

## POSITIONING AND BRANDING A WILDERNESS TOURIST ATTRACTION TO MEET ALL STAKEHOLDERS OBJECTIVES

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*The Beartooth Nature Center (BNC) is Montana's premier wildlife education refuge. Home to over seventy wild animals unable to be returned to their natural environments after accidents or abandonment, the BNC houses mountain lions, bears, moose, bobcats, and a variety of large birds. Located in Red lodge, Montana, the northern gateway to the world- renowned Yellowstone National Park, the BNC is in a unique position to create greater awareness of important ecological and wilderness sustainability issues for. Primarily funded through donations from tourists and local residents, effective branding and marketing are crucial for its survival. This article presents a 2011 student-driven brand development and marketing campaign designed to create greater visibility and name recognition for the BNC. Using contemporary theories which emphasize the importance of including all stakeholders in the branding process, students created a brand-positioning television and targeted collateral campaign. As a result of this campaign, attendance at the BNC doubled the following summer. This case study confirms that bringing multiple stakeholders into the branding process is a highly effective way to create a powerful message for eco-tourist destinations.*

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JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

### INTRODUCTION

Trying to establish a brand image that satisfies the diverse objectives of multiple stakeholders can be difficult to accomplish. This paper describes a successful branding process used by Montana State University Billings students to develop a marketing strategy which met the needs of multiple stakeholders and achieved the goals of the organization. In addition to the stakeholder requirements, the project also addressed the inherent



problems of marketing a natural place as a tourist attraction. For the last three decades, small rural communities in countries from Australia to Africa have used eco-tourism as a means to build the local economy, while sustaining natural places. However, marketing and sustaining an ecological tourist attraction are not always compatible. Encouraging economic growth can make it difficult to maintain the ecological integrity of the attraction. In fact, because marketing of tourist destinations traditionally concentrates on increasing the number of visitors, it has been seen as an enemy of sustainability (Buhalis, 2000). In the last decade, the eco-tourism destinations which have most successfully balanced their ecological missions with their economic needs have done so by making sure all stakeholders are involved in the branding and marketing process. The Beartooth Nature Center (BNC) is the premier educational center of its kind in the region. Located near the northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park in Red Lodge, Montana, the BNC provides a home for local wild animals that are no longer able to survive in their home environment due to injury or abandonment. Grizzly bears, birds of prey, moose, lions, raccoons and wolves all live in an enclosed, but well-cared-for environment where visitors are guaranteed interaction. The BNC approached the Marketing Department of Montana State University Billings (MSUB) in 2011 for assistance in creating an effective branding and marketing campaign. Their ultimate goal was to build a larger, more up-to-date facility. In order to realize this goal, they needed to create greater awareness of their project, attract more visitors, and ultimately, receive more donations to fund the expansion

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the United States, domestic travel combined with international tourism is a \$1.3 trillion industry, with a direct payroll of \$162 billion representing 1 out of 8 jobs (heritagedestination.com, 2005). World Tourism Organization estimates that 'nature tourism' accounts for 20% international travel and is the fastest growing sector at 10% to 30 % growth overall. (United Nation's World Tourism Organization, 2007). Within this context, wilderness and eco-tourism can be profitable. In 2000, according to Trails.com, wilderness and eco-tourists spent \$1200 more than the average traditional tourist (Trails.com, 2000).

The key to marketing an eco-tourist destination successfully is branding. Current holistic marketing theorists argue that building a distinct image that communicates a differentiated value must start by including all stakeholders. The success of such holistic approaches has

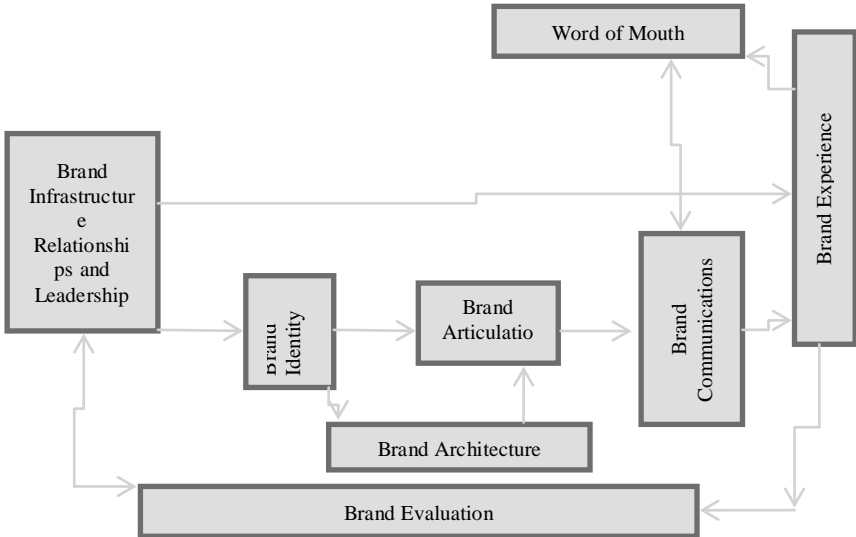
been demonstrated by brand models in New Zealand (Clark, et.al, 2010) , Zambia (Rogerson, 2004), the King Valley (Wheeler, et.al, 2011, Canada's Rideau Canal (Donohoe, 2011) and the Dutch Caribbean Islands (Daye, 2010)

Daye (2002) explains how the function of an effective brand does not merely give information, but also provides a meaning which appeals to stakeholders' values. The successful branding of an eco-tourist site like the BNC, for example, must reflect the tourists' desire to engage with the natural world as well as protect and sustain it. Drawing from the Means End Chain Conceptual Advertising Strategy, (Bagozzi, Dabholkar, 2000), Daye argues that a logo for an eco-tourist site should be symbolic, factual and emotive and that a slogan should be distinct and unique (2002). He maintains that physical attributes and distinctive local features can be very powerful in a marketing campaign. For example, the state of Florida effectively uses a flamingo as its symbol and ensures that visitors know that it is one of only four places where these unusual birds breed. To create a powerful brand for the BNC following Daye's theories, students needed to work with the stakeholders to identify the organization's key physical attributes as well as its unique features.

Aker (1997) argues that branding is a perceptual process which uses five essential brand personalities: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Sincerity expresses wholesomeness and family values; excitement appeals to the unique, young, cool and daring; competence denotes success and influence; sophistication speaks to elegance and prestige; while ruggedness signifies the outdoors. The students working on this project identified "sincerity," and "ruggedness" as the two fundamental brand personalities for the BNC based on the strengths of the product.

Students studied Hanna and Rowley's (2010) Brand-Management Model (Figure 1), which locates brand identity at the core of the brand-building process. In this model, brand identity expresses the distinctive characteristics that stakeholders ascribe to a place, provides a framework for overall coherence, and creates the means for building the effective brand.

**Figure 1.** Strategic place brand-management model, Hanna & Rowley (2010).



Significantly, this holistic model identifies stakeholders as an essential part of the branding process in the relationships area. As the authors explain, “the first stage in the process of positioning or repositioning any tourism destination brand is to establish the core values of the destination and its brand—these should be durable, relevant, communicable and hold saliency for both stakeholders and potential tourists . . . and . . . should be translated into brand personalities” (Hanna and Rowley, 2010). This model offered students an opportunity to benchmark branding practices identified below (Table 1).

**Table 1.** A comparison of brand development stages, Hanna & Rowley (2010).

<b>Destination Branding Model</b> (Baker, 2007)	<b>Destination Branding Process</b> (Laws, 2002)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assessment and audit</li> <li>2. Analysis and advantage (defining positioning)</li> <li>3. Alignment</li> <li>4. Articulate</li> <li>5. Activation (market communications)</li> <li>6. Adoption and attitude (engagement)</li> <li>7. Action and afterwards (experience management/ monitoring evaluation)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Market audit</li> <li>2. Consumer research</li> <li>3. Identifying target markets</li> <li>4. Portfolio strategies</li> <li>5. Developing strategies</li> <li>6. Implementation Track and review</li> </ol>

Table 2 describes the involvement of destination stakeholders in Hankinson’s (2010) five elements of brand orientation. Analysis of the field interviews indicated broad agreement among stakeholders about the relevance and importance of each step. Though the degree of implementation varied in each case, the fostering of stakeholder partnerships was found to be the strongest indicator of a successful branding initiative at 40%. (Hankinson, 2010)

Current research also shows that the importance of community stakeholders is not always considered in the destination branding and marketing process (Jamal & Getz, 1995, 1999.) Moreover, Schroeder and Salzer-Morling & Strannegård, (2004) have shown that marketing often neglects the importance of a community stakeholders’ cultural perspective. Yet, as Gnoth (2007) argues, the values and meanings expressed in the cultural, social, natural, and economic dimensions of people’s lives actually comprise the assets or “capital” of the destination. Students were persuaded by this review which supported a more holistic approach to destination branding. They were particularly interested in the

approaches that include local values, cultures, and identities as part of a broader sustainable destination management philosophy as described by Wheller, Warwick, and Weiler. (Wheeler, Warwick, Weiler, 2011). For these reasons, including the community stakeholders became a crucial part of the destination-branding process for the BNC project.

**Table 2.** Critical antecedents: responses from senior managers (Hankinson 2010)

<b>Critical antecedents</b>		<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1.	Stakeholder partnerships	25	40
2.	Brand leadership	25	25
3.	Departmental coordination	22	26
4.	Stakeholder communications	21	22

Students also learned that ecological issues pose significant and complex issues for eco-tourist destinations. Fyall and Garrod (1998) note that marketing strategies attracting mass tourists to eco-tourist destinations have replaced the golden rule of conservation. An increasing number of tourists and their impact on institutional infrastructures and resources threaten the ability to balance the desire for preservation with the need for revenues (Dearden & Rollins, 2009). As a result, contradictory commercial values can create complexity, uncertainty, and conflict in the management of eco-tourism sites where preservation should be the fundamental priority (Donohoe, 2012). Nevertheless, progressive organizations have shown that creative thinking can offset some of these environmental problems. Organizations like *Visit Scotland* have been able to emphasize conservation while encouraging tourism by promoting greener forms of transportation (Lane, 2009).

During their secondary research, students learned that eco-destinations which are brand winners have one common feature: they are founded on intensive stakeholder, consumer, and competitor research which is thoughtfully expressed in everything that communicates the brand’s personality.

## **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**

When the project began, the BNC’s goal was to raise \$12 million to move to a new location where it could improve and expand its facilities. The

students' initial review of the facility and its weaknesses as well as a subsequent mall-intercept study showed that the BNC had the following marketing and branding problems:

- It was unknown to tourists in terms of both its existence and its mission.
- Its value was not clear to tourists or residents.
- It needs to articulate its value to the right target audiences in order to increase its financial resources.

When the students became involved, the BNC had not yet brought its stakeholders together nor had it identified its brand promise. In order to articulate its brand identity, the BNC had first to understand its significant relationships. Students determined that the BNC needed to better understand its relationship to Yellowstone County, Montana residents, and Yellowstone National Park. Understanding these central relationships would make the new BNC brand both durable and salient for all its stakeholders.

Their preliminary research, including the mall-intercepts of residents and a quantitative email survey of donors also showed that the personalities of the animals held at the Center were important to all stakeholders. Through additional focus groups with school officials and students, they discovered visitors not only wanted to view the creatures, but envisioned having a relationship with them. Learning each rescued animal's name and history allowed stakeholders to feel a personal connection to the animals and increased their interest in the mission of the BNC.

## **TARGETING STAKEHOLDERS**

The student work began by making sure the BNC included all necessary stakeholders in its marketing process. Following the development stages similar to those described in Table 1, students started with Market Audit and Target Identification. These steps, along with the relationship articulation depicted in Figure 1, helped them develop a brand that satisfied all stakeholders. Eventually, they were able to use this information to deliver a branding promise that was both durable and equal to the experience of visiting the BNC.

## Tourists

Student research showed that in 2010, 10.5 million non-residents visited Montana, spending \$2.48 billion. Over four million out-of-state tourists visit Yellowstone National Park annually. Because the BNC is located on the highway near the northern entrance to Yellowstone, some 356,000 vehicles pass its gates every year. Another 110,000 ski tourists each winter and 100,000 tourists each summer visit Red Lodge, where the BNC is located.

Using Weaver’s (2002) Natural-Tourist Spectrum Analysis (Table 3), students identified visitors to the BNC as a “softer” natural-tourist group as their needs were consistent with the product offerings in this category. This group of eco-tourists accounts for 30% of all nature tourism. The visitors to this kind of destination are typically physically passive, prefer short trips, expect services such as restrooms and food, and want interpretations of the places they are visiting. For example, the visitors to the BNC wanted to better understand the animals they were observing. This “softer” eco-tourist became the students’ target audience and not the “harder” tourist or the “structured groups” in Weaver’s description.

**Table 3.** Natural-tourists spectrum (Weaver, 2002)

<b>Harder</b>	<b>Structured</b>	<b>Softer</b>
Strong	Strong	Moderate
Environment	Environment	Environment
Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Enhance	Enhance	Steady state
sustainability	sustainability	Sustainability
Specialized	Specialized	Multi-purpose
Trips	Trips	trips
Long Trips	Short Trips	Short trips
Small Groups	Larger Groups	Larger Groups
Physically	Physically	Physically
Active	Active	passive
Expect Few	Services	Expect services
Services	Expected	Emphasis on
Emphasis on	Emphasis on	Interpretation
Personal	Interpretation	
Experience		

## **Residents**

There are over 19,000 school children in the area. Even though nearby Yellowstone County only has a population of 130,000, it draws about 300,000 Montana residents to big events throughout the year. At the time of the study, the BNC currently attracted about 20,000 visitors each year.

## **Donors**

At the beginning of the project, the BNC had over 200 individual and corporate sponsors and donors worldwide, but primarily their funders lived in Yellowstone County.

## **TARGET RESEARCH**

Student conducted research in order to understand tourists' motivations for visiting the BNC. Using a quantified survey instrument in 100 mall-intercept interviews of residents, students discovered that:

- 51% of local respondents were aware of BNC
- 90% of tourists visited because a local friend took them
- 60% said the featured animals were the primary reason they visited
- 60% visited more than once
- 60% wanted updated exhibits
- 70% visited while in Red Lodge
- 25% made it a primary destination
- 33% were aware of its mission
- 85% thought it was a benefit to children
- 62.1% were willing to travel 1-60 miles to visit a zoo.
- 38% said they would "most definitely" visit

Students sent an additional quantitative research survey instrument via email to donors and received a response of 120, indicating a strong donor involvement. This survey revealed:

- 50% were likely to sponsor an animal
- 80% strongly agreed BNC was worthy of his/her donations
- 40% strongly agreed they gave because the animals were regional
- 40% strongly agreed it was important that the BNC was environmentally effective
- 60% wanted to sponsor specific animals

50% believed that BNC needed to use donations for advertising  
65% thought it was important to house only native animals to the region  
50% encouraged a new facility for the BNC

In order to help establish a brand orientation using Hankinson's framework, students also conducted three focus groups with employees, donors, tourists and residents in order to determine how they perceived the value of the BNC. They discovered in all three focus groups that all of the participants humanized the animals as part of their motivation. They then used this information to develop a positioning statement that would eventually lead to the overall slogan and campaign.

Students also learned that the primary visitors to BNC are out-of-state tourists who are brought as guests of local residents. This meant that an increased local awareness of BNC's value would create an opportunity for an increase in visitors. Residents and their tourist-guests offered a base for repeat visits, especially if the residents were motivated by relationships with particular animals.

Schools and families with children also appeared to be a strategic audience because the majority of the people surveyed agreed that children would benefit from visiting the BNC.

In the course of the research, one element stood out: visitors desired a personal relationship with the animals. A love of the animals and the opportunity of getting to know them as individuals, with their histories and needs, was the core motivation of most visitors. It was the animals themselves that made the BNC sincere and rugged. To many visitors, the animals were the BNC.

## **BRANDING METHOD**

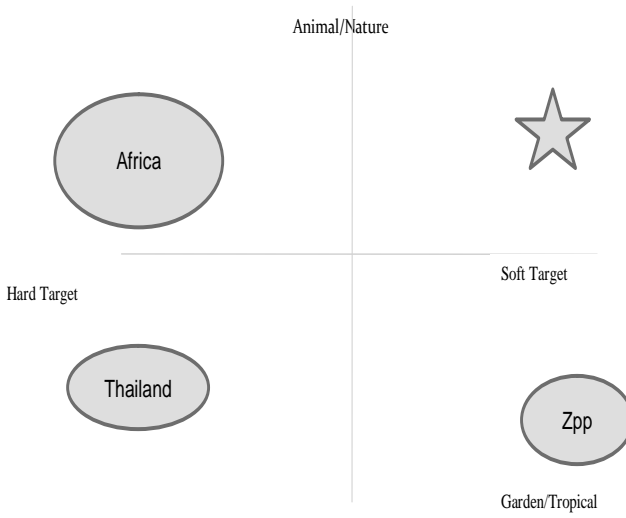
Using their values and identity. MSUB students developed a Means End Chain Conceptual Advertising Strategy (MECCAS) (Table 4) as a method for understanding the values of BNC stakeholders. It demonstrated how the Means End Chain was expressed for the BNC visitors.

Students also developed perceptual maps for each stakeholder group. Using the values established in their research, they located the BNC's position where it was most competitive.. The challenge was to create a positioning statement that satisfied all three groups in one slogan. (See Figures 2, 3, and 4)

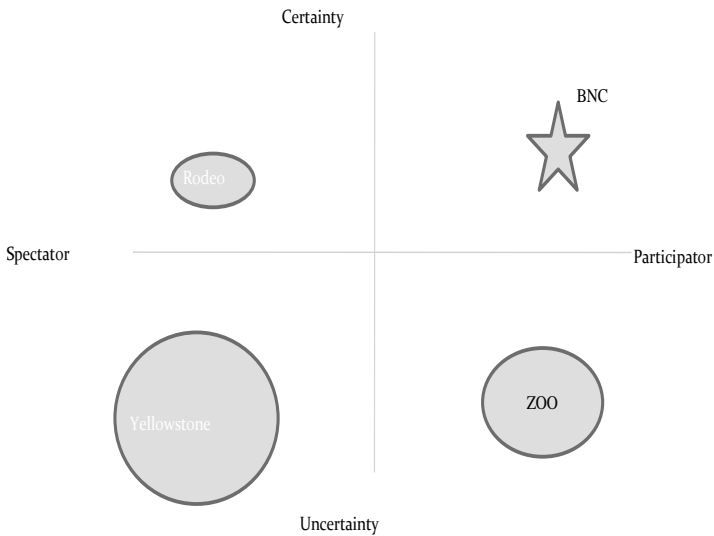
**Table 4.** Means End Chain Conceptual Advertising Strategy

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Physical Consequences</b>	<b>Psychological Consequences</b>	<b>Values</b>
A home for injured or abandoned wild animals. Each one has its own personality and story.	Participation with the sanctuary of actual wild animals. I know them; I go back to visit the ones I have a relationship with.	My visit and donation is saving the planet, protecting the wilderness, and saving the animals. I donate to save the lions who were orphans.	Universalism
Beautiful setting with gardens and pathways making it possible to always see the animals. Similar animals that live here also wild in Yellowstone Park.	Easy access, food and restrooms; it's a lovely setting in which to spend the day.	Enjoyable experience that I can tell my friends about; I might not have seen anything at Yellowstone Park. My kids got to know the bears personally.	Hedonism
Educational materials teaching people about animals in the wild and how they can be protected.	Learning and a new understanding about the earth.	I am humbled and have a new appreciation for myself and my family.	Stimulation
<b>Elements</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Hooks</b>	<b>Driving Force</b>

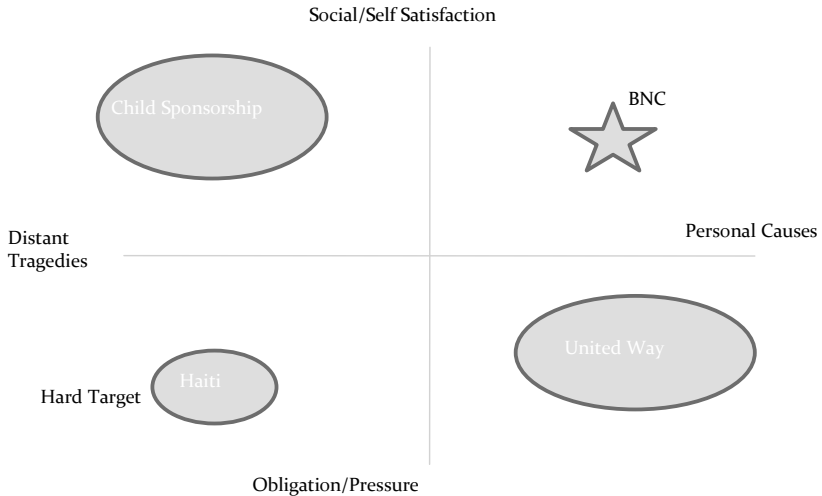
**Figure 2. Tourists**



**Figure 3. Residents**



**Figure 4. Donors**



The resulting brand-positioning statement stated that the BNC was for softer eco-tourists interested in animals and nature. For residents and tourists, the BNC was a place where one was certain to see animals. For donors, the BNC was a cause that made them feel socially responsible.

Repeatedly, the students' research and analysis showed the key value to communicate was the opportunity to develop a relationship with the animals. Overall, the stakeholders saw the animals as part of the community and the culture. Students communicated this value in the brand-positioning statement they developed: At the Beartooth Nature Center, you will see and understand wild animals. The slogan for the BNC became: "Befriend the Beasts."

In January, students began using focus groups to test the "Befriend the Beasts" slogan with three different campaign tones.

- Humorous animal personification
- Heartfelt connection with humans
- Escape to nature

Students interviewed resident and donor stakeholder groups using sample scripts and story boards for each campaign tone. The unmistakable winner was "humorous animal personification." This

campaign tone motivated and interested stakeholders and made them feel connected to the animal personalities. After seeing the materials, they felt they had a relationship with the wild animals being protected at the BNC. This campaign strategy motivated the stakeholders to visit, to take guests, and/or to donate to the BNC.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Analysing the size of the potential audience data listed under “Targets” above, (local residents, students, visitors to local events, donors and tourists), students determined that with a 3% action result from the combined groups, the BNC could double its number of visitors. They determined that they could use the limited resources available to target key audiences (local residents, the regional school system, and donors) at large events. They also decided to use television-based Public Service Announcements as an umbrella for the new branding. Moreover, given the large number of motorists who drive by the BNC, the students recommended better highway signage to create awareness and provide directions to the facility.

Students oversaw the production of three humorous animal personification television commercials which were aired in the Yellowstone County. The commercials featured actual animals in their habitats and used voiceovers that allowed the animals to “speak for themselves.” In one, a deer contemplates crossing a busy highway and then decides instead to head to the BNC for safety. On arrival, he is welcomed by two owls. In another, two mountain lions lament being orphaned by their mother and grumble about being stuck with each other. The two comic owls mock their grumbling. The third commercial stages what appears to be a dangerous confrontation between a bobcat and a strange visitor only identified by his boots. As the two come closer together, the audience expects a violent confrontation. Then, in the last moment, the audience sees Jeff, the BNC director, reach down and gently pet the affectionate wild cat. To extend the television campaign, students also designed an accompanying poster to reach local residents and tourists shopping in Red Lodge.

Because students also identified over 300,000 people attending various events in the area, a large part of the campaign promoted the new brand at these events using posters, fliers, and program ads. Table 5 illustrates the events the students targeted.

**Table 5. Events**

Home of Champions Rodeo and Parade- July 2-4, 2011 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parade float</li> <li>● Flier distribution in the parade area</li> <li>● Booth at the parade with animals</li> </ul>
Billings Mustangs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Radio/Print combination (including a half-page game announcement)</li> <li>● Five-night event sponsorship (Five home games per sponsor)</li> </ul>
Big Sky State Games- Summer 2011 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Program advertisement and flier in participants bags</li> </ul>
The Scout Show- March 19, 2011 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Booth at show at Metra Park</li> <li>● Distribute pamphlets and brochures focusing on family-based events at BNC</li> </ul>

Students decided that individual donors would best be pursued through fundraising events. They also identified corporate donors and possible granting opportunities that were consistent with the overall brand. The organizations and groups they targeted included:

- Pet Smart
- Veterinarians
- Kenmark (Fox)
- Yellowstone Valley Woman’s Magazine
- Harley Davidson
- Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP)
- Environmental Education Grants Program
- Montana Legacy Project (preserving Montana land)

With the support of the Yellowstone County School Districts, they also promoted the brand through the schools in order to reach the 19,000 children (Table 6).

Lastly, they recommended that even though the BNC Website offered many valuable learning tools, it could be effectively redesigned. They felt particular attention should be paid to Web materials that would attract more interest and interaction from the education community. Students also suggested that the BNC Web address appear on every piece of printed material.

**Table 5. School programs**

<b><u>Kindergarten</u></b>	<b><u>3rd Grade</u></b>	<b><u>School/Grade Assemblies</u></b>
<p data-bbox="165 347 367 651">Presentations were between 30 and 60 minutes. They were tailored to suit particular age groups. They were designed to be fun and exciting without being overly technical.</p> <p data-bbox="165 687 367 863">Children in each age group received a small poster and a flier to take home to their parents.</p>	<p data-bbox="433 320 630 619">Presentations were between 45 and 60 minutes and were slightly more technical than the kindergarten group, but were not overwhelming to students.</p> <p data-bbox="433 655 630 1449">Children in this age group received a small poster, a flier to take home (with an admission coupon), and trading cards. The trading cards focused on the eight most popular animals at the BNC. (Bears, mountain lions, raccoons, porcupine, wolves, owls, lynx and fox.) Each animal's 'tale' was printed on the back as well as information about the animal(age, diet, species, etc.). When a student</p>	<p data-bbox="697 347 916 834">Presentations were tailored to fit the needs of the school and were 45 to 60 minutes or longer as needed. They were designed to fit the educational group. For example, if the assembly was for ages K-6, the appropriate materials that would be interesting to the entire group were prepared.</p>

	collected the entire set of trading cards he or she could take them to the BNC for free admission for themselves <i>and</i> an accompanying adult.	
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## FEEDBACK AND CONCLUSION

In order to determine if they had followed an effective model that reached all stakeholders, students evaluated their campaign against Hankinson's branding process. They also considered whether their work achieved Hankinson's description of an active place brand. Did it enhance the "coherence of the experience"; support the efficient use of resources to "maximize the enjoy-ability and appropriateness of the experience"; did it facilitate the "evolution of the experience"? And, in general, as far as key stakeholders are concerned, did it "engender 'pride of place' that was effectively shared and communicated? (Hankinson, 2012)


Based on attendance at the BNC and reviews with stakeholders, students determined that they had, indeed, made sure that key groups were included in the process which, as Hankinson's model predicted, created support from the community and donors for the new brand. They also saw relationships strengthened in the process of developing the campaign. Local businesses in the area supported the branding efforts by featuring BNC posters in their store windows and at big events. Local TV stations ran almost double the usual number of Public Service Announcements in support of the on-air campaign. Several discussions with all stakeholders revealed the majority considered the brand and slogan to represent accurately the experience of the BNC. There was shared pride in the campaign which used personalized images of the BNC animals to relate to the values of the stakeholders. As a result, attendance at the BNC doubled during the summer of 2011. Moreover, the campaign itself won a Gold Addy from the Montana State Chapter of the American Advertising Federation in 2012.

The effectiveness of the campaign inspired donors to continue working on plans for the new BNC home which will ultimately complete the long-term promise created by this branding project. This new excitement and interest in the BNC would not have been possible without a brand that was well received by the community and which has attracted more tourists and more donors, both private and corporate.

Students concluded that the theories advanced by current literature are indeed effective in the branding of an eco-tourist destination. As their experience with the BNC taught them, understanding the values of all stakeholders and including them in the process makes it possible to sustain an important wilderness attraction which offers environmental, social, and economic benefits to the area. The BNC promises to be a valuable and sustainable part of the local ecosystem, environment and culture. Its success is the very definition of sustainability.

All materials including television and collateral can be reviewed at:  
[http://www.msubillings.edu/BusinessFaculty/otjen/examples\\_of\\_advertising.htm](http://www.msubillings.edu/BusinessFaculty/otjen/examples_of_advertising.htm)


Befriend the Beasts  
MONTANA'S PREMIER  
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AND RELAX

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