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## **You hear that, Boston**

Louisville branding campaign reaches out to souls trapped in big cities

by Terry Boyd

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Tempting as it must have been, "our city can beat up your city" somehow didn't make the cut.

But in the lofty downtown spaces of Red7e advertising agency, Dan Barbercheck smiles as he looks over what's about to hit the fan. And he looks forward to the reaction when it does.

The question is, what kind of reaction?

Barbercheck's answer? It's all good.

As a whole, Louisville's Community Branding Project is so far from the chamber of commerce, bulleted-item school of civic promotion that it has the fingerprints of Red7e president Barbercheck -- the man behind the infamous "At Tobacco Road, we can't talk about some of the products we sell" campaign -- all over it.

Starting with two television spots during Saturday's University of Louisville-University of Kentucky football game, Louisvillians will see the first round of the multimedia branding project, which is part "the cool things about our city you might not know" and part "your city sucks, so come live in Louisville."

The initial rollout isn't any more conventional than the campaign, according to officials involved with the project.

Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government officials and executives with Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce, started going out two weeks ago, introducing the campaign to groups and business leaders, said Eileen Pickett, senior vice president, community and economic development for GLI.

Now, the ads will roll out "in concentric circles," running first in Louisville, then in Atlanta and Columbus, Ohio, Pickett said. Then, the campaign will break to plan the next round of advertising and seek grassroots financing.

The buzz starts here

What city promoters hope will become a national phenom will start with local TV ads and print ads in *Sophisticated Living* magazine.

Quoting what she said is Barbercheck's analogy, the idea is to drop the rock in the middle of Louisville and let the message ripple out, Pickett said.

Without the millions of dollars of, say, a Las Vegas-style "What happens here stays here" campaign, Louisville's strategy depends to a great extent on buzz and on locals e-mailing the spots to family and friends or linking the ads to blogs.

"We have to start here," Barbercheck said. "When the person in L.A. asks why the hell you're in Louisville, you need an answer. We're giving (Louisvillians) the answer they never had before."

That answer, according to the branding campaign, is that anything is possible in Louisville: professional success, big houses with big yards and a good school for the kids. Oh, and the people are nice.

Out-of-towners, it turns out, as well as Louisvillians who ran off to bigger, and/or "less well-functioning cities," live "puny lives," where dreams go unfulfilled.

The tongue-in-cheek television spots reach out to those unfortunates. One spot features a fretting woman supposedly living in Atlanta.

"Everything she values is a two-hour traffic jam from home," intones the narrator. In the "clogged arteries" of the city, a user-friendly city such as Louisville "seems like a fairy tale. Won't you help save her life? Support the campaign to share Louisville. Because Atlantans deserve to learn of the possibilities here."

This ad will run in, um, Atlanta. "We have yielded to temptation," Barbercheck said.

It gets better

Then there's the couple whose college graduate daughter is moving to Los Angeles, "where she'll be valued less for the beauty of her intellect than for the size of her cosmetic surgery."

And don't overlook the ad about the boy in Oblivion, Ohio, with big dreams, including having a girlfriend with a tattoo on her butt. Alas, he knows all that's impossible in Ohio.

So, how is Ohio going to feel about that, not to mention the poor mayor of Oblivion?

"There will be some pushback," Barbercheck said, shrugging. "That's expected."

Like the mayor of Boston calling to find out why people in Louisville are creating television spots depicting his city as a place where a distraught medical worker longs to have a house payment because that would mean she lives in a house -- something that's "out of the question in Beantown?"

"I'm ready to take those calls," said Chris Poynter, communications coordinator and economic development official for Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson.

Anything -- and they mean anything -- is possible

Radio ads use a big-voice announcer, slinging hipster lingo and talking about the "okey-dokey" receptiveness here to ideas that would never go anywhere else:

"When this city said, 'Let's build a skate park and leave it open all night,' they said, 'Yessir. Damn their lawsuits. We are down with that!'"

By comparison, the print ads are positively tame, boasting that there's an "energy and progressive spirit in Louisville not found anywhere else."

There's a PowerPoint presentation, celebrating Louisville, quirks and all.

It highlights the city's claims to fame -- the Muhammad Ali Center, celebrating a prize fighter but dedicated to peace; entrepreneurs starting businesses; cutting-edge hand and heart transplants; the arts; antique shops and whole corridors of nonconformists and nichey little shops.

If there is any blowback, enraged politicians in targeted cities railing against Louisville might translate into millions of viewers on YouTube or on television.

When they were mixing the television spots in L.A., all the people there loved them, confirming the campaigners' suspicions that a lot of people are fed up in other cities, said Barbercheck and Brett Jefferys, a Red7e account executive on the project.

They don't like long drives to work and congestion, or the pure shallowness of it all.

"We invite people not to adjust to it," Barbercheck said.

The sweet spot

The Louisville-as-a-brand concept started in 2005 with research by Horizon Research International.

The project is meant to sell the city to lure companies and talent from other cities and to attract conventions and corporate gatherings.

Then, the creative teams at Red7e, Doe-Anderson Inc. and Guthrie/Mays Public Relations started "looking for the nail head" in that data, Barbercheck said.

That turned out to be people's innate desire for "an empowering environment with access to the things they want in life. That's the sweet spot of who we are."

To ensure authenticity, there will be none of that "Slugger City" or "Derby City" nonsense, said Barbercheck and Jefferys.

"Those are artifacts of the past" that don't reflect what the city is today, Jefferys said.

Even the core concept of "Louisville -- it's possible here" is only a leitmotif -- a conceptual epoxy holding together a collage of messages that run from quasi-conventional to way, way out there.

Believe it or not, some ads didn't make it, including a print ad stating that if Atlanta is the belt buckle of the Baptist Belt, "Louisville is the nipple ring."

Turned out people were uncomfortable mixing religion and irony.

"We're trying to have a little fun," Pickett said. "We're trying to evoke, not provoke. But to break through the noise, it wouldn't do any good to do a generic campaign."

In fact, there are no city or GLI logos or taglines -- no logos at all. The creative teams couldn't give the ads "official" sanction and still bottle the organic, heartfelt sentiment of people who really love their city, Barbercheck said.

When Louisvillians forward the ads or links to friends, "the last thing we want is for them to feel like they're doing the government's bidding." |

The most important element of the Louisville branding project is to distill for locals what defines Louisville.

Dan Barbercheck, president of Red7e ad agency, said Louisville's defining quality is that it works -- free of "ossified social structures," resistance to new ideas and overloaded infrastructure that define too many larger cities.

The "brand essence" is described in the campaign's PowerPoint presentation:

"Welcome to a city where dreams get introduced to can-do. Where people share a belief in the creative power of opportunity, expression and imagination. Alive with potential and inspired with a progressive spirit of possibility and aspiration, Louisville is a very special place -- somewhere between 'way out there' and 'feels like home.'

"It's a thriving, one-of-a-kind, don't-take-no-for-an-answer sort of city. It's an open, accessible, connected bunch of ambitious but caring individuals and families drawn together by the promise of the future and the quality of a life richly lived.

"It's the urban-but-green, nearby-but-expansive, inventive-but-roll-your-sleeves-up, surprising, bustling, energetic community that always gets things done with a smile." |

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#### | Louisville's Branding Campaign

**Description:** An effort to position the city as a brand and an attractive alternative to cities with lesser opportunities

**Partners:** Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau; Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce; Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government; and Greater Louisville Community Branding Alliance, a coalition of business leaders

**Creative firms:** Red7e, Doe-Anderson Inc. and Guthrie/Mayes Public Relations

**Initial budget:** About \$2 million. Most of the work was done at below-market rates. See the ads at: [www.red7e.com/LouisvilleBrandWork](http://www.red7e.com/LouisvilleBrandWork) |