

MONTEREY COUNTY: CAPTURING A FEELING

The assignment At the end of 2000, Monterey County's Convention and Visitors Bureau hired Leagas Delaney to create an advertising campaign. This was a first for Monterey, who'd never marketed themselves as one place with one voice. The assignment itself was straightforward: create a destination marketing campaign with a budget of \$1MM that would bring more people to Monterey off-peak. What wasn't straightforward was this client – a coalition of 400 members with different needs and objectives, some privately and some publicly-funded. Managing such a group, let alone creating something that appealed to all of them, would be a challenge.

Competition We started out studying other destination marketing programs. We looked at advertisements for Napa and Tahoe, Monterey's Northern California competition, as well as for places all over the world. Immediately we saw a pattern – bright pictures of landscapes, beaches or attractions enjoyed by romantic couples or happy families. Many were cluttered with disparate images and over-promising, cliched text while others focused on single-minded appeal (skiing in Tahoe, wine in Napa). Despite all the brightness and excitement, nothing stood out. There was a definite opportunity to do something different and get our client noticed.

Understanding our consumer We started out with a target who already knew the area, and conducted a series of focus groups throughout the greater Bay Area. We needed to understand this consumer and their current perceptions of Monterey. We honed in on a subset of consumers who were upper-middle class and led stressful, hectic lives. These aren't people who take solid chunks of vacation time. Instead they take short breaks on short notice – when work allows. To them, a perfect trip was one that was accessible, convenient, and relaxing. As a final qualifier we decided to focus on singles or couples without children under the age of 18, as they would be most likely to pick up and take a last minute, mid-week trip.

This consumer is familiar with Monterey. They know how beautiful it is, how many things there are to do, and how easy it is to get there. They even know to stay away during peak summer months and weekends, when it's crowded, expensive, and foggy. They say they love it there, yet they aren't going. *Our charge was to remind them of what is so special about Monterey, and why they need to go back.*

Understanding the brand Our next step was to understand the place. We were familiar with the main attractions (Pebble Beach, Big Sur, the Aquarium), but we knew there was much more to Monterey County. We explored for five days, immersing ourselves in the "Monterey Experience." We drove all over, sampled hotels and restaurants, and eavesdropped on tourists. We hung out with the local color – fishermen, vineyard owners, museum curators, farmers, waiters, and surfers. And every night we sat down with our own journals and photographs, documenting our personal thoughts. We came to understand that Monterey had more to offer than we could convincingly convey through a traditional print advertisement. We spent our last night at Big Sur, drinking local wine and watching the sun set. What is this place all about?

A unique positioning There were so many things we wanted to say about Monterey – it's beautiful, it's diverse, it's accessible, it's got something for everyone As we went over hundreds of descriptions of Monterey, we knew we needed to find the one idea that would remind our target of all this *and* break through the clutter. We kept coming back to one quote: "Monterey is more about how it makes *you* feel than the way *it* feels."

We realized that the hook wasn't so much what people were saying as how they were feeling. We remembered our own experiences from that night at Big Sur, how happy and relaxed we had felt and what a powerful and personal feeling it had been. If we could just remind people of this feeling – however they had discovered or experienced it – we knew they'd want to come back.

We asked everyone we could think of to describe “The Monterey Feeling.” What we heard was:

“It’s recognizable but indescribable”

“It’s unique to this place, and unexpected”

“You feel it regardless of who you are or why you go”

“Everyone experiences and interprets it in their own way”

“It’s whatever you want it to be – romantic, active, relaxing, cultural”

We brainstormed on the one idea that summed this up, speaking to everyone while allowing for personal interpretation. Our main idea: **“There’s just something about this place.”**

Briefing the team Bringing creatives in at this point was challenging. How do you ask them to create a mass campaign around a personal feeling? Instead of trying to describe it, we took them there. We showed them what we had seen, introduced them to people, and gave them time to let *The Feeling* sink in. We also exposed them to countless campaigns in the destination-marketing category so they could see what was out there.

They took their experiences and the briefing and put it together into an idea video. Then they conceptualized a campaign that was simultaneously groundbreaking and simple ... and asked our client to ignore every category rule.

Testing the work Our client was excited but understandably cautious. So we agreed to test the work through a series of local focus groups. The responses proved that our campaign clearly communicated its message while motivating people to take action.

What do these ads say to you?

“Words and pictures can’t describe the beauty of Monterey and what it has to offer ... you need to experience it live”

“They remind me that Monterey is a calm, soothing, relaxing getaway, a place you can make to be whatever vacation dream you want”

How do these ads make you think and feel?

“They make me use my imagination to fill in the blanks”

“You put in any picture you can imagine, depending on the individual and how he experiences the feeling and beauty of Monterey”

“They make me think of past trips to Monterey to create a visual that fills in the blanks”

We placed our ad in travel magazines and asked groups to flip through. They stopped at our ad and said:

“I like this one, what an intriguing, original concept”

“This one stands out ... empty boxes, you have to stop”

“The blankness here is so refreshing ... I want to fill it in for myself”

And we knew they were motivated when we heard:

“Leaving the beauty of Monterey up to the imagination makes me want to go back and see it for myself”

“Now I’m thinking about going there, it’s been way too long”

A successful campaign Since the campaign broke in April 2001, calls to Monterey’s information center have increased by 20% and hotel reservations are five times higher (through the call center). Our costs fell within the \$1MM budget.

Our client couldn’t be more pleased. They came to us for an ad campaign, but what they got was a new identity. The assignment burgeoned into an entire branding package, including media, logos, stationery, business cards, and website consultation. As this campaign unfolds we see the website as the perfect, affordable vehicle to roll it out to a broader audience. More and more people are researching and planning vacations online, and the site can communicate the incredible diversity that the County offers while aiding them throughout planning process.