

Hello from Magnolia!

How Magnolia is using their new brand to keep them top-of-mind.

By Michael Hudson

As you travel throughout the Natural State this summer, take in the personality and identity of the cities and towns you pass through. Each community in our state is unique and has diverse assets that contribute to making it a great place to live, work and play. When considering how to best display everything our communities have to offer, one of the greatest tools we can utilize is the development of a community brand. Identifying and marketing a community brand sends a cohesive message on behalf of your community, engages visitors and generates community pride. Community brands also establish a positive first impression for potential new businesses, residents and tourists in the digital world.

Magnolia city leaders saw the need to create a community brand to promote the city to external audiences and develop a sense of identity internally. The city partnered with the University of Central Arkansas' Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED), Thrive Inc. and Entergy Arkansas to create a new community brand and logo.

Magnolia's Economic Development Executive Director Ellie Baker recognized that "those who wanted to connect a business or item to Magnolia would have to use any one of the thousands of [magnolia] blossom images from the internet. There was no consistency of an image being used across the board to purposefully identify Magnolia." With the new logo and branding, Magnolia portrays a sense of unity and belonging within the community using cohesive branding materials, which are free and available for anyone to use.

Creating the brand

It is impossible for any city or town to be able to market itself to the world as a place to come work, live and play without knowing who they are first, said Ryan Biles, Thrive Inc.'s director of development. When creating a community brand, the first step is "to know what you believe about yourself before you can tell that story to others."



PHOTO BY SHELBY FIEGEL

Magnolia High School students paint a section of the mural with the city's new logo, which provides a catchy visual for the community's branding initiative.

In Magnolia's case, community stakeholders met with Thrive to develop an idea of who Magnolia is. To undertake a major project like rebranding your town, it is imperative that "every community have at its heart people who are proud to be from there," Biles said. The stakeholders then formed a design team that met with Thrive, CCED and Entergy every two weeks via Zoom to ensure that the project did not lose its momentum. During those meetings, Thrive conducted workshops that extracted the "emotional essence" of what each participant brings to the table. By understanding how the stakeholders feel about their community, Thrive was better able to distill what made Magnolia unique and important through the eyes of its own citizens.

Once the brand was developed, Magnolia and Thrive strategically involved high school students in the unveiling of the new brand. The students painted a mural in the city's Square Park that displays key elements of the brand. This process also gave the students real-world experience as artists. Mayor Parnell Vann was ecstatic that Magnolia youth were so involved in the creation of the brand. "This project brought pride and buy-in from our youth, and anytime you can do that with a city project it is a success," he said.

Getting the brand out there

Magnolia is incorporating the new brand into city departments and encourages citizens to use the new branding for free. Businesses are also encouraged to use the new branding and can contact city hall for the marketing materials. The city will continue to implement its new branding with wayfinding signage, future projects and a new movable mural to be displayed, according to Baker, “wherever there is an empty spot to fill.”



PHOTO BY JOHN ED ROWE

Representatives from Thrive Inc., Entergy and the city unveil the new mural in Square Park.

Every community can learn from Magnolia’s branding process. Some key tips include:

- Before your community begins to design and develop a new branding initiative, study your town to understand who you are and what your story is.
- Gather as many perspectives as you can so that everyone has a voice in the process.
- Create a consensus on what should be included with the brand and take pride in it!
- Don’t be afraid to ask outside organizations or companies to help with this endeavor.

Even though there are other communities with the name of Magnolia in the United States, the new Magnolia, Arkansas, logo is truly one of a kind and cannot be found anywhere else. So, the next time you visit Magnolia, be prepared to be welcomed with a smile, and snap a photo with the new mural to say, “Hello from Magnolia!” 📷



Michael Hudson is the project coordinator for the University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED). Learn more about CCED at www.uca.edu/cced.



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