

# Visitors need authentiCITY!

City branding is the process of image communication to a target market. During last European Cities Marketing meeting in Madrid, European cities investigated the state of city branding and confirmed that a strong city brand is key to any city facing the challenges of globalisation. Yet, the complexity of integrated city branding is now greater than ever before. And the DMOs might not always have the answer and certainly can't walk the talk alone.

### **City branding is about communities**

Keynote speaker Robert Govers, Founding Chairman of the International Place Branding Association, particularly captured the audience attention with his finding: city branding is not about the logo! "Cities should use their brand recognition and create an image for themselves. A city is not a product but an environment in which multiple products are created for multiple customers." he said. The message was pretty clear: people want actions not promises! Having a slogan that says "your city is cool" is a thing, proving to the world with actual examples your city is cool is what people want. Robert Govers continued: "City brands are co-created by people connecting, reacting! This works if you are a strong brand which sells itself. If you are a weak brand, the product builds the brand and you need to engage in democratic collaboration". This inspiring presentation concluded: "It's not about logos and slogans but about communities with identity strengthened with strategy, substance, symbolic actions and locals' participations".

### **Cities are not the only owners of their brand**

Fred Dixon, President & CEO of NYC & Company, explained to the 160 attendees from 65 cities what the future of destination marketing is with his very own example of

New York City. One of his messages was that destination marketers need to let go of the notion that they are the only voice of the city and set their brand image free. In today's connected world, you can't fully control your brand message any more, and trying to do so is a disservice to the community. The role of the CTOs is to be "authenticity experts" and to pursue living partnerships with the community and the world outside: "We are not the only owners of our brand!" he said, "We focus on curating, not creating stories. We love stories but no longer can control conversation". Fred Dixon's showcase was a real demonstration of how city branding has evolved through the years: "Logo and slogan: those days are over... People need authenticity!".

### **Consumers brand cities on TripAdvisor**

Finally, Justin Reid, Head of Destination Marketing EMEA at TripAdvisor, showed how people have the power thanks to reviews on specialised websites. When people are searching a destination, it starts with Google, and TripAdvisor always comes first. People can review all the things offered by a city, but according to Justin Reid "If you want to attract visitors, forget about the cuisine, cities should privilege things to see and do". This is especially important when you know that people that visit TripAdvisor look specifically for cities, not countries. ●●

## CITY MARKETING

### Meet. Share. Grow.

Six member cities (Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Istanbul, Munich and Nantes) as well as 5 external speakers from Europe highlighted their innovative approaches in City Showcases and Inspiration Lounges. From branding cities in order to attract meetings to changing perceptions, through building new infrastructures and the role of digital, attendees were offered many chance of learning from their peers.

Speaking about the meeting theme, Ignasi de Delàs, European Cities Marketing President, said: “As always, exchanges between members were at the heart of this European Cities Marketing Spring Meeting in Madrid. The Keynote presentations, City Showcases and Inspiration Lounges examined all the aspects of City Branding with inspiring examples and many lessons learned”.

The next ECM meeting will take place in Madeira, June 8-11, 2016 and the theme will be “Dare to share: how the sharing economy affects your city”.



European Cities Marketing



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### European Cities Marketing

European Cities Marketing is a non-profit organisation improving the competitiveness and performance of leading cities of Europe by providing a platform for convention, leisure and city marketing professionals to exchange knowledge, best practice and widen their network to build new business. European Cities Marketing is promoting and linking the interests of members from more than 100 major cities in 36 countries.

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