

Branding Your County: Create and Communicate Your Community Brand

The Importance of Branding

Community branding is a buzzword for distinguishing your county to attract tourists, talent, business, and investment. It is the narrative behind services that becomes a recognizable symbol. A strong brand can change perceptions, create a common vision, and enhance your regional or global position. To be successful, a brand should be authentic and highlight what makes your county unique. The purpose of this report is to provide you with guidance on branding or re-branding your county to draw in people and stimulate economic growth.

5 Tips for Building a Brand

1. Define your goal.

Begin by setting clear objectives for your county's brand. *Ask: What is our county trying to achieve by branding itself? Are we trying to attract a particular type of person, industry, or investment? What do they need that our county can provide?* A brand is a tool for achieving your county's goals, so you should hold off on designing one until you've defined your objectives.

2. Consult stakeholders.

Consulting with stakeholders can help you to understand the current perceptions or attitudes within your county and create buy-in. Stakeholders include residents, businesses, visitors, and the media. *Ask: What comes to mind when you think of the county? What are our strengths and weaknesses? What do you want people to think of when they think of the county? What type of experience would you like to have?* The answers to these questions should guide your decision making. Word of mouth, local attitudes, and publicity will all affect whether your brand catches on, so it is important to involve stakeholders early to generate their support and commitment to the brand.

3. Be specific.

While it is tempting to be all things to all people, this mindset will result in a brand that does not stand out or highlight your county's unique attributes. *Ask: What does the county stand for? What sets us apart? Can this brand fit anyone?* Think of the specific activities, amenities, ambiance, and icons your community offers.

Keep these rules for slogans and tag lines in mind:

- It must be unique.
- Three words is best – no more than seven.
- Be specific. If you have to explain it, toss it.
- Try to convey a feeling or bring a picture to mind.

The graphics you choose should also be simple, easily recognizable, and unique to the community. Logos and slogans should support and reinforce your brand.



4. Consistency is key.

Consistency and versatility are key to your brand catching on. Your county should deliver a consistent message, look, and feel across all communication platforms. Choose uniform color palettes, standard typefaces, and adaptable graphics that can be used for different formats. Your goal should be to “own” your brand the way Nashville owns country music, Paris owns romance, and Silicon Valley owns tech.

Display your brand as widely as possible, including on business cards, stationary, websites, airports, street signs, brochures, and social media. According to a marketing principle known as the “Rule of 7,” people need to see something at least seven times before they really notice it.

5. Measure success.

To know whether your brand strategy is working, you will need to establish metrics for measuring its success. You’ll want to set milestones, record performance, and continue or modify what you’re doing based on the results. A consistent survey tool can be used to annually assess brand awareness, recognition, understanding, and value. *Ask: Are we reaching the audience we hoped to? What marketing activities are the most effective? How do these metrics correspond with our economic and community development metrics?* This assessment will allow for more strategic investments.

Examples from New York State



Takeaway

Branding involves more than logos, taglines, and campaigns. A brand should combine the community’s characteristics and policies into a single big idea that stakeholders can buy into and support. Think of your brand as a county-wide mission statement to guide decision making. If your community brands itself as a destination for millennials, then you should invest in broadband and public transit.

Remember that brands are what people think of you and changing perceptions can take time. You should not expect your brand strategy to bring an immediate influx of visitors or businesses, but you may prompt tourists or grantors to give your county a second look and generate local pride in the process. These outcomes can be worth the investment.

