

COMMUNITY BRAND: Get Results

Thanks to the Coca-Colas and Nikes of the world, we all know what a product brand is, but for a municipality or region, just the idea of creating a product brand that captures the complexity of a community can put therapists on the municipal payroll. The irony is that creating the municipal equivalent of "Nike - Just Do It" or "Coke - Happiness Is" is more critical to community prosperity than ever before.

The Statue of Liberty is an alluring metaphor for communities; we are something for everyone...just arrive. It just about encapsulates the history of community governance. Fair enough, because it reflects the emotive pull of democracy itself—a system that maintains perspective on all, not some. However, in today's world of connectivity, globalization, international tourism, and a rising tide of knowledge workforce, "customers" choose communities to live in or visit. Locational choices aren't forced, and choices are global.

Statue of Liberty make way for the Statue of Originality. The more different you are - the more you stand out from the crowd in a noisy marketplace - the greater your odds of attracting investment, new residents, and/or visitors. Your effort is not just about marketing. Your Product – from recreation amenity to innovative initiative – has to be excellent, different, and even inspiring because the market talks about inspired not average. Quality of place – from planning policy to choice of streetlights – becomes central to locational decision making. Bold, confident leadership is required to put vision and action together in pursuit of "daring to be different"; not merely playing catch up with, or copying what other communities do.

In a world of choice not everyone will like your community enough to do what you want them to do – visit, invest, or locate. You need to get over that to move to the point where you consider that you are "something for someone," with a value proposition that appeals directly to that group of people. When a community recognizes the new world of choice we live in, and gets over its own sense of high and mighty, it is liberated to be an excellent specialist rather than a poor generalist. You also can't do everything on the product side; funds and capacity are limited. So you put some eggs in a basket, exploiting unique strengths, and pursuing 3-5 really refreshing initiatives that are strategic and create something worth talking about.

So what does it all mean for our community pathway? In the Statue of Liberty scenario you water down your product to simple basic services provider and your message to irrelevance with a boring "we've got stuff come see things" position in the market. In the Statue of Originality scenario you push the envelope with the message and speak to market segments. If you are exceptional, your stand-out "talk" is linked to an ambitious "walk" with a community development agenda working to put your community on the map vs. serving as just another one of those yawning dots on a map. Product development and marketing initiatives become return on investment-driven...seeking those you need to make your vision happen. You still care about everyone, but small set of core, compelling initiatives cares about spending tax dollars wisely to serve as a key mechanism to build an aspirational community.

Competition is fierce and people have increasing freedom to make choices. The choice is yours as to how ambitiously your community responds to the challenge.

Rynic has a 15-year history of building breakthrough strategic community brands that get results. Highlights: Castlegar, Chestermere, Elkford, Flagstaff County (region), Fort Frances, Lacombe, Lillooet, Medicine Hat, Parkland County, Radium Hot Springs, Strathcona County, Turner Valley, and Wainwright.

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