



**UNDERSTANDING
BRANDING
DIFFERENTIATING
THE EXPERIENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

Brands and branding have been around since the late 1800's. So, why is it that brands now seem to have more importance surrounding them? In order to answer that, let's take it back to the basics.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

By definition, a brand is a product, service or experience with **perceived intangible attributes**.

The key word is *perceived*. It is important to understand that brands really exist in people's minds. Your brand is the sum of your customer's perceptions of your service or experience. How people *perceive* that your service or experience will perform is your brand. How people think and feel about your brand *is* your brand. So even if you have never been to a community or a business, if you have heard of it, you have a *perception* of what it's like. You have an *expectation* of what I can experience.

Successful brands are the ones that have differentiated their product or experience in some way. With successful, well managed brands when you see or hear the brand name you know what to expect. It's a promise of what you will get.

BRAND OR BRANDING?

We've said that a brand is the perception that people have about the experience. Perceptions are not always founded on reality, they can stem from a number of reliable or unreliable sources. A perception may not be accurate but it is to the person who holds it. My perception is my reality.

Branding can be thought of as *managing* your brand. Defining what your brand stands for and how you **want** it to be perceived. It is creating the strategy to reinforce the right perceptions and changing inaccurate ones; it can also mean modifying the way you currently do things so people will think differently about your brand.

In short, branding **is defining, promising and consistently delivering on desired perceptions**.

CASE STUDY 1 – WestJet

WESTJET



WestJet is a great example of a strong brand. When the company started, they modeled their business after Southwest Airlines in the US. WestJet decided they would offer lower prices and make flying a pleasant experience. In their words, "we can make it fun and show we care about our customers." Here is an example of how WestJet's staff is empowered to manage the brand.

An elderly gentleman on a WestJet flight shared with his flight attendant that he was a widower and had recently reconnected with his high school sweetheart. She too was alone and he was going to visit her. The flight attendant saw an opportunity and called ahead to have a bouquet of flowers handed to the passenger on arrival so he could give them to his long lost sweetheart.

Everyone wins! The woman got flowers, the man looked exceptionally thoughtful and WestJet got a great story, which made the news and reinforced how they take care of their customers.

Actions prove that branding is the job of everyone in an organization, from the CEO to the front desk staff. Everything you do should reinforce the brand image you want people to have of your company.

Remember the Key Unique Qualities

Branding is creating and maintaining awareness of the key unique qualities you need people to remember most about your product or experience. It is your competitive edge. To be most effective, your **key unique qualities need to strike an emotional chord with your customers.**

Qualities are not features.

Starbucks' qualities are not its selection of specialty coffees; its qualities are in creating a place for people to connect. They call it the third place. First is home, second is work, third is Starbucks. The qualities of Federal Express are not its fleet of trucks or airplanes; their qualities center on their commitment to ensuring packages arrive when you need and expect them to. They promise every customer peace of mind.

Ways to Express a Brand

You should not use only a logo as your brand; a logo is the visual identity of a brand. The problem is that some people will use the word brand and logo interchangeably; this causes some confusion around what a brand really is.

For example, when you see the Fed Ex logo, you think reliable and don't panic, they've got me covered.

The FedEx logo is displayed in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The letters 'Fed' are in a dark grey color, and 'Ex' is in a lighter grey color. The 'E' has a distinctive cutout in the middle.

The logo is a visual cue, like shorthand but it's not the brand.

There are many ways of expressing a brand.

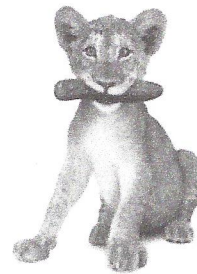
- tagline or advertising slogan
- style of imagery or photography that evoke feelings
- consistent color scheme
- type of language used and the overall tone; for example, does it sound relaxed and friendly compared to factual and trustworthy

You have probably heard the term *rebranding*. Unless you're ready to change most of what you do and how you do it, it's more accurate to think of branding as a process, instead of *rebranding*; it is more like *refocusing*.

Telus is a great product brand example.

You can tell this is a Telus ad before seeing the logo because Telus consistently uses an abundance of white space, adorable animals and the same tone. Their brand promises technology that is friendly and is expressed in the tagline – *the future is friendly*® and supported by the stylized 't'.

Change channels, change lives.



TELUS

BRAND BENEFITS

Brands and branding are more important now than ever before because of increased competition. With all of the choices that we have, it's important to have a well defined brand because of clarity. When people understand what your brand stands for, it's easier for them to decide if you fit within what they deem valuable.

Your brand differentiates you from others. In a world where product features can easily be replicated and comparisons based on price alone are so easy; differentiating your experience sets you apart. It can help your customers make an emotional connection to your experience but to make that connection, you have to know who your customers are and what will trigger their emotional interest. The best brand strategies come from customer insight.

Bringing your Brand into Focus

Whether or not you've said what it is, your business already has a brand, one that's been created by the things you do every day. Sometimes, articulating or defining an existing brand can hit some road bumps. As a community, you may think that the range of things to do for visitors means you really do have *something for everyone*. As an organization or tourism business, you may feel that narrowing your focus will result in losing business.

The truth is, a well defined brand most often results in attracting people who want what your brand offers. When they want what you have to offer, it's easier to meet or exceed expectations. This results in happy customers who will talk about their experience to others. They become your brand advocates – talking, tweeting and posting about their experiences; this brings more people to you, who want what you offer.

A brand isn't something you see or do, a brand is an emotional connection between the experience and the customer; it's a feeling, not a feature. For example, the Las Vegas brand isn't gambling; it's anything goes! It's a feeling that when you're in Las Vegas you can do whatever you want.

Branding is zeroing in on the one thing you want to be known for. Laying a foundation from which you can build all of the experiences you offer.

THE POWER OF A STRONG BRAND

When we buy a brand, we are not just buying the product; we're also buying how the brand makes us feel. If that feeling is important to us, we're willing to pay a higher price.

A distinct brand attracts customers that want the kind of experience (and feelings) that they perceive you offer.

- Riding a Harley Davidson motorcycle makes me feel free.
- Driving my family in our Volvo makes me feel like I'm keeping them safe.
- Owning a Mac instead of a PC makes me feel unique and innovative.
- Visiting Disneyland makes me feel good because I know everyone will be happy.

We studied WestJet earlier and saw an example of how their staff understand the brand and how they're empowered to help deliver on a branded experience. In turn, that generates employee engagement which helps sustain the company's brand.

They say branding is like breathing; it happens whether you think about it or not.

YOUR BRAND

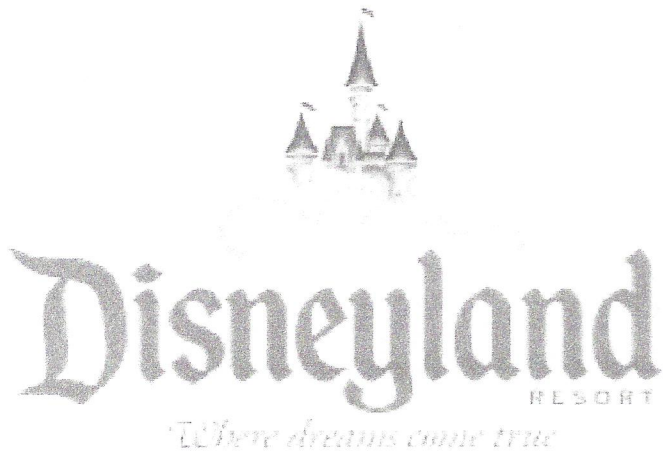
Even if you have not consciously thought about or worked on your brand; if your business or organization has been around for awhile, it already has a brand. The value in understanding branding is that it allows you to focus on the right things. In most cases, you're not creating something new but instead, you are defining what already exists.

Brands live in people's heads, they are perceptions and expectations of the feelings that the brand will deliver. To the consumer, those expectations are like a promise. If the consumer feels that promise isn't kept, their expectations aren't met and their perception of the experience may no longer be favourable. Worse yet, they won't talk about you in the ways you want them to and when it comes to intangibles; like experiences, people trust what other people say.

Your brand is a promise to the customer, so it's valuable to create a brand promise. A commitment in writing, of what your brand will consistently deliver. It should capture the heart and soul of the **functional benefits** and **emotive values** a customer will receive when they experience your product(s) and service(s).

Your brand promise isn't about you – it is what you are promising to your customer. **The most powerful brand promises evoke an emotion that makes your customer want what you offer.** Remember, the brand promise you create isn't **shared** with the customer but must be **consistently experienced** by them. Memorable brands are built over time by consistently delivering on their promise.

EXAMPLE – Disneyland



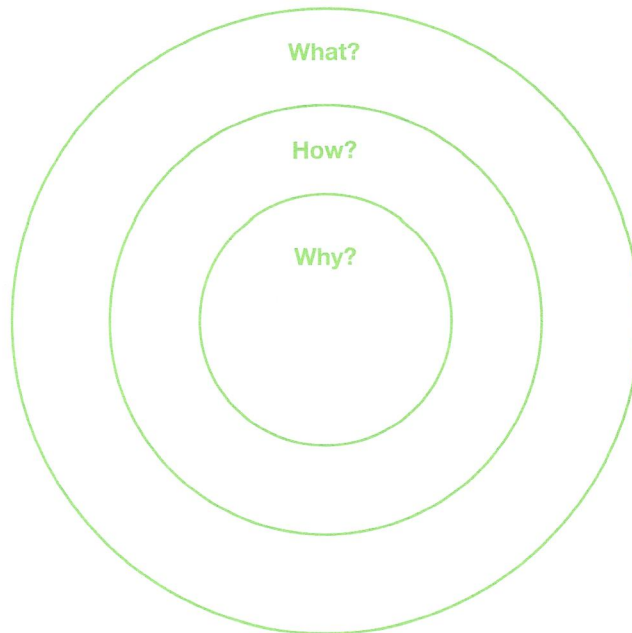
One of the most renowned tourism brands is Disneyland. They promise fun and family entertainment when you visit their parks and resorts. Universally, the perceptions that people have center on Disneyland being clean, safe and wholesome.

In 2004, Roy Disney summarized the intangible benefits of the Disney brand. *"I believe our mission has always been to be bringers of joy, to be affirmers of the good in each of us, to be – in subtle ways – teachers. To speak, as Walt once put it, 'not to children but to the child in each of us.' We do this by giving our guests a few hours in another world where their cares can be momentarily put aside, by creating memories that will remain with them forever."*

Notice that Disney did not describe their brand in terms of amusement parks, cartoons, films or products. They describe their brand in terms of the experience people get from Disney.

EXERCISE 1 – THE WHAT, HOW AND WHY.

If you haven't thought about your business as a brand, how do you start? It's often not what you do, or how you do it. What differentiates you could stem from why your company does what it does. Often, your why equates to your values and what matters most to you.



1. What is it that your business or organization does?

2. What is your unique selling proposition? How do you do it differently than your competition?

3. Why are you in business? What do you believe in?

WHAT IS A DESTINATION BRAND?

Like experiences, destinations have to connect with people on an emotional level. A destination can offer a mix of experiences and that often creates uniqueness and differentiates the brand.



The culture, (values, beliefs and attitudes) of the destination combined with the unique qualities (personality) and characteristics that elicit an emotional response from visitors equals the destination brand.

Many destinations have relied on pretty pictures to tell people about their region, province or country. Spectacular scenery or listing amenities doesn't easily distinguish one location from the next; it doesn't help anyone understand the personality of the location or show what you can do, it doesn't give me cues on how I'll feel.

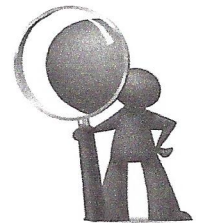
Today, the customer has more choices for places they can visit than ever before and the competition is fierce. Let's look at what Travel Alberta has done for its branding exercise.

CASE STUDY 2 – Travel Alberta

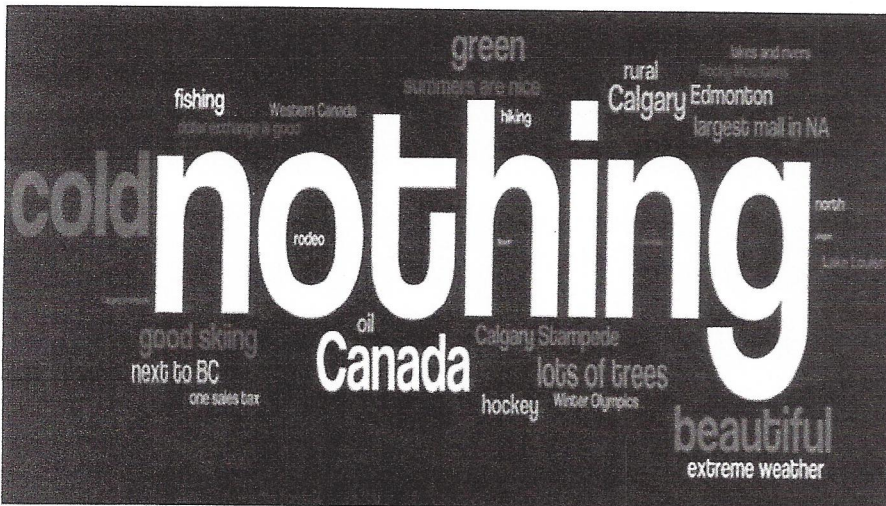
Brands need to bring clarity to people and this is critical in the travel industry. Travel Alberta saw brand as a way of focusing our messages and creating a consistent voice for the province. Competition is strong and Alberta, as a destination, is not well known. (Global awareness: 0.2%).

When we tested awareness in three of our highest potential markets, (Orange County, CA, New York, NY and Toronto, ON)

we asked people what they knew about Alberta and overwhelmingly they responded with NOTHING!



Our participants could not recall a single thing and what they did know included cold, Canada, beautiful, green, Calgary, extreme weather, good skiing and lots of trees.



EXERCISE II

1. Using your own business, what are some of the words people would use to describe your business?
Create a word cloud as with the Alberta case study above. (the bigger words represent how often that word would have been used)

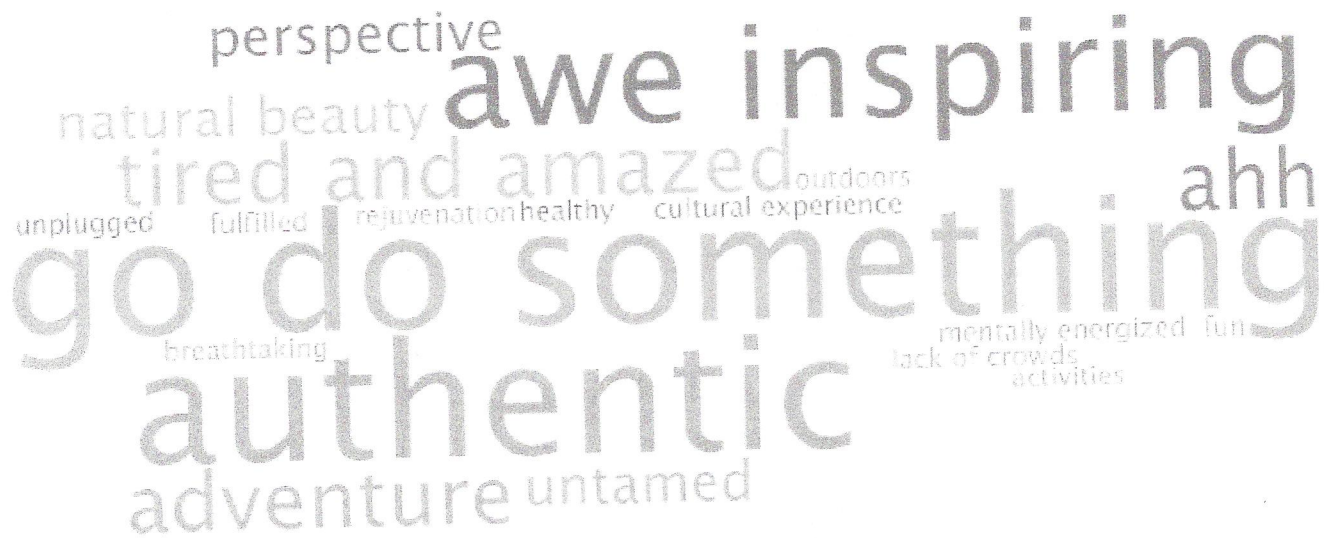


2. What do people know about you?

THE BRAND JOURNEY

A product brand is easier to define than the brand of a region or an entire province. A destination is much more challenging, as it is a composite of many experiences and the brand does not belong to any one organization. This means that everyone must fulfill the promise to work on the same page.

When Travel Alberta was creating its own brand attributes, we came to you. In a series of workshops throughout the province we heard representatives from destination marketing organizations and tourism businesses, big and small tell us what they believe differentiates Alberta from other travel destinations.



We did an online review to see what people were saying and what photos they were posting after a trip to and around Alberta.

We discovered that, Alberta is AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES IN BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES

This is what we adopted as **Alberta's unique selling proposition**. This sets us apart and differentiates us from other destinations.

We know we offer real experiences and that breathtaking landscapes can come in many forms.

- mountains
- badlands
- prairies
- cityscapes
- cultural landscapes

A brand isn't what WE say it is; it's what people THINK it is.

This leads us to what we are promising. If Las Vegas is, *anything goes* and Disneyland is *fun, family entertainment*; what do we promise when you explore Alberta?

TARGET THE RIGHT MARKET

We're going to move from branding into marketing for just a moment. One of the keys to successful marketing is segmenting and targeting the market(s) that will help you meet your business objectives and give you the best return on your investment.

Our research told us, our best market is Youthfully Spirited Adventurers. Why? Alberta is not the kind of destination where you come to relax. The kinds of experiences we have here are a fit for the kind of visitor who wants to be active.

To align with the Canadian Tourism Commission's (CTC) Explorer Quotient™ segments, we identified Free Spirits and Social Samplers as our primary target markets. These segments are receptive to marketing / advertising messages, are significantly more likely to say they'll visit many locations in a single trip and are most likely to tell others about their travel experiences, both online and off.

Our other target market is Cultural Explorers because, like our primary targets, they are always planning for their next trip and are likely to travel with friends or family.



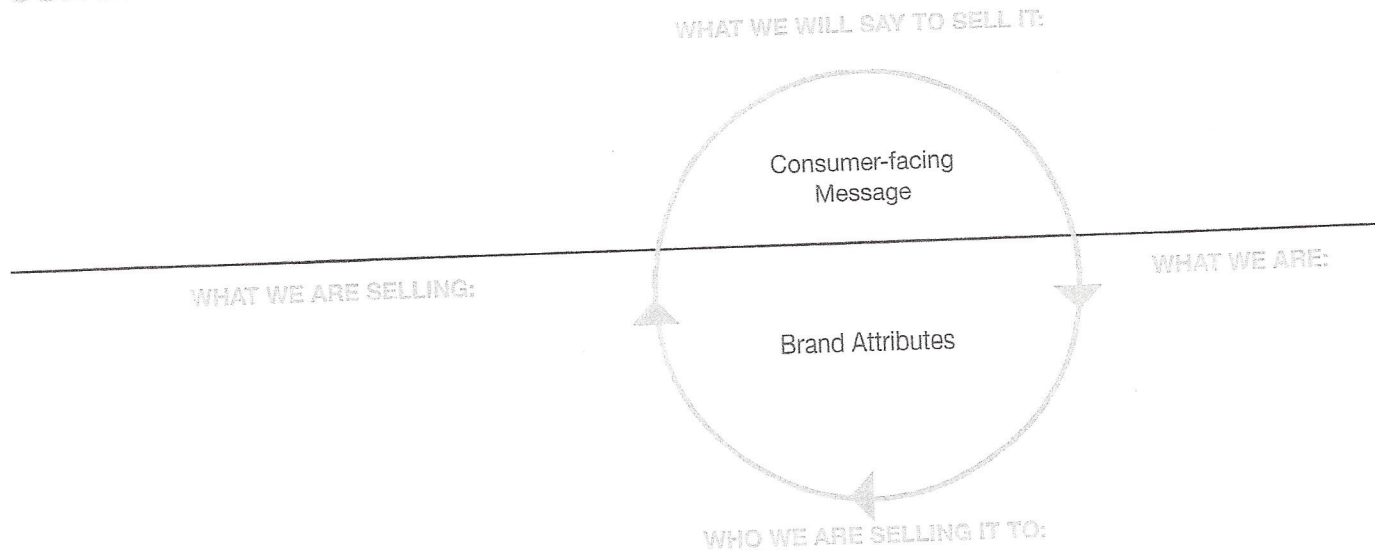
We also learned that the *feeling* of Goosebumps was a powerful and compelling promise but the word itself wasn't as attractive.

We are Going to Give 'em Goosebumps

We know there are Goosebump moments waiting to be experienced all over the province.

- Hand feeding carrots to the giraffes at the Calgary Zoo and getting my hand wiped clean by their mile long tongues!
- Watching the Northern Lights dance across the sky while relaxing in Jasper Park Lodges outdoor heated pool on a chilly March night.
- Teeing off on the third hole of the Athabasca Golf Course. Don't be short or you may find the creek!

OUR BRAND



As you can see, we now have all the items below the line in place. These are things that the customer or visitor does not see but are the basis and framework of a brand.

- What We Are: the *Unique Selling Proposition* is what differentiates us as a destination.
Authentic Experiences in Breathtaking Landscapes
- What We Are Selling: our *Brand Promise* is the emotional connection to brand and what people feel.
Goosebump Moments
- Who We Are Selling It To: our *Target audience*.
Youthfully Spirited Adventurers

The items above the line are what the consumer sees and connects to in our marketing messages.

Our **(remember to breathe)** campaign captures the feeling a person gets the moment before they jump into something new and exciting; it reminds us to pause our busy lives and take a moment to focus on what really matters. It captures the feeling of Goosebumps without using the word.

You can see all of the *below the line* elements coming together in many of our activities.

- Print Ads
- Website
- Social Media
- Public Relations
- Publications
- Commercials and videos

Give 'em Goosebumps

Every tourism operator in the province, whether a hotel, big business or small business has a stake in this brand. Without your experiences, there are no Goosebumps. A Goosebump moment will be different for each visitor but the feeling is the same. To look at the cause of a Goosebump moment, go back to the unique selling proposition.

Authentic Experiences in Breathtaking Landscapes.

It's the thrill of seeing or doing something totally new; in a cultural or natural landscape that is breathtaking. It's the personal, emotional connection that happens during this type of moment that literally gives people Goosebumps.

You hold the key to delivering Goosebump moments to each and every visitor in this province. Remember, Goosebumps are an emotional response, so you need to tap into the emotional wants and desires of your guests. When you deliver the promise of a Goosebump moment, you will inspire travellers to recommend Alberta to their family and friends and to come back and visit again.

This is where you need to see how your tourism product fits into the bigger picture as we invite consumers to come to Alberta to **(remember to breathe)**.

Leveraging the Brand

- Think Experiences
- Think Goosebumps
- Similar Messaging

Travel Alberta is taking our branded messages to target audiences in key markets. Our job is to get them thinking about an Alberta vacation; to the point where they're creating their own mental movie of the things they will do.

There are three main things to consider when capitalizing and delivering on this promise.

1. How to create or enhance the experience and **position it as an experience and not a product.**
2. What are, or what could be, your Goosebump moments.
3. Create your marketing materials so they complement the branded messages that get the consumers interested in the first place.

Explorer Quotient (EQ)

Before you can focus on the experience and the Goosebumps – you have to know who your experience appeals to.

EnviroNics Research Group worked with the Canadian Tourism Commission to develop the Explorer Quotient™ (EQ). This tool, segments visitors based on common social values and travel behaviours. Start by getting to know the four segments identified by the CTC. When you know which segments are most interested in your experience, you can start thinking about how to make it even more appealing.

In your marketing plan, you will identify the market segments you can realistically target. As you make these choices, think about the segments targeted by the Canadian Tourism Commission and Travel Alberta. Targeting the same segments creates similar marketing messages because we're focused on the same types of travellers.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Spirits • Social Samplers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Explorers • Cultural History Buff • Authentic Experiencers • Personal History Explorers • Personal Interest Explorers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejuvenators • Escape Artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Hassle Travellers • Gentle Explorers • Virtual Travellers • Group Travellers
INDULGERS	LEARNERS	ESCAPISTS	FAMILIARITY SEEKERS

The EQ™ segments that Travel Alberta is targeting are based on what Alberta has to offer and the segments that are most interested in the brand.

- Free Spirits
- Social Samplers
- Cultural Explorers

The Canadian Tourism Commission targets two of the groups.

- Free Spirits
- Cultural Explorers

If your Destination Marketing Organization has adopted EQ™, find out which segments they are targeting and consider using EQ™ to segment and target your customers.

Think Experience

When you are thinking of ways to enhance your experience, remember to focus on your segment type and keep it real.

Think about how you can take what you do well to the next level.

EXAMPLE

Free Spirits – Icefield Helicopter Tours

Icefield Helicopter Tours created a new experience for Free Spirits, Heli-Hiking was already a Goosebump experience but Icefield Helicopter Tours knew they could make it even more appealing by capitalizing on current trends and the Free Spirit profile. By offering Heli-Yoga, they were able to position their tourism product as a one of a kind experience that answered the luxury travel trend. This appealed to the Free Spirits' adventurous side while offering them a companion experience to brag about.

Cultural Explorers – Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump or Blackfoot Crossing

Either experience could offer the chance to make a traditional Blackfoot dish, including gathering the ingredients.

When you are looking at ways to enhance your experience, don't forget about the basics. Things like cleanliness, safety and hospitality should *never* be sacrificed; even when your time and energy are going into changes and improvements.

Think Goosebumps

Here are a couple of ideas to help you think about new ways to create Goosebump moments for your guests.

- Incorporate some unexpected elements. Stimulate the senses to enhance your product, like adding a taste of local foods or entertainment.
- Deliver insider experiences. Give your guests something to brag about, like exclusive tours, behind the scenes opportunities or the chance to talk with an expert.
- Build in opportunities for your guests to share experiences. Give them a chance to mix over drinks or take them on a group walk teaching them things about the local flavour.
- Offer a learning opportunity. Give your guests the chance to roll up their sleeves and try something new and hands on.

For more ideas on what gives people Goosebumps, visit albertagoosebumps.com

EXERCISE III

1. Is what you offer a product or an experience?



2. If it's a product, how can you make it an experience?

3. What Goosebump moments do you offer travellers?

4. How do you represent Alberta's Unique Selling Proposition?

5. What will make them remember their experience with you?

6. What do you offer that will make someone (remember to breathe)?

BRANDED MESSAGING

Aligning with our branded messages means that there is a similar feeling.

In that vein, to capitalize on our brand, your images should capture people in a breathtaking moment. That time when they are totally caught up in what they are doing. No fake smiles, or staged poses. They should look natural and be having fun. Ideally, because our target audience value shared experiences, there should be more than one person in the photo.

The language that you use and the overall tone of your marketing materials should capture the feelings of the experience. Remember to describe the experience, not the product. Don't just tell me what I'll do; tell me why I'll love it. Tell me why I should choose you. What emotional benefit will I enjoy?

(remember to brand)

Just because you are aligning with our tourism brand does not mean that you lose your own identity. It means customers will see your experience as an attractive part of the overall feeling.

TRAVEL ALBERTA EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

Course date: ___ / ___ / _____

Action plan item	How to implement	When
1. _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___
2. _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___
3. _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___
4. _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___
5. _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___ ___ / ___ / ___

ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AID

Complete this sheet for each item included on the action plan

1. What is the item of learning you intend to implement?
2. By which objectives/methods will you measure progress?
3. What barriers might impede your implementation?
4. How will you avoid or negate these barriers?
5. **Time:** when do you intend to start implementing the item?
6. **Time:** by when do you intend to complete the implementation of the item?
7. **Resources:** what resources (people, equipment, extra skills) will you need to complete the implementation of the item?
8. **Benefits:** what benefits do you hope will result from your actions (including financials if possible to assess)?
9. **Commitment:** when will you and your manager meet...
 - a. to discuss the implementation of your plan?
 - b. to review the progress of this action?