

DESTINATION BRANDING & TOURISM

Claiming *the ground*

Positioning a tourist destination against the competition: what makes people choose one territory over another, and how to make that known.

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A destination that looks like every other one exists for no one.

Snow, peaks, authenticity, a way of life: open ten mountain-destination brochures or ten tourist-office websites, and you'll often read the same words. In a saturated market, looking like everyone else amounts to existing for no one.

This guide is written for tourist office directors and marketing managers at destinations, resorts and territories who want to break out of interchangeable communication. It offers a method for identifying what makes a destination genuinely different, and for making that known without piling on adjectives.

Inside, you'll find why most destinations look alike, the three pillars that make a destination matter, a five-step framework for building a positioning, a list of concrete reflexes and illustrative examples.

01

Why most destinations look alike

Five reasons explain why so many tourist territories end up sounding just like their neighbors.

01. The same vocabulary for everyone

"Authentic," "unspoiled," "great outdoors": these words no longer differentiate anything, they have become the industry's default language.

02. Describing the place rather than the experience

Listing facilities, the number of ski runs, rooms or trails says nothing about how it feels to actually be there.

03. Shared governance that dilutes the message

When every stakeholder in the territory wants to be represented, elected officials, accommodation providers, ski-lift operators, shopkeepers, the final message satisfies everyone and speaks to no one.

04. Implicit comparison with the neighbor

Positioning yourself in reaction to a competing destination, more authentic than, less crowded than, keeps the audience stuck in comparison instead of creating a preference of its own.

05. The absence of proof

A brand promise with no concrete experience to back it up, an event, a local figure, a craft, remains a slogan, not a positioning.

The three pillars of a destination that matters

Three pillars that feed into one another. Neglecting one weakens the other two.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT
YOU

Reputation

Built over time, protected continuously, evolving with every season, every review, every news story.

WHAT YOU ACTUALLY ARE

Identity

Your distinctive traits, your history, what remains true even as the communication campaign changes.

WHAT PEOPLE FEEL

Perception

A subjective impression, shaped as much by the lived experience as by the touchpoints before the stay.

A five-step framework

From choosing the distinctive trait to measuring results, five steps structure a destination positioning built to last.

01. Choose

Choose a real distinctive trait rather than trying to represent everything. A territory cannot be both the destination of great calm and that of nonstop activity: better to commit to a clear choice than dilute a message to please every audience.

03. Tell the story

Build a narrative embodied by people, residents, professionals, visitors, rather than by superlatives. The destinations that leave a mark let real voices speak rather than adjectives.

05. Measure

Track indicators that go beyond raw visitor numbers: visitor origin, review feedback, the share of customers who return or recommend, qualified press coverage.

02. Prove

Back the promise with concrete proof: an emblematic local figure, a craft, an event, a measurable commitment. A promise with no proof remains a slogan.

04. Align

Make the same positioning hold across every touchpoint: website, social media, on-site welcome, signage, press relations. A gap between the online promise and the lived experience costs more than a modest promise kept.

03

Ten reflexes to keep in mind

Keep this within reach to build a positioning that holds from one season to the next.

☐

Choose a distinctive trait and repeat it. Rather than changing it with every campaign.

☐

Replace generic adjectives with concrete proof. Verifiable, dated, embodied.

☐

Involve a small number of local voices. Rather than seeking a consensus that dilutes the message.

☐

Tell a specific experience. Rather than listing facilities.

☐

Check the alignment between the website and the on-site welcome. The gap costs dearly in negative reviews.

☐

Track online reviews as an indicator of consistency. Not just of satisfaction.

☐

Accept not pleasing everyone. A clear positioning excludes as much as it attracts.

☐

Document what brings loyal visitors back. Often the best source of positioning.

☐

Coordinate the message with territory stakeholders before a crisis. Not during.

☐

Reassess the positioning every two or three years. Not with every change of team.

04

“A destination that speaks to everyone stays in no one's memory.”

01 Trying to represent the whole territory in a single message

The destination ends up representing no one in particular.

02 Copying the positioning of a successful destination

The audience quickly senses the lack of originality, and the comparison always favors the original.

03 Changing the message with every new season or new leadership

Consistency over time matters as much as the message itself.

05

Three positionings, for illustration

These situations are composite cases, built from profiles representative of the industry; they do not depict any specific territory.

MOUNTAIN RESORT

A mid-sized resort communicates on the same snow-and-scenery superlatives as its three direct competitors in the valley.

Response: identify a genuinely distinctive trait, a ski area geared toward families with recognized instruction, for example, prove it with testimonials from regulars, and commit to it even if that narrows the target audience.

COASTAL TOURIST OFFICE

A seaside tourist office repeats the same vocabulary as every neighboring coastal destination: beaches, sun, lazing about.

Response: build the narrative around a verifiable local craft, an oyster-farming industry, a sailing tradition, a culinary heritage, embodied by named people rather than by interchangeable scenery.

DEVELOPING RURAL TERRITORY

A little-known rural territory struggles to exist against destinations with much larger marketing budgets.

Response: give up competing on general name recognition, choose a narrow, well-defined audience, long-distance hikers, for example, and concentrate the proof and the story on that specific audience.

06

A destination that speaks to everyone stays in no one's memory.

The territories that stand out aren't the ones with the biggest communication budget.
They're the ones that chose a clear positioning and held it, season after season.

No territory should position itself alone, without an outside perspective.

Fifteen years supporting destinations and territory brands in demanding environments, from brand diagnosis to on-the-ground activation: The Stance is the strategic ally who helps your destination claim a place no one else occupies.

THE STANCE

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A destination positioning to clarify or bring to life? Let's talk.