Christine Osazuwa

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Baltimore Brand Image Analysis

Negative Brand Image & Media Representation

Baltimore has had to deal with a negative image for years that was only exacerbated by HBO's *The Wire*. In 1993, the homicide rate in the city peaked at 353 murders and has seen a rapid decline, hitting its lowest in 2011, at only 196 homicides (ReportSee Inc., 2012). Over the years, Baltimore has seen an influx of visitors to the city, with a primary focus on The Inner Harbor. As the harbor only spans a few miles, visitors and residents both have to eventually go beyond the harbor but there is still a resounding fear of neighborhoods beyond the downtown area.

Unfortunately, unlike many major cities that have a wide array of media representation (*e.g.* Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago), Baltimore's most well known depiction is *The Wire*. As a port town on the eastern seaboard, the city's biggest competitors are not large cities like the aforementioned but rather neighboring cities with similar populations such as DC and Boston. Another comparable city based on proximity is the more populous city, Philadelphia.

Demographics & Survey Biases

For this survey, 86% of responders were Caucasian with an average age of 26 years old. Survey takers were almost evenly split by gender. Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed have completed 4 years of higher education or more. Responders' average income was $33,900. Ninety-four percent of responders live in Maryland with 82% from Baltimore City or County.

This survey was distributed exclusively online, thus skews younger than Baltimore's actual demographics. 29.5% of Baltimore's population is between 18 and 34 years old, with a median age of 33 years old. Median household income is $39,788, with individual's median income at 23,326. Only 31% of Baltimore's population, overall, is Caucasian.

Though the general Baltimore population is primarily African American, the most gentrified neighborhoods have a demographic that aligns closest with the survey respondents. These neighborhoods include South Baltimore, Canton, Inner Harbor/Federal Hill, Greater Roland Park/Poplar Hill, Medfield/Hampden/Woodberry; all of which have the highest percentage of Caucasian residents and the fewest households with children under 18.

The demographic of the survey is primarily white, middle class educated individuals residing in the Baltimore Metro area with a strong preference for urban living. Most respondents identify closely with the "Innovators" VALS type in which sophisticated and unique tastes and variety is important. Most that responded were not likely to follow trends but would rather discover new brands that align with their current tastes.

As an assessment of competitors, this survey is biased, as most takers are Baltimore residence. Because of this, more weight should be placed on answers regarding Baltimore rather than as a comparison to other cities. Results regarding Boston should be considered least accurate because of its lack of proximity in comparison to DC & Philadelphia, therefore; respondents had much less familiarity.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths & Competitive Advantage

Baltimore's main competitive advantage is its low cost of living, which is essential to those upwardly mobile. The highlighted neighborhoods on Visit Baltimore (*e.g.* Inner Harbor, Mount Vernon) have a demographic predominantly of individuals between 18 to 34, therefore; it would make sense that that demographic should be targeted and encouraged to grow that segment that has been essential to Baltimore's gentrification.

Weaknesses

Baltimore's greatest weakness is its actual and perceived crime rate. Though its ranking on "Most Dangerous Cities" lists have declined over the past few years, it's not as apparent overall. Anecdotally, there have been strides to improve safety within the city but with heavy focus on the higher median income areas. Unfortunately, in order to improve the city, those residing outside of these gentrified neighborhoods must also feel safe and trusting of law enforcement.

Opportunities

Within the "Young Achievers" market segment, which is most represented in this survey, Baltimore's official marketing does not directly target these consumers. A new social media campaign entitled Visit My Baltimore has been unveiled recently but with little engagement, as this time. Both Visit Baltimore and BaltimoreCity.gov direct their focus primarily towards families. While Visit Baltimore is geared towards tourists, BaltimoreCity.gov focuses on current residents with issues like youth development and public schools. Unfortunately, the needs for the "Young Achievers" market segment differ from that of families and older market segments. This is the great divide between the general Baltimore population and those residing in the previously mentioned higher median income neighborhoods. As schools and safety are less of an issue in

those neighborhoods other less fundamental needs become prevalent such as arts and entertainment.

A subset of the “Young Achievers” market segment is those attending college. As people in Baltimore spend more money on education than Philadelphia, DC & Boston, it is clear that a big draw for the city is its colleges and universities (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Large segments of potential new residents are those of college age. Those within this demographic have much different needs than the city's current marketing targets.

Threats & Baltimore’s Current Target Audience

The currently highlighted events on Baltimore’s tourism website, *Visit Baltimore*, include The National Aquarium, The Maryland Science Center and several Fine Arts Museums (all destinations within 1 mile of each other. This is a clear oversight of the many other experiences Baltimore has to offer. There is an especially large inconsistency with current residents without children—26% of Baltimore households.

The *Visit Baltimore* Facebook page is slightly more youth oriented in activities and events but still focused in an area that has already gathered enough attention. Within the survey, many polled, when given an open-ended question note “the Inner Harbor” as the biggest association with Baltimore even for those that live within the city. Having such a limited focus gives competitors an opportunity to exploit this and highlight their more diverse offerings. A city must be more than one attraction.

Market Penetration

Currently there is an ambiguity towards Baltimore that needs to be addressed. Targeting current customers and informing them of what the city has to offer could gather loyalty for the city. The City of Baltimore's Citizen's Survey identifies whether current residence they would recommend Baltimore as a place to live. Only 57% said they were likely or very likely to make this recommendation. Forty percent of people choose to stay in Baltimore because of proximity to their friends and family not what the city itself has. If the current residents see more value in the city, they may be more likely to attract outsiders.

Because of the media, market development would be difficult, as *The Wire* has made Baltimore's mass public perception negative. The penetration strategy should be similar to Brooklyn in which word of mouth aided in gentrifying the area and made it viewed as safe.

Positioning Statement

To upwardly mobile young, educated residents, Baltimore is the city of accessibility and affordability. Baltimore competes mainly with Philadelphia, Washington DC and Boston, by providing unique neighborhoods, arts and culture, at low costs because Baltimore is a city to grow and flourish at all life stages.

Brand character: tough, quirky, down-to-Earth, spirited, charming and open-minded

Positive Brand Image

For those that live within the city, they are aware that Baltimore is more than "like The Wire". This is one of the few reasons why any positive brand image exists for Baltimore outside of the city. No marketing campaign can work without positive brand image but attempting to pander to those outside of the city with this preconception could seem insulting to those that actually live

in more impoverished neighborhoods and face similar challenges to the fictional television show. Currently only 56% of residents feel safe in their neighborhoods at night. It is not until the bare minimum is achieved throughout the majority of the city can Baltimore truly excel. In order to not alienate its residents, Baltimore should focus internally then proceed from there.

It is arguable that those not in need of direct government assistance do not need to be targeted by Baltimore marketing efforts, as they are self-sufficient. In order to achieve the goals of Visit Baltimore: to increase tourism and to bring in more permanent residence, the city's less vital features have to be made apparent to insiders, as well as the more pressing safety and security issues. Eventually outsiders will take notice that Baltimore has more to offer than the bare minimum once all its residence have embraced that fact.

Brand Personality

In addition to Aaker's Brand Personality items, several additions were included. Quirky, friendly, innovative, blue-collar, and open-minded were words that would resonate with residents about Baltimore, both negatively and positively.

Baltimore is a blue-collar city that is known to be tough, rugged, but also sincere. Deemed "charm city," Baltimore has a lack of pretention in comparison to neighboring cities such as DC. Due to the affordable and sustainable restaurants and thriving arts districts, Baltimore has an advantage over many other blue-collar cities such as Pittsburgh, but the low cost of living with all those offerings makes gives Baltimore a distinction over other major cities.

There is a growing tech scene in Baltimore that many, including residents, may be unaware of. Survey responders gave Baltimore low scores on "Imaginative," "Up-to-Date," and "Innovative." A larger awareness of the growing innovation would add positively to the overall

impression of Baltimore. Unfortunately, it may deter from the current brand image of easily accessible for all and pull Baltimore into the shadow of other tech hubs, thus giving off a more "cold" vibe.

Ad Campaigns

The other cities discussed in this survey all have overarching ad campaigns for the city. Philadelphia has a tourism strategy called "With Love, Philadelphia XOXO." This aligns with Philadelphia's ranking second highest in arts & cultural events. Washington DC has a government-sponsored campaign for Transgender and Gender Identity Respect, which also explains why DC is ranked highest in the LGBT friendly category. Boston has an ad campaign about sustainability, which aligns with their high ranking on sustainability on the survey.

Baltimore lacks a cohesive ad campaign and instead has fragmented initiatives throughout the city and mid-Atlantic regions. The word-of-mouth approach may be most effective initially as a more positive brand image needs to be acquired before an overall ad campaign can really make changes for the city.

Conclusion

Maryland is known as "the Southernmost Northern state" and the "Northern most Southern state." Baltimore is a continuous example of the "best of both worlds" that many other cities do not have to offer. If Baltimore first deals with its safety issues, it can be positioned as a city of convenience. With low prices, high walkability, many arts districts, and proximity to many other major cities, Baltimore can offer so much to residents and tourists.

The city, overall, focuses primarily on families without regard for the thousands of students attending colleges, the hundreds of aspiring doctors doing their residencies at the world-class

hospitals, and the influx of recent graduates working at startups tech companies. The choices available for the Innovators 18 to 34 years old are many but are almost unknown within the city and unheard-of outside of it.

Baltimore is a city full of untapped potential and boundless personality. If Baltimore can provide safety and better schools for families and embrace the entertainment and culture for the young adults, the city can work its way towards an all-inclusive destination rather than "just" The Inner Harbor or "just" like The Wire.

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