



A Community That Works

The Branding Journey of the Village of Los Lunas, New Mexico

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CONTENTS

Brands Are More Important Than Ever	3
Why Brands Are Critical	3
People Have Countless Choices	3
The Branding Journey Begins	4
A Village Seeks Identity	4
The Idea Group Community Branding Process	5
Putting Los Lunas on the Map	7
A Clear Understanding of Branding	7
A New Attitude Emerges	8
A Brand is Simply Everything	10
Starting Your Branding Journey	12
Additional Considerations and Information	13
James Glover, The Idea Group of Santa Fe, LLC	13
Evaluate Your Community Brand - A Quick Assessment	14
Q&A with Christina Ainsworth, Community Development Director	15

Brands Are More Important Than Ever

Why Brands Are Critical

Why do Nike, Apple, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and the rock band U2 perform so well in their respective markets? The answer is simple. They all have strong brands in the minds of their targeted customers. This is no accident.

These companies work hard to ensure customers know exactly what makes them unique and the benefits derived from their offerings. They create trust in their brands, loyalty, confidence and specific product expectations. Compelling messaging shares relevant and resonant information through diverse marketing channels to create recognition and top of mind.

Their branding goals are very clear. They want their customers to remember and recall their products every time they make a purchase. Even better, they want customers to automatically gravitate to their brands without thinking. In a nutshell, the essence of branding is being #1 in the minds of your target customers.

Why do communities need to develop a brand and mount formal marketing strategies? They are not P&G or Nike employing top-notch branding experts to build the perfect brand and sell billions of dollars of laundry soap and athletic shoes.

At first glance, one might think branding a community is not necessary. But having spent years in the trenches with communities, The Idea Group knows that in today's brand-driven world, fueled by social media and search engine optimization, there is absolutely nothing more important to the long term vitality and viability of a community than having a recognized and well-understood brand. People have choices where to live, work and recreate and it's imperative for every community to make sure its brand is considered.

People Have Countless Choices

People gravitate to brands they respect and trust and usually shy away from brands that they have had a negative experience with or no encounter at all.

Traditional and inbound marketing drive thousands of messages all vying for attention in today's environment. Consumers are bombarded from every angle with advertising and promotional clutter. Brands that clearly convey their customer benefits to desired target audiences get noticed and drive a call-to-action. Brands with negative or no identity fall off the radar and are either quickly dismissed or not considered at all.

When I mention Paris, New York and Santa Fe, does your mind conjure up clear images of these cities? Now think about your town or community. What comes to mind? Are you conjuring up positive images? Do you see your town as a desirable place to live, work and recreate? Or is the image a bit unclear with perhaps a few negative impressions creeping in as well.

Now consider all those people who don't live in your town. What impressions do they have? Positive? Negative? The wrong impressions or none at all? Since they lack your knowledge and personal experience with the community, they make decisions based on what they see, read, hear or learn through chance encounters. Numerous positive impressions create one mindset; negative impressions or no impressions foster another. The key is whether or not their perceptions and brand image align with your community's desired brand identity.

Whether your community is seeking to enhance its brand stature and esteem, or attract human capital (as residents and workers), new businesses and visitors, it's imperative in today's very competitive place marketing that you create a brand that appeals to and is understood by your targeted markets. To be in contention, communities must create and manage their brands as diligently as Nike, Apple, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and U2.

Through our ongoing work with Los Lunas, the Village leaders have gained a strong appreciation of branding and are deploying the appropriate tactics to emerge as one of New Mexico's top branded communities.

The Branding Journey Begins

A Village Seeks Identity

A mere 20 miles south of Albuquerque lay the Village of Los Lunas, population 14,850. In spite of many attractive and appealing community attributes, the Village of Lunas had a major challenge: poor brand awareness.

Most New Mexicans can't pinpoint Los Lunas on a map and have little idea of what the Village has to offer with respect to residential, business and tourism experiences and opportunities. Given that most New Mexico residents aren't familiar with the Los Lunas brand, it's easy to see that individuals and companies outside of the state have even less awareness and recognition.

Christina Ainsworth, the Community Development Director for the Village of Los Lunas, understood the importance of having a strong community brand. Before taking her position in Los Lunas, Ms. Ainsworth worked for the city of El Paso, Texas, a major US community and a regional leader in place branding. Ainsworth knew that a unified brand developed by local residents, businesses and organizations would create the desired identity and become the foundation for the development of the Village's comprehensive plan to guide future growth. Ainsworth also realized that the consistent branding of Los Lunas would finally put the Village on the map and generate increased interest in the community.

Ms. Ainsworth, working in conjunction with Los Lunas Mayor Robert Vialpando and the Village Council, engaged our company, The Idea Group of Santa Fe, LLC, to develop a unique community brand for the Village of Los Lunas. We also collaborated to construct a marketing action plan to enhance economic development

and support the ongoing branding of Los Lunas and the Community Development Department. This paper summarizes our place branding process and accomplishments to date.

The Idea Group Community Branding Process

The Idea Group, based on our decade of experience supporting the strategic and tactical needs of municipalities large and small, has created a community branding methodology comprised of three major components, each equally important to the overall success of the process. We have found this proven approach works with any community regardless of its history of branding activity. A summary of each key element follows.



Figure 1 The Idea Group Branding Process

Community Engagement

There are three components to community engagement: a) project management, b) public communications, and c) research. .

Project Management: The first component of a successful community branding campaign is to ensure that a management system is in place that enables the branding team to interact with city government, the community and/or economic development department as well as stakeholders including business leaders, partners, residents, and local media.

Public Communications: The second component of community engagement is to establish a fluid line of communications with local residents, businesses, organizations and the media. Communications should continue through the entire scope of the project.

Research: The final component of community engagement is research. It's imperative to determine the community's desired brand identity (how it wants to be perceived by its target markets) versus its brand image (how it is actually perceived by target markets). The Idea Group uses primary and secondary research to develop both a quantitative and qualitative understanding the existing and desired community brand.

Brand Strategy

Brand strategy drives all future marketing efforts of a project and is based upon research results and the expertise that The Idea Group brings to the table to evaluate such data and findings. Elements of the brand strategy include:

SWOC: The Idea Group uses a SWOC analysis (strengthens, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges) to determine the attributes of the community.

Brand Essence: We distill the attributes to determine the brand essence of the community that will enable it to be perceived as #1 in the minds of target audiences related to offerings and benefits.

Figure 2 Los Lunas Brand Essence

VILLAGE OF LOS LUNAS BRAND ESSENCE
<p><i>Los Lunas is a safe and thriving community with rich history, culture, and tradition. Our roots run deep and our businesses are cultivated with care.</i></p>
<p><i>Small and rural, close to Albuquerque, buffered by native lands, the Rio Grande and scenic mountains, our Village is all about family, education, quality of life, and living, working, sharing, caring.</i></p>
<p><i>Los Lunas. Small community. Big possibilities.</i></p>

Brand Values/Truisms: Next, we identify the values or truisms (self-evident truths) that will be used to promote the community. These values are based on fact and become the foundation for the community brand promise. It is essential for the community to be able to not only promise but also deliver on that promise, which is key to creating a brand that will resonate with targets.

Brand Positioning: We create several brand positions for a community that will enable different marketing strategies in the future. Positioning might include quality of life, opportunities, proximity to major metropolitan statistical area, size of community, etc. We address the functional benefits provided by the community and the emotional benefits residents, businesses and visitors will derive as well.

Brandline (aka Slogan, Tagline): Developing a brandline captures in a few words what a community stands for. It's a memorable tagline designed to appeal to selected targets. Nike's slogan is "Just Do It" but it represents Nike's overarching brand strategy to encourage everyone to workout but use high-tech, performance Nike gear when they do.

Marketing

With the brand strategy in place, The Idea Group supports the community's effort to share its desired brand identity in the marketplace through compelling and consistent message that will resonate with and is relevant to target audiences.

Marketing Action Plan: We prepare a marketing action plan that is creative, inspiring, and actionable. Based upon the community's ability to launch and manage the campaign, The Idea Group provides tactical support where needed. We are able to work with the community's marketing team to ensure brand integrity across its marketing campaign. We are also positioned to implement marketing tasks for the community.

Putting Los Lunas on the Map

The most exciting aspect of any community branding project is seeing the client evolve from a branding novice into a branding expert and champion their brand in a smart, strategic and consistent fashion. This has been the case with the Village of Los Lunas. Next we will highlight Los Lunas' branding transformation, its new brand identity and the approach it will take in the future to create brand awareness to enhance brand strength and stature with its target markets.

A Clear Understanding of Branding

Partnering with The Idea Group, the Village of Los Lunas has developed a clear understanding of branding and why it is so important to have a recognized brand to attract businesses, residents and visitors. In addition, the Village has made community branding a priority, formed a branding team, and has taken a proactive approach to building and sharing its brand.

By undertaking the community branding process, Los Lunas has clearly identified its target markets, brand essence, and positioning. They have developed their marketing messaging, deliverables, and action plan. In

the span of 18 months, the Village is moving in the right strategic direction and experiencing the benefits, large and small, of deploying a community branding strategy.

Now when Los Lunas economic development manager Ralph L. Mims visits local businesses he always asks how he can help them succeed. With this understanding of branding, Mims attends the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) global conferences to promote the community. Los Lunas enhanced their reputation as one of the state's top economic development organizations by hosting the 2013 Rural Forum, New Mexico's annual economic development conference. Recently, the leading business trade publication in New Mexico Albuquerque First, ranked Los Lunas as the #8 economic development organization in the state. Los Lunas understands that all these positive efforts create very favorable impressions in the market.

A New Attitude Emerges

The Idea Group developed 125 original brandlines for Los Lunas reflecting the many positions available to the community to promote. Through community review and input the brandlines were reduced to seven then finally to two, based on the community's desire to position as small and rural but with the ability to work together to accomplish major things.

Small Communities. Big Possibilities.

Deep Roots. Growing Opportunities.

By final vote, the community selected the first brandline to accurately reflect the unique positioning of Los Lunas. More than a motto, this brandline conveys the Village's desire to always strive for big possibilities despite the small size of the community.

Figure 3 Los Lunas New Logo and Brandline



Small Community, Big Possibilities

With the new brandline in place, The Idea Group worked with the Village and its graphic team EFG Creative to establish a new extended brand identity. Holding true to the roots of its original village logo, a contemporary logo was introduced that reflects the community's new bold branding attitude and commitment. This logo, depicted above, is now found on Village signage, stationery, vehicles, newsletters, shirts, and business cards.

In addition to the overarching positioning and tagline for the Village, The Idea Group developed a sub-brand for the community's economic development with a tagline that reads: ***A Community That Works***. Integrating the overall design of the new Village logo, a modified logo was created. This logo and tagline is the foundation for all outbound marketing efforts including brochures, website, PowerPoint presentations, webinars, etc.

Figure 4 Economic Development Logo and Brandline



To enable the Village's economic development efforts to stand out from other communities, a double-side business card was designed to appeal to prospects and instantly convey that it's not business as usual in Los Lunas. Because the Village has numerous picturesque tree-lined country roads, as well as Rio Grande flowing within its borders, we wanted to use a tree and the river as a graphical metaphors for growth and prosperity in the community. The front and back of the new business cards are displayed below.



Figure 5 Business Card—Front



Figure 6 Business Card—Back

A Brand is Simply Everything

The Village of Los Lunas, through its branding journey, now understands that a community brand is simply

everything. They know it's the appearance of the community, how government interacts with its residents, the quality of the education system, how well its fire and police departments protect citizens, the success of local businesses, the amount of recreational activities and offerings, ample housing, adequate health services, and every other aspect of community living.

Los Lunas also realizes that the size of the community doesn't matter. It's important for every city or town, large or small, to continuously brand to ensure that the public has a clear understanding of what that community is all about. As Los Lunas moves forward to market its attributes to residents, businesses and visitors, the Village is committed to maintaining the integrity of its brand.

As proof, Los Lunas is currently revamping its Interstate 25 freeway interchange and is integrating brand components into the overall design. The Village knows that something as common as a freeway on-ramp and off-ramp can set the tone for a favorable community brand experience. These visualizations strongly convey the Village's dedication to future branding.



Figure 7 Interstate 25 Freeway Interchange Exit

Starting Your Branding Journey

When your community is ready to embark on its branding journey, please contact James Glover to discuss how The Idea Group can work with you to develop a branding program that will position your community brand to be #1 in the minds of your target customers.

Contact Information:

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Additional Considerations and Information

James Glover, The Idea Group of Santa Fe, LLC



James Glover started his community branding career in 1986 when he produced a destination marketing video for the Ritz Carlton, Laguna Niguel. Later that year Glover produced "The California Riviera" travel video that branded the Orange County coast of Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, Corona del Mar, Dana Point and San Juan Capistrano as a world-class vacation destination.

During the 90s, Glover was owner of Total Entertainment, a branding and media company based in Santa Monica, CA. Clients included American Honda, Computer Sciences Corporation, Toyota, Computer Learning Centers, and The Upper Deck Company.

In 2002, Glover formed The Idea Group of Santa Fe, LLC. Over the past decade, The Idea Group has become one of the top branding and marketing companies in New Mexico, developing strategy for communities, businesses and non-profits. The Idea Group has completed economic development plans, Main Street plans, and branding for such cities as the Village of Los Lunas, NM, Angel Fire, NM, Raton, NM, Belen, NM, Truth or Consequences, NM, Elephant Butte, NM, Las Vegas, NM, Santa Rosa, NM, Tucumcari, NM and the Pueblo of Acoma, NM.

In 2012, Glover launched Once a Day Marketing™, a daily branding video blog followed in over 150 countries around the world. Glover is also the co-host of Ask Those Branding Guys, a weekly radio on KVSF 101.5 FM.

Mr. Glover speaks nationally on the subject of branding, marketing and media to businesses, chambers of commerce, universities, and associations. Past lectures include University of Illinois School of Business; University of California, Irvin; Los Alamos Entrepreneurs Association; the Pueblo of Acoma, New Mexico; The New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce; the Leadville, Colorado Chamber of Commerce; and the Tourism Association of New Mexico. Glover holds a BS in international business from the University of Oregon and an MBA from the University of California, Irvine.

Evaluate Your Community Brand - A Quick Assessment

Is your community brand creating the right identity and favorable impressions to entice and attract human capital, new businesses and tourists? Use this quick assessment to grade your community branding efforts. With "5" the highest and "1" the lowest, score each question and then tally the total and determine how well your community brand is working for you.

A) There is a very clear understanding in the market place of what our community brand stands for.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

B) Our brand attracts individuals and families to live and work in our community.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

C) Our brand attracts established companies and entrepreneurs to locate their businesses in our community.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

D) Our brand attracts visitors to explore and experience our community.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

E) Our branding plan is in place with consistent implementation underway.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

F) We have created a branding alliance with our partners and share in the cooperative marketing of the brand.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

Score

1 - 10: Your community brand needs serious attention

11 - 20: Your branding is underway but there is room for improvement

21 - 29: Nice branding job. Time now for some careful refinement

30: Your community is a branding superstar!

Q&A with Christina Ainsworth, Community Development Director

Christina Ainsworth is the community development director for the Village of Los Lunas. Her leadership inspired the Village's branding project.

Q) *What prompted the Village of Los Lunas to develop its community brand?*

A) Los Lunas experienced unprecedented growth in the last decade and is well positioned to continue that trend. Unfortunately few people have ever heard of Los Lunas. We felt that it was necessary to develop an identity that we could market to the outside world in order to share our successes and encourage further growth and economic development.

Q) *What expectations did you have regarding the development of the community brand?*

A) We expected to gain a clear picture of the community values, the community's strengths and what we needed to do to present that identity to the outside.

Q) *Through this process, what has the Village learned about community branding?*

A) That a "brand is simply everything!" We also learned that the branding process itself boosted pride in our community and really helped us to focus on the vision that we want to create for the future.

Q) *What benefits has the Village accrued through its branding efforts?*

A) Better recognition and exposure. In conjunction with our more aggressive economic development initiatives, the brand is helping the Village to establish a positive presence with developers, retailer and other service providers.

Q) *What would you say to other communities considering initiating a community branding effort?*

A) The branding process is well worth the effort and will take the community to a new level as far as identity and its focus on economic development.

Q) *In your opinion, why is a community brand important in today's market environment?*

A) People have too many choices out there. Especially for small communities, competition is strong. To be competitive, a community needs to position itself to be on the cutting edge and be able to display a unique identity.

Q) *What else would you like to add about the Village of Los Lunas branding experience?*

A) The greatest part of the branding effort was the response from the community. It was important for us to get as much feedback as possible and to ensure that the community was behind the effort. There has been nothing but positive response from the public during the process and to the final brand.
