



APEX
NORTH CAROLINA

BRAND NAVIGATOR

THE PEAK OF GOOD LIVING.

INTRODUCTION

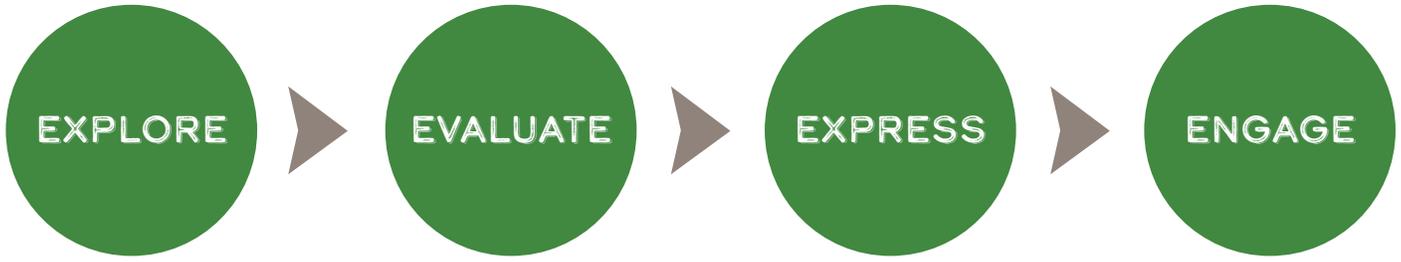
In April 2019, the Town of Apex issued a Request for Proposal for the purpose of seeking a firm to assist in the study, strategy, and development of a municipal brand. The primary project goals for the project were outlined as such:

- **DISTINCT IDENTITY:** Identify and promote what makes the Town of Apex distinct and appealing in a regionally-competitive environment for investors, businesses, retailers, visitors, and residents.
- **FLEXIBILITY:** The brand must be flexible and adaptable in order to meet the needs of a variety of town departments and municipal functions within the Town of Apex as well as groups and businesses within the overall brand. It must be flexible enough to grow and evolve with any changes in the market.
- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROMOTION:** Promote a healthy economy, attract private investment, attract new businesses, and help retain key businesses. A defined message that will market the Town of Apex locally, regionally, statewide, and nationwide as a business-friendly community.
- **COMMUNITY ENDORSEMENT:** The town brand must be authentic and resonate with citizens, businesses, employees, and community groups within the Town of Apex and throughout the region in order to gain the broadest possible support.
- **DELIVERABLES:** Following all research and community engagement, the following items will be produced by the Consultant:
 - Research Summary
 - Brand positioning statement
 - Graphic mark, with and without tagline
 - Style Guide with visual and graphic standards
 - Template samples for letterhead and business cards, web page layout, report covers, brochures, signage
 - Brand Strategy
 - Tracking & Measurement Recommendations
 - Final Report and Presentation

INTRODUCTION

To briefly summarize the final deliverable that will assist Apex in moving your organization forward, the Brand Explorer with the Brand Navigator program was created to help organizations like yours navigate through the delicate process of discovering, exploring, and promoting their strongest brand position. The Brand Explorer and Brand Navigator program creates a place of distinction, and shows you how to create traction within the organization so your brand works harder and smarter for you.

The stages of the Brand Explorer program for building the Apex brand were:



PHASE I: EXPLORE — In this phase, we measured the pulse of the community and strategic external audiences through research. This research is a building block from which brand truths emerge - the foundation for brand building.

*The research findings reports can be found in the Appendix.

PHASE II: EVALUATE — What does all the research say and what's the best brand positioning? After evaluating the research that was done, we were able to determine the best brand positioning for Apex. You will see the brand positioning that was developed based on the research in the following sections.

PHASE III: EXPRESS — In this phase, we were able to turn your brand from a strategy into a story. We were able to materialize your brand creatively and develop your story into the expressions that will gain attention from others.

PHASE IV: ENGAGE — This phase covers how to integrate the elements of your brand into the fabric of the organization so it creates traction. We call this the Brand Navigator because it gives you the navigational tools you need to actually put the plan to work rather than putting it on a shelf. You will see the full Brand Navigator in the sections that follow.

Again, thank you for the confidence placed in our team. We enjoyed our experience with each of you and know you will move forward in branding Apex quite successfully.

Let's get started!

PHASE I: EXPLORE

The Appendix of this document provides individual reports for each piece of research. The following summary provides the key takeaways from the collective research that affects the branding of the Apex.

We received a lot of input from many people and organizations, from within Apex as well as outside.

- Interviews with community stakeholders
- Focus groups (Department heads, Citizens, Businesses)
- Apex Facebook group
- Community survey (online, and paper copies distributed)
- Attitude, Awareness and Perception survey
- Review of Apex's digital footprint

Research Highlights: In-Market Feedback

- Apex is a family-oriented, friendly, small town with charm that is growing rapidly.
- Apex has a lot of good qualities: vibrant downtown, great festivals, great parks and recreation, great quality of life, and conveniently located.
- Downtown (Salem Street) is the most talked about asset in Apex.
- Apex IS "The Peak of Good Living"

Research Highlights: Community Feedback

- The community is proud of Downtown Apex.
- The Town of Apex is a friendly, family-oriented, and charming community that is growing.
- The Town of Apex is a good place to live, to visit and to start a business.
- The Town of Apex delivers on The Peak of Good Living.

- Residents feel keeping up with the growth is the biggest challenge Apex faces.
- Residents feel pretty good about the local government.

Research Highlights: Outsider's Feedback

- Apex is described as a small, friendly, growing suburban community outside of Raleigh
- Apex is known for "The Peak of Good Living"
- Apex has a positive reputation
- Most visitors visit downtown and/or eat at local restaurants and shop
- Outsiders say downtown, the festivals and affordable living are the most distinguishable assets of Apex.

Research Highlights: Digital Audit Feedback

- Top search results for Apex are the Town of Apex and Wikipedia. Sites about living in Apex NC often show up in top results as well.
- There isn't as much information touting Apex downtown as might have been expected.
- People are searching Apex NC most often for general information and weather.
- Town of Apex website and social media are effective in providing professional updates on community activity. Content often features a balance of expected municipal information with community "feel-good."
- Third-party websites featuring information about Apex NC quickly tell the story of quality of life and Peak of Good Living.
- Overall, social media activity is very important in municipal communications with its public.

PHASE II: EVALUATE

This is where we take all that we've learned and bring it together. We look at how everyone is involved. We look at the themes of what everyone is saying. We look at what stands out the strongest.

APEX PLACE BRANDING WHEEL

After reviewing the research findings, we were able to determine Apex's strengths and key attributes in the various areas that make up Apex. You can see these attributes in the Apex Place Branding Wheel below:



PHASE II: EVALUATE

KEY INSIGHTS AND BRAND TRUTHS

Brand truths are undeniable facts about the Town of Apex according to what was learned in phase one. Brand truths cannot be ignored when developing a brand promise and a direction for branding efforts. Embracing these truths allows us to face what it takes to create a place of distinction that can truly be delivered well.

1. Downtown-Salem Street and the small town charm that extends from it drives resident affinity to Apex.
2. Apex growth and popularity has been fast (and it's not slowing down).
3. The Peak of Good Living is firmly established as a local mantra. It equals:
 - the benefits of living in Apex - location and small town charm
 - excellence in providing service

BRAND DIAGNOSIS (what's the branding problem that must be addressed)

The strong growth in Apex is a threat to the small town charm loved by your residents and distinguishes the community from others. Apex is in danger of becoming another suburb swallowed up by growth - nice but lacking strong identity.

What is the right branding strategy that leverages and exploits Apex's many strengths and assets, while minimizing and overcoming its current weaknesses?

How do we make sense of all of this information?

- What makes Apex compelling?
- What makes Apex distinct?
- What can Apex envision?
- What is authentic?



PHASE II: EVALUATE

BRAND STRATEGY

- Relentless and unapologetically preserve historic downtown Apex as the core of the community's heart and identity, while growth continues around it and throughout the rest of the Town.
- Leverage 'Peak of Good Living' to be the Town motto for how it pursues excellence in all things to employees, residents, businesses, and guests.
- Create an identity system for the Town of Apex that reflects its personality.

A PERSPECTIVE ON POSITIONING

Classic Brand Positioning (for products) focuses on a promise made to the consumer that it can deliver better than anyone else: faster; stronger; more reliable; cheaper; you'll feel better; you'll look better; for people like you and so on. This is based on a strategy of occupying the consumers minds within the competitive marketplace, in order to grow a profit.

Town Brand Positioning is not as straight forward as product positioning. Existing customers have little alternative for town services. Potential customers make decisions based on a number of factors, many of which the Town has little control. Not all town-community benefits are perceived with same priority. The positioning goal is not necessarily to become the most well known. Chandlerthinks sees the following Town positioning elements-audience priority order:

1. Residents
2. Businesses
3. Guests

What goes into a branding direction? Place branding positioning factors are:

- Is it true?
- Is it compelling?
- Is it distinct?
- Is it sustainable?

There are a lot of ways a brand can tell its story. We call these various storytelling elements "expressions." For this project, we developed the expressions of a tagline, a logo and a visual platform for telling the Apex story. The intent is a creative platform for consistent messaging that reinforces Apex's strengths and points of differentiation.

THE BRAND STORY AND TAGLINE

The brand story is more than a tagline - it is a story that tells where the Apex has been, and more importantly, where it is going.

PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

APEX BRAND STORY

A warm winter wind carries the scent of freshly brewed coffee, fried pancakes and sausage down the street. Storefronts are brimming with holiday finery, fully arrayed in Christmas spirit. Shoppers greet one another on the street, and a family waves to neighbors bundled up on horse-drawn carriage ride. Just the night before folks gathered at the old train depot to sing carols around the town's tree lighting ceremony.

One could easily think you've stepped onto the set of a Hallmark movie. But, pinch yourself, because you've actually arrived at Christmas on Salem Street in Apex, North Carolina, just one of this community's many much anticipated events and traditions. Yet here, long after the holiday lights and decorations come down, the festive spirit lives on, and historic downtown Apex continues to charm with its authentic small town character and appeal.

In this town where traditions run deep, it's not hard to see why Money Magazine voted it the best place to live in the U.S. a few years back. If you could create the perfect place to live, work, grow and relish life, it may very well look like Apex.

But, you don't get to be America's best place to live by chance or accident. It takes great commitment and vision to create an environment that's so desirable and beloved by those who are fortunate enough to call it home. Maintaining the town's authentic, endearing character over years, decades and even centuries requires a dedication to the very attributes and qualities that set it apart from other growing surrounding communities.

But, at the end of the day, you still can't manufacture small town charm. Much of that comes from the warmth and friendliness exuded from the generations of people who have lived and grown up here.

You can begin to understand why visitors flock here to see for themselves what enchantment and appeal a place claiming to be the Peak of Good Living holds. Though Apex signifies the highest point on the old Chatham Railroad line, today that name fittingly stands for the highest degree and quality of life to be found anywhere.

Just ask around, and you'll soon find that the Peak of Good living means something unique and a little different to each person who lives here or visits.

Many will cite historic Salem Street with its preserved 19th century buildings filled with locally owned specialty shops, antique stores and boutiques, coffee shops and restaurants. Many will call out the exceptional schools, low crime rate, or the amazing arts programs and big city performances put on by the Halle Cultural Arts Center.

Many list the quiet, walkable neighborhoods, the lush greenways and beautiful parks, such as the Apex Community Park with its miles of developed nature and fitness trails. Or how lucky they are to have Jordan Lake and all its outdoor recreational possibilities. Or even Trackside Skate Plaza and the new 92-acre Pleasant Park in the works. Of course, many talk about all the festivals and events held throughout the year from the Peak City Pig Fest with its vintage food market and pulled pork barbecue to the annual Fourth of July Celebration where an old-fashioned cakewalk, hula-hooping and bubble blowing serve up a scoop of nostalgia with some hand-cranked ice cream.

Though Apex continues to receive accolades, such as Top Ten Best Town For Families and Number 3 Best Place to Move To, you don't consistently rank at the top unless you're doing something right consistently. And though 95% of residents are happy and believe that Apex is a great place to live, that doesn't stop the town from continuing to improve upon providing the best services, amenities and environment for all its citizens.

It's true that no one place is perfect. But, if you were to set out in search of the most ideal place to live, you may very well find yourself in an idyllic part of North Carolina, not far from Raleigh, nestled halfway between the mountains and the sea.

IN APEX.

The Peak of Good Living

PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

POSITIONING LINE

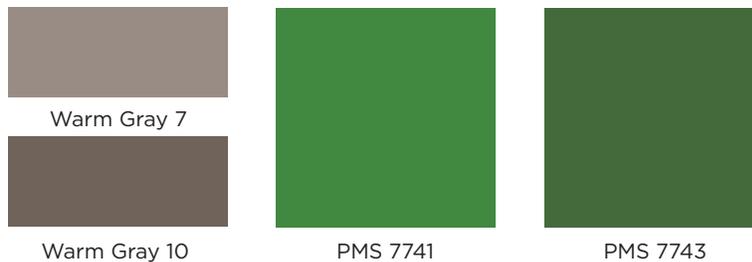
APEX, NORTH CAROLINA The Peak of Good Living

The line, “The Peak of Good Living” was developed from a public contest in 1970. Since then the town has changed quite a bit but much support has developed behind this line. Businesses are named from the “Peak” theme, programs, slogans, and more. The Peak of Good Living is as part of the Town as its buildings. The goal in Apex branding, is to simply leverage the line to stand for the high quality of life and standards Apex delivers. It’s more than a line, it’s a conviction.

THE BRAND LOGO



PRIMARY COLOR PALETTE



SECONDARY COLOR PALETTE



PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

BEHIND THE LOGO:

- The Apex logo was designed to be confident, clean and adaptable.
- It makes the Apex name the hero and creates a complementary but extendable icon.
- The icon features a 'peak' through the A as a nod to both the town's slogan, as well as the gently sloped curve in Apex's topography at its geographical peak.
- Green and brown tones connect the logo to one of Apex's much valued features - parks.

A complete Identity Standards Guide has been developed for Apex's future use and reference. It is included in the next section, as well as provided in digital format. The Standards Guide outlines the proper use of the logo for Apex and the various sub-organizations/departments that may want to use it.

TOWN OF APEX SEAL

Often it is confused that the creation of a new logo means the historic town seal must be removed. THIS IS NOT THE CASE. The Town of Apex Seal is important and timeless for many reasons. The new logo is intended to show Apex is relevant in today's communications. The town seal should still be considered for the following applications:

- Historical significance
- Achievement
- Official occasions such as special recognition or proclamations
- Used to create a sense of place for historic downtown borders



BRAND PERSONALITY AND ASSOCIATIONS

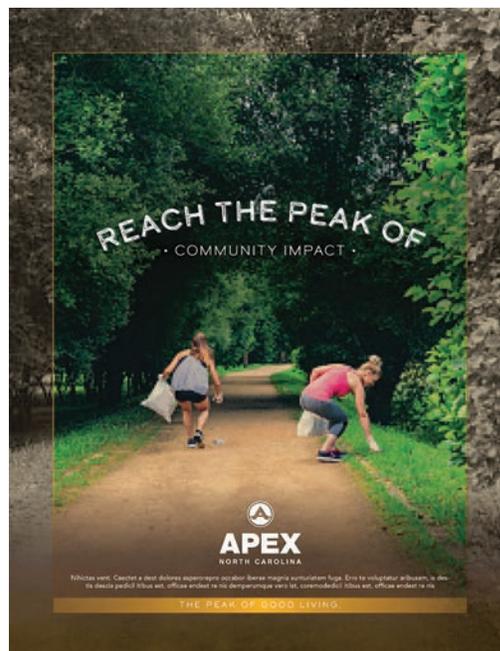
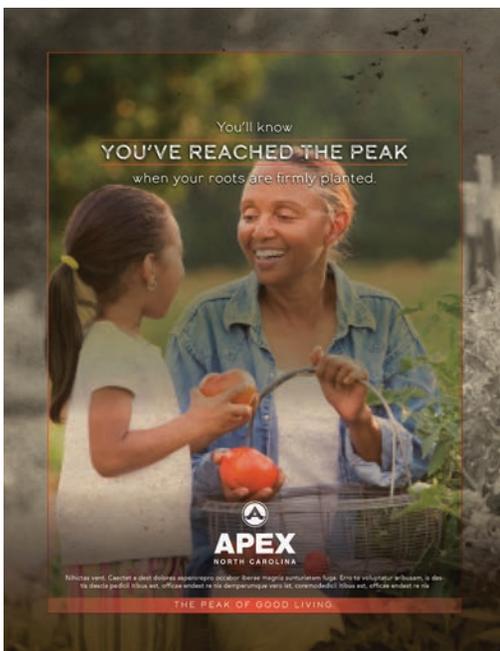
- Historic
- Educated
- Suburb
- Well kept
- Charming
- Safe
- Thriving
- Small town
- Family-focused
- Excellence

PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

MESSAGE CONCEPTS

Following are graphic depictions of messages that will help tell this story for the Town of Apex. They are a foundation that can be built upon for further marketing, advertising, digital messaging, internal communications and much more.

Production note: some of these messages may use using photography that did not include approval to use for production purposes. DO NOT use stock images in actual produced messaging for the Town of Apex. It is very important to use real Town of Apex employees and residents. It is important all images has approval for use.



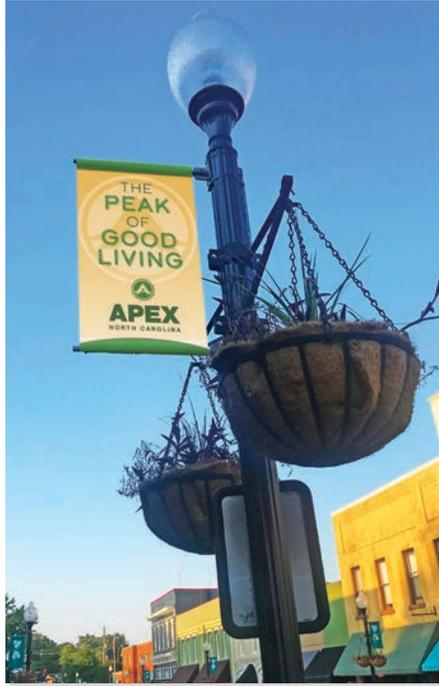
PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING - BANNERS



PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING - POLE BANNERS



WAYFINDING

The following designs work to implement small changes in existing signage. Final design will be completed during the town's wayfinding study.



PHASE III: EXPRESSIONS

MERCHANDISE



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

The Brand Navigator is designed to help the Town of Apex navigate through the process of organizing, seeding, launching, building, sustaining, and extending the Apex brand as a powerful brand identity and reputation-building strategy.

There is considerable emphasis on building a strong foundation and organization from which to launch and sustain the brand. There is a simple reason for this – from practical experience, we know the reason place brands fail isn't because they haven't captured the essence of the organization or community, or because they lack appropriate funding or marketing expertise. Place brands fail because lead organizations and brand leadership do not invest the time, commitment, imagination and persistence necessary to properly seed and nurture the brand.

While the brand is intended to support the work of the Town of Apex, we know the ability to achieve the overall goal is largely dependent upon the ability to influence a compatible environment in which the existing industry clusters and businesses grow and prosper. This is why it is so important to rally others to your brand and to integrate it throughout the organization and into the public and private sector communities. This is how the Town of Apex can extend its capacity to cultivate a brand culture that delivers on the brand promise.

The strategies and tactics recommended here will provide the Town of Apex with the tools necessary to achieve its goals. The following Brand Navigator document could be interpreted as complex, but truly it is rather simple in approach and can be best understood by the following diagram:



*Photography by Shawn Whipple
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PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

BRAND NAVIGATOR OUTLINE

I. TOWN OF APEX BRANDING APPLICATION

1. Audit / organize your communication tools
2. Embed the Brand
3. Protect your logo and tagline through proper legal action
4. Brand merchandise
5. Website Brand Facelift
6. Social Media
7. Brand town programs
8. Create storytelling opportunity in your public spaces (parks)
9. Prioritize action

II. PACKAGING THE BRANDING EFFORT

1. Create a one-page Town of Apex Brand Story
2. Develop a preliminary "Apex Branding 101"
3. Develop a branding project Q&A to share with the organization
4. Develop an Apex Brand Storytelling Package
5. Tell the branding story on a dedicated website web page
6. Join the discussion on social media
7. Create an Apex image video

III. SHARE AND ENGAGE WITH OTHERS

1. Employee culturalization
2. Create an internal marketing effort that engages stakeholders
3. Roll out into the community

IV. CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE

1. Implement signage programs for creating an instant sense of place
2. Downtown

V. EXTENDING THE BRAND INTO THE COMMUNITY

1. Build a Branding Team
2. Coach the Brand
3. The Brand as an Economic Development Platform
4. Additional Ideas for community involvement

VI. MEASURING THE BRANDING EFFORT

V. SUMMARY

Town of Apex Note:

A detailed list of action items is included in the staff copy of this document for consideration. The following pages gives a summary of each of the topics listed above.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

I. TOWN OF APEX BRANDING APPLICATION

Implementation of the branding into Town of Apex communication will require a lot of effort but don't let it seem overwhelming. It doesn't have to be. Take one step at a time and follow the direction below.

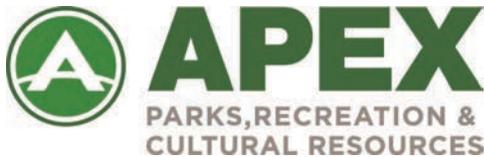
THINK ABOUT BRANDING AS A BRAND VOICE

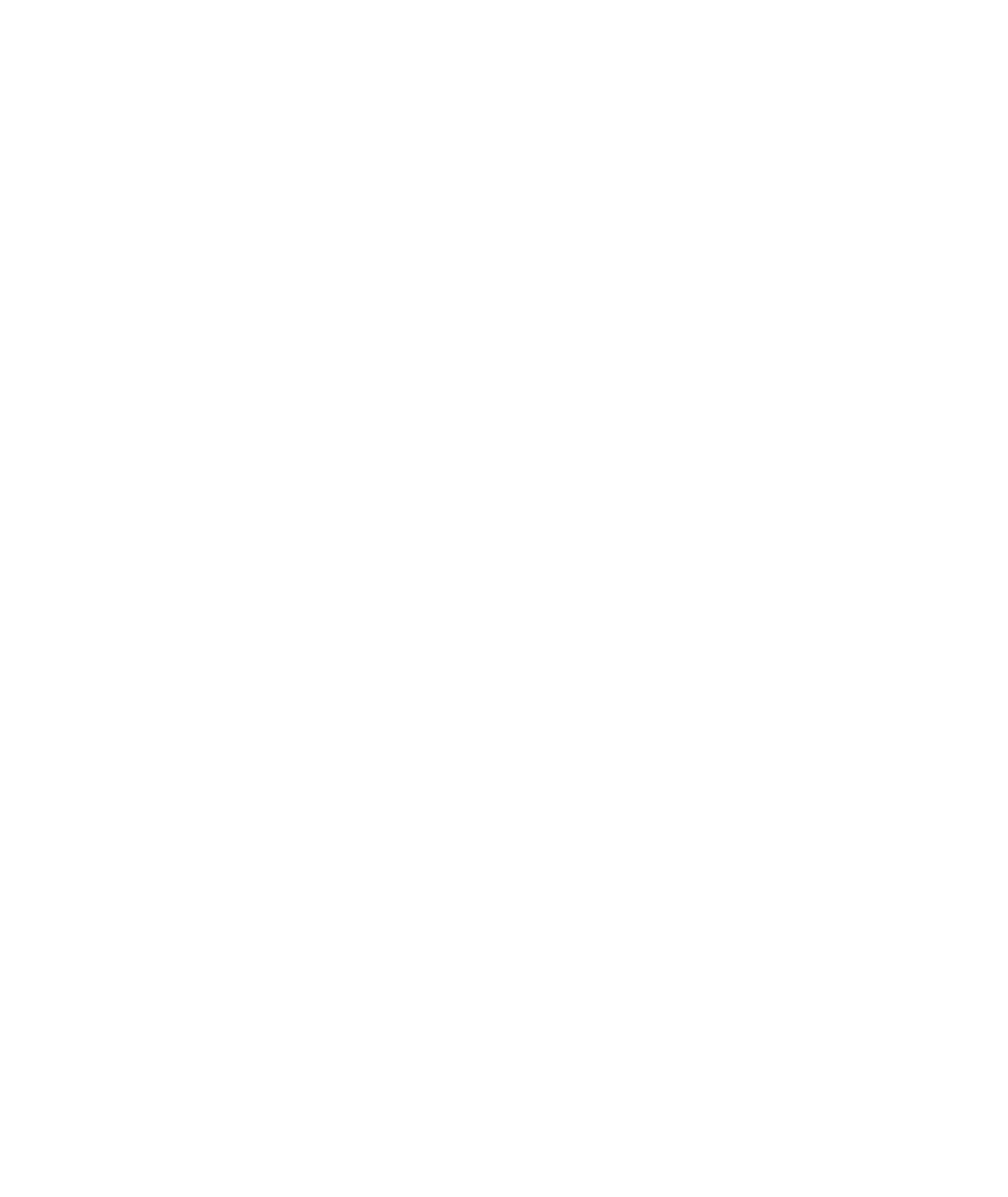
The Town of Apex has a voice, a specific tone. What you look like, talk about, how you present yourself - all of those things should reflect your brand voice. We have developed a Brand Story for you that portrays that voice. Use this. Moving forward, apply it to your communication and presentation. This is who you are.

USE YOUR BRAND IDENTITY TO CREATE CONSISTENCY AND FAMILIARITY

Now that you have a logo and color scheme, everything and everyone involved in the Town of Apex organization should follow that direction. Your brand identity is only as strong as you make it. If every department is allowed to create their own logos and designs, this results in confusion and a conflicting image outward. On the other hand, if everyone and every department within the Town of Apex uses the same color scheme, fonts, visual style and messaging, then you have consistency.

Consistency makes a strong identity.





PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

I. BRANDING APPLICATION... *CONTINUED*

1. AUDIT AND ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Evaluate your entire communication mix by first conducting an audit of your current efforts. Create a checklist of communication items which need a new design, or can incorporate branding. Prioritize and set goals and allocate resources to get this done. Telling the Apex story is easier when the power of the Apex brand and its compelling messaging is coupled with a checklist of “Communication Touch Points.” Using the following checklist to identify all your “storytelling” channels and vehicles is a convenient way to coordinate and optimize your resources.

Once you’ve created your communications list, challenge your Brand Apex team to identify ways the Apex branding direction can be applied. Yes, even answering the phone says something about your brand. Consider incorporating a branding story element into the way you greet others.

2. EMBED THE BRAND

It is important to align the brand with communication opportunities; the Town should conduct a communication audit to produce a baseline for messaging.

3. PROTECT YOUR LOGO (AND LINES) THROUGH PROPER LEGAL APPLICATION

Upon adopting the Town of Apex branding elements, be sure to go through the proper legal channels for protecting your intellectual property. You will want to register your logo and copyright the campaign theme, “Reach the Peak.”

4. CREATE BRAND MERCHANDISE

Provide brand clings, bumper stickers, back packs, hats, mugs and other merchandise to employees. Reminder – a logo on a shirt doesn’t make a cool shirt. A cool shirt makes a cool shirt. Have a local t-shirt designer craft up something from the brand story that makes a cool shirt. Same for other items. Elements of the branding can be lifted in a number of ways.

5. GIVE THE TOWN WEBSITE A BRAND FACELIFT

Hire a web design firm to apply the Apex brand identity system to the website for the Town of Apex. This can be more than color palettes and logos. Look to tell the Apex story based on what you know makes Apex so special. Research told us Apex has many great assets. Find ways to bring this out in your website communications.

THE PEAK OF GOOD LIVING



*** COVID-19: Updates on town operations, what we're doing, and what we ask of you. ***



Utility Service & Payments



Parks, Rec & Cultural Resources



Building Inspections & Permits



Garbage & Recycling

PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

I. BRANDING APPLICATION... *CONTINUED*

6. USE BRANDED CONTENT IN REGULAR TOWN SOCIAL MEDIA

Getting all departments involved in the sharing of Apex-branded content is one way to create a consistent image. Challenge each department to provide content that meets the brand story. The more ways the town can show how it is the “Peak of Good Living or how you can “Reach the Peak”, the more people will believe it.

7. BRAND TOWN PROGRAMS

Challenge the Town departments to look for ways to tie the branding into existing programs, either in renaming or including it in part of its offerings. For example, business licensing may be repositioned so the narrative that helps businesses get excited about how they can “Reach the Peak.”

8. CREATE STORYTELLING OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR PUBLIC SPACES

Parks, trails, sidewalks, parking lots and public buildings - what if there were subtle markers that told Apex’s story? This would allow everyone be educated on the many places and stories behind your brand.

9. PRIORITIZE ACTION

It is too wasteful to throw away old materials. Where budgets and supplies are valuable, we recommend a rolling change. In other words, take inventory of your brochures, business cards and related materials that are printed on a regular basis. Estimate when it’s time to re-order and roll any changes into the new copy and graphics. Everything does not need to be done all at once. This effort is for the long haul. We do believe a final change date should be identified. Usually this is somewhere between 6-12 months from brand rollout. Telling your brand story in Apex doesn’t just happen. Some basic communication messaging must be developed so everyone can see this was a serious effort and will be a priority for the organization moving forward.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

II. PACKAGING THE BRANDING EFFORT

This section emphasizes merchandising the actual branding project. It is important to create the proper materials that demonstrate to others that this is not just a new fancy logo; rather this is a serious effort to manage a purposeful identity for the Town of Apex. It will merchandise the hard work that has been put forth. Most importantly, it packages the story that you've worked hard to create and presents it so others can join in the storytelling.

1. CREATE A ONE-PAGE TOWN OF APEX BRAND STORY

Capture the essence of the Town of Apex brand identity on one page that can be distributed to easily communicate its story. We've already started the creative process with this project. Designing a nice one-sheet requires a small amount of work, but needs to be all things Apex – nothing flashy, but sophisticated and, of course, branded. Print copies in small amounts as needed.

One approach for doing this may be to do a one-page summary of the research and strategy, then another for telling the story. Or all of it together can make a nice folded brochure (8"x11" flat).

2. DEVELOP A PRELIMINARY "APEX BRANDING 101"

This storytelling piece will be for educating others on the Apex brand promise and brand campaign creative. This could be in the form of printed (i.e. a 4-panel vertical brochure) and digital materials (PDF document in a presentation format).

3. DEVELOP A BRANDING PROJECT Q&A TO SHARE WITH THE ORGANIZATION

Q&A addressing the obvious questions:

- Why an Apex brand? Why now?
- How does the Apex brand promise, platform and positioning help the town distinguish itself?
- How will the Town of Apex use the brand?
- What does the Town of Apex expect from the brand?
- How will the brand be deployed?
- What organizations/departments will support the brand process?
- How can people get involved? Inside and outside the organization.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

II. PACKAGING THE BRANDING EFFORT... *CONTINUED*

4. DEVELOP AN APEX BRAND STORYTELLING PACKAGE

This is for telling your story to outsiders. Create a communications package that describes Apex's brand, its purpose and promise for distribution to local and regional media.

5. TELL THE BRANDING STORY ON A DEDICATED WEBSITE OR WEB PAGE

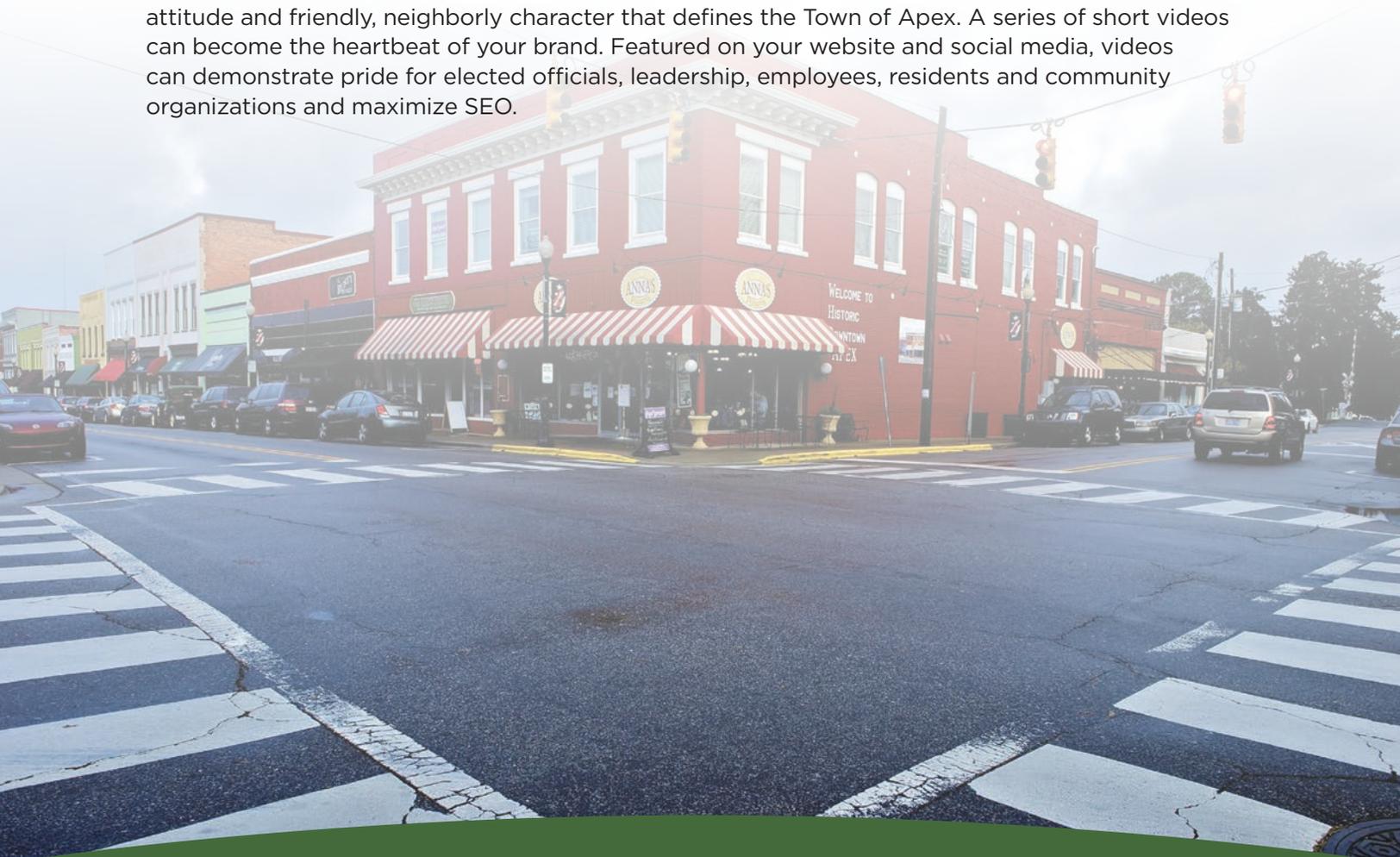
Launch a Brand Website (we suggest BrandingApexNC.org) or a web page (ApexNC.org/Branding). While not intended to replace or consolidate existing public/private sector websites, this website is intended to be the "go-to" place for anyone wanting to know about or engage with the Town of Apex brand. This website or web page will tell the Apex story, explain the branding process and research, and be the place where all brand integration materials and opportunities will be accessed.

6. JOIN THE DISCUSSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Leverage social media to share the insight gained through the branding process that led to the brand story. "Drip" research tidbits learned through the process - we learned about Apex from the people in Apex so it's important to share those common themes. This could be shared through infographics, charts and/or photos and other visuals.

7. CREATE AN APEX IMAGE VIDEO

Storytelling is done in a number of ways, but none more compelling than when words, brand promise, and an experience are brought to life on video. Videos can showcase the collaborative attitude and friendly, neighborly character that defines the Town of Apex. A series of short videos can become the heartbeat of your brand. Featured on your website and social media, videos can demonstrate pride for elected officials, leadership, employees, residents and community organizations and maximize SEO.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

III. SHARE AND ENGAGE WITH OTHERS

The Town of Apex should also make communication efforts to Apex residents. It needs to instill pride and keep people better informed. Let's get people excited! To do so, the Town of Apex should develop marketing efforts aimed at employees and residents using social media, public relations, and local advertising. The best way to engage the broader community is to expose them to the Apex story and provide easy ways to participate.

1. CREATE PROGRAMS FOR DEVELOPING A STRONGER EMPLOYEE CULTURE REFLECTIVE OF THE VALUES AND BRAND ESSENCE OF APEX

Display the Apex branding store on the inside. It should be big and obvious, but it can also be creative – for example an artistic mural in the lobby. Other ideas may be easy to execute, such as coffee mugs in the break room. Want more ideas on how to create better inspiration that is also on brand? Ask employees for ideas – they are full of them.

2. CREATE AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING EFFORT THAT ENGAGES STAKEHOLDERS

Throughout this project, we've been talking about the importance of community stakeholders being a part of the branding effort. Now is the time to re-engage your biggest community influencers. Many of the people involved in the research stage through interviews or focus groups are excited to get involved in the branding.

Another easy way to identify these players is to go back to the Apex Place Branding Wheel shared during the research presentation. Determine your community stakeholders involved in: business, culture, heritage, education, civic leadership, well-known citizens and community ambassadors, as well as those already involved in furthering the quality of life of the community.

With such a diverse group of people from different parts of the country, everyone has a story about their connection to Apex. These stories create authenticity. Capture stories and create advocates.

3. ROLL OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

The best way to engage the broader community is to expose them to the Apex story and provide easy ways to participate. Apex has a story worth sharing. Develop your pitch and include the local media in the process of spreading the word in the community. It's more than a press release. This is an opportunity for partnering with media in a constant storytelling role about Apex. Target Raleigh-Durham as well as the state media for this effort.

This is very important. Prepare a one-sheet that explains the branding process. Do not simply provide a logo and tagline, and allow them to report that's all the branding effort was about. Give them an easy explanation about place branding and how it's different than traditional product branding.

Encourage participation. Make it fun and interactive, asking your fans and followers to share your posts with their network of friends to spread the word even further. Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool and people certainly like to talk on social media.

PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

IV. CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE

This section outlines what needs to be done to start telling the Apex story visually when people are within the geo-political limits of Apex. A sense of place is not easy to create. It requires more than signage. It requires attention to curbside cleanliness, landscaping and infrastructure enhancements. It requires knowing where you are and the ability to see where you are going.

1. IMPLEMENT SIGNAGE PROGRAMS FOR CREATING AN INSTANT SENSE OF PLACE

It's important for visitors, as well as residents to know their surroundings. Welcome signage along entry corridors helps create expectations of an experience and tells people they've arrived. Whether it's a traditional "Welcome to Apex" sign or a sign that simply says "Apex - The Peak of Good Living" or "Apex - Reach the Peak."

Invest in wayfinding signage. Focus on Downtown Apex as well as the parks. Continue wayfinding throughout the community. Signage has maximum impact when telling your story. Audit existing signage and determine where the brand can be applied immediately. Ensure all new signage includes the new branding.

Integrate a branded street sign program - A logo is not necessarily mandatory, but a different style and perhaps colored street signs can create a sense of place for Apex.

One of the most important parts of branding a town is to make it real beyond just ads, logos and taglines. Stories about the Peak of Good Living in Apex can be told throughout its landscape: from Town Hall and throughout downtown and the parks.

2. DOWNTOWN - LOOK AT HOW THE BRAND STORY CAN BE INCLUDED IN THE DOWNTOWN BRANDING PROJECT

Looking back at some of the draft Charrette Concepts, there are some great ideas of how you could incorporate the new branding into the design enhancements of downtown.

We suggest all municipal signage inside the "downtown corridor" have specially made Historic Town of Apex seal emblems included as the hardware.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

V. EXTENDING THE BRAND INTO THE COMMUNITY

True community-wide branding occurs when more than one organization is purposefully involved in telling the community story. This section is dedicated to getting others engaged in the branding process.

The previous Place Branding Wheel is a nice guide for identifying who all could be involved in branding of Apex (beyond the Town).

If Apex is going to be successful at creating a real branded place, it must create a new way of actively managing the community's reputation and brand image. What follows next helps teach you how to make this happen.

Look for opportunity for other businesses, nonprofits, education, etc. to be a part of telling the story of Apex.

Work with each group to review their communication touchpoints to find ways to incorporate the Apex brand. There were already a lot of businesses that use the "Peak of Good Living." A lot of people are already playing along so we want to facilitate more of this.

What's that? If you question whether this is possible, look no further than Dublin, Ohio. They have a web page dedicated to showcasing the Irish approved businesses within their community. Why? They are encouraging others to get involved and giving added exposure to those that do.
<https://www.visitdublinohio.com/things-to-do/irish-approved/>

1. BUILD YOUR BRANDING TEAM - ASSEMBLE A COMMUNITY GROUP DEDICATED TO MANAGING ALL OF APEX'S IMAGE

Assemble a community group for developing, implementing, promoting and sustaining the Apex image, reputation and brand experience. For a brand to take root, grow and flourish, leadership is essential.

A dedicated group of public and private sector stakeholders and organizations should be established to ensure the brand's success. Champion the story, accept responsibility for it and do what's necessary to sustain its potential and power. Passion, drive and enthusiasm are key components of successful



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

V. EXTENDING THE BRAND... *CONTINUED*

branding, but a designated group must be identified to assume the responsibility for creating and sustaining a solid foundation for brand development, implementation, and accountability. Doing this ensures that Apex's reputation never becomes the mission of one organization and always reflects the entire community.

Some examples of this from other communities? Marshall County, Kentucky, on the heels of their Kentucky Lake themed community branding project, assembled a group called "Team Kentucky Lake." Seguin, Texas created the "Seguin Branding Rangers," to engage local stakeholders in spearheading their branding kick-off and subsequent initiatives. Let your group come up with a name that suits their fancy and gets the team focused on its mission.

2. COACH THE BRAND

Take the time to roll out the brand in a formal and orchestrated form to this new organization so it creates enthusiasm and understanding. The brand's reach and potential depend on the Apex brand team to understand, embrace and articulate the brand's implications, brand promise, internal and external applications, and how to interpret them in daily activity.

3. THE BRAND AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM

It can reasonably be said that in the 21st century, every city in the United States is competing globally, not just with neighboring cities within a region or across the country. It is therefore necessary for cities to adapt to a new imperative. Your brand offers you an opportunity to build reputation and enhance your efforts to gain greater traction among targeted customers. Being competitive today requires a holistic and comprehensive approach to positioning and marketing. The strength of the community brand provides the platform that results in a powerful, proactive economic development approach.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

V. EXTENDING THE BRAND... *CONTINUED*

4. ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Tell the branding story using the five senses

Now that you've identified where you can apply the branding messaging, you've got to decide how to do it. A reminder that a memorable destination with a strong identity delivers great experiences. One way to emphasize the experience is to ignite the five senses. Most community stakeholders do not care about branding and marketing speak. They want to grow their business. Every single business uses at least one of the five senses to deliver their products and services. So, challenge and identify how they can utilize the brand story elements with one or more of the five senses. The ideas will be endless and authentic to each person's business!

SEE

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Salem Street, the heart of downtown railroad coming through downtown, water tower at sunset, community park, festivals/parades, families gathering

HEAR

WHAT ARE YOUR SOUNDS? WHAT DO YOU HEAR?

The train, church bells, chime of the clock on Salem Street, sounds from the nature park, children laughing, children playing, skate park with kids

FEEL

WHAT PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES DO YOU DELIVER?

The festivals and community events, home football games, walking down Salem Street, Pig Fest, sidewalks in downtown, greenways with gravel and boardwalk, trees and landscape, night time Christmas Parade, 4th of July Parade

TASTE

WHAT FLAVORS ARE EXPERIENCED?

Dallas Chicken and Biscuits, Anna's Pizza, cookouts at home, Shrimp wrap and sweet tea at Salem Street Pub, fresh fruit at Apex Farms Market

SMELL

WHAT FRAGRANCES CAN BE ASSOCIATED?

The sweetness in the air, Pig Fest, Magnolia flowers in the summer, trees and forrest nearby, Outdoor grills, Salem Street Pub cooking burgers, waffle cones

PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

V. EXTENDING THE BRAND... *CONTINUED*

EMPHASIZE WHAT CAN BE SEEN

This can be done easily with great photography, but words can just as easily allow anyone to envision the scenery for themselves. Show pictures of downtown, the parks and other areas that really help to show the “Peak of Good Living.” From a consumer perspective, this is the most used sense-branding device; therefore, choose your images wisely. You’ve got to stand out.

EMPHASIZE WHAT CAN BE HEARD

This branding sense device can be a bit tough for many destinations. Apex has some nice sounds like train and the church bells as well as the joyful of kids playing, and the sounds from the nature park. Sounds can be incorporated in many things. Possibly “tooting the train horn” instead of a clock chiming.

EMPHASIZE WHAT CAN BE TOUCHED/FELT

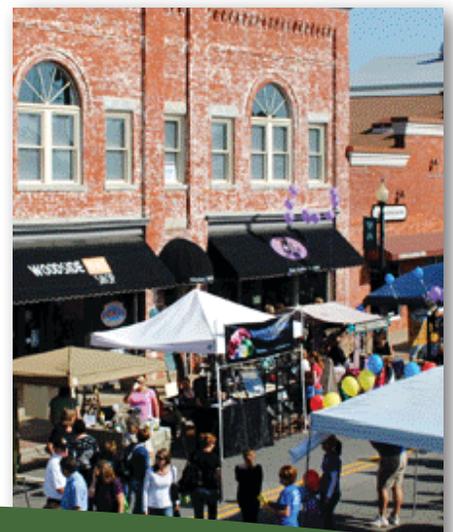
Activities and things that can be touched or felt are memorable. This includes any way a person can make physical contact or how a person feels. These can be created or shared (through advertising). For Apex look no further than walking down Salem Street. A program with the downtown shops can tie in easily with Town of Apex branding (i.e. Peak City Shopping Hour).

EMPHASIZE WHAT CAN BE TASTED

This is a gift and a great opportunity for Apex. Foodie-driven tourism has never been stronger and Apex has some great places to eat. Be sure to treat guests to your diverse local restaurants. We highly recommend packaging your food experiences and promoting them. Encourage some of Apex’s local restaurants to create menu items connecting to Apex and the branding. For example, create a food program called Peak City Flavors, anyone with a great tasting item can use a unique icon connecting them to the program.

EMPHASIZE WHAT CAN BE SMELLED

This is the most difficult branding sense to execute, but research shows that it leaves the strongest impact of all senses. Think about some of the great smells of Apex and find ways where it can work. Nature smells can be easily incorporated in the scent of candles, soaps, lotions or air fresheners. Some local businesses might just be interested in using Apex air fresheners or offering locally brewed coffee to their guests.



PHASE IV: THE BRAND NAVIGATOR

VI. MEASURING THE BRANDING EFFORT

CREATE BENCHMARKS FOR MEASURABLE RESULTS

How do you begin to measure this entire branding initiative? Should it result in increased business investment or higher generated sales tax dollars? It is really not fair to assign those areas of increase solely to better branding. But you can, and should, create new measurements for success.

SUMMARY

Are you ready? Branding the Town of Apex begins now. It's about action and engagement from the entire organization and the community. Branding a place is about delivering a real authentic experience to employees, residents, businesses and visitors. And although we're very proud of the new Apex logo, the logo alone is not branding. It's only a tool for branding.

Branding a place requires long-term commitment. This process and action plan gives you the roadmap to get started in telling the Apex story. The story that is unfolding is a great one to tell. It can help you set yourselves apart from other communities when talking about economic development, living or tourism.

Now, it begins with you. Your enthusiasm to create a better place is contagious. It will be fun to see the transformation. We look forward to watching your brand grow and expand.

