

COMMENTARY

A Proposal to Bring Life to San Diego's Brand



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George Mullen

Have you seen the newest menu addition from the world's most recognized brand: Coca-Cola Life? Or the **San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp.**'s terrific new 2017 marketing

campaign: "Life. Changing."? Or the 2017 San Diego Lodging Industry event: "LIFE"?

Clearly, the unique marketing power of "Life" is being recognized. And yet, San Diego still fails to utilize the potential of "Life" as a global brand. Why?

This is not about San Diego's various tourism and business marketing campaign slogans, but all such campaigns should be consistently reinforcing the city's brand. By doing so, the hundreds of millions spent on city marketing would simultaneously be building something critical and lasting for the long-term benefit of the city ... our brand. By not doing so, our city's marketing money has near-zero lasting effect. We can both market our city and build our brand effectively at the same time. Similar to how "What Happens Here Stays Here" supports Las Vegas' "Sin City" brand.

San Diego is one of the world's most all-around compelling cities with vast interests in business, life sciences, technology, higher education, tourism, military, sports, and more. In 2016, San Diego's metropolitan area had a Gross Domestic Product of \$224 billion. This is comparable to **Apple**, the world's largest corporation, which had revenue of \$234 billion.

San Diego's GDP exceeded that of 146 nation-states, including Portugal, Greece, New Zealand, Iraq, Hungary, and Ukraine. By economic output

alone, San Diego would rank as the 46th largest nation in the world.

And, yet, apart from our weather, world-famous zoo, and beaches, San Diego remains largely unknown on the global stage. Think of San Diego's extraordinary potential with a brand as ubiquitous as "The Big Apple" or "City of Light."

First, we need to understand what a brand is. Simply put, our brand is our identity, the essence of what we stand for.

Second, we need to recognize the difference between a "brand" and a "marketing campaign slogan" which are too often confused, even by professionals. With Las Vegas, "What Happens Here Stays Here" is the marketing campaign, "Sin City" the brand. For San Diego, "Life. Changing." and "Happiness is Calling" are marketing campaigns, and the brand is nonexistent. Moreover, while marketing campaigns are temporary and come and go, the right brand should be forever. Think "Just Do It."

The identity of Las Vegas is "Sin City," New York City "All That," and Paris "Enlightenment / Light."

City of Life

For San Diego it is "Life" because we uniquely live life to its fullest potential. And "City of Life" succinctly captures the essence of it. Background:

San Diego has the best year-round climate in the world. Weather almost never stops us. For most of the world, this is not so.

San Diego is situated in one of the most unique, diverse, and extraordinary geographic locations in the world with 70 miles of breathtaking Pacific Ocean beaches, vast bays and harbors, mountains, valleys, rivers, deserts, and neighboring Mexico.

This unique weather and geography

combination gave birth to the San Diego mindset of life having unlimited possibilities and opportunities — where we can do anything, anytime of the year. Life here is always game-on.

The site cityoflife.com highlights 20 specific reasons.

Compelling Descriptor

For a variety of reasons, there are only a few city brands in the world that actually work. A city brand is far different than a business or product brand because it represents an actual location with an array of interests and attributes. Thus, a city brand needs to nail its identity, be inclusive, and also be a compelling descriptor. "I'm going to the Big Apple tonight." "We're heading to the City of Life this weekend." "The Raiders are playing in Sin City tomorrow."

"City of Life" (*Ciudad de Vida*) perfectly defines who and what we are, and is inclusive of all our city's vast attributes and interests. Furthermore, "City of Life" is perhaps the most powerful and uplifting branding descriptor imaginable for a city. This is exactly why Hong Kong wanted it. ("City of Life" would be long gone if we hadn't acquired it from Hong Kong over a decade ago and protected it since.) And EDC's "Life. Changing." is an ideal supporting marketing campaign.

The very first supporter of "City of Life" was our great civic treasure **Malin Burnham**. He synthesized it perfectly with this statement: "City of Life is San Diego's DNA — it defines the essence of what San Diego is, and what San Diego aspires to be."

Indeed it is.

George Mullen is spearheading CityofLife.com and is a principal of StudioRevolution.com and SunbreakRanch.com.

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