



MEMO

DATE: July 20, 2006
TO: Denny Arnold, City Manager
FROM: O.C. Garza, PIO
SUBJECT: Community Rebranding Options

I have spent some time speaking to PIOs, marketing directors and other professionals about branding, specifically tourism branding and “community wide branding.” What I have found so far is interesting, to say the least.

The Rebranding of Bryan, Texas



CITY OF BRYAN
The Good Life, Texas Style.

Agency used: Go Go Creative out of Austin, Texas
Cost of project: \$20,000
Time from approval to finish: 6 months (March 2004 to October 2004)
Local contact: Jay Socol, PIO for Bryan, Texas

The first person I spoke with was Jay Socol, PIO of Bryan, Texas. Bryan recently went through a branding effort that was very successful. Bryan hired Go-Go Creative, an Austin ad agency to do the research, creative and some of the new brand rollout work. The Bryan brand was done specifically for the city and was basically focused on a new logo for the city. It did not include any other community groups or city affiliates such as their CVB, Chamber, Economic Development Corp, etc.

It must be remembered that Bryan and College Station actually co-fund their CVB and Economic Development Corporation. In many minds the two cities are one. In years past Bryan was always considered the “bully” of the two cities, dominating College Station. The opposite is true now. College Station has surpassed Bryan in population and economic growth. Texas A&M continues to fuel College Station’s rapid growth and development.

One of the primary goals of the Bryan branding project was to establish a “new” municipal identity separate from that of College Station. Go Go Creative approached the project with tried and true methodology: do some good research (surveys and focus groups) and report the feedback. Then create a new logo for the city based on the findings.

Jay was very complimentary of Go Go Creative and whole heartedly endorsed them. I spoke with several other PIOs whose cities were listed as clients of Go Go Creative, including San Marcos, Killeen and Round Rock. All were very complimentary of the work Go Go Creative did, but these were mostly “piece” projects such as annual reports, financial publications or community newsletters. Bryan’s project using Go Go Creative was the only one with a rebranding emphasis.

The Rebranding of McKinney, Texas



Agency used: North Star from Nashville, Tennessee
Cost of Project: \$63,000
Time from approval to finish: nine months
Local contact: Coco Good, Director of Communications and Marketing

McKinney was in an unusual situation in 2004. The city was awash in a logo soup. There were three city logos alone and a city seal being utilized on signs, vehicles, water towers and city communications. In addition, city-related entities – such as the McKinney Economic Development Corp., McKinney Community Development Corp., Chamber, Tourism and Main Street – were all using logos of their own, none of which shared any common elements.

Logos were only an indication of the problem. Messaging was across the board as well. While there were some excellent communications occurring – it was taking place separately and there was a lack of coordination causing lost opportunities. Making matters worse, the city was growing rapidly. Newer residents were unfamiliar with the city’s rich history. The city’s messaging was equally confused, uncertain as to whether to embrace the city’s historic past or its exciting future.

But the city spotted the problem and developed a clear and defined goal. That goal was to develop a common brand that would communicate McKinney’s unique personality, find common ground between the city’s historic past and fast-moving future, and bring the disparate entities into a shared vision under one overarching marketing plan.

The city lead the process from a community-wide prospective and realized that unbiased, third-party research was vital to create a base to start from. They hired the only company I have found that has experience with community-wide branding projects; North Star out of Nashville, Tennessee. Months of informational meetings, focus groups, surveys and



other research exercises resulted in one logo and slogan being presented to council. It was approved unanimously by council and the six affiliate entities agreed on the submitted logo and slogan as well. (These logos were copied from the McKinney online store where “official” city merchandise is sold.)

Coco raved about the superb work done by North Star. She is convinced that all the focus groups, surveys and meetings they conducted was the only way to make the project successful and get all six entities to work together toward the common goal.

I also checked with several cities that used North Star for rebranding on a community wide basis. Of those, Mesquite, Texas had a smaller scaled project that was similar to McKinney’s.

- **Mesquite, Texas** also used North Star for a community wide branding effort. The methodology was the same as used in McKinney. North Star did extensive research, focus groups and meetings before hitting the creative drawing board. The brand they came up with is shown below. On the left is how the city uses the logo and on the right is how their economic development corporation uses it.



A conversation with Don McEachern from North Star on July 17, 2006

I phoned Don McEachern, CEO of North Star to determine a cost estimate for a community wide branding research project for Victoria.

1. North Star will begin a community rebranding project in Killeen in September. So he and his associates will be in Texas on and off for several months.

2. Don is making an ICMA presentation in San Antonio in September on how important community branding has become.
3. Don said that a complete community wide rebranding project for Victoria, with extensive onsite research, analysis and creative work would cost \$73,000.
4. The working time line on such a project is 6 - 8 months.
5. He would be happy to do a Web presentation (or multiple presentations if needed) to whomever we feel is appropriate.

In-House branding efforts

Through the TAMIO PIO list server, I queried all Texas PIOs about any in-house branding projects. No Texas cities have tried a community wide branding project using primarily in-house resources.

From Pam Percival, PIO in Abilene:

“Our Convention & Visitors Bureau tried this in-house and the result has been a compromised logo and slogan that nobody in the community has truly embraced.”

Amy Radford, Marketing Director, Roanoke, Texas

“O. C., before coming to work for Roanoke, I worked for Dallas Advertising agencies for 15 years and personally feel comfortable handling and directing this kind of project. I have initiated several branding, logo and creative type projects (not on a community wide basis however) for Roanoke in my two years with the City. As a relative newcomer to Roanoke, I could better handle this work than if I had worked/lived in the city for a longer time. However, unless someone is well qualified, talented and experienced in this area **and** has the support of the City, it would be best to hire an agency for major image projects such as rebranding.”

Steve Hill from McKinney, Texas

“Everyone seems to be familiar with the path McKinney took, but I’ll add that if you’re going to do it in-house, make sure you have the personnel to pull it off. One advantage of going outside is that you get a more objective view of the city that avoids the myopic viewpoint we can all fall victim to. Had we done our branding initiative based on input from purely internal sources, we might have wound up with a less inclusive brand, something revolving around our historic downtown, perhaps. It is easy to fall into old habits without that outside viewpoint.”

Jay Socol from Bryan, Texas

“I believe it was Laura Kursman from Montgomery County, Ohio, who told me that if you want to create a brand in-house, it will absolutely look like you did so. The message was: leave it to the professionals. In Bryan, we managed to do a good bit of work in-house: survey distribution and collection, public awareness, slogan and logo selection, brand launch, etc. But that’s as far as we were comfortable going. All the creative work and data analysis was thankfully performed by an outside agency.”

Marty Harrison, Economic Development Specialist, Richland Hills, Texas

“One advantage to using an outside agency is—when people say they don’t like what you’ve done—and they WILL—it’s not YOUR fault, the agency did it!! You don’t have to defend your own creativity. Here in my city, we paid for a new logo but, after it was completed and everyone said they really liked it, that it is far better than what we have, city council was apprehensive about changing it because of the prior logo’s history. The logo that we paid \$6,000 sits there, largely unused—but I didn’t do it, the agency did!”