

Grit, Grace, Place:
Enhancing Place with Gallatin's
True Grit and Amazing Grace

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Introduction

When one thinks of branding done right, places like Chick-fil-a, McDonald's, and Starbucks are quick to come to mind. Why? They deliver with consistency, a strong presence, and conciseness. Businesses of all sizes are seen with an identity that represents them as they market and promote. Executive Chairman of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, has stated "Mass advertising can help build brands, but authenticity is what makes them last. If people believe they share values with a company, they will stay loyal to the brand." The same can be said about a city. If a city desires to be marketable and attractive to current and future residents, it should handle brand strategy and promotions similar to how a business does. The City of Gallatin has taken the steps to do so and is focused on further incorporating their identity into the lives of residents – current and future.

Background: Understanding Gallatin

Gallatin, Tennessee is located just 23 minutes north of Nashville and is the county seat of Sumner County. Rooted deep in tradition with a quaint historic downtown square and feeling the growth within the region, Gallatin is working hard to stand out on the map all while maintaining the charm that sets them apart. Representing over 520 businesses and hosting a large portion of community events that bring local residents and leaders together, the Gallatin Area Chamber of Commerce is a key collaborator in the promotion of Gallatin, Tennessee. Working in concert with many local entities like the City of Gallatin, Gallatin Economic Development Agency, and Downtown Gallatin (Main Street program), the Gallatin Area Chamber is able to foster economic vitality and enhance the quality of life in Gallatin by supporting their members, providing educational opportunities, and engaging the community.

Over the past half-decade, Gallatin has focused on enhancing their image across the region. In 2013, the Gallatin Area Chamber launched a regional image campaign, in an effort to better expose the positives about life in Gallatin. Funded by a grant awarded from the City of Gallatin, the campaign consisted of a 30 and 60 second video commercial that was aired on local broadcasting networks, cable, and various social media channels. The commercial that included video shots of events, recreation, dining, and residential options in Gallatin, was ended with a voice over encouraging viewers to “Experience Gallatin” and included the link to www.GallatinWelcomesYou.com. At the time, the City of Gallatin and the Gallatin Area Chamber both had dated and unattractive websites that were not mobile friendly. The Gallatin Welcomes You website served as a landing page with general information about Gallatin including weather and events, a rolling gallery of digital images, as well as a portal to other important links within the city: schools, tourism, chamber, city, and downtown. The campaign also included stickers that were intended for use on vehicles and storefronts; the design consisted of a graphic image of Gallatin’s downtown along with the website.

The campaign was successful in enhancing Gallatin’s image within the region, and served as a quick fix and temporary solution to some of the problems like dated websites and lack of identity. Prior to the 2013 regional image campaign, if someone were to Google Gallatin, high speed chase videos and bank robberies were among the top results. While the campaign made an immediate impact and brought positive attention to the Gallatin area, identity problems still existed. The campaign revealed that Gallatin had assets to showcase, but the rest of the in-place collateral did not demonstrate the healthy and strong collaboration that was going on in the Gallatin community nor did it clearly identify who Gallatin was.

At the time of the image campaign, and until about 18 months ago, if one had asked 10 different people to bring ‘something Gallatin’ to the table, everyone would have showed up with something different, both in look and feel. The City of Gallatin would have showed up with a dated, city seal boasting their incorporated date; the Gallatin Economic Development Agency would have walked in with a completely separate visual; the Gallatin Area Chamber would have brought a vibrant city guide that showcased the community, but without the appearance that it was at all the same Gallatin the City or EDA were working to promote. While collaboration and strong partnerships are not a new thing in Gallatin, it was far from evident that they existed. The materials being pushed out from entities like the City of Gallatin, Gallatin Area Chamber of Commerce, and Gallatin Economic Development Agency were not in unison and lacked continuity. Additionally, almost all materials and messages lacked the vibrancy and identity that was alive and well in Gallatin, Tennessee. For any resident or business prospect looking in, the lack of cohesion created the perception that “Team Gallatin” did not exist; that they were not working well together. The identity (or lack thereof) was not at all reflective of who Gallatin was, who they wanted to be, and who they wanted to attract.

Marketing v Branding v Placemaking

Unlike the chicken and the egg scenario, it’s important to identify what should come first when marketing a product. One wouldn’t want to market a product without being able to fully define or describe a product the product in need of marketing, so, it’s necessary to identify a brand first. According to Marketing Management, “Broadly, a product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need, including physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas” (Kotler & Keller,

2015). This definition supports the concept that a city is indeed a product and should be treated as one. As for a brand, the American Marketing Association shares that “A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (American Marketing Association). Given this definition, a brand is far more than just a logo; while it may include as logo, it also incorporates feelings, emotions, and a story to share with a consumer. Once a brand is identified, it helps make a product marketable. As the City of Gallatin learned, you can market a product without a brand, but, it limits the effectiveness and dampers the overall outcome.

While a brand can help one identify and create a message; placemaking can be used as one of many avenues to convey that message. A brand defines who or what something is, placemaking can help make it more personal. According to the Project for Public Spaces, by definition, placemaking is a collaborative process by which public spaces are shaped. The spaces can consist of parks, streetscapes, alleys, and more. It’s about more than urban design. It’s about facilitating creative patterns of use, and paying attention to physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. By definition, branding, marketing, and placemaking are very different. However, there are ways to incorporate the three together. A clearly defined brand can be incorporated into placemaking. A well branded product, like a city, can be marketed. Having all three can help create success for a product, like the City of Gallatin, Tennessee.

Gallatin’s Strategic Brand Process

In 2015, the City of Gallatin embarked on a strategic branding initiative with the hope of identifying and implementing a unique brand that would clearly tell Gallatin’s story. Led by the

City of Gallatin's Economic Development Agency, the city partnered with North Star, a company focused on developing brand identities and strategies for communities. North Star conducted dozens of pieces of quantitative and qualitative research to primarily gather external perspectives on Gallatin and its competitors. The research was divided into three main categories: community, consumers, and competition. For the community, research included but was not limited to key stakeholder interviews, residential demographic profiling, focus groups, undercover interviews, and red carpet tours. For consumers, perception studies that included interviews about Gallatin with regional officials and professionals as well as perception and consumer awareness surveys with both visitors and non-visitors to Gallatin were conducted. Competition was also involved in perception studies, including interviews about competitors as well as a brand message assessments.

The biggest component of the research conducted by North Star was involving the existing community; obtaining buy-in from local stakeholders and community leaders. Various groups were brought in for the research including business owners, community organizations, education leaders, high school students, city department heads, and, random residents that were stopped or secretly approached in stores or public places. The Economic Development course led by Maureen Collins-Williams on Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development covered the importance of a community culture that not only included natural and built resources to attract entrepreneurs and young talent, but also a culture that is diverse and creative in nature – where the arts are often highlighted. The culture should not be led by one force alone, but as Maureen stated “including everyone at the table”, in an effort to speak and present with a unified voice. Additionally, the Marketing and Attraction course included a session on Marketing Techniques and Technology Tools led by Clay Walker. He emphasized that a brand should be provable,

quantifiable, and includes pertinent facts. Like Maureen's course, partnerships were again covered – the importance of partnerships to reach the most desirable audience. Lastly, Clay's session taught the importance of consistency in delivery as well as the need for internal implementation as well as external. While Gallatin leadership already had a fairly good handle on how insiders viewed their city, it was insightful to learn of additional views and thoughts.

In addition to the research conducted by North Star, they also provided a set of creative deliverables as well as a brand action plan. The creative elements of the brand were developed from the research and consisted of a pantone set with the six brand colors, font styles, logo, and a full brand narrative that clearly defined the strap line "True Grit, Amazing Grace". The Gallatin Economic Development Agency identified a group of individuals to serve as a creative team, consisting of individuals who represented various areas: small business, native of Gallatin, transplant to Gallatin, young professional, small business owner, and large corporation employee. The group was also diverse in age, race, and gender. The creative team worked closely with the research results to help identify a message and other creative elements that would serve Gallatin for years to come.

The deliverables consisted of logo variations for the City, Economic Development Agency, Chamber, and various City of Gallatin departments. Additionally, designs and recommendations were made for business cards, websites, merchandise, advertisements, signage, and more. A 20+ page style guide was provided in an effort to help all entities with implementation and proper use of brand. The initiative has led Gallatin to develop a unique brand story including the strap line "True Grit. Amazing Grace." - a nod to Gallatin's hard

working culture, authenticity, uniqueness, and charm – based off of findings and perceptions revealed during the research process.

Incorporating Brand into Placemaking Projects

Since late 2016, the new brand has been fully adopted by both city and chamber officials. The brand story itself delivers what the research presented: Gallatin’s small town feel, growth potential, proximity to Nashville, historic downtown, and more. The brand story has already been well-shared and pushed out to those looking into Gallatin (prospects), however, the brand has yet to be fully implemented and incorporated on a more local level. Likewise, the brand is still not 100% reflective of what you visually see at first glance, when you arrive or pass through Gallatin.

Taking the next step with the already established City of Gallatin brand identity looks like developing a stronger sense of place for both those who call Gallatin home as well as those who visit. One way to do so is by fully incorporating the City of Gallatin’s brand identity into a series of placemaking projects undertaken collaboratively. Groups like the Gallatin Area Chamber, City of Gallatin, Gallatin Economic Development Agency, Downtown Gallatin, Gallatin Emerging Talent (Young Professionals Group), Gallatin Arts Council, Schools, Various Civic Groups (Rotary, Sertoma, Junior Service League, etc.), and business owners are already familiar with the brand and many participated in the research process to develop it. They are made up of community leaders who have the ability to implement ideas, drive change, and are committed to the betterment of the city as a whole. Because of these key facts, they are ideal groups to assist in placemaking projects throughout the city.

The Gallatin brand is supported by many, but still unfamiliar to others. Stakeholders and core community groups were involved in the conversations and educated on the brand during the research and initial rollout phase. However, others have been left to figure it out on their own and understand how to incorporate it into their business or organization. Additionally, the city currently has a number of less than desirable areas, many of which are entryways into the city or high traffic areas that visitors and residents pass through or frequently visit. If someone finds Gallatin, whether it be on their own or through a targeted marketing campaign, they are not immediately greeted with the story the city's brand portrays. This issue presents a significant opportunity to better incorporate the brand on a local level, serving those who are already in Gallatin through a series of placemaking projects. The City of Chicago, Illinois demonstrated this well when The Chicago Loop Alliance incorporated a brand identity into a series of placemaking projects in an effort to activate a number of underutilized spaces including alleys, underperforming parks, and street medians. The group activated the projects by partnering with other groups, community engagement, art projects, and active social media campaigns. They realized "the presentation will demonstrate how public space can drive real economic development and rebrand a downtown as a place for all people to enjoy..."

Looking Ahead: Plan of Action and Goals

The main three focuses of the project will include enhancement and improvement of existing entryways to the city, creating temporary and permanent art installations, and developing specific art focused programming. Having a strong brand already in place allows for a shorter start-up time, as design elements and features, in a sense, already exist. The initial startup will take 6 months, but the full implementation and integration of placemaking projects and the brand

identity within the community should be ongoing. For success, the following steps should be taken:

1. Establish a dedicated arts commission
2. Identify community partners
3. Hold informational sessions to create buy-in
4. Launch community-wide art projects
5. Assign community partners and civic groups to specific projects/locations
6. Launch social media campaign

Many components of the projects, like signage for entryways to the city, were proposed in the set of deliverables provided by North Star. The design has already been well thought out, so the focus of specific entryway projects can shift to identifying ownership, fundraising, and ongoing support. Additionally, many community partners have already been identified or, are just obvious such as groups like Gallatin's Main Street program, Downtown Gallatin, as well as the Gallatin Downtown Merchant Association. It is evident that they would be the ideal groups to lead or be involved in a downtown focused art installation; other community partners to pair them with could be the Arts Council or a group of students from the local high school.

Some projects will be short-term, or even one-time. Many will require a first-time task force, while others will have a continuous committee. For example, meetings of the newly formed arts commission will be ongoing; the arts commission will function as a committee that falls under the Mayor's office (like the already existing beautification committee) with rotating members. Civic groups will have the opportunity to champion specific projects and locations with continued support and care. For example, the Gallatin Noon Rotary Club has already chosen an

entryway and signage to “adopt”. They have updated an existing sign with wood repair, paint, and landscaping. They worked with the Gallatin Area Chamber officials to obtain the proper pantone color from the brand style guide to match paint for the sign.

In the white paper “Creative Placemaking” by Ann Markusen of Markusen Economic Research Services and Anne Gadwa of Metris Arts Consulting, they say the following about placemaking in a community: “In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.” The results of the placemaking projects in Gallatin, Tennessee will do just that. Additionally, they will lead to full implementation of the city’s brand ‘at home’ and better integration of it into the local community. More importantly, the placemaking projects will be designed to lead to a strong sense of place and hometown pride. If successful, this could result in increased economic vitality, retention of youth, and more attraction of new businesses and residents. Additionally, the projects will serve as ongoing city-wide beautification efforts as well as added tourism destinations.

Conclusion

Like most communities, the City of Gallatin is faced with the challenge of needing to stand out in a growing, dynamic region all while attempting to be the most appealing to those looking in – whether it be new business, new residents, or those who are already here. An effective brand only works well if it is fully reflective of who or what it represents and if it is supported by the

consumers who identify with it. For Gallatin, that's the assets within the city, the residents, the businesses, the visitors, and the prospects. Incorporating the brand through placemaking allows an opportunity to bring the brand back home. The process allows for residents to celebrate their community and it allows them to fully identify with the story that is being told. Additionally, it provides memorable first impressions, reasons to return, and an at a glance look into the culture of the Gallatin community. A collaborative approach not only gets the job done, but demonstrates signs of a healthy, hard-working, and functional community. Doing so creates a sense of place all in itself; it demonstrates a community that lives and leads with True Grit and Amazing Grace.

Resources

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