



# Positioning A Place Brand

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Originally posted: <https://brandingstrategyinsider.com/positioning-a-place-brand/>

As anyone involved with branding municipalities knows, there are three primary audiences for municipalities – residents, businesses and tourists. (There are other audiences as well, but for the sake of simplicity, I will focus on these audiences.)

Residents are most concerned with good job opportunities, low crime, good medical care, affordable housing, scenic beauty, attractive neighborhoods, friendly people, good school systems, etc. Businesses are interested in prevailing wages, labor force quality, housing and quality of life, labor market rigidities, proximity to suppliers and final markets, energy and resource costs, real estate costs, innovation capacity, etc. And tourists are interested in reasonable travel distance and costs, a variety of interesting things to see and do, aesthetically pleasing environment, restaurants, shopping, etc. Throw in meeting and event planners, and the list includes air transportation access, distance and costs, hotel rooms and ground transportation costs, space requirements, contiguous venues, safety of the area, tours and other activities, etc.

Given the variety of needs and considerations by different municipality audiences, the question I most often am asked by stakeholders interested in municipality branding is, “Can one brand position work for a municipality or do we need a separate brand position for each audience?” The answer is “yes.” Yes, one overarching brand position can work but it must be designed to work with more specific brand messages for each audience.

So, as an example, my hometown, Rochester, NY would benefit from focusing on the following for each audience:

- Residents
  - Small town feel, big city culture
    - Small town feel proof points
      - Friendly people
      - Excellent school systems
      - Short commutes
      - Affordable housing
      - Easy access to resources
  - Big city culture proof points
    - 18 universities (80,000+ students), each of which contributes culture and intellectual stimulation
    - Eastman School of Music, one of the world’s top rated music schools
    - Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra



- Garth Fagan Dance
- Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival, attracting 130,000+ attendees and over 1,000 musicians from around the world
- Numerous other ethnic , neighborhood and arts festivals
- Numerous museums including the Strong National Museum of Play and the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film
- Writers & Books, one of the largest community-based literary centers in the US
- Businesses
  - Knowledge based economy
    - #1 for utility patent registration—2.33 patents per 1,000 workers vs. US average 0.4
    - #1 of 125 world regions for patent registrations (Metropolitan New Economy Index)
    - #5 “Overall Innovation Capacity” based on number of high-tech jobs & degrees granted in science & engineering (Metropolitan New Economy Index)
    - 19th on “Top 20 Tech Cities” (Popular Science)
    - Home to 4 of the 100 best high schools in the US (Newsweek)
  - Quality of Life
    - #1 for quality of life among metropolitan regions of more than 1 million people (Expansion Management 2007)
    - One of the “Top 10 U.S. Cities to Raise a Family” (Child magazine)
    - #2 safest metro in US (FBI)
    - #7 cleanest city in America (Reader’s Digest)
    - #10 most livable places in the US (Places Rated Almanac)
    - One of the top 10 metro areas with the best education opportunities (Forbes magazine)
    - One of the top 10 places to vacation (Money magazine)
    - #7 among 225 metro areas for recreational amenities (Places Rated Almanac)
    - 3rd healthiest place for men to live (Men’s Health magazine)
    - More golf holes per capita than any other industrial city in the Northeast (Robert Trent Jones courses)
    - Number of #1 “Best Companies to Work For” rankings per 1 million residents (2005-2009): 2.9
    - Number of Top 10 “Best Companies to Work For” rankings per 1 million residents (2005-2009): 10.6
    - At \$117,200, the median home sales price is 47.6% lower than the national average and 78.2% of area homes are affordable for the region’s median income (National Association of Realtors (Q2, 2007), NAHB Housing Opportunity Index (Q2, 2007))
    - Average commute time in the Rochester, NY region: 22.6 minutes
  - Industry concentrations



- Alternative Energy
- Biotech
- Business and Information Services
- Food and Beverage Manufacturing
- Manufacturing
- Optics and Imaging
- Printing and Publishing
- Telecommunications
- Look here for additional business-related information
- Tourists
  - Culture & entertainment (some proof points)
    - Festivals
    - Lilac Festival
    - Park Avenue Summer Arts Festival
    - Fairport Canal Days
    - Corn Hill Arts Festival
    - Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival
    - Clothesline Art Festival
    - 360 | 365 Film Festival
  - Museums
    - Strong National Museum of Play (including the National Toy Hall of Fame)
    - Rochester Museum & Science Center
    - George Eastman House International Museum of Photography & Film
    - Genesee Country Village & Museum
  - Art galleries
    - Memorial Art Gallery
    - Rochester Contemporary
  - Theaters
    - Geva Theatre Center – most attended regional theater in New York State
    - Numerous other theaters
  - Concerts/performing arts
    - Eastman Theatre
    - Auditorium Theatre
    - CMAC
    - Eastman School of Music
    - Hochstein School of Music & Dance
    - Nazareth College Arts Center
    - Rochester City Ballet
    - Mercury Opera Rochester
  - Golf courses & tournaments
    - 100 public and semi-private golf courses



- LPGA Championship (2010)
- PGA Championship (2013)
- Oak Hill Country Club East Course rated one of the best in the US
- One of the 10 Best Golf Cities in America (Golf Magazine, Nov. 2007)
- Water sports (sailing, rowing, kayaking, fishing, cruises, water skiing, etc.)
  - Lake Ontario
  - Finger Lakes
  - Erie Canal
  - Genesee River
- Spectator sports (minor, not major league[1])
  - Six minor league professional sports teams in six different sports
  - Buffalo Bills training camp
  - Rated the best minor league sports market in America (Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal, July 2005)
- Parks, hiking, skiing, etc.
- Finger Lakes wine country
  - 100+ wineries

So what brand position could tie these laundry lists of amenities and benefits for different target audiences together? My opinion is that the following would be important components of a strong overall brand position:

- High quality of life
- Culture-rich
- Recreation-rich
- Higher education hub
- Highly educated population
- Knowledge-based economy
- High concentration of scientists, engineers and cultural workers
- History of innovation (Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglas, George Eastman, Joseph Wilson, Joseph Smith, etc.)
- A place many “cultural creatives” call home

Possible brand position:

- Overarching message: A progressive small city[2] where science, culture and families thrive
  - Resident message: Small town feel, big city culture
  - Business message: A knowledge-based economy with a high quality of life
  - Tourist message: Thriving with culture and outdoor recreation

This is one example of how an overarching brand position could work with audience-specific messages. This is preferable to three disparate messages that do not necessarily work together. To arrive at an overarching brand position and the supporting audience-specific messages, one must understand the



strengths of the metropolitan area as they relate to the needs and desires of each of its target audiences.

So, to whom would this brand position primarily appeal? Mostly likely, to a highly educated couple with children, perhaps with technical careers, who value culture, education and a good quality of life. And, perhaps to people fitting that description who are tired of the high cost of living and commuting hassles associated with larger cities. Who is likely to find Rochester, NY less appealing? Someone less well educated who enjoys major league sports and prefers warmer weather, especially if that person is single and without children. Also, recent college graduates who are seeking a big city experience. Tourists who enjoy golf, wine, water sports and family vacations might like to visit Rochester, while people seeking bigger city nightlife, tropical beaches and warmer weather are likely to go elsewhere for their vacations. What types of businesses would be most likely to relocate to Rochester? Those that require intellectual capital and strategic partnerships with universities in industries in which the region has high concentrations of companies and highly skilled workers (such as optics and imaging[3]). Bottom line: know your target audiences.

As an aside, one should always focus on brand strengths, not weaknesses. The number one brand association for Rochester, NY today is “snow” or “winter.” Minneapolis, Moscow, Quebec and Toronto all have colder climates and longer winters, however that does not deter those metropolitan areas from focusing on their strengths. Lake Placid, NY actually celebrates the fact that it hosted two Winter Olympic Games (1932 & 1980) and is the “Winter Sports Capital of the World,” offering opportunities to participate in 16+ different winter sports. Ottawa celebrates its winter with its very popular Rideau Canal Festival. And many highly sought after metropolitan areas have very hot and humid summers, but that does not deter them from thriving either. Having spent a lot of time in Southeast Asia, I can attest to the fact that Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and several other thriving cities in that region are not deterred by their climate-related weaknesses. Again, focus on strengths that are important to your municipality’s primary audiences.

The Blake Project wishes you much success in developing an overarching brand position for your municipality or region, one that supports and unites the more specific messages for each of its major audiences (residents, businesses and tourists).

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[1] Spectator sports could work against Rochester as it is a category in which the metropolitan area is not “major league.”

[2] Professionals working for the Greater Rochester Visitor Association would differ with me and say that Rochester is a medium-sized city.

[3] University of Rochester, RIT and MCC offer college level optics courses and concentrations. There are more than 50 optics companies in the greater Rochester area. The area is supported by the Rochester Regional Photonics Cluster and the Infotonics Technology Center.



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