

IT PAYS TO INVEST IN YOUR CIVIC BRAND



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As the world has grown smaller, the civic environment has become more competitive, making it essential for cities to create a unique civic brand to drive economic development. But the strongest elements of civic branding are often overlooked in favor of logos and taglines. While a city's logo is a visual part of its brand, it does not eliminate the negative or significantly enhance the positive concepts of the area. A civic brand is intended to move an audience from one place to another—giving business owners, visitors, and homebuyers a reason to take action.

When establishing a civic brand, city leaders take responsibility for their own identity, and give others a reason to share their passion. During the last decade, many cities throughout Texas have developed a strong civic brand,

resulting in unique lessons that all cities can benefit from.

Elements of Successful Brand Management

Even if your city is well established, a sound brand strategy should be at the core of how tourism and economic development function within the area. The City of Georgetown—a Main Street community north of Austin—experienced vast growth over the past 50 years due in part to the expansion of the Austin metropolitan area. While the catalyst for the city's growth may have been outside of their city limits, Georgetown developed the right strategy for their civic brand. By managing the community development as part of their pro-growth image, Georgetown was able to maintain the beautiful and historic nature of their downtown square while encouraging developers and businesses to establish

Georgetown as their home. As a result of their brand strategy, *Fortune Small Business Magazine* named the City of Georgetown the second best city in the nation to “live and launch” a new business in 2008.

While residential and community development may not be part of every city's brand strategy, economic development is often at the heart of marketing agendas. Giving businesses a reason to relocate to your city can result in significant benefits for the local economy. Texas A&M University is one of the most recognized brands in the State of Texas. Many businesses find that associating themselves with the Aggie brand is a surefire means of success. Through their strategic alliance with the University, the Cities of College Station and Bryan have been able to tailor their tourism and marketing platforms around the strength of the University's brand, and leverage that strength to increase awareness of their

brands. In this capacity, Texas A&M University acts as an "anchor tenant" for the area, and cities build their brand around that presence.

Brand Elements and Adaptations

Not every city is in need of a new civic brand or a brand revision. Many cities have found themselves benefactors of regional development(s) and have been able to capitalize on these resources. In 2000, the City of Pearland had a population of less than 40,000 and was a growing, dynamic city with a strong brand identity. Strategically located less than 20 miles from the Texas Medical Center, the city became an ideal place for people to live. In 2005, with the opening of the Medical Center's South campus facilities, the population in Pearland began to rise. By 2010, the city had experienced a growth rate of 142% and was ranked the 15th fastest growing city in the United States. With proper planning, the city was able to maintain their brand ideals throughout this significant growth curve, and have continued to shape their brand strategy to nurture the changing landscape. Pearland continues to be viewed as one of the most desirable cities in the Houston area, and their brand strategies have supported that success.



Developing Your Civic Brand

It is always easier to study a successful civic brand and understand how it works than it is to develop the path that will lead you there. When developing your civic brand and the associated brand strategies, keep these ideas in mind:

Invest in Your City – A civic brand must be built over time.

Sell Your City – Look at your city as a product that must be sold, and your civic brand as the sales pitch. Set up your strategy, put the ball in motion, and consistently work on it.

Define Your Branding Goals – With identifiable goals and metrics, your city's brand will see true success. Stay focused on your branding goal to achieve it.

Build in the Essentials – When successfully implemented, your civic brand strategy will inspire people to pay attention to your city. However, once they have arrived, what will they find? Your visitors' first impressions are created by your civic environment. Make it easy for tourists and residents to find your city's destinations and attractions through a wayfinding system. Additionally, features such as public art, manicured streets, exterior furniture, and easily accessible parking, give visitors the tools and aesthetics to explore everything your city has to offer.

Avoid Cost Paralysis – Make the financial investment in your civic brand. It's critical to your city's growth and development, and many brand elements can be dovetailed in to existing budget initiatives. Consider it an investment in your city's future. ★

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