



Qualitative Research Findings

Branding Alberta Message Testing Groups

January 2009



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Introduction

Harris/Decima is pleased to present the following report to Calder Bateman summarizing the results of a series of focus groups testing messages and branding for the Government of Alberta. This report is based on a series of 16 mini focus groups conducted in January, 2009.

The primary purpose of the research was to understand:

- The consonance of the identity and language with the objectives
- Association/fit with the goal of creating a sense of appealing attitude
- Ability to provide fuel for/support the idea of freedom to create, spirit to achieve
- Reactions that can be expected from audiences
- The aspects of the identity and language that are most powerful/productive
- Any concerns or challenges that are apparent with the identity and language

To that end, we conducted a series of eight qualitative sessions in Edmonton, Calgary, Stettler and Toronto. Toronto was suggested for inclusion because of the importance of the branding effort in helping shift thinking among some Canadians towards the province, and because Toronto is arguably the largest and one of the more challenging markets in this regard.

The groups were conducted among informed citizens: those who regularly follow current affairs and get involved in public and community affairs. In our experience, we have found that the quality of respondent who satisfies this requirement is significantly more helpful, participatory and productive than members of the general public.

In each Alberta location, two of the sessions were conducted with people who self-identify as Albertans first, the other two Canadians first, as this segmentation has proven highly important in determining feelings towards the direction of the branding of the province. In Toronto, all four groups were conducted with people who have a mixture of positive and negative feelings towards the province.

The format for the groups was mini-focus groups (4-5 participants as opposed to the normal 8-12) to allow for crisp, in-depth probing and equally important, to limit group effects. In each city, we conducted four 45-minute sessions.



The groups were carried out as outlined below:

| ALL ARE INFORMED CITIZENS IN ALBERTA: EITHER PROUD ALBERTAN OR CANADIAN FIRST IN TORONTO: MIXTURE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FEELINGS TOWARD ALBERTA | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Date | City | Times | Moderator |
| January 19, 2009 | Edmonton | 12:00 pm / 4:30 pm / 5:15 pm / 6:00 pm | B. Anderson |
| January 20, 2009 | Calgary | 12:00 pm / 4:30 pm / 5:15 pm / 6:00 pm | B. Anderson |
| January 21, 2009 | Stettler | 12:00 pm / 4:30 pm / 5:15 pm / 6:00 pm | B. Anderson |
| January 22, 2009 | Toronto | 12:00 pm / 4:30 pm / 5:15 pm / 6:00 pm | B. Anderson |
| Total | 4 cities | 16 mini-groups | |

Bruce Anderson, on behalf of Harris/Decima, designed and directed all elements of the project in close consultation with the clients.

Findings

Reaction to Brand Identities

The purpose of the research was to gauge initial reaction to a series of branding concepts for the province of Alberta. To frame that discussion, participants were taken through an initial series of concepts that other jurisdictions around the world and across the country have developed for similar purposes:

- to promote inbound investment
- to promote tourism
- to support export trade
- to build a positive image of the jurisdiction

Following that initial warm up, participants were asked a few general questions about their views of the importance of Alberta undertaking a similar initiative. As has been the case in our earlier research, the groups were strongly supportive of the idea of this type of effort being taken on the part of the province. There was a clear feeling that it was more important than ever that Alberta present itself as a great place to do business, to visit, to buy from, to live.

Participants were then shown a series of five concepts and asked to provide their reaction and interpretation of each using a scale of -5 to +5.



+ 2.3



+ 1.3



+ 1.0



- 0.4



- 2.6



This illustration was fairly well received. People felt that the style was open and friendly, casual and colorful. At the same time, some stopped short of feeling really enthusiastic about it because of the color scheme in part. It seemed more fanciful and less serious, and a little harder for people to read.



Most had a neutral or at best mildly positive reaction to this illustration. There was a feeling that it was clean and modern, on the positive side, but that it was also somewhat corporate and perhaps more suited to a technology enterprise than to the province of Alberta.



This illustration generally left people feeling cold to mildly negative. There was a sense that it was again too corporate, too serious, and didn't capture the spirit of Albertans.



Most people did not react positively to this illustration. The feeling was that it was hard to read, too stylized, and didn't really offer any insight into the personality of the province or the people of Alberta. If anything, this too seemed more corporate, more reflective of what a business might choose. The only positive aspect was the that people did like the idea of "albertan": the use of the adjective conveys the idea that the province is really all about the attitude of the people.

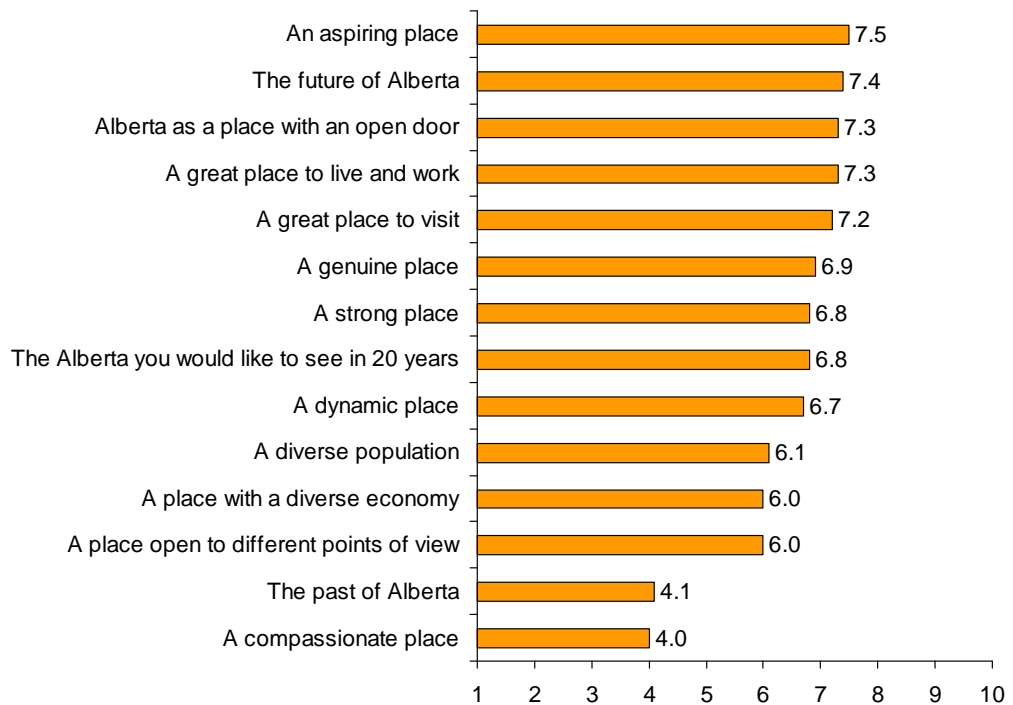
The concept that had the broadest appeal was the scripted Alberta with the coloured square. This brand signals a change for Alberta - dynamic, diverse, open, young, modern, contemporary, and forward-looking. This was the perception both across Alberta and in Toronto.



The font choice carried a lot of side benefits. Some felt the "a" and "l" depicted mountain peaks, one of the most emotive characteristics of the province. The open "a" at the end, suggests an open, welcoming Alberta. The cursive style says genial, friendly, down to earth.

Participants were given a short written questionnaire testing the fit of this option against a number of criteria. What emerged, illustrated in the chart below, was highly positive.

There was a strong positive association with the idea of Alberta as a place of aspiration, a place with an open door, a great place to live, work, and visit. The icon was judged to be far more about the future of Alberta than the past.



The idea of using the icon with a selection of four colors was also very effective. Participants could see how applying this as part of a marketing campaign would be relevant and interesting.

Participants suggested that the different colours signaled different aspects of the province and an added sense that Alberta is more dynamic and diverse. Some associated the colors with different landscapes others with different topics (eg. green for environment)

There were some differences in interpretation around the use of the square and what it meant or suggested. Some saw it as a representative of a period, which they generally liked because it suggested Alberta making a confident statement.

It is worth noting that in Toronto, while reaction to the concept was positive, some saw the brand as reflective of the Alberta they hoped to see in the future, but not necessarily a perfect fit with the Alberta they see today. For these people, this

raised questions about the credibility of the concept and highlighted the importance of demonstrating change, a different side to the Alberta than they perceive.

Reaction to the Strap Line

Reaction to the Strap Line “Freedom to Create. Spirit to Achieve.” was positive. It was clearly and consistently interpreted that that Alberta is a province of opportunity, possibility, freedom, creativity, achievement and people working hard to reach their potential. Most felt that it fit for Alberta and certainly fit for the Alberta of the future.



Where format and style were concerned, there was a sense that the font as tested was awkward alongside the style chosen for the word Alberta. The signature was seen as active, flowing, warm, and human, while the strap line was seen as more closed, punctuated and rigid.

Image Testing

The final section of each group session was spent reviewing a variety of images paired with the icon and strap line, to test reaction to different associations with the brand concept; this was meant to recommend the future pairing of subject and image to give life and clarity to the brand proposition.

Many of the images associated well with the icon and strap line, and some patterns of responses emerged that provided a deeper understanding of the nature of the relationship that people have with the brand concept.

As we interpret it, there are four different categories of association that people like to see paired with the icon and strap line.

These are:

Images that reflect the kind of people Albertans are: Albertans want to see others feel comfortable with this brand, but they want to see themselves in it first and foremost. The pictorial images they responded to most strongly were those that depicted families (ideally different generations) and children.

- People felt quite strongly that Alberta is a place that cherishes the idea of family, hard work, a down to earth manner, and these came through clearly in several of the images tested. Images of people helped create a connection with the brand on a human level, so that it was seen as about the people of the province and their attitude, a departure from representations of the province that might have seemed to focus so exclusively on the business or economic characteristics of the province.
- The image below tested well for the connotation of an active family, a life that embraced the outdoors, and a down to earth sense of enjoyment of the simple things in life, all characteristics that respondents felt fit well with Alberta as it had been and as they would like to see it in the future.



- The image below found people drawn towards the idea of young people shaping the future of the province, but resisting somewhat an image that they felt might not seem all that genuine. Some felt it resembled a model in an ad too much



The places Albertans love: after images that depicted quintessential Albertans, those that generated the strongest positive reactions, and the best connection with the brand were images of the landscapes of the province: clear, wide and vivid blue skies, epic mountain ranges, badlands, prairies, ideally in with a visual element (e.g. a road into the horizon) that speaks to a limitless and enticing future.

The two images that follow were both very well received, evoking a sense of expansive opportunities. The only hesitation that anyone voiced about the first image was that the sky was cloudy rather than clear blue. With the second image, of the foothills, responses were highly positive across the board.



The things Albertans love doing: people related strongly to the association of the brand icon and strap line with images of the people in Alberta being active in work or leisure pursuits. These images connected with the idea of the province as a place filled with active people engaged, dynamic, and confident. Several of the images tested of this sort worked very well.



The ways Albertans create and achieve: images of entrepreneurs (bookstore start ups, restaurant owners/chefs) coupled with the strap line freedom to create, spirit to achieve helped people make a strong connection with the idea of the brand as evocative of Alberta's success, both the things that has made Alberta successful in the past and the elements that need to be counted on for the future. Respondents urged inclusion of more references to innovation such as a university lab or new business technology at work.

The Relationship of the Brand with the Government

As a final probe, we explored the degree to which people would feel that this brand was the brand that represented the people of the province or the government of the province.

With few exceptions, people said one of the things that they most liked about the brand concept was that it felt more like a reflection of the people and attitude of the province and not a representation only of government.

There was widespread comfort with the idea that government could use this brand successfully to create upside for the province in terms of investment, trade and tourism promotion and also in terms of creating a more cohesive sense of common purpose in a province which has been changing rapidly.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Several different brand icons were tested. Reactions were clear and helpful. Unequivocally the brand icon which tested most successfully was the one illustrated below.



People very much liked the cursive style believing it displayed Alberta as open, friendly, confident and positive. There was a sense that this icon connected with the history of Alberta, but more persuasively with a future orientation, and this balance was comfortable for people, it evoked an Alberta that is increasingly dynamic, diverse, young, and contemporary.

The small number of people who had a less positive reaction typically fell into one of two categories:

- People who essentially have bad feelings about Alberta, believing it to be a place that is not hospitable, warm or compassionate, and that the idea of freedom to create and spirit to achieve was mostly one that applied to people with money.
- Albertans who loved Alberta as it had been in the past, and who tended not to like the amount of change that they have seen in the province.

Both of these groups together account for a small minority of those interviewed. The vast majority of others felt that Alberta needs an aspirational brand that embraces change and openness.

For the majority who generally react favorably to the brand, we learned a number of things that can help improve the comprehension and receptivity to the concept, and these learnings, as outlined in the following section, should be incorporated into the next stage of development.

As we move forward into the quantitative test, the following is a list of things we recommend be added or adjusted:

- A fairly significant number of respondents liked the strap line "freedom to create. spirit to achieve" but they felt that the font was awkward alongside the style chosen for the word Alberta. The signature was seen as active, flowing, warm, human, while the strap line was seen as more closed, punctuated and rigid.
- The use of four colors for the brand worked well, and we encourage that this be continued in the applications for the test. The use of more colors reinforced the idea that a more flexible, more creative, more modern Alberta was being presented.
- The following are a series of recommendations we would make to the images for the quantitative testing phase:
 - Aligning the branding icon with the goals of live, work, invest, and visit. Each one should be a stand-alone image or two, with the icon and the phrases below it, and possibly a single word call to action "Build" "Succeed", "Enjoy", "Invest", or similar. This will give us a chance to understand how well the basic platform gives lift to each of these goals.
 - One of the most powerful ways to rebut those who are skeptical about Alberta's new brand concept is to demonstrate images of diversity, that people of different cultures have come to Alberta, enjoyed the freedom to create and achieved success. These images must feel genuine to Alberta.
 - The people they are: Albertans want to see others fit comfortably with this brand, but they want to see themselves first and foremost. In an ideal world we would associate the brand with families, with older people, with students, with entrepreneurs, retailers, farmers, and oil patch workers. They want to see the spirit of achievement and the friendly, dynamic, genuine, and strong personalities of Albertans in these images.
 - The places they love: images of the landscapes of the province are very powerful, and link best with the brand when two conditions are met: clear and vivid blue skies, and a visual element (e.g. a road into the horizon) that speaks to a limitless journey. We recommend a cityscape (maybe a huge tower going up in Calgary) as well as prairie, foothills, river and mountain landscapes.

- The things they love doing: people relate strongly to images of the things they do as individuals and together with others. By way of example this might include, images of Albertans playing hockey on an ice pond, enjoying music at a live event, camping in the wilderness, hiking in the mountains, taking part in a rodeo, having a family reunion, meeting at a local coffee shop, or cheering at a Flames game.
- The ways they create and achieve: someone hanging a new sign out to open a new business, a new skyscraper with a recognized corporate name being placed on it, an artist with a new show opening at a gallery, a bustling book shop, a hip new restaurant/wine bar, a farmer plowing a field to create a new crop, a NAIT/SAIT researcher creating a new technology, a Tom Baker cancer researcher in a medical laboratory, the sign outside a ranch that lists the several generations who have been working it.

In every instance, the goal should be to try to avoid what might feel like generic shots from anywhere; they should have an element that seems obviously or likely to be Albertan in nature.

Based on this qualitative round of testing, we feel confident that this brand icon and strap line will be broadly positively received. The final stage of research will determine the specific applications that will work the hardest alongside this brand, and inform strategy for roll out purposes.

As a final note, this report is in summary form, in part because of the fact that our reporting on this project took an iterative approach, occurring after individual sessions through verbal reports. There was also some tweaking of the interviewing approach as more was learned, to broaden and deepen understanding.

Appendix

Discussion Guide

Today, we're going to spend a short time together during which I'm going to show you some concepts that consist of visual images and in some cases, words as well. As we all know, in this busy world we are exposed to lots of different images, visual stimuli, brands, etc, and so this means to be effective, thinks like brands need to convey a positive feeling and an underlying thought or message, even if that is not always directly spelled out.

Today, we're going to focus on a brand for Alberta. The purpose of having a brand for Alberta is to reinforce a positive image of the province as a great place to live, work, visit and invest. It would be used both inside the province, and across Canada and in key markets around the world.

I'm going to show you some ideas, in each case, I want you to write down two things:

1. Whether this gives you a positive feeling about Alberta, using a scale of -5 to +5 where -5 is very negative, +5 is very positive.
2. I'd like you to write down what this suggests to you is the attitude of Alberta in a few words or phrases.

Before I show you some of the concepts for Alberta, I'm briefly going to show you some examples of how other places use branding images and words to convey something important and relevant. In each case, I think you will see that these have a way of signaling something about the nature of the place they are meant to represent. (Show some non-Alberta examples, briefly.)

Now, to some examples for Alberta. I'm going to show you a series of 10 in a row, including some ways in which they might appear, before going back to the beginning and getting you to write something down after each. (Briefly move through entire deck except last slide on language)

Ok, let's go back to the beginning and start this exercise. ***Let's always try to remember that the idea is to find an image or idea that is not a brand about government but about the province and the people, what makes it unique, what promise it holds for the future.***

Icon, Strap Line Imagery Tests

What number did you write down, and what attitude did you see in this, what was it conveying to you?

-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

What attitude did this suggest to you, what is it that this says about Alberta?

Additional probing to focus on:

- *Does it fit the idea of a place where people are achieving things*
- *A place where there is freedom to create, to realize possibilities*
- *A place with an open door*
- *Both the past and the future of Alberta*
- *A place with a diverse economy*
- *A great place to live and work*
- *A great place to visit*
- *A diverse population, open to different points of view*
- *A strong, dynamic, open, genuine, aspiring place*

- *Does it convey your Alberta, the one that you experience?*

- *Does it convey an Alberta that you would like to see in 20 years time?*