

Branding Eugene

North By Northwest of Normal

1-31-07

I was at the city council meeting the night Rob Hankins sold them the tee shirt he was wearing that proclaimed Eugene, "The World's Greatest City for the Arts and Outdoors." He drew his line in the air, so to speak, and all the chickens were mesmerized, patriotically aroused but clueless that they were being branded by a master - who it turned out was about to leave for a better paying job in Ohio. I quickly checked for my wallet and was reminded of the pre-Google encyclopedia salesmen who always began their phone pitch with, "Do you believe in education in the home?"

I'd say **no, I do not**, and the smart ones would hang up quickly and move on to more tractable territory. But if they persevered - call it level 2 - I'd hit them up for a contribution to my campaign to end telephone solicitation.

And if they clung to my ear - level 3 - I'd talk them down with an uninterrupted diatribe about our abject failure to support art and music in our schools or to insist on a Eugene Arts Center downtown in the World's Greatest City for the Arts and Outdoors.

Most can't stand the truth of this and clearly don't want to pay the price, so...

Click!



The Triple Bottom Line

My point is that the best defense against a level-three sales job such as the Hankin's pitch is to be prepared with some real convictions and an authentic, secure sense of one's own identity. Homer tells us that putting wax in the ears at the right time can also help dampen the oh-so-sweet lure of the siren's song. And remember that it's a big mistake to turn your back when the branding iron is hot. Looking the other way, you're at the mercy of the "music man" when he comes to town. And he'll leave you holding your big trombone.

Getting branded is much like getting a community tattoo. But getting unbranded is more painful because there is no instant laser removal for logos that are more than skin deep. Letterhead, tee shirts, e-mails and the like that are on the loose are almost impossible to rein in. Worst of all is that reader-board emblazoned in the mind. **The Worlds...** See, there it goes again and again and...

How does one become unbranded? It requires (at minimum) a twelve-step program.

1. First you have to be willing to admit to an excess of aspiration and grandiosity and be willing to stand up and confess: "My name is Eugene and I've been claiming that I'm the world's greatest..." Remember, we started out as **Skinner's Mud Hole**.
2. You must be able to make fun of your slogan and the business of branding.

Eugene, where slogans overeat.

3. Go ahead; vent your cynicism. It's important to get it all out. First you have to get clean and sober in order to land North by Northwest of Normal.

Home of pretty good streets.

Developus interruptus.

A little above Butt Ugly.

Kitty-corner from reality.

Where democracy rains.

Home of the historic Eugene Millrace Cover-up.

Downtown Eugene, what doesn't happen here stays here.

4. I know it's far more fun to be nasty, but try to think back to who you were when you were who you are:

Eugene City

Tracktown, U.S.A.

Home of the University of Oregon and the Oregon Ducks

Home of Her Slimeiness the Slug Queen & the Oregon Country Fair

River City

5. Vigorously challenge and repel such myths as,

The People's Republic of Eugene

Leaf, Libertinism and the Purfuit of Hippyness. Remember when all the s's looked like f's and there was a Bill of Rights?

The VW Bus Graveyard

Point out that this first slogan comes from people who don't really believe in participatory democracy because it inconveniences their limbic love affair with the severing of raw resources whatever the social and ecological costs.

Point out that the second comes mostly from the dyslexic-minded who took the slogan, Make Love Not War, seriously. These are the same people who still haven't noticed that the pursuit of colonialism is backward or that their "new way forward" is really the reverse.

Re: VW buses. Recycle the peace signs, which are needed once again.

6. Avoid paying out thousands for "**Be all that you can be,**" and consider the more Eugenean,

Bike all that you can bike.

7. Vigorously remove the negatives, such as

Not Springfield,

Valley of denial, (de-Nile) and especially the (cough!, cough!) tear inducing,

Field Burning Catcher of the Rye.

8. Don't try to kid a kidder as in: **More Beautiful than the Amalfi Coast.** Besides, the Country Fair is the world's greatest (ephemeral) city for the arts and outdoors.
9. Now list some more civic strengths and reasonable aspirations. O.K., even some unreasonable ones. To borrow from the poet: "Ah, but a [city's] reach should exceed [its] grasp. Or what's a heaven for?" (R. Browning)
10. Dwell on and draw forth the highest aspirations, but remember step one. One of mine would be to take the good plans we write for our neighborhoods, transportation and local resources and not just roll them over when big money makes big moves. Another concerns art and music.
11. Accentuate the best of Eugene, and follow through on those aspirations that make a motto more than flack and air.

We talk a lot here civically because we're smart.

If you've got an hour, you're in the Cascades or on the Coast.

Our schools are better than your schools.

12. Now you're ready to try again. Drop those big pants on that triple-bottom-line, reach for the moon, and turn around.

Jerry Diethelm