

Brand America

An Interview with Edward M. Burghard,
Executive Director, Ohio Business Development Coalition



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EDITORS' NOTE Ed Burghard began his career with Norwich Eaton Pharmaceuticals as a Computer Programmer and proceeded to hold managerial positions in sales administration and operations research. Procter & Gamble (P&G) acquired Norwich Eaton in 1982, and Burghard shifted his focus to marketing. He then began directing marketing strategies and tactics that doubled sales and nearly quadrupled profits of P&G's U.S. pharmaceutical business earning P&G's Harley Procter Marketer title, which is a global appointment reserved for only their top brand builders. Burghard is recently retired from P&G and leads the Ohio Business Development Coalition (OBDC) as its Executive Director. In addition, he manages the Strengthening Brand America project. He holds a B.A. in theoretical mathematics from the State University of New York at Potsdam and an M.B.A. from Syracuse University.

INSTITUTION BRIEF The Ohio Business Development Coalition (www.ohiomeansbusiness.com) is a nonprofit organization charged with branding the state of Ohio. The OBDC also helps Ohio compete for global capital investment by developing and executing targeted, proactive sales and marketing strategies. The OBDC aims to provide the Ohio Department of Development qualified leads and effective tools to retain and expand Ohio companies and attract new business.

Several months ago you started a community of practice for economic devel-

opment professionals on place branding (www.StrengtheningBrandAmerica.com). What was the motivation?

I have been intrigued with the potential for reapplying product and corporate branding principles to the marketing of communities, states, and countries. There are some excellent case studies in this area, but it is mostly from the European Union and not the United States. I came to the conclusion that the E.U. was roughly a decade ahead of the U.S. in the understanding and application of place branding to attract and retain capital investment. In a globally integrated market, it is my opinion that the U.S. needs to get much better at place branding in order to maximize our full economic potential.

What makes you believe the U.S. really needs to embrace place branding? Isn't the U.S. the gold standard by which every other country measures relative success?

In my experience, the worst thing a market leader can do is maintain the status quo. A leader's job is to continually set the pace. As part of my research on place branding, I found there was a lot to be proud of with regard to Brand America. But I also found some alarming data that suggests Brand America is in trouble.

One measure of success is progress in foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow. While the U.S. continues to enjoy the highest absolute amount of FDI inflow dollars versus other countries, I am troubled that the U.S. share of global FDI inflow is declining when compared to the E.U. To me, this implies Brand America is not as competitive as it needs to be versus Brand E.U.

Another measure is the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index that evaluates countries on a set of standard criteria, which are a proxy for a country's core value proposition. The U.S. is ranked tenth overall and the favorable versus unfavorable comments are not particularly encouraging.

Certainly, some of the root cause for this poor performance is misperception of the core values of the U.S. But in my opinion, some of the problem has been a real shift away from those same core values. Stephen Covey has said: "You can't talk your way out of what you've behaved yourself into." I am convinced a better understanding of and improved skills in the application of product and corporate branding principles to the strategic management of Brand America is a key to acting our way out of the current situation.

The data you cite is certainly cause for alarm, but how can a slick advertising campaign really turn things around?

That is an excellent question, and it is one I get all the time from the economic development community. I define place branding as making a heart-and-mind-opening promise of what somebody can expect to experience when they invest time or money in a location, and proactively working across a complex delivery system to ensure that promise is realized each and every time. That promise needs to be relevant, competitive, and authentic. Working to ensure those three criteria are met is how we will reverse a declining share of global FDI inflow dollars and improve the world's perception of Brand America. It is not about a logo and tagline, or about a slick advertising campaign; it is about ensuring that the core promise of Brand America and the realized experience of Brand America are truly aligned. I am convinced we have meaningful room for improvement in this area.

In the past decade, attempts by the U.S. federal government to improve the country's image have not fared well. What is different about the approach you advocate?

I believe the best way to start strengthening Brand America is to help our states create a better value proposition for foreign direct investors. This will make our states more competitive for business investment and in aggregate will help reverse the declining global FDI inflow share trend.

Some of the solution lies in improving the mastery of place branding among the economic development community across the U.S. The intent is to connect private sector branding masters with economic development professionals so there can be an exchange of knowledge on how to successfully reapply product and corporate branding principles to the branding of communities, regions, and states.

Some of the solution also lies in providing metrics that will help governors assess the relative competitiveness of their states versus others and versus countries worldwide. With a better picture of their state's global FDI inflow share trend, I believe governors will be in a better position to make more fully informed decisions on investment priorities to become more competitive.

Can Brand America make a come back?

Absolutely. ●