

Trip Report: Gulf Coast Brands Damaged By Oil Spill and Clean Up ...

October 2010

I traveled to the Gulf Coast in August, as part of an **International Economic Development Council (IEDC) national response team**. Our 12-member team consisted of four economic development experts in various disciplines (branding/marketing, workforce development, retention, recruitment), two IEDC staffers from Washington D.C. and six high-level representatives from key Federal agencies, including **HUD, Homeland Security, USDA, SBA**



and others. We traveled to Jefferson Parish, LA on a very focused mission: to **Assess** the impact that the BP oil spill and the resulting cleanup effort were having on the local and regional economies ... and to **Recommend** strategies to mitigate any impacts and to facilitate recovery. To do this, we traveled to Grand Isle, where we talked with shrimpers, charter boat operators and local business people and spent a day in Metairie with stakeholders representing government, financial, banking, business and development interests. On Day Three, we brought all of these stakeholders back to hear our recommendations. It was an amazing experience. Every minute of it.

Branding issues were only one part of the equation, but they proved to be an important one. Three key economic sector brands were at stake: **Tourism ... Gulf Coast Seafood ...** and the region's **Economic Development and Investment** brands. Tourism is huge in the Gulf and there was uncertainty whether the beaches and water were open and safe and at what point tourists could return to the area. The perceived safety of Gulf Coast seafood was changing on a daily basis, impacting not only local fisherman, processors and distributors, but also restaurants and consumers nationwide. Confidence was shaken in the region as a place to do business. Hurricanes are 'expected' to occur regularly there and are often written into business plans. The oil spill, however, was a new kind of disaster ... a man-made one ... that no one was really sure how to deal with.



The good news? Each of these brands was very strong to begin with and they were damaged, but not broken. Our recommendations included many of the strategies that we share with all of our clients: Collaborate, Communicate, Create Brand Champions and use those champions to Spread the Word, Reflect Reality and Rebuild the Brand.



And that's the real lesson to be learned here:

Strong Brands Survive. Create a strong brand and reinforce it, consistently, and it will be resilient.

Interested in further details? Call Lori Martinek at (623) 537-0888 to hear more of the story