

Faced with location and amenity challenges, key tourism stakeholders set about to participate in repositioning the city as a tourism destination. Because tourism is a conglomeration of many industries and needs the coordination of a wide variety of enterprises and agencies are needed, planning was never easy.

The first order of business was to hire a director for the project, and then work with the stakeholder groups, each of which had their own marketing plan, to develop an “Overarching Brand” for Wichita Falls. All groups agreed to work together on one primary project—this included the Board of Commercialization and Industry (Chamber including the Economic Development Corporation), the Downtown Wichita Falls Association, and the City of Wichita Falls. To support these efforts a fundraising campaign was launched and gathered \$1,500,000 with \$500,000 allocated to fund projects and programs in each of the first three years.

The meetings, discussions and the development of a plan took over a year and involved input from over 2000 people in the community. They spent a great deal of time defining “who” Wichita Falls was, and “what” they wanted to be. The end result was a logo, a brand, and a marketing plan for the community. This campaign was called “Pride in the Falls”—Blue Skies—Green Spaces—Golden Opportunities. Planning began in 2009 and the new campaign was rolled out in 2010. Many of the first campaign items touted: “Best of _____ (you fill in the blank).” Or, slogans like, “Quirky, interesting people and places—only a couple of hours from _____” (you fill in the blank). Another idea that gathered a lot of attention among residents was the T-Shirt Campaign. These tee-shirts sported slogans such as, “We’re Not in Kansas—Never Were: Wichita Falls, TX,” “Red Draw—Not an Art Project: Wichita Falls, TX,” and “It’s OK to have a cow: Wichita Falls, TX.”

A key component of the initial campaign was to focus on general marketing communications—to tell the story to its own citizens first, selling them on the excitement of Wichita Falls. Sixty percent of the funding for the first campaign was directed internally, while 40% was directed externally to tell the story outside the community and draw people to Wichita Falls. This portion of the campaign was directed particularly toward Texas and southern Oklahoma. Ads were placed on buses, in magazines and in brochures.

Wichita Falls flags were sold to local residents and businesses. A publicity campaign was launched promoting the fact that the city had been named the “6th Best Value of Living” in the U.S. Literature was placed in the hotels and restaurants. The overall tagline was “Blue Skies—Golden Opportunities,” and the Chamber promoted “Hard working—Easy Living” featuring well known local leaders, the CVB promoted “Find Yourself in the Falls,” and the Downtown Association promoted “Downtown Proud.” The campaign was designed to build a “fulfilling sense of community”—potential financial opportunities and entrepreneurial possibilities comparable to bigger cities for newcomers, and a sense of community in the welcoming fellowship for temporary residents—military-based personnel and academics. An ad campaign was launched: “Troups First—First in our Hearts, First in Line” which gained national attention and awards.

There were Public Relations Placements and Signature Events, all with organized and coordinated marketing pieces. An initial area of concentration was to bring back, revitalize and grow the older events the city had been known for like the Oil Bowl and the Ranch Round-up. This was followed by the development of some new events particularly concentrating on downtown development and regional sports activities. “Because of a general lack of awareness of events, activities and attractions, a portal site with a common community calendar was developed. For the first time, one, easy-to-use calendar generated from a variety of organizations and sites existed for the citizens of Wichita Falls.” (*The Visual Brand, Wichita Falls, Texas*, 2011, Texas, p. 8). Overall the promotional messages concentrated on (1) Quality of Life in Wichita Falls, (2) Tourism and Events, and (3) the Image of Wichita Falls.