

Think global, sense local, market tribal

A new Language for Places

by André Vrydagh & Joël Gayet

Place branding is the new marketing frontier, but it needs a new language. The authors advocate an “imaging language” to answer the challenges of Branding & Marketing Places: global trends, competitive differences and tribal affinities.

To build coherence and difference, this new language has to give meaning to the emotional experiences chosen by your Place in order to be perceived as unique. To create desire, this new language has to develop brand values for your Place, tailor-made experiences and emotions that can be shared.

Adopting the new language in your Place will allow politicians and marketers to share, for the first time, a sense of purpose around brand values and market opportunities.

Destinations are going to have to create a revolution because most social, technical, environmental and economic parameters upon which tourism develops are undergoing a profound shake-up.

This is why we are seeing a change in the expectations and behaviour of visitors, and evolution in the vision of politicians in response to the needs of inhabitants.

In the European Union, all cities are competing with each other to attract attention. To survive, they have to reinvent themselves with unique values.

In this global context, tourism and all its related sectors (culture, history and local events) are from now on recognised as economic factors with workforces that cannot be relocated, and a new approach is emerging.

The new tourism is all about **identity** marketing and is founded on a strong brand which responds to customers’ needs for meaning to their consumption. It is **excellence** marketing in a context of fierce competition and the need for market transparency. It is **personalised relationship** marketing in a world that is more and more impersonal, faced by a multiplication of me-too offers. It is **affinity** marketing aimed at segmenting the market by common values, poles of interest and types of travel. Lastly, it is **partnership** marketing that forces companies and tourism organisations to re-think the way they are organised – both internally and in their relationships with others. It is marketing that speaks a new language.

Today, destinations must adopt this new language whose objective is to incite the **global** world to discover **local** experiences to the rhythm of **tribal** drums.

Think Global

or the realities of our time

Here are some of the realities at the heart of the volcano erupting under traditional tourism:

Crises are proliferating, in type, in number and in frequency. There are security, military, political, financial and economic crises... and they are all making clients and markets more versatile.

European construction is ironing out the differences in tourist behaviour (business and leisure) between the different members of the Union.

On the other hand, the **emergence of markets** such as Brazil, China and India is forcing Europe to re-examine its welcome and take account of distant cultural sensitivities.

The explosion of **low-cost** travel and **high-speed trains** is extending catchment areas dramatically and boosting short stays, putting all western European cities in competition.

The **Web 2.0** revolution with its blogs and forums is giving real power to the tourist. This new reality has considerable effect on the territorial offer, in terms of both its perceived quality and affinity.

The **mobile phone** revolution is accelerating. The cell phone has already become an essential support for the mobile population, which is at the heart of tourism. It is especially the phone's transformation into a payment method and personalised audiovisual, interactive info guide that is going to change the life of tourists in the near future.

Hyper-competition has been created by the imbalance between supply and demand. We talk all the time about the remarkable growth of the tourism market but we forget the even-faster growth of supply, both in terms of new destinations and structured products and services.

Seniors represent around half of visitors. They travel more often and spend more money than other groups. Faced with a financial crisis, will they reduce their tourist lifestyle?

Short-stay customers are almost exclusively **city dwellers**. They have stronger needs for a break from daily life, for get-togethers, adventure, relaxation, wellbeing, comfort and services. They look for new things and above all else, emotional experiences.

Perceived quality overrides 'norm' quality: customer opinion is what counts and it is starting to incorporate sustainability, especially via environmental and citizenship issues.

Communication budgets are exploding with, for certain countries, help from European funds. This inflation has taken place at a time when individuals' capacity to memorise messages has remained stable, media cost inflation has run ahead of the cost of living, and the audience increase of traditional media has slowed. The question now is "are these traditional advertising campaigns effective?"

New customer expectations are clearly evident; everybody follows tribal codes. Each one of us belongs to 7 or 8 big tribes (the same person may be 30 years old, sporty, opera fan, nature loving, golf player, butterfly collector and in love). At the

same time, we remain individualists looking for quality, discovery and the unexpected; and we are very suspicious of marketing!

To control the explosive consequences of these new realities and turn them into an advantage, destinations must speak the **new marketing language**. It is a language supported by **rules of grammar** and articulated by **rules of expression**.

Local Sense

or identity imaging

Three rules of grammar support the new imaging language and help to construct the identity of a destination:

- respect for the roots of its identity
- the pleasure of sharing quality
- motivation through tribal experiences

Yesterday's tour operators were happy to assemble these elements and sell them as they are. They merely composed a catalogue of postcards with labels stuck on destinations, usually giving a very limited view of the destination which they then found difficult to change. Simplistic identification is no longer sufficient. Today you have to imagine :

1st rule of grammar: give meaning to the roots

Construct an identity that goes well beyond a simple package of authenticity, by tapping into the DNA – a collection of cultural traits and specific codes that cement a personality to the group.

This **identity** research is indispensable because of the need to differentiate from competitive destinations. It enables communication to feature non-material factors which talk to the heart and are much more difficult for competitors to copy. It also provides a response to the fantastic quest for sense that drives citizens, visitors and even investors.

2nd rule of grammar: give meaning to pleasure

Hyper-quality – defined as a movement of continual progress towards better satisfying customers and building their loyalty – has become the first condition for success. Why? Because it is the only response to today's major challenges which are the integration of sustainable development, the recognition of customers' opinions and the need for personalisation of products.

To accentuate the meaning, **pleasure** must be placed at the heart of the offer because it responds to the needs for sharing and meeting, both from local inhabitants and target customers. The human is the best competitive weapon of a destination! Building with the new marketing means giving the Place an additional added value, over and above the reality of its environmental, social, economic, cultural or tourist proposition.

The quality of ISO norms is no longer sufficient; what's needed is a flawless perception with "zero faults" throughout the whole chain from background pre-sell

information until after the experience. This also means that support should be given to the most enthusiastic players who continually try to improve. Only the best and most effective merit support from the public sector in the promotion of tourism.

In terms of target groups, the pleasure will be more intense for those customers who feel in tune with the identity of the destination, which leads the strategy to be more specific in the choice of promotion periods during the year and the tribes to which it is addressed.

3rd rule of grammar: give meaning to the experiences

Thanks to Web search engines, new marketing will be based on semantic analysis of key words in the segmentation. To propose experiences that correspond to the desires of the garden lovers tribe, certain associations of words like "flower and garden visit" or "secret gardens of Dorset" or "in search of roses" or "castle and garden visit" are in fact mines of information.

These key words are the vocabulary of the new imaging language. They reveal the desires of the new tourist in search of escapades and enable us to track the entry points of a territory by target and by period.

The territorial proposition must address these **tribal themes**. This will change the vision and economic results since an approach based on a motivational universe expands the offer and increases the chance of higher average expenditure.

Another major challenge for the offer is to pass from the notion of a product to that of an experience. Visitors are looking for a change from their daily routine; they want emotion, something different, even daring. They want to experience something special and unique, that they will remember. They want to re-feel emotions, re-find experiences... and in a way, be re-born.

This search for meaning also leads to the creation of completely new offers, boosted by the Internet. For example, a virtual tour in the form of a treasure hunt which turns into theme walks, exchanges of similar points of view and even real meetings between people who share the same passions. Making sense of experiences enables us to surf on higher expectations – unique and rare moments.

These **three rules of grammar** for the new marketing language will establish the identity of a destination and position it with its own individual values.

The next step is to create the desire to visit and here, we have **three rules of expression** in the new marketing language which will give the communication its tribal dimension.

Tribal Market
or affinity marketing

The new tourist has strong desires and his quest for emotional experiences orientates him towards choices that fulfil this search. He looks for adventures and likes surprises, as long as these are in areas that interest him.

To seduce this new breed of tourist, the communication and personalised 'affinity' promotion must present tempting experiences where the customer's desire dominates the price story.

This new marketing language is declined in the 'affinitive' sense by three rules of expression:

- **the brand** personifies the Place
- **the Internet** is the tribal medium
- **emotion** comes from sharing experiences

1st rule of expression: the brand personifies the Place

The brand is the central expression that summarises the originality of the affinitive theme in a single proposition aimed at building tribal desire. The brand personifies the destination when it adds that bit of soul that strengthens the personality of the Place and gives it the meaning that tribes are looking for. As the central expression of the project, the brand becomes the heart of the destination strategy. You therefore have to first build the brand that will carry the marketing of the experiences.

You can't build a long-lasting brand without first affirming its **vision, mission** and **values**. This 'brand platform' is an essential foundation; it serves as the central point of reference and list of specifications when the brand communicates.

This brand platform must then be completed with a comprehensive operational guide that codifies all the written, visual and graphic elements in the communication. The objective of this code is to add strength and consistency to the brand image, in line with the identity of the destination. Unlike graphic guidelines which can be difficult to implement by the various players involved, a brand code works like a list of trends – open and adaptable in function of the context in which it is used. This code helps to establish a style across all communication elements including key words, expressions, visuals and people.

2nd rule of expression: the Internet is the tribal medium

Tourism promotion has traditionally been organised around lodging and activities. An approach with affinity theming will firstly tend to **diversify** by segmenting as much as possible the centres of interest and target groups into sharing communities, thus developing many more motivational concepts of experiences per tribe. In the same way, promotion and communication will be based more and more on marketing partnerships, diversifying sales and communication channels and expanding cooperation, mutualisation and co-branding agreements.

Just as it is necessary to adopt strategies that embody the brand positioning, so it is ineffective to stay with the same action plans over a period of time. Things are simply changing too fast and new opportunities are continuously appearing on the Net. Like a takeover bid, a sudden dramatic promotion can be particularly effective

for highlighting a destination. You have to be lightning fast and ready to put yourself as a link or in flash on general and sector information sites.

A literary or cinema success can add a universal dimension to a place lacking clear appeal. Who ever heard of Rosslyn Chappell in Scotland before the publication of Da Vinci Code? The popularity of arctic ice hotels owes their success to a certain Bond, James Bond...

The customer has a growing need to give meaning to his tribal wishes. In order for these to come to life, they must lean on a brand with strong identity which makes you want to travel and explore it. In the Internet hypermarket, the style of the brand helps it stand out from the crowd. In the blog jungle, it is travel anecdotes which make the destination credible.

In both cases, the key to success is to capture attention. Because capturing an audience creates the power to build loyalty.

We don't delude ourselves: the quality of the experience can be copied. The real power comes from adding that supplement of soul which strengthens the meaning and adds personality. In other words, the challenge from now on for Tourism Offices is to build a strong brand in order to generate interest, seduce and add legitimacy to the purchase. Meeting this challenge successfully means adopting a new posture where the brand is the central expression of the destination project.

3rd rule of expression: emotion comes from sharing experiences

The new marketing activates relationships within the tribal networks, because brand personality is not enough. You have to give meaning and talk to the heart, using the codes and values of the targeted tribes.

Tribal sharing adds value to experiences, taking them out of the ordinary run of the mill. The world is full of places where you can scuba dive, but if a destination offers enthusiasts the chance to come and admire a newly-discovered species of coral, they will go and have an unforgettable experience. This tribal sharing will add value to the destination and have a far greater effect on the emotions than its brand personality.

If in addition, a scuba-diving local inhabitant offers to share his love of the water with visitors and share his experiences, like a golfer talks about his round, the tourism becomes truly 'participative' and the offer is transformed into a unique emotional experience.

This evolution towards tribal network marketing is bringing changes to marketing methods, tools and organisations. It also demands a deep understanding of Internaut behaviour to evaluate the appeal of experiences carried by the Web. It leads us to evaluate the power of brands in terms of the strength of the links they manage to create with their customers, and not simply by means of brand awareness and image. This is a conclusion from the various brand evaluation criteria defined by specialist organisations such as Saffron (European City Brand Barometer Index) and Anholt (City Brand Index).

Focus

adopt a new posture

This new language is forcing destinations to reinvent their marketing in order to stay competitive. Politicians, hoteliers, managers of tourism equipment, leisure and event organisers, associations, artisans and local inhabitants must not simply do better than before – they must do it differently, because:

think

GLOBAL

- mobiles become info points for visitors
- low cost and speed increase competition
- sustainable places seduce more than postcard flagships

sense

LOCAL

- a coherent language is a must
- excellence builds long term places
- place image is about competitive sex-appeal

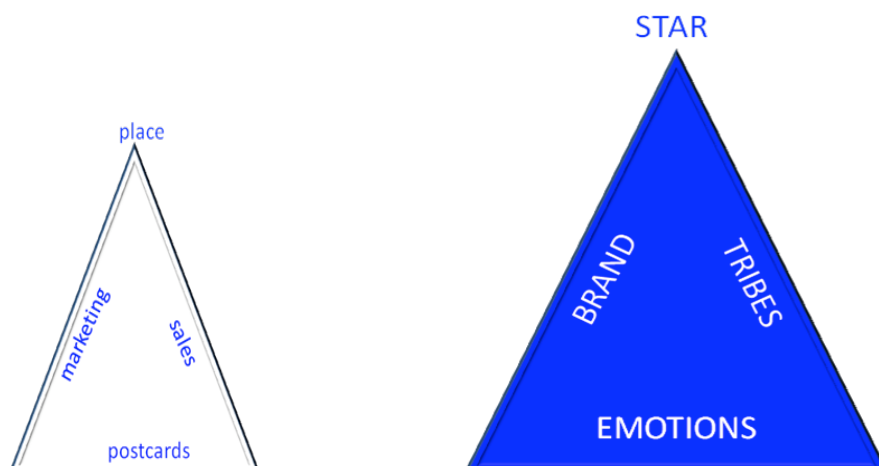
market

TRIBAL

- a place speaks to your heart, not a political logo
- clients dance to tribal tempos
- affinity seduces on benefits

Looking closely, it is less a problem of technique and tools than **a change of posture**.

The new language places Man at the heart of his activity and is built around the **brand** and its capacity to create a link with the **tribal** clientele through **emotions**. Expectations are evolving more and more towards shared tribal values: authenticity, simplicity, heritage, sharing, wellbeing, the environment and solidarity.



It is a fantastic opportunity. For the first time, an **imaging language** can help to give meaning to:

...the political-place, because an imaging language it is at last possible to legitimise the sale by reconciling the values with value, and the hu-man with the sales-man

... the brand-place because an imaging language creates the posture responsible for making your Place become a star.

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