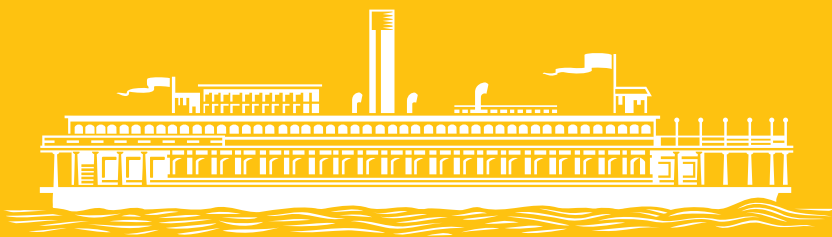


A country brand is
more than just a logo
by Antonio Marazza



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A country brand is more than just a logo

Eight golden rules for branding a destination

2

Country Branding
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In destination branding, places are treated as brands. The destination brand's purpose is to attract and win over customers from around the world. The market for destination brands is global, chaotic and competitive.

Destination branding combines visual communication and marketing techniques to promote a destination. As in the branding of commercial goods and services, specific rules govern the positioning of the brand, the way its reputation is built, how customer preferences are addressed and loyalty is achieved, and how the brand is managed.

Countries, regions, cities, localities and huge real estate development projects are currently being turned into branded products, with the planet serving as a global display case. As destinations make themselves known, they are tried, tested, discussed, recommended or rejected, just like other marketed brands.

While it is possible to brand regions, cities, events and real estate developments, destination branding is most appropriate for countries. The more important the destination is, the more complex the branding process. When branding a country, structural, cultural, social and political aspects interfere with goods and services marketing techniques and visual communications.

Countries are complex products

It is very difficult to modify a country so that it meets target needs unless there are serious interventions in the country's infrastructure. One cannot add a chain of mountains or alter a country's weather, for example. Building a new airport or highway is much more difficult than changing a flavor or package.

Countries are multifaceted, intangible products. They can be extremely difficult to define. Is a country simply the land outlined by its borders? Or is it a cultural, historical or linguistic entity? Or is it the products, people, images, and stereotypes associated with it?



Hong Kong
City brand created by Landor

While few consumer product brands can evoke immediate recognition anywhere on the planet, many country brands can. Besides the complexity of the destination, one must also consider the extensive, diverse and global characteristics of the target. Countries can be segmented by customer and purpose, whether the purpose is to increase tourism, attract investors, or promote commercial and cultural exchanges.

Political and social implications

A country's vision, mission or positioning must match its national political proposition. Developing and launching a destination brand therefore requires a long-term effort. There must be a broad and universal consensus on the desired outcome that is not limited by political affiliation.

Destination branding should involve every sector of the country's political and civil society. The government and its opposition, official bodies, and local communities are all stakeholders. Not to be excluded, however, are private associations, opinion makers, the media, and private citizens. Although the goal of destination branding is often

to promote a country abroad, there are also significant opportunities to infuse a genuinely positive emotional engagement within national borders.

A complex practice

Destination branding helps ensure that whenever there is an opportunity for a country to express itself, the key messages and tone of voice come across with strength and consistency. Destination branding creates instant identification and critical mass for the brand.

Reducing a destination's identity to a logo cannot achieve that goal. Even the most brilliant logo is powerless if it is not backed up by a comprehensive visual system. The colors, typography, formats, supporting graphics and materials or sounds in the visual system must also be managed by a set of rules to ensure consistency. Just creating a logo is a simplistic way to avoid proper branding.

Destination branding projects are often hampered by low budgets and a lack of dedicated, professional staff. Normally there is no single brand



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01-02 Landor has created brands for the Olympic games three times

03 Landor created the brand for Burj Dubai

guardian. Officials from embassies, regional offices, public law bodies, promotional organizations, and private associations—not to mention agencies and consultancies around the world, may all be guardians of the brand. The visual identity of a country, unlike that of a commercial brand, therefore tends to be defined by a diverse array of interdependent stakeholders.

Some people may try to use the destination brand to satisfy their self interest, thereby placing the brand's integrity at risk. There should be guidelines and an approval process for these individuals to follow, but complete control of the brand cannot be guaranteed. Branding a country requires hard work and a commitment to the greater good of the nation's interest on the part of every stakeholder who communicates the country brand.

Building strong destination brands

Over the last 15 years Landor Associates has successfully applied the philosophy of its founder Walter Landor to destination branding. His approach was to balance strategic drive with creativity, thereby increasing brand value and achieving a competitive advantage for clients.

Our work in destination branding began with the Seville Expo in 1992. Its most recent project involved launching a new promotional brand for Italy (2007). Landor has created city brands for Hong Kong, Madrid, Cincinnati, and Baltimore; state brands for Jordan and Florida; and three brand editions for the Olympic Games: Atlanta (USA) in 1996, the Winter Games of Nagano (Japan) in 1998, and Salt Lake City (USA) in 2002. Current projects include developing brands for Burj al Dubai—the tallest tower in the world, and other development projects.

Eight golden rules

Based on Landor's many years of experience, we have identified the following guidelines for branding a country.

1. Focusing on the brand is the best way to promote all aspects of a destination, especially in the context of global competitiveness.
2. Differentiation is key in highly competitive situations. What makes a destination unique, special and relevant must be expressed in a short, clear and relevant proposition.
3. All manifestations of the destination brand should be coordinated. The brand's unique and relevant proposition must be central to and mandatory in all brand expressions, and must be the basis for all key messages and every manifestation of the brand.
4. Stereotypes are what people already know about a destination. To raise curiosity and interest, avoid clichés and focus on the destination's uniqueness.
5. Ensure that the destination brand's identity and any related promotional activities do not lead to offensive or misleading interpretations by any country, religion, or culture. Make sure this rule is satisfied by testing it upfront.
6. Simplicity and flexibility enhance the destination brand's impact. The logo must work even when it is dramatically reduced in size or paired with other logos that are potentially uncomplimentary or that may clash with it. Its look and feel should be recognizable but should not cannibalize other graphics.

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Landor has developed brands for
01 The city of Cincinnati USA
02 The country Jordan
03 The city of Al Ain, UAE

7. The brand's logo and identity should conform to a set of rules. These rules must be easy to use and should be adaptable to unpredictable circumstances.

8. Building a destination brand is an ongoing process. It requires feedback from and an open attitude among all stakeholders and partners.

For our clients, Landor offers the following recommendations:

1. Don't confuse destination branding with a beauty contest. Destination branding will raise your country's popularity. An attractive logo usually will not.

2. Don't settle for just a logo, commit to a complete branding program that includes the guidelines necessary to deploy it.

3. Provide your agency with a comprehensive briefing that is based on market research. The briefing should clearly outline your communications and marketing goals, as well as the scope of work.

4. Make sure opinion makers and influential communities are in agreement before the project launches. Encourage collaboration between all major stakeholders—public and private.

5. Plan for communications launches. Prepare for the day after. Maintain momentum.

6. Engage and reconnect the country's citizens around the destination brand's vision.

7. Don't let the brand become corrupted. Name a steering committee to license the brand and monitor its use and applications. Assign to one skilled and professional partner creative leadership of brand deployment. ■

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