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Does Edmonton need a Brand?

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Successful corporations spend thousands if not millions of dollars creating a brand. They understand that it's essential for the public to know who they are and what they're about. What's our brand? In a few words or less, what describes Edmonton and why someone would want to travel or live here?

Vancouver is stunningly beautiful with great shopping and less severe weather. Calgary hosts one of Canada's greatest summer parties, boasts a more robust downtown with massive indoor walkways and towers that greatly out number ours, not to mention that most flights connect there. Toronto is the financial capital of Canada and one city that all American's understand without qualifying it with a country.

What about Edmonton? Don't get me wrong. I love this city. I was born and raised here and will always call this city home. I will defend our virtues until my dying day. I've even been called one of our city's greatest cheerleaders. But as I travelled Canada this spring on my book tour and am heading back on the road, I ponder, within a word or two, what makes us distinctly unique and sums up the crux of our city? I'm often left with "our great quality of life". That doesn't stack up well in defense of E-town with the rest of the world.

Due to size, population and many other factors, bringing Vancouver and Toronto into comparison is unfair. Although, during my travels, I was shocked to learn that other than housing prices, most goods and services were less expensive than those of Edmonton. Why, with a provincial sales tax should cab rides, fine and casual dining, gas prices and so much more cost less than in Alberta?

The fairest model of success comparable to our city, I believe, is Calgary. Although we excel in so many areas above our neighbours to the south, they have much to teach us.

During many recent visits to Calgary, I was pleasantly surprised with a number of their advantages. Whether navigating their well thought out ring roads, massive indoor walkways connecting countless towers, or their ability to keep their downtown core thriving after hours and on weekends. Stampede Park, the never-ending Stampede spirit, their softened water and of course, the benefit of having a true international airport are just a few enviable attributes.

Most noticeable however, in examining what Calgary has that we don't, in my opinion, is a brand. It seems as though this city operates more as a corporation, serving their businesses and creating policies that support a culture and spirit as opposed to simply managing a municipality. This brand, whether it starts and flourishes with Stampede, the massive party that has put Calgary on the map or whether it's something else, it's palatable as Calgarians have a sense

of pride and boldness that's not as clearly evident in Edmonton.

Edmonton is known for so much, but if asked to describe our brand, what we're all about, our essence, I wonder if the message would be succinct with all Edmontonians? If our city were to think more like a corporation with mission statements and policies clearly communica in a unified message to its citizens, could we one day too be describ for something specific?

One always finds what they're looking for. There is much that Edmonton needs to improve upon and also thousands of good reas to entice travelers and residents to our great City of Champions. Bu a few words or less, how do we describe what we're about to our citizens and outsiders?

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