A Branding Study Conducted by Rawle Murdy, the SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development at the University of South Carolina, and the University of South Carolina Beaufort

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“Bluffton’s a cool little town that is really undiscovered and really a hidden secret in the low country”
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Bluffton Past and Present

Established in the early 1800s as a summer refuge for plantation owners, Edith Inglesby conveyed Bluffton’s spirit in her Beaufort County retrospective with the local expression: “work hard, eat and drink…but keep the boat trim.” While striking the right work/life balance remains important to the residents of Bluffton, Inglesby’s insight also reflects the town’s inherent contradictions. Bluffton developed more slowly than proximal regions over the ensuing decades but has become today one of the Low Country’s fastest growing towns. While quintessentially Southern, Bluffton boasts an eclectic charm uniquely its own; local ambitions include preserving the area’s friendly, laid-back ambience while developing into a progressive, vibrant economy.

Though historically less celebrated than some of her prominent neighbors, Bluffton’s past also reflects these contradictions. Known for its serene beauty along with the placid tenor of the town, the area is most notably associated with The Bluffton Movement of 1844. Described as an early stand against taxation laws, this movement would set the stage for state secession ultimately to play out in Civil War. Prior to its recent territorial expansion, Bluffton was never a large community by contemporary standards. Nonetheless, early on Bluffton was noted for its cosmopolitan outlook attracting naturalists, artists, writers, and painters, and it continues to be a thriving haven for artists today.

One reason for this is that small town America is regaining its place as a central feature of contemporary culture. Once eclipsed by an influx of people to urban areas and the pursuit of fast-paced, technology-driven lifestyles, more recent trends suggest growing interest in slower-paced, authentic experiences associated with small-town communities and time spent in nature. The slow food movement for example, emphasizes local food sources and associated culinary traditions that unite communities. Such trends provide opportunities for visitors to reconnect with rural lifestyles, experience the outdoors, and enjoy the flavor and traditions of smaller-scale activities such as community festivals or farmers markets offering locally produced and hand-crafted goods.
These trends, though promising, necessarily take place against a backdrop of increasing globalization and a competitive international marketplace. As such towns must differentiate themselves from competitors as well as articulate a unique identity in order to succeed not only as places to visit but places in which future investment and development may also take place. Many smaller cities and towns claim to have spectacular scenery, good quality of life, friendly people, and a sound business infrastructure. As these attributes are no longer differentiators, towns also need a strong brand to attract people to visit, invest, live, work and play.

**Place Branding**

Dating from the late 19th century and the development of branded consumer goods, the American Marketing Association defines branding as ‘a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.’ Branding has since been applied to any entity that comprises a unified concept, story, personality or culture. Branding is also used as a policy instrument in planning and development.

In recent decades, place branding has eclipsed place image and destination marketing at national, regional and local scales. As an extension of place image, branding involves building equity in relation to a local identity. Expanding on destination marketing, branding objectives include creating name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and place brand associations. Ultimately, a brand should communicate the visceral experience of place. It should both define a community as well as mediate between the visitor and that community’s unique culture, encapsulated as it is within a particular landscape.

The branding of a place is not without its challenges, however, which likewise extends beyond creating a new logo or a compelling marketing campaign. Branding is built on a solid platform of research and planning, and ideally includes the perspectives of all community stakeholders: local business leaders, government representatives, residents and visitors. In the research process, core values of a place are identified.
A well-executed branding campaign may then serve to unite a community as well as reflect how it wishes to be perceived by the outside world. Finally, it should also serve as a guidepost for growth, defining both the nature and direction of a community’s future development.

**Bluffton’s Evolving Identity**

In 2006, The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce approached the town of Bluffton with the idea of developing signature brands to market southern Beaufort County. A branding project was subsequently completed that included Hilton Head Island, Daufuskie Island and Bluffton. The slogan for Bluffton was, “Discover Something Wonderful.” Hilton Head Island’s slogan was “Come Away with Me,” and Daufuskie’s slogan was “Daufuskie Island: The Paradise Beyond.”

The branding exercise was essentially a single campaign comprising three distinct elements. While the project accomplished the short-term goal of developing marketing materials for the three areas, the slogan for Bluffton was never fully incorporated into Town of Bluffton materials, neither was it embraced by local residents and business owners, many of whom were unaware that a formal brand identity had been established.

More recently, the need for a Bluffton brand evolved out of the Bluffton Town Council’s desire to direct its own economic future. The Town’s leadership crafted a vision for Bluffton that would transform the coastal village into a robust economy by attracting knowledge-based industries. The ultimate goal was to cultivate a local business environment that would allow residents and their children to find rewarding careers in Bluffton rather than having to seek them elsewhere. While economic development was the first priority, Bluffton town leaders were also aware that visitors may perceive Bluffton as the Lowcountry’s “middle child;” a quaint town sandwiched between the more well-known destination of Hilton Head Island or Savannah. Town leaders wanted Bluffton’s reputation to be distinctive and a tourist attraction in its own right, as well as a regional economic hub.
“we were a very well kept secret, and the secret started getting out”
Bluffton Town Council took a few risks to accomplish its vision. In 2012, Bluffton was the first non-metropolitan city in South Carolina to establish a business incubator, in partnership with Clemson University. The Don Ryan Center for Innovation is now an established pilot program to cultivate creative, technical and innovative small businesses region-wide. To date, it has incubated 16 local companies. Bluffton also attracted its first multi-million dollar company, CareCore National, LLC. The company is the nation’s largest specialty benefits management company and its clients include 30 of nation’s largest healthcare insurers. CareCore relocated to Bluffton in 2004 from Wappingers Falls, New York and is currently the town’s largest employer. In the interest of furthering economic development, the Town of Bluffton also established the Bluffton Public Development Corporation, an organization designated to negotiate with prospective businesses on behalf of Bluffton’s Town Council.

With these endeavors underway, Town Council members further made the case for a comprehensive branding campaign to support both tourism and economic development. Hilton Head Island – Bluffton Chamber of Commerce is the Town’s designated destination management and marketing organization. With A-Tax funds, the Town, under the Chamber’s direction, hired Rawle Murdy, a branding agency located in Charleston, South Carolina. The Bluffton branding campaign itself was subsequently launched by Rawle Murdy in partnership with researchers from the University of South Carolina Columbia/Beaufort. A committee of business and community leaders was also assembled as the Bluffton Branding Task Force to help guide the 6-month branding process.
The 2013 Bluffton Branding Campaign

The 2013 campaign had three key stages (see Figure 1). Stage 1 included a series of charettes with residents, and in-depth interviews with local decision-makers and key individuals. These were used to understand the core values in the community. A social media monitoring exercise was also undertaken to see what residents, visitors and others were saying about Bluffton online. Stage 2 included a competitor analysis, and a series of surveys targeted at local leaders, local business owners, potential business owners, visitors and area residents. These surveys were designed to refine perceptions around key concepts, including the perceived brand personality and attributes of Bluffton, as well as the prospects for economic development in the region. Finally Stage 3 comprised developing the written and visual components through which the new brand identity would be communicated.

Stage 1: Benchmark Establishment of Core Values

To establish the core values and paint a picture of the future, the research team devised a methodology based on the place branding and destination branding literature. They first conducted four charettes, each attended by 25-30 people. Charettes, intensive planning sessions where citizens, researchers and others collaborate on a vision for development, are often used in the development of place brands. They provide a forum for ideas and offer the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to the researchers. The four charettes were open to the public and were widely advertised through websites and blogs, e-mail blasts, newspapers, radio news programs and key town organizations. After an introduction to the process, participants were randomly divided into sub-groups for brand assessment and development exercises at two stations.

The first exercise explored the Bluffton experience through appreciative inquiry, which places emphasis on identifying strengths within an organization or community. The emphasis is on process rather than outcome, where participants help to guide researchers to insights that can then be communicated in a shared language. Researchers asked participants for words to describe Bluffton. Wordle was then used to generate “word clouds” from the text that is provided. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. Participants were also prompted to discuss their most memorable or favorite experiences in Bluffton – or, if they had family or friends visit Bluffton, to talk about the experiences they would recommend. Post-it note responses were grouped (by participants) to create themes about ‘the best of Bluffton’.
“(The rivers) are clean for swimming or for harvesting seafood.”
In the second exercise researchers used metaphors and association games to explore the brand personality of Bluffton. Participants were first asked to associate Bluffton with a celebrity by describing the ‘appearance’ and ‘personality’ of Bluffton. Such projective techniques are common in brand image research. Numerous pictures of Bluffton were then provided to participants (buildings, natural resources, traffic etc.) illustrating the unique tangible and intangible qualities of the community. For each image participants were asked to describe the picture, and tell a story about the image (such as event that was associated with that image). This type of projection technique is known as construction and is quite common in uncovering feelings, attitudes and motivations towards a brand. Participants were then given a small number of colored dots to place on the pictures that for them represented the ideal Bluffton, and least-desired Bluffton.

Finally, visioning exercises were used to create images and statements to help guide change in Bluffton. Visioning is widely used in creating images of the future to serve as goals or guides for planning decisions. Facilitators asked participants to close their eyes and imagine they were walking through their neighborhood as it should be fifteen years into the future. Participants recorded their visions in written or pictorial form and the group as a whole was asked to vote for their favorite. The group was then asked to make one positive, declarative one-sentence statements about how the community would be in the future.

The second part of the qualitative research involved conducting 36 in-depth interviews with key decision-makers and stakeholders in Bluffton – people who had a deep sense of connection with the community, such as the Mayor or the newspaper editor. Names of potential respondents were provided by the Town of Bluffton, and they were recruited by telephone or by email. Questions again were based on the place branding literature, and explored quality of life issues in Bluffton, the current and desired image of the town, the economic development opportunities in Bluffton, and a vision of the future. Interviews took between 40 and 60 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed for analysis using NVivo software.
Results: Charettes

Overall, respondents were clearly engaged and passionate about the Bluffton community. A Bluffton personality that is strongly linked to the Old Town, the beauty of the river, and the rustic, relaxed, laid-back (but caring) nature of the people was identified. Preserving the Old Town’s unique characteristics was highlighted. In this respect cultural and historical features, as well as more artistic and eccentric elements associated with the Old Town were noted. A strong bond with local businesses such as art galleries and activities such as the farmers market was also suggested. Respondents further emphasized preservation of the natural environment. Quality of life in Bluffton was described in terms of recreational opportunities, educational standards and job opportunities. Figure 2 shows the word clouds generated when participants discussed the current and future quality of life in Bluffton.

The town’s proximity to Hilton Head is clearly important for the quality of life for current and potential residents, and residents envisage having a healthy, thriving, diverse community, and one that maintains the local charm for residents. Whilst recognizing the importance of tourism, participants would prefer economic development that emphasizes soft/clean jobs (technology, health care, education, and aerospace). Such development should be closely tied with the quality of education, sustainability, infrastructure, and the natural and economic environment.

Five common themes emerged from the charette sessions:

1) The people of Bluffton were described as truly “Southern” in terms of hospitality but also “funky”, “quirky” and “unique”, with an appreciation for diversity and integration.

2) The Bluffton area was described in terms of the natural environment. That is, natural resources of Bluffton were described as being a key component of residents’ quality of life. People want to protect the local May River and see manufacturing jobs as threatening the natural beauty of the area.

3) The town character was a key theme with respondents demonstrating appreciation for the Old Town, its preservation, and the importance of relationship with the “New Bluffton”.

4) Arts, festivals and activities were also important to respondents, and viewed as an avenue for self-expression as well as community bonding.

5) The final theme centered on economic development. Respondents expressed distaste at the idea of large manufacturing plants moving into the area. Instead, they expressed a desire to attract technology, medicine, and research and development industries.
“Tennessee Williams would have a wonderful time here. He would probably write...it’s sultry. There’s something romantic.”
“The May River defines our community”
Favorite and memorable experiences in Bluffton were associated with attributes such as the May River, Old Town, the farmers market, the environment, festivals and oyster roasts. Emotional engagement included references to community, respect, family and friendliness. Attributes describing Bluffton included beauty, peacefulness, artistic, green, safe and progressive. Descriptors for future quality of life included opportunities, education, jobs, preservation and development. Finally, economic terms to describe economic development included technology, were clean industry, white-collar jobs and research. Visitors identified Old Town, Hilton Head, the May River, local restaurants, churches, shops, golf courses, the farmers market and the Oyster Factory as points of pride.

Celebrities most often associated with Bluffton included Jimmy Buffet, Andy Griffith, Will Rogers and Sandra Bullock. Characteristics associated with these celebrities included: honesty, unpretentiousness, smarts, graciousness, thoughtfulness, caring, a sense of humor, creativity, tolerance and a free and unique spirit. Other frequently cited descriptors for Bluffton’s personalities were: easy going and laid back; low key and relaxing; caring, big hearted or giving; kind and friendly; historic; small town or rural; fun or funny; and nature or environment.

The other project technique using pictures, images elicited discussions of hidden historical and recreational treasures in Bluffton, as well as the natural beauty of the area. Popular images amongst participants were those associated with the Old Town and the May River, whereas images of big-box development (e.g. Wal-Mart) were the least liked images overall. However, when discussing the future, participants acknowledged that targeted economic development was critical for Bluffton’s survival and growth. So-called ‘New Town’ Bluffton, therefore, was described as integral to future prosperity and local quality of life. Visioning exercises also suggest that Bluffton residents would like to see a future full of trees, and multi-generation gatherings in parks, the Old Town, local restaurants and bars. Residents envision a future that emphasizes the natural environment and enjoyment of it through, for example, expanded pedestrian walkways as well as architecture that reflects the Low Country and remains essentially unchanged.
Results: In-depth Interviews
Themes uncovered in the in-depth interviews tended to mirror those of the charrettes. Overall and important to the quality of life of residents is the quality of the May River, the proximity to Hilton Head, a good education, job opportunities, recreational resources, and the natural environment. The most important features of Bluffton that would attract new residents, according to the interviewees, are a good education, development opportunities, the proximity to Hilton Head and Savannah, and recreational activities (in that order), whereas new visitors were described as most likely to be attracted by the proximity to Hilton Head, shopping opportunities and festivals and local activities. It was suggested that business investors are likely to be drawn to the promise of sustainability, quality education, a low tax rate, a pristine May River, and an established infrastructure. To cultivate high quality and high paying jobs, interview respondents recommended improving the scope of education, maintaining the environment, developing a strategic plan for the area, increasing a focus on technology in the area, and a trained, locally based workforce.

As a result of the qualitative research, four positioning statements were developed and then tested in Phase 2. These statements came under headings of 'the Old Town charm,' 'the nature and character of Bluffton,' 'economic development,' and 'accessibility/connectivity with other places.' The survey contained questions about the four positioning statements such as: was it appropriate for Bluffton?; did it differentiate Bluffton from other communities?; would it encourage people to consider moving to Bluffton?; and was it credible and clear?

Results: Social Media Monitoring
In addition to the charrettes and interviews, the team saw great value in monitoring and analyzing the prevailing social media conversation about Bluffton. That is, what were residents, visitors and others saying about Bluffton online? Where was the conversation taking place, and when were there natural spikes in the volume of that dialogue? And what was the overall sentiment of the conversation?
Through a partnership with Clemson University’s ‘Social Media Listening Center’ researchers created a robust listening program, enabling them to listen, discover and measure conversations across the web by capturing more than 150 million sources of social media conversations across major social networks, blogs and other online communities. The process lasted approximately three months, with the resulting summary dashboard providing a graphic display of content and specific
Details regarding sentiment, share of voice, trends, geo-location data and much more (see Figure 3).

Results showed a consistent, but relatively modest volume of social media conversations for Bluffton, averaging roughly 85 posts per day. More than 77% of conversations were taking place on Twitter and Facebook. Young professionals and men were leading the conversations, with 58% being male and 87% aged between 25 and 44. Conversations were mostly local chatter (i.e., news, attractions/events, quality of life, etc.) led by locals, whereas business-related terms, such as entrepreneur, healthcare, infrastructure, innovation and technology appeared in an extremely limited number of conversations. The volume of conversation was low compared to the neighboring markets of Hilton Head and Savannah, but the sentiment was mostly very positive. Although this low volume could be considered as a disadvantage for the town, the positive tone of conversations represents an opportunity for social media to be used as a key marketing channel for future brand-building and engagement. In summary, the social media listening exercise helped build a powerful layer of insights on top of the traditional research findings, and provided a measuring stick of how stakeholder opinions from the qualitative research match or contradict those of the online public.

Results: Competitor Analysis

In the competitor analysis, the team reviewed “best places to…” lists such as: Best Places to Start/Relocate a Business; Best Places for Young Professionals; Hottest Cities for Business in the Future; Top Ranked Cities for Key Industries; Southern Living Best of Towns; and a Bluffton Competitive List. The criteria used to identify competitors to Bluffton included: business-friendly climate; proximity to major markets/interrstate/airport; educated/skilled workforce; housing affordability; cultural activities; and quality of life.

Some of the logos and taglines from this list of competitors are presented (in Figure 4). What the researchers found from this review was that many of these competitors could be “Anywhere, USA” – as their branding was not unique. Others were clearly tourism-focused (eg. St. Petersburg, Jacksonville and Emerald Coast), or stand for business-only (Greater Portland, San Jose and Chapel Hill). Those cities that did differentiate and stand out, did so based on quality of life and attitude. These included Portland Maine who said “Yes. Life’s Good Here”, Mobile Bay who were “On the Water. On the Move”; Aiken “Where Tradition Meets Technology,” and Paducah Kentucky, who were “Distinctly Creative”.

Figure 3: Conversation cloud for Bluffton, Summer 2013

Figure 4: Sample of competitor logos and taglines
Stage 2: Brand Identity/Positioning Development

A survey was administered to existing and potential businesses, local government officials/people of influence, visitors, and Town of Bluffton residents. Electronic, mailed and intercept surveys explored the perceptions towards the Town of Bluffton as a brand, the Town's image, and tested iterations of brand positioning. Survey questions were based on previous research and first of all explored the dimensions of the existing brand. The scale had four key dimensions: Presented Brand – appeal, attractiveness and interest; Brand Awareness – dominance, recall, recognition; Brand Meaning – believability, sensations, strong personality, trust; and Brand Equity – loyalty, perceived quality, word-of-mouth. The survey also measured the image of Bluffton in terms of infrastructure and socioeconomic environment; natural and cultural resources; pleasant Atmosphere; social setting environment; and overall image. The last section measured perceptions towards various brand propositions developed after Stage 1.

Results: Surveys

As can be seen in Table 1, a total of 624 usable surveys were collected with respondents made up of 223 residents, 103 visitors, 108 existing businesses, 46 local leaders and 144 potential businesses. Table 2 summarizes for each group their words most used to describe Bluffton, their perceived top rated attributes of the town, the most important factors for creating jobs and economic development, and the items most critical to Bluffton's future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey group</th>
<th>Surveys completed</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Work status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local leaders</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54% Male</td>
<td>71% Caucasian</td>
<td>69% Married</td>
<td>63% Work in Bluffton</td>
<td>74% Full-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Existing business</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>62% Male</td>
<td>88% Caucasian</td>
<td>88% Married</td>
<td>91% Work in Bluffton</td>
<td>80% Full-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential business</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>61% Female</td>
<td>61% Caucasian</td>
<td>73% Married</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>42% Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>60% Female</td>
<td>82% Caucasian</td>
<td>74% Married</td>
<td>50% Work in Bluffton</td>
<td>74% Full-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey group</td>
<td>Top descriptors*</td>
<td>Top rated attributes</td>
<td>Development**</td>
<td>Work status</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local leaders</td>
<td>Friendly; growing, laid-back; quirky</td>
<td>Natural beauty; eating and drinking establishments; farmers market; cultural events; festivals</td>
<td>Financial incentives for job creation; streamline permitting, cut “red tape;” job training to improve worker’s skills</td>
<td>Access to quality education; Access to quality health and medical services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Business</td>
<td>Growing; friendly; quaint; beautiful; charming</td>
<td>Natural beauty; May River; live oaks; farmers market</td>
<td>Streamline permitting, cut “red tape;” financial incentives for job creation; state and local government incentives to develop business/industries</td>
<td>Access to quality education; Access to quality health and medical services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential Business</td>
<td>Quaint; friendly; growing</td>
<td>Natural beauty; outdoor recreation; place for family and friends to visit; Southern charm; lifestyle</td>
<td>Job training; state and local government incentives to develop business/industries; financial incentives for job creation</td>
<td>Access to quality education; Access to quality health and medical services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>Quaint; Charming; Lovely; Beautiful; Nice</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Friendly; quaint; growing; beautiful; charming; eclectic; comfortable; fun</td>
<td>Natural beauty; lifestyle</td>
<td>State and local government financial incentives; streamline permitting, cut “red tape;” financial incentives for job creation</td>
<td>Access to quality education; Access to quality health and medical services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Table 2: Survey responses by group

*Words most often used to describe Bluffton

**Three most important items to foster economic development
“I see tourists all the time who are amazed just by the Spanish moss hanging off the tree. Just the type of foliage that we have here and the way we have things in bloom and living “pretty much year around”
Existing business owners were primarily male, Caucasian, married, employed full-time, and work in Bluffton. Over two thirds reported being overwhelmingly satisfied or very satisfied with the current business climate in Bluffton (see Figure 5). For them the words most used to describe Bluffton were growing, friendly, quaint, beautiful, and charming. Attributes most important to them in Bluffton were special natural beauties such as the May River and the Live Oaks, as well as the unique Farmers Market. According to these business owners, the top three most important factors for creating jobs and economic development were streamlining the permitting processes, providing financial incentives for businesses to create jobs, and providing state and local government incentives to develop new business/industries. Existing business owners felt that the top two most important items for Bluffton’s future were access to quality education and access to quality health and medical services.

Potential Businesses mainly represented professional, scientific and technical services. On average, they had 861 employees, and over half had been in business over 16 years with 23% having 41 years of business experience. Over half identified business-to-business as their primary customer base. Nearly 40% grossed over 2 million in the last years. Words they used most often to describe Bluffton were quaint, friendly, and growing. Attributes most important to them were special natural beauties such as the May River and Live Oaks, good access to outdoor recreation areas and a place where family and friends would want to visit. They felt that the top three most important items for economic development were job training to improve worker’s skills, providing state and local government financial incentives to develop new business/industries, and providing financial incentives for business to create jobs (see Figure 6). The top four most important features that would attract them to start a business in Bluffton were the location, a skilled workforce, quality of life and infrastructure.
Local Leader respondents were primarily male, Caucasian, married, currently work full-time in Bluffton, have lived in Bluffton for over 10 years and reported having a master's or doctoral degree. Their words most used to describe Bluffton were friendly, growing, laid-back, and quirky, and attributes most important to them are the natural beauties such as the May River and Live Oaks, nice eating and drinking establishments, the unique farmers market, and the many cultural events and festivals. They felt the top three most important items to foster economic development were financial incentive for businesses to create jobs, streamlining permitting processes, and job training to improve worker’s skills. Their top two items most important for Bluffton's future investment were access to quality education and access to quality health and medical services (see Figure 7).

Residents who responded to the survey were primarily female, Caucasian, married, full time employed working in Bluffton, and reported having a Bachelor’s degree. Their words used most to describe Bluffton were friendly, quaint, growing, beautiful, charming, comfortable, small, fun and eclectic (see Figure 8). Bluffton attributes most important to them were special natural beauties and a good lifestyle. For them the top three most important items to foster economic development were providing state and local government financial incentives, streamlining permitting processes and providing financial incentives for businesses to create jobs. Similar to the local leaders, the top two items most important for Bluffton’s future investment were access to quality education and access to quality health and medical services.

Of the visitors surveyed half were 42% were female, 60 years, or older and (42%) were retirees, 68% reported having a college or graduate degree, and a majority (57%) reported annual household income above $75,000. Visitors were for the most part day-trippers and were visiting for a variety of reasons (see Figure 9). They were overwhelmingly satisfied with their visit to Bluffton and would return and also recommend Bluffton to others. The most visited attractions in Bluffton included the farmers market, Old Town, area restaurants, and shopping outlets. Visitors described Bluffton as quaint, charming/lovely, beautiful/nice, friendly, historic, and fun.
In summary, all five stakeholder groups described Bluffton as quaint, friendly, charming, and beautiful. The highest ranked attributes were the May River, Live Oaks and the laid-back nature of Bluffton, and the lowest ranked attributes were the job prospects, education quality, and public transportation. Bluffton was perceived mainly for its southern charm, but not for being exciting, intelligent or innovative. Differences were mainly between residents and potential businesses with respect to Bluffton. Both groups indicated that Bluffton was laid back, peaceful and artistic, but residents ranked these attributes higher. The consistencies between the qualitative and quantitative data analysis validate the credibility of the findings. The brand personality matched very closely to the celebrities used to describe Bluffton during the charrettes.

Factor analysis was conducted on the brand personality scale revealing two factors, labeled as ‘Quality of Life’ and ‘Economic Development’. As can be seen from Figure 10, the Quality of Life factor items all had higher mean scores than Economic Development factor items, suggesting that Bluffton is recognized more for its quality of life than its economic development potential.

In terms of how the four different positioning statements were perceived, there were two highly rated statements, and both match the data collected during both phases (see Table 3). The first emphasized the “charm”, “nature” and “quaintness” of Bluffton plus the importance of economic development. The second positioning statement emphasized “economic development” and “location” of Bluffton with southern charm. The team’s recommendation to the Town’s Branding task force was that Bluffton’s brand communications should be built around the second positioning statement. It encompasses both the quality of life and economic indicators that are important to all stakeholders, but emphasizes economic development – an area that where Bluffton needs to strengthen its image.
Bluffton is a feeling. It's very difficult to describe. There’s something about being in Bluffton that triggers a sense of inner peace. The environment. Everyone is proud of who we are. It’s so beautiful....And in my view, that does something to the human psyche. When you’re in this gorgeous, serenely beautiful place that's full of history, it’s calming.
The next phase of the project comprised developing the ‘message’ or written and visual components through which the brand identity would be communicated. Based upon the comprehensive analysis of the data, Rawle Murdy presented branding concepts to Bluffton’s Branding Task Force. They were shown two tagline options and two different concepts for tourism and economic development. Mock-ups were created of how these could be used in TV, radio, outdoor, digital banner and economic development website home pages. The Task Force elected to go with the tagline ‘Heart of the Lowcountry’ because they could see the power of the connection to the heart (emotion), location, quality of life and the heart icon. The logo selected was Bluffton in lower case (confidence, it reflects who they are, understated and authentic/real), with the two hearts in the negative space formed by the two “f’s” in Bluffton. “Bluffton, Heart of the Lowcountry seems to define how residents from all walks of life, feel about their town,” said Sue Thomas from the HHI-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce.

The new creative was unveiled in February 2014, and examples of these materials are below. ‘Bluffton, Heart of the Lowcountry’ tourism messages were carried across four southeastern states in television, radio, outdoor, and digital advertising. At the time of writing, plans were also underway to expand the messaging to economic development prospects.

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**Table 3: The two highly-ranked positioning statements for Bluffton**

**BLUFFTON POSITIONING STATEMENT 1**

In the shade of the towering Live Oaks and located on the banks of the historic May River, Bluffton is charmed, small town southern living. The community’s relaxed atmosphere complements its strong, forward leaning, economic attitude, while a mix of Lowcountry living and a thriving art scene create an eclectic environment.

**BLUFFTON POSITIONING STATEMENT 2**

Bluffton, South Carolina, is a quintessential Southern town on the banks of the historic May River. Dedicated to a strong, progressive economic future, Bluffton is the center of our Lowcountry coastal region, providing abundant opportunities for a desirable work/life balance.
"The Lowcountry is Magical"

SFX: MALE, 30s-40s. FRIENDLY, LOCAL.

WOMAN: The heart of the South Carolina Lowcountry is a magical place. Days are filled with vast salt marsh views, while at night, Spanish Moss frames bright, glowing stars.

Here, against an effortless backdrop, things move at a different pace...life seems a little simpler...smiles last a little longer.

And in the middle of it all, hidden beneath majestic Live Oaks, you’ll find Bluffton, South Carolina. Heart of the Lowcountry.

Start your trip at VisitBluffton.org.
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