Chapter 48
Los Angeles:
Diversity and Dreams as Brand

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ABSTRACT

During the Twentieth Century, Los Angeles experienced periods of both positive and negative city branding. Its gleaming midcentury optimism devolved into challenges such as the Rodney King riots. However, modern leadership has a renewed sense of optimism in the Los Angeles city brand that appears to rest on a more integrated and therefore more sustainable foundation. This chapter examines examples of this more integrated and diverse approach toward Los Angeles' city brand. Examples include major events, industrial development, and examinations of certain cultural and ethnic enclaves. It ends with a discussion of how the specific actions taken by Los Angeles can be translated into other cities and their unique assets.

INTRODUCTION

Few places on earth are more mythologized than Los Angeles, thanks to its position as the world's hub for the entertainment industry. While it long served as the crown jewel for the American Dream, increasing economic and cultural diversity within its borders has positioned Los Angeles to sell itself as a truly global ideal.

This was not always the case. As noted by Mayor Eric Garcetti (2015):

This city was ripped apart by riots. … As the city burned, people challenged and looked at Los Angeles and said 'Los Angeles' diversity is a weakness. Will Koreans ever understand African-Americans, and Anglos, and Latinos?' Well, cut forward some twenty-five years later and as I travel the world as mayor of this great city, I meet with mayors like the mayor of Seoul, Korea who said, 'How do we get to be more like you? We need more diversity if we're going to succeed.'

In the late Twentieth Century, the Los Angeles community was largely one of separation. It has since moved toward a better state for a city, that of positive and beneficial mutual integration (Kipnis et al., 2013) where separate identities can exist side-by-side and yet benefit the other. This chapter examines how Los Angeles has moved away from an earlier, isolated approach toward managing its economic, cultural, and societal assets. Now, it presents a face to the world that is integrated and stronger for it. By celebrating multiple cultures, building on existing human and physical resources, intelligently promoting them as part of a broader city image (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Gertner, 2011), and utilizing creative marketing techniques, Los Angeles has strengthened its brand considerably in recent decades.

The lessons learned by Los Angeles can be translated to other cities in two distinct ways. One: create a sense of optimism and imagination within city borders. While Los Angeles has done this throughout its history, recent years have seen a change in this approach. The older strategy promised anything, and then laid the groundwork. Countless American Dreams grew in the Twentieth-Century west, where citrus groves sprouted next to theme parks and freeway systems. There was always room to sprawl toward more development. Increasingly, modern promises are integrated with what is already available to build upon, offering a more sustainable vision of change.

Two: celebrate and welcome diversity, but with integration into the broader city community as it happens. As with its infrastructure and economy, Los Angeles increasingly builds on existing human and economic assets to strengthen itself. The chapter first discusses how Los Angeles has pursued both of these goals to emerge as a stronger city and stronger city brand, while acknowledging the challenges it still faces. Implications for other cities are raised, as well, with suggestions for how these lessons could translate onto other mixes of economic and cultural assets.

BACKGROUND

Brand History of Los Angeles

"Anything is possible." This could well serve as the central branding statement for Los Angeles. From those sitting in Hollywood directors' chairs to those who seek a better life across a border, the core belief on the streets of Los Angeles is: it could happen here. While reality cannot always match such a dream, Los Angeles does not shy away from selling it. The city has always been always willing to try something new, like some sort of exercise in stage improvisation (Fine, 2000).

This novelty is not always sustainable. Midcentury Los Angeles suburbia was a dream centered on automobile culture, and presented mostly in the lens of white migrants moving from other states. Single-family housing could hold a two-car garage for everyone, with green, grassy lawns out in front. To get to work, all that was needed was to hop onto the extensive freeway system. At the end of the day, the drive home would be just as smooth. It was promised as a paradise in the Golden State, where every day was somehow simply easier than anywhere else (Waldinger, 1999).

In past decades, shopping malls with specific, tightly controlled interiors bloomed across the Los Angeles Basin. These were common in much of the nation, but few places resonated more with mall culture than did the home of the Valley Girl. Gallerias and Centers allowed visitors to leave their cars in the attached parking structure. Afterward, guests spent the rest of their day strolling sheltered, air-conditioned walkways. The world was left behind. These malls could offer experiences as controlled as

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