creating genuine points of difference. ➤

Three things a place brand needs to succeed:

1

A clear purpose and a unique vision.

Much of this comes back to placemaking which increasingly is understood as crucial to determining a place brand. Town planning, urbanism and architecture create magnetic and meaningful destinations. Such physical attributes are the best form of a place brand. This is very important. Actions speak louder than logos. Your audience wants to see the unique attributes of their city manifested in everyday life.

In Berlin, the Holzmarkt shows how unique development and a strong place brand has inspired beneficial growth and investment from big business. Holzmarkt sits on the banks of the river Spree and is an alternative urban village containing, among other things, a studio for circus acrobats, a children's theatre, a cake shop, a nursery (where parents can drop off their children while they go clubbing), bars and a restaurant run by a Noma-trained chef. It attracted outside funding from a Swiss pension

2

A connection to an inherent truth, ideally one with a point of difference. It can be an existing asset or something that can be created and delivery is guaranteed.

fund and, since launching five years ago, has been so successful it has lifted Berlin's profile globally. This further enhances Berlin's place brand as a city supportive of alternative and arts-based culture.

So how do you measure a city's success? Firstly, go back to the original goals determined at the outset. Secondly, benchmark yourself against other comparative cities or destinations. These may include numerical markers, such as the local economy, investment, jobs, and the number of people moving to your city. Numbers are not the only measures, though, and some are much harder to quantify, including happiness, quality of life and access to opportunities.

With the advent of a new wave of benchmarks, urban growth and management agendas have become far more holistic. Today, we look at factors like resident and long-term liveability, national and international identity and

perceptions, smartness, culture and neighbourhood vibrancy, resilience, business and institutional investment, social cohesion and integration, leadership and institutions, plus innovation ecosystems. These all help to understand whether a city has ingredients required to attract and stimulate growth.

At its essence, place branding is a blueprint for the future we want to create. It helps us shape a community and increase economic opportunities for citizens, and for businesses of all sizes. It should be seen as an optimistic, positive endeavour that creates value. It amplifies positive differences and celebrates what makes a place unique. It's a call to action and today it is a non-negotiable factor for any city wishing to prosper. The right outcome will deliver an improved reputation and increased civic pride. Excitingly, even a small place – consider Hobart

3

A strategy that clearly defines the evolution of branding to marketing. This is the difference between reputation and communication. Branding and its associated tools must convey the spirit of a place, helping people understand what makes it distinct and magnetic. Marketing should be tactical, bringing the strategy to life through short-term activations and long-term campaigns. This could be based on such things as themes, seasons or events.

and the Museum of Old and New Art from the first volume of *The Place Economy* – has the potential to become a truly global brand. — ●

- 1 www.forbes.com/sites/petesaunder1/2018/03/21/the-value-of-city-branding/#1927766d2ec0
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- 3 www.isiarticles.com/bundles/Article/pre/pdf/2220.pdf
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- 5 Forbes, America's Fastest Growing Cities, Austin, www.forbes.com/pictures/mj45hfd/1-austin-texas/#469810ec56d0

“Town planning, urbanism and architecture create more magnetic and meaningful destinations... the best form of a place brand.”

*Andrew Hoyne,
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CHAPTER 3 Think global, brand local

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