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BRANDING THE BAHAMAS

How a Minneapolis design firm helped make these “forgotten” islands a tourist draw again.

Remember the Bahamas? A few years ago, the island nation, which stretches across the Atlantic off the eastern coast of Florida towards Cuba, found itself losing tourists. September 11 certainly was a factor. But the number of visitors to the Bahamas had already been declining. The reasons? Increased competition from other warm-weather locales, and an indifferent attitude that had infected the ranks of service employees. Because the 23 inhabited islands that make up the Bahamas derive more than 60 percent of their overall gross domestic product from tourism, the situation was critical.

“[The Bahamas] were really kind of lost amid a host of sun-and-sand destinations,” says Tricia Davidson, managing partner of Minneapolis-based Duffy & Partners. “They needed something more encompassing than advertising.”

The Bahamians first worked with Duffy some years back, when it was part of Minneapolis-based advertising and branding agency Fallon Worldwide. Rather than creating a new ad campaign, Davidson saw education of the work force as the first task. That became even clearer when she attended her first meeting with 65 clients, who represented hotels, restaurants, and the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism.

The education process was a coordinated effort between Duffy & Partners and a variety of government and business agencies, all

working to help people from taxi drivers to employees of luxury hotels understand the importance of customer service and its direct economic impact. They also launched an effort to reconnect with young Bahamian adults that had begun to turn away from tourism as a career.

Duffy’s branding efforts focused, in part, on the variety of experiences that the Bahamas offers. Islands like New Providence, where the capital Nassau is located, and Grand Bahama Island have a “personality” that is more extroverted, with nightlife, gambling, and shopping. San Salvador, by contrast, is smaller and quieter—its draws are history, fishing, and diving. Duffy also created a “brand book” that serves as a guide for internal communications and training. The book has been widely distributed to island businesses and government agencies.

According to Davidson, “If the people regained a sense of pride, the rest of the world would see,” and in-

creased tourism would follow. So far, that appears to be the case. According to official Bahamas tourism statistics, at the end of 2001, the country saw just slightly more than 4 million visitors “landed” by air and sea. By 2004, there were more than 5 million such visitors.

The Duffy-designed logo for the Bahamas plays off the nation’s variety and color.

Duffy is now planning an expansion of the branding effort throughout the islands. This will include a signage program with common brand design elements, with distinctive elements for each island. Duffy also is designing uniforms that carry the brand image forward. These uniforms will be worn by government workers in the tourism industry. In addition, Duffy is creating branded merchandise for re-



tail establishments.

“There is a unique truth about every place and every brand,” Davidson says. “And that’s the opportunity.” ■

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