

Top 10 Tips for achieving successful branding and marketing of complex mixed use regeneration projects

Admotus Marketing has specialist skills and experience in helping companies involved in delivering mixed use projects to develop and implement marketing strategies that create lasting location and place brands (www.admotusmarketing.com/place-marketing).

Introduction

We are often asked what advice we might give to those who setting out to create a successful place brand as part of a major mixed use regeneration project. It's a complex topic and one which certainly requires full commitment and buy-in from all who have a declared interest in wanting to see a successful outcome to a major place shaping development programme.

Our top 10 tips are based on lessons we have learned from being closely involved in place shaping developments, either in a marketing advisory capacity or as marketing programme leaders.

Tip 1 – Work hard at your communication

Good communication is a vital ingredient in building successful brand and marketing strategies. You need to create a clear and simple story to tell about your plans and aspirations for your mixed use development. This means ensuring that your investors, your own development team, local businesses and residents, the media and other key stakeholders are briefed and are able to articulate, in simple language, your vision for the place or destination you are creating. Being in a position to successfully convey your vision to others, will help you build a diverse group of brand ambassadors for your development who will spread your key messages to networks and influencers where you do not have easy access.

Tip 2 – Thorough research underpins everything

Detailed research is a key determinant to the success of any place shaping programme and no more so than where a major mixed use development is acting as the catalyst for regeneration and town or city transformation. Research will not only tell you much about the demographics of a region, city, town where you plan to invest and develop your scheme, it will also give you insight into customer perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of the place you are aiming to reshape. Good research is essential if you want to develop a compelling story which leaves those you want to attract (such as investors, retailers, shoppers, residential and business occupiers) in no doubt that this is the place to be.

Tip 3 – Work hard at bringing doubters onside

The subject of place branding and marketing is a relatively new but is building in acceptance and credibility amongst property developers, civic leaders and commentators as new developments that employ such approaches are seen to work (see: <http://www.admotusmarketing.com/download.htm>). However, doubters can have a corrosive influence on others if they are allowed to hold negative opinions of the virtues and merits behind the need to build successful place brands. Large scale mixed use developments, in particular, require good marketing and branding to truly maximise investors' return on investment and therefore the case for good marketing and branding ought to be a given.

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Tip 4 – Build your brand early

Building a genuine place brand takes time, so start work early on creating it. The brand should help influence all areas of the development process from visioning work, through to design, sales, tenant management and ultimately the creation of the visitor experience - which comes at the end. Remember that good place brand development should stretch and challenge conventional thinking. You should be looking to create something which is unique but true to what the place will become. It's a difficult process but getting it right will deliver huge benefits on just about every dimension you care to mention.

Place branding and the role of mixed use development is much more complex than product or conventional property marketing. Often the brand will need to satisfy a number of different offers, which is the nature of mixed use development. The branding and marketing must also work in harmony with what already exists within the location. However, when considered thoughtfully, the wider town or city offer - together with the heritage that may exist - can be of benefit to how you approach your place branding and marketing.

Tip 5 – Embrace the history, culture and wider 'city offer'

Place shaping, branding and marketing that comes with mixed use development rarely happens in isolation. Many mixed use developments involve existing brown field sites often located within town and city centres. Embrace the existing virtues of what exists around you as what you are creating will enhance what is already there. Think about how you might weave the wider town or city offer into the stories you are using to describe your vision for the 'new' place. If ever the saying "the sum is greater than the parts" then this is a good example. For those who know the 'old' place well, what already exists may hold a certain emotional importance, so let the past and historic influences enhance your vision for the future and the stories you create to describe that vision.

Tip 6 – Keep all your stakeholders informed

Your stakeholder group will be large and diverse but keeping them informed before, during and after the development phase will help you establish you build brand equity. When we talk about stakeholders in this case we mean local residents and businesses, interest groups, town and city leaders. Brand ambassadors will be important to you (a point raised earlier) particularly when, as is likely to be the case at some point during the development phase, the project comes up against difficulties. Irrespective of how challenging these difficulties might seem, having a diverse group of stakeholders who are genuine advocates will help you to quickly overcome potentially brand damaging issues. Regular communication using traditional communication channels as well as social media is important. In addition to professional communications and PR specialists who you may employ, responsibility for keeping stakeholders informed should extend to everyone within the developer's team, particularly those close to the decision making process.

Tip 7 – Building B2B action on the back of awareness, interest and desire can be challenging

If you plan to sell retail and office space as part of your mixed use development remember that making yourself heard and gaining commitment to make an investment in your development can be challenging and frustrating experience. Your branding must be clear, as should all aspects of your marketing mix

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and messaging. However, big value purchases take time to convert, so the sooner you start talking to your target occupiers the easier the conversion process will become.

Tip 8 – Monitor performance and change course if needs be

Keep an eye on your place branding and marketing programme and continue to monitor the perceptions of the target market you want to reach. If your marketing messages are failing to change opinion or, inertia and a reluctance to make a commitment persists among your target buyers, change what you are doing. Be prepared to change tack with your marketing programme as nothing should be off limits when it comes to delivering a successful place shaping programme.

Tip 9 – Court the media and tackle difficult issues head on

When it comes to matters such as large scale mixed use development, the emotions that this work sometimes engenders amongst local people, pressure groups and businesses - which in some way are impacted in a negative way by the change you are bringing about – can leave you on the receiving end of some hostile reporting when things go wrong. It would be naive to suggest that having a good relationship with the media is a safeguard against bad news seeing the light of day, far from it. However, good relationships will, at the very least, mean that you get the opportunity to put your side of the story which may help lessen the impact on your reputation. If you know that something difficult is almost certain to find its way to the media, deal with it head on. Trying to dodge uncomfortable truths will damage your place brand and the equity you have built up in it.

Tip 10 – Deep rooted negative perceptions about a place take time to change

There's a maxim which goes something like this: "when you start to get tired of hearing your same marketing messages that's when consumers are just starting to get it." Putting it simply, if you are looking to build awareness and interest which will lead to a change in negative perceptions about a place, it's going to take time. Indeed, deep rooted negative perceptions are hard to change so, if your development sits within a town or city which carries with it a lot of negative baggage, the sooner you start to show examples of the what is going to replace what went before and the sooner you start telling people your story about the 'new' place that's coming, the sooner you will start to win hearts and minds and with that a real shift in perception.

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