



The National Voice of Scenic Byways & Roads

MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX

Unit Four

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Welcome to Unit Four of the Monthly Marketing Toolbox. Each month we are looking at a different aspect of destination marketing and illustrating how it applies to real world situations. This approach enables you to use the material to transform your own destination or Byway marketing.

This month we're focusing on Step Four: Destination Identification— a concept that is significantly broader than a symbol, line or mark. Careful analysis of the comprehensive inventory of tourism resources and assets that was developed in Step One can reveal a whole new destination personality. The most effective destination identification in today's hyper competitive marketplace arises right out of those resources and assets, evolving organically and simply, focused on the collective visitor product that is available at the destination. Identification emerges as authentic and is no longer the purview of advertising agencies creating symbols and tag lines that have little relationship to destination resources and assets.

A structured, evolving process that enables discovery of the possibilities for an identification that feels authentic and viable to all concerned. Only then will it resonate in the eyes of travelers who are considering visiting to support the experience they find when they actually arrive, as well as be perceived as authentic by the local population.



The intent of an effective destination identification is to create a Destination of Choice in the minds of potential travelers -- the kind of place that resonates with them over and over again. This level of identification can be carried through branded visual corridors, regional way-finding and connection systems, as well as all printed and social media marketing materials that prompt travelers to visit.

A New Concept of a Brand

We're all familiar with brands and the strength they can carry: Coca-Cola, Tide, Amazon, Apple, Ford, Bounty, Charmin, Hilton and Hyatt. In the past, brands have been created through massive advertising budgets delivering the same message over and over again, mostly as the primary sponsor of television shows.

Just one of the major brands spends more in advertising in a year than the entire 50 state travel offices do together. The only reason anyone knows that Bounty is a brand of paper towels or Amazon is an online store (not a region in Brazil), is through advertising. None of those names have anything to do with what the product actually is. Applying the same concept to physical locations means that a "brand" that has little relationship to the location, is often applied and promoted through advertising, rendering it completely ineffective.

I am proposing a dramatically different view of branding than most marketing professionals, and one that is not universally accepted, but grounded in common sense. In many cases, destination branding has been relegated to a logo and tag line. In spite of this common practice, it stands to reason that the experience you offer to customers is what they are going to equate with your brand. It's not just the experience offerings you deliver, it's the entire experience the customer has with your organization from beginning to end. It's the only point of reference customers have.

As you work to engage, inspire and transform your customers and how they deal with your organization, it is your brand that leads the way to creating the new perception. Because your experience is your brand, the experience that exemplifies your brand must be changed to reflect how you want customers to think about the organization.

The interactions visitors have with your organization not only reflect your brand, the interactions create an emotional response to your brand. If the words you use to describe your brand are not consistent with what customer's experience, they're going to believe what happens to them in real time, not the words. In fact, the mind rejects information that does not match prior knowledge or experience. So just changing a tag line or logo, without changing the experience delivered, is not going to have much of a positive effect.

The authors of *The Experience Effect* relate that “interactions with an organization are our personal experiences that influence our feelings about the brand, how we experience the brand, and how we choose to interpret the brand. The crux of good marketing is the conscious and methodical process of determining exactly what kind of offering and experience to create for visitors and then extend that experience consistently across every facet of marketing.” The brand then becomes the sum total of the interactions it takes to get the visitor through the entire experience journey—from first awareness of the destination until they are home posting pictures.

These factors are so important to success that taking control of the brand experience of visitors is imperative, and that is best achieved by proactively planning the total experience to include all the touchpoints the visitors will have with the organization — how they become aware of your destination, investigate its offerings, and ultimately decide to visit. When you consider the experience the visitor is having all the way through this process as representing your brand, you have the opportunity to totally re-create that experience to better and more authentically represent your destination, while delivering a better experience to visitors.

Positioning - How Do You Want Your Brand Viewed?

To better understand how to create a “standing” for your destination or Byway and instill its brand in the minds of visitors, we can go back to the concept of positioning brought to us in the early 1980s by Jack Trout and Al Reis. They were the first to say that truth has no bearing on any situation, it's what the visitor believes is the case that makes the difference.

Positioning is what you do in the mind of the visitor to reflect what you want visitors to believe about your brand and your experience. It is the impression that you work to create in the mind of visitors that your offering is what they would like to experience.

The reason it's so important to thoroughly assess the competition, which we did in Unit Two, is that the messages they are delivering to create their own positioning can be dissected and as Trout and Reis say "then subtract the poetry and creativity which has become a barrier to getting your own message into the minds of visitors, to create a purified and simplified message that can then penetrate the customers mind."

Yet, so many destinations still proceed without looking at competitor's positioning as if it has no bearing on the organization's own message. In today's marketplace, a competitor's positioning is as important as one's own, because it influences the ability of the visitor to deal with the positioning of your organization.

Effective positioning creates a leadership position for a brand illustrated by the fact that Trout and Reis reviewed 25 brands that were the leader in their category in 1923: Campbell's, Carnation, Coca-Cola, Colgate, Crisco, Del Monte, Eveready, Gillette, Gold Medal, Goodyear, Hammervill, Hershey's, Ivory, Kellogg, Kodak, Life Savers, Lipton, Manhattan, Nabisco, Palmolive, Prince Albert, Sherwin-Williams, Singer, Swift and Wrigley's. Right at 75 years later, only three had lost leadership in their category. And now, nearly 100 years later, we are all still buying many of the brands that were leaders in 1923!

Each of these brands established their position by being the first into the marketplace with their particular offering or approach. And each has a distinctive one word or short name that continues to have impact in the marketplace. The number one position in any category is hard to displace – think Pepsi vs. Coca Cola.

In order to change this hold on position, one must first move the old market leader out. The old idea has to be overturned to make room to introduce a new idea, most effectively accomplished through a new brand experience to achieve a new position in the mind of the visitor. This new brand experience can be unique to an organization and not compete with the positioning of other brands at that point.

Trout and Reis recommended a six step process to change the positioning of an organization.

Step One: Determine Your Current Positioning in Visitors Minds—How Your Destination or Byway is Currently Viewed

To begin repositioning, you must first determine the position your organization now owns in the mind of visitors. What do they think of your destination or Byway – how do they view it? Don't attempt to determine what that positioning is internally – that information can only come directly from visitors. This is information you can discover when you interview visitors to gain psychographic data—an aspect of marketing that we will cover in Unit Five. What you are looking for is information that is already in the visitor's minds in order to hook a new positioning to it.

Step Two: Determine What Position You Want to Own—How You Want Your Destination or Byway to be Viewed

Once you understand the position your offerings and brand holds in the minds of visitors, you can consciously and precisely determine the position you want to own. Changing positioning is going to be a long term process and one that occurs over time, so it's best to get it right the first time.

Using a newly established vision as the foundation of the discussion, determine the position that you want the organization to hold in the minds of visitors in the future, and begin working to put it in place. Create a plan that supports consistency of delivery of the brand positioning over a span of time, because trying to change positioning frequently leads to nothing by confusion.

Step Three: Determine What Positioning Must Be Pushed Out

Rather than trying to move the position of the market leader out of the minds of visitors, since you can see from the brands that have held their positions for a

century, that is challenging to do, select a positioning that no one else has. Offering a unique customer experience is one of the most effective ways to introduce a new position – because it is something that no other organization can copy, unlike products.

Step Four: Identify Adequate Funding to Do the Job

It takes money and time to build a position in the minds of customers. The traditional approach of using advertising is the most costly solution since it must penetrate the over 200,000 advertising messages that Americans receive each year. Social media and digital marketing is more effective and less costly in today's world, yet even in today's social media driven world, it takes time and manpower to establish a position.

Step Five: Sustain Year After Year

Since establishing positioning in the mind of visitors is a long term process, consistency must be maintained over several years to really anchor the new positioning in. Any plan must spell out several years of consistent exposure in the marketplace, while tracking the success of the effort.

Step Six: Making the Organization Match the Positioning

Since the selected positioning is how you want the organization to be positioned in the minds of customers in the future, the last step in the process is to make the organization, its customer experience, and its offerings, match the positioning that is being instilled.

Destination Identification and Place Branding

Most definitions of places are based on the external focus, the sum of what others think. Rather than branding and attempting to bring something external to the destination, it makes more sense to “re-identify” the place enabling the best and most unique attributes of the place to be used as its “identification” - or what the location will be known as. We all have IDs that indicate who we really are and places can have the same. Bubbling up organically from the location’s assets and resources – the collection of what the place has, what other locations do not have, and what the collection of resources and assets reveals about the place -- the sensibility it invokes — they reveals the very essence of what the place is all about. It becomes the collective sensibility, the overall unique selling proposition, the competitive advantage, and symbolic of uniqueness of the place.

Getting to an identification requires a proactive process that enables the location to dig deep, search for bedrock, and express the foundational core of the location’s culture – not culture in the sense of music or art –but culture in terms of the sum total of life in the region, which is significantly broader.

STEP FOUR: THE RE-IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

A carefully structured, yet fluid process, supports discovery of possibilities for destination identification—allowing for the development of an identification that feels authentic and viable to all concerned.

Action One: Get a Handle of the Region’s History

The only way to clearly understand the culture of any place is through understanding the heritage that started the destination in the first place. Gaining a clear understanding of history and heritage, require reading about the region’s history, and is most beneficial if it includes material that was written contemporaneously during early period of a destination’s history. In today’s instant delivery of information climate, that may seem really tedious, but it’s the

only way to know first hand what the foundational heritage of the destination is. One Pennsylvania destination has a 1,400 page history written in 1867, that is replete with details and analysis. It makes very clear the reasons that the traditional foods are what they are and why the architecture looks like it does. Before setting out to create any identification and branding, gaining a clear grasp of this type of information is the first step.

Action Step Two: Respond to the Destination

No inspired destination identification ever occurred without experiencing the region. Doing so in Northern Kentucky enabled grasping the “crisply groomed beauty of rural horse country.” Doing so in West Virginia enabled grasping the “thunderous forces it must have taken to create ridge after ridge of uplifted mountains.” The process will be no different in your area, where immersion in the landscape will render a foundation of the identification. In addition to written research, one must drive the roads.

Action Step Three: Use the Comprehensive Tourism Inventory

When Go Greater Reading re-identified as Pennsylvania’s Americana Region, that identification was much more in keeping with what was revealed in the comprehensive inventory, than the prior brand, that was limited to a single city.

Action Step Four: Conduct a Three Session Identification Process

Good visioning to generate a re-identification for any destination takes time. It would not be unusual for the process to take 90 days or more, while the information is ingested, absorbed and evaluated by participants who are effective, committed and inspired.

Session One

It's most beneficial to focus the first session on the core sensibilities of the region that reflect it at its most authentic and brainstorm about an identification that would best express that sensibility. Make sure everyone has thorough knowledge of the inventory and a good handle on the entire destination. Come up with single words that absolutely capture the destination. Combine those words into phrases. Send participants home with those words and phrases to consider between sessions.

Session Two

Besides firming up the core words and phrases—to determine which one absolutely reflects the core of the destination, session two should focus on a geographic identifier, which is very important so visitors know immediately where it is located. There are multiple counties and cities with the same name all over the United States, and other similarities. Without the geographic modifier, a destination could be located anywhere — and not convenient to the potential visitors location. When searching for a full identifier, it is important to keep in mind that it should (1) enhance the destination — the impression that potential visitors are provided about the destination, (2) convey the essence of value, (3) be distinctive and memorable, (4) foster an emotional connection and (5) reflect the destination personality.

Session Three

By the third session, things start to come together. Committed participants have thought about both the identifier and the geographic modifier, and the tagline between meetings and make come back with specific thoughts. The identification will begin to gel and the process of finalizing a decision nears its end.

This is also the time when the destination should think about being a “region” or “land of” or some other larger concept. There are international attractions, national attractions, regional attractions and county and local attractions. The further up the scale the identifier is placed, the more prestige it will have. Often, when the full new destination identification emerges, there will be a silence in the room when everyone knows it is exactly the right descriptor.