

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (WORKING SESSION) – OCTOBER 10, 2007**

### **CORPORATE IDENTITY AND BRANDING PROCESS**

#### **Recommendation**

The Director of Corporate Communications, in consultation with the City Manager, recommends:

1. That Council receive this report for information purposes; and
2. That Council consider the options suggested in this report to conduct and implement a corporate branding strategy, and after due consideration, provide direction on the preferable option, including budgetary implications.

#### **Economic Impact**

The cost of re-branding the City will depend on the branding process selected and can range from \$100,000 to \$500,000. These costs can be budgeted over two or more years.

#### **Communications Plan**

Not applicable at this stage of determining the process to be implemented. An extensive communications plan would be required as part of the branding process and communicating the new brand to all stakeholders.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the municipal branding process, providing options from a limited branding exercise to redesign the city logo artwork to a comprehensive branding process that engages all stakeholders.

This is a critical and opportune time in the history of the City to address the issue of branding. Several new initiatives to define the future development of the City are underway: a new strategic plan, *Vaughan Vision 2020*; the Growth Management strategy 2031; and an Environmental Master Plan. The new Civic Centre potentially provides an iconic representation of the new Vaughan. Finally, there remain challenges in establishing the image of Vaughan as one city and not just a collection of former small towns and communities.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

This report addresses Item No. 2, Report No. 36, Committee of the Whole, September 4, 2007 that “staff prepare a plan to review and update the corporate identity and slogan of the City” and “that a detailed report outlining the process to be used to develop and implement the new corporate identity be presented to a Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting in October 2007.”

#### **General Considerations**

A municipal brand reflects and communicates the “image” of the city, capturing the essence of what makes a municipality unique and great.

The City’s logo and branding slogan (or tagline) are the graphical representation of the City’s brand, and only part of the overall municipal brand. The branding message (the key messages derived from the branding slogan), however, is pervasive and presented, to some degree, in every speech, presentation, program and service.

An effective brand is adopted by key stakeholders, including residents and local businesses who will start using your brand message when describing or referring to the city.

Essential components of a comprehensive branding process include: input from key stakeholders (focus groups, surveys) and professional-level branding experts (usually from a contracted service). See attachment: "Why City Brands Fail."

One objective of a comprehensive municipal brand is to represent all activities of a city, such as economic development, tourism, the strategic vision, major landmarks or attractions, key programs, etc. Many civic brands, particularly the first or original brand produced by a new or growing municipality, are driven by economic development programs designed to attract business investment. Other common approaches include a civic brand that promotes tourism or a community lifestyle and amenities.

Most cities also brand major programs and initiatives. A program brand serves as an "identifier." For example, the Greening Vaughan logo is a program identifier that serves as an umbrella for what might be considered several related programs: the blue box program, the green bin program and the regular garbage pickup services. An identifier brand or logo/icon is intended to reduce confusion in the marketplace.

Although program logos should support the overall branding strategy in terms of being consistent with the overall branding message, it is a subjective choice to produce complementary artwork for all program logos used by a municipality.

### The City Above Toronto

In 1991, the branding slogan "The City Above Toronto" was introduced as an economic development initiative to attract business investment. It was intended to identify the geographic location of the City and to promote Vaughan as the first choice for investment.

What was originally produced as an economic development slogan would become identified with the larger community, due in part to frequent references in the media.

A municipal brand should support economic development activities. An effective brand is a brand that "sells" the City to a wide audience. The corporate identify should reflect the best attributes of the City: dynamic and progressive, open for business, environmentally responsible, well-managed, a preferred destination, a City that celebrates diversity, etc.

### Cost Considerations

The most expensive aspect of a re-branding exercise is not the cost of research, conducting focus groups and creating the artwork, but the expense of communicating the new brand and effecting the changeover to the new logo on buildings, signage, vehicles, letterhead, business cards, etc.

Most of \$4 million cost of the City of Toronto's re-branding of its tourism marketing efforts – "Toronto Unlimited" – would be allocated to communicating the new brand through advertising. The branding process took 13 months and involved 250 interviews, 4,500 contributions from residents, and 14 focus groups in three countries.

City of Hamilton's branding program – "Reach Dream Rise Shine" – included a new logo, outdoor and transit shelter advertising, newspaper ads, and an economic development promotion. The estimated cost of the entire branding project was \$450,000.

More modest approaches to re-branding a municipality have been undertaken in recent years by Brampton, Guelph, Oshawa, Sarnia and several other municipalities. Case studies of Canadian municipalities and their brands should be part of the research for Vaughan's brand development.

A simplified approach to branding, described below as Option A, could be accomplished within a \$100,000 budget by minimizing professionally-conducted focus groups and any advertising expenditures. It would be the starting point for establishing a new city image over time.

A more comprehensive approach, described below as Option B and presented in the attached flow chart, could take two years and cost between \$280,000 and \$500,000 depending upon the extent of public consultation through discovery sessions and the brand roll-out.

#### Option A: The Branding Process – A Basic Approach

Program length: six months to final strategy and artwork.

A simplified approach to branding would focus on producing a concise branding strategy (strongly aligned with the City's strategic plan) and creating a new logo and/or tagline. The process would involve three phases:

##### **1. Situational Analysis**

- Establish program objectives (Council, SMT)
- Determine why the current brand is no longer effective
- Determine new direction by engaging key stakeholders (2-3 focus groups facilitated by expert branding consultant)

##### **2. Brand Development**

- First draft of branding strategy to include stakeholder input
- Produce several branding options (logo design proposals from 3 creative firms)
- Review options with all stakeholders (focus groups, interviews, market research firm)
- Second draft of branding strategy to include proposed new logo design and/or tagline (contract creative firm for final artwork)
- Test new brand with focus groups
- Finalize branding strategy and establish performance measurements

##### **3. Marketing and Communications Plan**

- Communicate the branding message (key messaging, website, limited advertising, etc.)
- Staff buy-in through an internal communications program
- Changeover to new logo (letterhead, business cards, vehicles, buildings, website, etc.)

The main challenge of a simplified approach to branding is the difficulty in getting meaningful input from all stakeholders, due to a limited budget for focus groups.

#### Option B: The Branding Process – A Comprehensive Approach

Program length: up to two years

The following information was provided by a strategic business and marketing consulting group. A flow chart of this process is attached.

The total estimated cost of this process is \$280,000, excluding the cost of the brand launch and marketing program (advertising, etc.).

## **1. Situational Analysis**

Includes a review of current positioning, establishing a detailed process or project work plan, Council approval of the proposal, and formation of a steering committee.

- Consultant prepares needs assessment report: process review, research, prepare focus group presentations
- Consultant meetings with key stakeholders (in chronological order): City staff (Corporate Communications; Economic Development; other); Senior Management; Council
- Consultant prepares “Branding Vaughan” proposal for review by steering committee.

## **2. Discovery Stage – Internal Stakeholders**

Consultant conducts focus groups and produces “Internal Perspectives Report” for review by steering committee.

Internal stakeholders include:

- Council
- Senior Management Team
- Department Management
- Staff
- Special project managers
- City ambassadors

## **3. Discovery Stage – External Stakeholders**

The Discovery Sessions with key external stakeholders would include focus groups by invitation, town hall meetings, and web surveys. Consultant would produce “External Perspectives Report” for review by steering committee.

External stakeholders include:

- Public (residents, community groups, students, visitors/non-residents)
- Business community (Chamber of Commerce, other business associations, local SMEs, local corporations, etc.)
- Government agencies (regional tourism, etc.)

## **4. Evaluation Stage**

Consultant provides report on consultation process and list of strategic considerations. Working with the steering committee, the consultant prepares a “preliminary opportunity report” and “brand roadmap.” Key components include:

- Benchmark studies
- Key trends
- Competitive analysis
- Linkage with City’s strategic plan

## **5. Concept Development**

This stage involves the steering committee, advertising agency and select stakeholders. The deliverable is a short list of prioritized concepts leading to the draft brand strategy.

- Evaluation and prioritization of findings
- Define key brand factors
- Brand workshops (how designs make an impact, etc.)

## **6. Creative development and production**

The advertising agency would be working closely with the steering committee.

- Complete Brand Strategy
- Develop creative brief to support brand strategy.
- Develop creative concepts.
- Production of creative elements.
- Communications and media plan.

## **7. Communications and marketing plan**

- Communicate the branding message (key messaging, website content, advertising, etc.)
- Staff buy-in through an internal communications program
- Changeover to new logo (letterhead, business cards, vehicles, buildings, website, etc.)

## **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have not been allocated and approved.

## **Regional Implications**

Not applicable.

## **Conclusion**

A review of the branding process will be the first step in determining whether the City's brand position needs to be revised in order to be more effectively aligned with the City's strategic priorities.

## **Attachments**

1. Flow chart of Option B: The Branding Process – A Comprehensive Approach
2. Article: "Why City Brands Can Fail," by Ted Griffith, Municipal World, Sept. 2007
3. Article: "Canadian city brands – a statistical survey," by Bob Mills, Urban Issues Marketing, Oct. 2005

## **Report prepared by:**

Madeline Zito, Director of Corporate Communications  
Ted Hallas, Manager of Corporate Communications

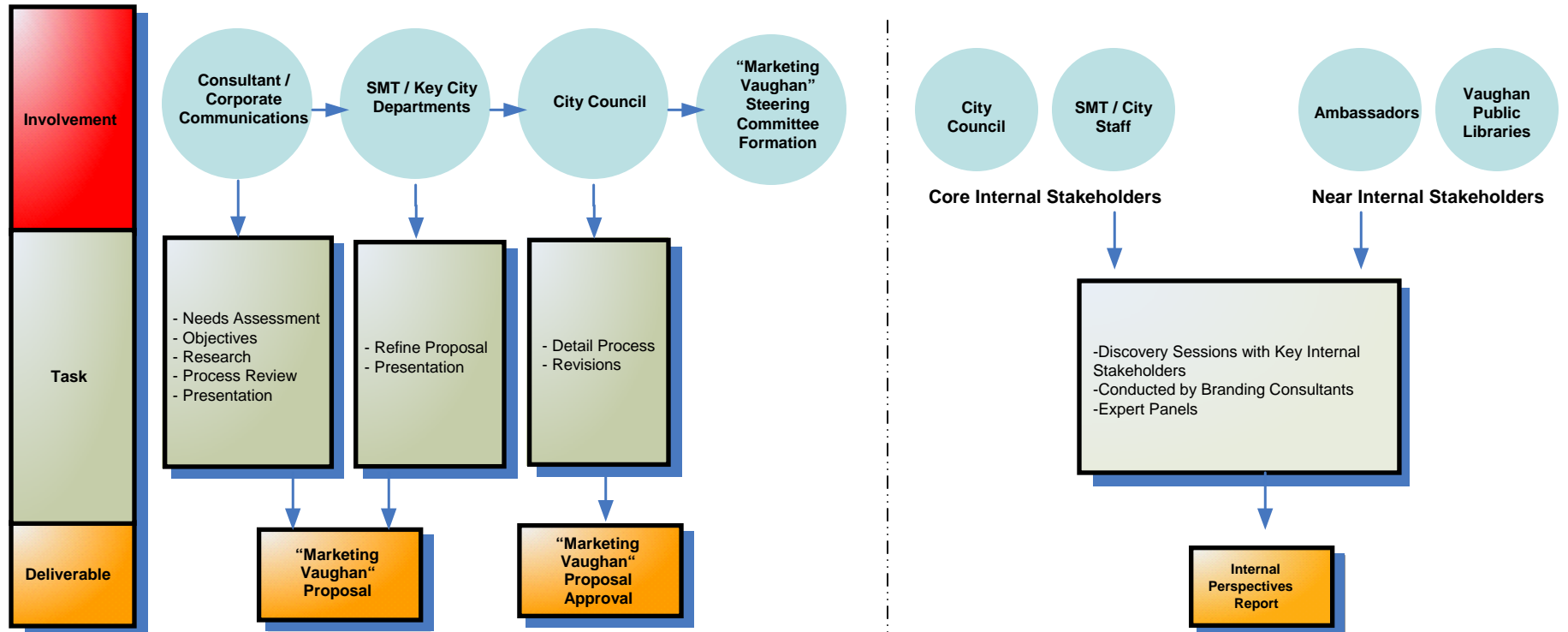
Respectfully submitted,

**Madeline Zito**  
Director of Corporate Communications

# The Branding Process – A Comprehensive Approach

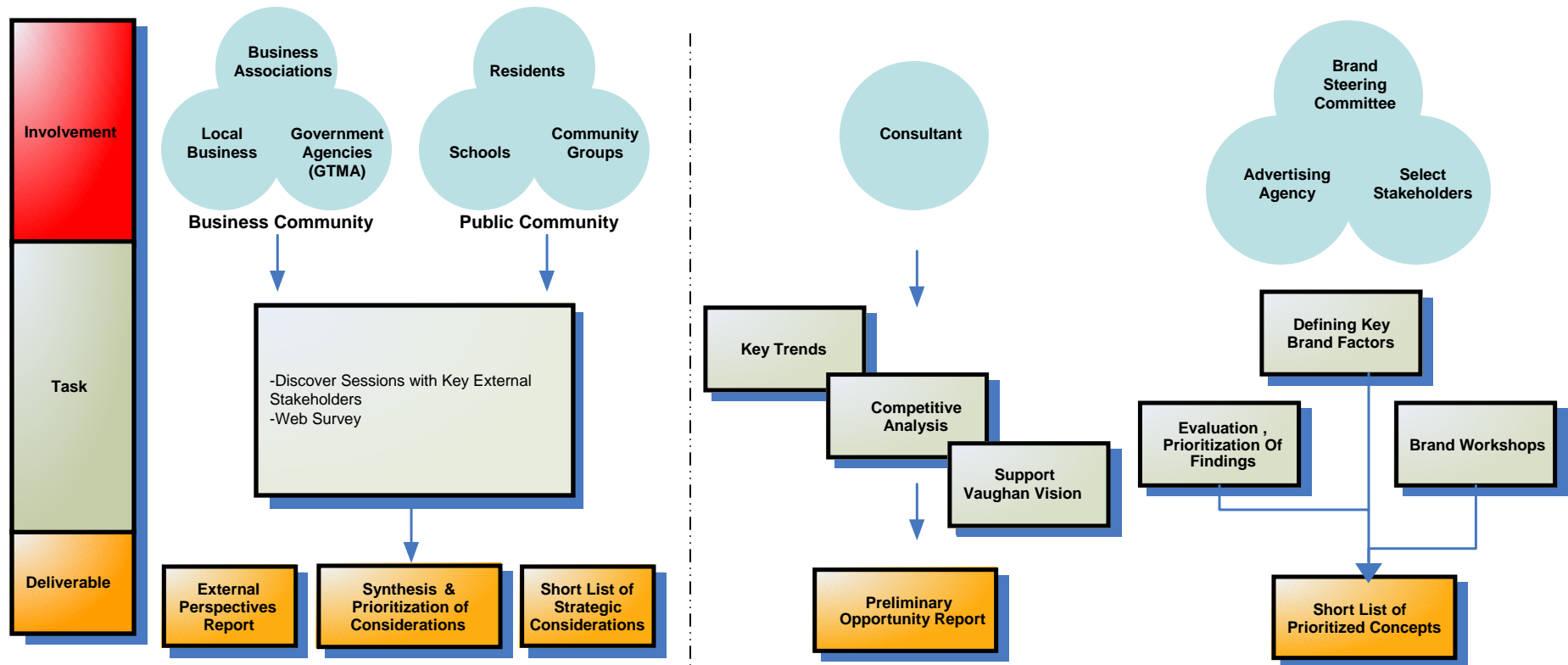
## 1. Situational Analysis

## 2. Discovery Stage - Internal Stakeholders



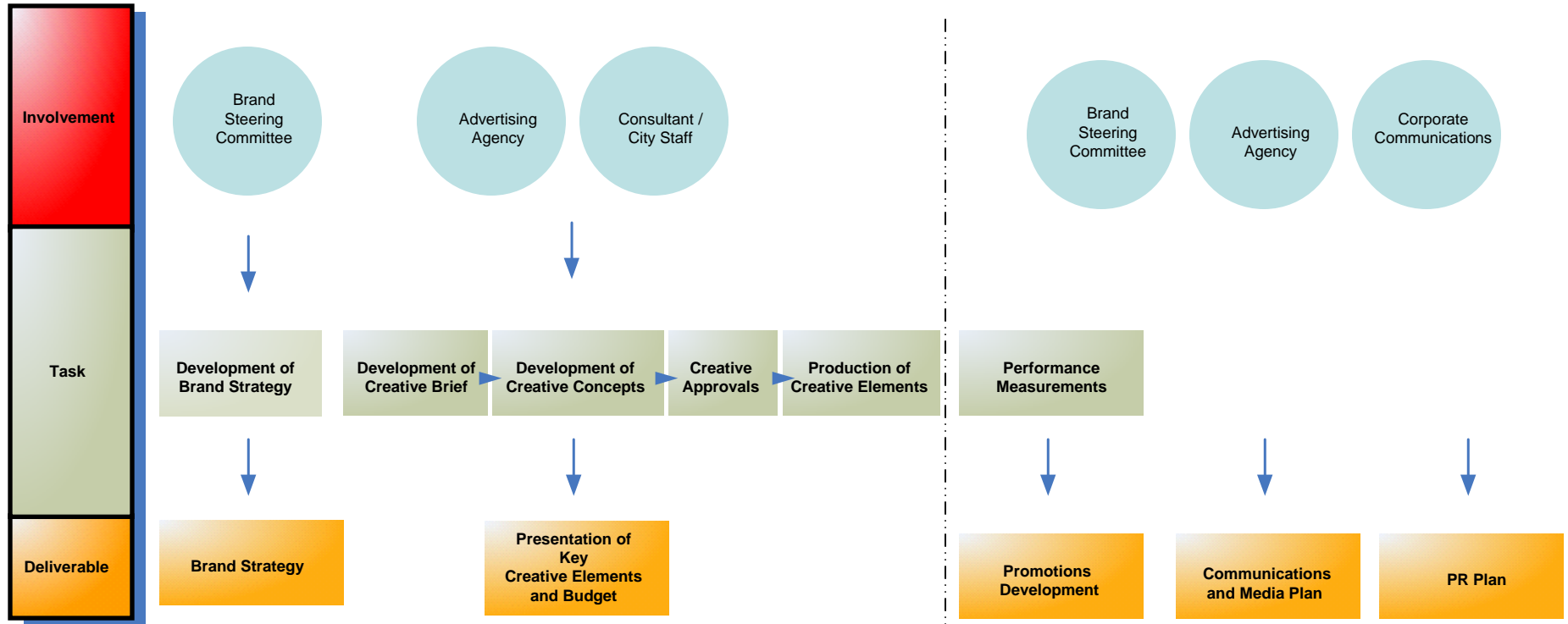
### 3. Discovery Stage – External Stakeholders

### 4. Evaluation Stage



## 5. Creative Development, Production & Execution Stage

## 6. Communication & Marketing Plan





# WHY CITY BRANDS CAN FAIL

Ted Griffith

Municipal branders often listen to the wrong people, themselves.

Municipal politicians talk a lot about branding. Ask any councillor if their city or town needs either an image boost or better selling of their community. Very likely, the answer is yes. A new “brand” is often suggested, and what will most often come next is a new logo and perhaps a slogan. But, branding is not a hundred-dollar word for a

either. Most people in charge of selecting a brand will tell you that they know what they like when they see it. Unfortunately, liking a brand, or not, has very little to do with its effectiveness.

Municipal leaders know a great deal about strategic planning, finance, and even how the simplicity of a toilet flush is a complicated, highly engineered and critical service to the taxpayer. Staff and politicians venture into the weeds of

## Why Municipal Brands Fail

So, why do so many municipal brands fail, especially the newer ones?

Branding a municipality is much more demanding a process than packaging a product, such as soap. The marketers of laundry detergent are only concerned with the needs of the consumer, the actual soap in the box, the design of that box, and the relative position it occupies on a retailer’s shelves.

When it comes to branding their municipalities, experienced leaders fall into the trap of deciding on “what they like”; “what they think people will like”; and avoiding what they know, for sure, will “get them into trouble.”

set of graphic designs paired with a catchy phrase. It’s the combined expression of your community – real and perceived – and that expression is carried by the actions of your municipality and all of its stakeholders. Branding is the most challenging, frustrating and perhaps rewarding experience that you can do for your community. But, it is fraught with dangers, beginning with the fact that few staff or political leaders have any idea *what* a city brand really

*is*. Take no offence – few people outside the walls of city hall do

these issues with regular depth and aplomb. But when it comes to branding their municipalities, these same experienced leaders fall into the trap of deciding on “what they like”; “what they think people will like”; and avoiding what they know, for sure, will “get them into trouble.”

In fact, more branding initiatives fail to the point of abandonment than actually succeed. Yet, when such programs *are* successful, they align the thinking and actions of bureaucrats, politicians and community leaders in a way no mere slogan could ever hope to do.

A municipality, on the other hand, is concerned with its residents, businesses, community groups, politicians, staff, management and the media. Addressing as dynamic a stakeholder group as this would send a corporate brand manager into a year of stress leave. Yet, the most astute marketers know that you never really own your brand – your customers do. For a municipality, that brand ownership is magnified a hundred fold, as you’re messing about with the image of the place your stakeholders live in, work in and call home.

The City of Hull, England, just kyboshed a six-year old branding campaign in favour of its previous brand – one that dated from the 15th century. The goal of the campaign was to move



Ted Griffith is Vice President, NATIONAL Public Relations Inc., Toronto – in 2006 named by Marketing Magazine as Agency of the Year. In 2006, NATIONAL developed the new brand for the City of Oshawa. Ted can be reached at <[tgriffith@national.ca](mailto:tgriffith@national.ca)>.

the Yorkshire sea port city into one of England's top 10 places to live and invest. Councillor Andy Sloan said recently, "It has not done anything for the city. It was a waste of time and money." How much money? The published number to develop the campaign was £300,000 – but, when you factor in the cost to change vehicles, signage, letterhead and such from the new brand back to the old one, the real cost to taxpayers of Hull was likely double that amount. More than two million dollars Canadian.

The taxpayer often has a different view of what money should be spent on. "They would have done better listening to people," said John Walker, a resident of Hull. "It could have been better spent on our struggling schools."

When there are thousands of other projects vying for the same funding as a new city image, a logo can seem like an irresponsible investment. Upon seeing

the final design for a city's graphic, a councillor might be expected to think that the six-figure sum often paid to brand designers is a waste of taxpayer money. However, consigning the notion of a brand to only a logo would only be correct, if one believes that the 3-point star logo that's emblematic of Mercedes-Benz is the thing that distinguishes the brand from a Pontiac.

Municipal brands often fail because the people who create them fail to recognize that it's the people, places, businesses, landmarks and institutions that truly reflect what a municipality is all about. *That's* the real brand. An effective logo and slogan are merely two expressions of it.

As Hull's John Walker said, "they would have done better listening to people." He was right. The process of branding a municipality is mostly about listening. The more you listen, the better the process and its result.

## Oshawa Gets It Right

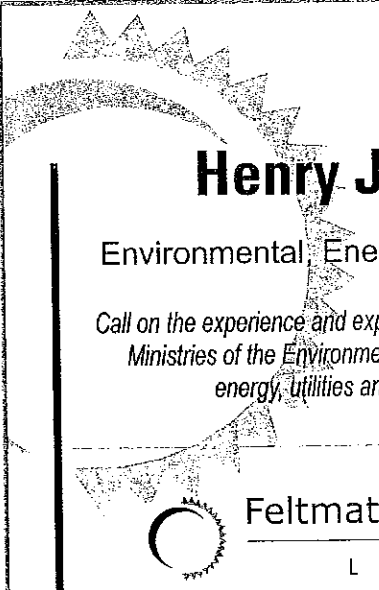
More recently, the City of Oshawa got it right. They began, not by starting a branding campaign, but with a strategic plan in which the community identified the city's image as a problem. As with most projects, finishing well means starting well. Oshawa achieved this by letting the needs for a new image grow organically. The municipality listened, then initiated a process that required even more listening and engaged residents, businesses and community leaders.

The city conducted 47 one-to-one interviews, 18 focus groups, and reviewed a compendium of research on the communications practices of not only all of Oshawa's competitors in the Golden Horseshoe, but also the best and worst examples of branding in over 100 similar communities across North America.

They asked people from both within the city and outside – including municipal staff, politicians and the media the usual list of questions that one would expect: What are Oshawa's strengths, weaknesses, and most compelling features? And, of course, what did the city want to be?

Not surprisingly, the answers were as diverse and different as the people who responded. A few points were common, however. Oshawa's most noteworthy feature was that it is the Canadian home of General Motors. And, the city was undergoing a significant process of change; few even went as far as to refer to it as a "renaissance."

There were a couple of problems with these consensus answers, though. The first was the political decision to distance the community from General Motors. As upstanding a company it was, there was pervasive feeling that hitching the community's wagon to one industry and one company was a risky proposition – and Oshawa had a lot more to offer its residents and businesses than being the birthplace of the Buick. The second problem was the notion of change. There was considerable momentum created by the municipality's investment in new recreation



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**BRANDING, cont'd on p. 48**

centres, a new arena and convention complex, and a revitalization plan for the downtown, all of which added up to a community with great things ahead of it.

Change, however, is hard to market. We all know that people hate change, even when it's positive.

So, the city asked its stakeholders one more question, this one in keeping with Oshawa's car-town heritage, but designed to prod the creative instinct of its stakeholders. They asked, "If Oshawa were a car, what kind of car would it be?"

As you'd expect, they got a lot of GM answers ... Malibus, Trailblazers, even a few Cadillacs. The more creative people went outside the GM product group; yet still, most of them settled into reliable, family brand cars and the odd pick-up truck. But, it was in one of the last focus groups that a woman identified the car that most reflected Oshawa's branding needs. With all due apologies to GM and their investment in the city, the woman said "Hyundai" – and the other eight people in the focus group immediately turned an about-face with their own opinions and agreed. "Hyundai," the woman told the group,

"was a good car with poor reputation, one that was changing for the better and good value for the money." This woman had nailed Oshawa. Her vision had articulated the branding the community needed.

The result: Oshawa, the former "City in Motion" became *Prepare To Be Amazed*. A formerly dull, corporate blue nomenclature became a vibrant call to attention. Oshawa was amazing, both today and ahead on the horizon.

Will it succeed? The only test of a brand is time. Yet, the brand does capture the high-technology focus of Ontario's first new university in 50 years, the worldwide design headquarters for some of GM's most popular automobiles, the new arena and convention complex, and a plan for a new downtown that will draw retailers and customers from across the Greater Toronto Area.

#### Listing to Stakeholders

The Oshawa brand has succeeded, at least initially, because the city listened to its stakeholders throughout the process – even beforehand.

Most city brands fail for one of two reasons: one, the municipality isn't listening to its stakeholders – the people that truly own the brand; and two,

where the municipality does listen, it doesn't have the marketing and creative insights to actually hear what people are saying. So, they end up with a brand that a few councillors and senior staff "like." That's usually when they smell the smoke of public discontent and can sense the rise of pitch forks on the horizon.

In fact, most municipalities do listen to their stakeholders, eventually. But, unlike a new road that people don't want, or a landfill site that seems put in the wrong place, an unsupported brand can be banished with the press of the "delete" button on a website and the installation of a few new signs.

The best advice is to trust the people who make up your community and engage some marketing talent that understands both municipalities and communications. An effective brand engages all stakeholders to be your best salespeople and, unlike the soap-in-the-box, has a voice all of its own. Ask your stakeholders to describe your community in terms of what kind of car it would be. Their answers will tell you everything you want to know about what brand your community truly has, if you know how to hear them. MW

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## Canadian city brands – a statistical survey

By Bob Mills B.A., R.G.D.

September 2005

In the spring of 2005, students in my communications design course at the University of Western Ontario surveyed the visual brands and positioning statements of 37 Canadian cities. The purpose of this project was to determine, statistically, the degree to which Canadian cities have embraced branding to market their communities.

Each student was asked to review the websites of two different cities and to note the following:

- is there a city logo on the website home page?
- what type of logo is it?
- what are the colors of the logo
- is there a branding slogan used by the city?
- is there a page on the website that explains the brand, or which provides corporate identity guidelines?

The 37 cities we reviewed are a cross-section of Canadian cities, and includes most large cities as well as a number of smaller communities drawn from all regions of Canada. Cities selected include 8 from Atlantic Canada, 4 from Quebec, 15 from Ontario, 9 from Western Canada and 1 from the Yukon.

### What we expected to find

Prior to beginning this survey, I discussed with the class the possibility – indeed likelihood – that many of the cities we would review would have little or no central branding. The branding of cities is an issue not without controversy. Many political leaders and citizens believe it is neither possible or desirable to brand cities. Cities, after all, are not commodities that are bought and sold in the marketplace. They are diverse communities of many different economic, religious, ethnic and cultural groups, inhabiting different neighborhoods, and may even be aggregations of distinct communities that were amalgamated, forcibly or otherwise, into a single political entity. How can a brand ever hope to represent all of that?

We also did not expect to find all of our cities embracing community branding because we were aware of other surveys that had been done, specifically a survey in 2002-2003 by Mary Tschirhart, associate professor of public administration at the University of Syracuse, who had looked at the branding practices of 99 U.S. cities.<sup>1</sup> Her study showed that 41% of cities presented a strong city brand on their website. The remainder demonstrated either little or no branding (10%), or a eclectic mix of central city branding with individual program and service branding.

### Logo / No Logo

How prevalent is the embrace of branding by Canadian cities? Our 2005 study found that 81% of city websites surveyed had a distinct municipal logo. The remaining 19% had no distinctive logo. Most of these non-branded cities used their "city crest" to represent the community.

Our survey also looked at what kind of logo solution cities were using. We determined five categories, using the system proposed by Alina Wheeler.<sup>2</sup> Those categories were: typographic logos, either letterforms or wordmarks; symbol logos, either pictorial or abstract; and city crests. Among the Canadian cities that had brand logos, 37% were wordmarks while 63% were symbols.

*Figure 1: Typographic logos – Wordmarks and Letterforms*



*Figure 2: Symbol logos – Pictorial and Abstract*



### **Color Me Blue**

As part of our survey we also investigated the colors used in city logos. Going into this project, we suspected that the colors selected to represent these different communities would not be evenly spread across the color spectrum; rather we expected the color choice to be skewed. We were aware of an earlier survey published by Wired Magazine<sup>3</sup> that showed large corporations decisively favoring the color blue in their choice of a dominant logo color. We suspected the same might be true of city logos.

Our survey discovered that this was in fact true. Of the 37 cities we examined, 59% used blue as their primary logo color. The next highest group was green at 11%, followed by red and black, at 8% each.

### **Branding slogans**

Our review was not confined solely to city logos. We also looked at city branding slogans to see how cities were positioning themselves.

Here, the results were less decisive. Just 51% of the cities surveyed had a brand positioning tagline or slogan. For those that used a tagline, we investigated what type of positioning statement they used. Once again, we followed the system proposed by Wheeler<sup>4</sup>, dividing taglines into five categories:

- imperative – commands attention and usually starts with a verb
- descriptive – describes the service, product or brand promise
- superlative – positions the organization as best in class
- provocative – thought provoking, frequently a question
- specific – establishes leadership of a category

The top form of slogan was descriptive at 37%, followed by imperative 26%.

Descriptive slogans are the easiest to formulate and are generally non-controversial, as in *Charlottetown – The Birthplace of Confederation*; *London – The Forest City*; and, *Victoria – The City of Gardens*.

Imperative slogans, the second most popular, generally take a bold stance, as in *Guelph – Grow Your Future Here*; or *Winnipeg – Embrace the Spirit*.

Superlative slogans are hard to come by since it really is difficult to excel over all other cities. Still, 10% of cities with positioning slogans used the superlative: *Markham – Canada’s High-Tech Capital*; and, *Waterloo – Life at it’s Best!*

Specific slogans are sometimes hard to distinguish from descriptive taglines, but generally they will tell you what the city does, rather than what it might be famous for. The town of Yellowknife, the northern-most city in our survey, proudly proclaims that it is the *Diamond Capital of North America*.

Provocative slogans, when done right, are hard to beat because they invite the reader to think twice about what they might mean. The hands-down winner in our survey had to be *Thunder Bay, Ontario – Superior by Nature*. Sheer poetry.

Figure 3: Logos with positioning taglines



### Online branding support

Websites have become one of the most important brand touchpoints for any organization. The web is the first place most people go to find out about your organization, and that includes its visual brand. There are many stakeholders who need information about a city’s brand, including municipal partner organizations – hospitals, educational institutions, community groups and others – who may be promoting events and campaigns that are sponsored by the city and need to use the city logo, and even city employees themselves, who need to apply the brand to informal communications they produce in their own departments. The city website can be a great place to provide brand support resources.

Notwithstanding, only 14% of city websites provide lots of brand support online, while a similar number provide some support. Fully 73% of city websites that we surveyed chose not to provide any support at all.

## Conclusion

While it is clear that not all municipalities see a need for civic branding, a very substantial majority of the Canadian cities we surveyed did. Indeed, although we have not done enough formal research to confirm this, it would appear that Canadian cities are well ahead of their U.S. counterparts in their embrace of branding tactics.

While most large Canadian cities have embraced branding, some, like the City of Calgary, demonstrate no branding at all or use their city crest as the branding element on their website. St. John's, the provincial capital of Newfoundland, likewise uses its city crest as the brand.

## Project Participants

Thanks to the students of the University of Western Ontario public relations diploma course for their diligent research, which made this survey possible. They include: Shonagh Simpson, Shawna Buchanan, Matthew Harnett, Andrea Simon, Jenny Weber, Jane Collins, Leanne Behrns, Mary Jansenberger, Julia Michienzi, James McDermott, Derek Johnstone, Jessica Wilkes, Katie Schmeer, Isabelle Duerden, Terence Fan, Suzie Kim, Gail Manlucu, and Stasa Veroukis.

## Footnotes:

1. Mary Tschirhart, Identity Management and the Branding of Cities, paper presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> Public Management Research Conference at Georgetown University, 2003, downloaded from [www.pmrnet.org](http://www.pmrnet.org)
2. Alina Wheeler, Designing Brand Identity, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2003
3. Wired Magazine, June 2003, p. 157
4. Alina Wheeler, *ibid*