

Capstone Project | University of Tennessee | Center for Industrial Services
Certified Economic Developer

Establishing a Marketable Identity for the City of Lebanon

Marketing a city

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Topic:

Establishing a brand and identity for the City of Lebanon as it is undergoing major growth and struggles with the complexity of growing pains and the differing views of its future by various generations.

Introduction:

Marketing typically is the fun portion of a business strategy that most people enjoy. It often provides an opportunity to be creative and explore options of messaging along with images that resonate with others in an attempt to create brand loyalty. When it comes to economic development and marketing, it can be rather overwhelming to establish a brand for a city that speaks to the existing community and to outsiders that are potentially new businesses scouting the area.

This capstone report will look at the challenges associated with establishing a brand and commonly accepted identity for the City of Lebanon. It will speak to the use of both visual and verbal branding, while the community is struggling with regional growth challenges and cultural crossroads with a rapidly increasing population of new people moving into the city limits. It will also identify what that process looks like in a city that is essentially at a crossroads with its identity.

History and Background:

Lebanon, TN, the county seat, is a “community of opportunity.” It is a city with open arms and an enviable list of resources to help newcomers build their dreams. On Nov. 23, 1819, the City of Lebanon was officially incorporated. Lebanon, has maintained its rich heritage through historic preservation and yet has a progressive flair that is primed for growth through the city’s effort to move forward with continuously expanding infrastructure. Lebanon remains accessible, affordable, and primed for growth. ¹⁷

Lebanon is known for its historic Public Square, formed in 1802 over the Town Spring. Since its founding, the Public Square has been a center of commerce and community for Wilson County

and the city of Lebanon. The Square has been shaped by several fires which destroyed whole blocks of the original buildings. Most of the structures today date from the late 1880's to the 1930's. Lebanon's Square has hosted speeches and political events staged by luminaries such as William Jennings Bryan, Frank G. Clement, and Sam Houston. It's been the site of military parades with General Patton and his Second Armored Division during the WWII maneuvers headquartered at Cumberland University. First Monday Mule Day sales were a monthly event on the Square until 1939. Four county courthouses have called the Square home including the third version designed in 1848 by William Strickland, architect of the Tennessee State Capitol building. And perhaps, most importantly, from the days of its earliest stores and the Square has been the home of numerous businesses. ¹⁷

In 1803, a quarter century before being elected President, Andrew Jackson owned a store on the Public Square. Lebanon's Square was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic Commercial District in 1999. In the fall of 2013, Lebanon was accepted into the Tennessee Main Street Program. Today's Square is a vibrant spot for shopping, entertainment, and heritage tourism. ¹⁷

Located on Interstate 40, Lebanon sits just east of Nashville, Tennessee, whose metropolitan area was recently named "hottest city" for business expansion and relocation by Expansion Management Magazine. Lebanon is located only minutes from the Nashville International Airport, downtown Nashville, and the Grand Ole Opry. Lebanon is close to the heart of Music City, and several country music stars and songwriters call Lebanon home. Lebanon's strategic location is unrivaled. Its central location is also within one-day trucking distance to 75% of the United States' markets. It sits at the heart of the Nashville, Tennessee transportation service area. Lebanon offers direct east and west service through Interstate 40, which connects Memphis to the west and Knoxville to the east. Five existing interchanges provide access to Interstate 40. State Route 840 connects I-40 to I-24, I-65 and I-40. Lebanon is within 650 miles of 50% of the United States' population. The City is also served by rail and its own thriving executive airport.

Lebanon thrives with its railway access and three Music City Star Stations that provide commuter service to and from Nashville. The Nashville and Eastern Railroad Authority also provides rail service for industrial customers throughout the City of Lebanon. The Lebanon Municipal Airport is an asset to many businesses in the community, as it provides accessibility for product deliveries and executive transportation. The Lebanon Municipal Airport serves as the largest welcome center to the city. These all play into the attributes that can and should be considered with branding a city and need to be looked at further while going through the discovery process for an identity.

Branding, brand loyalty, and strategic marketing is valued in the private sector and is recognized as critical for success with strategic planning, sales, customer service, and strategic initiatives in business. It has been drastically overlooked within local municipalities, however, with organizations such as, State Department of Economic Development, Joint Economic and Community Development Boards, and local internal departments of economic developments there is an opportunity for cities to establish a brand to help with creating a voice for a great place. The City of Lebanon is seeking new opportunities for growth. Part of seeking new opportunities is being able to communicate the difference between Lebanon and Lebanon's peer cities with marketing methodology. Marketing the city is essential to economic development and should encompass community pride, and connecting people who want to work, live, play and invest in Lebanon.

A major role in the City of Lebanon strategic planning process is establishing an identity for the city that highlights the unique attributes of the city. ¹How does one market a city if the city itself is lacking a positive and marketable identity and going through transitional years with the explosive growth of the regional market. Research today suggests that with strategic marketing one must understand who is the audience is and what are the consumer behaviors and attributes associated with the targeted audience. A strategic marketing plan in today's world anticipates the targeted audience's reactions, emotions, and behavior associated with the overall brand messaging and images. With Lebanon having such a rich history and being so close to Nashville the amount of "not from around here" people is increasing every day. This influx of

people has brought the city to a crossroads where a lack of commonly understood identity exists among the ever-changing populace that has moved into the small town.

As the world has evolved, so has economic development. Yes, jobs, workforce and infrastructure are still prominent factors to sustainability needs with economic development, but placemaking and the idea of livability has also grown. This is where the branding and the identity comes together with the actual idea of how a city functions with planning departments, public works departments and public safety. Marketing of place comes when the natural attributes of the city and what is best for the city with growth, can tie into an emotion that is evoked through images and ultimately draw people to the area. The emotional connection that people have not only to each other but to a community can be extremely strong. In this fast-paced digital world, human nature still ties us together and brings about a need to connect and feel a sense of belonging.² The emotional connection to a community is still deeply rooted in our American culture and must be considered during brand discovery and establishing the identity and branding of a city. When companies take this psychological approach to behavior with the modern consumer into the private world – companies are looking at creating an emotional tie with a consumer and a product. This is accomplished by connecting images and emotions.

Take the brand “Coke” as an example and observe a unique branding and customer loyalty. When in a restaurant and a consumer orders a “Coke”, but the waitress kindly replies, “is Pepsi ok?” the response typically is a message that there is a displeasure from the consumer. Pepsi’s marketing approach is less emotional and more focused on product placement with promotion. Pepsi sponsors the great American Football Super Bowl halftime show! It usually is a spectacle with fire and lights and what one would call a big show. Coke however, is using an emotional connection with their marketing and provides commercials that speak to the heart and usually touch the human condition. It would be difficult to argue that one is better than the other, but easy to suggest they are both different and created their own brand loyalty through different channels. Can a municipality create the same affect with emotions and so much so that this identity speaks to those who are familiar with the city and those who are not?

Looking at trends today and studying the market place, there is an overwhelming amount of the City of Lebanon's population, "baby boomers" aging out of the workforce and a "millennial generation", entering the workforce with "Generation Y" growing up in the ranks of the city's current workforce. One can see similarities within these groups of diverse people, but also more differences. A municipality is representing a city that would include a mix of these generations, plus more so. How does one market to them if there is such a wide variety? Understanding local behaviors, needs, wants, and desires is a great start. As Lebanon continues to study the demographics of the area and begin to define their current community, it is important to also look at the new comers joining the community. Plus, while looking at the demographics of the regional, national, and globally expanding companies, both small business and large business. When recruiting new business and industry to a town it is important to study the people in the leadership roles and the workforce of the organization. What are their behaviors? What are the amenities that speak to their company culture? What are the amenities that they are looking for and what speaks to the younger generations? As Lebanon begins the process and is starting to define an audience and see that it has a mix and more than one audience in the municipality's focus. Lebanon will have those who are existing members of the community that see the city in different eyes as well as people outside of the community that are looking at it as a potential new home. With marketing a brand, one must speak to both and in doing so one must truly represent who they are, but not only with an image that is compelling and exciting, but also with a brand that speaks to the community desires and relates to community behaviors.

With Lebanon sitting just east of Nashville, in fact just one county over from the "it city," Lebanon is seeing a direct impact in terms of growth and exposure. Nashville has over 100 people per day moving to the City proper. Nashville is a clear urban market that has been the recent focal point of the exploding real estate market with retail, multi-family housing, hospitality, and certainly tourism. The unprecedented growth in middle TN is on many levels and is continuing to grow at a record pace. Nashville has also tapped into the "creative class" and this brings new opportunities to the city of Lebanon, which do not necessarily fit into our traditional blue collar, manufacturing history. The opportunity to market Lebanon with regional partnerships should be maximized during this peak time of economic stability. With Lebanon

being so close in proximity to the City of Nashville and logistically being ideal with infrastructure to accommodate large corporations at a fraction of the cost compared to Nashville proper – being close to Nashville and regional partnerships need to be incorporated into the identity strategy.

How does this benefit Lebanon's growth? Lebanon is clearly benefiting from this growth at a rate that has outpaced its strategic planning, comprehensive planning, zoning, and marketing. A few examples of the benefits are:

- an increase in population through exposure,
- Lebanon's highest sales tax revenues each month are from construction and building material stores,
- available job opportunities for Lebanon residents, which increases disposable income and
- the hotel market has increased with four additional hotels in the past year.

The lack of effective marketing and intentional economic development is becoming clearer with each new development project that comes through the city's planning department because of the disconnect of who the city thinks they are and the types of new development projects coming. As property owners are asking to come into city limits the city is still asking itself if they want such development. How can a city market itself without a plan or an identity? In the middle of this growth and incredible momentum, how does a city create a recognizable identity? How does a city that has so much history and since its founding has embraced a culture of people that have only ever lived in Lebanon, but now is split amongst outsiders who, "aren't from around here," begin to identify itself, rebrand itself, or launch a branding strategy? This lack of clear identity or transitional phase is not a new phenomenon at all. There are cities across the United States that have already experienced what Lebanon is going through and there are still other cities that will experience this transition soon. It will probably continue and could arguably be considered that a community's identity should be somewhat agile as society and economies evolve.

The process to understand the identity is an important factor in creating a brand or establishing a unique identity that could be utilized for marketing. This idea of critically thinking about the

city's unique, natural attributes comes into play with not only planning, but alignment with the economic development strategic planning. ² And understanding the identity of a city is not just for famous cities, either, says José Torres, of Bloom Consulting: "There's something special about every city. City branding isn't about inventing something; it's about discovering what's already there." The key is to examine a city's characteristics and policies, and then align them to a single big idea, he says. Not everyone gets this right. "If a city's big idea is to brand itself as a party town, a law forcing bars to close early would contradict that. The resulting confusion weakens the overall brand." José Torres. ⁹

It is important to understand that branding is more than just a logo or a tagline; it is not a campaign and it's not advertising. But for cities, it is actions, not words, that really impact reputation. An effective city branding strategy brings all stakeholders together – from investors to officials to residents – at the beginning of the process. That way, they can define a common vision and then agree on a plan to reach it. "A city always speaks through the behavior of its stakeholders... Campaigns just focus on words and images. And that's why they fail, because they don't change the behavior," according to brand strategist Günter Soydanbay. In other words, there are no quick-fixes. ³

When a municipality is beginning to critically think about its identity and they are asking themselves "who are we?" or, in this case, "what is Lebanon?" it is extremely important to incorporate a wide range of opinions. They must involve the community and its key business stakeholders, as well as non-profit organizations within the city. ² A city must function under the idea that they represent everyone within the city, which includes all walks of life. Often some small-town functions on committees that are selected or appointed by local officials. The unfortunate down side to this equation is too often there a lack of diversity and too many like-minded individuals together at the table, to truly benefit from their time together and reach an objective or ultimate outcome. ⁴ According to a study by consulting firm k629, many cities around the world face an 86% failure rate in their attempts to rebrand themselves. Such campaigns can revitalize a city, and secure it a more prominent place on the map. Yet often, mayors find that their hopes were misplaced: the average branding campaign is just an

expensive attempt where at the end of the day the vision either represents a minority of the community, does not speak to outsiders, and lacks alignment with municipal zoning policies. From an economic development perspective, a great brand is certainly an asset. It can help a city to attract everything from tourists to investors to talent. It can help promote exports. It can boost residents' pride. A branding strategy and the identity of the city is not usually a quick fix, but a long-term investment that requires commitment from all sides.⁶

This begs the question if a municipality and its staff could do this on their own? Should they even try? When it comes to strategic planning with economic development it was suggested by Dr. Kolzow in Economic Development Strategic Planning Course at the University Tennessee Center for Industrial Services to bring in an outside consultant, facilitator, or moderator. In fact, consultants are highly used in the city with planning, engineering, and formatting public policy, why should it stop there? If economic development is going to adjust its overall focus and include "placemaking" and "livability" perhaps it makes sense to include a professional marketing company to develop a brand, branding strategy, and ongoing marketing campaign to get the city on the map. There is a strong need for department alignment within the municipality that leads to the idea of combining city planning, urbanism, and architecture to look at how spaces should be used. Then taking the best options, and together with economic development, using a proactive approach with strategic thinking. This alignment will not only help identify the unique attributes of the city, but help bring forth a successful marketing plan as well.

Malcolm Allan, of consulting firm PlaceMatters, suggests that successful rebranding requires marketing agencies and place makers to join forces with an alignment with strategic planning, visioning and goal setting, to create an overall strategy. "Marketing is useful in a long-term brand strategy, but it's not sufficient for place makers, town planners or marketers to handle the strategy on their own," he says. "A combined approach is needed, with a holistic view of the process." Like with any approach this needs to have proper expectations based on the size of the city and its relative perspective to regions and the global economy. Günter Soydanbay. argues "Not every city is New York, London, or Paris; nor should it try to be. Most

cities operate within their own 'ecosystems'. With this respect, every city does not need to build a truly global brand. 3

Looking at branding exercises on the corporate strategic level organizations will see there are many different answers to how this works and this can only be partially applied to the municipality. The most significant difference is the initial buy-in required by key stakeholders. "Place-Branding" within the general context of marketing a city is a growing trend in economic development. In the world of consumer goods, it is understood that a brand is the sum of all experiences related to the product and service. Meaning, brand perceptions are shaped by functional experiences like quality, reliability etc., as well as emotional experiences associated with the product. This is also true in marketing a city "place-branding": the place brand exists in the mind of the citizen and the general perception of the community. 7 When it comes to marketing, an organization can define their brand all they want to inside their corporate walls, but it's what the consumers and social media says about the brand that truly defines. This is where brand perception plays a vital role in your company, organization, and municipality. The City of Lebanon is challenged by the effort to pursue economic development and create a marketing strategy, and has a significant lack of brand and identity. With most cities, the brand and identity stems from the history associated with the city. This is where the complexity comes into play with Lebanon because of its rapid growth. The city needs much more than a logo, and needs to launch an inclusive brand development process. The defined goals for the branding process should include:

- Attract new citizens, business, investment, events, and stay competitive with other communities.
- Ability to define communities, rather than allow others to define the community.
- Clean up confusion and build consistency in marketing messaging.

The City of Lebanon has decided to look at creating a vision for the city and look at how this vision can align with strategic goals and planning for the city and in turn develop a marketing strategy. The goals articulate a new brand aimed at developing a dynamic way to promote the

city's unique identity to both the internal community whom the city serves, and the external community the city wished to attract. The overall goal is to enhance local economic development in the community with messaging that would support attraction of investment, talent, and tourism. To define an identity for the city of Lebanon, the lack of identity or missing elements of the brand and perception must be identified. The methodology to place-branding and marketing the City of Lebanon should include the following six elements: 6

1. **Create a stakeholder group** – It has been noted throughout the research process by several marketing, branding, and place-branding experts that it is imperative to the success of the objective to have stakeholder and community involvement throughout the entire process. Selecting stakeholders will allow for a variety of education, insights, and different perspectives. A stakeholder can be defined as someone or an organization that has a vested interest in the success of the City of Lebanon, or whose role is to support economic growth. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Chamber of Commerce Board Members,
 - b. tourism director,
 - c. Tennessee College of Applied Technology director,
 - d. Cumberland University representative, and,
 - e. business community executives and management that are involved in the community, including bankers.

It is also beneficial to have multiple stake holder groups, to ensure a diverse group of people. In the past Lebanon's stakeholder groups were appointed by the mayor and other local officials, which tends to bring together like-minded individuals and compromises the integrity of the process and the overall outcome. With the case study of the City of Regina, Canada – three stakeholder groups were formed. Main stakeholders: were the typical elected officials, and city and community organizations, downtown districts, warehouse districts and the city officials. The secondary stakeholder group included the business community including representatives from the largest employers in the area, and regional employers in key sectors of industry growth. The third stakeholder group included the youth. This is key to the City of Regina because

attracting and retaining young talent had become a challenge for the city and it's important to note that when looking at engaging the emerging workforce, it's important to include them. 7

2. **Establish communications auditing** – it is important to understand the City of Lebanon's current communication approach and this requires it to be audited internally or externally. After this is complete Lebanon can understand what the current branding and messaging is to the community and to the larger region. This will be done with research and quantifying the gaps in current communication system, as well as identifying the process of how our internal and external communication is distributed. Today the municipality's communication is not centralized, organized, and often not branded by the city because there is a lack of a standard. 7
3. **Research and surveying** will begin after a thorough and extensive communications audit. Ideally a place-branding team will be in play to develop research tools and questions. The analysis of the audit will move forward to establish survey questions. The survey component will be critical to this process. The questions will focus on understanding the perception of the municipality by the local community. At this point, the City of Lebanon will need to clearly define their audience: A. current community, residential and business, B. stakeholders and non-profits, and C. key external markets. This survey research should be executed in a mix process of telephone surveys, digital surveys, written surveys, focus groups, and workshops with internal audiences, as well as civic groups, chamber meetings, and property owners. 7
4. **Reviewing the data with analysis and establishing brand platform development** – after the research phase is complete from the key audiences it should be reviewed by an outside creative or communications agency. The data should be reviewed for relevant content, and consistent themes should be determined. Identifying the consistent themes will help the brand strategy move forward to define both the consistent positive themes that will highlight strengths of the city that a brand can be built on. It will also identify negative themes that the brand will need to address with positioning statements, as part of the marketing efforts. 7

5. **The creative development** will begin with the verbal and visual identity utilizing the research and data brand document. The brand identity will develop by using both visual and verbal identity. The creative of the visual identity shall consist of the images, colors, and artistic expression of the City of Lebanon's unique personality and reflection of its vibrant energy. The visual identity will bring together images that are also known as a logo to portray the overall messaging and feel of the city. The verbal identity will pull together words and phrases that have been established to reflect the essence of the verbal brand. The visual identity and the verbal identity of the City will project to a targeted audience its values, attributes and personality.⁷ This verbal identity is also referred to as a positioning statement and is going to be based on the research, perception, factual history, and aspirational feelings, and will assist in providing a vision for the City of Lebanon.
6. **Launching the brand** – this can be a release of creative energy and considered fun by playing with the brand and exploring new opportunities for the communication of the City. An internal launch with the community and key stakeholders should take place first and let it be embraced with the brand advocates that were established along the way since the community was involved with the process.⁷ There should also be external launches as the brand should be utilized to attract and recruit new business to the area as well as new investments.

During the research process of preparing this capstone there were several place-branding and imaging campaigns that were identified with themes such as; "Hello Lebanon" and "We are Lebanon." The recruitment opportunities are endless with the amount of creativity that can be put into the overall objective; however, the process is what is crucial for the small town. When considering the lack of marketable identity and moving towards working through the brand identity process, the regionalism and the outsider's perspective is just as important as the internal perspective. Including outsiders both regionally and with a professional branding agency must be part of the process with buy-in from the community and the internal city leaders. This should be from the beginning of the process, otherwise it will result with an image that no matter how beautiful and unique it will not reflect the potential of the opportunities the City of

Lebanon must offer. With the city going through the process of evolving from a small historic town to a city with a rapid increasing population and focusing on economic development, it has been identified that the alignment of departments is interdependent in the city's ecosystem if strategic planning will play a part in continued growth.

Establishing the brand and identity of the City of Lebanon is part of the overall need that will go into the objective of planned growth and being ready to respond to new development opportunities with not only rezoning and annexation, but also with a new business recruitment strategy. If Lebanon wants to step away from being reactive with their planning, it is crucial that the identity and branding becomes a part of the city's ecosystem to stop perpetuating the mixed growth reactions and utilizing the over used word "smart growth." If the city could have an identity to market itself in a way that was in alignment with the vision and strategic planning of city, the decision makers would not have to struggle over decisions because of the complexity of existing or future variables. The idea of being reactive is due to the lack of planning and lack of vision for the city. There is currently no plan for prospective opportunities of new business to fit into. Therefore the decisions for approvals that are subject to rezoning and annexation are made on inconsistent variables. It is too difficult to market a city and establish a marketing plan for economic development if there is no brand identity. The questions of "who is Lebanon?" "Who does Lebanon want to be?" And "How is Lebanon going to get there?" need to be answered and incorporated into the branding and identity of the city. It should entail a systematic process of discovery, analyzing the data and research, while putting together a creative strategy that speaks verbally and visually about the city to both the community and external key influencers to maximize growth opportunities.

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