

Branding Tillamook County, Oregon



Place branding expert and author Bill Baker presents this example related to the development of a county-wide brand strategy with a specific focus on tourism. The case study provides information on defining a destination brand, the selection of a new destination name, the simultaneous development of a brand strategy and a tourism development strategy, and the introduction of a new regional destination on the Oregon Coast in the USA.

The Region

This large county on the Oregon Coast has a population of 25,250. It has a scenic coastline of 104 kms (65 miles) that includes vast unspoiled beaches, four bays, nine rivers and three National Wildlife Refuges, six County Parks and ten State Parks. Sprinkled throughout the county are nine small cities and villages that are visitor destinations in their own right.

Introduction

In 2013, Tillamook County introduced a transient lodging tax (TLT) i.e. a hotel occupancy tax, which was initiated to facilitate countywide tourism marketing for the first time. The County government decided that simultaneously with the introduction of a new regional destination marketing organization (DMO) or the commencement of any tourism marketing it was necessary to establish a brand identity and a strong strategic foundation.

[Total Destination Marketing](#) (TDM) was engaged by the [Economic Development Council of Tillamook County](#) (EDC) to simultaneously develop a Tourism Development Strategy and Brand Strategy. The EDC coordinated public – public – nonprofit collaboration through a Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) which was responsible for overseeing the project. The two projects were completed within seven months on an accelerated schedule by TDM with the support of Tourism Development Solutions, Axia Creative and HPR Internet Marketing Agency.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the assignment were to increase economic development and employment opportunities within the county through optimal deployment of the TLT funds. The EDC required that a consultative approach be adopted for the preparation for both strategies. The brief required TDM to provide:

1. Countywide tourism asset mapping to supply a clear understanding of the region's tourism capabilities, assets, product gaps, market situation and opportunities
2. A compelling, competitive identity and persona
3. A distinctive brand platform and brand toolkit that includes strong positioning, attractive visual and verbal identity, key market messaging, deployment and outreach programs, and a comprehensive style guide
4. Greater synergy from the communications of all relevant county messengers
5. Increased awareness, respect, and relevance as a regional destination
6. Clearer and more meaningful differentiation from other destination choices
7. A unifying, strategic approach to optimize available resources and opportunities
8. Recommendations for tourism infrastructure, services, placemaking and visitor experiences to ensure consistent delivery of the brand promise
9. Recommendations to enhance the capabilities of local organizations
10. Programs for collaboration and partnership between Tillamook County and other Oregon destination marketing organizations, relevant government, non-profit and business entities

The Challenge

The introduction of the TLT provided the resources for the county to be marketed as a unified destination for the first time. To date the County had not had a regional approach to tourism marketing, nor was there a regional tourism management organization (DMO). It would be necessary to transition from fragmentation and individual community focus to a countywide brand strategy. Additionally, because of the past marketing focus on individual communities, the Tillamook County name was not widely recognized as a tourism destination.

The Methodology

The TDM team used the place branding process based on the *7A Destination Branding System* outlined in the book, *Destination Branding for Small Cities*. The 7A process follows a well-researched and consultative approach that generates community buy-in which is balanced with customer and competitor research. A Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) was convened to act as a sounding board throughout the brand journey. It met five times at critical milestones and this allowed participants to gain an understanding of the research, the strategic rationale and for TDM to harness their insights and fine-tune elements of the strategy. Importantly, this approach empowered TAC members to

become advocates and leaders during the later adoption and implementation phases and for them to become champions for the new brand.

The County government requested that all TAC meetings had to provide opportunities for public input. A public gallery of approximately twenty interested stakeholders including local media was present at all meetings.

Some of the key actions during the initial Assessment phase included:

- A community survey which was accessible online (441 responses)
- A Tourism Asset Mapping review to identify key assets, opportunities and gaps in the range of tourism products and experiences
- A review of web sites, web reviews, social media and brochures relating to local businesses, key competitors and partners
- Personal interviews with over 50 local business and community leaders
- Three community workshops, north, south and central, with residents, businesses and community leaders (80 participants)
- Portland residents perceptions research attracted 340 responses
- Interviews with individuals outside of Tillamook County who have partnership relations with the region in regard to tourism
- Site inspections for 7 days, at over 200 sites in Tillamook County

Assessment and Audit Results

The Assessment phase involved a comprehensive evaluation of the tourism assets, perceptions, communications, competitors, partnerships and market trends that may be relevant to a regional brand identity. Research studies were initiated in regard to consumers, residents, partners, and competitors. The following are a sampling of top-line results from the main research studies.

Community Perceptions Study: An online study captured the unfiltered attitudes, perceptions and opinions of Tillamook County residents. The poll also gauged the level of advocacy and loyalty toward the county as a desirable destination and place to live. Some of the questions that gained the highest positive responses were:

- I am confident in recommending Tillamook County as a place to visit. (88.7% Highly Agree/ Disagree)
- As one of a number of industries, tourism is important to the economic mix of Tillamook County. (95.3% Highly Agree/ Disagree)
- The overall benefits from tourism in Tillamook County outweigh any negative impacts. (72.1% Highly Agree/ Disagree)

The questions generating the lowest levels of agreement were:

- Local organizations approach the marketing of Tillamook County in a unified and co-operative manner. (9.6% Highly Agree/ Disagree)
- Tillamook County has a clear, meaningful and attractive identity. (28.4% Highly Agree/ Disagree)

Residents were asked to express what they consider to be the most important issue relating to tourism development in Tillamook County from the perspective of residents.

- A healthier attitude toward tourism and tourists
- Create more jobs, income and opportunities for small business
- Don't generate traffic and congestion, or pressure at residents' popular places
- Improve roads, parking and signs
- Restore, protect and conserve natural resources
- Retain natural beauty
- Retain small town feel, low impact on village lifestyles

They were also asked, what they considered are the qualities or values that they would not want to lose as the county increases its focus on tourism. The most common responses related to:

- Agriculture, fishing and timber industries
- Beautiful unspoiled beaches, bays and forests
- Clean air, cleanliness, unpolluted
- Do not become Lincoln City or Seaside (i.e. the two closest competitor destinations)
- Small town friendliness or hometown feel

Community Consultation: Interviews and workshops were conducted throughout the county and attracted a total of 130 government, business, non-profits and citizens. They identified the following as the region's greatest tourism strengths:

- Beaches / Coast / Ocean
- Beautiful landscape / beautiful scenery / beautiful coast / natural beauty
- Cheese / Cheese factory
- Nature / natural
- Unspoiled, quiet, not-overdeveloped
- Small town feel / coastal villages

On the other hand, they saw the following to be the greatest weaknesses

- Anti-tourism / growth sentiments
- Fragmented approach to tourism marketing and development
- Lack of cohesion / unity in tourism
- Seasonal impact on business
- Traffic and congestion in Summer

Consumer Perceptions Research: An online consumer study focused on a panel of Portland Metro residents aged 24-70, who "travel a couple times per year for pleasure". A total of 340 respondents completed the survey. The study was designed to gain perceptions, attitudes and feelings toward

the county and its three main competitors, Astoria-Warrenton, Lincoln City and Newport (all on the Oregon Coast). It also sought opinions in regard to the most appropriate destination name for the region. Respondents most strongly associated Tillamook County with being:

- A place to get close to nature
- A place that is not over-developed and has retained its original qualities
- A place to be active in State Parks and forests
- A place of outstanding scenic beauty
- A place to be active in estuaries and bays
- A place with miles of unspoiled beaches

External Influencers Research: TDM conducted phone interviews with individuals nominated by the client. They represented Travel Oregon, State Parks, meeting planners, group travel organizers, tour operators, and DMOs to gain insights into their attitudes and perceptions toward Tillamook County, competitors, and visitor behavior.

Analysis and Positioning

Following the comprehensive asset mapping, destination audit, and associated research, TDM prepared a Fieldwork Research Report which was circulated to TAC members. It summarized the research findings, Asset Mapping review, draft SWOTs, and presented key strategic considerations.

Defining the most potent brand platform and positioning required careful consideration of three dynamic elements: (1) the needs of target customers, (2) greatest strengths (both tangible and intangible), and (3) competitor strengths. The emerging positioning concepts were only recommended to the client after they could be shown to be compatible with the values and visions of residents.

TDM provided concepts for the brand platform and positioning to the TAC. Instrumental in this process was matching the region's tourism assets with Oregon Coast visitor needs and values, local community values, and the capabilities of competitors.

Guiding the identification of the county's most compelling brand strengths and most potent positioning was the need to align with the factors that are influencing the success of coastal and nature-based destinations that have been revealed in national and international studies.

Brand Strategy

The Brand Platform is integral to [the brand strategy](#) and was produced in consultation with the TAC and key stakeholders. It provides the guidance system to focus and prioritize the Tillamook Coast's communications, marketing and tourism development. It provides the rallying point to unify and leverage the combined efforts of partners. The key components of the Brand Platform are:

Positioning: The Tillamook Coast brand positioning is centered on the region having Oregon's most diverse and varied marine and rainforest environments, all in close proximity to low-key beachfront villages.

Destination Promise: This statement informs and guides every message, process, decision, communication, and investment.

For those needing to escape the stresses of everyday life and seek the transformative power of nature, the untamed and unspoiled beauty of the Tillamook Coast's natural wonders are the perfect prescription for body and soul.

Only here will they find the enriching, revitalizing and adventure-filled encounters of Oregon's most diverse and varied marine and rainforest environments, all in close proximity to low-key beachfront villages that have not been overdeveloped – and within 90 minutes of Portland.

Brand Pillars: These are the leading strengths and benefits that attract target audience and underpin the delivery of the Destination Promise. These brand pillars also serve as the key experience themes or clusters, and provide an important conduit for partners to play their role in delivering the brand. Importantly, they provide opportunities for customers to immerse themselves in the brand. They facilitate prioritization for marketing, product development, investment and partnerships.

Priority Pillars:

- Natural Wonders
- Beach Traditions
- Outdoor Adventures

Complementary Pillars:

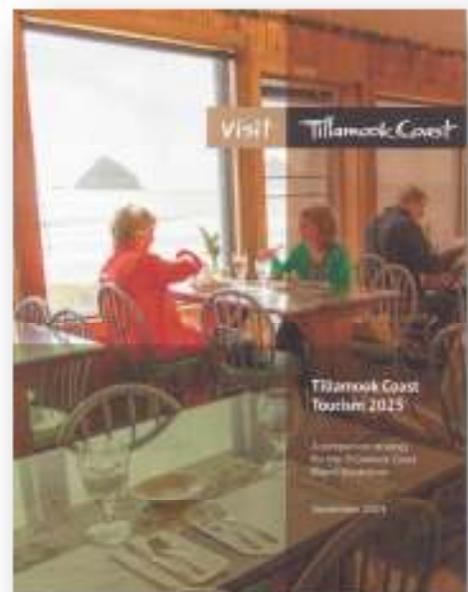
- History and Culture
- Nature's Bounty
- Events

Emotional Benefits: The Tillamook Coast brand will convey and provide a sense of discovery, freedom, inspiration, rejuvenation, romance, togetherness. They should reflect how we want visitors to feel through their contact and experiences with the region, according to the needs and desires of specific target audience.

Brand Personality: These describe the characteristics and traits of the Tillamook Coast as if it were a person. They influence the feel and tone of voice used in communications as well as the selection of typeface, colors, images and other visual elements which in combination elicit an emotional response. The Tillamook Coast brand personality is authentic, environmentally sensitive, inspiring, natural, relaxed, and untamed.

Tourism 2015 Strategy

[Tourism 2025](#) is the companion strategy which provides recommendations relative to experience design, infrastructure development, marketing, placemaking, tourism management and other brand delivery issues. The plan



outlines the need for the destination to adopt sustainable tourism practices to safeguard and enhance the county's environmental, economic, cultural and social well-being. An important principle underpinning the brand and Tourism 2025 is that what can be attractive to visitors can also be appealing to residents and investors. As the natural and cultural attractors are enhanced, they will be supplemented by improved amenities, signage and employment opportunities to improve the quality of life and business opportunities for residents.

[Tourism 2025](#) adopts a holistic approach which addresses all of the elements necessary to communicate and deliver outstanding visitor experiences that are aligned with the brand. It recognizes that tourism is a complex economic and social activity where success requires cross-region and cross-agency cooperation involving public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

Brand Alignment

Before finalizing the strategic directions and brand concepts TDM had to ensure that there would be consistency and alignment across the many messages and experiences emanating from Tillamook Coast and its partners. TDM had to ascertain whether it would be possible to orchestrate the proposed brand messages, behavior and experiences that would leave target customers with similar basic feelings, impressions, and perceptions of the county no matter who was communicating them. Through one-on-one discussions and group discussions, consideration was given to:

- Who are Tillamook County's current and potential partners, both internally and externally? Which are the most influential with key audiences?
- Is the proposed brand likely to be in harmony with them in meaningful and appropriate ways?
- Will the proposed destination name be appropriate for all partners?
- Can the proposed brand be leveraged with prominent local, regional and state brands?
- Does the proposed brand provide optimal opportunities for new business, product development and the expansion of Tillamook County's current strengths?
- Does the brand platform fit neatly with the County government's vision?
- Can the brand work effectively across tourism, economic development and lifestyle marketing if required?

Visual and Verbal Identity

Once the Brand Platform and Destination Promise™ were designed, the verbal and visual identity systems were created. These supplied the designs, images, and language to consistently and enticingly project the brand. Key elements are:

Brand Names: Community and consumer research strongly supported a new destination name, *The Tillamook Coast*. This name will directly tie the region to the famed Oregon Coast, present it as a more evocative destination, and leverage the region's distinctive natural environment. The use of "County" as a destination name was not supported by the research. It was seen to be a name more associated with government and bureaucracy, and not vacations or getaways. By adopting the name, "Coast", the region will be immediately associated with the term commonly heard in key geographical markets, "We're going to the Coast". Community and consumer research also indicated

that the most favored name for the destination marketing organization responsible for marketing the region was, *Visit Tillamook Coast (VTC)*.

Tagline: The essence of the Tillamook Coast brand is captured in the phrase, “*It’s the natural choice.*” This is an experiential invitation which captures the distinctive advantage of the region and spirit of the area from a tourism and lifestyle perspective. It highlights how the region stands apart from its more urbanized and busier competitors. Research confirmed that “*It’s the natural choice*” was highly compatible with the region’s farming, dairy product, timber and fishing industries. The tagline was selected from three options by an online panel of seventy frequent travelers.

Graphics: Separate design graphics were created to represent the destination and the ‘corporate’ identity of the tourism organization, Visit Tillamook Coast. At the heart of these designs are nine linked visual identity graphics referred to as either pictographs, wordmarks, brandmarks or taglines. These designs evolved from several concepts that were inspired by the coastal landforms, textures, colors and features from the natural environment. The main symbol is the rugged coastal seastack formations that represent a timeless relationship between land and sea and soaring sea birds. The color pallet represents the green, moss covered forests that caress the coastline. After hundreds of fonts were evaluated, two were selected and combined into a custom treatment that captures the character and essence of the region.

The final design emerged after contributions from an online panel of seventy frequent travelers in the USA and overseas. A number of design iterations were used in several rounds of consumer research and consultation with the BAC to refine the final design.

The organization mark is a combination of the reversed wordmark over a black field and a reversed “Visit” over one of three primary colors; sage, coast and clay. The organizational mark is used for business communications and never for destination marketing unless it is used as a sponsorship recognition.

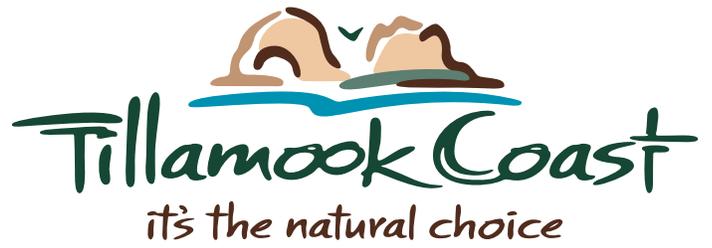
Brand Communications

The strategy informed marketing communications with a strong emphasis on internet and social media marketing. To ensure that the most potent brand messages would be optimized for priority audiences, a matrix was created comprising key words, phrases, images, benefits and strengths that should be conveyed to specific target audiences. This approach ensures that the brand is conveyed in ways that will resonate with the region’s target audiences, thus adding directly to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Tillamook Coast marketing.

Brand Assets



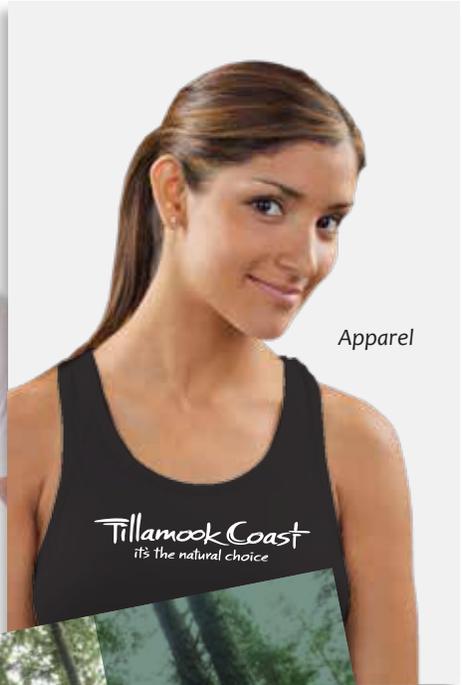
Color Palette



Brandmark



Coffee Cups



Apparel



Rack Brochures

Visitor Guide

Bringing the Brand to Life

The Tillamook Coast brand is created by more than just the actions of Visit Tillamook Coast and its marketing messages. Delivering memorable brand experiences will require a 360° focus by many partners to provide superior value through a seamless series of highly satisfying encounters.

Working with TAC and key stakeholders, TDM identified the critical points where the Tillamook Coast brand can most effectively influence customers before, during and after their encounters with the region. It was recognized that Visit Tillamook Coast cannot exercise control or influence at all of these points. They may, however, be able to exert influence at the most critical points and encourage partners to support the objective of communicating and delivering outstanding brand experiences. The programs for activating these experiences are outlined in the *Tourism 2025 Strategy*.

The strategy highlights where improvements and investments may be made and draws attention to where relationships, policies, guidelines and rules may need attention, variation and enforcement.

Tourism 2025 addresses:

- Sustainable tourism practices
- Nature-based tourism experiences
- Cultural tourism experiences and events
- Village experiences and placemaking
- Lodging and conferences
- Marketing communications
- Professional development
- Partnership development
- Leadership and management



Brand Deployment and Outreach

The Tillamook Coast brand presents a unifying rallying point around which the county is starting to prioritize and convey messages and experiences. The brand sets the directions for using one look, one voice, common themes, images and words by public, private, and nonprofit partners. Achieving this will require constant outreach, education, oversight and coaching for key organizations and individuals to understand the brand rationale, use consistent brand messages, as well as demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting, funding and actually using the brand strategy as a valued strategic toolkit.

To aid the correct and consistent deployment of the brand strategy, two brand books were prepared as cornerstones to guide and prioritize actions. The two complementary brand books are (i) the [Brand Style Guidelines](#) and (ii) [Tourism 2025 Strategy](#). These explain the strategic rationale, brand platform, design guidelines, actions and checklists that should be consistently, correctly and creatively integrated the brand across programs.



After the release of the brand strategy, a benchmarking study was conducted to establish the current level of brand awareness and image perceptions with potential visitors living in key market areas, Seattle, Portland and Eugene. This will enable VTC to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness for marketing programs.

Results to Date

The strategies were launched in September 2014. Since deploying the brand:

- The DMO responsible for the implementation of the brand strategy, *Visit Tillamook Coast (VTC)*, has been established
- An executive director has been appointed
- The new names for the region, “the Tillamook Coast” and the tourism organization “Visit Tillamook Coast” have been widely acclaimed
- The brand strategy and Tourism 2025 have been favorably received by stakeholders and are encouraging increased collaboration and unity in tourism marketing

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All brand visual identity designs by [Axia Creative](#)