

The City Council has asked for a short list of marketing agencies that specialize in branding. The concept was to explore developing a comprehensive, integrated brand that brings together community partners with a positive message about Ames. Prior to investigating agencies, the City of Ames, Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau, Main Street Cultural District, and the Chamber of Commerce worked with Dr. Linda Niehm, ISU Associate Professor in Retail Merchandising and Entrepreneurship, to discuss cross marketing opportunities through a class project. After working with Dr. Niehm's class through the semester, City Council members and staff were invited to view final presentations.

The following list of agencies includes those who specialize in municipal branding, as well as those who have been recommended from communications professionals at other Ames organizations. This is not a comprehensive list, but represents many of the agency options that are available. The City of Ames has not utilized any of these agencies.

Branding Agencies - National

***North Star Destination Strategies* (www.northstarideas.com)**

This agency targets municipalities to develop brand identity. They have a BrandPrint program, which they customize for each city. North Star is headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, and frequently sponsors events with 3CMA (the communications branch of ICMA). Several City of Ames staff members receive North Star updates and information via email. North Star currently is working in Sioux City, Iowa, and has completed a project with Forest City, Iowa. Additionally, they have worked with Cape Girardeau and Warrensburg, Missouri, as well as cities in Minnesota. North Star offers a cost structure based on a city's population. For a city the size of Ames, the four-stage community branding program costs approximately \$88,000 and includes 15 pieces of research, creative work, and brand action ideas.

North Star describes branding on their Web site:

Branding Moves Communities from Good to Great

One of the most neglected responsibilities of community governments and leaders is the job of building a reputation that is fair, honest and powerful. Whether leading a small town or a world power, leaders owe it to their individual and institutional constituents to dig out the "competitive identity" of their region. This identity comes from the history, the culture, the geography and the society of the place – as such, it should be an accurate reflection of the genius and the will of the people.

A brand is not created; it is discovered within the spirit of a place. North Star's Community BrandPrint process does just that. Using qualitative and quantitative research tools, we achieve a focused snapshot of a community's values, assets and priorities, which can then be articulated as its "brand." Brands uncovered in this manner are endorsed and absorbed by their communities due to their fundamental truth. Because of this, they are exceedingly useful to community leaders in furthering the economic, political and social goals of the community. In other words, an honest, relevant, clearly and cleverly articulated brand can move your community from good to great.

***Total Destination Management* (www.destinationbranding.com)**

Total Destination Management specializes in tourism planning and destination branding for cities, counties and regions. Total Destination Management's work includes developing a city image, a county slogan, a city motto, a regional tourism brand, a

community identity and much more. The agency has a seven-step branding process for municipalities called 7A Destination Branding System.

Total Destination describes branding on its Web site:

Recovering from these tough economic times will require thorough research and the right strategic responses. Genuine city branding does exactly this. It makes a powerful contribution as a focusing device and decision making toolkit that is too often overlooked or underappreciated. A TDM brand management strategy is essential for all forward-looking cities seeking to rise above the field of 22,000 incorporated cities in the USA. It provides a clear strategic path to stand apart from the ordinary in ways that makes them more valued by customers. It achieves this through improved targeting, defining laser point positioning, hitting customer hot buttons, and amplifying the co-operative energy and resources of partners. This philosophy has shaped the many proven techniques in our *7A Destination Branding System* and proprietary research methods.

7A Destination Branding System

The TDM *7A Destination Branding System* addresses the special challenges of city branding. It follows a proven and systematic path to foster buy-in from the earliest stages by widely canvassing, engaging and energizing stakeholders. The 7A Destination Branding System not only leads to highly effective marketing applications, but takes you beyond a logo and tagline to provide the catalyst for elevating all marketing efforts to levels of excellence and effectiveness that may not otherwise be possible. Working with more than one hundred satisfied destinations has proven that this highly researched, collaborative and consultative approach leads to a much more relevant, credible and competitive brand strategy.

City Image (<http://www.city-image.com/>)

CityImage provides marketing and public relations services to small businesses and public sector organizations. The agency works closely with each client, ensuring their needs are met and goals achieved - all for a reasonable cost. CityImage's communications experience is wide-ranging, including logo development, media training, web site solutions, advertisement design, communications plans and audits; as well as general communications consulting. Clients include Fort Dodge, Iowa; Red Wing, Minn., St. Louis Park, Minn., West St. Paul, Minn., College Station, Texas, and Salinas, Calif.

Branding Agencies – Local

Flynn Wright, Des Moines (www.flynnwright.com)

Mentioned by Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau

Mauck-Groves, Des Moines (www.mauckgroves.com)

Mentioned by ACVB and Iowa Energy Center

Innova, Ames (www.innovaideasandservices.com)

Mentioned by ACVB

Integer Group, Des Moines (www.integer.com)

Mentioned by ACVB

McLellan Marketing Group (www.mclellanmarketing.com)

Strategic America, Des Moines (www.strategicamerica.com)

Both mentioned by ISU New Service

ME&V, Cedar Rapids (www.meandv.com)

Mentioned by McFarland Clinic

Hellman & Associates (www.hellman.com)

Mentioned by Story County Medical Center