

The Branding of Botanical Gardens for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Randall L. Fiveash

Independent Study Paper

Fall 2018

Associate Professor of Marketing

Dr. Youngseon Kim

School of Business

Central Connecticut State University

New Britain, Connecticut

December 9, 2018

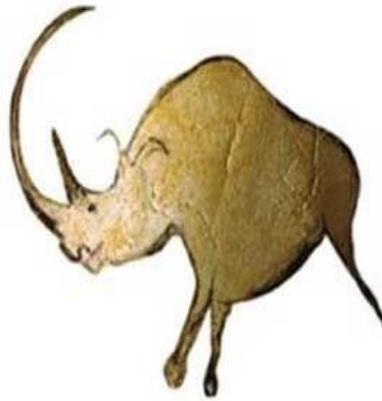
## **Introduction**

In the realm of branding, the American Marketing Association (AMA) describes a brand as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers.” Further, it asserts that branding is “a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often, it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme”. (AMA.org). Destination branding, including that of a destination attraction such as a botanical garden, takes the notion of brand and branding to a much more unique and granular level. The success of an attraction’s branding, at its very core, can be the deciding factor in the decision-making process of a visitor or benefactor to visit or support the garden.

Al Ries, along with co-author Laura Ries, in their book, *22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, write that “a successful branding program is based on the concept of singularity. It creates, in the mind of the prospect, the perception that there is no product on the market like your product.” Further, as authors Ries & Ries point out, the worlds of corporate and destination branding began to take parallel paths in the late 1990’s as it became apparent that there was real economic benefit in the branding of their “product”. (Ries & Ries 1998)

Branding, as a concept, one could argue, has been present since the Chauvet cave dweller paintings, some 32,000 years ago. These paintings were some of the first examples of how humans communicated their world into visual meaning. From a marketing tool and programmatic business practice perspective, branding has been present, at least since the mid 1800’s when the red triangle of Bass Ale became the U.K.'s first official trademark and paved the way for the brand as we know it today. And then in 1900, a first example of a brand, as an

experience, came about, when the tire manufacturers André and Édouard Michelin published the first edition of a free guide for French motorists, along with the early version of the Michelin man branded symbol. (Lippincott, September 18, 2015)



Chauvet cave painting (Approx. 32,000 yrs. ago); Bass Pale Ale label (1876); an early version of the Michelin man (1900) Source: Lippincott September 18, 2015

Well known and iconic companies like Coca Cola, Nike and Xerox, in the traditional product world, and Disney and Marriott Hotels, in the services world, have been branding their

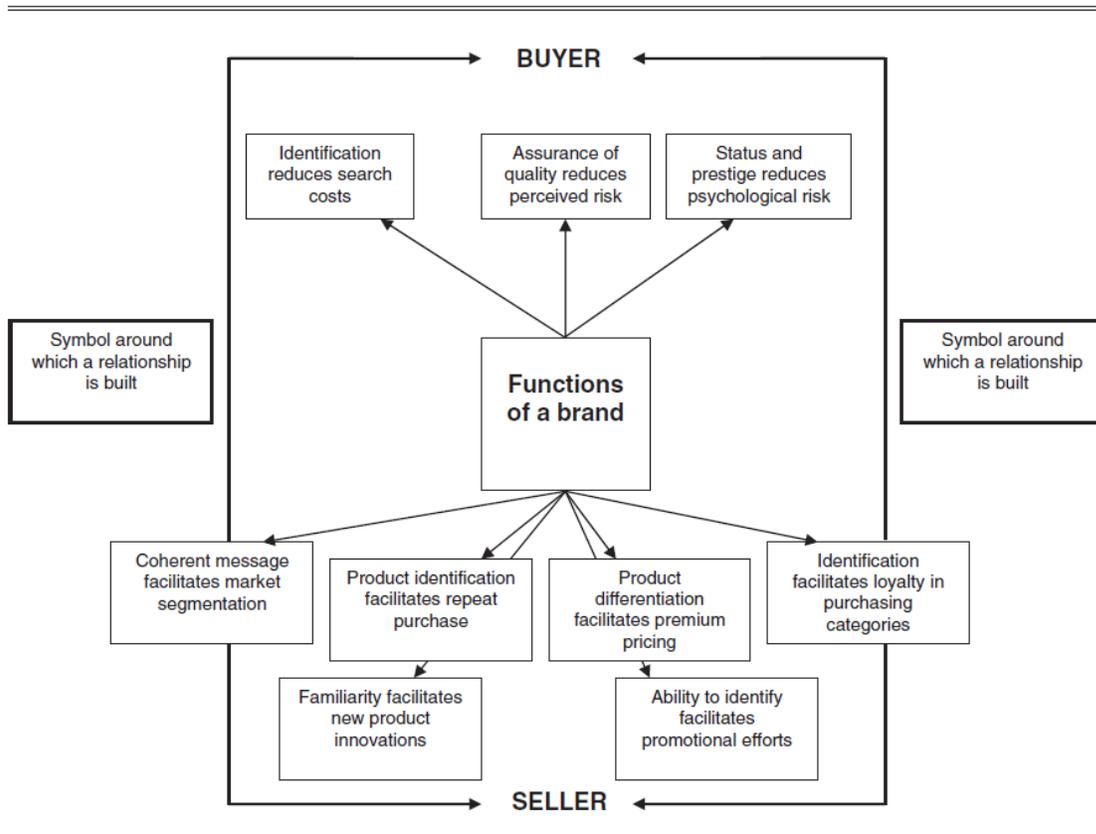
products, through brand marketing, for decades. For example, Coca Cola is known as “The Real Thing” while Nike is better known, simply by its “swish” icon.

There are distinct and differentiating functions of a brand as it relates to the buyer and a seller of a product. In their work, *Brand Management Prognostications*, Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt, developed the chart below to convey the message of the functions relative to branding of a product of any goods or service. (Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt 1999)

Taking this model into the realm of branding of destination attractions, such as botanical gardens, it fits exceptionally well. For the buyer, a successful brand assures product quality, reduction of search, an identifiable symbol or logo around which the brand is built, and the “brand promise” of a memorable experience.

For the seller, a successful brand is a way to provide a coherent message that differentiates the product from its competition. The successful brand should also create brand loyalty and customer return. Specifically, relative to the “brand promise” Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt, conclude that it should have the strength to ensure visitor confidence, brand loyalty, and recurring emotional attachment. (Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt 1999 pp.52-65)

**FUNCTIONS OF A BRAND FOR THE BUYER AND SELLER**



Source: Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt (1999).

Figure 4 - Function of a Brand for the Buyer and Seller  
 Source: Berthon, Hulbert and Pitt (1999)

There has been work relating to the development of corporate brands and how the resulting brand is different from product brand thinking. In the work, Hatch and Schultz, explain how the corporate brand contributes to the customer-based images of the organization, not only to those commonly held in product-based branding, but to images “formed and held by all its stakeholders, including: employees; customers; investors; suppliers; partners; regulators; special interests; and local communities.” (Hatch and Schultz 2003)

Further, corporate brands, to be successful, on an ongoing basis, should be managed in “relation to the interplay between vision, culture and image”. In order to achieve this success,

there also must be ongoing and effective dialogue between top management along with internal and external stakeholders. (Hatch and Schultz 2003 pp.1041-1064.)

On the other end of the spectrum, looking at the relationship of corporate brands and destination brands, Graham Hankinson concludes that key similarities do exist in the management of the two brand categories. (Hankinson, 2007 pp.240-254). In Hankinson's "The Management of Destination Brands: Five Guiding Principles Based on Recent Developments in Corporate Branding Theory", Hankinson further concludes that to be effective, both destination and corporate brands need strong top-level brand management, to manage the brand and its sub brands along with strong internal and external communications and departmental structures. In addition, both brands must be able to "manage and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders." (Hankinson 2007 p.245)

Based on the literature examined, Hankinson proposes a five guiding principles approach to destination brand management, which would closely align with the structures of botanical gardens. The approach first includes strong, visionary, brand management leadership, acting as the brand champion, providing a clear vision for the brand, while building and acting upon a strong and clear set of core values, while being able to communicate to all stakeholders. Second, the brand must be, in great part, built by and universally supported within the organization, from the top of the organization, throughout.

The third guiding principle relates to coordination and process alignment within the prevue of organizational responsibility. It is vital that all areas of the organization are aligned with the brand and in support. This includes Boards of Directors and other related affiliated groups.

Fourth, very importantly, the brand must be consistently communicated across and through, the wide range of outside partner stakeholders. These stakeholder groups include the media and other influencer groups.

Finally, the fifth guiding principle relates to the important act of building and caring for, strong and compatible partnerships. These partnerships can most often include funding sources and legislative and granting supporters along with other allied supportive likeminded partners.

This process begins with rock solid, strategic vision and the commitment to building and maintaining a brand-oriented culture that permeates throughout the organization and its partners. (Hankinson 2007)

To further understand the importance, complexities, and ramifications of destination branding, this paper will look more closely at destination branding relative to the important building blocks of branding; brand personality and brand image. Defined by the educational management study guide, ManagementStudyGuide.com, *brand image* is “the current view of the customers about a brand and can be defined as a unique bundle of associations within the minds of target customers, signifying what the brand presently stands for”

(ManagementStudyGuide.com). Brand image relies on customer perception, functional and mental connections, and overall impressions of the brand.

Additionally, *brand personality* is defined as “the way a brand speaks and behaves and means assigning human personality traits/characteristics to a brand to achieve differentiation”. Brand personality has more to do with “relationships” the consumer may have with the brand and how one might identify with the brand. (ManagementStudyGuide.com)

In “*Destination Image and Destination Personality*”, Hosany et al, examine the relationship between brand image and brand personality of tourism destinations. Interestingly, they

describe their writing and research in terms of the “contentious” relationship between the two concepts. (Hosany et al 2007 pp.62-81),

Brand image and brand personality are both vital to the destination or attraction branding initiative process. Understanding that brand image deals with the functional impressions of the consumer while brand personality relates to the emotional and relational benefits of the brand, these two elements of branding will become essential in the process of research, development and execution, in the brand initiative process. (Hosany et al 2007 pp.62-81)

Additionally, relative to brand image and brand personality, (Keller 1993 pp.1-22) concludes, the definitions of brand image as, “the perceptions about a brand reflected as associations existing in the memory of the consumer” and, (Batra et al., 1993 pp.83-96), Aaker (1997 pp.347-56. ) define brand personality as “the personality traits generally associated with humans that consumers perceive brand to possess”. In the studies done by both, it is readily apparent that both brand image and brand personality are critical to creating destination brand equity. Relative to this study on gardens, both are critical, as well.

### **Botanical Gardens and Purpose of Study**

The destination of interest in this study – the botanical garden - is a specialized destination that is a unique subset of the travel and tourism industry. This uniqueness of the botanical gardens subset can be defined as, representing a destination product that is, a “living” museum, while at the same time being a visitor attraction. In addition, the garden, most often, is an educational institution, as well as a horticultural research and conservation organization.

It could be said that branding and the focus of the botanical garden, plant life and specimens, go back a very long way. The plant example, being tea.

Twinings Tea Company, founded in 1706 has used the same logo — capitalized font beneath a lion crest — continuously for 231 years, since 1787. Richard Twining I., founder, Thomas's grandson, commissioned the entrance way, which you can still see today, and the logo, making it the world's oldest unaltered logo in continuous use, according to the company website. A past member of the Queen's export award, all bags of Twinings' teas carry Her Majesty's Seal. (twinings.co.uk)



### **Twinings Tea**

Perhaps even more remarkable, the company has occupied the same location on London's Strand since its founding by Thomas Twining in 1706.



Tea consumption was not always essential to everyday British life. Coffee, gin, and beer dominated English breakfast drink preferences in the early 18th century. By the

turn of the century, however, tea had become extremely popular. After 10 generations, family-owned Twinings is now a globally recognized company, distributing its tea to more than 100 countries (twinings.co.uk).

The purpose of this study is to look at botanical gardens, in light of these unique and diverse initiatives, and seek to discover attempts at, and the success of, destination branding in this tourism sector. There was a relatively small group of diverse, botanical gardens chosen to survey, to determine the degree branding plays a part in the strategic planning, product development and marketing in, and of, the sector of botanical gardens.

Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), a membership organization representing a network of over 500 botanic gardens in more than 100 countries, including the largest and most influential gardens in the sector, and the largest plant conservation network in the world., defines botanical gardens as “*institutions holding documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display and education.*” (bgci.org)

While there are over 500 botanic gardens which are members of the BGGI, there are botanic gardens and arboreta in 148 countries, worldwide, and they maintain more than 5 million living plant collections. The database of BGGI contains detailed information on more than 3,000 gardens around the world. (bggi.org)

Among the collections at the gardens in BGGI’s database are representatives of more than 115,000 species, almost one third of the known vascular plant species of the world and there are over 142 million herbarium specimens in botanic garden herbaria and around 6.13 million accessions in their living collections.

Over 500 botanic gardens are in Western Europe, more than 350 in North America and over 200 in East and Southeast Asia, of which the majority are in China. Most of the southern Asian botanic gardens are to be found in India. (bggi.org)

In addition, the American Public Gardens Association (APGA) is the leading professional organization for the field of public horticulture. Since 1940, the APGA, has been committed to “increasing cooperation and awareness among gardens.”(publicgardens.org) It represents over 600 institutions, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, and 24 countries. The membership includes, but is not limited to, botanic gardens, arboreta, zoos, museums, colleges and universities, display gardens, and research facilities. (publicgardens.org)

The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) gives “generally accepted criteria for defining the terms ‘botanic gardens’ or ‘botanical gardens’.

They include:

- The garden is open to the public on at least a part time basis.
- The garden functions as an aesthetic display, educational display and/or site research.
- The garden maintains plant records.
- The garden has at least one professional staff member (paid or unpaid).
- Garden visitors can identify plants through labels, guide maps or other interpretive materials. (publicgardens.org)

According to the Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), botanic gardens, historically, often began as medicinal gardens, for the studying and cultivating of plants with healing properties. The gardens have gone through many phases, including being places open for visitors. Today, gardens are key players in both conservation and education, as well as playing roles in the science behind issues, including climate change. (bgci.org)

While each Garden may be a small part of the overall tourism, cumulative product of a community and the total economic impact of the area's tourism industry, a community's botanical garden could, through its image and personality, set the tone for how the community views itself, in various important areas.

Because botanical gardens are stalwart researchers and supporters of plant and habitat conservation and responsible development, they are in a place to be more socially relevant to meet the urgent challenges of the twenty-first century. In turn, "as part of the biological and cultural fabric of communities in almost every country and ecosystem around the world, botanic gardens have the potential to reach millions of people." (Dodd and Jones 2011)

## **Key Common Objectives of Botanical Gardens**

In the initial look at the Garden sector of the Travel and Tourism industry, there are common objectives that emerge, collectively, which a garden organization sets out to achieve. Five key objectives guide the work of the gardens: creating a *visitor experience*, *education*, *conservation*, *research* and finally, *building and retaining a donor and patron base*. This study will look at each, in the context of the efforts of selected gardens' branding initiatives and results.

### **Visitor Experience**

Visitor experiences are the greatest external view most of the general population would have of a botanical garden. This visitor experience can be in the form of individual, family, group or special event visitation and can vary depending on the size and scope of the garden, as well as the location and diversity of the host community.

As in destination branding, visitor experience and the successful implementation of it, has a great deal to do with the garden's ability to create an emotional connection or bond with the

visitor. This emotional connection has to do with the intent to visit, as well as creating an experience that will capture repeat visitations and word of mouth recommendations, to others, to visit the garden. (Bethune 2018)

In his book, *Emotional Branding*, Daryl Travis recounts many successful branding examples that all connect the consumer with emotion-based messages. “You can’t make an emotional connection with a customer without using some form of emotion”. In addition, there is a tie to the emotional experience and connection to the consumer with the brand promise. (Travis 2000 p.20)

Kew Gardens, founded in 1840, in southwest London, England, that houses the "largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world" is one of London's top tourist attractions and is a World Heritage Site. Kew serves as a premier example of this first objective. Kew Botanical Garden is immersed in creating, implementing and measuring the ultimate visitor experience, for their guests. (kew.org)

Clearly stated in its corporate strategic plan, Kew lays out its vision and commitment. “We aspire to take every visitor on an exciting journey through the diversity of the plant and fungal kingdoms, inspiring them with the importance of plants and fungi in their lives. We connect with visitors through their love for the beauty of plants. We will achieve this through continually improving the gardens, bringing our collections and science to life”

(kew.org/strategy) Kew goes even several steps further in its visitor commitment in wanting Kew to be the reason for people to visit the U.K and, for British citizens, a reason to travel across the country to visit. Additionally, Kew wants its visitors to be “representative of society and will positively act to ensure there are opportunities for a greater diversity of people”. (kew.org)

## **Education**

Education is an objective that botanical gardens take very seriously, across the spectrum of gardens, regardless of size. Gardens offer programs in horticulture and plant science. Most present adult and children's workshops, classes and other opportunities to learn about botanical horticulture and nature. Some present more advanced Science courses in Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation which include courses that address skills gaps in taxonomy and systematics.

In its 150-year history, the Missouri Botanical Garden, located in St Louis, has been a great example of the education objective, sought by gardens. It has been "committed to connecting people with plants in meaningful ways". Education is paramount to the mission of the Missouri Garden. It welcomes nearly one million visitors a year, at its St. Louis area destinations and strives to "strengthen science learning and teaching for students and teachers to helping drive local and global communities towards sustainable living" ([missouribotanicalgarden.org](http://missouribotanicalgarden.org))

## **Conservation**

Conservation is a key objective of each Garden, as each wants to foster the sustainable use of plant resources locally and globally. The scope of each garden's conservation efforts depends on the size and reach of the organization and the host community.

From a global perspective, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), defines sustainable tourism as: "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." More specifically, the touchpoint at which botanical gardens cross the UNWTO's definition most clearly, is in the first of its 'dimensions to guarantee the long-term sustainability of tourism; "Make optimal use of environmental resources that

constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.” (unwto.org)

One of the leaders within the botanic garden world in conservation is the New York Botanical Garden. The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) is known worldwide as an iconic living museum, a major educational institution, and a renowned plant research and conservation organization.

The key conservation efforts of the NYBG are led through its Center for Conservation Strategy (CCS) The Center’s work with local and international collaborators, “ensures that science-based policy and decision-making guide and inform conservation initiatives to advance the preservation of life and the sustainability of Earth’s ecosystems for the benefit of future generations”. The three main goals of the CCS are to expand, strengthen and advance conservation initiatives, meeting the mission of the NYBG ‘to maximize the reach and impact of NYBG’s scientific programs and catalyze conservation action that will help save the plants of the world.” (nybg.org)

## **Research**

Research is a key component to the mission of a garden, no matter the size or reach. Depending on the locale, budget and mission, the garden’s research can provide scientific information, essential to those making key decisions. Because research is tied to, not only the future of the home garden but to the ecosystem it promotes and protects, it is an integral part of the strategic plans and direction of the garden.

A larger garden, in the world of botanical gardens, the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis, considers itself a world leader in systematics - the study of plants and their evolution. The Missouri Gardens research “provides scientific information essential to decision makers, from

conservation and land use to social and environmental policy”. The Gardens pride themselves on their program’s accessibility of information and of their maintaining the world’s largest botanical database. (missouribotanicalgarden.org)

Smaller gardens like the McIntire Botanical Garden in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia stay ahead, as well, by concentrating on research, as a part of its strategic plan. The Garden’s advisory committee is made up of local scientists and allied academics to develop a research plan for the garden to foster and direct research objectives. Further, the Garden partners with local and regional academic institutions to fund and direct research programs within the garden. (mcintirebotanicalgarden.org)

The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, in Sydney Australia, has taken a serious and innovative step toward research. The Garden has, in its first brand update since its foundation, set out to brand itself to “strategically establish itself as one of Australia’s top scientific organisations”. The Garden sought to brand itself as a great place for a scenic and tranquil visit, but one that was grounded in research and communicated a brand “to enrich awareness and make people really think about ways to safeguard their futures.” Thalassinou (2018)

### **Retaining a Strong Donor and Patron Base**

The final objective is building and retaining a strong donor and patron base. Most gardens depend on a donor and patron funding base as a consistent funding source, to carry out the mission of the organization. Depending on the organization, this can take on a structure which may include corporate sponsors, government funding, event sponsorships, along with individual donor support. Donor programs can range from programs as large as the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG), which partners with companies “who want to reach our audiences and share our commitment to the environment, education, scientific research, and the arts”. Their

donor programs range from the \$1500 Patron level, to a \$25,000 and higher, President's Circle level, with benefits according to donor level. In addition, NYBG has a robust corporate partner program with partners such as Bank of America, Google, Cigna and Pfizer. (nybg.org)

Corporate partnerships and foundation gifts are an integral part of the focus of the donor and patron building plan at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens in Richmond, Virginia. Funding from these sources provide vital operating support for Garden's education programs, Community Kitchen Garden, and world-class plant collections. The Garden promotes its corporate partners program as an opportunity to "receive a connection to the Garden, visibility and an experience that makes a lasting impression on clients, employees, and target audiences". (lewisginter.org)

These five objectives, while individually being keys to the structure, development and actual lifeblood of a botanical garden, combined, make the Garden sector of the tourism industry rather unique in its diversity of mission, with somewhat of a "split personality", that could make the branding of the Garden more of a challenge. Relative to this "split personality", this study will seek to determine if there are ways to meet the objectives of a multi-faceted organization like a Garden, to accomplish successful destination branding.

### **The Research Tool**

Using a background in tourism, research and destination branding, along with an interest in niche markets of tourism such as botanical gardens, the objective of the research associated with this paper was three-fold:

1. Has there been a branding, re-branding or branding re-fresh initiative of the garden, within the last five (5) years?

2. If there has been an initiative, was it influenced by the areas of focus: (a) visitor experience, (b) education, (c) conservation, (d) research, (e) building and retaining a donor base.
3. If there has been an initiative, how important was acceptance/buy-in of the brand, by the (a) local community, (b) the garden's board/governing body, (c) the garden's internal staff and leadership, (d) the garden's patron and donor base.

There was a relatively small, but very diverse in size and location, sample of botanical gardens surveyed, within the US, Canada and Mexico. Each was asked to complete the survey, in part, to determine the degree branding plays a part in the strategic planning, development and marketing of botanical gardens. Further, it was explained that the information from all the surveys would be used either unidentified or in a cumulative form and direct quotes or specifics will only be used with permission. (Survey – Attachment A)

### **The Gardens Surveyed**

As previously mentioned, there was a small but diverse, select group, of botanical gardens chosen for the study. These gardens were chosen for their geographic diversity, size of garden, in terms of budget and acreage, as well as for the garden's length of existence and perceived marketing expertise and strength.

There were twenty-three (23) gardens which were sent the survey, asking for their input. Of those sent, there were thirteen (13) which responded to the survey.

The gardens represented were located in the U.S, Canada and Mexico and included gardens ranging from University funded gardens to US government managed, private to public/not for profit gardens. The gardens ranged in their weather locations from hot, tropical and humid, to cold and dry. The common denominator, however, among all the gardens, is a passion

for, as Richmond, Virginia's Lewis Ginter's Botanical Gardens puts it, "connecting people and plants to improve communities. ...to extend beyond traditional boundaries, to have a positive impact and to enrich lives." (lewisginter.org)

## **The Results**

Fortunately, as it turned out, the integrity of the research, in terms of diversity of gardens studied, was upheld, in the responses received. Of the thirteen gardens responding, there were representatives from the U.S, Mexico and Canada. In addition, climates, both hot and humid as well as cold and dry were represented. Finally, size of gardens was diverse, along with funding source (university, private, not for profit and government).

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## **Branding, Re-Branding or Branding Re-Fresh Initiative of the Garden,**

### **Within the Last Five (5) Years?**

For the purpose of organization, relative to the branding/refresh initiative objective, the botanic gardens will be broken out into four categories:

- A. Gardens Having No Branding or Brand.

B. Gardens Having Brand But No Brand Refresh in Last Five Years.

C. Gardens Having Brand w/ No Brand Refresh in Last Five Years But Brand Awareness Studies Done.

D. Gardens Having Brand and Having Brand or Brand Refresh in Last Five Years.

A. Gardens Having No Branding or Brand

In the group of thirteen responding botanical gardens, there were three (3) that answered the first two questions of the survey, in the negative. Each of the three neither considers that they have a brand for their garden nor have they initiated any brand or brand refresh in the last five years. Of these three, one was a university funded garden, one a government funded garden and one a public, not for profit. Additionally, the public, not for profit was an international garden.

The non-scientific takeaway from this small, but diverse sample, can be that funding structure support could have little to do with the internal or leadership, structural vision needed to move forward with a marketing and development effort such as a branding initiative. The circumstances can, however, be apparent, that government funded gardens, which two of the three represent, may incur barriers in bureaucratic and nontraditional structure, that could prevent innovation and vision unlike an outside of governmental structure may. A deeper dive of this sector of the botanical garden industry could give greater insight.

An additional aside in this group of three, was with the public not for profit respondent. In the attached response sent along with the survey, the Director of the botanical gardens said, “we last looked at branding here 12 years ago. Your questions remind me that it’s time for a refresh”. So, possibly the research helped one more garden realize the value that branding can make to the successful marketing and developmental strategy of the garden.

## B. Gardens Having Brand But No Brand Refresh in Last Five Years

Of the thirteen respondents to the survey, there were two which were in a unique category. Both recognized that the garden did have a brand but had done no branding or brand refresh initiative in the last five years, Nor had any developmental work, relative to the garden's brand been done, in the last five years.

One of the two gardens is a large U.S coastal location, while the other is a large garden in the U.S Midwest. Both gardens have done a significant amount of marketing and development of programming such as seasonal promotions. Each of the gardens has strong mission and vision statements that seem to have been developed with a great deal of forethought in mind, of the specific garden's purpose. Both mission statements provide strong elements on which to base and build brand refresh initiatives.

In using terms and phrases such as “elevates quality of life and connects the community through *educational, cultural and social experiences*”, in its mission statement, the Midwest garden has a good basis to delve into a brand refresh effort, should it choose to do so. The vision statement of the U.S. coastal garden, using terms and phrases such as, “*diversity of plant collections, educational programs and dedication to conservation*”, provides a great start towards a brand refresh, as well.

## C. Gardens Having Brand w/ No Brand Refresh in Last Five Years But Brand Awareness Studies

Among the respondents, there were two gardens which consider themselves having a brand but have not done any re-branding or brand re-fresh initiatives, in the last five years. However, both of these gardens have done brand awareness studies on the garden's brand's effectiveness. One garden, located in a large U.S. metropolitan western area, does a regular semi-

annual brand awareness study, on which to base any “tweaking of creative/communications strategies”. This garden begins with the four core values — *transformation, relevance, diversity and sustainability* — which “spell out the Gardens' intentions in the years ahead”. These core values are excellent pillars for brand development.

The second garden, located in a tropical area of the U.S, considers that it does have a brand but has not done any re-branding or brand re-fresh work in the last five years. However, this garden is now doing research for a possible re-branding and is in contact with a marketing, consulting company to guide the initiative. The garden’s mission includes *diversity by exploring, explaining and conserving* the world of tropical plants and ... *inspiring*, all bedrock elements to a solid, successful re-branding strategy.

#### D. Gardens Having Brand and Having Branding or Brand Refresh in Last Five Years

The final group of gardens responding to the survey were six very diverse botanic gardens ranging from a non-U.S, tropical garden to a metropolitan area U.S garden. There was a U.S. hot and dry destination garden, a northeast garden as well as a Midwest and a southern U.S. garden. All but one of the gardens are designated as not-for-profit organizations.

By the design of the survey’s questions, all of this group has been involved in a branding or brand refresh in the last five years. Of the six, there was one whose initiative was accomplished in 2013, two in 2014, two in 2017 and one with a re-branding in 2018. Of the six gardens, it was split three and three as to whether they used an outside branding, marketing or consulting agency to help with the branding initiative or whether it was accomplished in-house.

**If There Has Been an Initiative, was it Influenced by the Areas of Focus: (a) Visitor Experience, (b) Education, (c) Conservation, (d) Research,(e) Building and Retaining a Donor Base?**

Each respondent was asked to answer yes or no.

- a) *Visitor Experience* – yes 6 no 0
- b) *Education* – yes 4 no 2
- c) *Conservation* – yes 1 no 5
- d) *Research* – yes 1 no 5
- e) *Building and Retaining a Donor and Patron Base* – yes 4 no 2

**If There Has Been an Initiative, Please divide by 100 points, in Terms of the Relative Importance to Your Garden’s Initiative, by the Areas of Focus: (a) Visitor Experience, (b) Education, (c) Conservation, (d) Research,(e) Building and Retaining a Donor Base?**

Based on the key areas of focus outlined earlier in the research, the question was posed to the respondents to determine the major influencing factors in the decision to re brand the garden or initiate a refresh of the existing brand. Of the six respondents, it was clear that, relative to the decision to embark on branding or a refresh, that the major influencers that rose to the top were, visitor experience and building and retaining a donor base.

Each garden was asked to divide 100 points between (a) *visitor experience*, (b) *education*, (c) *conservation*, (d) *research*, (e) *building and retaining a donor base*. The results are as follows:

- a) *Visitor Experience* – 45, 25, 40, 40, 33, 90
- b) *Education* – 10,18,12,15,34, 0

c) *Conservation* - 0, 18, 4, 10,0, 0

d) *Research* – 0, 18, 4, 25, 0, 0

e) *Building and Retaining a Donor and Patron Base* – 45,18,40,10,33,10

**If There Has Been an Initiative, How Important Was Acceptance/Buy-In of the Brand, to the (a) Local Community, (b) the Garden’s Board/Governing Body, (c) the Garden’s Internal Staff and Leadership, (d) the Garden’s Patron and Donor Base.**

As this question is discussed, it is vital for the owner of the brand, in this case , the botanic garden, to understand that, the greatest and most thought-out and developed brand ever, will never be effective, without buy-in. In great part, it is all about the experience of the brand, how will it affect the local community, the board, the staff and leadership and the vitally important donor base?

While referring to destination branding, as a concept and subject matter, in *Destination Branding: Insights and Practices from Destination Management Organizations*, Blain et al., makes the case that *visitor experience* and the *brand promise* both play a significant part in the buy-in of the brand. Further, while the visitor may be purchasing the individual products, it is the entire visitor experience that is being sought. (Blain et al 2005) It is that visitor experience that will ultimately drive the botanic garden’s brand. The results of the question on buy-in seem to bear this out.

As was referred to earlier, but relevant in this context, while looking at the relationship of, and similarities between, corporate brands and destination brands, author Graham Hankinson concludes some interesting correlations, to this work, in botanic gardens research. Hankinson concludes, that for brands to be successful and effective, key management overseeing the brand and its sub-brands, must be present and engaged, along with a strong internal and external

organizational and departmental structure, able to “manage and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders.” (Hankinson 2007 p.245)

The respondents to the survey were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not very important and 5 being extremely important) how important the buy-in of the garden’s brand would be by category of influences. The results are as follows:

- a) *Buy-in by Local Community* – 5,4,5,5,5,5
- b) *Buy-in by Garden’s Board/Governing Body* – 5,5,5,5,4,5
- c) *Buy-in by Garden’s Internal Paid Leadership and Staff* – 3,5,5,5,4,5
- d) *Buy-in by Garden’s Patron and Donor Base* – 3,5,5,5,4,4,

## **Conclusions**

As was stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to look at botanical gardens, in light of the unique and diverse initiatives they represent; a destination product that is, a “living” museum, while at the same time being a visitor destination/attraction. In addition, the garden exist, being an educational institution, a horticultural research and conservation focused organization. The study sought to discover attempts at, and the success of, destination branding in this tourism sector. There was a relatively small group of diverse, botanical gardens chosen to survey, to determine the degree branding plays a part in the strategic planning, product development and marketing in and of the sector of botanical gardens.

While the sample size was small, it was diverse and represented a fair cross section of the botanical garden sector, as far as size, location, as well as budget and funding model diversification. The surveys seemed to be answered truthfully and with all relevant information and knowledge available.

Among other possible observations that can be taken from the research and follow-up conversations, there are three key conclusions:

1. Without exception, the organizational leadership, including the marketing and communications teams, are fiercely committed and loyal to the work and product of the individual botanical garden.

Within the botanic gardens structure, there is evidence of strong commitment to, and genuine fondness for, the work done by the gardens. Beth Monroe, the Director of Public Relations and Marketing at Louis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia, is a great example of this type of leadership. Beth and her team have seen that the garden has grown and reached out to engage and attract audiences. She is committed to the Garden's mission of education and passion for connecting people and plants to improve communities.

Other gardens have teams of employees and volunteers that are committed to everything from children's education to climate change. Brendan Lange, the Director of Visitor Experience and Marketing for the San Francisco Botanical Garden, expounded upon the Garden's team's commitment to its work related to climate change. In addition, he discussed new family programs and efforts to reach out to millennials, led by members of the committed garden team.

2. Organizational/destination branding is not at the forefront of the majority of individual botanical garden's priorities.

The key takeaway from the study is that organizational/destination branding does not appear to be on the top of the priority list for the majority of botanical gardens. There seems to be common reasons for this; a) leadership commitment b) financial resources c) lack of understanding of the value and long-term benefits of branding.

More often than not, there was a reason of lack of financial resources given as to

why branding initiatives weren't contemplated. Unfortunately, there, most times, was never the conversation about research being done to complete a cost analysis of, branding vs. no branding. As one garden said to me, "the board just somehow knows it will be too expensive".

Further, the volunteer/board leadership of the gardens, many times are unaware of the value of branding and the resulting positive visitor and revenue benefits. One prestigious garden's representative relayed to me that the Board was open to branding but in the most recent strategic planning session, it did not make it to the top 10 in priorities.

3. When branding or branding refresh initiatives are undertaken, the two primary influencers are visitor experience and appealing to and retaining patron and donor base.

The leadership at the botanical gardens that have done branding or brand refresh initiatives do have a keen understanding that it can and does make a difference in all aspects of the garden's programming, but particularly in visitor experience/attendance and retaining donor and patron base. Obviously, these are the two most visible elements to a garden's program and revenue generating portfolio, so these two should be at the top. When taking into consideration the other elements of a garden's programs, education, research and conservation, all will ultimately be affected by the success of visitor revenue and satisfaction as well as the revenue generated from donors and patrons.

For example, according to Dana Terrazas, Director of Marketing Communications for Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona, Branding and Communication is the 4<sup>th</sup> Pillar of the Garden's Strategic Plan. It was included because of the value and importance the Board saw in the branding, visitor research and programmatic changes, all instituted to "resonate better with

visitors”. In reviewing the differences Dana and her team have made in the garden’s brand identity, even the most casual observer will see the benefits, both short and long term.

The Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden was another terrific example of building a brand with the visitor and stakeholders at the forefront. Beth Monroe, with Louis Ginter, writes, “ As part of the master site planning process, we assembled internal and external stakeholders to envision what the garden could be for the community. Participants represented a range of diverse groups, including staff and volunteers, community leaders, and even fourth-graders. Some had close relationships to the garden, while others had visited rarely or never. . At the end of the day, we had developed a three-pronged vision to be a garden of: 1) *Timeliness: A Garden of All Ages* 2) *Community: A Garden for Cultivating Community* 3) *Awakening: Mind, Spirit, Body*” (Monroe 2018)

These are great examples of what can be done when branding is taken seriously, as a means to an end. That end is, focusing on the product through the eyes of the consumer, the donor or patron and the community. Finally, these are examples of what can be done when there is support and commitment of the leadership of the Board and key staff members. It can be done!

## **Recommendations**

Based on this study of botanical gardens and the interest, or lack thereof, in branding as a way to increase the marketability, visibility and recognition of the individual garden, there are two recommendations, which could be useful in this area, to further the realization of more gardens understanding the potential of successful branding initiatives.

1. Additional research is needed, in an expanded platform, to determine the more broad-based needs, desires, limitations and institutional marketing

predisposition of the individual garden's leadership (Board and key staff) toward branding analysis and branding initiatives at the gardens.

2. There are very active, knowledgeable, and capable gardens' trade, membership organizations. At present, there doesn't seem to be any programming within the organizations' purview, that includes branding or even marketing, to any real degree. These organizations, both US based and International could be the perfect educational venues for marketing and branding discussion and education. These organizations should consider this approach in their future educational programming.

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## **Biographical Statement**

Mr. Randall L. Fiveash is the Director of the Connecticut Office of Tourism, a division of the Department of Economic and Community Development - the State of Connecticut. Prior to becoming Connecticut's Director of Tourism, he served as Commissioner of Tourism for the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Department of Tourism. He has also served as Executive Director of the National Tourism Foundation and served in CEO positions of Convention and Visitor Bureaus in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Arlington, Texas, Gatlinburg, Tennessee and Branson, Missouri.

Fiveash was a Delegate to the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism and has served in leadership positions on the Boards of the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus, Travel South USA, South Carolina, Tennessee and Missouri Convention and Visitor Bureau Associations, the Southeast Tourism Society, National Tourism Foundation and the Mississippi River Development Association, Discover New England, among others.

Prior to completing his Master's Degree in Geography at Central Connecticut State University, he earned a B.A. in Political Science at Mercer University. Mr. Fiveash is married with five children and resides in South Windsor, Connecticut.