

**CITY  
NATION  
PLACE**

**LAB** 

18th - 20th May, 2026  
**Lisbon**

# **Your digital place brand: Report**

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## Thank you to our partners

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## Executive Summary

The first City Nation Place Lab brought together 30 place brand and marketing leaders with five expert consultants to workshop ideas and challenges and to translate AI and digital shifts into practical priorities. Over the two days of discussion, the group worked to decode the impact of developments in AI not just on marketing strategy but more broadly on strategies for strengthening place reputation, investment appeal, visitor attraction, and community resilience.

This Report aims to share the learnings.

Perhaps the key finding is... Don't panic!

At worst, you're only going to be three months behind, because the technology is moving so fast, and when every pound, dollar, and euro needs justifying, there's a lot of value in taking the time to get your approach right and learn from others. The advice from those in the room is that curiosity is more valuable than confidence at this stage of development in AI.

It's also surprisingly reassuring that, after two days of intense discussion about algorithms, bots, and the impacts of technology, one of the group's key takeaways is that, at the end of the day, the fundamentals of place branding create the structures and relationships you need to respond.

### Building the business case for experimentation and investment

Where place branding and place marketing is public-sector funded, there may be more of a challenge in justifying budget for experimentation, but there are low-cost experiments that every organisation can undertake which will start to demonstrate why testing, testing, and testing again is so important. For example, take on the personality of different audience types [investors, tourists, talent etc] and run search prompts - you'll see the gaps in discoverability and reputation first hand and this will help convey the importance of action.

We know that place brand and marketing teams are very different the world over in terms of size and budget, but the increasing availability of AI tools means that every organisation can invest in curiosity. It's probably true that your team are already experimenting: auditing the tools that are currently being used to understand what value is being achieved is a crucial first step to developing an organisational approach to leveraging AI. What you're aiming for is the right balance of

encouragement and established guardrails to protect your data and IP. Every organisation should have a written and communicated AI policy. This needn't be a huge, unreadable policy document - a one pager will be more useful.

### Perception and your digital place brand

To set the scene for the discussions, Bloom Consulting's Jose Filipe Torres presented an exclusive preview of their upcoming report, Perception Genesis.

In our new digital reality, perception and reputation are permanently visible - and continuously vulnerable. As mass media is an important factor in shaping influence and perception, Bloom Consulting have analysed articles from five major publications to tag specific emotional patterns and correlate these signals with perception of countries. And the better you are at managing your vulnerability, the stronger the perception of your place.

We also heard from The Swedish Institute's Sofia Bard, who gave attendees an overview of how they are tracking online conversations about Sweden. Nation branding isn't just a matter for trade, investment, and visitor attraction - it's a matter of national security - something that became abundantly clear after Sweden was the target of a disinformation campaign purporting that Muslim children were being kidnapped in Sweden, compounded by the two instances of individuals in Sweden burning copies of the Holy Quran.



The team conducted a perception study in MENA and identified that a third had heard about the burning of the Qurans, and a fifth had heard about the 'kidnapping of Muslim children' - but only 25% of those had changed their perception of Sweden. Those who hadn't been influenced had other ties to Sweden, whether they had visited, bought Swedish products, or knew Swedish citizens.

The team are using digital tools to track the image of

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Sweden, using AI to create search strings to capture and analyse specific information flows. Through this, they're able to develop targeted counterstrategies that ensure they're telling the right story on the right platform to strengthen the narrative of Sweden.

### Responding to disinformation

Our attendees' practical tips on responding to disinformation...

- Test to see how much mis- or dis-information is actually impacting the AI algorithms
- It's usually best to not engage with deliberate disinformation – avoid “feeding the beast”
- Focus on positive stories vs defensive messaging
- A community response usually has more credibility than official sources
- And the good news, for the moment at least - AI quality filtering is currently reducing the risk of fake news



### The changing rules of discoverability

How can you ensure that your place shows up in the right place, at the right time, for the right reasons?

AI discovers through aggregation and typically prioritises referenced sources, repeated signals, external validation, structured authority, and consistency across ecosystems. At the same time, AI is changing human decision-making journeys and so a key takeaway from the discussions is that you need to be tackling human discoverability and AI discoverability at the same time. One piece of advice was to treat an AI as a persona or audience in its own right.

Luca Romozzi from Sojern walked attendees through what changes when the next visitor to your site is a machine rather than a human. The digital marketing

funnel has never been truly linear – many people loop through exploration and evaluation touchpoints multiple times before they make a purchase decision. AI is further disrupting this funnel, and places need to begin operating in terms of both human and algorithmic discovery.

Sarah Volberg from Destination Canada shared a new methodology for rethinking approaches to generative engine optimisation, recommending that you test, test, and test again to understand what the LLMs say about your place. Once you know how you're being cited, you can re-engineer your strategies to close the gaps you identify.

Visibility is great, but credibility is what moves the needle – and that's built from proof points. Matthew Kruchko, Gravity Global, demonstrated how you can build a proof point library that ensures you're consistently building your story and being surfaced in the new AI era.

Matthew's recommendations?

- Design for discoverability
- Build proof that travels
- Treat stakeholders like a distribution network
- Use paid media to amplify trust, not replace it

### Brand consistency and narrative control

Stina Vürmer from Brand Estonia shared how her team are using AI to support their strategic objective of ensuring that all stakeholders have the tools they need to help tell the consistent nation brand story. They have developed AI chatbots to provide stakeholders with tailored messaging for different audiences and an interactive web tool that compiles stats, messaging, and images as presentation-ready resources.

While this approach is ensuring that the Estonian story is both AI readable and repeated consistently



## Executive Summary

across touchpoints, the team are committed to taking an authentic approach to their visual communications, putting the spotlight on Estonian citizens and locations rather than relying on generative content.

This need for collective storytelling was an oft-repeated mantra over the two days. In a fragmented environment, narrative consistency is everything. Give your stakeholders, private sector partners, and community the tools to tell your story and embed your brand across as many touch points as possible.



You need a systematic approach to stakeholder and partner storytelling. Here's just some of the practical ideas for ensuring you build this consistent narrative that many had not thought of but that have proved effective...

- HR onboarding to your own team must include your core place brand value proposition [surprisingly, this is not a given!]
- Encourage private sector partners and other stakeholder organisations based in your place to include the place story in their "About us" sections on their website
- A peer-to-peer ambassador strategy is usually most effective – ie: CEO to CEO, not marketing to CEO
- Build in custom AI agents to your online stakeholder communications using enterprise tools - add chat functionality for stakeholder questions

## Rethinking KPIs and measurement

There's an opportunity for place brand teams to re-set expectations around KPIs – many have always known that perception is the key, and now that AI is changing marketing approaches, there's a strong argument to focus back on perception and rethink impact measurement.

Steve Duncan from C Studios challenged attendees to rethink what we should be measuring – particularly at a time when the decision-making lead time is shrinking. Traditional digital marketing analytics encourage marketers to optimise based on direct outcomes, rather than long-term benefits. Now, AI is providing a new opportunity for marketers to shift their attention and focus back to the top of the funnel.

Tiki's Toby Morris acknowledged there's a resistance to evolving these KPIs to demonstrate the longer-term value of place branding and marketing – which he says is partly because of vanity, and partly because of fear. Shifting from a vanity metric that you know will look good to a new metric brings with it the fear of the unknown. After all, what happens to your team if you can't produce favourable results?

Place leaders need to release that fear and ask themselves the hard questions:

- Are leads a measure of your influence or are they an outcome that you're taking credit for?
- Where in the decision-making journey can you make the biggest impact?
- What are you here to do that no-one else can?
- What is your role in driving economic impact and value for your community?

Once you have that clarity, it's easier to identify the KPIs you need to measure how you're moving the needle and adding that long-term value for your place.

## Expert Perspectives

# Before the crisis arrives, the discourse has already decided the outcome



By José Filipe Torres, Bloom Consulting

These days, nation and city brands operate in a highly polarized, low-trust environment shaped by disinformation, likes, posts, and algorithms that evolve faster than we can track them. In this reality, crises never fully disappear; they are archived, resurfaced, and reinterpreted through new emotional lenses. Algorithms amplify outrage and fear more efficiently than they amplify trust. A single incident, framed the wrong way by the right outlet, can undo years of careful positioning.

We had the privilege of working through these questions at the City Nation Place Lab in Lisbon and the question we brought to the room was deceptively simple. Do we actually know how perceptions of countries and cities emerge and evolve?

## Understanding perception genesis

Most places today employ sophisticated measurement systems. Digital data tells us what audiences are searching for and how interest is shifting, as well as what AI and search engines present them. Ad-hoc studies tell us what people think of a country or city at a given moment. Social listening tools track volume and sentiment in real time. These are genuinely valuable instruments, and their adoption across the field over the past decade represents real progress.

But there is a layer of perception measurement that none of these tools reaches. By the time a belief shows up in a survey, it had been formed already. By the time a search pattern changes, something had been shifted previously. What produces those changes, the actual “raw material” of perception, has remained largely invisible. In other words, what is the genesis of perceptions?

This “raw material” is discourse that surrounds

countries and cities. The way places are written about, spoken about, and framed through various sources, particularly the international media environment. The word choices, the emotional registers, the metaphors, the sources selected to speak, the themes that dominate coverage. They are the tiny waves, individually insignificant, that collectively build the tide of perception. It's worth mentioning that discourse is not the only factor of perception genesis; policies and actions that city or country develop do shape perceptions. Yet the discourse part is a powerful factor, largely underexplored in the place branding field.

## Digital Discourse analysis: What the research found

Working with a pilot corpus of 267 articles about twelve countries, published between 2020 and 2024 across five major international outlets, we analysed discursive patterns in media coverage and cross-referenced them with existing perception scores collected by Bloom Consulting. The correlation was meaningful: countries with lower perception scores consistently showed higher levels of discourse vulnerability, meaning that the way these countries were projected in the mass media in this period made their image vulnerable. The relationship between how a place is talked about and how it is perceived is not random. It is structured, and it is measurable.

We identified five signals that together produce what we call the Discourse Vulnerability Level, or DVL.

Empathy level measures whether coverage frames a place as relatable and close, or distant and other. Emotional tone captures whether the dominant register is admiration and hope, or fear, suspicion, and contempt. Thematic framing assesses whether coverage is diverse or locked onto a single narrative

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of crisis or instability. Legitimacy examines whether citizens and institutions are portrayed as credible and active, or as passive objects of external judgement. Source diversity looks at whose voices govern the story: the place's own voices, or almost exclusively those of outside analysts and foreign commentators.

Together, these signals position a place within four discourse profiles: admiration, ambivalence, suspicion, or threat. The profiles carry practical weight. A country in the admiration cluster enters a crisis with the world predisposed toward empathy and trust. A country in the suspicion cluster enters the same crisis carrying a pre-existing discourse burden that amplifies every negative development.

**What the room told us**

When Lab participants saw the signal breakdown for specific countries, how Estonia's digital leadership sat alongside framing of anxiety and permanent threat, how Costa Rica's environmental credentials were undercut by an emotional tone of crisis rather than inspiration, something clicked. Practitioners recognised their own countries in the patterns. They could name the moments when the discourse shifted, the years when their voices went quiet in international coverage and outside voices filled the space. They did not need convincing that this was real. They needed a way to see it clearly and measure it systematically.

**The practical shift**

The DVL framework opens a different kind of strategic conversation. The question is no longer only, "How do we communicate better?" It is what does our current discourse environment actually look like, and what vulnerabilities does it contain before

the next crisis arrives.

Discourse vulnerability is a pre-existing condition, not a consequence of crisis. The places that will navigate the next decade of permanent visibility most effectively are those that understand their discourse environment structurally; not just what the world thinks of them, but why, and through what mechanisms that thinking is being continuously produced and reinforced.

This means looking beyond sentiment scores and search volumes to the narratives, frames, and emotional cues that sit upstream of all of them. It means asking which of your perception elements are being framed in ways that create risk. It means identifying whose voices are missing from your story and understanding what their absence signals to international audiences. It means treating discourse not as a byproduct of events but as a strategic environment that can be monitored, diagnosed, and actively shaped.

**Where this goes next**

What we are building now is a real-time capability, operating at scale, across broader source sets, languages, and geographies, that will give place brand managers a live diagnostic for their discourse environment rather than a retrospective analysis. The ambition is to add the dimension that has been missing: visibility into the mechanisms that produce perception before it solidifies and results in the economic losses and reputational damage. The work ahead is collaborative, as the best work in this field always has been.

**Meet the CNP Lab Partners****Bloom Consulting**

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[bloom-consulting.com](https://bloom-consulting.com)

Bloom Consulting is a company 100% specialised in Nation and City Branding headquartered in Madrid, with offices in London, Lisbon, Paris, and Riyadh. The specialisation in Place Branding makes Bloom Consulting one of the most advanced and globally renowned companies in the sector with more than 100 projects implemented across 5 continents.

Bloom Consulting publishes its own Country Brand Ranking, with the aim of analysing the Brand performance of 180 Countries. Bloom Consulting introduced the first-ever study on the impact of Nation Brands and City Brands on local and global economies.

Nation Brand Builders, Bloom Consulting's latest book is available on Amazon.

**Expert Perspectives**

# Digital marketing pushed our focus to the bottom of the funnel. Will AI push us back to the top?



By Steve Duncan, C Studios

Place promotion organisations are often asked a simple question: what results did your marketing deliver?

The answers come in familiar forms. How many investment leads were generated. How many people relocated. How many visitors booked a trip. These are the numbers that appear in reports and justify budgets.

The challenge is that these outcomes prioritise the end of a decision process, whereas place marketing's strongest value comes much earlier. By the time a company contacts an investment promotion agency (IPA), or a skilled worker decides to move, much of the decision has already taken shape.

That creates a problem: organisations are measured at the moment they have the least influence over the decision itself.

The structural misunderstanding of digital marketing for place promotion is a big reason why. Over-optimisation pushed marketing towards short-term attribution. That emphasis on one part of the journey has now left many place brands exposed as AI condenses research, comparison and action into fewer steps.

It raises a question: are IPAs and talent hubs truly influencing complex, long-term decisions, or merely facilitating those likely to happen anyway?

## Why leads became the dominant metric

The focus on leads came from the rise of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) strategies and performance marketing. Digital tools made it easier to track clicks, form fills and enquiries, creating pressure to optimise towards direct outcomes.

That model works well for shorter sales cycles, larger budgets and high-volume sales teams. It also drives much of the B2B marketing advice found online. But location decisions are different. Companies and talent spend months or years forming opinions before engaging directly with an organisation.

The ability to measure leads created a tendency to value what was easiest to track. Brand marketing was de-emphasised, market preparation became secondary and short-term lead capture became the dominant way to show value.

## The risk of continuing with that mindset

AI is bringing the awareness-consideration-conversion stages closer together. A single chat can reinforce perceptions, compare locations and suggest next steps. The point of influence, where your location earns its way onto the consideration list, is increasingly controlled by third-party tools drawing from everything they can find about your place.

When an AI assistant answers "where should we expand?" it synthesises from public perception, not from your lead-capture funnel. Places with weak brand presence are invisible at the exact moment a decision is forming.

If brand marketing is undernourished, consideration and conversion will weaken. People cannot choose you if they do not understand you, trust you or see you as relevant before they move to the next stage.

Websites and social media still matter, but they are now part of a wider discovery system rather than its centre.

**Expert Perspectives****What alternatives to measurement do we have today?**

None of this means leads do not matter. They do. But they should sit within a broader measurement system, and their relationship with marketing success needs to be better defined.

That system can include perception monitoring through surveys, social listening and AI analysis. It can include brand lift indicators such as direct traffic, branded search growth and referral increases. Depending on scale, conversation share across media and social channels is another way to show awareness traction.

Deeper into decision-making, organisations should track inbound referrals, close rates and enquiry quality, all of which should improve through effective marketing. This requires cleaner CRM workflows that show how people move through the decision process, shifting from a leads-only view to one that includes reactivated leads and influenced opportunities.

As place brands focus on value over volume, improving how people perceive a location matters more than increasing raw lead numbers.

Many forces shaping long-cycle decisions – reputation, familiarity, perception – have never been perfectly measurable. That does not make them less valuable.

**What you should be doing now**

Place organisations need broader ways of thinking about marketing performance beyond lead generation.

Perception, visibility and engagement will become more important indicators alongside traditional enquiries as AI shapes how locations are discovered. We propose that “reputation” be considered a core KPI of investment promotion agencies, talent brands and any place organisation that does not currently treat it as one, going beyond the sales-oriented metrics that have long governed government decisions.

This changes what’s required for CRM and analytics systems that connect activity across longer decision cycles: how enquiries first discovered a location, how often they returned, where referrals originated and which channels influence higher-quality opportunities.

For many place brands, this requires a larger internal conversation about what marketing is capable of doing as audience behaviour changes: capture existing demand, shape future demand or both.

**Meet the CNP Lab Partners**

[c-studios.com](https://c-studios.com)

C Studios is the marketing communications agency for places, with expertise in investment promotion, talent attraction and trade promotion. We enable destinations to thrive on the global stage by developing strategies and campaigns that attract investment, draw top talent and boost trade. In short, we position your location where decision-makers can’t ignore it. Based in Amsterdam and with offices across London, Paris, and Frankfurt, we help cities, regions, countries, real estate developments, science parks and trade zones become more lovable, credible and findable in the eyes of decisions-makers.

# Your next visitor might be an algorithm



By Luca Romozzi, Sojern

For years, destination marketers operated under the assumption that travellers moved through a relatively predictable funnel: awareness, consideration, planning, and booking. But that model has fundamentally broken down. Today's traveller journey is fragmented, dynamic, and increasingly influenced by algorithms. Discovery happens across social media, creators, reviews, maps, video platforms, and AI-powered experiences. Travellers move in and out of consideration constantly, influenced by dozens of touchpoints before they ever book a trip. Generative AI is accelerating that shift.

[39%](#) of consumers have used AI search in the past 12 months. But what started as a change in search behavior is quickly reshaping the entire path to purchase. AI-powered tools are helping travellers discover destinations, compare options, build itineraries, and narrow decisions before they ever click through to a website. As travellers rely more heavily on conversational AI and recommendation engines, destination marketers face a new reality: Your next visitor might not be human. It might be an algorithm deciding whether your destination appears in the answer at all.

## Visibility is becoming algorithmic

Historically, discoverability was largely about ranking on search engine results pages. Today, visibility is becoming far more complex. Destinations must now compete across multiple layers of discovery:

- **Human discovery** through creators, social media, reviews, and video
- **Algorithmic discovery** through feeds, rankings, and recommendation engines
- **AI retrieval** through generative AI platforms that synthesise and recommend destinations directly within their responses

- **Multichannel presence** across search, social, display, video, and connected TV

This shift is forcing destination marketers to rethink the role of their websites and content strategies. The goal is no longer just to drive clicks, it is to become a trusted source that AI systems can understand, summarise, and cite. Structured, current, question-answering content is becoming essential. Destinations that create content designed for AI summarisation improve their chances of remaining visible even if travellers never visit the website directly.

Many DMOs are already adapting. Sojern's [State of Destination Marketing](#) report shows that 64% of destination marketers are already creating structured, question-answering content specifically designed to improve AI visibility.

As Travel Manitoba's VP of Marketing, Cody Chomiak, said in the research: "It's about shifting your mindset. Your next guest isn't just a visitor, it's an algorithm. You have to be open to your content being sliced, diced, and served up by large language models. The website of the future may not even be built for visitors in the traditional sense... If we're still measuring success solely by website traffic, we're heading toward a cliff dive of irrelevance."

## Data must move beyond planning and reporting

The rise of AI-driven discovery also changes how marketers need to use data. Today, destination marketers see the biggest value in using data for planning campaigns and reporting performance. But in fragmented, AI-influenced traveller journeys, static campaigns are no longer enough. Travellers

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now shift consideration in real time across multiple touchpoints and platforms. Campaigns must continuously adapt as traveller behavior changes and should use data to optimise in real time. The destinations that succeed will be the ones using data operationally, not just strategically and analytically.

Behavioral signals and real-time travel intent data are becoming far more valuable than static demographic targeting alone, yet many DMOs still rely heavily on demographic data for campaign targeting (74% say they do). The competitive advantage now comes from adjusting creative, audiences, and spend dynamically across live campaigns and channels vs focusing on demographic data.

**Paid media still matters**

Visibility still matters a lot as AI reshapes organic discovery. In fact, organic traffic alone is becoming less reliable as AI summaries, recommendation engines, and zero-click experiences increasingly mediate traveller discovery. Waiting for algorithms to “find” your destination is becoming a risky strategy.

Paid media and multichannel presence are still essential. Paid media influences human discoverability, it taps into the emotional side of inspiring travellers. With paid media, you ensure consistency in messaging and control over how your brand is portrayed. Paid media ensures destinations appear consistently across the environments where travellers discover, research, and compare options. It's ultimately an insurance policy for visibility in an algorithmic world. Search, social,

video, display, connected TV, and programmatic media all contribute to reinforcing awareness and consideration throughout the traveller journey, meaning a multichannel strategy is critical.

**The future of destination marketing is both human and algorithmic**

AI will absolutely change the mechanics of travel discovery and marketing, but it will not replace the emotional drivers behind why people travel in the first place. Travel decisions remain deeply human. People still seek inspiration, connection, and memorable experiences. The destinations that win in the AI era will not simply be the most technically optimised, they will be the ones that combine discoverability with authentic storytelling and strong brand identity. The future of destination marketing belongs to the brands that can do both: organise their data and content for algorithms while creating experiences and stories that humans genuinely want to explore.

**Meet the CNP Lab Partners**

[sojern.com/segments/destinations](https://sojern.com/segments/destinations)

The Sojern Travel Marketing Platform helps destination marketers reach and inspire travellers throughout their planning journey across digital channels. With unmatched visibility into travel demand and market insights, we build audiences to find the right travellers for your destination. The platform is flexible to meet the needs of destinations and their stakeholders and gives visibility and into the economic impact of your marketing efforts.

## Expert Perspectives

# From visibility to belief: Rethinking the place marketing mix



By **Matthew Kruchko, Gravity Global**

For years, place marketing has been organised around a familiar trinity: paid, earned, and organic. Strategy meetings have largely been budget meetings, asking how much to allocate, where, and to whom.

That framing no longer reflects how decisions actually get made.

Place competition now happens inside an attention economy, where AI, aggregated content, and third-party signals shape what audiences see, what they believe, and what they choose. In that environment, visibility is no longer the same as credibility. And it is credibility, not visibility, that converts attention into investment, talent, and visitation.

## Discovery is aggregated. Decisions are still human.

Audiences no longer linearly discover places. An investor asks an AI assistant where to expand. A graduate compares cities through aggregated rankings and synthesised reviews. A traveller plans an entire trip based on a single AI summary drawn from dozens of sources they will never see.

Being seen is not the same as being chosen. The question is no longer whether a place shows up; it is whether it shows up in the sources AI systems and audiences trust enough to act on.

But while algorithms increasingly mediate discovery, decisions are still grounded in trust. Place choices involve real risk, careers, capital, families, and long-term horizons. People look for confirmation across multiple signals: credible media, peer voices, institutional endorsements, and consistent narratives over time. When those signals are missing, visibility does not convert.

## From media mix to trust mix

The most useful shift for place teams is to stop thinking about paid, earned, and organic as separate channels and start thinking about how trust is built and distributed across the ecosystem.

In practice:

- Paid creates initial visibility
- Owned and organically established narrative consistency
- Earned provides third-party validation
- Stakeholder and peer advocacy converts belief into action

Most place strategies remain optimised for the first two layers. But AI-driven discovery increasingly weights the latter two. If a place is not being talked about, referenced, and validated beyond its own channels, it is less likely to appear in the moments that matter and far less likely to be believed when it does.

This is where many strategies fall short. Investment is concentrated in campaigns, but not in the signals those campaigns need to point to. The result is visibility without reinforcement.

## Four shifts that turn visibility into credibility

If the goal is to influence decisions, not just accumulate impressions, the practical work looks different.

1. **Design for discoverability beyond your own channels.** Place stories should not just live on owned platforms. They should be structured

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and distributed so that media, partners, and aggregators can pick them up, because those are the sources AI ecosystems weigh most heavily.

- 2. Build proof that travels.** Rankings, economic outcomes, investor case studies, and resident voices should be developed as portable assets to be cited, shared, and referenced externally. If proof cannot travel without you, it does not scale.
- 3. Treat stakeholders as a distribution network.** Employers, universities, founders, and community leaders are not just audiences for the place narrative. They are amplifiers of it. Aligned around a shared story, they extend both reach and credibility in ways paid media never can.
- 4. Use paid to amplify trust, not replace it.** Paid performs best when it points audiences toward credible third-party validation, rankings, media coverage, and partner stories, rather than trying to be the sole source of persuasion.

**A more effective way forward**

The balance of paid, earned, and organic is no longer a budgeting exercise. It is a strategic reflection of how well a place understands the relationship between visibility and credibility in a system shaped by AI and fragmented attention.

The places that win the next decade will not be the ones that generate the most impressions. They will be the ones that show up consistently in the sources their audiences trust, are reinforced by others, and are structured to be found in the moments that matter.

**Because in the attention economy of place, the prize is not being seen more.**

**It is believed.**

**Meet the CNP Lab Partners**The logo for Gravity Global, featuring the word "gravity" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, with "GLOBAL" in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font directly beneath it.

[gravityglobal.com](https://gravityglobal.com)

Gravity Global is the world's most awarded, fully integrated marketing agency, built to help organizations earn attention and accelerate growth. We propel brands upward and outward with cohesive strategies that inspire action and deliver measurable impact.

With deep expertise in place branding, we've partnered with Middlesex County (NJ), Fiji Islands, Fulton County (GA), City of Detroit (MI), City of Calgary (Canada), the Toledo Region (OH), Cathedral City (CA), and Virginia Horse Industry Board—alongside global leaders in technology, entertainment, and beyond. Wherever the challenge, Gravity brings global reach, unified expertise, and independent spirit to drive transformative growth for places and organisations alike.

# Are your KPIs keeping you relevant?



By Toby Morris, Tiki

Here's the uncomfortable question.

If your existing KPIs disappeared tomorrow, would anyone actually miss them? Or would they quietly fade into the same drawer as last year's campaign report, impressive on paper, irrelevant in practice?

Vanity metrics age like milk. They make you look good for a moment, and then they don't. If your measurement framework hasn't evolved, it's not neutral. It's actively working against you.

Destinations have always answered to a crowded room. Budget committees. Elected officials. Residents who care less about click-through rates and more about whether they can get a dinner reservation in July. Each group defines "success" differently, and none of them are wrong. The problem isn't the number of stakeholders, it's pretending one set of metrics can satisfy all of them.

For years, our industry got comfortable telling a partial story. Impressions climbed. Engagement ticked up. CTR looked respectable enough to hold its own in a board meeting (provided a board knew what CTR was.) And to be fair, that was the best we had. You can't fault an industry for using the tools available at the time. But those days are firmly in the

rear view. The data caught up. And now it's a little less forgiving.

Today, we're surrounded by signals, lodging data, geolocation patterns, spend analytics, and event performance. The kind of visibility we used to wish for is now staring us in the face. And here's the catch: real data doesn't always tell a flattering story. It doesn't care about your campaign narrative. It doesn't adjust itself to make a quarterly report feel better. It just tells the truth.

That's where things get interesting. Because transparency creates a choice. You can lean into it and build a smarter, more honest framework for measuring success. Or you can keep polishing the same safe metrics and hope no one looks too closely.

One of those paths leads to better strategy. The other leads to longer meetings explaining why everything looks good but nothing feels different.

The shift isn't just about better data. It's about better conversations. If your stakeholders still think success equals "more clicks," that's on you. The role of the modern destination marketer isn't just to report results. It's to translate them. To explain why quality of visitation matters more than quantity. Why timing can be more valuable than volume. Why attracting the right visitor beats attracting all visitors. To bring your stakeholders with you on any measurement discussion.

As a marketer or place branding professional, you need to put yourselves in the shoes of your wider organisation and understand what they see as success. Engaging with them directly, with two-way dialogue, and early in the process of any new initiative is key.



**If your KPIs are still rooted in a version of the internet that no longer exists, you're not measuring performance, you're measuring nostalgia.**

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That requires bringing people along early. Not after the dashboard is built, but before the first KPI is even defined. It means asking harder questions: What does success actually look like for this place? For this community? For this economy? And being honest enough to accept that the answer might not fit neatly into last year's template.

AI is only accelerating the urgency. Discovery is shifting. Planning is becoming conversational. Influence is happening in places you don't fully control. If your KPIs are still rooted in a version of the internet that no longer exists, you're not measuring performance, you're measuring nostalgia.

Relevance is the real KPI now. Not just for your campaigns, but for how you define success in the first place.

Because this comes full circle. If your KPIs disappeared tomorrow and no one noticed, that's your answer. They were never measuring what mattered. And like anything built on looking good instead of being good, they won't age well....

**Meet the CNP Lab Partners**

[tiki.com](https://tiki.com)

Tiki is an AI-powered advertising platform that helps Destinations connect with over 100 million active travel intenders every month.

Through our direct travel 200+ publisher private exchange, we've created the first conversational marketing ad platform for DMOs, serving as a destination brand ambassador to engage travellers safely and effectively before they reach your website.

Our mission is to inspire both travellers and the places they visit, fostering meaningful experiences that make the world a richer, more connected place.

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