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Nine innovative approaches to private sector engagement

According to our most recent place branding survey, the number one area places are looking to improve their collaboration is with their private sector. Your private sector is a core part of the make-up of your place. More than that, they can often be those with the most to gain from your strategy to grow tourism or attract new talent, and of course they can also be an important source of funding for place brand and marketing initiatives.

We reached out to nine of our expert partners to get their insight on how places can improve their strategies to engage their private sector in their vision for their place.

Listen to your private sector to get a deeper understanding of your place.

When considering your place brand vision, it is critical to engage your local businesses and other local organizations. They can often identify the 'why' in the question "why did you start your business here" or "why did you move here"? Their stories, concerns, investments and ideas are part of the unique fabric of your community. By getting to know the private sector and how they view your place as an ecosystem for their success, place makers can get inspiration and also be challenged to do better. Leaders often overlook the people and organizations that create the character of your place or can overemphasize one industry or company over the myriad others surviving and thriving. Seek out these private sector voices to listen, learn and grow!

Rob Hunden, President & CEO, Hunden Strategic Partners

Identify your shared values.

The private sector is us when we are at work, it is you me, people we know, people we don't know. So, what would someone or some group have to do to engage you in their brand vision? Probably quite a bit. The things we support in our communities, the things we foster and grow are things we value and protect. Look around, those are the kind things that the private sector can get behind. It is easy to see the shared value of:

- water treatment plants - clean water
- crisis services - safety and security
- communal sports groups - health and well being

All of those things are "community shared values" as our friend and peer Jack Johnson, Chief Advocacy Officer at Destinations International so eloquently puts it. *So what are the shared values of tourism? What do we have that really matters?* Tourism done well enriches the lives of citizens of a destination, engages them and asks their consent and participation, leaves more on the table than it took and authentically shares cultures and ideas in a way that makes the world a better place. We want their attention, I guess in some sense that's what the private sector is looking for... *someone they can work with to do just that!*

David Peacock, Senior Advisor, Future Tourism Group, Simpleview

Create a platform that amplifies the synergies between place and private sector.

The key to success with a place brand vision is to identify the overlapping values with brands in the private sector. What are positive characteristics both share and want to promote? Focusing on those attributes, while giving brands the space and freedom to deliver, will provide a platform for synergies to amplify the place brand.

Richard Haigh, Managing Director, Brand Finance

Cultivate an open, collaborative, and inclusive environment.

To truly captivate the private sector and integrate them into the fabric of a place's brand vision, it is crucial to foster a culture of sustainability and inclusivity. This means going beyond mere lip service to these values and actively working to create a more equitable and harmonious environment for all members of the community. To do this, places should first and foremost clearly articulate their unique vision and values to the private sector. From there, they should actively involve the private sector in co-crafting this vision, inviting them to bring their diverse perspectives and expertise to the table.

It is also essential to provide opportunities for the private sector to engage with and contribute to place brand-building initiatives, encouraging them to think outside the box and propose innovative ways to align with the brand. Furthermore, places should leverage the power of technology and digital platforms to amplify the reach and impact of their brand vision. By utilizing these tools to connect with the private sector and share the brand vision with a wider audience, places can truly make a mark and inspire positive change within their community.

Manolis Psarros, CEO & Chief Strategist, TOPOSOPHY

Showcase how your private sector contribute to the fabric of your destination.

Place leaders and teams need to involve the private sector where they can in the development and implementation of their brand vision and help them to understand the benefits such as increased investment, economic growth and potentially helping them to meet their sustainability goals and targets. Private sector organisations also need to be offered opportunities to showcase their involvement and contribute to a place's brand vision through marketing initiatives, partnerships and collaboration. Places should also regularly measure and report back to the private sector on the success of the brand vision to ensure continued engagement and highlight the commercial opportunities which arise through partnership.

Deirdre Wells OBE, Chief Executive, Go To Places

Spotlight hidden gems through recommendations

In our experience, the private sector is more willing engage than the officials in charge of place branding may think. Businesses are keen on any extra publicity that a place brand can offer, and gladly subscribe to communication campaigns and initiatives.

If a place brand vision involves a change of behaviour, standards, additional investment on part of the private sector, the most practical incentive in our experience is a "[Place] recommends" campaign. The public sector endorses and gives free communication support to the hospitality sector businesses if they adhere to a set of criteria that help materialise the place brand vision. These may include: the style of service, placement of certain objects (books, souvenirs), the choice of background soundtracks, air fragrances, and other ways to communicate the experience of the place. It can be tricky but good fun to translate the place brand vision into service standards and criteria. They must be feasible and inexpensive, yet produce a consistent effect. The "[Place] recommends" sign assures and attracts visitors making it a worthwhile investment for the private sector.

Natasha Grand Norman, Director, INSTID

Demonstrate the economic impact your strategy is having on your place.

To be able to demonstrate the correlation between perceptions - about countries, regions, cities, and so on – and economic and social performance is the holy grail of place branding. It's also key to engaging your private sector in the value and purpose of your strategy. We're working together with City Nation Place and academics to understand how much a positive place perception impacts economic or social performance of a place and creating the correlations between proactive effort in managing a nation or place brand and a place's economic performance. Having this demonstratable correlation will be essential in helping to engage private sector partners in your place brand vision. [Find out more about the study here.](#)

Jose Torres, CEO, Bloom Consulting

Embrace new methodologies.

If a place has a vision to improve the lives of their residents, they need to embrace new methodologies. Destinations and places should be utilizing newly available insights from geolocation, spending and event data to tell a more effective story to their private sector partners. We can now measure and understand the movement of leisure and business travellers compared to residents, the effect of events and conventions on the visitor economy, and where visitors spend their money. Providing private sector partners a more complete picture creates space for new collaborations and meaningful action.

Ted Sullivan, CMO, Zartico

Find a story that engages and back your strategy with data.

Trying to build an effective brand for a locale without engaging the private sector is like driving a car with two flat tires. You can move forward but the experience will be slow, bumpy and largely ineffective.

The private sector is a critical stakeholder with strong vested interests in your brand's success. Businesses – large and small – can also be your most powerful champions, if you take into account these six ways to fuel success:

Shared Ambitions: Relationships thrive on shared goals and values. Take the time to explore mutual ambitions and what really matters to business sectors. Finding "common cause" in priorities like attracting talent, quality of life, well-managed growth, long-term sustainability, and resilience sets a strong foundation for meaningful engagement.

Start with facts: You can't recalibrate a trajectory if you haven't got a clear picture of today's position. Use research to quantify underleveraged strengths and assets. When Detroit's auto industry was imploding, initiatives to reimagine the city discovered it was home to one of the US's largest concentration of designers and engineers. Mobilizing this expertise helped spark an entrepreneurial renaissance that has been vital to Detroit's recovery.

A Powerful Story: What could we build together? Great brands are fuelled by ambitious goals and belief-inspiring stories – "Imagine how we could achieve X..." The "we" is an essential part of the brand proposition. Show how everyone has a role in bringing about change and everyone can realize an upside for their future.

Rules of Engagement: The missing ingredient in many place branding efforts is a forum and governance model that allows businesses, civic organizations, and governments to create effective stewardship models and feedback loops for long-term management. This is a kind of "future-proofing" that supports collaboration, long-term investment, and planning that transcends election cycles and management tenures.

Useful Tools: Businesses relish practical tools that enable them to demonstrate their commitment to community and ESG goals, help them recruit talent, garner local support, and amplify their own brand values. Smart messaging and marketing tools like Playbooks and brand elements are tangible benefits.

Jeannette Hanna, Chief Strategist, Trajectory