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# Best Practice Guide

## Place branding and marketing



**HIGH  
STREETS  
TASK  
FORCE**

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## An Introduction to Place branding and Place Marketing

Place branding and marketing has increasingly become an area of interest for those involved in the process of improving places as destinations to visit and enjoy. As such, developing a better understanding of the precise role that the process of place branding and marketing can play in the construction of town or city centre identity is needed.

This 'Best Practice' guide sets out to achieve this, through a consideration of what factors are needed to deliver successful place branding and marketing, what factors are needed to avoid poor place branding and marketing attempts, before concluding with a series of relevant case studies.

To start with, it is first worth making a distinction between the definitions of place branding and place marketing.

### **Place Branding**

Place branding is about the identification of values and ethos associated with a place. Good branding will tell the place's story and history, which includes its unique assets, including the particular landscape, individuals, businesses and events that matter most to residents. In this way, a place's brand comes to reflect the way in which it functions, the needs that it serves its population and the emotions it generates for the people who live, work and visit there.

A good place brand should be comprised of a toolkit of visual symbols, colours, messages and key words which capture the values, ethos and distinctiveness of the place. Importantly, effective place branding is not simply about visual messaging but should also be reflected in the way decisions are taken in relation to how the place experience is created and crafted. This process should resonate with and involve the people living, working and visiting the place. In essence, place branding is an activity that sets out to capture the authentic essence of a place, that can then be used to further shape its vision and direction.

### **Place Marketing**

Place Marketing is about the actions promoting economic development, encouraging people to spend time and money in a specific location and proactive projection of the values and ethos of the place brand. This does not simply need to be the act of presenting visual messages to an audience but will be also about the proactive projection of the brand through actions which enable the place brand to be recognised, understood and experienced.

Effective place marketing successfully engages an audience with whom the values and ethos of the place brand most powerfully resonate across a diverse range of marketing media, including print, radio, online and offline communications, including events and festivals.

***In short, place branding is strategic, whilst place marketing is operational.***

## What factors need to be considered to deliver successful place branding and place marketing?

There are a variety of factors which are important to deliver successful place branding and marketing initiatives. Place branding must be based on authentic local identities and have a purpose to enrich the lives of residents and visitors, which can be achieved through effective collaboration between public, private and civil society stakeholders.

### Setting Long Term Goals

It should be comprised of a long-term plan that exists beyond the creation a mere logo. It needs to be robust but also flexible, being able to adapt according to local, regional and national issues. It is important to understand the needs and wants of potential customers (residents, visitors, investors), the place strengths (tangible and intangible) and the strengths of competing towns and cities.

### Leadership

A place brand's positioning (i.e how the place relates to certain values and manifests its perceived strengths) needs to be authentic, differentiated, compelling, persuasive and sustainable rather than a set of generic claims that could be made about anywhere else. Reputation monitoring and management should be seen an integral part of governance of the brand and there needs to be adequate resources provided to adapt the brand. Finally, it needs constructive collaborative leadership to be successfully developed and delivered.<sup>1</sup>

### Authenticity

Successful branding will ensure community ownership and authenticity, there will be an alignment to key values, and it will ensure that it reflects a place's distinct look, feel, and unique visitor experience.

### Shared visions and ambition

Successful Place Marketing relies on all those who are associated with marketing and promotion of the place to be engaged with and understand the brand values. There also needs to be a coordinated and consistent approach between all these parties as regards the projection and marketing of the brand values. That is not something which comes easily. It is not just about a set of pantone colours, logo images and key messages to key stakeholders rather they need to understand how to 'market' these brand values and ethos.

To achieve successful Place marketing, there needs to be a full understanding of the brand and place. There should be a creative activation of the brand, and consistent communications relevant to specific target audiences.

### Involvement of Businesses and Community

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<sup>1</sup> <https://placebranding.org/manifesto/>

Therefore, there needs to be an active consideration about what the place has to offer that will make a unique place. This can be achieved through interviews with various stakeholders, businesses, investors, users and non-users and different marginal groups to understand what the local community feels the place is. The information collected can then be used to create a distinct brand, however, it needs to then be tested with residents and stakeholders, to generate feedback, to ensure that the community is at the heart of branding the place.

### **Effective Communication**

After the branding process has been completed, place marketing can ensue, with campaigns which promote the brand. An activation plan which takes a twelve-month, two-year and three-year, approach should then be adopted by all stakeholders and businesses to ensure that they all align.

This process will require constant reviewing, in three, six, nine and twelve month slots to ensure that tweaks can be made but the 3-year plan is crucial to drive consistency, traction and awareness.

## **What factors need to be considered to avoid poor place branding and place marketing?**

There are various factors which should be avoided when thinking about and conducting place branding and place marketing. An understanding from all those engaged in the process of developing place branding and marketing that it must go beyond simply creating a nice-looking logo and a set of pantone colours is absolutely paramount.

### **Paternalism**

Successful branding must avoid limited community engagement, relying on a set of unsupported assumptions, confusing itself with the local authority brand, and focusing on a place that is not recognised by residents. The brand needs to be coordinated and coherent and the marketing needs to be sustainable and should evolve to meet the changing needs of residents and visitors. Consideration of how the macro political, social and technological environment within which people live and the place exists, impacts on the place brand identity, and its execution through place marketing, should also be applied.

### **Bland, un-unique Identities**

Both branding and marketing need to remain relevant. Some issues arise when places do not have a distinct identity as they try to replicate other places in both branding and marketing, meaning that there is nothing that separates them from other places in the region. It is vital to remember that every area is unique, and that differences should be actively celebrated.

Other factors to avoid in marketing include, sloppy and inconsistent messaging, giving up after a few months because you have not yet got buy-in for the campaign.

## Understanding your Place

The success of place branding and place marketing will come from developing a thorough understanding of the place which you are trying to work with. There is certainly the need to engage and collaborate with stakeholders to develop an informed and nuanced view about what a place stands for, taking into account what currently makes residents proud of their area and what unique features could be highlighted to attract visitors and tourists.

Understanding a place's geographical position is crucial in how a place can be marketed and taking a 'bottom-up approach is advised to discover the unique features of the city and user centered spaces.' As the International Place Branding Manifesto states, 'Perceptions and civic pride matter. Locals deserve opportunity, dignity and the ability to engage internationally with their head held high.'<sup>2</sup>

Their 10 key principles for effective place branding are outlined below:

### Principles

1. Based on local identity and purpose,
2. Through collaboration between all public, private and civil society stakeholders,
3. Create a long-term positioning strategy (beyond the logo),
4. That is robust and capable of absorbing change and responding to crises,
5. That is implemented through meaningful action (policy-, project-, investment-, infrastructure-, campaign-initiatives) contributing to society, humanity and a sustainable planet,
6. Using the power of imagination to create original, creative, innovative, captivating and inspiring initiatives that catch the imagination of internal and external audiences,
7. Thereby building a distinctive, relevant, authentic, consistent, meaningful image,
8. Seeing reputation monitoring and management as an integral part of governance,
9. Committing adequate resources and processes to it, and,
10. Therefore, requiring constructive collaborative leadership to co-create the future.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://placebranding.org/manifesto/>

## Case studies

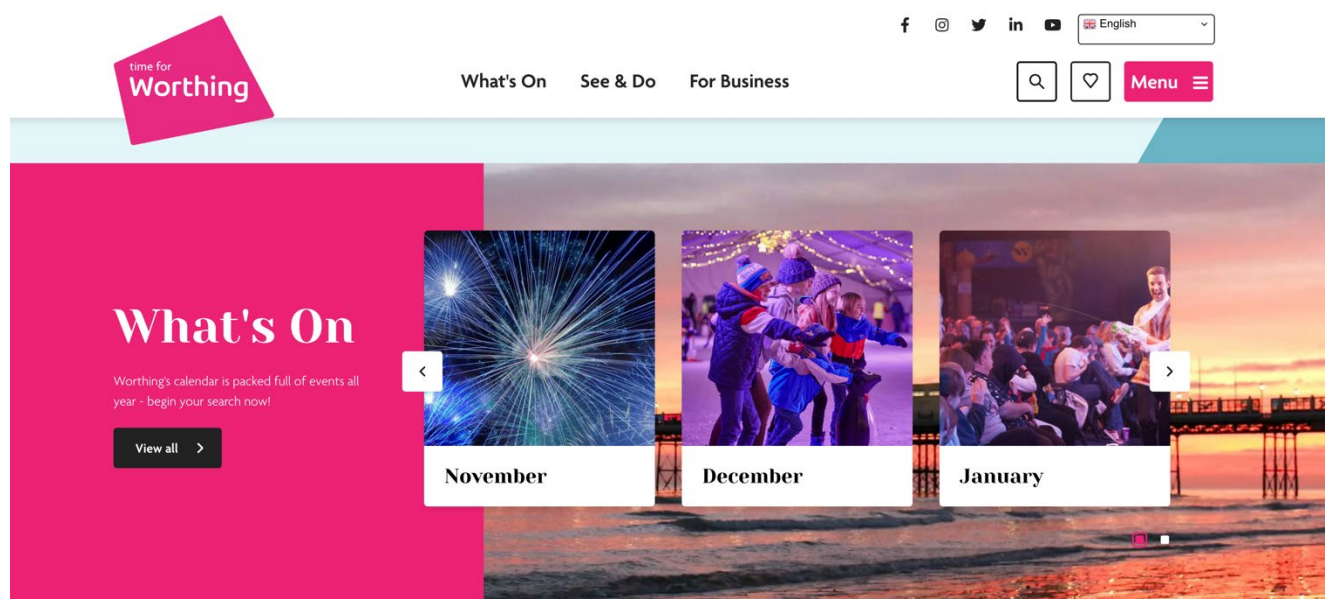
### Worthing

Worthing developed and launched a place brand in 2020. The main brand driver / strapline is “Time for Worthing” which it has successfully used in multiple campaigns and accentuates the positive changes that have happened / are happening in the town. The brand narrative and messaging supports the place brand, highlighting the amenities, accessibility and competitive (cost) advantage of Worthing over other towns in the South East.



The brand has been used well across the town – particularly on Council led regeneration projects and the colour is very vibrant and noticeable with professional high quality executions on a range of collateral. Good use of photography and videography is also visible on their website.

[www.timeforworthing.uk](http://www.timeforworthing.uk)





## Stockport Old Town

In response to high vacancy rates and low footfall, a group of stakeholders in Stockport used the 'Portas Pilot' money allocated to them from central government to commission a design agency to create a new brand identity for 'Stockport Old Town', an architecturally distinct but underused part of the town centre.

The result of this was the creation of a simple, modern new brand and website for Stockport Old Town, which drew on local landmarks for inspiration and altogether embodied a new direction for the area based on innovation and creativity.

Alongside the roll-out of the brand, a series of large-scale events (including the now award-winning Foodie Friday) were run in the Market Place and the brand was used across a wide range of marketing materials, from billboards to beer and from maps to magazines.



The roll-out of the new place-brand, alongside the events programme, helped stimulate private investment in the Old Town, reducing the vacancy rate in the Market Place from 50% to 5%. Stockport is now heralded as a town that's a model for others to follow, with [The Sunday Times](#) describing it as “[one of the coolest little corners of the country](#)” and [The Guardian](#) heralding it as “[the new Berlin](#)”.

[www.stockportoldtown.co.uk](http://www.stockportoldtown.co.uk)

## Lowestoft



Lowestoft's place branding programme, which was launched in 2020, had a clear aim at its beginning. To boost pride in place and to attract new visitors, businesses, and residents. This was led by East Suffolk Council and ThinkingPlace alongside local partners.

Lowestoft's branding displayed three clear elements.

- Communicating the story, past, present and future.
- Constructing an improved place which demonstrated ongoing improvement and development of the brand.
- Cooperating with partners and stakeholders for the common good<sup>3</sup>

The branding followed a story which identified what the residents of Lowestoft were all about; it presents the place as a unique destination. The story is split into themes, Harnessing and celebrating the energy of the sea, which celebrated the town's sea heritage, and Exploring the Eastscape which promotes Lowestoft as a place with a great variety of landscapes such as skies, beaches, the broads, coastlines and marshlands.<sup>4</sup> These themes and the creation of Lowestoft story has helped residents and stakeholders focus their plans and has helped them to identify what makes Lowestoft special, competitive and unique. They believe that it is a story which will bring people together and one where different businesses and communities can be part of.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://thinklowestoft.co.uk/2023/01/27/lowestoft-place-branding-programme-recognised-as-good-practice/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thinklowestoft.co.uk/the-lowestoft-story/>

## Withington

Withington, a district of the city of Manchester, developed a draft framework for the village through a series of community consultation events and stakeholder meetings.

Following this engagement, the community of Withington have made effective use of social media channels, particularly Twitter and Instagram, to effectively communicate their development plans. Their 'We Are Withington' brand demonstrates their collaborative approach, with a style that is engaging, quirky and fun – values that they perhaps want to translate to the image of the town itself.

The We Are Withington brand champions the positive work that is ongoing in the village, including the Withington Walls campaign that has seen a number of shopfronts and blank walls be transformed with street art murals. Whilst there is now a wide array of creative artwork throughout the village, the most famous one of these is the Marcus Rashford mural which has been widely featured across social media and on Match of the Day.



## Wakefield

# WAKEFIELD

Wakefield's branding was launched in 2020 with the aim of increasing visitors and improving pride in the local place. This happened as Wakefield businesses, education providers and the public sector came together to improve the way the Wakefield district was perceived and marketed.

The collaboration found that they needed to understand what made Wakefield unique and how could this place compete with other places in the region and country. This led to the creation of the Wakefield Story which was told through events, marketing and activities that involved residents and local businesses to ensure that this was a locally led story.<sup>5</sup>

This marketing focuses on promoting the food offer, the industrial heritage and history, the countryside, and contemporary modern stories. It also promotes festivals, events and the arts and humanities.

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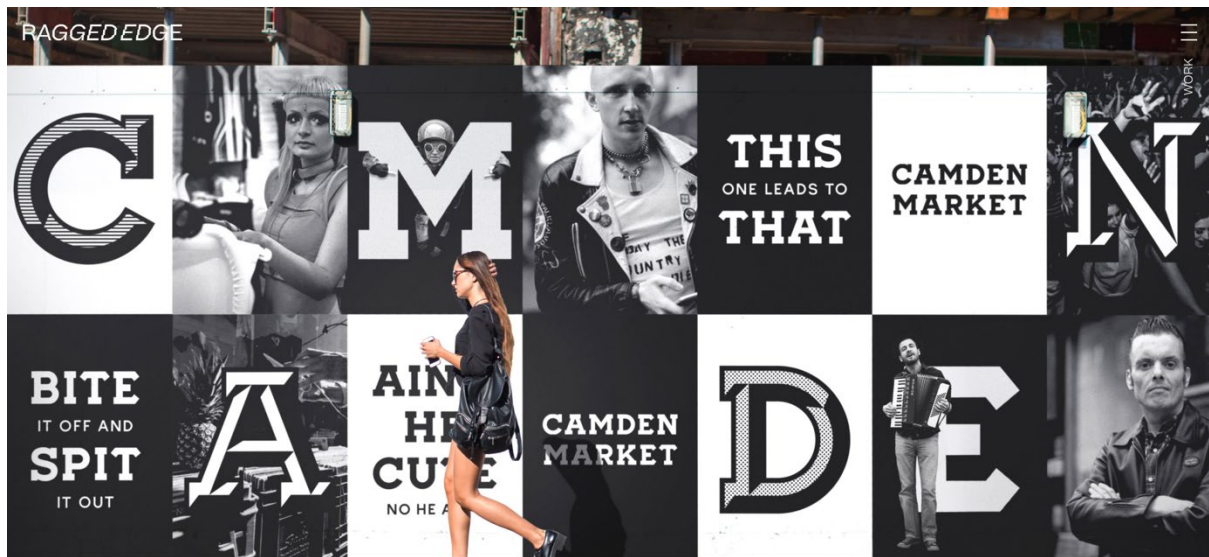


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<sup>5</sup> <https://bewakefield.co.uk/about/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://experiencewakefield.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/265940-Visitor-Guide-2022-pages.pdf>

## Camden Market



The place branding for Camden Market was led by an organisation called Ragged Edge. Although a private organisation, they immersed themselves in the market and engaged with the owners, workers and visitors. Through this they found a shared commonalities which in this case was ‘corporate conformity.’<sup>7</sup> This ensured that the branding of the place did not follow conventional methods and templates and instead used Black and white colours with two bespoke typefaces.

Ragged Edge have ensured that they have ‘created a brand that could change Camden Market’s future without changing its heritage.’<sup>8</sup> It shows awareness of local identity and the history of the place which are intrinsic in brand creation. They have ensured that Camden’s uniqueness is celebrated and in doing so, the offer for visitors is clearly displayed.

This work led to the organisation win numerous awards such as D&AD Professional Awards 2017, Wood Pencil, Branding Scheme Transform Awards Europe 2017, Gold, Best Place Brand.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://raggededge.com/work/camden-market-branding/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

## Shrewsbury



Shrewsbury's branding and eventual marketing began in 2012, where the local council asked &smith to design a brand identity that promoted the place's uniqueness. The design focused on the concept of 'The Original One-Off': which celebrated all of the town's one-offs, such as historical figures such as Darwin and smaller, more localised aspects. This expanded as the years progressed, for example, a DarwIN Shrewsbury Festival was established so in order to to celebrate and promote Shrewsbury as 'The Origin of Independent Thinking.'<sup>10</sup>

This involved local businesses, for example, the visual identity was promoted using 'one-off since...' stamp, with which local businesses could use to show off their product and company, whether this was deeply historical or more recent. The use of black and white in the imagery was because of Shrewsbury's iconic Tudor history and landscape which separated the town from many others.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, the image focused on the promotion of the historic character, the local community and the unique aspect of the local businesses.

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<sup>10</sup> [How Shrewsbury Discovered Charles Darwin as City Branding Opportunity \(placebrandobserver.com\)](https://placebrandobserver.com)

<sup>11</sup> <https://identitydesigned.com/shrewsbury/>

## 25 Vital and Viable Priorities

Research into understanding the factors that contribute to the creation of vital and viable high streets has identified 25 priorities for creating attractive high streets that deliver long-term success. This Framework can be used by place leaders to prioritise action.

Improving the usage and identification of anchors links to some of these 25 priorities and reading about them can therefore be helpful in this task. Improving place branding and marketing can link to the following priorities: place marketing, experience, anchors, place management, etc. You can find more information about the 25 priorities [here](#).

### What 5 step plan would you put forward for a place to have a successful brand and marketing campaign?

1. **Establish the essence of a place brand.** Develop values through workshops with a wide variety of stakeholders, this will help you understand your audience.
2. **Set the vision of place and define the brand.** Use these values to shape your strategy so that you can create a unique offer and brand.
3. **Develop a brief and a marketing plan.** Create an activation plan for the place brand which will last 1-3 years.
4. **Implement the marketing of the brand.** Through various methods and in various locations, showcase your place brand both locally and nationally.
5. **Evaluate and iterate.** Evaluate marketing with stakeholders, get feedback from businesses, users and do not be afraid to tweak, fail, or make mistake

## Acknowledgements

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