WHAT'S MARKETING & BRANDING GOT TO DO WITH URBAN FOREST?

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INTRODUCTION

In 2006 the NSW Local Government Association (LGA) policy working group chaired by Newcastle City Councilor Ian McKenzie recommended the association apply for an Environmental Trust grant to establish a program promoting urban forestry to local government. At this time the working group also moved to sponsor me to attend a European workshop titled *Communication in Urbanised Forestry and Green-Space Management.* My participation in the communication course was supported by funding from:

- NSW Local Government Association
- NSW Local Government Tree Resources Association
- Clover Moore, Lord Mayor, City of Sydney
- The International Society of Arboriculture Australian Chapter
- Sylvia Hale, MLA - NSW Upper House.

The communication course introduced key theories and tools in the following themes:

1. Forestry and Green-space management serving urbanised societies
2. Media relations
3. Politics and lobbying
4. Marketing and branding
5. Communicating with the public

The course addressed the implications for green-space and urban forest management from surging global population growth, with urban forestry, community forestry, green-structure planning and urban greening presented as examples of innovative responses.

By the end of the five day course I was convinced that a well developed urban forest marketing and branding strategy could be a powerful, effective promotional tool if combined with a communications strategy using media relations and political lobbying.

This paper provides a glimpse of the global population growth phenomenon and an overview of marketing and branding tools. It looks at how these tools might be used to support green-space and urban forest management in Australian urban centers.

What's happening with global population?
According to a 2007 UN population report humanity will make the transition from a rural to an urban species in 2008 (Anon. 2007). The executive director of the UN Population Fund, Ms Thoraya Obaid characterises current population growth as unprecedented in human history and predicts that by 2008 half of the world's population will be urbanised.

The report predicts that climate will increasingly shape and be shaped by cities. It describes a 'vicious circle', where climate change increases energy demand for cooling in cities thus adding to greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change may also make some cities unliveable, adding to the "heat island" effect which may lift temperatures in urban areas by 2-6ºC. The impacts of climate change on urban water supplies are also expected to be dramatic.

At the release of the UN report Ms Obaid said: "It concerns everyone, not just developing countries. If we plan ahead we will create conditions for a stable world. If we do not, and do not find education, jobs, and houses for people in cities, then these populations will become destructive, to themselves and others."

Australian cities are not immune to the pressures of unprecedented global urbanisation. Urban 'compaction' is now the primary growth model in every Australian city. The impacts of population growth and urban densification on the natural and social systems underpinning our urban 'lifestyle' are largely unstudied.

The dominant urban tree discourse in Australia is focused on risk – a morbid fear of trees falling onto things, and a righteous indignation at trees 'blocking' real estate views. The 'horrendous' nuisance of leaf fall into swimming pools and onto shiny vehicles is an obsession so gripping of NSW property owners that the NSW Land and Environment Court has found it necessary to rule that leaf and twig fall is not a matter for the court's consideration under the recently introduced *Trees (Disputes Between Neighbours) Act 2006*.

Rapid urbanisation and the loss of large numbers of mature trees now at the end of their urban life cycle (Shears 2007) should be ringing alarm bells throughout municipal corridors, but with the exception of a few proactive Councils, few are even thinking about the impacts of urbanisation on urban green-space and tree canopy let alone planning to address the impacts.

Urban forestry with its integrative, multi-disciplinary and holistic focus is the most promising approach to addressing these issues. Marketing, branding, lobbying and communications are tools to raise awareness of the urgent need to start planning now for managing the impacts of population growth on urban green-space and forests and thus on urban sustainability.

What Is Urban Forestry?
Urban forestry has been described as:

> The art, science, and technology of managing trees and forest resources in and around urban community ecosystems for the physiological, sociological, economic, and aesthetic benefits trees provide society. (Helms 1998, based on Miller 1997)

Cecil Konijnendijk, editor of the recently published European reference book on urban forests (Konijnendijk 2004) reports a long-lasting debate on the concepts and definitions of urban forestry. He describes the framework for a European definition as:

- Integrative; incorporating different elements of urban green structures into a whole ('urban forest').
- Strategic; aimed at developing longer-term policies and plans for urban tree resources, connecting to different sectors, agendas and programs.
- Aimed at delivering multiple benefits; stressing the economic, environmental and socio-cultural goods and services urban forests can provide.
- Multidisciplinary and aiming to become interdisciplinary; involving experts from natural as well as social sciences.
- Participatory; targeted at developing partnerships between all stakeholders

Figure 1 illustrates the European urban forest matrix.

	The Urban Forest		
	Individual trees		**Urban woods and woodland** (forests and other wooded land eg natural forests and plantations, small woods, orchards)
	Street and roadside trees	Trees in Parks, private yards, cemeteries, on derelict land, fruit trees etc.	
Form, function, design, policies and planning			
Technical approaches (eg selection of plant material, establishment methods)		**Urban forestry**	
Management			

Fig. 1 The urban forest matrix, representing the magnitude and scope of urban forestry in Europe (adapted from Konijnendijk 2004)

An Australian Urban Forest Context

The NSW Local Government Association policy defines urban forest as:

> "*the totality of trees and shrubs on all public and private land in and around urban areas (including bushland, parkland, gardens and street trees) which is measured as a canopy cover percentage of the total area, and is recognised as a primary component of the urban ecosystem"* (NSW LGA 2003)

An urban forestry dialogue is emerging in Australia principally at the municipal level. There is a lot of catch-up to be addressed as we are three decades behind the USA and a decade behind the Europeans. Both South Australian and NSW Local Government associations have adopted urban forest policies, and the South Australian state government introduced its urban forest and biodiversity program in 1997.

Beginning in 2005 the NSW LGA Urban Forest Policy Working Group gave briefings to the NSW LGA Executive, the upper House Greens MLA, Sydney City and North Sydney councils.

The City of Newcastle began developing an urban forest policy in 2005 and Councilors, staff, community stakeholders participated in a workshop series. Policy development was delayed due to an organisational restructure that included positioning public tree management under the Asset Management program with increased funding for programs to improve the quality and quantity of public urban forest. This move and the increased funding is positive development that the draft urban forest policy supports.

What is most needed now is Australian research to underpin the emerging awareness of urban forestry otherwise critical support and momentum will be lost. Unfortunately urban forest does not produce export commodities so research support will be difficult to secure. Marketing could be used to raise the profile and expose the values and benefits of urban forest.

According to European experience, marketing and branding programs have been effective in attracting funding and political support for green-space and urban forest management.

MARKETING

What is marketing?

A keyword search in the Google internet search engine reveals marketing as a topic of significant global interest.

Keyword	Total Google Entries
Health	902,000,000
Sport	804,000,000
Car	607,000,000
War	525,000,000
Marketing	496,000,000
Sex	437,000,000
Tree	260,000,000
Religion	251,000,000
Climate Change	105,000,000
Urban forest	55,500,000

Table 1 Internet keyword search

A majority of the internet definitions I scanned describe marketing as tactics, advertising, brand management, sales, service, pricing and the like. However these matters are only components of the marketing approach and are not marketing as such.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) gives this definition:

> *Marketing is an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders*

The AMA definition is clearly pitched at the corporate/commercial rather than the municipal organisation.

Given the emerging Australian discourse on urban forestry is occurring at the municipal not corporate level, it is important to understand the nature of local government relative to the nature of corporate/commercial organisations where marketing and branding is heavily focused.

Most Australian councils have adopted the corporate sector ‘customer’ focus. Councils now speak to customers rather than citizens. This approach risks blurring differences between municipal supply-oriented functions, and corporate demand-oriented functions and can create unreasonable expectations for Council services.
For example, a review of ‘customer’ demand for street tree services in the city of Newcastle found a very high level of customer dissatisfaction arising from demand for a service of choice e.g. remove or prune a street tree when the Council inspector found no reason for work or assigned work a low priority. The customer mindset carries expectation that the service provider will deliver service on demand. This example illustrates the importance of convincing citizens to feel good about the services they get rather than adapting the services to their demands which is more in line with the corporate/commercial model. (Enggrob Boon 2006)

Few new ideas or products ever get into the marketplace and establish market share without an effective marketing strategy. Urban forestry may well be a bright idea with substantial benefits but it is unlikely to progress far in our consumer oriented society where attention is rarely captured and held without effective marketing.

Analysis is at the core of marketing. Effective marketing strategies are based on an understanding of customers, their behaviour, motivations, perceptions and preferences. Marketing also focuses on understanding competition and competitor’s objectives and capabilities as well as understanding one’s own organisations strengths and weaknesses.

In summary, marketing begins with detailed analysis of self, customer and competition which then inform the approach to tactics, branding and advertising.

Who are the urban forest and green-space customers?
The proposition that practically every living being stands to gain from the sustained existence of urban forest makes an analysis of urban forest customers a potentially daunting task. Everybody ‘consumes’ urban forest even if few realise they do so. Many pay little if any conscious attention to trees which are usually just a backdrop to the urgencies of daily life. Urban forest and green-space customers come from every walk of life so it is important to narrow the focus by beginning with the most influential consumers.

What do the customers get from urban forest and green-space?
Urban forest and green-space customers get improved physical health eg fitness, cleaner air and cleaner water, and recreational opportunities. They get improved economic health eg real estate values, business share and reduced energy demand. They get improved mental health eg through stress relief through green experience. All of these gains have been well researched internationally yet a majority of Australians know almost nothing of these values – this is why marketing is such an important tool.

Quist (2006) sees Park, Green-space and Urban Forest managers as working with ‘experiences’.

So, rather than trying to convince others about how good trees and parks are, we should link urban forest and green-space to customer health, wealth and happiness just as McDonalds links its product to the experience of happiness and not to food, and Nike and Harley Davidson link theirs to experience and not to shoes and machines.

Who has influence?
From a marketing perspective, customers with the greatest influence should be the focus of analysis since they can forge change if they are convinced of the need and are persuaded to act (Anon. 2007) Market analysis shows children have significant influence over parental decisions on the purchase of numerous goods and services so it is no coincidence that very young children are the target for marketing such things as snack foods and toys.

Politicians, municipal councilors, municipal management, policy makers and advisors, business leaders, community groups, resident/citizen forums and NGOs all have influence and are well positioned to persuade and initiate change. Their beliefs, attitudes and motivations need to be analysed and understood.

Who are the urban forest and green-space program competitors?
Budget is always a limiting factor in the delivery of most municipal programs, and especially green programs. Organisational budget is divided amongst departments so there is intensive competition within the organisation to secure necessary funding. To claim new market share for green programs involves intense competition for decreasing funds despite an increasing demand to expand services. This highlights the need for a marketing strategy to help secure the funds and support.

Television, video games, and numerous other 'urban' activities may divert citizens from using or being concerned about quality green-space and so green-space may be under-utilised and unable to attract resource support. For example, if a community does not know of the existence of urban forest or the importance of planning to sustain its benefits then there will be little demand and few resources committed.

But Marketing Costs!
A common misconception views marketing as a cost that is not affordable on a limited budget. On the contrary, marketing is a potentially powerful tool to help secure budget and deliver programs – in other words marketing is one of many costs associated with achieving good results (Quist 2006).

Marketing is also about telling people what you are doing
What value is there in producing an innovative new product if nobody knows about the product? What is the value in managing green-space that rarely gets used or is inappropriately utilised? Why expend funds managing trees if people only complain about trees and they care or know nothing of the benefits they are getting?

If budget competitors argue that funds committed to green-space and tree management are less important than their programs then how will the decision makers respond when it comes time to make budget allocations?

Ask, do and tell
Quist (2006) says all marketing should be based on customers and their needs and so all competitive sections need to prioritise their resources so means are available to:

- Analyse the market – ask!
- Produce what the market wants – do?
- Market and sell the products or services – tell?

5%	90%	5%
Ask	Do	Tell

Fig 2 A marketing approach to program delivery (Quist 2006)

Ask, by way of surveys, interviews and the like to increase the likelihood of doing the right tasks.
Tell about what was done so the public gets to know what was done was what was asked.
Focus on positive aspects of what was done.

Be part of a strategic marketing approach and consider using experts
It is common for Councils to produce a range of brochures on green-space systems and programs but these fail to gain program support because they are usually produced in isolation and not as part of a strategic marketing approach. It is therefore worth studying successful programs that have prioritised marketing and to also consider using marketing experts with specific experience in green marketing.

At the urban forest communications course I attended in Denmark, Quist (2006) gave this short checklist for marketing urban forest and green-space activities.

- Make a project out of everyday activities
- Think strategically and media-oriented
- Become interested in politics
- Develop an activity plan for next year
- Make a plan for contacts with the mass media
- Bring planned projects forward if they are currently 'hot' in the media
- Prepare ready-to-use lists for local, regional and national media contacts
- Learn how to communicate your message clearly
- Offer publicity to politicians
- Involve experts if unsure and learn from this experience
- Allocate resources and time now – do not wait until tomorrow!
- Politicians do not give money for marketing, but with marketing politicians will give you new money.

BRANDING

What is branding?
The power of 'brand' – recently the Mayor of New Orleans was quoted as saying that the 'New Orleans brand is still out there' despite the bad press the city is receiving for numerous violent attacks and murders. Apparently the violence is a two-edged sword since it keeps the brand in the public mind (SMH 2007).

Branding is so ubiquitous that most people pay little conscious attention to it however it is a most powerful determinant of market success. Consider for example, global brands like Shell, Nike, McDonalds, Ikea et al. Hyde Park, London and Central Park, New York are internationally recognised urban green-space brands.

People	City Image
Buildings	
Streets (including trees)	
Places	
Squares and plazas	
Parks	

Table 2 City image as the product of city elements

Table 2 illustrates the important potential contribution of trees and green-space in presenting a city image.

Konijnendijk (2005) sees brand as the proprietary visual, emotional and cultural mage one associates with a certain company, product or service.

Branding incorporates a name, a logo – a total visual package. The article describes a range of marketing theories and concepts such as *brand hearsay*, *brand evidence*, *brand attitude* and *brand verdict*.

Branding types include *product branding* as used for example by Coca-Cola, and *service branding* used by the service sector such as banks and insurance companies wanting people to associate their services with good quality and value, customer care, easy access. In this approach Konijnendijk sees links with urban forestry as it becomes more oriented to customer service. *Emotional* and *sense* branding are new techniques gaining attention and *destination* branding sells a bundle of goods and services associated for example with a country or region. Branding is not always positive, for example, some industrial cities have difficulties getting rid of their negative brand image (Konijnendijk 2005). This has been the experience in Newcastle better known as a steel and coal centre than for its fascinating harbor, quality beaches, historic precincts and easy lifestyle.

Konijnendijk (2005) sees four strong arguments in favor of urban forestry branding:

1. Urban forestry is in constant struggle for political and public support and funding and will slide down the political agenda if the connections to its major benefits are not made.

2. Branding can strengthen the morale and internal organisation of municipal and private green-space institutions and strengthen the profile of the profession (which does not yet exist as such in Australia).

3. Branding can bring more users into the urban forest which because of its nature generally invokes positive associations and loyalty, generating regular use and contact with the local urban forester or arborist.

4. Branding can help build relationships with a series of new users including ethnic minorities and children.

Konijnendijk (2005) believes the brand 'Urban Forestry' is not very well known in Europe but sees the International Society of Arboriculture programs for certifying arborists and promotion of good practice as helping brand urban forestry at large.

He reports that some years ago the city of Celje in Slovenia decided on the need to strengthen the collaboration between forest managers around the city. Key players included the city foresters and the Mayor of Celje who recognised the importance of maintaining and promoting the city's green image for tourism and business. A special brand was created – *The City Forest of Celje* which was posted at the entry to all major green-spaces and used in the city's promotional material. The branding promoted good management practices and the city became a model for other Slovenian cities (Konijnendijk 2005).

A simple example of green-space branding invoking the urban forest concept
Imagine walking into a local park in a city you are visiting and instead of seeing a sign like this:

SMITH PARK

You see a sign like this:

City of Hereandnow Urban Forest

SMITH PARK
A link in the Hereandnow meeting and breathing space network

Map

other meeting & breathing spaces in the network are at

Would such a sign add to your understanding and appreciation of the park and what would it say about the city's attitude?

Indeed there is clearly much more to this subject than the mere presentation of a sign, but by adopting a marketing and branding approach to urban forest and green-space, the view changes and the scene appears much brighter. This is because marketing is always looking for the bright, the happy, the optimistic view and urban foresters and municipal arborists can always do with some optimism!

CONCLUSIONS

Population growth is such that Australian cities must begin smart planning to integrate urban forest and green-space needs into public policy associated with urban growth.

Current approaches to urban forest management are not adequate. In order for urban forestry to prevail as a means of securing and sustaining tree canopy in urban Australia it must gain recognition and be seen as worthy of political and financial support.

Marketing and branding are potentially powerful tools for securing the sort of market exposure and market share needed for urban forestry and green-space programs to compete for resources and political support in a rapidly urbanising world.

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