

Developing a sense of place – the importance of a shared identity and purpose in place promotion

All for one and one for all

It might be a little unrealistic to expect everyone in your community to share the same perception of its identity and its opportunities for growth (or indeed agree that they even want to pursue economic growth) and to concur on its future direction and development priorities.

But there is no doubt that the more the local population can be drawn in to and inform the identification and development of place identity, then the more likely that that 'identity' will be sustained in internal and external perception beyond the initial high profile advertising campaigns - and the more likely it is to convince potential new individual or corporate investors that it is an identity with substance that they might like to be a part of.

Of course communities need guiding and the development of identity by a very large committee is probably not a good idea. But the three basics of; consult, include, inform; should be the foundation for the building of any revised / new place identity, as well as subsequent development activity to support that identity and promotion to a wider world. Put another way:

- This is what we think we are aspiring to be – what do you think?
- These are the sorts of things we will need to do if we are to achieve that aspiration – here is how you can play a part in that.
- This is what we will also need – this is what we are going to do about it.
- This is how we will regularly update you on progress – our collective performance – and how we will continue to ask you for further input and support.

Building New Identities

When trying to identify and define a new sense of place – a new identity; the desire to find something environmentally, culturally, industrially, academically unique – a marketing / advertising USP - can sometimes prove overwhelming. Of course every community in some way is unique to the people who live there, but as a proposition to new individual / corporate investors a simple sense of local pride is not always enough.

The reality is of course that many places are actually not that much different from the places

that surround them and while the advertising agencies get paid huge amounts of money to come up with that winning line and image that says we are different, we are unique, we are a great place to be.; the foundation of those propositions are often weak and based on what a small group of people thinks it would be good to be rather than what is actually the case.

One of the biggest problems with this is that not only does it probably not fool the external audience; it also fails, because it is not founded in reality, to fool or take with it the local population.

If you have a unique strength – great – do everything you can to capitalise and shout about it as loud as possible. If you haven't, don't make it up – it won't fool anyone. And USP's don't always have to be about singular uniqueness in the physical, cultural or industrial environment – very often they can be more about just doing something well – understanding the target investor, working closely with key existing investors for example; two things which many place marketing agencies don't do very well and where there is plenty of scope for developing relatively unique selling propositions. Furthermore, by developing realistic – while still competitive and sellable - identities and by doing things well on the ground, the aims and activities of the place marketing agency are far more likely to resonate and have impact with the local population.

Local People / Global Ambassadors

The best way to develop belief in your place and to spread the word about the opportunities it offers is to include in your activity and empower the people, the businesses, the community that you already have. Big advertising campaigns, attending all the big events and extensive targeting programmes are one thing – but if you want you achieve real impact; include, enthuse and take the people with you.

For more on a shared sense of identity and how The Place Marketing Company can help you more effectively promote and market your place, please contact us on:

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