

#2 - TOURISM BRANDING: USING YOUR VOICE

Without a doubt it has happened to us all at some point in time. There you are quietly sitting in your hotel room or lounge at home, your mind busy with something other than watching the television, and without your really even noticing, the room is suddenly filled with the a series of distinctive chords of music. Before you know it you find yourself quietly humming to yourself: “*Malaysia, Truly Asia*”, maybe even picturing in your mind's eye images of still, sparkling turquoise waters being broken by a diving silhouette, baby turtles wiggling back into the sea, wooden toys magically dancing in the light of golden candles, and bronzed smiling travellers sharing a moment of play with local elders. Technically speaking you have not even seen the television screen. All you have heard are the first bars of music. And you are transposed to another place, a place which reminds you of how badly you need a holiday and offers a very enticing suggestion of a destination.

That is the power of DESTINATION BRANDING.

DESTINATION BRANDING has become one of the most exciting, entertaining and expressly competitive aspects of today's Tourism industry. Across the world and across the airwaves, television and computer screens are busy carrying music-wrapped images of sand, sea and sunshine, snow-white ski slopes and statuesque monuments, sprawling green landscapes, stunning sunsets, perfect starlit nights and warm smiling faces, all tempting hopeful travellers with the promise of a perfect, personal escape.

Each of these different destination promises comes neatly, sensually packaged in the destination BRAND. Or at least they try to.

For any destination, central to tourism sector growth and development is the establishment of a creative, compelling, competitive identity which accurately reflects the experience promise, and delivery capability, of the destination.. Governments around the globe are confidently and proudly investing billions of

national revenues each year into establishing destination BRAND exposure and appeal. With such widespread competition, destination BRAND advertising on local, regional and international networks has in many ways evolved tourism communication to destination pageantry.

Still, for all of the excitement and expectation generated by destination BRANDS, it is vital to not lose focus on the fundamental role and purpose of the BRAND.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SYMBOL

A destination BRAND, while appearing as a singular logo creatively stating the name of the destination, is in fact an important symbol for the destination. One seemingly simple design is, in fact, a vital reflection and source of identification of a destination's character and strategy. The fonts selected, colours used, textures employed, creative devices introduced to support the destination name, even musical arrangement, they all work together to reflect specific key elements of the spirit and character of the destination.

A clear set of practical, meaningful Tourism objectives and aspirations lie behind a BRAND's unique features.

Through its presence the BRAND showcases the destination to the world, making the desired connection with target audiences.

Ultimately the destination BRAND seeks to speak to two priority Audiences:

1. The TRAVELLER
2. The PEOPLE OF THE DESTINATION

Firstly, the *Traveller*.

For Tourists the Destination BRAND acts as a source of identification of not only the destination name, it is a reflection of the destination's character and PROMISE of the traveler experience – the beauty and intrigue of places to be seen, the cultural pageantry of people to be met, the range of local activity to become a

part of, the spirit of the destination to be felt. The destination BRAND acts as both an invitation to the destination, and an encapsulation of the unique experiences which the tourism can come 'touch' for themselves.

Secondly and as importantly, the People of the Destination.

For these people the destination BRAND represents a symbol of the destination's DNA. The Destination BRAND acts as a unifying force, aligning all of the people of the destination behind all that it has to celebrate in its:

- Culture
- Spirit
- Personality
- Future aspirations

The destination BRAND must therefore work to unite and inspire the people of the destination to proudly serve *in their own way* as hosts of visitors to their destination, be they formally a part of the tourism industry or simply because they call the destination 'home'.

Ultimately the BRAND acts as the **VOICE** of the nation - a vital source of destination identity and messaging for the destination.

With the global Tourism industry becoming more and more competitive, crowded and creative, destination BRANDS must achieve clear, confident, meaningful differentiation.

This requires thoughtful, responsible commitment to destination BRAND development.

As a framework for BRAND development (and examination), it is important to stay focused on the fact that a truly powerful destination BRAND focuses on the fundamentals of its VOICE:

- **V – Vision** : a powerful destination BRAND reflects the spirit and aspirations of the people of the destination. It expresses the energy and personality of the destination, proactively shaping its social, cultural, natural and economic destiny. Destinations defining themselves purely by growth should naturally project an energy which confidently expresses the destination's goals and sense of belief in their dreams becoming a proud reality. Destinations rich in history, culture and tradition can effectively showcase and celebrate these features as pillars of the BRAND's positioning and personality which inspire the future of the destination. Ultimately the destination BRAND should project a clarity of self-understanding of where the destination has come from and where it is going, acting as a source of traveler excitement and motivation to visit.

- **O- Originality**: The destination BRAND must clearly, confidently and competitively tell a unique, authentic, compelling story about the destination. Creativity is critical. But beware creativity for creativity sake. The creative expression of the BRAND acts as a mirror of the creative spirit of the destination itself.

Importantly, having established the BRAND's positioning, core messages and look & feel, it is critical to ensure consistency of messaging. A BRAND is a symbol of identification, understanding and trust. While creative expression of the BRAND may and should change over time, it is important to ensure that BRAND governance is applied towards the Destination Brand's DNA – i.e. its iconography, look and feel, strategic pillars, pay-off. Constant change of, or to, the BRAND's DNA can result in target audience confusion, distrust of the promise being put forward in communication, and abandonment of interest in the destination.

- **I – Icons**: each and every destination has leveraging and creating highly memorable, ownable and inspiring symbols uniquely associated with the destination. These may be, *inter alia*,:
 - Natural environments

- Structures
- People
- Wildlife
- Sport
- Elements of Arts and culture

Destinations icons reflect the energy, possibility and pride of the nation. Anchoring the destination BRAND in icons enables the destination to 'own' truly unique elements of interest and attraction. Focus, however, should be few icons. Destination branding is not a form of cataloguing the full range of experiences open to the traveler.

Ultimately the BRAND should seek to extend an invitation to not just see what travellers are wishing to experience for themselves, but also to discover beyond their expectations of experiences.

- **C – Competitiveness:** Importantly, a destination BRAND must be able to creatively, powerfully, positively and quickly grab and hold the attention and interest of travelers. Competitiveness of BRAND identity is critical to overall destination competitiveness on the global tourism map.

To truly stand out and achieve recognition, differentiation and interest, creative thought is required not just in the expression of the BRAND's identity and core messaging, but also in the media mix which is used to achieve desired BRAND exposure. Strategic thought is required to ensure that the *right messages* are being sent out to the *right people* in the *right mediums* at the *right time*...and importantly, with the desired ROI.

Destination advertising clutter is a reality of the tourism sector, globally, with little chance that it will subside. Creativity in media execution is as important as creativity in BRAND expression to ensure that the destination BRAND's voice is heard as powerfully, meaningfully and purely as possible.

- **E – Experiential:** Travel today is no longer simply about *seeing* and *doing*, it has become about *feeling*. Destinations which simply showcase static features of destination – places, sights, structures – risk failing to reach out and make an emotional connection with the traveler.

A destination BRAND which authentically and meaningfully showcases the rich opportunities for engagement of travelers with the destination – *its people, its culture, its places, its nature* - seeds the development of a relationship between the destination and the traveler. By bringing the destination BRAND to life through emphasis of a select scope of desirable experiences reflecting the pillars of the BRAND strategy, the destination unlocks a rich, powerful opportunity for pre-, during and post- traveler connection. In addition to enhancing the traveler experience to the destination, the destination secures a strong competitive edge vis a vis other destinations,

The power of a destination BRAND is clearly within its VOICE.

Destination BRANDS communicating with a clear, confident, consistent VOICE open themselves up to a world of possibility in growth, development, appreciation, competitive edge and, importantly, pride.

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