

DESTINATIONS ARE NOT COMMODITIES. BUT WHERE IS THE BRAND EVIDENCE?

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“To increase the chances an ad gets noticed and remembered, it generally must have a theme that ties all advertising and promotional messages together under a single umbrella. Usually that theme should arise from a good positioning strategy and proper branding.

“In my years in the business, I have heard much discussion about these twin concepts 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*.

Mr. Plog is not alone. A statement at the bottom of this newsletter reads: News and muse about the least understood yet most oversold subject – Brands.

Ours and a few other firms, most of which are members of a group of certified brand zealots called The Brand Establishment, have spent decades working to demystify branding and brand development. We’ll continue here while focusing on **destination marketing**.

First let’s tackle the definition of a brand. If you ask ten ad agencies you’ll get ten iterations on the same idea, that a brand is a promise, an inherent value, a mark and so on. Given that level of ambiguity, let’s turn to Webster’s: “A distinctive type or an indelible mark, or impression on someone or something.” Paraphrased, this means a brand is simply a “claim of distinction.” But even that

leaves to question the word “claim.” Shouldn’t it read, “The delivery of a claim of distinction?” For our purposes, we suggest the best definition would be, “**Evidence of distinction.**” It’s impossible to argue that without evidence, no other definition is finite. Given this, any brand without evidence of distinction is generic or brand X or worse, a commodity.

Many ads you see for destinations today have a real commonness – they have everything for everyone. Or, they have everything research has suggested everyone wants – with or without evidence to support it. Granted, most destinations have trees, historic or thriving downtowns, restaurants, theaters, attractions, friendly and welcoming locals and so on. But with the exception of those places with dramatic or unique physical characteristics, few promote “our brand of destination.” Several do, like San Diego, Las Vegas, Hong Kong and New York City to name a few. All should.

OK, let’s clear the air about the difference between branding (marketing’s most uttered word) and brand development (often called positioning). Brand development is the process of discovering that evidence of distinction we

mentioned earlier, claiming it, and then developing a communication of it. Branding on the other hand is the tactical application of the newly discovered distinction to all marketing materials. *(continued on back)*

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Wilkin Guge Marketing is the Inland Empire’s largest business and brand development firm. We help companies thrive beyond their expectations by providing uncommon strategic thinking brilliantly communicated. Here, brands leap and business bounds.

If you would like to brand speak with Gail Guge, Andrew Wilkin or Jim Hughes, please call 909-625-2225 or visit www.wilkinguge.com.

The Las Vegas brand of destination is “Sin City” or at least, “Unrepressed Fun.” The communication of their brand is: “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” One of the branding tactics is the very cool TV spot where the bachelorette party participants are quietly sitting in the limo on the way back to the airport, glancing up at each other then suddenly breaking out in a pure sign of sworn-to-silence sisterhood laughter.

When these twin concepts are aligned and regularly adhered to, two things happen. One, the message and positioning become more memorable faster and two, it becomes more economical to run a successful marketing campaign - both because of consistency.

So, what is the process for developing a crystal clear brand position and successful branding tactics? How do we discover our destination’s evidence of distinction? Here’s how we do it: Wilkin Guge Marketing’s brand discovery session is designed to differentiate your destination by a process called “Brandus Operandi™.” This is where we look outside to analyze industry trends, competitive threats and ascertain visitor needs and wants. Then we look inside and examine your destination’s history, offerings, attractions, amenities, culture and more. In other words, we explore both internal and external factors in the process to discover the essence of your brand of destination. Once clarified, validated and thoroughly researched for marketability we can then develop a truly unique brand campaign that will communicate your destination and distinguish it from all others.

The typical four- to five-hour session is a process of distilling information. We start with discovery of facts. Lots of them. We will spend one and a half to two hours listing facts about the destination, attractions and people. After that, we eliminate those that are not possibly unique. And ultimately, we find those that are absolutely unique to you.

By applying these practices and principles, we were able to more than double the leads (116%) for the Ontario, California Convention Center in one year. The sales team was also able to convert one out of three of those leads to increase revenues and secure multi-year contracts.

And we didn’t accomplish it by out-spending our competitors. We did it through a campaign theme that communicated Ontario’s unique evidence of distinction. In other words, twin concepts - advertising and promotional messages together under a single umbrella, born from a good positioning strategy.

Mr. Plog, if you’re reading this, we hope you’ve finally found definitions that don’t leave you confused and a process that helps you select your next destination.

Brandus Operandi™

Our proprietary method for creating and operating a brand.

- STEP 1 INDUSTRY TRENDS
- STEP 2 COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS
- STEP 3 CUSTOMER RESEARCH
- STEP 4 SWOT ANALYSIS
- STEP 5 BRAND DISCOVERY
- STEP 6 ESTABLISH MEASURABLE GOALS
- STEP 7 DEVELOP A STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN
- STEP 8 BRAND DEVELOPMENT CAMPAIGN
- STEP 9 EXECUTE AND TRACK RESULTS
- STEP 10 THE BIG IDEA