

TASMANIAN

BE TASMANIAN PODCAST

Episode Five: The unifying cultural expression

(Be Tasmanian Podcast Theme Music)

Welcome to Be Tasmanian, a podcast about an impossible mission in a small state at the bottom of the world. It's about uncovering a hidden story that unites people and using that story to inspire community action.

It's about place-branding, destination marketing, and economic development, but it's really about culture. It's about who we are, why we live where we live, what all that means and what we ought to do about it.

This is episode 5.

(Be Tasmanian Podcast Theme Music)

In 2014 Pat McCrory, the Governor of North Carolina, agreed to spend one and a half million dollars on a new logo and tagline for the state.

Because you've been listening diligently and passionately to our little podcast about place-branding, you know why Governor McCrory agreed to do it. A powerful and enduring place-brand is worth billions. Here's Charlotte, North Carolina public broadcaster Tom Bullock with the story:

0:20 "Full disclosure..." to 1:21 "... you name it."

<https://www.wfae.org/post/nc-looks-new-slogan-wait-whats-our-current-slogan#stream/0>

"Full disclosure, I just moved here a few months ago, but even I know North Carolina has a state slogan "first in flight". It's even on our licence plates and licence plates don't lie, right? Right?"

Well, many folks would probably say that's the state slogan, but the state's motto is "to be rather than to seem".

Maybe it sounds better in Latin. David Rhodes is Director of Marketing for the North Carolina Department of Commerce and he's looking for that one phrase to lure them all.

"In today's market place there's so much competition for people's attention. There's really a need now to unify under one umbrella if you will."

So, if: 'Virginia is for lovers', 'Georgia's on your mind', and 'South Carolina has those smiling faces and beautiful places', what's North Carolina to do?

Hold a contest, of course. Crowd-source a new state slogan that sums this place up in one new catchy phrase. The state-run brand NC project ended up with more than 250 entries—poems, songs, photos, you name it."

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They named it!

Now, here at Tasmanian podcast central, we're rather partial to North Carolina's state motto—Esse Quam Videri, 'to be rather than to seem.' But, I guess that didn't sound advertising-y enough.

The winning slogan was 'Nothing Compares' The logo? An N and a C with a tree in the middle.

Now, what did the marketing director say was the reason for this exercise?

To unify under one umbrella.

In previous episodes I've defined a place-brand as "a unifying cultural expression." The hardest part, the part that ruins my sleep, is "unifying".

The Australian State of Tasmania has 29 local council areas, and each one is constantly pitched by ad agencies keen to solve all their problems with a re-brand. A new logo, a visual identity, a new tagline, a new website every few years.

The University of Tasmania has a big brand, communications and marketing team, and every government department has its own. Then there are industry associations, each with their own brand and marketing budgets, and regional tourism organisations and trails: beer trails, whiskey and cider and tasting trails, and economic development bodies. Then, of course you have the thousands of businesses large and small, and artists, and community organisations and charities and... they all want you to think about them before you fall asleep at night, and to dream about them too.

In a centrally-planned economy, "Dear Leader" can force everyone to sing the same song. Brand strategy resembles military strategy.

But, in a gloriously messy liberal democracy, we can't force anyone to do anything. We have to seduce our partners into joining us on this beautiful mission. We have to seek unity by making a public asset of the story Tasmanians told us and the strategy they invited us to build. We have to make decisions, all of us, that reinforce that story.

Again, Brand Tasmania has no power to tell anyone "you must do it this way."

The only way is to listen, to do the work, to get the story right. Right enough that your partners see themselves in it and want to join you. Right enough that they own it.

North Carolina did what almost every city and state does. They hired an advertising agency to do what almost every advertising agency does. Did they get it right?

Here's the launch video for Nothing Compares.

0:03 "How far can your see..." to 0:32 "... beyond compare."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eT_AVUE_XC8

"How far can you see from a mountain top? Or across the ocean? Or from the windows of the executive suite? In North Carolina the view is always changing. And everywhere you look there's something beyond compare."

All this over images of good looking people riding bicycles and floating in boats and looking at papers in office towers and... baking bread.

I don't want to criticise the slogan or the video. But I would love to sit down with that marketing director, or with then-Governor Pat McCrory, over a beer, to ask how they *used it*—beyond the logo and the video.

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How did “Nothing Compares” work as the metaphorical umbrella guiding and unifying their efforts?

A place-brand can be worth billions by attracting tourists and investors, and brilliant workers and students. More importantly, it can encourage and inspire citizens to act. When he was Governor, Pat McCrory was single-minded in his ambition to make North Carolina the best place for business in the United States. Now... this is something. A tangible goal. Does “nothing compares” tell this inviting story? Not in any obvious way but he and his team might have united around it to bring “nothing compares” to life as an expression tying, well, looking at papers in office towers to... riding bikes and floating in boats and baking bread.

Then, in March 2016, a year after the launch of “Nothing Compares,” then-Governor McCrory signed the *Public Facilities and Securities Act*. Better known as the Bathroom Bill.

The Bathroom Bill made it illegal for transgender people to use a restroom inconsistent with the gender listed on their birth certificate.

Friends, a place-brand can also... cost you billions. It doesn't matter what anyone thinks of your logo or your tagline. Your brand lives in the decisions you make, in those invitations you make to people, in the opportunities you provide them.

The Governor wanted his state to welcome business from across the country.

And, shortly after he signed the Bathroom Bill, then-president Barack Obama—remember him?—condemned the Act. Cities and states and counties across America told their employees to stop travelling to North Carolina for business. Major conference organisers cancelled. College sports tournaments dropped out. A long list of performers like Bruce Springsteen, Cirque du Soleil, Pearl Jam and Itzhak Perlman cancelled concerts and shows. Bloomberg, Capital 1, Pay Pal, Deutsche Bank, Williams Sonoma and plenty of other companies halted plans to open offices in the state.

The Associated Press did an economic analysis and determined, over 12 years, the Bathroom Bill would cost the State of North Carolina thousands of jobs and \$3.76 billion in lost revenue.

Nothing compares.

Eight months later, Governor McCrory lost his re-election bid. The new Governor, Roy Cooper, repealed the “*bathroom*” part of the Bill. And, quietly, the logo and tagline disappeared too.

If ‘Nothing Compares’ was doing its job as a unifying cultural expression, this never would have happened. Remember the spectacular simplicity in Austin? “Does this keep us weird, or not?”

Unity is hard. Making a brand come to life through action is hard. How can you create a feeling of discipline, around a city or state brand, without... disciplining anyone?

Here in Tasmania we started with workshops. Rather than put people in a room and shove the brand at them, as a passive audience, we decided to first help our partners with their own brand stories.

Together we worked on narrative structure and techniques, and helped our partners explore how to make emotional connections with their customers, their clients, their audiences. We helped them develop a first draft, and to think about ways to bring their brand stories to life in their work—both as communication and as a lens for decision-making.

And then we presented what we had heard from Tasmanians in our interviews, and how we had distilled it. We do not want this to be all about the new Tasmanian mark or the brand book or about any rules they had to follow.

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Our message was simple: The Tasmanian story is your story. You are the brand. What you do and why you do it. Why you do it here. How can we bring it to life together?

Rather than “launch” the Tasmanian mark and platform and brand story, with a splashy event, we didn’t launch it at all. We just started using it, and we encouraged our partners, early adopters to use it too.

Given the Tasmanian brand story, our natural allies are the small, boutique, niche, artisanal creators, producers, and entrepreneurs. Some of them grabbed the Tasmanian mark so quickly they put it on the boxes that contained their Christmas shipments.

But we couldn’t forget the artists. We couldn’t forget the activists. We couldn’t forget the passionate social inventors. The story is deeply about them too.

We couldn’t forget Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities. We couldn’t forget new Tasmanians, immigrants who have chosen to build or rebuild their lives here.

We couldn’t forget the University of Tasmania, or TasTAFE – our vocational college.

For nearly all of them, it isn’t about a logo, or a slogan. It’s about a way to unify their efforts under a powerful brand that adds value to what they’re doing. A way to do it with more Tasmanian-ness.

And... we had to find a way to work with 27,000 state government employees, to use the brand as an engine of inspiration and encouragement for the work they do on behalf of their neighbours.

I have failed, a lot, in my life. I failed a lot, in branding work, and I paid close attention to those failures. And thereafter, I always sought to avoid that costly pain—for my clients and for myself.

For example: In my work in place-branding, as a consultant, I had made the mistake of NOT including the government. I was biased toward community ownership, as I had seen governments “launch” re-brands only to end up in the media as a new logo and tagline. Without context, new logos always inspired public uproar over wasted tax revenue. And understandably.

A cultural expression has to be genuine. The people have to cooperate in building it. If it is true, they will own it.

But as right as the expression and strategy might feel, people are busy with their careers and their families, their volunteer initiatives, their hobbies, their holidays, their television series. Very few of them are brand nerds.

In this era, driven by social media takes context is ... well there isn’t any context. But some people use the Tasmanian brand every day, whether they know it or not. Take Public Servants. Here is what I have learned: even the most exciting, bottom-up, community-driven brand strategy will shrivel up and die over time if agencies and departments, and political leaders, choose to ignore it.

There is a popular television show here in Australia called UTOPIA. It’s about a fictional, but achingly authentic, government agency called the Nation Building Authority—or NBA. They speak in nonsensical bureaucratic jargon, scheme up massive projects, ideate with sticky notes, obsess over office wellness fads, and year after year... achieve nothing.

In the first episode, NBA leadership discuss—of course—a new logo. In this clip, a creative gentleman pulls back a curtain and reveals it: some lines going through a prism and exiting colourfully on the other side.

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From 0:13 (applause) to 1:07 “...can we just have the soundscape off for a minute?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfTBdqF5Vgw>

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Bravo Maestro!

[Karsten Leith, Graphics Consultant] Merci!

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] Where’s our name?

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Didn’t need it.

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] On a logo?

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Not when you’ve got something that strong.

[Karsten Leith, Graphics Consultant] Thank you.

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] I thought the point was to tell people who we are?

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Tell him Karsten.

[Karsten Leith, Graphics Consultant] The more you write, the more words and letters that you use, the less you actually say.

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] This way the logo does all the talking.

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] Okay, and what is it saying at the moment?

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Listen to it.

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] It need someone to speak on its behalf...

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] I’m just going to play the soundscape

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] What?

[Karsten Leith, Graphics Consultant] It’s saying one idea, nation building, through a prism, your organisation, endless possibilities

[Rhonda Stewart, Public Relations Manager] Bam! I hear that loud and clear.

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] Yeah, but at least have our letters NBA

[Karsten Leith, Graphics Consultant] N.B.A

[Tony Woodford, Chief Executive Officer] But I don’t want people playing “Where’s Wally”...can we just have the soundscape off for a moment...

It’s absurd and funny and just truth-y enough to seem real. When we started this work in Tasmania, a lot of people warned that our potential partners in government would ignore us. Not maliciously. They aren’t cruel. They would simply want to protect their turf and their budgets, their logos, their websites, their strategies and plans.

They wouldn’t want a new, untested organisation, run by a guy with a bad accent, to come in and tell them how to do their jobs.

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In some places, you have to stomp in and present a bold vision and be big and loud and charismatic about it. You have to give everyone the new rules. Be a boss. Our new brand is NOTHING COMPARES. It's incredible, the greatest brand anyone has ever seen. It's huge. World class.

Tasmania is not one of those places. Tasmanian storytelling is about showing, not telling, quietly. The pattern of Tasmanian success is all around us. So we've chosen to be specific, to use examples of Tasmanian-ness to inspire and encourage everyone to follow this pattern.

Rather than establish the office of "Brand Police" we have simply offered to help our colleagues in the Tasmanian Government. We want to uplift and enhance their work, not own it. The Tasmanian story is not ours to own. We want to inject what we have learned about the Tasmanian heart into our colleagues' plans and strategies, their language, their decisions.

We seek to influence and infiltrate—not dominate.

When towns and regions and councils are thinking about re-branding, a new logo and tagline, we talk to them about our research, what we have learned about the Tasmanian pattern of success, and we offer to help. Perhaps their brand is already there, just waiting to be activated by a local yet deeply Tasmanian project.

Now... what do I mean by a deeply Tasmanian project?

Here's an example:

The year 12 completion rate is far too low in Tasmania. It came out in our interviews, and in our year of workshops, as a source of deep anxiety. And it's not as though governments and communities haven't tried to reverse this.

We looked at the story, and realised that nearly everyone people point to as *deeply Tasmanian* came from a modest place. It's how Tasmanians frame their stories. That woman who grew up different, in a big family in Smithton. That boy from the Northern Suburbs who was good at maths. That teenager who liked tinkering with equipment on his parents' farm near Burnie. That woman who heard that will never work, don't even try it. That young man who arrived in Launceston as a Czech refugee. The doctor who wanted to fight big business and save our wild places. All the women and men who came from the mainland, or from Scotland, or from India, or from Eritrea, or from China with an idea.

What bound them all? Not capital. Not wealth and privilege and powerful global connections. Not an open door or an easy path. It was always passion, obsession, and—in time—a community that was willing to support them. In Tasmania, there aren't millions of people to do everything for you. You have to do it yourself. And this does something to people. They don't go to the big city, or if they do they're called back. They decide to pursue their definition of the extraordinary here, with a small local market and island supply chains and, at least in the mainland-Australian mind, bad weather and poverty.

It takes a special kind of person. It takes... a Tasmanian.

Rather than lie to young people about their prospects, we think: let's be as honest as we can be. Success, in Tasmania, is about energy and determination—grit—and a relentless focus on the different, the special, artisanal everything. Why not bring that culture into the school system? Why not build toward a year 12 business plan competition, so every Tasmanian teenager understands rudimentary finance and knows how to build a team, how to solve a problem in a unique way, how to design a product or a service, how to market, how to sell...

Even if young Tasmanians don't launch a business or become artists or build a social enterprise or a political movement or a video game company in their bedrooms, they know they could. They take something essentially Tasmanian with them, into their futures. They think Tasmanian.

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And, ideally, they remain in school because they understand, in some way, they belong. Their ideas and ambitions, even the 16 or 17 year-old versions of them, matter.

The message is simple: someone just like you did it, and you can do it too. And it doesn't have to be big. It probably won't be, and that's okay. But make it special and it will grow, and sustain you, and add something to your community.

This example of a year 12 business plan competition is part of a series of projects we're trying to launch with our partners in the public and private sectors, with Tasmanian families, with our schools and our university, and ideally this notion of Tasmanian Enterprise can begin at birth and move through K-12, into post-secondary studies and beyond, as we think Tasmanian in our careers.

In the midst of a pandemic we want everyone in Tasmania to understand there's a special opportunity here, and invite them into it. Then, we have to tell our audiences in the beige and busy world, who may not have even heard of Tasmania, that something different is happening here—and they might to be a part of it. We have to show them how.

And all of this has to feel like a simple, emotional invitation to change your life—in some meaningful way, from a small taste or a trip to the decision to bring your business and your life here.

We're a small team with a small budget. And to be honest: when people hear the name of our organisation, Brand Tasmania, they think we're here to make brochures for them. People are busy. We're so easy to ignore.

The first five episodes of this podcast has been a way for us to answer... why?

Why Tasmania?

Why place-branding?

We hope it's helped you think about answering these questions for your own city, or state, or province, or country, or company.

In episode 6 we'll reveal our deepest vulnerabilities and talk about how. How are we doing all of this when, now more than ever, it all just seems way too hard?

(Be Tasmanian Podcast Theme Music)

Hey, if you have questions about what you heard today about me, or the team, or Brand Tasmania, send us an email at podcast@brandtasmania.com.au.