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## Get Healthy in Cleveland

By Lute Harmon Sr.



Cleveland's political corruption escapades are just the latest in a series of events that have shaken our confidence and damaged our national reputation.

In my lifetime, Cleveland has been known by the keywords "mistake on the lake," "burning river," "poorest city," "biggest population loser" and now "corruption central."

Crazy as it may seem, most of us like Cleveland so much we are willing to forgive and forget. Yet that won't make our problems go away. A city cannot continue to lose good people, including its bright college graduates, without paying a high price. In a competitive world that rewards talent and brains, Cleveland is losing its most valuable asset.

At times like these, when the phrase I hear most often is "I've never seen it any worse," I wish we had a common understanding of the benefits we share in living here. It would be nice to believe enough in our strengths and in a vision of where we are going that we could absorb the blows of inept politicians and even laugh them off.

In the past, we have created slogans to convince ourselves and the world that Cleveland is a good place to live and work.

Unfortunately, our attempts have been less than successful. "Believe in Cleveland" certainly doesn't work if you're having second thoughts. And no one I know has ever been able to explain what "Cleveland Plus" means.

At least when we were promoting ourselves as a plum, we understood what a plum was. Then again, we could never find anyone who liked plums. As hard as we've tried, we just haven't been able to find that certain something about Cleveland that gives us the confidence to feel good about where we live.

As serendipity would have it, a book arrived on my desk recently that may provide an answer. As with most good answers, this one has been right under our nose for a long time — which is the point of the book.

Dick Maggiore, president and CEO of Innis Maggiore advertising agency, was nice enough to send me Jack Trout's new book, *The Search for the Obvious*. Trout, a friend of Maggiore's, is recognized as one of the world's most knowledgeable marketers. His earlier book, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing*, written with Harvard professor Al Ries, is still the best marketing book ever written.

The importance of what Trout has to say starts with the premise that we live in a highly competitive world where if we want to sell something — a product, a city, a country — we need to create a brand. And successful brands do one thing: They deliver a specific, believable benefit to the customer.

Trout makes the point in this new book, a point often overlooked, that the most successful brands are

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those that are the most obvious. If the customer doesn't understand the benefit of a product immediately — and believe it — it won't sell.

The brand that delivers what it says it will deliver wins customers every time. If you want to give your beloved a diamond that lasts forever, you will give her a DeBeers. If you want better ingredients, better pizza, you'll call Papa John's. If you want to drive the best engineered car in the world, you'll drive a Mercedes. If it's the safest car you want, you'll purchase a Volvo.

Marketing is not so much a battle of products as it is a battle of perceptions. And perception, as we know, is reality. DeBeers, Papa John's, Mercedes and Volvo are successful brands because they are perceived to deliver what they promise.

Trout has several tests for a successful brand. The two most important ask: Is it obvious, and is it real. Which brings us to Cleveland today.

Wouldn't this be the perfect time, with the addition of a Medical Mart and all the national attention we are getting as a world-class health care center, to brand Cleveland as the city in which to live, work and get healthy? Our brand would pass Trout's tests with flying colors: It's obvious, and it is real.

And better yet, getting healthy in Cleveland is a brand we can extend, from healthy bodies to healthy minds and healthy businesses — our three greatest assets.

There is no one who desires government reform more than I do. But why would I place my future in the hands of any government organization? I want the future of my business and my family in my own hands and in the hands of the outstanding individuals I know here in medicine, business and education. Our future is obvious.

Now that Jack Trout has helped me see it and believe it, the next time someone asks me why I live in Cleveland, I'll say: "Because I want to be healthy, wealthy and wise."

## Comment:

Wednesday, September 16, 2009 3:30:56 PM by [maggiore](#)

It's a fact of life that the easiest idea to overlook is the obvious one. Most ideas are apparent only in retrospect.

Having the right idea, a unique and differentiated position, is the first step. Expressing that idea right is the next. And it can be just as tricky.

Lute, I'm pleased that you embraced the book's concepts and immediately began to apply them. After much work in determining how best to position the Cleveland area, we too have come to a similar conclusion.

Cleveland should indeed be branded around the idea of the 'leader in healthcare.' It is natural. It is obvious. It is a perception we already own in the minds of many. It is meaningful. It is a leadership position. And, we sure do have the credentials to back it up.

Of course, we would need to build on it with a more focused and cohesive campaign - the expression. This is where it gets mighty challenging. Politics. Turf battles. Competing campaigns. Money. And much more!

The central problem of brand-building is getting the organization (or place) to execute on one simple idea!

It was a mammoth undertaking to get the greater Cleveland area to coalesce around the theme, Cleveland Plus. A lot of very smart people found the best way they could to get folks to join in. However, there was a very big problem on the front end. In 2006, during the early stage of the process, a decision was made that proved fatal.

They were charged with coming up with an idea that would work for the Cleveland Chamber, Cleveland Convention and Visitors' Bureau AND for Team NEO's efforts to recruit businesses into our area. These are very different and often incompatible efforts. And to top it off, it had to work in 16 Northeast Ohio counties and with it, its over four million residents. Hence, the 'Plus.'

It never works to serve two or more masters.

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