

# Good community branding adds value

By Shelby Fiegel

The current competitive economic environment is making it harder for communities to command attention and display relevancy. Thus, many Arkansas communities are getting lost in the crowd. One way these communities can redefine their situation and demand consideration is to develop a strong community brand. A community's brand aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence among other communities. A strong brand influences public perception, makes investment in the community attractive, supports tourism activities, and provides citizens with a sense of identity.

In the mind of a typical consumer, the concept of branding is most often associated with a logo or tagline—the Nike swoosh, the Chevrolet bowtie, Coca Cola's "Open happiness," "Like a good neighbor State Farm is there," or "Got Milk?" While logos and taglines are important in branding, they are not necessarily the most important part. This notion is especially true concerning community branding.

To create a community brand that generates top-of-mind awareness and "sticks" in the mind of consumers, a city cannot simply pluck a logo or tagline out of thin air because it looks/sounds cool or they "think" it represents their community; a community brand has to be developed through research and self-identification. A good brand should provide a community with added value by conveying a powerful identity and create consumer trust and respect.

Las Vegas is a solid example of a successful community brand (though maybe not one any given community could or would want to recreate). The city would not be known as "Sin City" if the residents of Las Vegas and the general public did not attribute the city with that description. Las Vegas delivers on its brand promise (benefits and experiences that are associated with a community in its current and prospective consumers' minds) by providing the experience, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." The city created brand success by understanding, playing off, and building its tourism-focused identity that is now known throughout the world.

So, how does a community in Arkansas compete with the big boys in branding? It starts with research. Review your community's history and identify its future direction. Do you have a strategic plan set in place? If so, draw upon it during brand development. Define your competitors, conduct case studies of other successfully branded communities of similar size, and map out your strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. Make sure you ask yourself the right questions, such as:

- How do you define yourself as a community?
- What are the key features or unique attributes of your community?
- What are you selling (a good place to live, business environment, tourism, etc.)?
- What do residents think about your community?
- What do outsiders think about your community?
- What is your community vision or mission statement?
- What are your goals and objectives?

As you slowly accumulate this information, you will see your community brand take shape. Only after this research is complete and these questions are answered can a community begin to develop a logo or tagline.

As the branding process winds down and decisions are made, there are many key things to remember. Be aware of perception (inside and outside of your community) so you can stay true to your community's identity. Do not under deliver on your brand promise. If your brand falls short of its promise, you will lose the attention and trust of consumers and your brand will be unsuccessful. Most importantly, create a brand that adds value to your community and is consistent with your community's future plans.



*Shelby Fiegel is project coordinator of UCA's Center for Community and Economic Development. Contact her by phone at 501-450-5269, by email at [sfiegel@uca.edu](mailto:sfiegel@uca.edu), or visit the Center's website at [www.uca.edu/cced](http://www.uca.edu/cced).*