

# NIAGARA CASE STUDY



# Niagara Original.

Our regional brand, the positioning and design platform upon which we will express our unique story to the world.



## NIAGARA ORIGINAL CASE STUDY

### Context: Ontario

Increasingly, communities across Ontario have become less reliant on their traditional stronghold industries and are developing innovative strategies to attract new investments and diversify their existing economies. These strategies, however, are often not developed or executed in partnership with all major stakeholders in the community. This often results in an uncoordinated community economic vision. Recognizing the benefits of a coordinated economic development strategy, the Regional Municipality of Niagara and the Niagara Economic Development Corporation collaborated with stakeholder associations to create the *Navigating our Future: Niagara Economic Growth Strategy 2009-2012*.

Niagara's Economic Growth Strategy identified six strategic action plans to spur economic activity and strengthen the community's competitive advantages. Two action plans which were outlined in the document included "Build a Stronger Collective Voice" and "Marketing the Niagara Brand". These two action plans became the catalyst for the development of the transformative regional branding strategy: "Niagara Original".

The Niagara Original Brand was developed in partnership with business, government and the non-profit sector to provide a strong collective voice for the region's economic transformation. Niagara Original has successfully transformed the region's identity and encouraged new investment, as the region is now considered a diversified business community and multi-faceted tourism and cultural destination. This innovative branding strategy is increasingly being recognized across Ontario and the globe. Niagara is Open for Business.

### BENEFITS REALIZED FROM NIAGARA ORIGINAL

#### **Improved Regional Approach to Economic Development:**

*The development of Niagara Original facilitated greater dialogue and deeper partnership among business, government and not-for-profit stakeholders in the region, resulting in a stronger collective voice.*

#### **Region-wide Brand Adoption**

*Over 100 businesses and organizations across the region have applied to use industry-specific versions of the Niagara Original logo. Users include: Tourism Niagara, Niagara GO Train, Niagara College, Niagara Fallsview Casino, the Niagara Wine Festival, and the Shaw Festival, among many others.*

#### **Recognition for Excellence in Branding:**

*Niagara Original has won excellence in marketing awards from both the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) and the Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC).*



Niagara Original is the Niagara region’s “place-based” marketing strategy which has been adopted and promoted by area businesses, organizations and municipal partners in various marketing activities. The signature stylized “n” and accompanying tagline: “Original” also employed as “think niagara. think original,” is gaining widespread usage and portrays a unified regional message that Niagara is a progressive community in which to live, work and play.

This marketing tool is available to local businesses and various community stakeholders for a nominal five dollar licensing fee. It is usable in its master brand format (maple leaf icon), or it can easily be utilized in one of the many sectoral icons, both public and private, across the region.

It is actively displayed by businesses, community organizations, and tourist attractions throughout the region that help to inform and support the Niagara brand. The brand functions as a flexible, creative platform designed to spur an integrated, impactful communications style for the region.

*“With the launch of the Niagara Original marketing brand by the NEDC in 2008, an important piece of the strategy to re-position Niagara as a place for business development and investment has been implemented. Complete with a new logo that plays to Niagara’s strengths and collateral materials featuring narratives that shine a light on Niagara’s unique businesses, it is a strong step towards re-branding Niagara as an economic zone with international appeal.”*

**-Walter Sendzik, CEO, St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce.**

### **Vision**

Niagara Original is designed to be very simple. A message that all stakeholders can communicate clearly and effectively to the consumer, in ways nobody else is doing.

The brand is more than a logo. Niagara Original represents the region’s unique voice, imagery, and experience. The language we use to evoke the Niagara experience is as critical as the images we use. The brand conveys the region’s unique and original character through its embodiment of four key attributes: Inventive, Abundant, Vivid and Accessible.

The collective adoption of the brand is positioned to capture the interest and imagination of the travelling public, investors, residents and the media. With the end goal of increased financial and social benefits through growth generated from tourism and broader economic development.

*“We’re a big fan of the Brand. The concept we’re putting together as a region to show a consistent face outside Niagara is great. Otherwise we can just get lost in the indifference.”*

**- Phil Ritchie, Owner, Keefer Mansion Inn**

## **Why Niagara?**

Niagara, like many other regions across the province, suffered economic pressures in its manufacturing sector. Changes in the global economy were compounded by falling commodity prices, which led to manufacturers in the region downsizing or closing their operations. As a result of the changing economic climate in the region and beyond, the Economic Growth Strategy was revised for 2009-2012 through extensive stakeholder consultations, with the commitment to pursue new directions in the region's economy and industry sectors.

The Economic Growth Strategy identified the need for both a stronger collective voice and a regional branding strategy. The brand embodies collaboration and partnership among stakeholders toward common goals, in turn providing prospective investors with confidence in their decisions to invest in the community.

Marketing the Niagara Original brand better positions the region as an innovative business location and tourism destination in the minds of investors, tourists and the general public. Indeed, with respect to tourism, previous studies revealed that Niagara was primarily viewed by many as a short-term destination location. This perception did not accurately reflect the true potential and many opportunities for the tourism sector as a whole.

By uniting Niagara tourism products under the Niagara Original umbrella, an inclusive, more encompassing experience based product holds the potential to alter the incorrect perception of the region as a short term destination.

*"Niagara is a very strong brand and The Shaw (Festival) is a part of that brand. We feel its important to cross-brand to the consumer, so that the relationship between the Shaw and the Niagara region is always reinforced."*

***-Odette Yazbeck, Shaw Festival Spokesperson.***

## **Benefits to Niagara**

Niagara Original has brought many benefits to the region, including a unified marketing and communications strategy to stimulate economic growth. Most importantly, however, Niagara Original has helped transform the region's identity to better reflect its unique character and showcase the region's opportunities for new investment.

The Niagara region continues to realize many benefits as a result of actively promoting the Niagara Original brand, as evidenced through the following examples:

- Niagara Original achieved national recognition when it was awarded honours in the "Best of Category" in the 2009 Marketing Canada Awards presented at the Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC) national conference.
- The Brand received industry recognition through the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) when Niagara Original was awarded the EDCO 2009 Award of Excellence in Marketing.

- The Niagara Original brand has been featured in numerous media outlets including Strategy Magazine, The Business Link, and the St. Catharines Standard newspaper’s Niagara at Work feature.
- Over 100 local businesses and organizations have requested to use the Niagara Original brand in their communications and marketing materials.
- The Niagara Original brand is currently featured on fruit baskets distributed throughout the province. To date, over 3 million baskets featuring the “produce sectoral icon” have been produced.
- In 2009, the NEDC developed a Niagara Original Award in partnership with the Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (NEYA) to honour innovative and imaginative business leaders in the region. This can also be leveraged to help them gain increased visibility and recognition on a national and global business stage.

*“We’re in the surveillance business and sure enough we found the perfect location in the Niagara Region... It seems the sky’s the limit since we relocated to the Niagara Region...access to world markets has no limits here. And, as our business continues to grow, local governments have been extremely proactive in assisting with development...”*

**-Dr. Tim Nohara, President, Accipiter Radar Technologies Inc. and recipient of Niagara Original Award**

### **How: For Ontario’s Communities**

The Niagara Original “Team of Champions” undertook a multifaceted approach to create the brand, which centered on the following:

- **Develop a Strong Growth Strategy** - Niagara’s Economic Growth Strategy 2005-2010 acted as the catalyst for the re-branding of Niagara. This Growth Strategy reflected the changing economic climate and involved the continued participation of over 200 public and private stakeholders. In 2008, the updated 2009-2012 version, based upon further community consultations, especially from stakeholder input at the Niagara Economic Forum in April 2008, mandated the creation and execution of the Niagara Original branding program as an integral component of the region’s need to remain competitive and relevant in a global marketplace.



Produce Sector Icon

- **Collaboration and Partnership** - Developing the brand initiative in partnership with various stakeholders from all sectors of the community promotes a strong sense of ownership among partners, and ensures that the brand will be enthusiastically promoted throughout the region. The development of Niagara Original was designed to be highly inclusive. Led by a committee of business and tourism leaders, the brand was developed from 20 stakeholder interviews, 7 municipal group interviews, 3 workshops, 1,650 traveller interviews, and 15 business leader interviews.

- **Work with a Regional Focus** - Niagara's Economic Growth Strategy 2009-2012 also identified building a stronger collective voice as a strategic action plan for the region. For Niagara to emerge as an economic leader, business, government and the not-for-profit sector must rally around the common cause for Niagara's economic future. Niagara's Regional Council and NEDC acted as pioneers for the community to adopt a regional lens.
- **Market a Strong Brand** - Niagara created a brand which defines the unique features of the region and its market position. In order to promote Niagara Original, a brand booklet, accompanying website, and two minute destination video were created to act as primary communications outlets. The NEDC acts as brand custodian and has championed the brand by fully integrating the Niagara Original into its marketing materials and publications such as the *Niagara Success Stories* campaign, *Niagara News*, and *Emerging Clusters* brochures. Finally, the Niagara Original serves as a cornerstone for all NEDC marketing decisions.



- **Create a Flexible Brand Platform** - In addition to the master brand, sectoral icons were created as identifiable logos to represent specific industries or sectors in the Niagara region. This provides greater flexibility and inclusiveness, thereby increasing the likelihood of adoption. Interested parties are encouraged to submit their own designs, as long as they are not exclusive to the creator. As the brand custodian, NEDC provides approval and guidelines on their use. Information regarding the use of the icons and examples of businesses currently using Niagara Original can be found on the brand website at: [www.niagaraoriginal.com](http://www.niagaraoriginal.com).



## **Background**

With a population of over 425,000, the Niagara Region is located in southern Ontario between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Niagara's location at the Canada-U.S border and proximity to the Welland Canal and St. Lawrence Seaway provides many competitive advantages to businesses, including easy access to North American and global markets. As a result, manufacturing industries have traditionally been the backbone of Niagara's economy. Agriculture (wine production) and tourism are also major revenue-generators for the region, as Niagara is the top tourist destination in Ontario and accounts for 40% of the province's tourism revenue.

## **Ongoing and Future Directions**

NEDC engages in a variety of activities to increase awareness and buy-in of the Niagara Original brand from community stakeholders. Below is a list of ongoing and future activities by the NEDC:

- **The Niagara Original Business Forum**

In November 2009, the NEDC hosted a business forum which was attended by over 100 Niagara business leaders in order to review progress on the Niagara Original brand, gain feedback, and develop strategies for the future propagation of the Brand.

- **Niagara Week 2005 to 2010**

An annual delegation of Niagara's politicians, municipal staff and private sector representatives visits Queen's Park to meet with Provincial politicians and staff in order to present a collective voice on a number of issues relevant to the region. These matters include tourism, infrastructure, and economic development for the purposes of investment readiness and sustainability. The Niagara Original Brand is prominently featured.

- **Brand Workshops & Webinars**

NEDC is leading community presentations and workshops with various organizations such as Business Improvement Areas, Chambers of Commerce, leadership groups and more. NEDC is also holding multi-media and interactive online Niagara Original webinars to allow easy access for businesses, community groups and residents alike to take part and discover the Brand's opportunities. Surveys, polls, comments, questions and suggestions will also be collected for analysis and consideration.

- **Continued Research & Monitoring**

In order to improve best practices for the Brand it is imperative to conduct primary and secondary research, and also continue to analyse case studies of other successful place brands. Brands evolve over time, and as local adopters begin and/or continue to use the brand in innovative ways, Niagara Region is committed to monitoring and capturing that information so that other brand adopters can benefit from Niagara's experience.

- **Niagara Original Award**

The Niagara Original Award is presented annually to a Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (NEYA) Alumnus. The award was developed to honour innovative and imaginative entrepreneurs in Niagara and is a part of NEDC's strategy to increase the profile and

involvement of Niagara business leaders and to build the Niagara brand. The NEYA 'alumni' are the region's finest entrepreneurs, are among the best in the province and the country, and the goal is to continue to spotlight Niagara's best and to help them become more widely recognized in the Canadian and international business community.

*"We've learned that Niagara's brand promise must be very simple, a message that all stakeholders can communicate clearly and effectively to the consumer, in ways nobody else is doing. Ultimately, **Niagara Original** is an idea about who we are and a promise to the consumer about what is possible here."*  
**-Niagara Original Brand Booklet**

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