
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER REPORT

TO: Ken Watson, City Manager
FROM: Pat Deakin, Economic Development Manager
COPIES TO: Mayor and Council
DATE: For April 13, 2015

SUBJECT: RE-BRANDING OF THE COMMUNITY

Issue:

The proposal to re-brand the community has met with a great deal of reaction and some confusion. This is an information report to clarify some of the concerns and lay out the process.

Background:

In February's budget presentation for the Economic Development function, Council was advised that part of this year's work plan included a re-branding of the community. The notes to that part of the presentation argued the current branding of 'Bear Tracks and Lumberjacks' had failed and there were so many contenders for a new tag line that would capture our brand that we came across as having multiple personalities. The limited discussion at that Council budget meeting was very supportive.

The Business Dictionary defines branding as "the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly through advertising campaigns".

The BC Wood consultant who worked with the McLean Mill to brand their custom cuts summarizes a brand as "a collection of perceptions about a product or service in the minds of customers, clients and consumers. It is the sum of all experiences, good & bad, shaped by messaging, personal interaction, product quality, support & service at all points of contact".

In either of these definitions, the word 'community' can be used in place of the word 'product' or 'service' to give one a sense of what a community's brand is about.

In the aforementioned budget presentation I also acknowledged we do not have to re-brand to 'Get the Word Out'. We have been 'selling' the many attributes and the few 'market-ready' attractions we have for years. However if the brand is, as some have argued, simply our name, 'Port Alberni', then there are many negative image issues we have to overcome that are attached to it. A 'tag line' can assist in defining a community and we have used several in the past: the Salmon Capital, the Ultimate Fishing Town, S'Port Alberni, the Gateway to the West Coast; the Heart of the West Coast, and Vancouver Island's Most Affordable Community to name a few. However we will do better at attracting visitors, residents and entrepreneurs if we are not "all over the map" or 'all things to all people'.

Discussion:

In the last two weeks, two proposed brands or tag lines have been given media attention: 'The Place Where the Island Smiles', and 'The Heart of Vancouver Island'. This has prompted a buzz in the community including dozens of emails and phone calls to the Economic Development office, a vigorous online debate, letters to the editor and blog entries. The comments have run the full gamut:

- "it's about time we had a new brand";
- "what's wrong with the old one?";
- "you don't need to waste money on branding to sell the place";
- "I vote for the Place Where the Island Smiles";
- "adopt the Heart of Vancouver Island because it has proven itself";
- "I don't know what it should be but I don't like either of what I've read about";
- "here's my proposal for our brand _____";
- "have you thought about using this _____?".

I propose to take advantage of the current keen interest in re-branding by:

1. Recruiting a small group of people to guide the re-branding exercise
2. Educating ourselves (the entire community) about what a brand is and its value
3. Initiating a survey/contest and working our way through the re-branding exercise
4. Checking in with subject matter experts at a couple of points along the way

I believe this process will engage the community, define ourselves, and ultimately serve to attract new visitors, residents and entrepreneurs. The group chosen to guide the process will be people who have no initial attachment to a brand or tag line being proposed and will be in the younger demographic we are looking to attract. I have asked Mayor Ruttan that Councillor Minions be Council's liaison to the group as she fits the aforementioned criteria and has been most vocal about the need for re-branding.

Any costs associated with the work will be covered by funds previously granted to us from the provincial government. These will be matched with ICET Economic Development Readiness Funds. In other words it will be done without increasing taxes and without taking away any of the budget currently allocated to economic development.

One final note: the tagline we are searching for is something like the 8th or 9th step in a 13 step community branding exercise recommended by Roger Brooks, one of North America's foremost experts on this topic. If we decide to take a simpler, faster approach we could ask for permission to revise the 6-page Brand Discovery questionnaire and an associated process the BC Wood consultant used for the McLean Mill before arriving at a branding and tag line.

A bit of history and a few comments about "The Heart of Vancouver Island" are appended here for information.



Pat Deakin, Economic Development Manager

- The Worst Place to Live Facebook page was created in response to the March 2014 media 'storm' that took our ranking at the bottom of the 200 Best Places to Live in Canada and turned it into the Worst Place to Live. That page was designed, as a 'bit of a lark', by Ben West, the owner of a couple of social media companies in Vancouver, who has family ties to the Alberni Valley. He thought only a few of his friends and family would enjoy it and did not expect it to capture the community's imagination.
- Ben was getting swamped by requests for permission to 'post' to the page, in response he ran a competition to identify a person in the Alberni Valley who would assist him in managing the page. In the end he couldn't choose between two candidates, Tashia Potter and Kama Callicum, so he paid both of their tuitions at a University of British Columbia six-week social media course. Then he offered to help them begin to develop a social media company here by finding them a Vancouver client. Tashia accepted the offer and incorporated 'Great Central, a social company'. Kama assists with the company's work but has remained primarily focused on her education career.
- In May of 2014 and again in June I asked Ben to create a more positive, outward looking Facebook page. Essentially it was an opportunistic move on my part. I saw that his Facebook page had gained a considerable following and I wanted to take advantage of that. I saw there was a low or no risk way of spending dollars to market the community through his efforts given what he had already achieved.
- After some consideration, he agreed and chose the new tag line or branding 'The Heart of Vancouver Island'. I rationalized it on the basis of our reputation as 'the community with a heart', the fact that we have pumped out hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of resources over many decades, and our geographical location on the Island. However I also advised him that I was proposing to do a re-branding of the community in 2015 and while The Heart of Vancouver Island might be put forward as an option, it would not be guaranteed.
- Ben did not charge for the creation of the new page, the domain names he secured, the drone he bought to do video for the page, nor the mentoring he has done. After a discussion with me, he chose Great Central to manage The Heart of Vancouver Island. The Facebook page was launched on July 1st, 2014.
- I have, in effect, bought advertising on a month to month basis from the company since. It is one of dozens of advertising buys I do each year. At my request Great Central has since added 'Instagram' and 'Pinterest' to The Heart of Vancouver Island social media suite. Recently I asked them to add a website because the other media forms are somewhat more transient. The range in the monthly amounts being paid (\$1,200 to \$1,800) comes about when some posts are 'boosted' with additional dollars paid to Facebook to get the message to our particular target audience.
- Those decisions and the monthly amounts involved are within my mandate and approved budget and my spending limits as a manager. These expenditures were discussed with City Manager Ken Watson prior to commencing the purchases. In several of my monthly reports since then I have advised Council that we continue to

use the various forms of the Heart of Vancouver Island to get a positive message out.

- It has had the kind of success I had hoped for. In March of this year alone, approximately 170,000 people were 'reached'. The number of people reached (those who have seen the page or the post) averaged out to 43,950 per week. Approximately 14,000 people were actively engaged (have liked, commented on or shared posts) in March; the average was 3,514 per week.
- Based on Great Central's monthly reports I know what age groups, in what cities, have seen what posts. This helps us refine our message to our target market which is the 18 – 44 year old demographic (chosen because we need to attract young families and young entrepreneurs). The monthly reports give me better and faster feedback on what we are promoting than any of our traditional forms of advertising or marketing including those with a 'call to action'.