

Paris, New York, Hong Kong... Abu Dhabi What brand for a city?

Territorial branding or how to use the power of brands to market a city.

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Branding, the new marketing way. Why?

The financiers are the near hereditary enemies of the marketers- deemed to be big spenders. However, paradoxically, they enabled branding to be re-discovered about twenty years ago, first in the United States and then throughout the rest of the world.

Because they realised that when a product or a service is associated with a brand, consumers were willing to pay more.

It is the marketing of the brand (branding) which is at the origin of the concept of value creation, with the development of the virtuous circle: the brand creates a difference.

This difference will generate a preference: and if something is preferred, one is willing to pay a little bit more... or a lot more for it. There is no shortage of examples, from Mercedes to BMW, Apple, Four seasons.... It also includes luxury brands, or simply brands from the food processing industry such as Danone or Nestle, replacing local produce everywhere.

Thus, a new branch of marketing was born with the phenomenon of segmentation; that of value marketing. It very rapidly became synonymous with strategic marketing.

From now on, the aim is to win the battle of minds in order to win the battle of markets.

Success goes hand in hand with a 'preferred brand' in any area...

Because above all, luke-warm brands or copies, must be avoided. The brand must be 'the most desirable', or the product will only remain a product and, progressively become a commodity of ever decreasing value to the consumer, generating ever decreasing value for the company.

How to build a strong brand?

A strong brand relies on 4 elements:

- *The transactional element, i.e. the successful cost-to-price ratio.*
- *The relational element, i.e. the way the brand manages its relationship with its consumers.*
- *The inspirational element, i.e. the ideas and values conveyed by the brand.*
- *The identity-related element, i.e. the tribe, the family, the club the consumer belongs to by consuming products of this brand.*

In other words, a brand speaks to the wallet, to the individual, and to society. By achieving this, it is possible to build a strong brand, and send to the consumer signs of recognition and identity.

And now, territorial branding :

Nowadays, as is true for brands, the cities, regions and countries are engaged in a fierce competitive battle:

- *To attract industries*
- *To attract tourists*
- *To attract as residents the influential leaders, who will build the reputation of the city.*

This is because the success of a location depends on the very same 4 elements that a strong brand is built upon, i.e.:

- *The transactional element: in the number of streets, schools, hospitals, green spaces, economical infrastructure encouraging business...*
- *The relational element: in the safety, the relationships between individuals and their fluidity, in the way the individual relates to the location, and how the location relates to him or her.*
- *The inspirational aspect: is the location the most renowned?- or the best in the world for: earning more money, developing culture, spirituality, pleasure, beauty, calmness, or reputation....?*
- *The identity-related aspect: what is a resident of the location called, how is he/ she perceived, and what makes him/ her different from a resident of a neighbouring location? Is a Hollywood resident perceived in the same way as a resident of Algiers or Lyon?*

The identity of the inhabitant, the visitor or the investor will come from this "marketing mix". It is this very identity that one must track down and develop, generally through controlled paradoxes. It is by the use of controlled paradoxes that the reputations of cities are built, as are the reputations of brands.

Louis Vitton is the craftsman yet at the same time, the great world-wide brand. In the same way;

- *Mercedes combines security and beauty*
- *New York is the heart of America yet the least American city*
- *Paris is the city of old monuments, but also the city of pretty girls and fashion*
- *Hong Kong combines communist China with the most expansive capitalism*
- *London is the most contemporary city of finance, whilst being home to the strongest traditions.*

Abu Dhabi, a strong territorial brand?

Venice was a forerunner during the Renaissance: a very small area, but a very big reputation as a merchant city, as the location for international exchanges related to science, culture and good living.

This very small city became the centre of the world and the Doge was the most powerful person of his time. Venice means Marco Polo, Galilee and Copernic. Venice, following Antonello da Messina, naturally became the land of painters and architects.

The Doge's money enabled the best minds of the Renaissance to settle in Venice, thus enhancing further the city's shine. Because the alchemy of success is always the same: financial means, cultural exchanges, and well being...

Abu Dhabi has had a good start, combining the Louvre, the Sorbonne, together with the best English Colleges and the most daring architectural achievements.

But the following will need to be addressed without delay:

- *To define and communicate this difference*
- *To qualify the inhabitants in order to create a real identity, which must go beyond the current amalgamation of all middle-eastern countries, as perceived by the rest of the world*
- *To explain why this process is intentional, specific and opening doors*
- *And it will be necessary to name it, as what has no specific name does not exist: Abu Dhabi must give to its approach a name that conveys its strategy.*
- *Finally, it will be required to show proof: to give evidence of this will, evidence in human, relational, and identity-related terms. Why not the world-wide forum of knowledge, where all great minds, all Nobel prizes in all areas would deliver to the world the vision of the future, and would allow the transition from a world trying to find itself to a world having discovered itself?*

We were talking about Venice, the magnificent.... How are you, and how are we going to define Abu Dhabi?

Could the road to wisdom and knowledge that our contemporaries are seeking so intently go through Abu Dhabi? It would be a formidable gift to the world and as a result, the making of the ultimate brand, the most beautiful and the most generous. Perhaps handing out a light to a world that has become short sighted?