

# Australia – the story of a destination brand

The 'shrimp on the barbie' ad was an early – and highly successful – example of what is known today as destination branding, though the term has only been in use since the mid nineties.

In the past, tourism bodies relied on 'bums on seats' data such as arrivals numbers, hotel occupancy and other 'turnstile data' to chronicle rises and falls in tourist flows. However, since the advent of destination branding in the mid 90s (Brand Australia was 'officially' launched in 1995, however, the branding momentum had begun prior to the lead up to the successful Olympic Games bid in 1993), tourism stakeholders now have a deeper understanding about why people travel where they do, or, in Australia's case, what barriers are preventing them travelling where they claim they want to go.

## Destination branding

Countries and cities are competing worldwide not only for tourists but also for export markets, business investment and skilled migrants. To meet tourism, business and

population objectives, destination managers are now applying branding principals, derived from product marketing, to establish their destinations as brands.

Alongside the advent of destination branding came destination branding research – with tourism researchers employing the full gamut of marketing research techniques and practices in an attempt to understand the motivations behind destination choice.

Bill Baker, from the US company Total Destination Management, says that while branding has been applied to consumer products for decades, the concept of strategically branding countries, cities and regions really only appeared during the mid-90s to assist destinations to compete more effectively in an increasingly competitive marketing environment.

Continued on page 14

VIEW

MARKET ATTITUDE

## Australia – the story of a destination brand

Continued from page 13

‘In this era of super-brands it may seem an unusual notion to consider a city, state, region or country as a brand,’ he says. ‘We buy brands because we enjoy them and they make our choices easier. In the context of a place being the focal point for the promotion and catalyst for economic development, it makes sense that it should be managed as a brand to enhance its identity and perceived value in an increasingly competitive marketplace.’

The power of applying branding theory and practice to a destination can be seen in mega events such as the Olympic Games. This level of global exposure allows destinations to offer a total branding package to the world as exemplified in 2000 by the Sydney Olympic Games showcase.

### Failure to sustain brand equity

According to Richard Trembath, manager research for the South Australian Tourism Commission, the branding model suggests that failure to build and sustain destination brand equity, or the value of the brand in the minds of potential visitors and investors, can lead to economic decline.

‘Globalisation has meant that the product offerings of many destinations, such as hotels, attractions, transport systems, education services and so on are increasingly homogenous. Branding provides a way of creating a unique identity through relationship building and emotional appeal, rather than differentiation on the basis of functional qualities,’ he says.

‘However, place branding involves much more than the establishment of a clever tag line and logo. The brand tools must be based on a clear articulation of the brand essence reflecting both the attributes of the destination and its people and the benefits sought by consumers.’

While place branding draws on principals from product marketing there are some important differences.

‘According to George Whitfield, tourism and brand strategist for Tourism Enterprise and Management (TEAM), destination managers do not “own” the brand but rather represent a range of competing stakeholder groups,’ says Richard. ‘Under these circumstances the establishment and maintenance of a differentiated and tightly focused brand strategy may be challenged by stakeholders who feel they are not adequately represented by the brand.’

### Using online research helped to track tourism campaign

The framework of destination branding offers a powerful research tool. TNS is conducting research globally with Tourism Australia to track the effectiveness of the “Uniquely Australian Invitation” campaign (which incorporates the line “So Where The Bloody Hell Are You?”).

TNS is tracking the campaign in 14 key markets in Asia Pacific, Europe and the USA. Tracking within 11 of these markets is being conducted online, with only China, India and Malaysia using CATI or face-to-face methods. The online approach is allowing the research to be conducted more quickly and cost effectively.

‘Through our new campaign, we have set out convey the compelling aspects of Australia – the personality, the lifestyle and the place says Geoff Buckley, managing director, Tourism Australia.

‘As a brand, Australia is well-established and respected by consumers. They already have a strong and positive predisposition to the destination. The brand insight is that Australia has a uniquely open personality and environment – characterised by its natural experiences. The campaign captures the brand insight and conveys and invitation to visit and get involved.’

Online access panels are providing a more sensitive evaluation of the TA advertising.

‘As with many ad campaigns, the soundtrack plays a vital role in Tourism Australia’s campaign, complementing the visuals and helping to reinforce key messages, not least the “So Where The Bloody Hell Are You?” line,’ says Geoff. ‘Online interviewing enables us to play the soundtrack to respondents to achieve accurate recognition and gain a more detailed understanding of advertising response. We also have the opportunity to re-contact respondents for future research with a specific focus. This would be valuable for us if we want to do some ‘deep dives’ into the data and understand the nuances of a particular sub-sample.’

## SURVEY SAMPLING

Continued on page 16

## Australia – the story of a destination brand

Continued from page 14

‘The destination manager does not control the visitor experience, which may limit the capacity of a destination to deliver on a consistent brand promise. Destination marketing is also often funded by government and branding strategy may be derailed by political considerations.

‘Simon Anholt [architect of the Anholt-GMI Nation Brands Index] also argues that destinations should be regarded as corporate rather than product brands. From this perspective brand management is about managing destination image and perceptions rather than manipulating the product offering which is largely outside the control of the destination manager,’ he says.

### Birth of a brand

The 1980s were a time of unprecedented growth in brand awareness for Australia in the US courtesy of the now famous Paul Hogan shrimp on the barbie campaign. While Paul Hogan’s face has long since disappeared from Tourism Australia’s US television advertisements, his legacy lives on. In his 2005 article ‘Come and say G’day’, Bill Baker from Total Destination Management, who directed the campaign for seven years, explains to travel marketers how it established Australia as a leading destination brand.

‘Although the last “Come and say G’day” (shrimp on the barbie) advertisement was aired 14 years ago, it is still the most memorable campaign ever launched by a foreign company in the USA,’ Bill says. ‘For many Americans it is still “top of mind” when you mention Australia and some can readily recall some of the key lines 20 years after the first ad.

‘Even without a branding framework we instinctively directed our research, analysis, communications and product development towards what is today referred to as destination branding.

‘The ingredients of a powerful destination brand were all there. The brand personality was friendly, fresh, different, fun-loving and adventurous.

‘The television advertising entered the American psyche and gained momentum far beyond any previous long-haul advertising campaign.

‘The “shrimp” advertisement was so successful that it was included in the Smithsonian Institute’s collection of major influences on American culture during the 1980s.’

### Branding studies

Australia has continued its strong track record as a destination brand, performing strongly in a number of international destination benchmarking studies. In June this year, young travellers in the UK voted Australia as the destination they most want to visit next in the Lonely Planet poll. Sydney was voted the number one city in the world in the Condé Nast Traveler Readers’ Choice Awards in New York in October 2006, for a record 11th time. In these awards, some 28,000 Condé Nast Traveler readers vote on different global cities on a variety of criteria, including ambience, friendliness, culture-sights, restaurants, lodging and shopping – essentially brand attributes.

Australia has also consistently rated strongly in the Anholt-GMI Nation Brands Index (NBI), developed and first published by Simon Anholt in 2005. Every quarter GMI polls a worldwide panel of 25,900 consumers on their perceptions of 35 developed and developing countries. The survey measures destination attribute associations across six dimensions relating to tourism; exports; people; governance; culture and heritage; investment and immigration.

According to the index, consumers worldwide picked Australia as the number one destination if money were no object and Australians are viewed as hardworking, trustworthy and honest. In the NBI results for the second quarter of 2005, Australia ranked number one overall.

‘One of the most interesting results on Australia’s remarkable brand scorecard is the fact that it comes top of the list as a desirable tourist destination,’ says Simon. ‘This is such a strikingly inaccurate reflection of actual tourism patterns that some explanation is required.

‘What we are testing here is neither behaviour nor even serious intent, but brand image: not what’s in people’s heads but in their hearts. The fact is that many more people end up going on holiday to France, Spain, the US, UK and Italy rather than Australia, but in their hearts they would prefer to go to Australia. Tourism is merely the most striking example of several of these fundamental disconnects between Australia’s value as a nation brand and its actual performance in the global marketplace.

‘What the NBI tells us is that much of the world has an appetite for things Australian. Now is the time for Australia to be producing great Australian-branded products, culture, events, services, ideas and media as fast as it possibly can.’

By Jesse Blackadder, editor, Research News.

### Australia’s advantages and challenges

Roy Morgan Research has compiled interim findings from a survey on key challenges, competitive advantages and opportunities for growth in the next year and next 10 years for the tourism industry. The findings were presented at the Tourism Futures conference 4-6 December 2006. The survey was conducted online as a self completion questionnaire by individuals working in the Australian and New Zealand tourism industries. There were 122 Australian respondents and 10 New Zealand respondents. Can you please make the point that these are all Prompted

#### Top five challenges facing the industry in the next 10 years

CHALLENGES	PERCENT
Need for product development and infrastructure in regional areas	38 percent
The price of oil/fuel and the effect on airfares	34 percent
Effect of world instability on Australia e.g. terrorism	33 percent
Climate change	30 percent
Competition by overseas destinations	25 percent

#### Top five competitive advantages in the next 10 years

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES	PERCENT
Clean/green environment/natural/pristine beauty of Australia	68 percent
Stable and safe country	67 percent
Australia’s culture and friendly people	54 percent
Unique experience offered in Australia	52 percent
Vastness of Australia/uncrowded	49 percent