

Sustainable Canada

Report of Consultation Meetings in Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto June 10 - 19, 2002

The following points encompass the discussion following Dr. David Wheeler's presentations at the four meetings.

Branding Canada

- There is a difference between intentional national branding and relying on the general history and reputation of a country, as well as firm driven national identity forming.
- The upside / downside of Canada's high dependency on exports must be considered in any brand development process.
- Implications of getting the branding message "wrong" must be discussed and dealt with before promoting the brand.
- What value system do we encompass in the brand? If we push the message too high, we will risk a backlash with people looking for or expecting too much.
- How much inconsistency can the brand tolerate – does "everyone" need to buy in? Can one "bad" company, or company acting contrarily to the message tear down the entire brand?
- The brand message cannot go too far or too fast – if some companies in various sectors cannot keep up with the message or value system being conveyed, it could undermine the rest of the message.
- A learning journey analogy is therefore more powerful – not representing ourselves as perfect, but as on an aggressive learning track (addresses the risk factor).
- At what level should Canada be marketed? How do we decide what Canada means and what segments we are marketing to i.e. corporations versus individuals?
- Are we branding products or branding our multinational companies? Why not just let the multinationals build the brand? Is it feasible to control this process? Is the branding process focusing on national or international markets?
- Canada is often considered a branch plant economy – how would this work with the brand? Canada also has a well-developed SME economy creating the opportunity for the brand to create a sophisticated, international advertising campaign for thousands of SMEs to assist with their supply chain strategies. Supply chains are important for reinforcement of values and sales messages: vendors and customers are both important. Also, Canada could build its own product, something uniquely Canadian that has value abroad.
- The solution has to be innovative, as the brand will have a different value depending on the size of the business aligned behind it. There is opportunity for small business to bask in the halo affect of a Canadian brand endeavour.

- Out of all the Canadian social values, how do we know which one all-encompassing message could ring true for Canadians?
- How do we capture one advertising message that fulfills all the ethics and values that make up a “Canadian identity”? This is why the advertising message will be so important: It requires a marketing strategy to Canadians to get them excited about being Canadian, as well as marketing Canada abroad to get foreign markets excited about Canadian products and services.
- There is a level of complexity for branding abroad: people see Canada, not a collection of individual provinces.
- There has to be consistency between the marketing message and what’s going on in the Canadian organization – current research efforts are focused on this.
- What supports the brand? Difficult to tie standards into an overarching brand message at this stage as it could hinder the creative process. Rather, start at the other end: opportunity/image and then work back to what this means.
- It is not for the researchers to say what this means, but for the companies to say what it means. It is up to the companies to invest in this brand.
- Can also consider labelling, such as an eco-logo. This, however, would again require some standard setting and so is a step after the brand creation process.
- It was suggested that if this initiative can capture the values of Canadian companies at their core, then it would not matter whether individual companies meet certain, preset standards. Either this message reflects core values already embedded in Canadian companies, or it doesn’t.
- The effort needs to link the brand to ‘core competencies’ of Canadian society and firms e.g. developing the ability to foster and build communities locally and globally.
- How are companies dealt with that hurt the brand?
- There may not be a hard and fast way to protect this brand, but rather more of a reinforcing sense of who we are and what this means.
- Many feel that branding Canada is an ambitious undertaking, and that managing the brand at a national level will incur a good deal of risk.
- Closest thing to an active media promotion is “Cool Britannia”, although this was not initially strategic.
- For Canada, needs to be something that everyone in Canada can get behind, get excited about and will resonate with them. It also must be an image that people abroad agree this could be Canada.
- Provided Canadians feel this message reinforces their values overall, the branding exercise could be an unstoppable force.

The Sustainability Message

- A fundamental truth to Canada’s economy is that we are producers of natural resources and, as such, have to be good stewards of these resources.
- As a resource-rich country, Canada naturally has ecological footprint issues.

- Some believe the country already has a negative image regarding sustainability in Europe, especially with the country's recent response to Kyoto. There is also the opinion that Canada has every bit as much leadership at the government level on sustainability issues as that existing in the UK and Europe. Is this fact enough, especially as the country does not demonstrate this leadership actively to its constituents? If not, a sustainability message must be introduced with a level of humility (which, as many pointed out, is very much a key strength for Canadians!).
- Has a proactive national branding strategy around sustainability ever been done before? If so, a model exists from which to study. Sweden says that by 2010 it will be "sustainable", but we are not sure if this includes an active branding strategy. New Zealand has committed to branding its organic agriculture production – the country was in a good position to do so and seized the opportunity.
- Is it possible to collaborate with some of these countries i.e. a joint Canada/Scandinavia endeavour?
- Using sustainability as a context allows us to speak to interconnectivity – branding not just environmental responsibilities, but social ones as well e.g. literacy. There is, so far, a fragmented approach to how people see this and so need to map out a more concrete social value brand before companies can choose whether or not to commit to the underlying message.
- The economic incentives for a sustainability message and how it will work internationally have to be considered. These considerations still have to be tested.
- What is the marginal gain for leadership companies aligning behind this message? There is ongoing research to determine the benefits of this idea for sectors and companies. Until the benefits are established, it will be difficult to capture synergies by convincing business, government and civil society leaders to join.
- Most people believe that, if Canada brands on sustainability, the country would have to rectify the dissonance between promoting the country as sustainable without employing sustainable practices.
- How would the message work with international ISO standards? Different sectors may align with existing international standards, under the umbrella brand image.
- How Canada brands itself may be embodied into International corporate social responsibility standards currently in discussion at the international level. The country will have to watch how these play out because this will affect the message chosen for Canada to convey.
- Have to get the message out, however, that this isn't just another standard – don't want to lose the centrality of the notion of creating value; this is where we start from and it embodies a whole change in how organizations work.

Sustainable Canada Branding Initiative

- The Sustainable Canada project is examining whether or not a national brand could increase competitiveness for Canadian goods and services internationally. In order to be successful, it is necessary for the country to also brand itself internally, and receive buy-in to the brand.

- Phase II – Gap Analysis: what are the gaps in current self-image and Canadian identity? Is it sustainability? There are two separate research components currently at work:
 - 1) Building a brand identity for Canada
 - 2) There is an intuition that this identity could contain environmental and social messages, but this is still being tested i.e. the identity could instead focus on quality.
- What is the future for the Sustainable Canada organization? Eventually the academic component would move aside for a coordinating body, possibly an association with strong business support. This is primarily a business-led endeavour with active involvement from NGOs and government.
- What has already been tested?
 - Sectors: Forestry, Oil & Gas, Electricity, Mining, Manufacturing, Chemicals, Environmental Services, ICT, Tourism
 - Still to be tested: Biotech, Agriculture, Finance, Arts and Media
- Active collaborators at this time include academic, marketing/branding and consulting participants.

Stakeholder Engagement

- The position was presented that if this is going to work, it has to engage consumers at the individual level – drive demand at the individual level.
- Drive a “model of change” response: when the brand is offered, people will want it. Only a few companies in each sector are required to show what’s possible in order to move the entire sector.
- Important to align the various stakeholder groups: if the public sees a value being promoted that is out of line with public policy and/or corporate behaviour it could become disillusioned.
- Need to engage international NGOs including more activist organizations, as they may help define future issues which could be important for consumers in Europe, Asia and North America
- Who is going to sell the message? (Partnership with Team Canada?)
- Some believe it is in the national interest to raise the bar on environmental issues, to link national interest with sectoral interest.
- A sustainable branding strategy could be much more innovative if all sectors work together – align the national interest for leveraging international competitiveness.
- Important to use the advice and skills of everyone so as not to duplicate efforts.

Sectoral Research

- Sustainability is a key issue for the tourism sector, as companies in this sector must keep destination sites worth visiting.
- There is potential for learning across sectors, such as tourism working with resource sectors – one affects the other. For example, mining can connect with tourism such as the case of the Four Seasons building on an abandoned mine.

- Branding Canada’s most obvious link is with tourism, especially relevant for BC with its Olympic bid.
- There is an opportunity now to shine a light on the Whistler initiative, which is an early adopter case study of an ecologically responsible tourism development strategy that Whistler is currently actively branding.
- The different needs of the communities each sector affects have to be considered.
- How each sector’s own marketing message can align with an umbrella Canadian message is to be considered e.g. how can one align the oil and gas sector’s message with the “Canadian” message? Sector research should also encompass all components of the various industries, for example, not just exploration, but downstream at refining.
- The more fragmented the sector, the greater the risk for mixed messages, which dilutes the overarching theme of what it means to be Canadian, and what Canada offers the world.
- Goal here is to find and exploit synergies where they exist, and create them where they do not.
- There is tension between synergy and competition: why would Suncor want to improve Imperial Oil’s brand (through one national brand)?
- One message difficult for the ICT sector because it is fragmented as well as containing a great deal of branch operations. One solution is to approach each company at the individual level.

Next Steps

- Bring industry associations together (possibly in December) in order to create synergy.
- Get others who may have an interest in this involved.
- Contacts from everyone who attended the meetings of people who could assist with this initiative.
- Feedback, ideas, connections, action plans, offers for pilot sites in which a Sustainable Canada brand and organizational structure could be tested, and more formalized partnerships would also be very much appreciated.
- Business case level research to be reported back to everyone involved in project, therefore requiring a systemic way to disseminate findings. The consultants (listed above under “Active Collaborators”) will be instrumental in this.
- Require participation from Industry’s sales and marketing departments to create solutions to the tension raised above under “Sectoral Research”.
- Require input from additional companies: Air Canada, Canadian hotel chains.

In what way can you keep this initiative moving forward?

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