



Brand versus Concept in Area Development

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23 July 2008

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Confusion

Brand and concept are two notions that are becoming increasingly popular in area developments. They are sometimes used interchangeably and that often leads to confusion, disagreement and disappointment. Professionals such as urban planners and architects often dislike 'brand' while they have little trouble accepting 'concept'. This is mainly because they, wrongly, associate brands with advertising and commerce. It is high time that both notions are clarified.

Concept

A concept is a good, distinctive and sometimes unique idea for the development of a product, service, building or area. In real estate, concepts are already applied to the development of, for example, office and residential buildings, shopping, entertainment and conference centres, and leisure centres. Concepts function well for such developments because they take a certain characteristic of the development and apply it to for example, the architecture, the retail offer, the decor and service. A concept often serves a specific target group, such as shoppers or partygoers, conference or business users. A concept is often has a sell-by date. A workable concept often becomes outdated in a number of years. The development and implementation of a concept is usually the responsibility of separate parties such as the architect and developer. Concept management is rare.

Brand

A brand is a promise of value that must be kept for different audiences simultaneously, such as residents, visitors, businesses, investors and institutions. This means that the way the promise is fulfilled will differ (somewhat) for each of the groups while still retaining a clear connection between these activities. A brand for an area development is therefore often not a single promise, but is formed by several related themes. Often, (valuable) themes added over time. This enrichment of an area brand does not happen by chance, but is created through (carefully) brand management. A brand is not only a leading principle for the development of an area (e.g. urban planning, architecture, landscape, materials) but also for its management (e.g. attraction programmes, area management, events, communications). Furthermore, the development, implementation and management of the brand of an area are the shared responsibility of its stakeholders: government, developer, investor, key tenants, residents and the like. A brand is ideally suited for developments with a fairly high level of complexity and an extended period of development, such as (inner-city) mixed-use developments.

Complementarity

In area development processes, brand and concept are often complementary and can be used in conjunction. Within an area development, there may be various concepts that help realise the brand, such as a designer hotel, a slow food restaurant, an organic market, shared facilities for creative start-ups, an ecological district, a culture institution or a factory outlet centre. In this context, concepts such as area incubators are sometimes used. These are physical (permanent or temporary) functions that are employed to speed-up an area development process.

Conclusion

In summary, we can say that:

1. A concept is a form of reduction (a good idea), while in a brand enriches the image of an area
2. The value of a concept decreases with the time, while the value of a brand increases (at least with carefully brand management)
3. A concept is especially applicable to single-use developments and a brand to mixed-use developments
4. Concepts within an area can complement and help realise its brand
5. A brand functions simultaneously as an organising principle and a decision-making tool for a partnership of stakeholders.

This is a translation of a column for the Dutch publication Real Estate Magazine (August 2008).

The Author

Sicco van Gelder is founder of Placebrands a company dedicated to helping cities, regions and countries develop and implement their brand strategies. He has been instrumental in developing the theory and practice of place branding. Sicco has advised places such as Amsterdam, Botswana, East Africa, Malaysia, Southampton and The Hague.

Sicco has lived, worked and travelled across five continents. His exposure to the great diversity of these continents has helped him to develop his understanding of and sensitivity to differing cultural, motivational, economic, social and competitive issues.

Sicco has (co)authored several books, among them:

- Global Brand Strategy – Unlocking Branding Potential Across Countries Cultures and Markets (Kogan Page, 2003)
- Beyond Branding – How the New Values of Transparency and Integrity are Changing the World of Brands (Kogan Page, 2003)
- New Age Branding (ICFAI Press, 2003)
- City Branding – How Cities Compete in the 21st Century (Placebrands, 2006)
- Global Branding Perspectives and Challenges (ICFAI Press, 2007)