



THE LONG VIEW

There's no place like Nome? A visit to destination branding.

"In my years in the business, I have heard much discussion about good positioning strategy and proper branding... but few definitions. Some books written on the topic have left me confused about the authors' thinking on the subject." Stanley C. Plog, author of Leisure Travel: A Marketing Handbook

Well, Mr. Plog (or do you prefer "Stan?"), you are certainly not alone. When we consider most of the marketing communications we see for destinations, we must conclude that many of your brethren in the industry are equally puzzled. With a few notable exceptions—San Diego, Las Vegas, Hong Kong and New York City spring to mind—every marketed destination appears pretty much like every other. Beaches, mountains, history, restaurants, friendly locals—do we REALLY need to make reservations for Metooland, USA? Or will Anyotherbeach suffice?

The problem, of course, lies not so much with ho-hum advertising but with the fuzzy brand thinking that drives it. Because a place has a brand, just like a company. And just like a product or company, a place's brand is its claim of distinction, widely understood and consistently delivered. (FYI, Stan, this is what is sometimes referred to as "positioning strategy.")

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Viva Las Vegas!

What makes Las Vegas's current "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" brand campaign so effective is that it grows from a claim no other destination dares

to make: This is the only place where you can escape everyday morality... and get away with it. The brilliantly effective TV spot in which bachelorette party participants sit silently in the limo on the way back to the airport, then suddenly break out in a fit of sworn-to-silence sisterhood laughter shows no hotels, no golf courses, no swimming pools, no Wayne Newton. But boy, does it ever work. Because it tells a compelling story no other destination can tell, one that grows directly from the heart of a fully realized brand.

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Which brings us, Stan, to what constitutes "proper branding." In this case, the words "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" function as branding. If the brand is the distinction itself (widely understood and consistently delivered, of course), branding is the tactical application of the claim: all the visual/audio/sensory elements that communicate the claim and that we come to associate with it. And when a clearly defined brand (or "positioning," if you must) meets inspired branding, you get "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

What's that, Stan? You say: Everyplace is not Las Vegas?

True enough. But every place does have SOME distinction, SOME reason to live there, work there, vacation there, rather than some other place. But FINDING that true, compelling claim of distinction can be hard work that lots of tourism boards, city councils, business improvement districts and advertising agencies just aren't prepared for, preferring instead

to move directly to (inevitably drab) advertising execution: "Cue the sunset panorama!"

So, how do you go about developing your own place brand to rival Las Vegas's? It begins the same way any for-profit company's brand development process begins: with "brand discovery," a process by which a brand's unique, compelling distinctions are plucked from the clutter of me-too distractions, to be sharpened by creative thinking, validated by research, and brought to life as meaningful communications.

Try turning the telescope.

There are a number of brand discovery processes out there, but one we have found to work in case after case is called "Turning the Telescope," so called because it's a way of looking deeply inward to discover the essence of a brand, rather than scanning the horizon for secondary evidence. Turning the Telescope gives us a manageable tool to look inside a destination's soul and examine its history, offerings, attractions, amenities, culture and much more. It's a process that enables us to explore and discover the essence of a place's brand, enabling us to build communications that can meaningfully distinguish it from all others.

How does the process work in real life?

Well, here's how it worked for Orange County, California.

Vacationing families as well as business travelers enjoy OC's near perfect weather and variety of excellent accommodations. Visitors can also experience world famous attractions like Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm, as well as 42 miles of public beaches, world class shopping and an array of outdoor activities. OC has a fresh, young and welcoming attitude and

is the birthplace of the modern surf culture. As well, some of the world's most magnificent resorts dot the pristine OC coastline. But OC has never before undertaken any brand development or any major tourism marketing. Stakeholders in OC realized there was an opportunity to build on their success.

Following an extensive set of brand discovery sessions, involving more than 60 stakeholders and a wealth of research, a brand team developed and validated a brand essence statement that positioned OC as the place that—more than any other—epitomized what people think of as California culture: trend-setting, theme parks, beaches, weather, etc. This led to the slightly cheeky brand statement—OC: It's so California—that tested extremely positively.

***"But every place does have
SOME distinction,
SOME reason to live there,
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So maybe it's not Las Vegas, but stakeholders are ecstatic with the new brand, and efforts are underway to fund and mount a serious campaign in the very near future.

So, Stan, settle your mind. The why's and wherefore's of destination brands and branding may be misunderstood. But, perhaps, they are not so confusing after all.



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discovery process "Turning the Telescope™" is second-to-none. It's part of a larger brand development process Breehl, Traynor & Zehe calls Brand Engineering™. For more information on how you can build more value into your brand, call Tom or Ro at 216.861.1500...or to receive upcoming issues of The Long View newsletter via email, email tom@btzbrand.com. Visit the Breehl, Traynor & Zehe website at www.btzbrand.com.

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