



PROTECTED AREA BRANDING STRATEGIES TO INCREASE STEWARDSHIP AMONG PARK CONSTITUENCIES

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ABSTRACT

With the complexity and resource intensity needed to manage parks, protected area managers increasingly rely on their constituencies to assume stewardship responsibilities. To meet the intentions of the Convention on Biodiversity Target 11, thousands of new protected areas will need to be gazetted. This dramatic increase in the number of global protected areas will significantly add to the dependence of managers on their constituencies to be actively engaged in park protection and management. One underutilized management tool to connect people to parks sustainably is branding. Protected area brands can engage emotions, evoke personal beliefs and prompt the behaviours managers prefer when the brand's core values are appropriately expressed. Yet, management often does not wield these brands to their maximum potential, thus limiting the tangible and intangible benefits they could bestow if simple marketing practices were followed. This paper outlines three fundamental branding practices – building brand awareness, teaching brand meaning and growing positive brand equity over time – that are applicable to the goals of every protected area manager. Strategically deployed, branding plays an essential role in the sustainability of parks and protected areas.

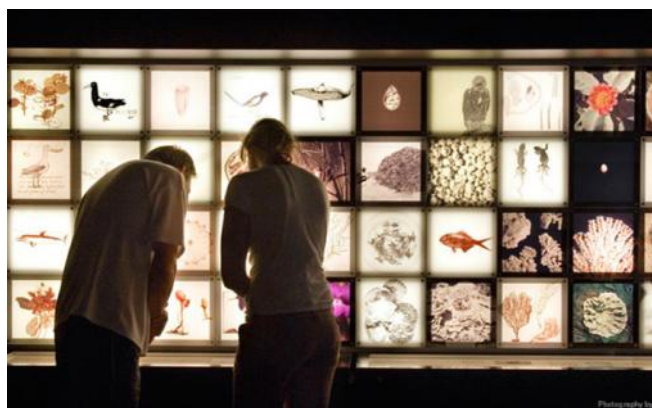
INTRODUCTION

Globally, over 55,000 new protected areas will need to be designated within the next seven years to meet Aichi Target 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Hvenegaard et al., 2012). The gazettement of protected areas does not just happen. It is a politically complicated process, based on the intentions of governments, the level of popular support and activism, and the general level of understanding among constituencies.

This enormous escalation in the number of new protected area designations will require major shifts in political and informational processes by protected area managers (e.g. government agencies, indigenous and community managers etc) regarding the benefits and costs for each new site. It will also require a formidable effort by

managers and decision makers in raising public awareness of the values of natural heritage and biodiversity. A valuable tool in this effort will come from the field of marketing. Marketing is the activity of “*creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings* (i.e. the natural heritage values such as ecosystem-based services and benefits of protected areas) *that have value for customers* (i.e. local residents, potential visitors), *partners and society at large*” (American Marketing Association, 2012).

The integration of marketing and management is always a challenge (Hall & McArthur, 1996; Hall & Piggin, 2003; Fyall & Radic, 2006; McCool, 2009). Most managers have little training (Eagles & McCool, 2000; Lardere, 2002) or interest in marketing (Eagles & McCool, 2000). This situation may be related to the resistance by protected area



Picture 1. Visitor centres with colourful up-to-date interpretive displays, such as those found within Shark Bay Discovery Centre in Western Australia, help market the site to a diversity of constituencies and build broader appreciation for a site and its ongoing protection. Exhibition Design: Freeman Ryan Design © John Gollings

staff to the notion that their property is being viewed simply as a tourism commodity instead of as a site being managed to conserve its natural and cultural resources (Figgis, 1999). To complicate matters, some managers continue to hold misconceptions and maintain biases about the role of marketing in the management of their property (Hall & McArthur, 1996; Eagles & McCool, 2000; Archer & Wearing, 2002; Hall & Piggin, 2003; Fyall & Radic, 2006; Halpenny, 2007). Nevertheless, protected area managers will need to develop new marketing-related skills and strategies, not only to build greater understanding and appreciation of the natural heritage values preserved within these new areas, but also to engage broad segments of the civic community to develop on-going support. Effective application of these skills will help build the public support needed for biodiversity protection to help achieve the Aichi Target.

Additionally, while tourism has a complex relationship with parks, it is broadly viewed as an important source of revenue for not only the management of protected areas (Bushell & McCool, 2007) but also for local residents and gateway communities (Spenceley, 2008; Fredman & Yuan, 2011). One way of achieving enhanced revenue streams from tourism is by more effectively marketing the heritage values contained within these sites.

Marketing protected areas has many dimensions such as building awareness, price setting, and developing and managing attractive products (high quality visitor experiences, maintaining product quality, selling wider benefits such as ecosystem services, etc.). Using well-designed marketing strategies, protected area staff can

maintain and strengthen connections with local residents, communities and service providers (e.g., water authorities). See Picture 1.

Of fundamental importance in any marketing strategy; however, is the brand of a particular product or place. Strong brands have the ability to provide a variety of services for protected area constituencies (Eagles & McCool, 2000; Morgan et al., 2003; King 2011). If the Aichi Target 11 is to be met successfully, managers will need to embrace good branding practices.

This paper discusses how simple branding strategies can increase stewardship among park constituencies. We first introduce the anatomy of a brand and describe its essential qualities. Two high profile brands, World Heritage and national park, are presented from the view of branding and how they have been used to build public support for their management, attract visitors and develop expectations of appropriate experiences. We then present three techniques for constructing effective protected area brands. The paper concludes with remarks on some of the challenges and opportunities of managing brands within the context of the Aichi Target 11.

WHAT IS A PROTECTED AREA BRAND?

When any agency or organization creates a name or logo for a product or service, a brand has been created (Keller, 2008). The same holds true for protected areas. Game reserve, state forest, national park and World Heritage are all examples of well-established park brand names. These brands may engage emotions, evoke personal beliefs and prompt preferred behaviours (Kotler & Gertner, 2010) when properly marketed not only among visitors, but also decision makers, communities, tourism businesses and agency personnel. However, managers frequently fail to utilize these brands to their maximum potential, resulting in limiting the tangible and intangible benefits they could bestow if more effectively employed. Thus, a short review about brands and branding is warranted.

All brands, including those for protected areas, consist of tangible and intangible elements (Aaker, 1991). The tangible or physical aspects of a protected area brand include the brand name, logo and the size, colours, textures and distinctive fonts used to present them. It is the recognition and recall of the tangible elements of a brand that subliminally cue a visitor's memory concerning the second part of a brand, its intangible or emotional elements (Keller, 1993).



Picture 2. A World Heritage 'collector' proudly standing by the entrance signage to Macquarie Island, documenting his visit to this oceanic island located some 1,500 miles southeast of Tasmania and ticking one more World Heritage site off his list © Ted Brattstrom

The emotional part of a protected area brand consists of all the knowledge, factual and emotional, a visitor remembers about the brand. In other words, it is all the thoughts, feelings, associations and experiences a person has had with the protected area and its marketing efforts. The intangible value this adds to the brand is known as the brand's *equity* (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Brand equity begins when the mental components of the brand imprint themselves in the visitor's mind and are conjured up when the brand is somehow evoked (Keller, 1993). Once remembered, the brand's net equity has the opportunity to influence, either positively or negatively, the individual (Rossiter & Percy, 1997; see Picture 2). Overall positive brand equity stimulates affirmative thoughts and associations while prompting the visitor to behave in ways protected area managers prefer, while negative brand equity may provoke visitors to act inappropriately or visit elsewhere. Powerful brands have extremely positive brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

Stand-alone brand logos can also trigger brand knowledge and equity. A protected area logo is the physical and symbolic manifestation of the organization's core values, products and mission. When viewed alone, a strong logo will instantly communicate a variety of succinct messages to the viewer. If the logo fails to communicate with the visitor, it is simply taking up space on a sign (King, 2010). See Pictures 3-6.

It is the positive equity of protected area brand names and their logos that agencies must carefully build and sustain over time to encourage engagement and foster a stewardship ethic among constituencies. Such brand equity may also come into play during public debate over gazetting and influence the outcome of this political process. Thus, protected area managers are not only responsible for managing their area, but the strategic management of their brand(s).



Picture 3. Visitor at Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes World Heritage Area reading a sign that includes the World Heritage emblem © Lisa King



Picture 4. A large road sign welcoming visitors to Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park in far northwest Queensland. © Lisa King



Picture 5. Gunung Mulu World Heritage Area is an example of best practice in World Heritage branding. The World Heritage name and emblem are prominently, consistently and repeatedly presented to visitors during a park visit and is found on entrance and interpretive signage, staff uniforms, the official park web site and more. © Lisa King



Picture 6. Teaching World Heritage brand values using imagery that forms the World Heritage symbol. This artistic piece is found within the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Site in Queensland, Australia. © Lisa King

WORLD HERITAGE AND NATIONAL PARK AS HIGH PROFILE BRANDS

World Heritage and national park are two well-known protected site brands. Since 1974, the World Heritage brand has signalled, 'the best of the best' (Luly & Valentine, 1998, p. 12) and is awarded only to those properties meeting the rigorous criteria set forth by the World Heritage Convention. Examples of the nearly 1,000 natural World Heritage properties worldwide (as of September 2012) include the Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef, Ngorongoro Crater, the South China Karst, the Messel Pit Fossil Site and Ha Long Bay.

Based on its symbolic meaning, the World Heritage brand possesses strong positive equity with those familiar with

the brand (Hall & Piggin, 2003; King, 2011). King and Prideaux (2010) found that approximately 13 per cent of visitors to World Heritage Sites in Queensland, Australia actually 'collect' the brand. Furthermore, the cumulative effect of multiple World Heritage sites has a positive correlation with the willingness of a visitor to revisit the country (Poria et al., 2011).

The national park brand was created with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 (National Park Service, 2012). With 140 years of publicity and hundreds of millions of people worldwide holding positive brand equity associated with the name, the national park brand is globally the most influential protected area brand, especially in terms of tourism.

Countries such as Australia and parts of Malaysia, for example, take full advantage of this fact and brand what in truth are state managed parks as national parks.

INCREASING SHARED STEWARDSHIP THROUGH BRANDING

By embracing basic branding concepts managers can not only help themselves meet the challenges of Aichi Target 11, but also make the process less frustrating. Three fundamental branding strategies managers can apply to build shared stewardship over time for existing and future protected areas are: building brand awareness, teaching the visitor brand meaning and growing positive brand equity.

Branding plays a critical role in determining the degree and type of visitation to any protected property (Weiler & Seidl, 2004; Morgan, 2006; Fredman et al., 2007; Wall Reinius & Fredman, 2007; King, 2011). To capitalize on the full range of visitor management benefits a protected area brand can bestow, management should provide multiple opportunities for the visitor to become aware of which brands their site possess. However, inconsistent presentation of a protected area brand makes it difficult for visitors to become aware of the brand and its values. For example, King (2010) collected photographs of signage approaching and within 15 World Heritage sites across Australia. The researcher found the World Heritage brand was erratically presented across different states, within multiple properties managed by the same agency and frequently even within the same site.

In a related study, King (2011) collected 1,827 standardized questionnaires from on-site visitors across five World Heritage Areas in Queensland, Australia between 1 April 2008 and 31 July 2008. King found that in four of Queensland's five World Heritage Areas, visitors who were unaware the site was World Heritage prior to their visit were insufficiently exposed to the brand on-site to easily recall its status upon their departure from the park. Interestingly, all the World Heritage sites included in the study also carried the national park brand. King's (2011) study found a significantly higher percentage of visitors were aware that the site they were visiting was a national park compared to those who were aware the site was World Heritage.

One technique to build visitor awareness of any protected area brand is to present the tangible elements of the brand prominently, consistently and repeatedly at points of on-site visitor contact, in such a way that a visitor will see it,

remember it and connect their experiences with the name and logo (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2008; King, 2010).

One strategy to ensure consistent presentation of a protected area brand is to develop and adhere to a visual identity guide for the brand. To maximize effectiveness, this guide should be integrated with communication and marketing strategies. A brand visual identity guide is the roadmap on usage of the brand in almost any situation. It presents a consistent layout in terms of space, colours and size relevant to the format being used, such as websites, entrance signage, flyers or brochures. A visual identity guide ensures a consistent presentation over time on all communications across administrations, staff changes or the well-meaning intentions of over-eager advisory boards or other constituencies. Guides can be done by professionals or produced in-house if there is sufficient staff expertise. Any visual identity guide will need to be periodically reviewed and updated.

Visitors taught about the natural and cultural values of protected area brands and their history, better appreciate the property they are visiting as well as the organisation charged with its management. Specifically, this involves explaining in plain language what the functions of the brand are and why a visitor should care (Keller, 2008). Awareness and understanding fosters brand stewardship. Yet, it is uncommon to find an explanation of the values of a protected area brand, such as World Heritage, prominently displayed in language that resonates emotionally with the visitor. It is also rare to find this information in more than one location within the designated site. Thus, if the visitor misses the single opportunity to read about the brand values, an opportunity has been lost. It is worthwhile to place such valuable information in more than one location on a property.

In the case of World Heritage, far too often the traditional bronze plaque is the only explanation of brand values found on-site. Even when placed in a prominent position, the plaque generally does not pique a visitor's curiosity and is frequently walked past with no more than a glance. In other instances, brand meaning is conveyed by extracting text from the World Heritage Convention and placing it on a sign. This text rarely connects emotionally with the average visitor. Not often enough is the Convention text simplified to be engaging enough for a visitor to remember the values of the World Heritage brand (King, 2010).

Communication and interpretive plans should include identifying strategies to transmit the brand values of the

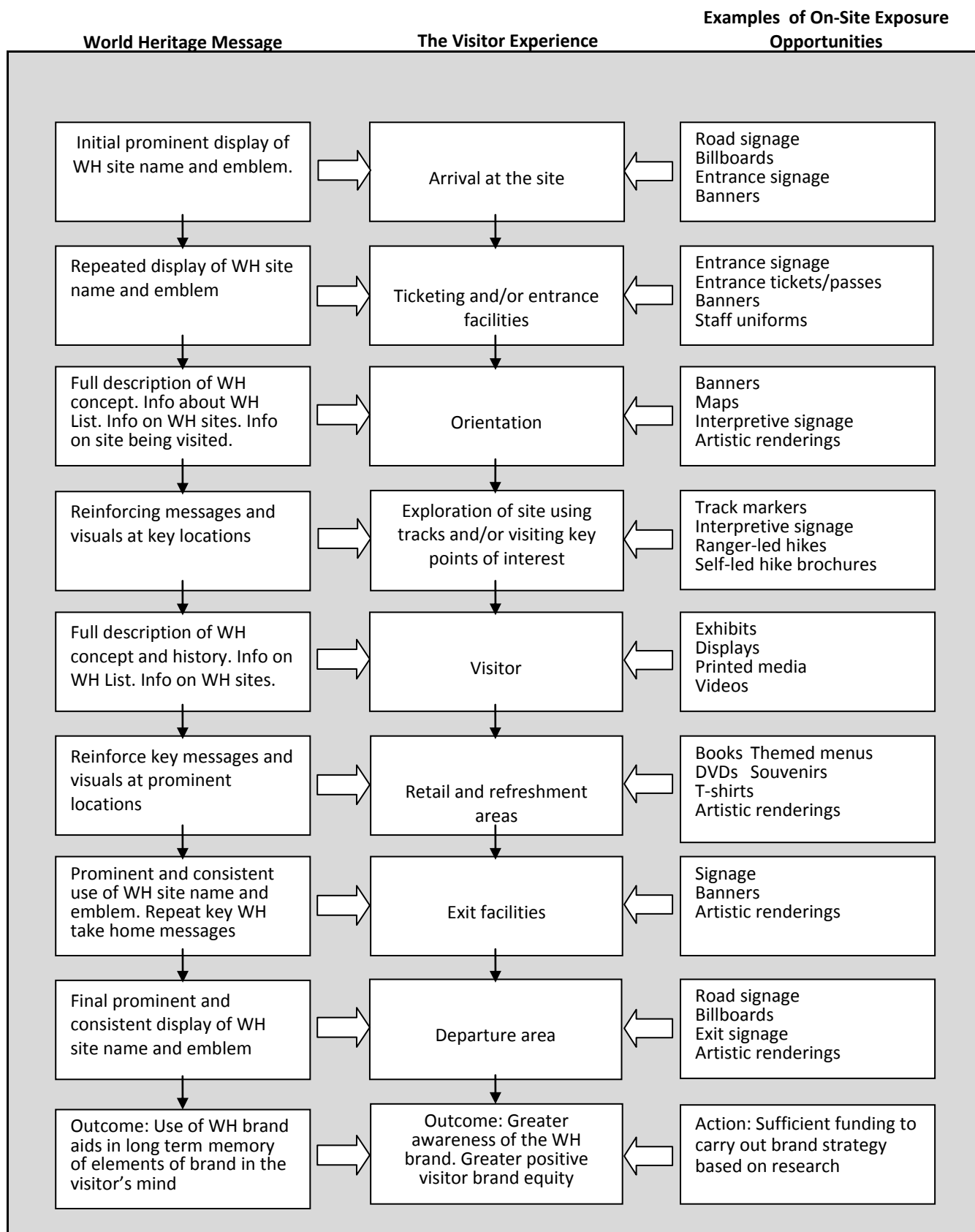


Figure 1. The Brand Equity Development Model for Protected Areas illustrates how to design a visitor's prominent, consistent and repeated exposure to a protected area brand during an on-site visit. Source, King (2011)

park to constituencies. Recent research in the field of persuasive communications (c.f. Ham et al., 2007; Curtis et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010) will assist in this task.

Growing positive brand equity means linking a visitor's emotional experiences on-site with the brand possessed by the protected area. Positive brand equity forms the basis for behaviours protected area managers want to encourage such as public donations, in-kind contributions, volunteerism, self-policing, grassroots support and advocacy for any protected area carrying the brand. However, to maximize the benefits a protected area brand can bestow upon a property, the visitor must first be aware of the brand (King, 2010).

Too often management does not capitalize on the opportunities to appropriately transmit their brand to the visitor at visitor contact points, thereby slowing down the process of growing positive brand equity. Managers have the greatest control of this situation inside the protected areas under their charge. The Brand Equity Development Model (King, 2011), shown in Figure 7, provides a general template for developing brand awareness, teaching brand meaning and growing positive brand equity as a visitor moves through a generic protected area during the course of a visit. The model maps a visitor's movement through a site and identifies points of visitor contact while presenting a suggested brand exposure process on what types of messages to communicate and locations where they could potentially be transmitted. Although the World Heritage brand is used as the example in the model, any protected area brand could be inserted.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDING PROTECTED AREAS

All protected areas possess a brand, whether managers have deliberately constructed one and are currently managing it or not. Within the context of achieving the Aichi Target 11, there are some unique challenges for protected area brands. These are summarized below.

1. *Lack of knowledge about key protected area brands.* IUCN's six categories of protected areas have varying degrees of public brand awareness. For example, national park and wilderness are probably the most familiar of the IUCN's categories. Other categories such as protected landscape/seascape and habitat management area most likely have little public awareness or understanding. Since many of the areas established to meet Aichi Target 11 are likely to be one of these less well-known categories, guidelines for a

branding strategy to develop strong and consistent public images and communicate possible visitor experiences is essential to their gazetting and management, and needs to be developed at the international level and coordinated on a national level.

2. *Negative brand image among some constituencies.* Gazetting protected areas is often the culmination of a broad and frequently contentious public dialogue about conservation, impacts on local people and the level of commitment to the environment and international conventions. Some protected area brands within specific localities may develop a negative image amongst some constituencies. This situation will need to be mitigated as much as reasonably possible to further Aichi Target 11.
3. *Conflicting brand images between agencies and the private sector.* Managers charged with the protection of the natural heritage develop and maintain a brand image, but so do private businesses established around the property. These businesses may develop a brand image that distinctly conflicts with the protected areas brand image, causing not only confusion among local residents and potential visitors, but also influencing development of inappropriate expectations.

In contrast, developing a consistent, well-recognized brand, such as World Heritage or national park can help communicate the importance of preserving our natural and cultural heritage and demonstrate the relevancy of those sites to humankind. Within this context, there are several opportunities for developing and using brands that can jumpstart these objectives. For example:

1. *Implementation of brand plans between managers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) at the national, regional and local level.* As new protected areas are gazetted, opportunities are created for protected area managers to work with DMOs to synchronize their brand messaging to create stronger protected area brands.
2. *Licensing items using the brand.* Managers may wish to license items for sale (such as T-shirts, caps and patches and products from the protected area) so they not only control how the brand is used, but also gain revenues to support the management of their site.
3. *Collaborate on brand usage between agencies and private protected areas.* Private protected areas will play an important role in achieving Aichi Target 11. These businesses will want to use well-recognized and highly valued protected area brands such as wilderness or game reserve to help secure the tourism dollars that

help make the management of their private protected area a viable proposition. It will be important for management agencies to develop workable relationships with those developing private protected areas to ensure the integrity of the brand being used and that the meanings conveyed are consistent.

CONCLUSION

The success of Aichi Target 11 of the Convention on Biological Conservation is intimately linked with the level of awareness, understanding, support and activism among constituencies concerning the benefits provided by protected areas and the need for more of them. The strategic management of a protected area brand, such as World Heritage or national park, can help transmit the importance of preserving our natural and cultural heritage while demonstrating the relevancy of such sites to humankind by emotionally connecting people with these places.

By using simple branding strategies that build brand awareness, teach brand meaning and grow positive brand equity over time, managers can not only engage visitor emotions and prompt preferred behaviours, but also help foster stewardship of the protected sites under their care. To ensure the consistent presentation of the brand over time, a visual identity guide for the protected area brand should be implemented. Additionally, brand placement and how brand values will be communicated to the visitor, should be carefully designed to ensure consistent and repeated exposure during an on-site visit.

To aid protected area managers in determining how to use their brands to their maximum benefit, future research needs to closely examine the dimensions of visitor brand awareness and knowledge. Specifically, these studies could include aspects such as researching the effects of brands on visitor attitudes and behaviours and what persuasive communications could be implemented to maximize the impact of protected area brands and their values among various constituencies. Developing appropriate benchmarks within properties and across countries is another way to determine which methods are most effective while identifying properties that could use further assistance in transmitting their brand values.

Without question, formidable challenges lie ahead in meeting Aichi Target 11. However, improving protected area branding strategies to increase stewardship among constituencies is one way to help meet the challenge.

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RESUMEN

Con la complejidad y la intensidad de los recursos necesarios para gestionar los parques, los administradores de áreas protegidas dependen cada vez más de la participación comunitaria en el ejercicio de la administración. Para cumplir con los propósitos de la Meta 11 del Convenio sobre la Diversidad Biológica, miles de nuevas áreas protegidas deberán declararse oficialmente. Este aumento dramático en el número de áreas protegidas a nivel mundial intensificará de manera significativa la dependencia de los administradores en la participación comunitaria para la protección y gestión de los parques. Una herramienta de gestión subutilizada para conectar de manera sostenible al público con los parques es la imagen de marca. La marca característica de un área protegida puede despertar emociones, evocar creencias personales y estimular los comportamientos favorecidos por los administradores cuando sus valores básicos están adecuadamente expresados. Sin embargo, la administración no suele explotar al máximo el potencial de estas marcas, limitando así los beneficios tangibles e intangibles que se podrían obtener con solo observar unas sencillas prácticas de comercialización. En este artículo se describen tres prácticas fundamentales –fortalecer la percepción de marca, enseñar el significado de la marca y aumentar la imagen de marca en el tiempo– que son aplicables a los objetivos de todo administrador de áreas protegidas. Estratégicamente desplegada, la imagen de marca desempeña un papel fundamental en la sostenibilidad de los parques y las áreas protegidas.

RÉSUMÉ

Du fait de la complexité et de l'intensité des ressources nécessaires pour gérer les parcs, les gestionnaires d'aires protégées se basent de plus en plus sur leurs circonscriptions pour assumer la responsabilité d'une gestion avisée. Afin de satisfaire aux intentions de l'Objectif 11 de la Convention sur la diversité biologique, des milliers de nouvelles aires protégées devront être reconnus officiellement. Cette augmentation considérable du nombre d'aires protégées dans le monde renforcera significativement la dépendance des gestionnaires vis-à-vis de leurs circonscriptions, obligeant celles-ci à être activement impliquées dans la protection et la gestion des parcs. La valeur de la marque est un outil de gestion sous-utilisé pour connecter durablement les individus aux parcs. En effet, les marques d'aires protégées peuvent faire appel aux émotions, évoquer des croyances personnelles et provoquer des comportements que les gestionnaires préfèrent lorsque les valeurs centrales de la marque sont correctement exprimées. Cependant, ceux-ci n'utilisent pas la plupart du temps ces marques au maximum de leur potentiel, limitant ainsi les avantages tangibles et intangibles qu'ils pourraient en tirer s'ils suivaient des pratiques de marketing assez simples. Cet article souligne trois pratiques fondamentales en termes de marque – renforcer la sensibilisation à la marque, enseigner la signification de la marque, et améliorer positivement la valeur de la marque avec le temps – qui sont applicables aux objectifs de chaque gestionnaire d'aire protégée. Une marque stratégiquement déployée joue en effet un rôle essentiel dans la durabilité des parcs et des aires protégées.