



BRAND STRATEGY

FALL 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fourteen years have passed since the last Visit Helena branding action plan was created. Though that project lost momentum due to limited resources to differentiate, much of the foundational work and findings from the plan remain valid and relevant.

In the ensuing years, many different entities within the City and broader community—such as the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Business Improvement District (BID), Downtown Helena Inc. (DHI), Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC), the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) and Visit Helena itself - have made their own efforts to promote against their own individual targets. This has led to some limited successes for each, but it also has led to a branding vacuum across the city, with differing logos, slogans and messaging promoted out in the world, muddying any clear brand identity of Helena's community.

Several national trends, State and local developments have since changed the picture. Notably, Montana's population and urban centers are experiencing profound growth due to broad economic, societal and technological changes. The boom in Montana and Western tourism, fueled in part by film and television exposure, the advent of social media and an increasingly mobile post-pandemic workforce have combined to bring record crowds and significant development to our State—though they've not all been positive changes.

Helena has largely navigated this new climate without a well-articulated brand or a cohesive strategy for how to promote its many positive attributes.

At the same time, we have watched as our neighbors in cities like Missoula, Bozeman and Kalispell have promoted themselves heavily and subsequently experienced massive influxes of tourism visitation, economic and population growth.

Visit Helena, tasked with creating a brand strategy, has uncovered both Brand and Community imperatives. As our City moves toward the more modern Destination Marketing Management Organization (DMMO) framework, we recognize many opportunities to work together across the various civic entities and within our broader community.

Simply put, our goal is to grow the Helena visitor economy. In support of that goal:

- Develop a brand that improves the community experience and product offerings that stimulate long-term growth in tourism, workforce, and business development.
- Define how the visitor economy in Helena can be leveraged more strategically to drive sustainable growth and equitable community development.
- Establish a brand which begets community pride and endorsement.



KEY STRATEGIC FINDINGS COMMUNITY

Create a unified brand, coordinate communications and police usage to maintain consistency going forward

Involve and communicate with the entire valley

Nominate an Economic and Community Liaison

Investigate economic development of 'Third Spaces'

- There is disconnect, overlap and working at cross-purposes happening across organizations within the City of Helena (e.g. CVB, BID, DHI, MBAC and TBID/Visit Helena,) particularly related to brand messaging, promotion and marketing. This sends mixed messages, causes confusion and frustration, and is financially inefficient.
- Visit Helena needs to intentionally involve and communicate with the entire valley, not just focus on Downtown.
- There are several potential economic developments which would directly address some of Helena's tourism shortcomings and enrich community life, known as 'third spaces':
 - Upscale, resort-style and DIY (tent, RV, vanlife, glamp) lodging
 - Mixed retail, dining and social spaces
 - Indoor sports venues



KEY STRATEGIC FINDINGS BRAND

Helena's inspirational people are its strongest brand attribute

Not just pretty mountains and trails

The cumulative stories of the Helena community are a key differentiator

Intentionally target key audience segments with compelling content

A balanced marketing mix of Organic, Paid and Earned media is Helena's best foot forward

- Helena's inclusivity and diversity, safety and family and business (particularly small business) -friendliness and educational sector are strong brand attributes. The inspirational individuals who comprise the community by living, working and playing here are the **strongest** brand attribute.
- Helena's outdoor scene, while plentiful, does not alone differentiate it among its competitive and peer cities. Research and analysis of 50+ competitor and peer cities has yielded a set of "best in class" examples, plus a key differentiator for Helena: ***the cumulative stories of the inspirational individuals who make up the community.***
- Helena has many positive differentiators and a few negative ones.
 - **Economic:** Our stable and diversifying economy, business-friendliness, Medical Science and Aerospace Manufacturing clusters, many educational institutions and IMBA Silver Ride Center designation
 - **Brand:** Our central MT location, outdoor recreation 360° x 365, diversity and inclusivity, college town atmosphere, affordability and high national livability rankings, focus on education, art, history and cultural heritage, community safety and world-class biking / hiking trails.
 - **Negative:** Lack of primary attraction, lack of upscale or resort-style lodging, lack of walkable lodging in close proximity to downtown core
- There are five broad target audience segments identified by this strategy: Leisure Travelers, Groups and Sports planners, Events and Meetings Planners, Economic Development and Community Recruitment. Further, we intend to target a mix of demographic, psychographic and geographic segments.
- The forthcoming marketing plan should balance promotions and spend among the three types of media—Organic, Paid and Earned—to maximize engagement and exposure while spending budget efficiently. This plan will require investment in resources such as Public Relations, Media Planning/Buying and Creative Development, but will allow Helena to actively promote its best attributes and strongest differentiators to strategically targeted audiences.



A photograph of three mountain bikers sitting on a rocky ridge. They are wearing helmets and casual riding gear. The background shows a town, rolling hills, and mountains under a cloudy sky. The text 'THE STRATEGY' is overlaid in the center.

THE STRATEGY

KEY TERMS

Throughout our brand strategy we use terms that may be new to some of our stakeholders and partners. We value a shared understanding of these key terms and invite our stakeholders to use them alongside us.

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO): A destination marketing organization is an entity that promotes a town, city, region, or country to increase visitation. It promotes the development and marketing of a destination, focusing on convention sales, tourism marketing and services. The goals of a DMO are to create and implement strategic marketing plans around tourism to bring businesses together and help them work collectively. This transforms a set of attractions, activities, and services into a cohesive and compelling travel experience.

Destination Management Organization (DMO): The main role of a DMO is coordinating long-term destination planning and management, as well as finding the right balance between competing and challenging environmental, social, and economic goals such as preserving natural resources, increasing destination appeal and reputation as sustainable, fulfilling the needs of visitors and maximizing tourism's economic contributions and the well-being of local populations and public and private stakeholders.

Brand: A brand is the source of distinctive promise for customers from a product, service, or place. Everything the lead organization does in collaboration with its partners and community should be oriented around delivering and constantly enhancing this promise.

Brand Awareness: The degree to which the city's name is present in the minds of prospective customers. When exposed to the name, people should immediately recognize it and form positive associations.

Brand Essence: The 'heart and soul' or DNA of the brand.

Brand Identity: The brand identity comprises the unique set of visual, auditory, and other stimuli that project the brand through its many applications to shape market perceptions. These include the attributes, benefits, logos, fonts, tagline, and colors.

Brand Image: How the brand is perceived from the customer's point of view.

Brand Loyalty: This is often considered the single most important outcome of a brand strategy. It may be best measured through repeat transactions, referrals, and spending patterns.

Brand Management: These actions ensure that the brand's value and promises are maintained and consistently delivered.

Brand Partners: These individuals and organizations are responsible for communicating and delivery of the city's brand.

Brand Personality: This describes the place using human personality traits.

Brand Platform: The brand platform is the foundation on which the brand promise and all future brand experiences will be based. It includes the brand vision, values, benefits and personality.

Brand Positioning: Brand positioning establishes what we want customers to think and feel about the place. It relates to the position in consumer's minds and hearts that we want to occupy.

Brand Guidelines: A comprehensive document or rulebook affirming the principles of a brand and providing guidance for understanding its legacy, vision, mission, personality and attributes. Brand standards inform staff, external agencies, and vendors of the code under which the brand operates. It serves to establish appropriate usage, variants and application of each of the brand assets, and specifies how each element fits together.

Brand Values: These are the principles that the city and its constituents believe in and live by. They are the guiding principles by which residents want their community to develop.

Brand Vision: It clarifies the high-level role that the brand will play in assisting the city to achieve its long-term vision and goals.

Brand Voice: Brand voice is your brand's personality; the unique way you present to the world. It must run consistently through all communications (social media, website, blog posts, emails, advertisements).

Community Brand: Created to resonate with residents and is designed to boost local pride, provide a sense of identity for the place, or increase resident patronage for local residential, retail, entertainment, leisure and sporting activities.

Destination Brand: This encapsulates the positioning, benefits and values that distinguishes the place from competitors. It acts as a vision and roadmap to deliver the superior value to customers.

Economic Development Brand: Sometimes referred to as an 'investment brand' it is directed towards business relocation and expansion and investment.

Placemaking: This is the act of creating and managing the public environment so that it provides attractive and rewarding experiences for residents and visitors.

Overarching Place Brand: This is a holistic brand encompassing all aspects of the city's marketing portfolio.



BRAND PARTNERS

HELENA TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT - TBID

The Helena TBID's organizational mission is to promote and preserve Helena as a unique destination to increase occupancy for lodging facilities thereby creating vibrant growth in the local economy. The TBID's organizational vision: The Helena TBID is the premier partner and leading advocate for Helena's quintessential experiences and profound opportunities.

HELENA AREA CHAMBER - CVB

The Helena Area Chamber of Commerce is the oldest chamber in the state of Montana. Their sole mission is improving and fostering business in the Helena area. Along with looking out for the business needs of their members, the Chamber also operates Helena's Convention & Visitor's Bureau (CVB). The CVB is committed to increasing tourism in the Helena area and ensuring that local businesses benefit from visitors to Helena.

MONTANA BUSINESS ASSISTANCE CONNECTION - MBAC

The Montana Business Assistance Connection catalyzes community leaders, stakeholders, and opportunities driving prosperity, our economy, business vitality, high quality job growth and the enhancement of quality of life throughout the region.

DOWNTOWN HELENA, INC. - DHI

Downtown Helena, Inc. (DHI) is a 501(c)6 a non-profit business membership organization established in 1964 that works to ensure that local businesses in the Downtown Helena community thrive and have their voices heard. Downtown Helena Inc's mission is to promote and publicize Downtown Helena in our community; encourage and develop a spirit of cooperation among members; establish and develop cooperative advertising and promotional campaigns activities; and foster favorable public relations for Downtown Helena in various communities, organizations, and agencies in the area served by Downtown Helena.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT - BID

Helena created Montana's first Business Improvement District in 1986 when a group of business and property owners collaborated with the goal of promoting economic growth in downtown Helena.

The organization represents property owners within Helena's legally constituted city district. Revenues to fund the BID programs and services are derived from a special assessment on the district's property owners' tax bill. The Helena BID creates a vital avenue of support and growth as a catalyst for economic development in the heart of Helena while sharing a vision and voice for the downtown community.



GOAL & OBJECTIVES

STIMULATE LONG-TERM GROWTH IN TOURISM, WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Develop a brand that improves the community experience and product offerings that stimulate long-term growth in tourism, workforce, and business development.

Define how the visitor economy can be leveraged more strategically to drive sustainable growth and equitable community development.

Lastly, establish a brand which begets community pride and endorsement.



APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

Analysis of 600+ pages of historical data

Direction, working sessions and input with Visit Helena

Working sessions and feedback with Vision Helena, Community Forum

Solicit, Simplify, Synthesize





THE STRATEGY

Our findings from strategy development highlight a number of strategic imperatives, though some are outside the scope of what a brand is and can do. As such, we differentiate between Brand and Community Imperatives.

To be certain, Visit Helena and the broader cohort of City agencies and resources should actively engage in community and economic development, but the Brand can bolster those efforts through good design and smart execution.



THE STRATEGY

BRAND IMPERATIVES

- Act and market with authenticity
- Promote inclusivity and diversity in Helena, as well as family and small business-friendliness of community
- Create a unified brand, coordinate communications and equip stakeholders with appropriate assets to maintain consistency going forward
- Focus content on the individuals and businesses that make up the community
- Maintain involvement and momentum with Community Forum members to gain endorsement, drive engagement and amplify marketing campaigns
- Convey a sense of action in marketing promotion
- Develop and execute Organic, Paid and Earned promotional plans, targeted to key market segments
- Prioritize hired PR to actively promote the City with earned media





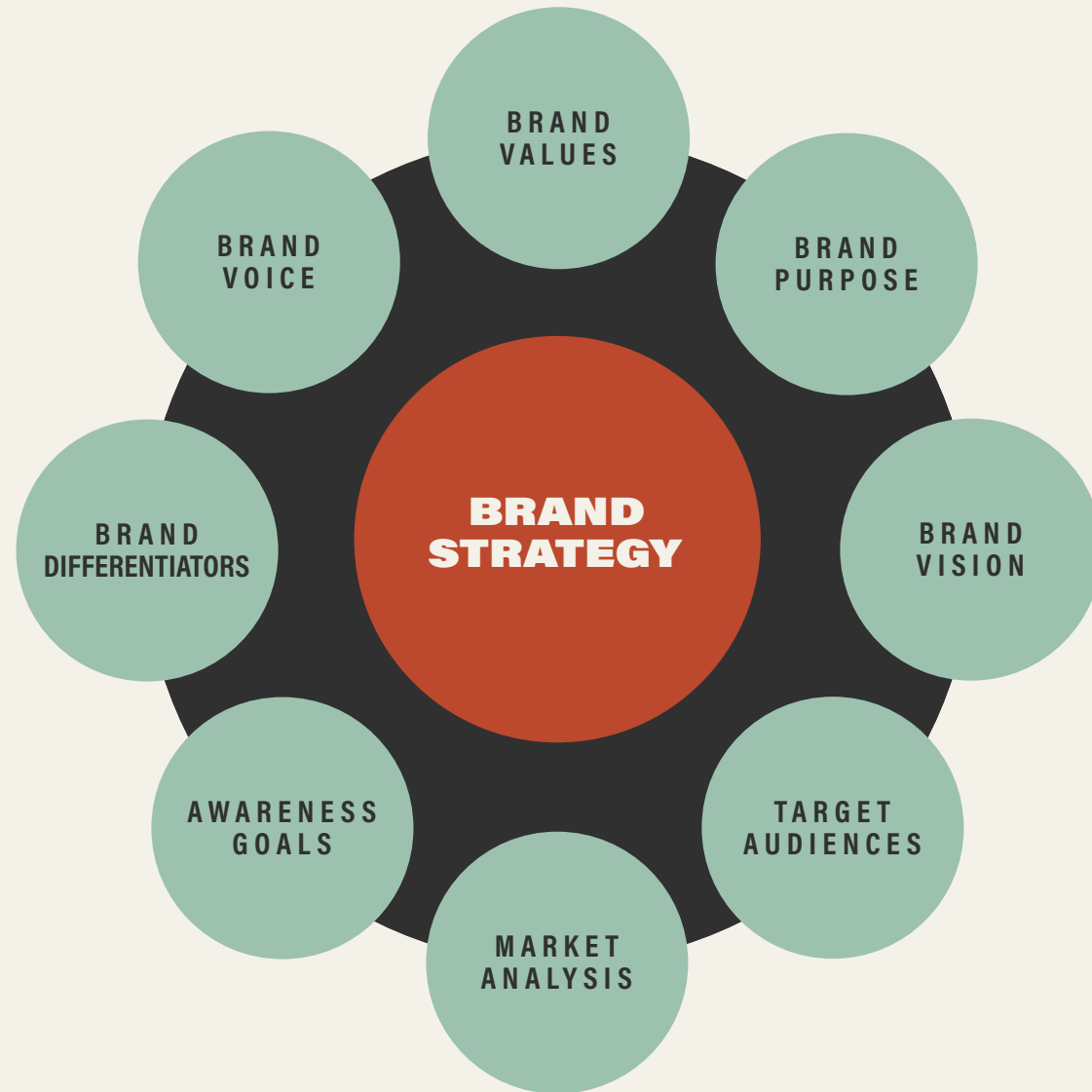
THE STRATEGY

COMMUNITY IMPERATIVES

- Align the many stakeholder entities in Helena to reduce differing messages, encourage a unified brand communications framework and maximize effectiveness of the collective spend
- Continue momentum towards Destination Marketing Management Organization (DMMO) framework
- Define and identify 'Economic/Community Liaison' role
- Prioritize development of 'third spaces' with economic and community impact, such as:
 - Upscale and DIY lodging
 - Mixed retail, dining and social spaces
 - Indoor sports venues
- Support a positive visitor experience and drive economic development for the benefit of visitors and local stakeholders
- Promote Helena's unique attributes in a responsible manner to foster year-round, sustainable economic growth for the Helena area



BRAND STRATEGY ELEMENTS





THE ELEMENTS

BRAND VALUES

Helena revels in the creativity, diversity, openness and entrepreneurialism of its citizens.

Helena is an inspirational community which offers access to opportunity, one that is as friendly to small business as it is to Fortune 500s, and also possesses strong nonprofit and energy sectors. All of this is underpinned by a rich sense of history and cultural heritage.

Helena's access to nature and western heritage inspires the independent hard-working spirit of those looking to achieve a high quality of life. With direct access to the outdoors, Helena draws inspiration from the surrounding natural beauty of the Rocky Mountains' abundance of water access.



THE ELEMENTS

BRAND PURPOSE

Functionally: Increase visitors, visitor spending and attract young professionals.

Intentionally: Gain community endorsement, enable community marketing, engender civic pride, enhance visitor and resident experience and enable product offerings that stimulate long-term growth.

- Attract low-impact visitors looking to experience a community like a local
- Emphasize community partnerships that foster long-term growth





IN 5 YEARS, VISIT HELENA WILL
HAVE AN ESTABLISHED, EFFECTIVE
BRAND WHICH THE COMMUNITY
ENDORSES, BENEFITS FROM AND
PARTICIPATES IN PROMOTING

THE ELEMENTS

BRAND VISION

Helena will be ascendant in the eyes of tourists and relocating young professionals, as will the bottom lines of locally-owned businesses due to compelling, community-based product offerings and engaged local government and stakeholders.

Helena's brand will be better known to external target audiences as well as its own citizens via well-messaged earned media and active, authentic promotion of local successes and awarded designations.

Helena will be in a period of long-term sustainable growth, having identified and prioritized development of a mix of vibrant 'third spaces' to appeal to tourists and locals alike, and will host a wide range of new events at a growing number of facilities.



THE ELEMENTS

TARGET AUDIENCE COMPOSITION

PSYCHOGRAPHIC

Geotravellers / Adventure Travelers

Low-impact, high-value visitors who appreciate the unique characteristics and natural values of the places they visit. They're interested in experiencing a place *'like a local.'*

Families seeking opportunity

Young families looking for a lifestyle change, an employment relocation or a move for youth academic or sports opportunities.

Craft Brewery/Distillery & Ranch-to-Table tourists

Travel extensively or in a focused manner to visit craft breweries, distilleries and restaurants that offer an authentic connection with the artisans behind the products.



THE ELEMENTS

TARGET AUDIENCE COMPOSITION

**May fluctuate with new or enhanced data*

52%
MALE

48%
FEMALE

(average of MT and CVB targets)

GEOGRAPHIC:

All of Helena area

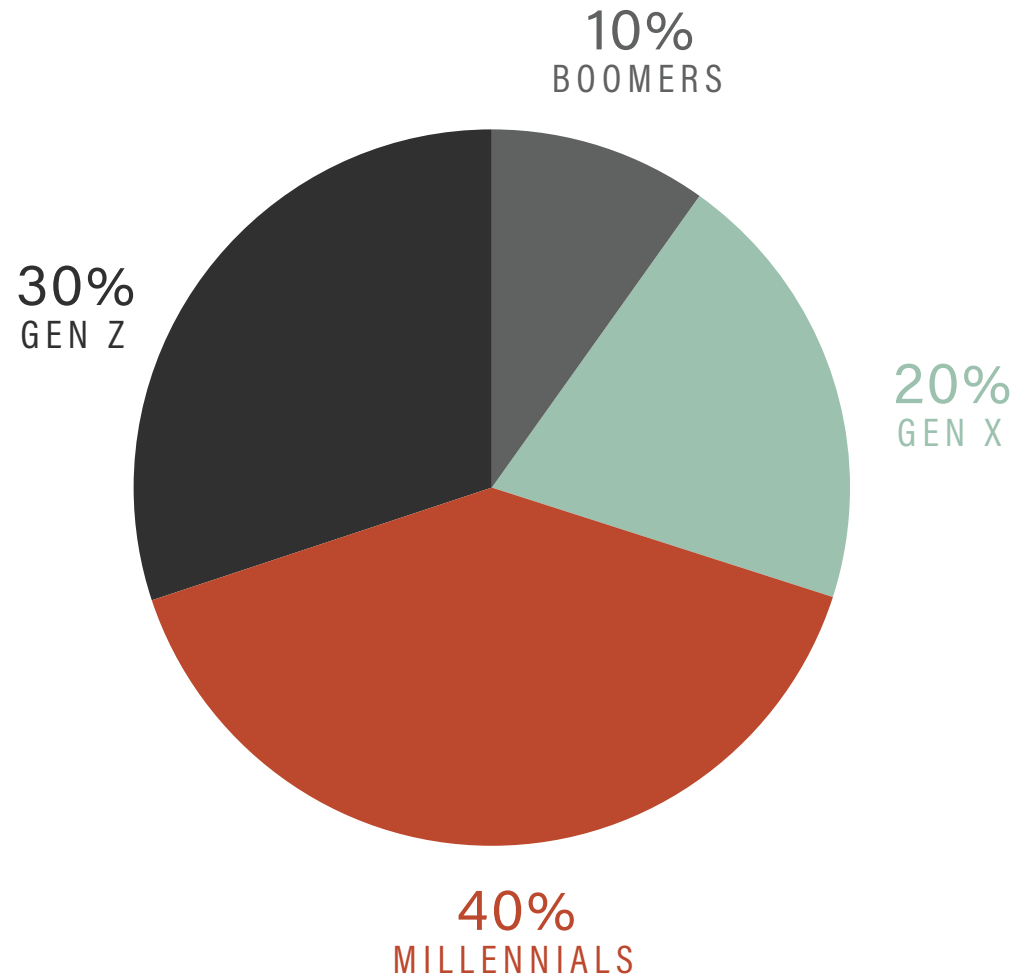
Montana, non-Helena DMA

American States: AZ, CA, CO, FL, ID, IL, MN, ND, NY, OR, TX, UT, WA, WY

Canadian Provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan

International: United Kingdom, France, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan

DEMOGRAPHIC:





There are five key segments to target with promotion. Helena has clear benefits to promote, but also should its competitive deficits in lodging, indoor sports and events venues to counteract negative differentiators and improve the community experience.



THE ELEMENTS

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

LEISURE TRAVELERS

Targets: Travel trade, geotravellers, adventure travelers, craft brewery /distillery tourists, local family and friends visitors, arts + festivals, LBGTQ+, farm/ranch-to-table, fly fishing and angling, STEAM travelers

Differentiators: Location within MT, 360° x 365 access to backyard nature, action and outdoors sports, blue ribbon trout, flatwater fishing, STEAM attractions, brewery/distillery/farm-to-table scene, LBGTQ+ friendliness, IMBA Silver Level trail system

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Targets: Developers of 'third spaces' such as resort-style and DIY lodging, mixed retail and dining, event venues and indoor sports facilities, aerospace and aerospace-adjacent companies, and small tech and professional service firms

Differentiators: Helena's national livability rankings; stable economy; aerospace manufacturing cluster; educational institutions (Helena College, Carroll, arts + crafts); medical science cluster; tourist attractions



THE ELEMENTS

TARGET AUDIENCES

GROUP & SPORTS PLANNERS

Targets: Youth athletics organizations, event organizations, adult league organizers, tournament organizers, race and athletic event organizers, weekender/amateur/pro athletes

Differentiators: Central MT location; affordability of lodging and dining, family-friendly and safe, marathons and athletics, Last Chance Stampede and Carroll College athletics

MEETING RECRUITMENT

Targets: <150 person meetings/conferences; SMERF (Social, Military, Education, Religious, and Fraternal) groups and non-profit organizations

Differentiators: Out-of-state meeting planners and organizers, out-of-state aviation, executive-level corporate meetings with locals like Boeing, SoFi, Figure Technologies

COMMUNITY RECRUITMENT

Targets: Teachers and educators, healthcare workers, construction contractors, skilled laborers, tech founders and workers, manufacturers, State employment, entrepreneurs, hospitality and retail frontline workers

Differentiators: Helena's national livability rankings; stable Capitol city economy; community safety; commute-free nature access, live/work/play attributes



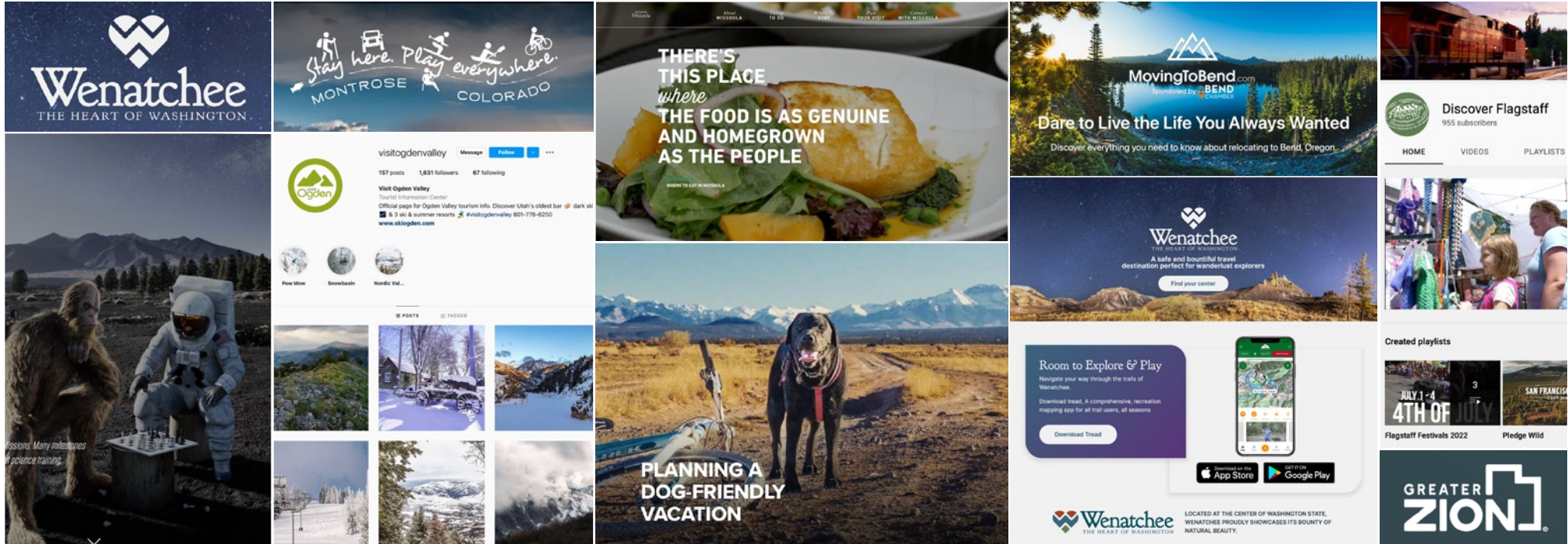
Presently, Helena is at a competitive deficit when trying to attract event and meeting planners. Helena is mostly negatively differentiated by its lack of resort-style or upmarket lodging and because hotel rooms in town are not within easy walking distance of downtown.



MARKET ANALYSIS



50 peer and capital cities were compared for brand identity and marketing.



The same group of taglines and slogans dominate the competitive set: *Visit, Experience, Discover, Travel, Explore, Enjoy*. Taken together, all those words muddle together and thus fail to differentiate any of the places from any other. **Few places among the competitive set differentiate on action or doing.**

Life in Helena is a multisensory experience—the loud snap of a fly line on a Missouri river hookset, the pounding of hooves and flying dirt in a Last Chance Stampede barrel race, the whirring of the potter’s wheel at Archie Bray—and demonstrating and creatively implementing a sense of motion, action and vitality is a way to create a primary differentiator in brand marketing communications.



THE ELEMENTS

PAID PROMOTION HISTORY

There are many entities in Helena (TBID, CVB, Chamber, DHI, BID, City of Helena) all spending money to promote toward their own goals, often to overlapping targets and without a unified brand or consistent messaging.

Campaigns have primarily run on Facebook, Google AdWords, YouTube and Sojourn platforms, and have been placed in targeted states and provinces: (USA) WA, ID, WY, ND, UT, CO, MN, MT, IL, CA, TX, OR, FL, NY and (Canada) AB, SK, BC

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES:

Align Helena's relevant civic entities, develop and maintain a unified brand and jointly promote with consistent messaging.

Develop and implement a new paid promotion plan to serve as one leg of Organic, Paid and Earned marketing mix.



ORGANIC, PAID & EARNED

The strategy should balance owned content, advertising and public relations in its future marketing mix.

ORGANIC

- Encourage user-generated content
- Enable community-based marketing plans

Web Properties

Website
Blogs
Social Media Channels
Apps
SEO, Page Speed, Accessibility
User Generated Content
Community-based Marketing Plans

SEO & brand content
drive earned media
sharing and traffic

EARNED MEDIA

Invest in PR consulting to drive national, regional place awareness

Press & Sharing

Press Coverage
@mentions
Shares
Reposts
Reviews

ORGANIC / OWNED MEDIA

EARNED MEDIA

PAID MEDIA

Leverage organic, earned & paid media for a comprehensive marketing strategy

Gain more exposure to web properties with SEO and PPC

Propel sharing & engagement with paid promotion

PAID MEDIA

Create and execute campaigns and ads, strategically matched to target audiences

Advertising

Pay Per Click
Display Ads
Retargeting
Paid Influencers
Paid Content Promotion
Social Media Ads
Matched Content & Targets



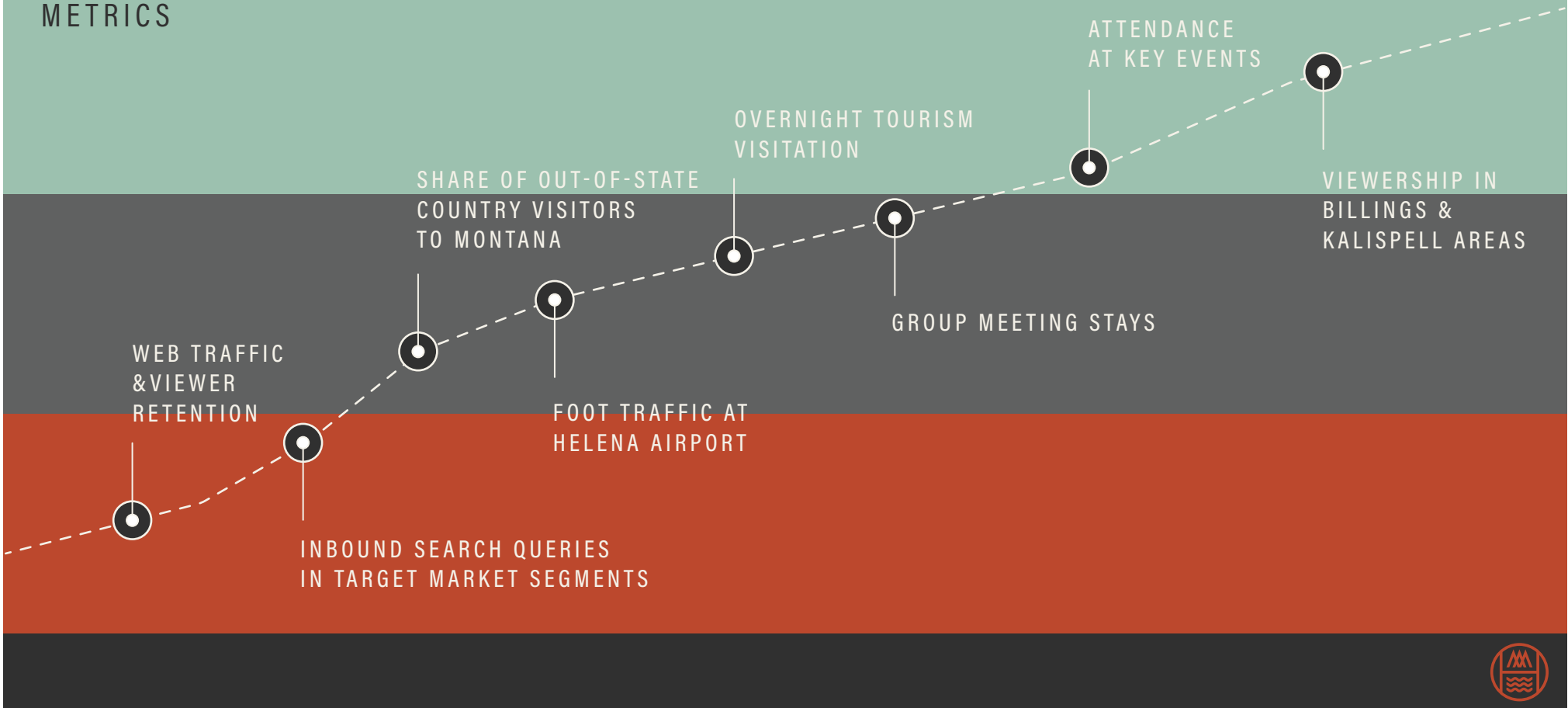
THE ELEMENTS

AWARENESS GOALS



- Increase awareness and preference of Helena as a travel destination, not as a pass through
- Help orient potential visitors to where Helena is in the country, region, and state
- Gain national and international media exposure for Helena’s natural environment, rich history, attractions, and unique personality
- Build excitement about Helena among niche market enthusiasts
- Communicate and deliver Montana’s spectacular unspoiled nature in a way that makes it real, tangible, and accessible to the visitor
- Showcase brand facets: central location, all-year access, *‘where all Montana backroads meet’*; summertime *‘midway between the parks’*

METRICS



THE ELEMENTS

DIFFERENTIATORS

BRAND

- Central location, smack dab in all of Montana's wonders
 - Education, art and history
 - Outdoor recreation, 360° x 365
 - Friendly, active, engaged community
 - Open and welcoming community
 - College town on the rise
 - Affordability and quality of life
 - Live, Work, Play
 - Inspire, Create, Explore
 - Stable and diversifying economy
 - World-class biking and trails
 - Community safety
-

COMMUNITY

- Stability as a government town, diversifying economy
- Business-friendly/'open for business'/diverse funding sources
- Medical Science
- Aerospace Manufacturing
- Montana's Museum/Holter Museum of Art
- Helena College Fire and Emergency Services program
- IMBA Silver Ride Center
- Renewed focus on small tech and service firms
- Focus on downtown revitalization



THE ELEMENTS

BRAND VOICE

INTERCONNECTED

Neighborly, friendly, welcoming. A town where you wave and smile at strangers. Gritty, independent and self-sustaining but quick to help in a moment, or period, of need.

UNEXPECTED

Open, inclusive and representative. Uncrowded, unpretentious, unfussy: a *'suit jacket with jeans'* town. Surprisingly good four-season recreation in every direction.

MONTANA'S HOMETOWN

Family-focused, kid-friendly, dog-friendly. Unspoiled and uncrowded—a chosen hometown.





HELENA
MONTANA

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