

Best Practice

SASKATCHEWAN'S OUTBACK Community Branding Campaign

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

Councils wished to support the tourism industry in our community and build on the successes that we have had in the past while looking forward to putting our community out there as a destination, as a viable travel opportunity.

Councils wished to work together with businesses and Sask Tourism to capitalize on the industry and to retain and expand tourism business in and around Carrot River. It was quickly discovered that, to best do this, we needed to find a niche, a brand, to market ourselves.

The two municipalities financially support CRED, Carrot River Economic Development, a local think tank really, made up of business minded, community volunteers. They formed a subcommittee called the tourism committee and invited key people from both municipalities to join. Shortly after they went through the process to identify tourism assets, infrastructure and put together a description of typical tourists to the area, the subcommittee morphed into a Community Branding Committee. This committee works tirelessly to promote our community and has worked with Sask. Tourism staff and Roger Brooks as well as some contractors to come up with SASKATCHEWAN'S OUTBACK TM, our brand, a tag line, "That's Life Here!" and a logo. While the progress has been slow at times, the efforts put forward by this group of volunteers and municipal staff is proving to be incredibly rewarding for our community. Buy in by local business and citizens has been the key to the success, if we don't believe in who we are, who the heck is going to want to come see us? We have found many businesses and groups that have embraced the brand and have attached themselves to it. We are confident that we are becoming known as SASKATCHEWAN'S OUTBACK and that, while there is a lot of work ahead of us, we have done the due diligence required to reap the rewards that are to come.

THE PROCESS

Both Councils supported this project by approving staff time and financial resources through CRED, Carrot River Economic Development, an appointed committee of both Councils. At first, a Tourism subcommittee was formed which engaged in analysis of tourism in our community outlined by Tourism Saskatchewan. The tourism committee consisted of 4 municipal staff members and members of CRED along with members of the community. At the end of the work of the Tourism Committee, a group of that team then morphed into a different subcommittee of CRED called the Community Branding Committee. The Branding Committee consists of members of CRED, community members and 3 municipal staff members.

The key members were from CRED, Angela Schmitt, Daniel Janzen, Colin Peters, a member of Town Council, Neal Wasko, and community member Tim Fehr along with CRED Coordinator Maggie Doerksen, Recreation Coordinator Miranda Blaber and Town Administrator Kevin Trew. These committee members have been community champions, attending seminars, meetings, fundraising for the community square, working at the sides of their desks putting together a branding campaign.

From the start, the committee has relied on guidance and input from resources and staff of Tourism Saskatchewan. Tourism Saskatchewan invited us to meet with Roger Brooks, a renowned branding expert. The committee was fortunate to meet with him, bounce ideas off him and then see him in our community at a later date. Both municipalities were able to commit financial resources to the work of the branding committee.

From the outset, the committee identified that the success of selling the brand to the world would require buy in from key segments of the community including but not limited to businesses, volunteer groups and all citizens. While the committee developed the brand and strategized the implementation, there were a number of community projects that were at a bit of a standstill. One such project was the Community Square. The branding committee took the role of developing this as a tangible project that would give the group of volunteers not only credibility in the community but a bit of a launching point for the brand. It is difficult to see how these relate if you look at it from a specific moment in time. Projects like the branding project come to fruition with dedication from people who already have a lot of things on their plate, it is often said that if you want something done, ask someone who is already busy. Or community needed someone to do something with the empty lot on Main Street and the branding committee took it on because they recognized that, in order to be successful, the brand needed a greenspace in the middle of Town; an outdoor venue, with amenities that lend itself to celebrating what we have to offer in the community, outdoor experiences of many kinds in the OUTBACK. As the community square project was hitting various benchmarks, the branding committee introduced different aspects of the brand. The strategy behind establishing the brand included: Identifying our anchor tenant, the key businesses, groups and activities that we wished to promote, involving these key businesses, groups and activity leaders in development, inviting key stakeholders to an introduction of the brand, developing a marketing campaign which includes a logo, championing the brand in the community and outside of the community, meeting with groups wishing to use the brand, incorporating the brand into already existing activities and groups, and, perhaps the biggest job of all, backing up the brand promise by encouraging business development to support it.

THE RESULTS

We are SASKATCHEWAN'S OUTBACK, people can't stop talking about it, business has embraced it, the community has embraced it, people are proud of it – we are marketing ourselves with this brand. At our tourist information booth, we now have OUTBACK Ambassadors, many businesses have adopted the name in product or in facilities, we have changed the names of a few annual events (OUTBACK Winter Finale, OUTBACK Family Festival) and developed a new annual event, Flavours of the OUTBACK (similar to Taste of Saskatchewan). A local charitable organization named itself the OUTBACK Bears, our local Jr. B Hockey team is now named the Carrot River OUTBACK Thunder, we now have an OUTBACK Car Club. We sell OUTBACK bottled water, restaurants are naming menu items with homage to OUTBACK, businesses are selling merchandise with the logo on it as well as naming facilities (the OUTBACK Cooler, the OUTBACK tire barn), CJVR, a Melfort radio station, announces “to our listeners in SASKATCHEWAN'S OUTBACK”. It is really turning into something special...almost a mantra....almost

The project has not been formally evaluated. The committee is still there as a bit of a watchdog and municipal staff are in charge of monitoring it.

There are two challenges that come to mind, the biggest challenge was seeking buy-in to the naysayers in our community. Of course, not everyone will always love the idea – in fact, there are still people who absolutely hate the

brand for a number of reasons. Our staff and committee are to be credited with championing this to a level that those naysayers are quite quiet. The second challenge is doing this while “normal life” goes on. The volunteers and staff involved really do this “off the side of their desk” – they do it because they believe in the work that needed to be done and they are true community champions.

LESSONS LEARNED

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