

THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE LEE'S SUMMIT BRAND

by James E. McKenna

"Be Yourself Because Everyone Else Is Already Taken." ~ Oscar Wilde

It should be no secret to anyone that a city, much like a product or service, does not sell itself. It requires a consistent voice, image and presence. A strong civic brand is invaluable as the competition for the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of visitors and investors intensifies. While building brands used to be about creating messages that would endure for years, those days are over. In today's hectic, ever-changing world, brands can become irrelevant if we become complacent and do not revitalize the message by facilitating its evolution to reflect changing consumer attitudes, desires and lifestyle.

In April 2012, the city of Lee's Summit, on behalf of the LS360 Committee and other stakeholders, contracted with North Star Destination Strategies to gain valuable insight into the perceptions, attitudes and awareness of Lee's Summit among residents, businesses, visitors, neighbors and stakeholders. This critical information would allow the entire community to come together to determine the City's true, unique and relevant brand position in order to propel the City into the public consciousness.

THE CHALLENGES

- The need to attract more investment and development to the community.
- The city was plagued by the lack of cohesive messaging that manifested itself in a low-aided



- and unaided awareness level (vs. neighboring communities).
- A lack of collaboration and cooperation contributed to a disjointed perception of Lee's Summit in the minds of residents, businesses, investors and neighboring communities.

THE GOALS

- To communicate a clear, cohesive and consistent message in order to attract and retain visitors and investors.
- To foster an environment of collaboration between both the public and private sectors.
- To position Lee's Summit as a community of opportunity so that residents and businesses alike will have every reason to spend dollars in the community.

"YOURS TRULY" CAMPAIGN

In January 2013, a marketing collaboration was launched that included the Chamber of Commerce, the city of Lee's Summit, Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street, the Economic Development Council, and the private sector. With everyone working together, the City was able to craft a timely and relevant messaging platform that resonated with its targeted audience that resulted in the "Yours Truly" campaign.

The brand positioning statement for Lee's Summit was the foundation for all messaging:

For individuals and businesses looking for the serenity and security of a small

town, Lee's Summit is the place where history converges with vision and energy to create a smart, friendly environment . . . that energizes relationships and holds the promise of a community where anything is possible.

THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

By the public and private sectors coming together to invest in the City's marketing program, Lee's Summit was placed in a much stronger position to leverage media-buying power. With the private sector joining ranks with the public sector investing dollar for dollar, the City was able to create a significant marketing campaign budget.

Next, the City sat down with various media partners (television, radio, newspaper, magazine and emerging media formats) to negotiate a deeply discounted city rate. When

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~ Lee's Summit Brand Positioning Statement

all was said and done, the city and its private sector marketing partners were the recipients of thousands of dollars of value-added and preferred-positioned media.

INVESTMENT IN THE CITY BRAND

- Fifty percent of all marketing expenditures could be traced to private sector investment.
- The marketing media arsenal included both traditional (TV, Radio, Magazine, Newspaper, etc.) as well as new and emerging interactive, digital and social media.
- There were more than 40 private-sector partners – tourism, retail, lodging/hospitality, restaurants, real estate, college/universities, healthcare, service clubs, economic development and downtown main street.
- The additional media-buying power contributed thousands of dollars, value-added preferred positioning media that now accounts for more than 30 percent of the entire marketing campaign.

IMPORTANCE OF BRANDING

It is important to understand the difference between *branding* and *advertising*. A brand represents the key connection between you and your customer that differentiates you, the city, its products and services from all other competitors within the category. Advertising is the act of actually communicating the benefits of a brand to the consumer.

Lee's Summit's challenge was not simply to have folks choose Lee's Summit over the competition, but to see Lee's Summit as the only option capable of providing a solution to their needs, wants, desires and aspirations.

The promise of comfort through connection behind the Lee's Summit brand must be validated by the resident's, visitor's and investor's personal experience. Interaction

with shop keepers, hotel personnel, restaurant wait staff, and attractions all play a vital role in being copilots of the City's brand.

TEAMWORK MAKES IT ALL WORK BETTER

It was imperative that the public and private sectors all share a common vision in order to project a consistent tone and spirit. Working together, the community was able to leverage and manage the City's brand personality and create joint opportunities for everyone involved. This collaborative approach created the optimum environment in order to focus the budget on the most efficient and effective types of media.

QUANTIFIABLE RESULTS

In order to assess how residents, visitors and investors think and feel about Lee's Summit, the City launched a comprehensive evaluation process, conducted by North Star. North Star

compared its findings for Lee's Summit to more than 200 cities and 40 states across the nation.

The results were prefaced by the following statement in North Star's final report:

"Congratulations to Lee's Summit. Your scores are not only high, but they are the highest scores we have ever recorded in each respective category since the creation of our study. In fact, Lee's Summit is a benchmark community for marketing implementation and success in the nation."

Some of the results included, the following:

- The rating as a "Place to Live" is 7.5 times higher than the national average.
- The rating as a "Place to Visit" is 7.2 times higher than the national average.
- The rating as a "Place to Conduct Business" is 12.9 times higher than the national average.



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Opportunity...



When our first child was born, I was a ball of nerves and all thumbs. When we welcomed our second child, I felt a lot more in control. Today, I'm a working mom, doing what I love. I have 10 little ones who rely on me. No, not all of them are mine, but I treat them as if they were. I want to give them every opportunity for a successful tomorrow. That's why I made the choice to teach as well as to send my children to Summit Christian Academy. For us, life is all about our family and our faith. That may seem unique in today's world, but it's just the way we like it!



Summit-Christian-Academy.org



- Seventy percent of respondents recall having seen or heard an advertisement promoting the city of Lee's Summit. (The national average is 54 percent.)
- Seventy-Five percent of survey respondents stated, "The marketing and advertising campaign makes me proud of Lee's Summit."

Other above-average ratings included; great quality of life; business friendly; active arts and cultural scene; a community full of potential; schools; safety; recreational opportunities; authentic/historic; and a place "where I belong."

The City's "Yours Truly" campaign is simply about connecting with others. It is about comfort through connection; celebrating the things residents have in common with one another. Lee's Summit has fostered a resident passion for its community. □

James E. McKenna is the community marketing director for the city of Lee's Summit.

Figure 1: Marketing media for the "Yours Truly" campaign included traditional as well as digital, integrative and social media.

Figure 1



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